



Ducks Unlimited Canada
CANADA'S CONSERVATION COMPANY

Partnership provides for wetlands education program

This June, Grade 5 students across Alberta will focus on wetlands conservation as part of their curriculum. Many of them will receive classroom visits from Ducks Unlimited Canada volunteers and Project Webfoot kits of materials from DUC; the luckiest will also participate in DUC field trips to wetlands near their community.

Though DUC staff and volunteers form the nucleus of this conservation education program, community partners often pitch in. One of the latest partnerships is with Talisman Energy, a Calgary-based, upstream oil and gas company with an established record of growth and a diverse set of global operations.

Talisman got involved with DUC in 2004 when their Edson area manager Dave Stewart suggested they develop a community based education program near their gas plant west of town. Talisman had recently purchased land adjacent to School Lake as a conservation easement and the provincial government owned the rest. Here was an ideal opportunity to not only preserve this ecologically rich wetland, but to educate local children as well.

“We know our company’s operations both impact and benefit the communities where we work,” said Michael Reid, area community relations liaison for Talisman. “There are obvious employment and economic benefits, but we also look at ways to benefit the community itself. Children and education are high on our list of community investment initiatives, so DUC’s Project Webfoot seemed a natural fit.”

Like all successful businesses, Talisman scoped out DUC before it proceeded. They wanted to work with a conservation organization that had good local foundational support, but was also large enough to have the potential to expand from a local program to a national one. DUC fit the bill on both counts. The fact that both organizations also place a high value on environmental considerations was an added inducement.

Check-up over, Talisman rolled up its sleeves and went to work. Four Talisman reps, two staff and two summer hires, built the five field stations at the School Lake site where the children would try everything from critter dipping to trail walking. They also rented and set up tents for food and shelter, gave a donation to the local Knights of Columbus to cook a barbeque, and came out for the field trips to help as needed. The local high school came on board too, making nesting boxes in their industrial arts class. As Reid says, “We provided logistical support and DUC provided the environmental education.”

The partnership worked well, and the company expanded its participation to Hinton and Grande Prairie in 2005. Originally two days in length, it is now six, with about five classes on site for each half day of programming.

In its first two years, 21 classes and 449 students in the Edson-Hinton area participated in field trips at the School Lake site and 30 classes with 581 students in the Grande Prairie area. Warburg is a new area added in 2006. Talisman is now considering expanding its support corporately to all its Canadian operations, which include Ontario, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, as well as Alberta. “This year will be significant,” added Reid. “This initiative is taking on a whole new life.”

Ducks Unlimited Canada is a private, not-for-profit, Canadian organization. Since 1938 DUC has positively influenced more than 24.9 million acres (over 10 million hectares) of wetland and upland habitat for the benefit of waterfowl, other wildlife and people. For information, go to www.ducks.ca, call your local DUC office or toll-free in Alberta 1-866-479-3825.