



flyway

Sharing the “Wonder of Wetlands” with teachers



Over 400 teachers attended the British Columbia Science Teachers' Association Conference in Richmond last May. The conference also attracted Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC). It was an ideal opportunity for DUC to share the wonder of wetlands with B.C. teachers.

Rick Wishart, national director of education, presented a one-hour workshop entitled “Wonder of Wetlands”. The workshop outlined DUC's role in conserving water resources and wetlands and demonstrated hands-on activities designed to engage students in wetland studies. Teachers poured water through funnels and sponges, which demonstrated how ground cover and wetlands regulate stream flows. And teachers played the “Wetland Metaphor” game and identified pond life.

Kathleen Fry, coastal region education and extension specialist, kidnapped some pond life and drove it (very carefully, no speed bumps!) to the conference for the DUC display booth. The display featured information about Adopt-A-Class and Green Street, DUC's curriculum-based wetland ecology program. As well as the tiny pond life, teachers learned about bigger wildlife – young salamanders in a glass aquarium.

This was just one of several events DUC attends annually to encourage educators in the study of wetland ecology. Already in 2004, DUC has provided hands-on workshops, lesson plans or other assistance to educators at Learning For Sustainable Futures (Vancouver), a Project Wild workshop (Delta), the Primary Teachers Association meeting (Richmond) and the Intermediate Teachers' Association (Victoria).

Contact your local DUC office or visit www.ducks.ca for more information about opportunities to help bring wetlands to teachers and students in your area.



Conservation on the shores of Great Slave Lake

Ducks Unlimited Canada is helping Yellowknife, N.W.T., residents learn about wetlands and wildlife right on the city's lakeshore.

DUC provided the prize in a contest for local artists to develop interpretive signs for Willow Flats, a marsh nature preserve on the edge of Great Slave Lake. The City of Yellowknife and the Rotary Club plan to finish building a boardwalk through Willow Flats by 2005.

The Willow Flats project is part of an eight-year Waterfront Management Plan designed to bring the community of Yellowknife closer to the water's edge.

"We live on one of the largest lakes in the world, but we have very little access to it," says Grant White, Director of Community Services for the City of Yellowknife. "So, this plan brings the community down to the water's edge by developing parks. One of the larger parks is Willow Flats."

The interpretive signs illustrate lake ecology, marsh plants and wildlife – from mayflies, wood frogs and northern pike to red-necked grebes and muskrat.

"Being involved at the community level is

important to DUC," says Jason Charlwood, N.W.T. biologist and fundraising manager,



"especially when it concerns educating the public on the importance of wetlands, including those right in their backyards."



Pioneer Biologist Sterling acknowledged in Comstock Marsh

When retired Ducks Unlimited Canada biologist Tom Sterling visited his old colleague Murray Clark, manager of habitat programs in the B.C. Peace, Sterling thought he was going for a mule deer hunt. And only a mule deer hunt.

But once the hunt was over, Clark, Pacific Region director Ian Barnett, and eight other past and present DUC employees led Sterling to Comstock Marsh. There, with Sterling's daughter, two grandchildren and an old DUC colleague from the 1950s, former assistant chief engineer Herb Moulding, DUC dedicated Comstock Marsh to Tom Sterling.

"The company has been wanting to dedicate a project to Tom for years," says Clark. "But Tom, being the modest person he is, refused each time they proposed it."

DUC has had a program to recognize long-term employees with a project dedication for about eight years.

"It is generally reserved for those who have given exceptional service and is approved by the senior staff and director in each province," says Barnett. "Tom certainly meets those criteria."

Sterling worked for DUC for 37 years. He started as a field biologist in Saskatchewan and Alberta in 1949 and then became the provincial biologist in Saskatchewan. From 1966 to 1968, Sterling surveyed British Columbia wetlands and waterfowl. He and engineer Gunnar Campbell opened DUC's first B.C. office, in Victoria. He was the first

to work in the Northwest Territories on snow geese and in his final years with DUC, he did preliminary assessments of waterfowl and habitat in the Yukon.

"He was the pioneer biologist for DU," says Clark. "He was the guy that broke the ice, and the rest of us followed."

Comstock Marsh was one of the first partially drained wetlands that Sterling identified as valuable waterfowl habitat in B.C. DUC restored the 40-hectare project in 2002.

On Nov. 9, 2003, Clark and Barnett unveiled a bronze dedication plaque on a cairn overlooking Comstock Marsh. It said:

In recognition of Robert Thomas (Tom) Sterling for his lifelong contribution to waterfowl conservation in Ducks Unlimited Canada. This project, Comstock Marsh, is a vital wetland for waterfowl and provides exceptional habitat for a great variety of other wildlife.

"Tom and his family were all touched by the wording and the whole ceremony," says Clark. "If there's anybody in Ducks who was ever dedicated to Ducks, it was definitely Tom."



Friends, family and long-time colleagues joined Sterling at dedication.

Research follows ducks in the Georgia Basin/Puget Sound



If you see a dark green pickup with a large antenna mounted on the roof driving around the Fraser River delta, it's a clandestine operation – of the avian kind. Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) is spying on ducks.

Kate Hagmeier, DUC field biologist in Surrey, is leading a three-year research project into how ducks use habitats in the Fraser River delta and north Puget Sound.

“The Georgia Basin and north Puget Sound area are considered to be one ecosystem complex,” says Hagmeier. “Birds that are wintering here, or migrating through here, ignore the international border.”

Last November, Hagmeier and the DUC team captured 40 American wigeon and 35 northern pintail, drakes and hens on Boundary Bay, Serpentine Wildlife Area and Roberts Bank wildlife management area. They fitted the ducks with radio transmitters that mount backpack-style between the wings. The 15-gram transmitters will eventually fall off, but not until researchers have followed them through the winter and spring.

Four times a week, the green antennae truck drives the delta searching for radio signals emitted from radioed ducks. Each duck wears a transmitter with a different frequency, so the crew can identify individuals. The field crew records where the

ducks are feeding and what they are eating. The data will tell researchers what habitats the ducks are using on the Canadian side of the border.

Once a week, the crew flies a plane down the Fraser Valley, out to Vancouver Island, and south to Everett, Wash., 30 km north of Seattle. This broader scale surveillance will tell researchers how ducks are using the whole ecosystem complex, from the Fraser River delta to beyond the Skagit River delta in the U.S. Already they know that some ducks are using the whole area.

One male northern pintail, banded on Dec. 2, 2003, in Boundary Bay, was found in Boundary Bay one day, then 65 kilometres away in Chilliwack the next. Then it flew to Puget Sound.

Hagmeier and the team chose wigeon and pintail as their study species because they have very different feeding habits. Although both are dabblers, wigeon graze on new green vegetation and eelgrass in the intertidal zone, while pintails prefer seeds and invertebrates. Identifying and conserving habitats that support these species will benefit other less picky feeders, like mallards, too.

The Fraser River Delta is a region where urbanization and non-soil-based agricultural practices, such as greenhouses and

nurseries, continue to change a landscape that annually supports almost a million wintering and migrating waterfowl.

“When you have limited conservation dollars, as we all know there are, these data will help us make the best decisions about what waterfowl need in the Fraser River delta and north Puget Sound,” says Hagmeier.

The transmitter battery operates for around 250 days – long enough for Hagmeier to follow the ducks all winter and during spring migration. With support from Ducks Unlimited, Inc. (DU, Inc.), the Institute for Wetland and Waterfowl Research, the Canadian Wildlife Service, B.C. Institute of Technology and the B.C. Waterfowl Society, Hagmeier and DUC biologist Dan Buffet are planning on another two years of trapping and radio telemetry. Ultimately, this project is one part of a larger goal in collaboration with DU, Inc.

“What we're planning on doing in the long term is expand the conservation plan from the Fraser River delta, down to the Skagit Valley in Washington,” says Buffet. “The goal is to create one of the first DU cross-border conservation plans.”

News and Notes

Students in the Okanagan learn all about wetlands

The first four DUC Adopt-A-Classrooms held in the Okanagan region were recently sponsored at the Penticton DUC fundraising dinner. Thanks go to A & K Grimm, TD Canada Trust, Jim Cumming and Coastal Inn at Apex for their sponsorship. In the classes, 105 Grade 4 and 5 students learned all about wetlands.

Snow Geese

Record number of snow geese wintered this year in the Pacific Northwest between the Fraser River Delta and the Skagit Valley, Wash. Up to 80,000 snow geese migrated from Wrangel Island, Russia, to our coast.

Living by Water gets support from the Vancouver Foundation

PACIFIC REGION

It has been a productive year for Living by Water in the San Jose River Watershed (SJRW). In its first year, the Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) project partnered with landowners in 10 shoreline improvement projects and planted 153 native plants along 800 metres of newly stabilized shoreline.

In January, the Vancouver Foundation recognized the value of the two-year project by awarding DUC an \$18,450 environment grant.

"The money that the Vancouver Foundation gave us is great," says project co-ordinator Sarin Warman. "It allows us more freedom and flexibility to help make our shoreline projects successful."

Warman is currently planning five new projects for spring and hopes to generate more over the 2004 field season. In one partnership with the B.C. Ministry of Transportation, Living by Water in the SJRW will help improve the shoreline around a settling pond that was built to capture and filter road runoff. The pond is in downtown Williams Lake, right by the shoreline of Williams Creek.

"It's a high-profile site," says Warman. "So we're also looking at putting up some signage to explain the site and make the connection between urban land use and watershed management."

This year, Living by Water in the SJRW will also expand its education and awareness programs.

At the "Stewards in the Cariboo" open house in March, Warman will introduce residents to the B.C. Community Mapping Network (CMN), a community, non-governmental organization, industry and government collaboration that provides a web-place for sharing environmental information for building sustainable

communities. Locations of eelgrass beds, frogs, invasive plants, grasslands and sensitive habitats are just some of the maps that CMN partners have built on the database, and can use for future urban and restoration planning.

"We're inviting people to map their shorelines so we can get an idea of what's happening on the ground and where the needs for restoration are," says Warman. "Then we'll look into putting the information on the Community Mapping Network."

With help from the Vancouver Foundation, Living by Water in the SJRW anticipates another successful year of shoreline restoration and stewardship.



"We weren't restoring our shoreline for esthetics but rather for the environmental reasons. However, after seeing the transformation on these pictures, we're so happy about how much better it looks. The concrete and lawn was so cold and unfriendly," says Barbara Bearman, owner of the lakefront home.

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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: Barbara Gautreau-Kyle
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
National Coordinator of Media Relations:
Lauralou Cicierski
Art Director: Tye Gregg
Graphic Designers: Lindsay Pikta-Marie,
Aquila Samson, Jeopie Wolfe
Administrative Assistant: Debbie Menard

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Area Contacts

Director of Regional Operations
Ian Barnett, Kamloops (250)374-8307

Habitat Programs
BC Coastal
Les Bogdan, Surrey (604)592-5000

BC Intermountain
Brad Arner, Kamloops (250)374-8307

BC Peace
Murray Clark, Tomslake (250)786-0220

Fundraising
Rory Brown, Victoria (250)652-5090

Marketing/Communications
Deanna Bogart, Surrey (604)592-5004

Major Gifts and Feather Society
Gordon Stewart, Surrey (604)592-0987

Western Boreal Program
Gary Stewart (780)489-8110

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