

# DUC'tario

SPRING 2023 – VOLUME 29

NEWS FOR YOU FROM DUCKS UNLIMITED CANADA

UNLIMITED IMPACT. UNLIMITED POTENTIAL.

## ATOCAS BAY: A GIFT OF NATURE THAT'S FOR THE BIRDS



THE POWER OF  
PARTNERSHIP

AI TOOLS HELP THE FIGHT  
AGAINST INVASIVE SPECIES

DUC WETLAND  
HEROES



Ducks Unlimited  
Canada



## Wetlands: nature's best weapon for healthy lakes

Canada has more lakes than any other country in the world: a whopping 879,800 to be exact! They offer us an escape to swim, fish, paddle or to simply listen to waves lap against the shore. While our lakes are a source of pride, keeping them clean and healthy is a responsibility we all share.

Right now, many of our lakes are in crisis. Blue-green alga (cyanobacteria) is impacting many lakes, depleting oxygen, killing off aquatic life and making them toxic for humans. The cause can be traced to

human activities, including agriculture. Runoff water from ditches, creeks and rivers flows downstream, carrying nutrients like phosphorus and nitrogen, creating a buildup of nutrients that can dramatically impact lakes. Climate change is making matters worse, by creating favorable conditions for blue-green algae blooms to form earlier and more frequently.

But all is not lost. Scientists studying Lake Erie — one of the country's most diseased waterbodies — have found that wetlands are the best

proponents in the war against blue-green algae. Research has shown that wetlands are good at filtering and processing nutrients, and as we work to restore even more wetlands, we can vastly improve the health of Canada's lakes.

Research on a number of small, restored wetlands on the north shore of Lake Erie found that wetlands retained 60 per cent of the most harmful phosphorus and 47 per cent of nitrogen throughout all four seasons.

Wetlands are critical for protecting the health of our lakes and our ability to enjoy them.

### How you can help?

Learn more: visit [ducks.ca/healthy-lakes](https://ducks.ca/healthy-lakes)

Sign up for updates on our work to heal sick lakes and safeguard our environment through natural solutions at [ducks.ca/how-to-help/stay-informed](https://ducks.ca/how-to-help/stay-informed)

Explore nature: Get outside into wetlands to experience nature in a whole new way. Now more than ever it's important we all take time to enjoy our families, decompress from our hectic schedules and enjoy the natural spaces around us.

### DUC'TARIO: NEWS FOR YOU FROM DUCKS UNLIMITED CANADA

DUC'tario is a newsletter for Ducks Unlimited Canada volunteers, project landowners and other partners in conservation in Ontario. We strive to inform and engage our valued supporters with stories and news about the people, projects and events that make up our Ontario community.

[ducks.ca/ontario](https://ducks.ca/ontario)



### CONTACT US

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# The power of partnership

## DUC'S CHERISHED PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COWAN FOUNDATION

**I**n many respects, Ducks Unlimited Canada's (DUC) success has been inextricably tied to its ability to build and grow its partnerships. For 85 years, DUC has relied on those who collaborate with us, including individuals, community groups, landowners, clubs, schools and businesses. Their commitment to conserving wetland habitats have strengthened our mission and helped us collectively achieve our goals.

The close ties DUC shares with The Cowan Foundation in the Woodstock area stands as a model of a mutually beneficial partnership and one that both parties treasure. With three completed projects under their belt and another one slated for the near future, The Cowan Foundation has shown its strong connection to its community, its residents and the natural world.

The first project supported in part by The Cowan Foundation was a flood mitigation project in the Thames River wetlands in 2018. Impressed by DUC's wetland restoration model, the foundation supported the project goals to create wetlands to control flooding in the flood plain, build habitats for waterfowl and other wildlife and improve water quality.

A poorly functioning Hodges Pond was the second project partially backed by The Cowan Foundation. The work involved recreating a wetland system on the 400-acre (160-hectare) site, building in waterfowl habitat and connecting it to Cedar Creek. Reconnecting the cold-water stream was vital to improving the area's water quality.

As part of their support of the removal and study of invasive Phragmites from a wetland just off Highway 401, the foundation also funded a portion of a billboard (*right*) celebrating the value of conservation with DUC partners, specifically the City of Woodstock and The Cowan Foundation. With its high visibility, the sign attracted a great deal of interest, including a \$20,000 donation from a local tech firm that saw the sign and wanted to get involved.

Phil Holst, chair of the conservation programs committee of DUC's volunteer board of directors, believes the mutual respect and trust between DUC and the foundation is the basis of the partnership's success.

"I think The Cowan Foundation looks at our 85-year history of getting things done is why this partnership works," says Holst. "It's a natural fit and they know we stay true to our words. Both organizations care deeply about the environment and together, have and will continue to make great things happen."

Later this year, The Cowan Foundation will support DUC in restoring a 7.66-acre (3.1-hectare) wetland at Onondaga Farms, a Tim Horton's Foundation camp. Volunteers from the foundation and DUC will plant trees on the site in late May, then once camp season is over, rebuilding the wetland's water control system will commence.

"We're deeply committed to this work here in southwestern Ontario that will benefit everyone today and for generations to come," says Mary D'Alton, executive director of The Cowan Foundation. "This collaboration allows us to give



*"It's a natural fit and they know we stay true to our words. Both organizations care deeply about the environment and together, have and will continue to make great things happen."*

— PHIL HOLST, CONSERVATION PROGRAMS COMMITTEE CHAIR, DUC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

back to our community in real and lasting ways, and we're grateful to be a part of it."

On the horizon, The Cowan Foundation and DUC hope to build on their past success as partners. The foundation remains committed to improving the resilience of our natural world and plans to be a part of DUC initiatives for many years to come.





## Atocas Bay: A gift of nature that's for the birds

When it comes to providing unlimited ecological benefits, Atocas Bay is the gift of nature that keeps on giving. Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) purchased the property in 2000. Two decades, more than 300 additional acres secured and over 300 wetland basins restored later, Atocas Bay continues to be a shining example of how agriculture and wetland restoration can co-exist successfully and become a model of sustainability.

The story of Atocas Bay, now a premier wetland demonstration site, is one that combines collaboration and a shared love for the environment. In the past century, 95 percent of the wetlands there were lost due to farming. Atocas Bay's low land values, clay soils, undulating topography and potential for cost-conscious and productive wetlands was an opportunity DUC could not pass up, knowing they could further enhance the diverse waterfowl habitats there.

Atocas Bay was purchased from the Bowater Paper Company out of South Carolina through the multi-partner Eastern Habitat Joint Venture (EHJV) to secure vital wetland habitat in the area. Rod MacLaren, the original farmer with lease rights to the land, continued his cattle operations there after DUC took ownership.

Restoration work for the Atocas Bay wetlands was broken into three phases from 2001 to 2008. There was a flurry of early work prior to any shovels going in the ground, including biological field and waterfowl surveys, engineering field inspections, designs, permitting and budget approvals. The start of Phase 1 began on 9/11, cementing that date in the memory of those who were undertaking the work there that day for two very different reasons.

At the time, DUC was required to obtain a Permit to Take Water from the Ministry of the Environment for every wetland targeted for restoration. Of the first 244 permits taken out, many of the wetlands were restored, while others were left as they were to monitor the success rate for waterfowl. Not surprisingly, the restored wetlands were vastly more productive with waterfowl, than those left unrestored. Clearly, DUC was on the right track.

While Phase 1 was underway, two other properties owned by the Charlebois and Chatelaine families were purchased by DUC and another 39 wetland segments were restored.

When MacLaren died in 2007 from a farming accident, Sylvain and Annette Lepage, who ran their cattle farm on land adjacent to MacLaren's, took over his herd as well as the lease with DUC.

*"We're fortunate to be able to secure even more land at Atocas Bay. To have this much of a positive impact and to witness it first-hand is gratifying. It shows what can be accomplished when people have a shared vision and a common goal."*

— MIKAYLA STINSON,  
DUC CONSERVATION  
PROGRAMS SPECIALIST





More recently, another 50 acres was acquired from the Lepage family with the support of Environment Climate Change Canada and Nature Smart Climate Solutions. With additional acres secured over the years—most recently in 2022, the property is now more than 2,000 acres of rolling uplands, wetlands and small lakes. The Lepage family still runs a cattle operation on land leased from DUC.

On the newly acquired acreage, DUC restored nine individual wetlands of both pair ponds and brood-rearing habitat, using a combination of small clay earthen plugs and water management structures.

“We’re fortunate to be able to secure even more land at Atocas Bay,” Mikayla Stinson, conservation specialist for DUC in eastern Ontario, says. “To have this much of a positive impact and to see it first-hand is gratifying. It shows what can be accomplished when people have a shared vision and a common goal.”

In total, DUC has restored nearly 300 wetland basins on the site, providing significant benefits to waterfowl, wildlife and the people living in the area. More than 13 species of waterfowl now can be found on the site, including snow geese, mallards, black ducks, blue-winged teals, gadwalls, wood ducks, buffleheads and ring-necked ducks. Atocas Bay is also home to several rare species, including black terns and short-eared owls, and has the highest density of breeding bobolinks in Ontario and Quebec.

The Atocas Bay project shows how agriculture and wildlife habitat management can work together. Several environmentally friendly agricultural practices on the property have been implemented, including cattle exclusion fencing, rotational grazing, alternative livestock watering sources and delayed haying to reduce wildlife mortality.



*The 200 restored wetlands and upland habitat at DUC’s Atocas Bay project host breeding pairs of rare bobolinks (top) and short-eared owls (above).*

This major conservation initiative could not have been possible without a multitude of conservation partners including the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Wildlife Habitat Canada, Environment Climate Change Canada, the North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA), Ducks Unlimited, Inc. and seven state agencies through the Fall Flights Program, the Stirling Adams Foundation, the Prescott-Russell Stewardship Council, United Counties of Prescott-Russell and the South Nation Conservation Authority.

DUC will continue to showcase this remarkable project to share the benefits of restored wetlands and how agricultural stewardship practices can sustain both farming and wildlife.



## AI tools save time in race against invasive species

**I**n the race to eradicate invasive species from wetlands across Ontario, every second counts. That's why an innovative project using artificial intelligence is giving Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) another tool in its toolbox in the fight against European water chestnut.

Funded through the Green Shovels Collaborative, the project was the brainchild of Kyle Borrowman, DUC's head of invasives in Ontario. Borrowman thought the use of AI could drastically improve the process of finding and removing European water chestnut—and he was right. Building on the efficiencies of using drones that had already been

implemented, Borrowman approached saiwa, an artificial intelligence software developer on a 2022 pilot project using AI to analyze drone footage and identify the leaves of European water chestnut. The use of the AI tool continues to show promise for eradicating the invasive plant in the province, and further use of the technology will improve efficiency and accuracy over time.

What's fascinating about this project is how it combines technology to solve real-world problems. First, drone technology is used to capture visuals from wetlands, then AI software 'learns' what European water chestnut looks like and identifies locations where the invasive species can be found.

The process is a game-changer, since it can locate the plant far faster than crews in canoes paddling through wetlands ever could. It allows crews to spend less time searching for European water chestnut and more time removing it from our wetlands.

*To read the full story about how DUC is using drones and AI technology to identify invasive species and advance DUC's conservation work, visit [ducks.ca/stories/biodiversity/putting-artificial-intelligence-to-work-identifying-invasive-species](https://ducks.ca/stories/biodiversity/putting-artificial-intelligence-to-work-identifying-invasive-species)*

## Join in the fight to protect wetlands from invasive species

**Landowners play a vital role in helping to prevent the spread of invasive species in Ontario.** Those of you who have a wetland on your property are especially key players, as wetlands not only provide valuable habitat for waterfowl and other species, but also protect against many of the impacts of climate change.

Invasive species like Phragmites threaten the health and function of our wetlands by outcompeting native species, changing the ecosystem and robbing habitat from birds, mammals, amphibians and other wildlife. Invasive Phragmites has become a common sight throughout Ontario, and eradicating

this species is particularly difficult. Yet, all is not lost. You can help restore the places we love by partnering with DUC to identify invasive species in our beloved wetlands.

Wondering how you can help? The answer is as simple as going online to read DUC's new *Landowner Guide to Invasive Phragmites in Wetland Habitats* and completing our invasive phragmites survey.

The guide will assist you in spotting invasive species on your property, and the survey is helping us better understand their spread. If you're already a DUC landowner partner who has completed a wetland conservation project

on your property, keep an eye on your mailbox for the full package we've sent you. But we also want to hear from our entire conservation community. If you have Phragmites on your land, or if you want to learn more about identifying invasive Phragmites (or other aquatic invasive species), this guide will be of interest to you.

*Join us in the fight to eradicate invasive species in Ontario wetlands today! To access the guide and survey, visit [ducks.ca/invasive-phragmites-guide](https://ducks.ca/invasive-phragmites-guide)*



# A year of projects, partners and purpose

The past year was a busy and productive one for Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) in Ontario. Once again, we built and restored wetlands both large and small. We deepened our relationships with funders and partners alike and continued to advance the DUC mission, adding more conserved acres of wetlands and grasslands for the benefit of waterfowl, wildlife and even us too!

Every year, we work with landowners to create or enhance wetland and grassland habitats where restoration is most needed. Our mission is to conserve, restore and manage wetlands and adjacent habitats, which together create healthy ecosystems. While our focus is on habitat for ducks and other waterfowl, these same habitats have many other benefits for water, wildlife and communities.

DUC collaborates with conservation authorities, stewardship councils, local governments and landowners to implement new wetland conservation projects. Our contributions include project identification, site suitability assessments, biological assessments, project design support, assistance with permit processes and requirements, and sourcing “match” funding for habitat projects that meet mutual conservation goals.

Funding for DUC projects come from a variety of federal and provincial programs, as well as from our international partners, the North American Wetland Conservation Act, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., and seven state agencies through the Fall Flights Program. The generosity of our funders allows us to grow the number of wetlands across Ontario and we are grateful for the support.

## DUC CONSERVATION PROGRAM DELIVERY EFFORTS IN ONTARIO: FY23 (APRIL 1, 2022–MARCH 31, 2023)

MORE THAN  
**5,000**  
TOTAL ACRES  
CONSERVED,  
RESTORED OR  
ENHANCED

 **169**  
LANDOWNER  
PARTNERS

**116** NEW  
WETLANDS

 **27** WETLAND  
REBUILDS

 **25**  
FUNDING  
PARTNERS

**15** CONSERVATION  
DELIVERY  
PARTNERS

 **77** CONTRACTORS



## DUC Wetland Heroes: Making a difference for the environment

**E**than Kouri and Bradley Mosher are the kind of heroes that don't wear capes.

The two young men spent much of the summer of 2022 paddling in a canoe around Wolfe Island taking on European water chestnut, a prolific aquatic invasive species, and becoming Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) Wetland Heroes.

The DUC Wetland Heroes program celebrates the volunteer work of youth under the age of 25 who are making a difference by taking action to conserve and protect Canada's wetlands. Heroes can be individuals, classes, entire schools or community youth groups or clubs.

The young men's introduction to conservation work came through their impassioned grade eight teacher, Logan Morris, at Tamworth Elementary

School. A long-time summer contractor with DUC, Morris worked closely with Kyle Borrowman, a biologist who heads up DUC's invasive species program in Ontario. Morris recommended the boys as potential volunteers for the 2022 field season and was given the go-ahead to bring the enthusiastic young men on board. No one could've imagined what a fit it would be for all involved.

"I know it sounds strange," Morris says, "but from the moment the boys learned about how I spent my summers with Ducks, they were excited to be a part of the team."

European water chestnut had developed quite a foothold in the area and removal hadn't taken place for one year due to the pandemic. The boys learned first-hand why the invasive species is a

problem in wetlands and how their efforts could make a big difference for the health of the ecosystems there.

Kouri, 14, has been a duck, deer and moose hunter most of his life and is an avid angler. His connection to nature is a strong one, so this project was a perfect fit.

"I love being outdoors," says Kouri. "I'm comfortable out in nature because it feels like home for me. This experience gave me a huge sense of achievement and has inspired me to think about a career in this area too."

Mosher's mom Catherine was thrilled her son was included in this volunteering opportunity but a little nervous since her son has Down Syndrome.

"He was so excited to just be one of the boys," she says. "I knew he was happy and safe. Every day he would tell his friends or family 'I had to work today' and you could tell that was very important to him. He cares about nature and wants to leave it better than how he found it."

With Morris at the canoe's stern, Kouri in the bow acting as lookout and Mosher in the middle,

*Right: Ethan Kouri reaches to pull a patch of invasive European water chestnut from a marsh on Wolfe Island as Logan Morris steers the canoe.*







**Above (left to right):** Ethan Kouri and Bradley Mosher, DUC 2022 Wetland Heroes, with DUC biologist Kyle Borrowman and DUC summer contractor Logan Morris.

the trio made many memories together. Each has special moments they'll cherish forever, including seeing a huge flock of trumpeter swans and a deer swimming right in front of their canoe.

More work is required to eradicate European water chestnut from the waterways around Wolfe Island. Both boys are hoping to return this summer and do what they can to improve the function of the wetlands there.

Here's to Bradley Mosher and Ethan Kouri: DUC Ontario Wetland Heroes!



## Fostering a love of nature at Hilliardton Marsh's new interpretive centre

**E**xciting news for the North! The Hilliardton Marsh Provincial Wildlife Area in Timiskaming will soon open its brand-new interpretive centre.

Hilliardton Marsh is a diverse shallow-water marsh that spans over 1,800 acres (728 hectares) and is home to over 600 species of waterfowl, songbirds, mammals, plants and fish. Since DUC first constructed the marsh in 1996, it's served as a great spot for nature enthusiasts and an outdoor classroom for nearby elementary schools.

At 2,400 square feet, the Hilliardton Marsh Research and Education Centre will be large enough to host events of all kinds, including school groups, clubs and bird banders from all over North America. With accessible washrooms, a private kitchen, showers and two bunkies able to house 12 volunteer researchers, the centre will service all those who come to visit.







# Finding the balance

PRESERVING NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN A RAPIDLY GROWING ONTARIO

For 85 years, Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) has been dedicated to protecting and enhancing wetlands. Since 1974, DUC has conserved more than one million acres (404,685 hectares) of wetland and associated habitats in Ontario. We're proud of our accomplishments, but there are challenges ahead. As the province's population continues to grow, the need for housing grows too. The pressure of accommodating the thousands of people moving to Ontario each year pits the need for development against the conservation of wetlands across the province.

Ontario needs clear, effective wetland policies and ongoing investment in habitat restoration and management. Wetlands are critical natural infrastructure that capture and store carbon, enhance and protect water quality, help prevent floods and drought and reduce the impacts of climate change.

That's why DUC continues to advocate for stronger provincial policies which offer higher protection for wetlands and require

any losses to be offset by newly created habitat. DUC is also working at the municipal level to embed natural infrastructure in planning decisions and the conservation and restoration of wetlands across Ontario. Municipalities need the province to support their efforts through clear policy guidance.

DUC believes that it is possible to balance the needs of growing communities with the goal of net ecological gains.

## Wetlands remain a vital part of the Ontario housing puzzle

On October 25, 2022, the Government of Ontario introduced Ontario's Housing Supply Action Plan which included Bill 23, the *More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022*. This bill is complex and touches on many areas of legislation and policy.

DUC's focus on the discourse around affordable housing reinforces the critical role of natural infrastructure in planning

*Right: The Town of Ajax restored wetlands along Duffins Creek with guidance from DUC's wetland sustainability tool.*



decisions and the conservation and restoration of wetlands across Ontario. Wetlands must be included in the municipal planning and development process to ensure a climate-resilient Ontario.

We believe that the changes to the CA Act, eliminating municipalities from engaging conservation authorities in technical and land-use planning reviews, threaten wetlands. By removing CA's 'seat at the table', there is a heightened risk to development without environmental oversight.

### **Ontario Wetland Evaluation System review: DUC's position**

While DUC supports the need for an OWES review, we are concerned with the reduced oversight of the province, removal of wetland complexing from the scoring system, and the ability to "downgrade" a wetland to not significant. This will cause further loss of wetlands in Ontario.

DUC is committed to working with the Province of Ontario, to achieve sustainable development, while at the same time, including natural infrastructure in planning processes. Any viable housing strategy must include protection of ecologically valuable wetland habitats and restoration of natural systems.

### **Targeting municipalities for wetland restoration**

Natural heritage systems provide significantly more benefits than isolated features and DUC is working to bring our expertise and resources to municipalities to help restore and reconnect

*DUC believes that it is possible to balance the needs of growing communities with the goal of net ecological gains.*



natural systems for water quality, wildlife and climate resilience. Restoration opportunities must be included in planning processes, given the need for affordable housing.

DUC recently developed a wetland suitability tool to help municipalities identify restoration opportunities and guide their natural heritage system planning. DUC is in talks with several municipalities to explore potential wetland and natural infrastructure projects and provide input on protecting and restoring wetlands in their official planning process.

This targeted approach has already resulted in wins with the Region of Durham and Town of Ajax's restored wetland habitats in the Carruthers Creek and Duffins Creek watersheds. The partnership is part of municipal urban growth plans to make local communities more resilient to the effects of climate change in a high-growth region.

As we continue to develop planning tools and our science on wetlands, we will continue to be a resource for Ontario municipalities to address their climate concerns.

Ducks Unlimited Canada has reviewed the implications of all proposed changes within Bill 23 on our mission of conserving wetlands, and we have been responding to each component individually. We are committed to working with the province to ensure that proposed changes to do not result in increased wetland loss for Ontario. You can read our full position and review our submissions by visiting [ducks.ca/news/provincial/ontario/duc-ontario-bill-23](https://ducks.ca/news/provincial/ontario/duc-ontario-bill-23)



# Memories and more: Parting words from our beloved retiring staffers



Owen Steele



Dave McLachlin

This year, we bid farewell to four individuals who have dedicated their careers to Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC). Here, they reflect on their storied careers, answering these questions:

- + How did you come to work for DUC?
- + How long did you work for DUC?
- + What is your most memorable moment?
- + What is your proudest achievement?
- + What are your thoughts on DUC's 85-year history and its future?
- + What is your favourite duck?

## Owen Steele

*Biologist, Area Biologist, Conservation Programs Leader, Head of Conservation Planning, Head of Conservation Programs, Acting Manager of Provincial Operations – 34 years*

At our family farm in Bruce County in the 1970s, I learned the links between agriculture, the environment and wildlife. I developed a desire to explore and protect these special places.

My most memorable moments came through field tours with our DUC volunteers, like when we were driving a school bus of volunteers through the flooded Minesing swamp, and the water come rushing in through the doors... great fun, and many laughs!

I marvel at the environmental legacy a few bold, forward-thinking duck hunters made — one million acres of wildlife habitat here in Ontario — and how that vision has grown from ducks, to “more than ducks”, to ecological goods and services, to climate resiliency. We appreciate wetlands for their contributions to our sustainable future, mental health and spiritual wellbeing. With our brilliant young staff brimming with ideas and knowledge, DUC is in good hands.

The wood duck is my favorite duck because of the conservation story and the role Ontario played in its recovery. Without passionate conservationists like my mom, who have diligently maintained nest box programs and helped protect wood duck habitat, we wouldn't be able to marvel at the splendor the wood ducks bring to our wetlands every spring.

## Dave McLachlin

*Resource Technician, Ontario Habitat Restoration Program Head, Conservation Specialist, Biologist – 34.9 years*

My job on the trumpeter swan reintroduction program was ending and in a happy coincidence DUC was hiring at the same time. Mike Barr, a DUC biologist already familiar with my field



work, helped me land the job at DUC on May 20, 1988.

My early work was restoring degraded small wetlands and DUC's Beaver Pond Management Program in the Crown lands of northern central Ontario. The program's focus was to increase the numbers of fertile and productive beaver ponds at a landscape level by looking at all the beaver ponds in one township after another, one field season at a time.

Restoring my first wetland and seeing it the next year with hundreds of ducks roosting in it was a real thrill. Accepting a gift of land in 2002 worth \$16 million from a trusted DUC project landowner was both a proud and very humbling moment.

DUC remains suitably anchored in our primary focus of waterfowl habitat. One of our earlier catchlines, "Ducks and More," is increasingly true given that habitat for ducks brings a multitude of benefits and opportunities. I believe DUC employees of the present and future will continue to make discoveries around the science of wetlands, keeping these rich and varied habitats healthy across the Canadian landscape.

The vividly-coloured the drake wood duck has been a long-time favorite of mine.



Lynette Mader

## Lynette Mader

*Provincial Marketing Manager, Head of Outreach, Fee-for-Service Head, Manager Provincial Operations – 21 years*

I applied for the job of provincial marketing manager in 2002. I went through three interviews and had never gone through such an extensive process before. When I got the job, I almost fainted. It was such a big opportunity for me.



Jeff Krete

Getting a lamprey eel stuck on my hand at the Invasive Species Centre, DUC's Queen's Park Day or speaking to a crowd of 400 at a government stakeholder meeting regarding changes to the Conservation Authority Act, touring a mining operation at Glencore in Sudbury, or meeting premiers (McGuinty) and a prime minister (Harper) stand out as memorable moments.

I'm proud of starting the Ontario Wetland Care program where our wetland restorations projects were delivered through local partners and starting Ontario's first fee for service program. Also, landing a couple of multi-million-dollar grants!

DUC will endure. Always. I think DUC needs to continue to balance their origin story with the future goals like carbon markets, sustainability and climate solutions. DUC needs to maintain its niche in wetland restoration because program cutbacks under different governments have significantly reduced on-the-ground capacity. DUC needs to keep some boots on the ground while pursuing new opportunities.

The ruddy duck is my favourite, because it's a cute little duck.

## Jeff Krete

*Conservation Specialist – 21.5 years*

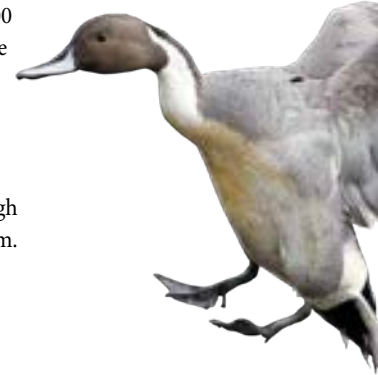
In my 20s I volunteered on my local DUC committee while attending the University of Waterloo. Once I graduated, I began a job search in my field of Environmental Studies. Opportunities were scarce in the 90s but I eventually landed a posted position as a Conservation Specialist with DUC.

My most memorable moment occurred while completing biological surveys with Dave McLachlin at Hullett Provincial Wildlife Area. We were paddling our canoe and noticed a duck on the water quite some distance away. The duck began swimming towards us, so we stopped paddling. It swam right up to the canoe looking at us, and I reached down and picked it up. It posed for a sniff from Dave's dog and a few photos. It started to flap its wings, so I let it go over the side and it simply flew away. Craziest thing that ever happened to me on the job!

My proudest achievement nurturing new partnerships to complete a great deal of wetland restoration work across Ontario. I value the relationships that I built with conservation-minded people.

DUC is as strong today as it's ever been. The many new young staff and professionals coming to DUC in recent years bodes well for our future success.

The drake pintail is my favourite duck.





## Volunteers drive our success

With the COVID-19 pandemic in the rearview mirror, the Ontario volunteer-led events program was able to drive towards another successful year in 2022. It was gratifying for our teams to return to hosting in-person events this past year — something we had all missed.

Ontario led the country in hosting events in 2022. Taking place from the summer months through the fall, most sold out well ahead of their scheduled dates. While Ontario has a long-standing tradition of event banquets, we continue to see volunteers pitching new and exciting opportunities.

Our firearms calendar raffle is a great example of a unique fundraising initiative volunteers have graciously supported over the past six years. This raffle generates nearly \$140,000 and sells out all 5,000 calendars, many to new supporters of DUC. Our volunteers are the backbone of this successful fundraiser, and we are grateful for your tireless efforts.

As we journey into 2023, DUC events staff and senior volunteer leaders are placing a greater emphasis on volunteer education and training. DUC was founded by volunteers who had the vision and desire to make DUC one of the most respected conservation organizations in North America. As staff, we are here to support and guide our volunteers in all aspects of conservation and fundraising activities to continue to make DUC the leader in wetland conservation. This past year, DUC invested time and effort broadening our volunteer opportunities by diversifying events and opportunities for volunteers.

Congratulations to everyone nominated for Ontario Volunteer of the Year, and in particular, Craig Lalonde of the Midland Chapter, who was voted 2022 Ontario Volunteer of the Year. Thank you on behalf of everyone at DUC.

### Tim Binch

DUC National Manager of Volunteer Fundraising | [t\\_binch@ducks.ca](mailto:t_binch@ducks.ca)

## Welcoming back the DUC Ontario volunteer council

### The DUC Ontario Volunteer Council is back!

With flagging interest and burnt-out members, the council seemed to be on life-support. With only two members trying to make a go of it, the council's future looked bleak. But in 2022, a working group was struck to gauge the potential interest and goals for the council and the result is a re-energized group, ready to support the fundraising efforts of the many DUC committees across the province.

Thanks to the infusion of several new members to DUC's Board of Directors, the council is enjoying a comeback. Chaired by Charles Fisher with Craig Lalonde acting as vice chair, the council includes retired lawyer and fundraiser John Goldsmith and DUC director Rob Tamblin. They have established terms of reference and goals for the future: the council plans to host workshops for fundraising, more social media messaging and a volunteer newsletter.

Greg Weeks, DUC Ontario senior director, is thrilled the council has been resurrected. "As in the past, the council should be an important component," Weeks says, "in helping our committees be more successful in fundraising, recruiting new members and supporters and generating innovative fundraising ideas. Our committees are our boots on the ground in their communities and are essential to our fundraising efforts. The council aims to support them in whatever way it can."

For more information on the Ontario Volunteer Council, contact Charles Fisher at [807fish@gmail.com](mailto:807fish@gmail.com)

## DUC Volunteer Milestones



<b>Percy Whitcroft</b>	45 Years	Aylmer	<b>R. James White</b>	30 Years	Aylmer
<b>Gerald Landriault</b>	40 Years	Terrace Bay	<b>Fred Neukamm</b>	30 Years	Aylmer
<b>Robert Carr</b>	40 Years	Frontenac	<b>Mike Manary</b>	25 Years	St. Thomas
<b>James Brady</b>	40 Years	Aylmer	<b>Ken Webb</b>	25 Years	Sault Ste. Marie
<b>Marvin Betz</b>	35 Years	Markham Sponsor	<b>Craig Lalonde</b>	25 Years	Midland
<b>Gail Campbell</b>	35 Years	Smith-Ennismore-Lakefield	<b>Dixie Lamb</b>	25 Years	Matheson
<b>John Campbell</b>	35 Years	Smith-Ennismore-Lakefield	<b>Timothy Binch</b>	25 Years	Kingston Golf
<b>Rick Haigh</b>	35 Years	Kingston Golf	<b>Edward Hoffman</b>	25 Years	Geraldton
<b>Donald Mellors</b>	35 Years	Brantford	<b>Linda Lalonde</b>	25 Years	Dunnville
<b>James A. Cook</b>	30 Years	Sudbury	<b>Leonard Lalonde</b>	25 Years	Dunnville
<b>Ray Pellatt</b>	30 Years	Sudbury	<b>Andre Gionet</b>	20 Years	Sault Ste. Marie
<b>John Pinhey</b>	30 Years	Prescott	<b>Linda Hill</b>	20 Years	Port Colborne
<b>Marjorie Bouck</b>	30 Years	Long Point Ladies	<b>David Borbely</b>	20 Years	Port Colborne
<b>Susan MacLaren</b>	30 Years	Long Point Bay	<b>Ethel Forbes</b>	20 Years	Mount Forest
<b>Hubert Gibson</b>	30 Years	Frontenac	<b>Dave Snider</b>	20 Years	Frontenac
<b>Carol Gibson</b>	30 Years	Frontenac	<b>Gerald Venturi</b>	20 Years	Coniston
<b>Russell Hoffman</b>	30 Years	Brantford	<b>Charles Exton</b>	20 Years	Campbellford
			<b>Kevin Van Velzer</b>	20 Years	Aylmer



## Volunteer with DUC and take action for conservation!

Volunteering with Ducks Unlimited Canada is a great way to turn your passion for conservation into action—and make a meaningful difference for wetlands and wildlife across the country. There are lots of ways to get involved as a DUC volunteer and give back to the conservation of the natural spaces you enjoy. You can:

- ✦ **Help your local DUC committee** with fundraising events such as banquets and auctions.
- ✦ **Organize a personal fundraiser** like a golf tournament, paint night, walkathon or any other activities you can dream up!
- ✦ **Lead an event** that shares your skills and knowledge about your favourite outdoor recreation activity.
- ✦ **Be a social media influencer** and help spread the word about DUC programs and events.



## A lifetime love of nature, conservation and caring

Craig Lalonde knows a thing or two about giving back. The 25 years he's devoted to volunteering with Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) have been his way of saying thank you to the organization that sparked his curiosity, wonder and passion when he was a little boy. For his selfless dedication and hard work, Lalonde has been named DUC Volunteer of the Year in Ontario.

Like many people who get involved with DUC, Lalonde was first introduced to the organization through his father, Leonard, who brought him to several DUC conservation dinners beginning when he was just six years old. There, he learned about the work of DUC and the importance of preserving Canada's wetlands.

As Lalonde grew, so did his involvement with DUC. In his hometown of Dunnville, he started the local chapter of the Greenwing Club, enlisting the help of his peers to build and install nest boxes and remove the invasive purple loosestrife from what is now the Thompson Creek Eco Centre. They built a pavilion there and planted trees on the site as well.

When he was 16, his brother encouraged him to take part in a DUC contest. He had to identify a number of birds and other wildlife, as well as answer a few essay questions. Lalonde was shocked to learn that he had won the contest and his prize was a trip to DUC's national office at Oak Hammock Marsh in Manitoba. It cemented his connection to nature, wetlands, waterfowl and conservation.

The experience at Oak Hammock Marsh inspired Lalonde to pursue post-secondary studies in Fish and Wildlife Technology, although his path took him elsewhere. Now living in Waubaushene with his wife Kerrie and their two sons, Caleb, 10, and Cameron, 6, he is well-known in his community as the 'DUC guy'. Lalonde spends much of his time with his 12-member Midland chapter organizing conservation dinners, securing donations and getting his boots dirty in wetland projects wherever he can.

"I've always enjoyed the fundraising events. After a few years I started emceeding our hometown events and seeing the same people every year," he says.

"Everyone remembers your story and you remember theirs. You build a connection with them."

An avid birder and hunter of waterfowl, deer and moose, Lalonde supports the work done by DUC to conserve and restore wetlands in Canada, as well as educating the public about its mission. He says DUC's science-backed projects illustrate the organization's forward-thinking approach.

Despite his lifelong dedication to the organization, being honoured as DUC's Volunteer of the Year in Ontario came as quite a shock.

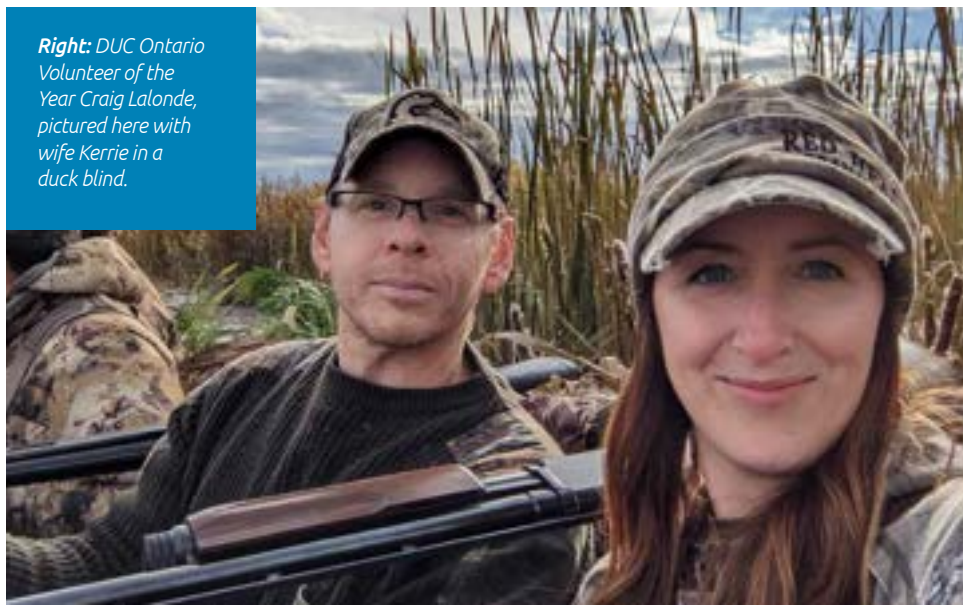
"Being awarded means the world to me," he says. "I'm still overwhelmed, but so touched I was chosen. DUC is my passion and I believe in what this organization stands for. When you consider the scope of the work done and the benefits of that work, you can't help but respect DUC. I'm so honored to be a part of the DUC community."

Last fall, Lalonde visited Oak Hammock Marsh with his father Leonard, brother Chris and son Caleb. It was a full-circle moment for him as he returned to the place that had lit the flame of conservation 25 years earlier. The experience was made even more memorable by sharing it with his loved ones.

"The things that always get to me are the nostalgic fall smells of mud and swamp that take me back to being a kid out with my dad."

*There are more than 800 DUC volunteers in Ontario, and 3,950 across Canada. Ducks Unlimited Canada is proud to recognize each of them—including outstanding leaders like Craig Lalonde—as volunteer champions and conservationists who serve with generosity, passion and dedication.*

**Right:** DUC Ontario Volunteer of the Year Craig Lalonde, pictured here with wife Kerrie in a duck blind.



# LOOK GOOD WHILE DOING GOOD!

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