



# flyway

## Community stewardship in the Yukon

“Ducks Unlimited Canada has found that there’s no way to do wetland conservation unless you start with the communities,” says Amy Leach, DUC biologist in the Yukon.

In fact, co-management is legislated in the Yukon – communities must be allowed to participate

in wildlife and habitat conservation. Communities share their concerns, goals and ideas with the non-governmental advisory bodies – either the Renewable Resource Councils or the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board (YFWMB). Half of the constituents of these agencies are government nominees and the other half are First Nations nominees.

One link between the YFWMB and communities are Community Stewards. The Yukon’s four stewards initiate wildlife monitoring projects, develop interpretive areas, communicate community concerns, develop capacity, generate funding and facilitate interactions between government or non-governmental organizations and the community.

“It’s essential that stewards live in their communities,” says Jocelyn McDowell, stewardship co-ordinator.

“It’s integral to gaining the trust of community members and getting buy-in for the whole process.”

DUC supports the stewardship program by contributing to steward salaries in the wetland-rich regions of Mayo, Old Crow and Haines Junction.

“They’re working on conservation issues and we’re working on conservation issues so it’s a good partnership,” says Leach. “When we’re working with the community stewards, they are able to let the community know what DUC is doing in their areas and that facilitates community co-operation.”

DUC also provides expertise to stewards. This year, Leach will help stewards develop waterfowl surveys and banding programs.

Haines Junction steward Brad Wilson is planning several ground-based waterfowl surveys and the development of an interpretive site for the Beaver Creek wetland project.

“A big part of being a steward is letting people know that protecting areas or protecting certain species or limiting the number of a species that you can harvest isn’t negative – it’s positive in the long term,” says Wilson.

The YFWMB Community Stewardship Program helps DUC work with Yukon communities.

“Up here the communities are the ones that know about the wetlands and which wetlands are important,” says Leach. “If we don’t have their support we’re not going to be able to do the type of work that we do in the Yukon.”



Haines Junction community steward Brad Wilson learns how to band ducks.

# Wetland summer school

Visitors to the sandy beaches of Saskatoon Island Provincial Park (SIPP) west of Grande Prairie, Alta., are leaving that protected area with a better understanding of why healthy wetland and riparian habitats are so important to Alberta's wildlife and human populations.

Under a pilot project, a naturalist working for DUC assists Alberta Parks and Protected Areas (APPA) staff with formal interpretive programs, she also performs "point duty," wandering the park, often carrying wildlife exhibits, and informally encountering park visitors. Rosemarie Fergus uses these encounters "to talk about Alberta's provincial parks and the role individual Albertans play in protecting these valuable resources," says Ian Waugh, head of learning services, APPA.

This educational outreach partnership "is an opportunity to work together to get out messages that we (APPA and DUC) both feel are quite important," says Waugh.

In addition to its broader conservation message, the program can be tailored to highlight different aspects of the park. Saskatoon Island, for example, is in a landscape internationally recognized for its importance to trumpeter swans.

According to Reg Arbuckle, a biologist with DUC's office in Grande Prairie, Albertans need to know more about how recreational activities can impact wildlife habitat. For birds, that impact can be potentially devastating, "especially during critical nesting and brood rearing phases of their life cycle," Arbuckle says.

Before summer's arrival, Fergus, working with SIPP staff, delivered educational outreach programs to schools in the

Grande Prairie area. In-class presentations were followed by field trips to a local wetland, where children learned how wetlands help provide abundant clean water for all Albertans.

With other government departments and non-governmental organizations expressing interest in similar initiatives, "the momentum is there to develop strong wetland educational programs right across Alberta," says Jerry Brunen of DUC's Calgary office.

It's a trend that's already taking hold in the Red Deer area, where DUC started a year-round wetland education outreach program three years ago. This year, a second naturalist was contracted to expand the program to Edmonton-area schools in May and June, says DUC biologist Ian McFarlane. Like the provincial park pilot program, the Aspen Parkland initiative enhances the educational impact with an indoor and outdoor component.

An Alberta Parks and Protected Areas (APPA) staff person and a keen student spot waterfowl on a local wetland. DUC has hired a naturalist to spend the summer months assisting APPA staff with interpretive programs at parks near Grande Prairie and in Calgary.



Photo credit: APPA

## Fishing derby gives spirits a boost

Local cattle producers and their families received a welcome reprieve from the ongoing challenges of their beleaguered industry with an ice fishing derby held at Good Spirit Lake, Sask., in March.

The first-ever "Ranglin' Angler" derby was organized by DUC in partnership with the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority and Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization. Thirty local businesses sponsored the event, donating more than \$5,500 in cash and prizes. According to Stu Cairns, a DUC agrologist based in Yorkton, the event was an opportunity for producers to get away

from the farm to mingle with friends and fellow cattle ranchers. More than 120 people registered for the event to enjoy ice fishing, skating, snowmobiling and a 100 per cent Canadian beef hamburger lunch supplied by the local 4-H Beef Club. Proceeds from the lunch sales were provided back to 4-H.

Brian Berrns of B&J Electric Fence Supplies is a cattle producer and sponsor of the event: "It turned into a friendly family-oriented event. It was well organized and well attended and I hope to go again next year."



Shadow Konan, son of DUC's program partner Larry Konan, finds a new use for his hockey stick – hoping to score a whopper at the first Ranglin' Angler derby held at Good Spirit Lake, Sask., in March.

## Waterfowl research continues on prairies

Scientists from DUC's Institute for Wetland and Waterfowl Research (IWWR) are conducting research in four study areas across the Canadian Prairies this summer. This is Year 3 of a 10-year study to determine how nesting success of prairie waterfowl varies in relation to the landscape types of the Prairie Pothole Region.

Common prairie duck species such as mallard, blue-winged teal, gadwall, northern pintail, northern shoveler, canvasback and redhead are the focus of this research, known as the Spatial and Temporal Study (SpATs). This year the research focuses on areas in southeast Saskatchewan, at locations near Unity, Sask., and in central and southern Alberta. According to Bob Emery, an IWWR biologist and a supervisor of the study, the researchers are getting good support from these local communities. "About 100 landowners gave us permission to access their land for this research," he says.

Each site varies in the number of waterfowl pairs and areas of perennial upland vegetation such as hay land, pasture, trees and shrubs. About 20 researchers will be at these sites from now until August to search for duck nests, conduct waterfowl pair counts, and classify upland and wetland habitat. Additional research to evaluate duck nesting use and success in pasture land is also planned in conjunction with the 2004 SpATs study in southeastern Saskatchewan.

A DUC researcher investigates a nest located in a SpATs study area. The study is trying to determine the relationship between waterfowl nest success and the amount of uncropped plant cover on the landscape.



## DUC helps libraries go wild

With its ecologically-friendly reading list, DUC is thrilled to be part of *Natures Sings @ Your Library*, a summer reading program that shines a literary spotlight on the wild side of Alberta's library collection. The program offers a host of nature-based activities for the wonders of wildlife habitat.

"Every year, different library systems in Alberta take turns developing the summer reading program for the province," says Connie Forst of the Northern Lights Library System (NLLS). This year, NLLS took the lead and opted for a nature-themed reading program. A conversation with Brian Ilnicki of DUC's office in St. Paul brought Canada's conservation company on board and the concept took flight.

It's the first time Alberta's summer reading program involved a private partner

and both sides are pleased with the results. "We wanted to develop a program with a strong outdoor focus. Since many Alberta libraries are based in small communities with strong ties to rural areas, Ducks Unlimited seemed like a good fit," explains Forst.

Thanks to DUC's help with reading lists and resources, this year's program features more of a family focus than in years past.

Participating libraries received a number of ideas for nature-based displays and book lists that hit the target demographic of children ages five to 12, as well as teens and adult readers.

While *Nature Sings @ Your Library* is an optional program, close to 250 Alberta libraries have picked up that option, including some of the larger independent systems in Edmonton, St. Albert, Fort Saskatchewan, Lloydminster and Airdrie.

"The great thing about summer reading programs at the local library is that the learning happens while the reader is having fun," says Ilnicki. "We're really happy with the program."

Considering the groundswell of interest in water and water issues in Alberta, this is another way to expose all ages of people to DUC's conservation messages."



# Conservation easements protect habitat for future generations

Here today. Here tomorrow. That's the basic principle behind conservation easements. A conservation easement (CE) (also known as a conservation agreement in Manitoba) is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a government or a qualified conservation organization, like Ducks Unlimited Canada. Negotiated on an individual basis, the CE is tailored to the landowner's wishes and allows for compatible land use options.

These agreements give landowners a way to preserve their families' natural heritage. Conservation easements signed by DUC are perpetual, meaning the agreement stays with the land, even if it changes hands. These habitat-friendly legal agreements are gaining in popularity as landowners seek a way to protect the ecological integrity of their land and to be rewarded for doing so. At the same time they are helping conservation organizations like DUC put ground-level projects into action.

Brian Rousseaux, a cattle producer from Vanguard, Sask. is one of an increasing number of Prairie landowners taking an active role in conservation through CEs. "Having a CE is great," says Rousseaux, who placed a CE on his property through DUC to keep a wetland intact for watering his cattle. "I get reimbursed for something I was going to do anyway. I benefit, the habitat benefits, the ducks benefit and so will future generations."

Keeping land sustainable over the long term is why landowner Steve Sawchuk and his wife Jeanette of Churchbridge, Sask. are making the conversion from grain farming to cattle forage. The Sawchuks, along with sons Perry and Trevor, made their first habitat conservation move in 1994 under a lease program with DUC – seeding 90 acres of cropland to grass. Then in 2004 the family continued this transition of grain to grass by signing a paid CE with DUC. "We wanted to keep some of the land as natural as possible.

We were watching other producers cultivate their land from corner to corner and we didn't want to go that route," Trevor says. Instead, "we're keeping our slough and bush land and getting paid for it."

Trevor says he learned that keeping these natural features on the landscape could mean benefits not only for wildlife, but for the farm,

too. "I watched Dad on the tractor, going around the potholes instead of draining them. When other people were complaining about drought, we had sloughs on our property that held water."

Landowner Wilf Leidl recently signed a conservation easement with DUC on a portion of his farmland east of Viking, Alta. The 77.5 acres covered by the CE include native upland and a series of seasonal wetlands. The land is part of the watershed around Thomas Lake, a major waterfowl staging lake located about two kilometres from Leidl's property. "In the spring and summer, thousands of geese come into the lake," says Leidl, who also enjoys his seasonal views of birds, deer and the occasional moose.

Under the terms of his agreement with DUC, Leidl will be able to use the land to graze cattle and horses. But the seasonal wetlands will not be drained, nor will any trees be removed. That's great news for Leidl, who is frustrated by land-use changes in the area he's called home for more than five decades.

"This conservation easement helps make sure this land will stay the way it was meant to be." That's an opinion shared by Leidl's son Kevin, who recently signed a similar CE on 85.1 acres of his land in the same area.

Two provinces over in Manitoba, another father-son commitment to land stewardship is found on the Harvey family farm near Strathclair, Man., where Gordon Harvey and his son Peter run a small organic flour mill operation. The Harvey property consists of ravines, shrubs, potholes, trees and crops – an attractive mix of habitats for wildlife. In 2003, the Harveys signed a CE with DUC on three quarter sections, but the family's conservation roots go deeper.

"I've always been interested in conservation," says Gordon, who was born on the farm 66 years ago. "We don't bulldoze or drain. In 1966 I planted 8,000 trees as a windbreak and as shelter for birds." Gordon recalls a time when he would stop his farm machinery at the end of the day and listen to ruffed grouse drumming. "It was quite a spectacular thing," he says.

An avid birdwatcher, Gordon marvels at the variety of birds and other wildlife on his farm, including hawks, owls, songbirds, waterfowl and deer. The Harvey legacy continues, with Gordon's grandchildren building an early appreciation of the legacy being left for them. "My oldest grandkids are paying attention – they can name the birds they see."

## FAQs

### Why consider a CE?

With conservation easements, landowners can ensure the ecological integrity of the land is maintained even after the land is sold. Landowners can benefit from the placement of a CE through either a cash value (paid) or a tax receipt (donated). A CE preserves the natural integrity of the land by limiting the amount and type of development that can occur there. Two types of CEs are used. An agriculture-use CE allows for continued hay production and pasture usage, including pasture rent and live-stock production. A managed-for-wildlife CE can generate revenue from non-farming uses like ecotourism, nature trails and wildlife viewing.

### Why choose DUC for a CE?

Different conservation organizations are interested in the ecological values of different properties. DUC, for example, requires the property have some conservation value to North American waterfowl populations. As a result, DUC negotiates conservation easements on land with wetlands or intact native uplands, or on property where DUC has already invested in habitat restoration or maintenance.

### Where do I get more information?

Please contact your nearest DUC office or visit [www.ducks.ca](http://www.ducks.ca).

# DUC has busiest year ever in Saskatchewan

Both of Ducks Unlimited Canada's Saskatchewan field offices were firing on all cylinders last year – one of DUC's busiest and most successful years ever in the province. This success reflects DUC's emphasis on long-term, landscape-scale habitat conservation and a high level of individual staff effort.

According to Kevin Rozdeba, a habitat acquisition specialist based at DUC's Yorkton office, the period April 1, 2003, to March 31, 2004, was one of the most active he has ever seen in his 23-year career with DUC. For example, "we signed up over 1,000 acres under **conservation easements** this year, much higher than in previous years," Rozdeba says.

In addition to conservation easements, DUC continued to work with its landowner partners on a number of key programs.

"**Winter cereals** was one of our main focuses over the past year," says Saskatoon-based Les McLean, head of conservation programs for DUC's Saskatchewan Parkland field office.

DUC's winter cereals programs are designed to increase the number of winter cereal acres seeded in key waterfowl areas. DUC is an advocate of winter cereals due to their significant value as waterfowl nesting habitat.

"We worked with individual producers to address any of their concerns and provide agronomic support in order to encourage them to include winter cereals in their crop rotations," says McLean. This approach has paid off: 337 Saskatchewan producers seeded 38,600 acres to winter cereals last year alone.

More than 100 producers participated in DUC's **perennial cover program**, leading to 23,700 acres of cultivated lands being converted to hay and pasture – habitats preferred by nesting ducks. DUC provides producers with financial assistance for forage seed and free seed for restoring salinity-prone areas around wetlands.

DUC's **Rangeland Stewardship Program** in Saskatchewan works to improve grazing management practices to ensure sustainable use of native prairie compatible with livestock, wildlife and biodiversity interests. It focuses on areas of high-density breeding waterfowl and some of North America's largest concentrations of migratory shorebirds and songbirds. DUC staff work with private producers, government and non-government agencies to provide financial and technical assistance.

In 2003-2004, DUC's Saskatchewan field offices influenced more than 2,000 producers and 683,000 acres through this program by promoting wildlife-compatible forage and livestock management and providing financial assistance for grazing clubs, stock watering demonstrations and rotational grazing systems. In addition to private landowners, DUC works with public, or Crown-owned, lands through this program, says Brian Hepworth, DUC's head of conservation programs for the South Saskatchewan field office. "We signed three pastures in excess of 61,000 acres. It's a significant accomplishment – nearly double the acres over last year." The Crown lands signed under 15-year agreements will see improved range management through fencing and water development and grassland rejuvenation. These lands will also be used as demonstration sites showing rangeland stewardship practices that can be applied on private lands, says Hepworth.

DUC worked with 15 **First Nations** bands to develop **biological and land capability maps**. Geographic information systems (GIS) technology is used to determine soil and plant types on First Nations lands. The information will be used to help promote sustainable land management plans and the protection of native habitats and associated wetlands. "We have the potential, through this partnership, of influencing and possibly

managing habitat lands in excess of one million acres that fall in prime waterfowl production areas," says Keith LePoudre, manager of field operations for the Saskatchewan Parkland field office.

In 2002, DUC, in partnership with two Saskatchewan rural municipalities (RMs), launched a three-year **Municipal Tax Credit Project**. The goal of this pilot project, the first of its kind in the province, is to protect natural lands and at the same time reward landowners for their valuable role as stewards of the land. Last year alone, the Tax Pilot educated 900 producers on the value of native lands, and 108,000 acres of these lands were enrolled in the program.

DUC continued to be an active participant on a number of watershed technical and planning teams. **Watershed planning** is an excellent example of where partnerships are essential to ensure the conservation of Saskatchewan's critical wetland and water resources.

Of course, DUC continues to steward its project lands. "A large part of our work is **habitat management** – we have lots of wetland and upland acres of our own that need to be managed in some fashion," says McLean.

The payoff from all these initiatives is worth the effort, says Brent Kennedy, manager of field operations for DUC's South Saskatchewan field office. "Partnerships across industry, government and non-profits are fundamental to the future of our province – a future that includes the healthy, sustainable conservation of Saskatchewan's abundant natural resources."

# Oak Hammock Marsh Hosts Family Fun Day

PRAIRIE-WESTERN BOREAL REGION

Families and staff from James Richardson International (JRI) and Ducks Unlimited Canada braved gale-force spring winds and flocked to Oak Hammock Marsh, Man., on April 24 for the Second Annual JRI-DUC Family Fun Day.

A total of 93 people attended the event, which included a barbecue lunch and a variety of hands-on educational activities for families led by staff from the Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre. These included a marsh biodiversity scavenger hunt, an "explorer program" trek through the Interpretive Centre, critter dipping for wetland water bugs, and an animal detective game through the new CSI (Crime Scene Investigation) exhibit.

All the fun was aimed at building understanding about wetlands, while strengthening the partnership between

staff members from JRI and DUC.

JRI and DUC are working together at JRI's Kelburn Farm research demonstration area south of Winnipeg. There, research is being done on winter wheat and wetland and riparian restoration. It was the site of the first JRI-DUC Family Fun Day which focused on putting up nest boxes. The Kelburn Farm facility is also an education site for local schools and classes involved in DUC's Green Street and Adopt-A-Class programs.

"The Family Fun Day is a great way to bring together families from both DUC and JRI, who are partners in conservation," says Dr. Rick Wishart, DUC's director of education. "This annual event gives JRI and DUC staff a way to better understand each other's goals and programs, beyond just our working relationship."

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Ducks Unlimited Canada  
Oak Hammock Marsh Conservation Centre  
P.O. Box 1160, Oak Hammock Marsh, Manitoba  
ROC 2Z0  
tel (204)467-3000  
fax (204)467-9028  
toll-free 1(800)665-DUCK

**Please direct your inquiries to the following:**

Atlantic Region: Lucy Uberoi  
Quebec Region: André Martin  
Ontario Region: Lynette Mader  
Prairie Region: Trish Ritthaler  
Pacific Region: Deanna Bogart

**Flyway production staff**

Director of Communications and Marketing:  
Madeleine Arbez  
Editor: Duncan Morrison  
Assistant: June Finnson  
Art Director: Tye Gregg  
Graphic Designers: Lindsay Pikta-Marie,  
Aquila Samson, Jeope Wolfe

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Longtime DUC volunteer Mickey Hersak (inset) submitted this photo of the Hersak Marsh project, located near Oakburn, Man. The 100-acre DUC project features a shallow marsh that attracts a variety of waterfowl species. Mickey, his wife Gloria and Hersak's mother Nell, who passed away earlier this year, have hosted a number of Greenwing events and school groups at the family's nearby Conservation Farm retreat.



## And the Great Blue Heron Award goes to...

Ducks Unlimited Canada congratulates the Environment and Resource Stewardship Branch of Saskatchewan Environment for being unanimously selected to receive the 2004 Great Blue Heron Award for its outstanding efforts on behalf of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP).

DUC nominated the Branch for the prestigious award, which is open to organizations in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico and presented to NAWMP participants whose long-term contributions result in benefits to waterfowl and other migratory bird populations.

One of the Branch's most notable achievements was the establishment of the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund

in 1970 to conserve and protect important wildlife habitat with revenue generated from hunting and fishing licenses. Under this program, more than 190,000 acres of wildlife habitat have been protected in Saskatchewan, in key breeding and staging areas for North American waterfowl.

The Branch also led the development of key conservation programs in Saskatchewan, including the Saskatchewan Heritage Marsh program. As one of DUC's six Diamond Legacy sponsors, Saskatchewan Environment's leadership is a model of how government, conservation agencies and the agricultural community can work together to preserve wetlands for continental waterfowl and other wildlife.

## Area Contacts

Marketing/Communications

Jane Bailey, Edmonton (780)489-2002  
Duncan Morrison, Western Boreal (204)467-3202  
Leigh Patterson, Oak Hammock (204)467-3306  
Trish Ritthaler, Edmonton (780)489-2002

Manitoba

Bob Grant, Brandon (204)729-3500

Saskatchewan

Brent Kennedy, Regina (306)569-0424  
Keith LePoudre, Saskatoon (306)665-7356

Alberta

Perry McCormick, Calgary (403)201-5577  
Rick Harland, Calgary (403)201-5577  
Dave Kay, Edmonton (780)489-2002  
Dave Kay, Grand Prairie (780)532-7960

Greenwing Liaisons

Jerry Brunen, Calgary (403)201-5577  
Barb Hanbidge, Saskatoon (306)665-7356  
Duane Hudd, Oak Hammock (204)467-3000

Western Boreal Program

Gary Stewart (780)489-8110