



# DUC'tario

SPRING 2025 – VOLUME 31

NEWS FOR YOU FROM DUCKS UNLIMITED CANADA

## CELEBRATING FIVE DECADES OF CONSERVATION IN ONTARIO

LAKE LAURENTIAN  
WETLAND  
REVITALIZED

INSPIRING  
YOUNG  
CONSERVATIONISTS

REACHING NEW  
HEIGHTS TO MONITOR  
INVASIVE SPECIES





## Together we thrive: partnerships in wetland restoration

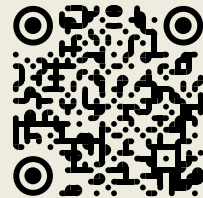
**A**t Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), partnerships have been the driving force behind our success from the very beginning. Founded on the principle of people coming together for a shared commitment to conservation, our early efforts laid the foundation for the meaningful collaborations that define our work in policy, conservation and education.

In Ontario, we're proud to maintain our reputation as a trusted partner as we advance collaborative partnerships with government, Indigenous communities, private landowners, agricultural producers and other conservation groups to restore wetlands across the province.

As the importance of preserving Ontario's farmland grows, this past year we've focused on bringing the value of wetlands into the conversation around agriculture. We are particularly proud to have spent our 18th year as part of the East Central

Farm Stewardship Collaborative, a group of dedicated partners supporting a variety of on-farm stewardship projects. In 2024, members of the group pushed forward several key initiatives, including the restoration of a degraded wetland on a farm in the Kawartha Region Watershed. By combining their expertise and resources, the group secured funding and successfully built the wetland, integrating it seamlessly into the farm's operations, with a section made accessible to livestock for drinking. DUC continues to partner with farmers to support these important projects.

Our collaboration with the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association has also been a critical part of advancing wetland restoration projects throughout Ontario. Through their Species at Risk Partnerships on Agricultural Lands (SARPAL) program as well as their other various programs, we've helped



*Above: Read the full Water Canada article about our wetland restoration work with TRCA and the Town of Ajax.*

### 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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*We're glad you're here! Search for @DUOntario on Facebook and Instagram. You can also join us on LinkedIn @ducks-unlimited-canada*

numerous landowners restore habitats. A notable project funded through SARPAL and by DUC provided an opportunity for landowners Barb and Paul O'Neill to enhance the wildlife habitat on their property by converting 18 acres (7.2 hectares) of idle farmland into a wetland. The new space is already attracting an abundance of wildlife, from waterfowl to other birds and reptiles.

In Ontario, over 70 per cent of wetlands have already been lost in developed areas, making our ongoing work with the Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and other partners even more crucial. Together, we're focused on conserving wetlands as part of urban landscapes, where they play an essential role in capturing carbon, filtering water and preventing flooding. Our collaboration with TRCA and the Town of Ajax, recently covered by Water Canada, helped restore vital wetland habitats in the Carruthers Creek and Duffins Creek watersheds, ensuring these communities are more resilient to climate change.

Wetlands don't exist in isolation — they are part of interconnected water systems that flow through our farmland, towns and cities. It is this vital connection that fuels our commitment

to staying engaged with our partners across the region. Together, we're stronger in our ability to protect Ontario's vital ecosystems!

We are deeply grateful to our collaborators for their support in 2024 and look forward to another year of continued partnership and success knowing, together, we can achieve even more.

*"I'm a birder, so watching new and unexpected species come to our wetland is a thrill. Now we're seeing ducks of all kinds, geese, deer, wild turkeys, swans, green and blue-winged teals, black ducks and pintails. Recently, we were treated to the sight of shorebirds that normally spend their summers in the Arctic Circle: American golden plovers. It's been such a wonderful surprise."*

— BARB O'NEIL

## A vision for wetlands: Phil Holst's 100th project milestone



inspired by them." Having grown up on a farm, Phil recalls spending hours by the river, where he began to understand how nature worked and changed through the seasons.

He then went on to own and operate a landscaping business for many years, developing a talent for collaborating with landowners and for designing natural features, like wetlands, that blend seamlessly into the landscape. After buying a farm in 2000, he built his first wetland on that property with DUC in 2005, and since then, the work hasn't stopped.

Phil often envisions the outcome of a project before it even begins. He can look at an idle field and picture how a wetland would fit and benefit the surrounding area or imagine the wildlife it would attract.

About eight years ago, during his weekly commutes through Woodstock to his wife's veterinary office, Phil noticed an overgrown, declining 80-acre (32-hectare) marsh in the heart of the city. He saw its potential and pitched an idea to the city council: What if DUC could restore the marsh into a vibrant urban wetland, full of wildlife and accessible to the public by foot and public transportation? After leading engineered designs, securing funding approvals and fostering partner collaborations,

the Brick Ponds wetland is nearly complete — just in time for Phil's 100th project milestone.

"A project like this embodies Phil's synergetic approach," says Nick Krete, DUC conservation specialist for Southwestern Ontario. "He's always thinking of everyone, and he's spearheading efforts to make sure this wetland is accessible to the community."

As Phil reflects on his 100 completed projects, he emphasizes that his success isn't just about his work but the partnerships he's built. Phil has always believed that true success in conservation lies in collaboration. Whether working with landowners, funders or partners, he consistently brings together diverse perspectives to ensure each project thrives and that everyone involved is proud of the outcome.

Phil's journey isn't over. "I have no intention of stopping," he says. "I think the opportunities are rather limitless. Let's see what happens." His passion, vision and leadership set a high bar for collaboration in conservation, and we look forward to seeing where he'll take his work next. Thank you, Phil, for your commitment to building a legacy of conservation that will benefit generations to come.



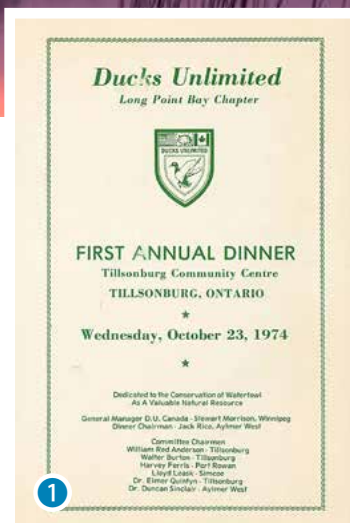
# Celebrating five decades of conservation in Ontario

THE FOLLOWING HIGHLIGHTS JUST A FEW OF THE MANY KEY MILESTONES THAT HAVE SHAPED DUCKS UNLIMITED CANADA'S (DUC) JOURNEY OF UNWAVERING COMMITMENT TO CONSERVATION IN ONTARIO.

## 1970s

**1 1974 – DUC Fundraising Program Launch:** In the 1970s, Hazard Campbell (Buffalo, N.Y.) and Dr. Duncan Sinclair (Aylmer, Ont.) encouraged their fellow Turkey Point Hunt Club members to attend Ducks Unlimited fundraising dinners in Buffalo, inspiring the formation of the Long Point Chapter. On October 23, DUC held its first fundraising dinner in Canada, in Tillsonburg. This chapter, led by Campbell and Sinclair, became known as the “Magnificent Seven,” a group that helped shape the future of DUC.

**1975 – Ontario's Conservation Program Begins:** DUC established its first field office in London, under the management of its Manitoba team, to continue its work with the Canadian Wildlife Service in Ontario. That same year, DUC completed its first Ontario-team led wetland conservation project, a 10-acre (4-hectare)



flooded area on private property near the town of Erin. The project is overseen by Dave West, DUC's first Ontario staff member.

**2 1976 – Small Marsh Program:** After opening a new provincial office in Aurora, DUC launched efforts to restore small wetlands across southern Ontario, one of Canada's most developed and populated regions. The program focused on areas that had been drained for agriculture, which were once thriving wetland habitats.



## 1980s

**1980 – Research Drives Conservation Focus:** DUC's Ontario Waterfowl Production Study, a research initiative aimed at understanding waterfowl breeding success in Ontario's wetlands, assessed habitat quality, nesting success and environmental factors affecting waterfowl populations. The data helped drive informed decisions about wetland conservation priorities and target efforts to restore and protect vital habitats, ensuring sustainable waterfowl populations in Ontario.

**3 1985 – Expanding into the Boreal Forest:** By the mid-1980s, DUC had expanded offices to Kingston, Barrie, and Peterborough, and in 1985, DUC opened an office in Timmins. This expansion marked the beginning of DUC's conservation work in Ontario's boreal forest and claybelts, with programs that included large-scale projects like nest box placements and wild rice restoration.

**1986 – International Partnership for Wetland Conservation:** The creation of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) – a collaborative effort between Canada, the United States and Mexico to address declining waterfowl populations through wetland and upland conservation – provided DUC with a science-based conservation framework and access to new funding sources, accelerating its conservation efforts.

**4 1989 – Beaver Pond Management Program:** DUC's first program not focused on water control, aiming



instead to enhance wetland habitats in central and northeast Ontario utilizing beaver food plots, beaver dam removal on stagnant ponds and nest box installation. Using 99-year agreements with the Province, the program secured 650,000 acres (263,000 hectares) of Crown land, carefully managing it to protect wildlife while allowing compatible sustainable development like forestry and mining.

## 1990s

**1993 – Ontario Land CARE (Conservation, Assessment, Restoration and Education) Program:** This initiative, launched in partnership

with the provincial government, was tailored specifically to the farming community in Ontario. Offering financial incentives and technical support to landowners, it encouraged agricultural practices that were beneficial to farmers while also providing benefits to nesting waterfowl, securing wetlands, and improving wetland quality.

**1994-95 – Protecting Great Lakes Coastal Wetlands:** Recognizing the importance of Great Lakes coastal wetlands for staging waterfowl on their way to or from breeding grounds further north and west, which were becoming severely threatened, DUC – with help from the Eastern Habitat Joint Venture (one of the regional initiatives under NAWMP) – began securing marsh complexes along



Lake Erie, the Detroit River and Lake St. Clair.

**1999 – Development of a Conservation Vision:** In collaboration with government agencies, conservation organizations and local stakeholders, DUC developed a Conservation Vision for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Region of Ontario. This vision was created to guide DUC's habitat conservation efforts, maximize wildlife benefits and cost-efficiency, and provide a solid foundation for future fundraising. It became the strategic framework for wetland conservation across Ontario, focusing on preserving critical habitats for waterfowl and wildlife, addressing the region's unique environmental challenges, and ensuring long-term ecological health.

## 2000s

**2000 – Walkerton Inquiry Highlights Wetlands' Ecological Value:** The Walkerton water contamination tragedy in May 2000, which caused seven deaths and sickened 2,500 people, led to a comprehensive inquiry, with DUC helping develop recommendations on restoring and protecting wetlands and watersheds to prevent future contamination. DUC's resulting 2001 report *Beyond the Pipe* emphasized the importance of wetlands, uplands and riparian zones in water sustainability and protection. The inquiry's focus on watershed planning highlighted

wetlands' ecological services and influenced public policy on wetland management, elevating DUC's profile as a science-based advocate for water resource management.

**2000 – Ontario's First Demonstration Site:** The Atocas Bay Project, Ontario's largest wetland restoration and land acquisition initiative, began with DUC and partners acquiring 1,700 acres (700 hectares) of uplands, wetlands and small lakes. By 2002, the project had expanded to over 2,000 acres (800 hectares) with additional purchases and wetland restoration of more than 200 wetland basins. To this day, it is a key project demonstrating how agricultural and wildlife management can coexist, showcasing practices such as rotational grazing, cattle exclusion, and alternative watering sources.



**5 2003 – Healthy Wetlands, Healthy Communities Partnership:** DUC and Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources worked together from 2003-2007 on a \$2-million joint initiative to educate the public about the connection between community well-being and a healthy environment by promoting the value of wetlands. In addition to





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further restoration of small wetlands, it included enhancing public viewing and education facilities at wetlands across southern Ontario.

#### 2009 – Commitment to Sustain Southern Ontario's Wetlands:

With funding from the Government of Canada's Southern Ontario Development Program (SODP), DUC undertook infrastructure repairs to maintain, protect and restore 57 wetland conservation projects in southern Ontario. In a record six-month delivery period, DUC completed repairs while providing economic stimulus to local communities through job creation, material procurement and project supervision.



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## 2010s

#### 2010 – Southern Ontario Wetland Conversion Analysis:

DUC completed the Southern Ontario Wetland Conversion Analysis, a research project building on the 1987 Environment Canada study that analyzed current and historic wetland loss rates in southern Ontario and helped determine long-term change trends in large wetlands. Results showed 72 per cent of southern Ontario's large inland wetlands had been lost or converted to other land uses. It also highlighted regions where wetland loss exceeded 90 per cent, prompting a more urgent focus on wetland conservation.

#### 2017 – Wetland Restoration Funding Supports Improved Water Quality for Lake Erie:

DUC partnered with the provincial government, with funding from

Infrastructure Canada, to implement the Lake Erie Wetland Initiative – a wetland restoration program in the Lake Erie Watershed focused on adding wetlands to this highly altered landscape, as well as monitoring and outreach components. Over 60 projects were completed, contributing to enhanced water quality and supporting environmental goals of the Lake Erie Domestic Action Plan.

#### 2019 – A New Tool in the Invasive Phragmites Management Toolbox:

DUC partnered with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the University of Toronto and the Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (Switzerland) on a research and development partnership to introduce biological control methods in an integrated management strategy against invasive Phragmites, with two small moths released at select sites to combat the invasive plant.

*We extend heartfelt gratitude to the current and former DUC Ontario team members for generously sharing their memories and contributions to this article: Mike Williams, Lynette Mader, Dave McLachlin, Rick Robb, Owen Steele and Ron Maher. Your invaluable insights have been instrumental in ensuring the accuracy and richness of this milestone journey, reflecting the true spirit of five decades of conservation in Ontario.*

## 2020s

#### 2020 – A Coastal Gem Protected in Perpetuity:

On September 30, DUC acquired St. Luke's Marsh, a 488-acre (197-hectare) property adjacent to the St. Clair National Wildlife Area, that includes coastal shoreline, provincially significant wetlands and diverse wildlife habitats – securing one of the last remaining coastal wetlands on Lake St. Clair and ensuring its protection for wildlife, including species at risk, in southwestern Ontario.

#### 2020 – New Research Highlights Wetlands as Natural Infrastructure for Water Quality:

As part of DUC Ontario's conservation program in the Lake Erie Watershed, researchers studied eight recently restored wetlands over two years, monitoring water inflows and outflows to measure their ability to capture nutrients like phosphorus and nitrogen. The results showed that these small wetlands effectively improved water quality under various conditions, helping protect downstream rivers and lakes year-round.

#### 2021 – Record Investment in Ontario's Great Lakes Watershed:

DUC received a record \$6 million in funding in the first year of the Government of Ontario's Wetlands Conservation Partner Program. Over the life of the four-year, \$30-million program, DUC received more than \$10 million and delivered 165 projects, representing almost 5,000 acres (2,000 hectares), including both newly restored wetlands and the upgrading of existing wetland restoration projects that were ready for habitat improvements to enhance function, ecology and longevity.

#### 2022 – Putting Artificial Intelligence to Work Identifying Invasive Species:

DUC partnered with external partner SAIWA, to develop an AI-powered tool using drone technology to automate the detection of invasive species like European water chestnut. This tool is being expanded to manage other invasive species, such as water soldier, advancing Ontario's wetland conservation efforts. In 2025, DUC and SAIWA received the Invasive Species Centre's Innovation Award for this pioneering AI detection tool.



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PROJECT  
spotlight

*Left: In partnership with the Northumberland Land Trust, DUC helped secure the 305-acre Biddy Creek Wetland.*

## From wetlands to woodlands: Ontario's securement success

After surpassing an incredible milestone of conserving one million acres in Ontario in 2022, Ducks Unlimited Canada's (DUC) conservation team has continued to build on that momentum. We're working harder than ever to protect more wetlands, forests and grasslands across the province. To date, we've acquired 34 wetland properties — a testament to our ongoing commitment to preserving Ontario's natural heritage. Our dedicated land securement specialists collaborate closely with partners and leverage DUC's support to strengthen conservation networks, connect ecosystems and enhance biodiversity resilience across the province.

In early 2025, we announced the co-purchase of two key wetland properties — one in Northumberland County's woodlands and the other along the shores of Georgian Bay.

The Biddy Creek Wetland spans 305 acres (123 hectares), with 65 per cent covered by a significant fen wetland. Fens are biodiversity hotspots, playing a critical role in carbon storage and supporting



*Above: A wood thrush perches in the forested Benallen Wetland Nature Preserve, at the base of the Bruce Peninsula. Photo © Rob Wray*

a diverse range of species. The property's mixed woodlands — featuring oak, birch and white pine — add further ecological value. Situated in an increasingly developed region, this area helps

manage floodwaters, filter water and support local biodiversity. We are partnering with the Northumberland Land Trust to secure this area for future generations.

The Benallen Wetland Nature Preserve, located just north of Owen Sound, encompasses 135 acres (55 hectares) of wetland and 96 acres (39 hectares) of hardwood forest. It is home to at-risk species like the Least Bittern, Wood Thrush and Snapping Turtle, as well as a variety of wildlife, including herons, egrets and White-tailed Deer. This important site is being protected in collaboration with the Escarpment Biosphere Reserve.

Both the Biddy Creek Wetland Nature Reserve and the Benallen Wetland Nature Preserve represent crucial steps in preserving Ontario's diverse natural landscapes — not only for waterfowl and wildlife but also for the well-being of local communities. We look forward to continuing our work with partners to ensure these ecosystems thrive for generations to come.



# Conservation by the numbers in Ontario

## FUELLING OUR MISSION IN ONTARIO

Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) is backed by a conservation community of dedicated individuals actively supporting our conservation mission across the province. This includes:

**26** staff members who advance conservation every day.

**492** volunteers who raise funds and awareness for wetland conservation.

**4,014** landowners who protect vital habitat on their property.

**8,420** attendees at the 63 annual fundraising events across Ontario.

## OUR CONSERVATION SUCCESS TO DATE

(CUMULATIVE, AS OF MARCH 31, 2024)

In Ontario, DUC has conserved more than **one million acres**, influenced **348,676 acres** and enhanced an additional **3,242 acres**. Currently there are **5,239 conservation projects** under our care across the province.

**CONSERVED ACRES** – Acres that DUC has directly protected through habitat programs that extend for 10 years or more such as land purchases, management agreements and conservation easements.

**INFLUENCED ACRES** – Areas that DUC impacts through partnership and advocacy work.

**ENHANCED ACRES** – Areas DUC is directly impacting through habitat programs that extend for fewer than 10 years, including invasive species work and nest box activities.

**HABITAT PROJECT** – A parcel of land that DUC is responsible for protecting and managing.

## Growing our programs from the ground up

For more than 87 years, Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) has partnered with rural landowners and farmers to put water back on the land. We work with rural landowners and farmers to create and enhance wetland habitats, focusing on areas where restoration is most needed. As our stewardship programs continue to grow, we're proud to launch new initiatives like the **Soil Health Testing Partnership Program**. Unveiled in 2024, this program will provide Ontario farmers with up to \$1,000 in funding for soil health testing in the first year. By focusing on the 4Rs of nutrient management — applying the right type and amount, in the right place, at the right time and at the right rate — this

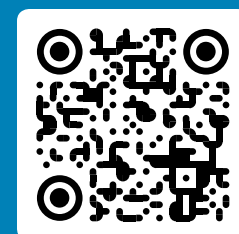
program supports farmers and champions wetland conservation, improving the overall health of Ontario's ecosystems and agricultural landscapes.

In addition to this new program, our stewardship efforts range from restoring wetlands to creating livestock fencing and distributing nest boxes. Our programs aim to foster the connection between wetlands and other vital ecosystems, from improving soil health to enhancing woodlands. We know that when these ecosystems work together, they are stronger and more resilient. And as we like to say, what's good for the ducks is good for us all!



### Get involved today!

From financial incentives and land management advice to a partner who's in it for the long haul, our conservation specialist work with you to find the best options for your land.



Scan this QR code to learn more about our suite of land-owner programs.

## A restoration success: A big win for conservation and community

After decades of service, a vital wetland at Lake Laurentian Conservation Area (LLCA) in Sudbury faced increasing challenges — threatening wildlife, flood control and community recreation.

The area's distinctive topography, characterized by exposed bedrock and shallow soils, limits its capacity to absorb excess rainwater. As a result, wetlands play a critical role in flood and erosion control. With little soil to retain water, the region's numerous wetlands are relied upon to help manage and mitigate the impact of rainfall and runoff.

First constructed by Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) in 1992, the original wetland at LLCA was created by building a dam to restore and sustain the marsh for waterfowl and other wildlife. Over three decades later, maintenance and rehabilitation efforts were required to ensure the long-term functionality of the wetland, which plays an essential role in the community for flood mitigation and water quality.

In early 2024, DUC and Conservation Sudbury partnered to rehabilitate a dam in the northeast portion of the LLCA and by October, the project was complete, marking the restoration of the vital 40 acre (16 hectare) marsh.

This project ensures the continued ecological health of the area while benefiting local wildlife and the community. The Lake Laurentian Conservation Area can be found a short 10-minute drive south of downtown Sudbury. The wetland is part of the larger LLCA that spans more than 2,370 acres (960 hectares) and boasts more than 60 kilometres of recreational trails. These trails, popular for hiking, biking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing, attract more than 20,000 visitors annually.

"The Lake Laurentian Conservation Area is a unique and invaluable treasure in Ontario's natural landscape," says Marie-Paule Godin, DUC's Manager of Provincial Operations for Ontario. "Beyond its beauty, it's a critical resource for wildlife, flood mitigation and climate resilience. By working with Con-

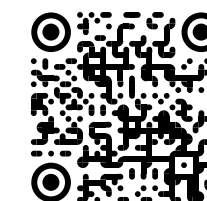
servation Sudbury, we're ensuring that this vital wetland continues to support both nature and the thousands of people who rely on it for recreation and wellbeing."

Through this partnership, the restoration project will ensure that the wetland remains an integral part of the local ecosystem for years to come. It will continue to provide valuable habitat

*In early 2024, DUC and Conservation Sudbury partnered to rehabilitate a dam in the northeast portion of the LLCA and by October, the project was complete, marking the restoration of the vital 40-acre (16-hectare) marsh.*

for waterfowl, fish and other aquatic wildlife, while enhancing biodiversity in the region.

By restoring the dam and surrounding wetlands, the project will not only secure the health of the local environment but will continue to offer a tranquil, accessible natural space for the community.



Scan the QR code to watch a video of the DUC team and local contractors bringing the wetland back to life.

*The work was funded by the Province of Ontario through the Wetlands Conservation Partner Program and implemented by DUC, in collaboration with Conservation Sudbury and local contractor Bruce Tait Construction Ltd.*





# Reaching new heights with our invasive species monitoring tool

**I**N Canada, the summer is short, and for biologists working to protect the environment, every day in the field counts. That was the driving force behind Ducks Unlimited Canada's (DUC) partnership with Saiwa, an AI software developer, to launch a pilot project in 2022. The goal was to use AI to analyze drone footage and identify the leaves of the European water chestnut, an invasive species first found in the Ottawa River back in 2006.

Invasive species threaten the health of wetland ecosystems by overtaking native plants, reducing biodiversity, and weakening the overall resilience of these habitats. In the past, monitoring these invasives meant biologists would spend days searching by foot or boat. But with this type of technology, they can cover a lot more ground in just a few hours. How does it work? The drones collect imagery that the AI quickly analyzes, spotting the distinct leaves of the water chestnut. To build up the tool's functionality, DUC helped monitor and identify more than 1,000 acres (400 hectares) of the invasive plant across 40 sites between Brighton and Gananoque in Eastern Ontario.

The success of the water chestnut monitoring tool didn't go unnoticed. In February 2025, DUC GIS specialist Mallory Carpenter and Saiwa's Peyman Saidi were honored with the Innovation Award for their work in developing the tool. The award was presented at one of Canada's largest invasive species events, hosted by the Invasive Species Centre.



This milestone has fueled our team's determination to take the technology even further this summer. Recently, DUC was invited to join the Lake Simcoe Water Soldier Working Group, where we'll focus on managing the spread of another invasive species: water soldier. With its distinct leaf pattern, this plant is an ideal candidate for the AI tool. Over the warmer months, we'll be collecting data from Lake Simcoe to enhance the AI's ability to detect this new threat.

Be sure to follow our social channels for updates from the field!



# Restoring aquatic ecosystems, one project at a time

CONSERVATION PRO LAUNCHES FISH HABITAT OFFSETTING PROGRAM



**D**ucks Unlimited Canada's (DUC) new fish habitat offsetting program is making waves by helping businesses meet their environmental obligations while also restoring critical fish habitats across the province. The program is part of DUC's Conservation PRO consulting services, which help companies invest in nature-based solutions that support sustainable conservation. This year, Conservation PRO expanded its efforts in Ontario to include the restoration of fish habitats alongside wetlands and grasslands. The approach is simple yet effective: design, build and manage self-sustaining ecosystems that provide long-term benefits to water, wildlife and communities.

A great example of this program in action is the recent restoration of a wetland on Howe Island, east of Kingston. When the Ontario Ministry of Transportation upgraded the Wolfe Island ferry terminals, they needed to offset the environmental impact. DUC stepped in and enhanced 5.6 acres (2.3 hectares) of wetlands off Howe Island into fish-friendly habitat by creating a series of interconnected pools and channels. This past summer, in partnership with Quinte Conservation, they wrapped up monitoring, and the results are in: The channels remain stable, supporting 16 species



*"Without fish, aquatic ecosystems would collapse as they play an important role in maintaining the balance. Fishing is also a great way for people to connect with nature and has important cultural significance for indigenous communities."*

— DANNY McISAAC

of fish, including the grass pickerel. Plus, some sightings were recorded of at-risk species like Blanding's turtles and Monarch butterflies!

This new program is just getting started. To help lead and expand its impact, DUC welcomed Danny McIsaac to their Ontario team in August 2024. Danny's background in wetland ecology and fisheries will be key in guiding the growth of this program, working together with businesses to ensure compliance while continuing to restore Canada's vital fish habitats. (And if you're wondering, Danny's favorite Canadian fish species is the Northern pike!)

## Why it matters

**Fish habitats are crucial for biodiversity, water quality and the overall health of our ecosystems.** By offsetting the loss of these habitats, industries are not only meeting their environmental obligations but also investing in the long-term health of watersheds that benefit both wildlife and local communities.



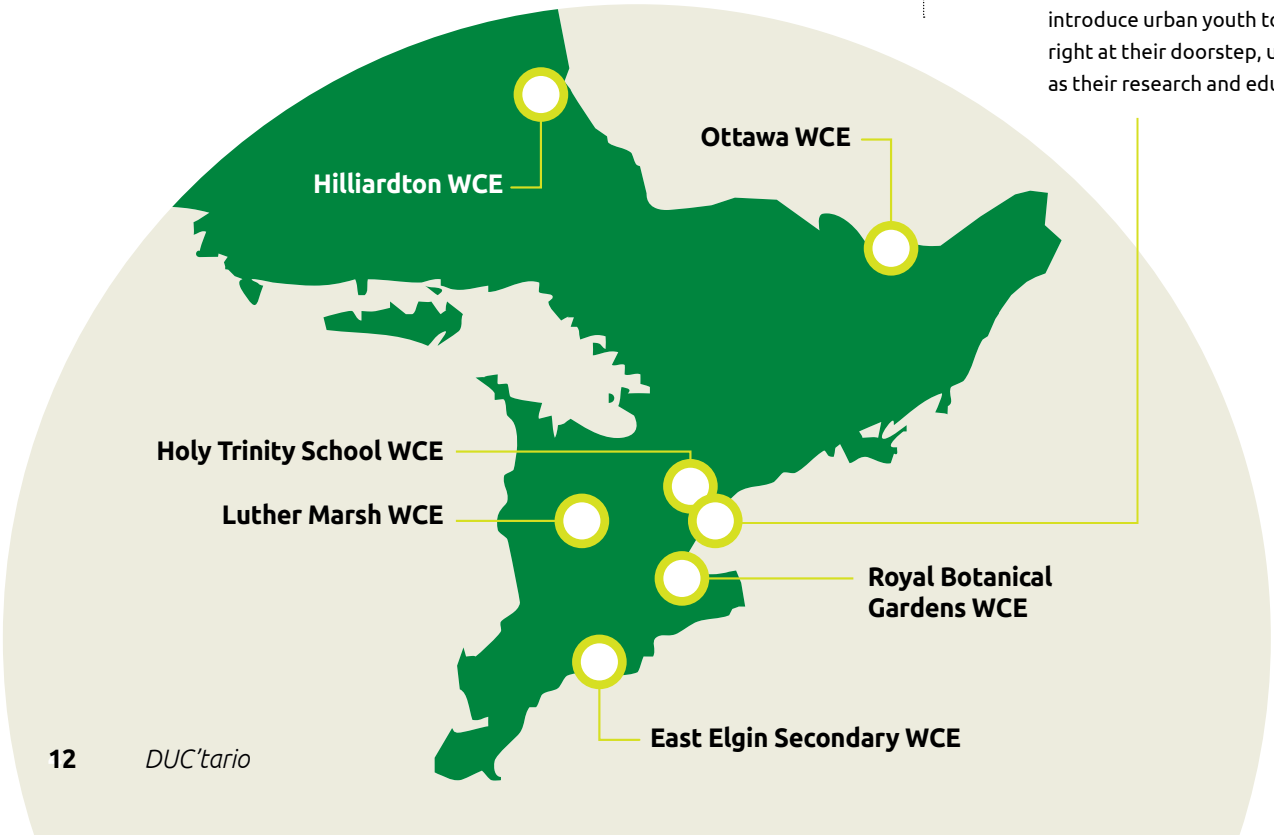
# Inspiring the next generation of Ontario conservationists

Ducks Unlimited Canada believes that youth have the power to change the world — and many already are. Through our award-winning education programs, we inspire young minds to explore and protect one of our most vital biodiversity hotspots: wetlands. The Wetland Centres of Excellence (WCE) form a national network of schools and community partners where students lead wetland projects, engage in peer-to-peer mentorship and promote community outreach.

Each year, the program sets up more than 2,200 students are stewards of their local wetland and, in 2024, its reach expanded even further across Ontario with the addition of a seventh WCE in Toronto's urban core.

*“We see such a big difference between kids before and after the program. Their confidence improves. Their leadership skills improve. They learn what it means to be an active citizen and feel incredibly proud of everything they’re able to do for Ontario wetlands.”*

— KATE BELMORE,  
ACTING MANAGER OF EDUCATION, DUCKS UNLIMITED CANADA



## Ontario's Wetland Centres of Excellence: By the numbers

7	WCE schools
200	Lead high school students
2,000	Mentored students

### Newly added! Mary Ward Catholic School WCE

Our education team is uniquely privileged to introduce urban youth to the natural world right at their doorstep, using local wetlands as their research and education destinations.

## Be the visionary Ontario's wetlands need. Guide the future of conservation.

Spring is here, and so are the birds! As migratory flocks return to Ontario's wetlands, they need healthy landscapes to sustain them. For more than 87 years, Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) has led the charge in protecting these vital ecosystems, ensuring they remain a sanctuary for generations of birds and other wildlife. But as you know, wetlands in Ontario are in danger, and their future depends on bold leadership.

As a volunteer, landowner, event attendee or donor, we already consider you a Conservation Champion. Your dedication to protecting wetlands, wildlife, and our cherished natural spaces is inspirational. As our wetlands and our migratory birds face increasing challenges, your support is more vital than ever.



**I really hope that you consider making a transformative donation to DUC in Ontario.** When you donate, you're creating a legacy as enduring as the great migrations themselves. Every dollar helps put

wetlands back on the Ontario map, manage invasive species, work with landowners and raise awareness about the importance of conservation. Your gift gives birds a safe place to land—and a future to thrive.

This is your moment to take flight with us. If you're ready to be a leader in wetland conservation, please get in touch.



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# The race to conserve and restore Canada’s wetlands

On June 21 and 22, hundreds of runners, walkers, rollers and waddlers from across Canada will lace up to run for wetlands, sharing a beautiful day in nature with their Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) community. Our annual national fundraising race, the Duck and Run, is entering its third year of raising awareness for wetland conservation. Since 2023, this event has celebrated the beauty and value of wetlands and mobilized community action towards conservation. Originating in Manitoba and fueled by its success, the event has blossomed into a nationwide phenomenon, thanks to the generosity of our sponsors, Bass Pro Shops and Cabela’s Canada. Last year’s event welcomed over 600 participants and raised nearly \$50,000. This year, DUC is hosting 15 events across the country, with five in Ontario, including Toronto for the first time, along with Barrie, Thunder Bay, Long Point and Ottawa. Giselle Schwartz (above right) decided to join the 2024 Barrie event because it perfectly aligned with her love for running and her commitment to preserving Canada’s wetlands. “The run was so much fun,” Schwartz said. “I would recom-

mend this event to my friends and family. It’s important that we raise awareness for this cause; with each passing year the threat to our wetlands becomes greater. This is a way to show support and get involved. It really was a memorable experience.”

**Interested in getting involved?**

**Participate:** Duck and Run caters to all ages and fitness levels. Whether you attend an event or take on the virtual 10,000-step challenge, every step contributes to the well-being of our rural and urban ecosystems.

**Volunteer:** DUC relies on the generous support of volunteers to make each Duck and Run a success. Sign up today to help with event planning, race day activities, and more.

Beyond supporting a good cause, Duck and Run participants can expect great giveaways, prizes and more. To learn more about how you can support wetland conservation and participate in upcoming Duck and Run events, visit [ducks.ca/run](https://ducks.ca/run)



Duck and Run is proudly sponsored by title sponsor Bass Pro Shops and Cabela’s Canada.

## DUC Long Point Men’s Chapter: 50 Years Strong

This past September, the Ducks Unlimited Canada Long Point Men’s Chapter celebrated its 50th anniversary with a dinner in Port Rowan. This milestone was significant for the dedicated group who hosted Canada’s first-ever fundraising event in Tillsonburg, before it moved permanently to Port Rowan. Founded in 1974 by the “Magnificent Seven” – Dr. Duncan Sinclair, Jack Rice, Harvey Farris, Lloyd

Leask, Red Anderson, Dr. Elmer Quintyn and Walter Burton – the committee has been a powerhouse in generating funds for wetlands conservation, continually finding new ways to engage and expand its supporter base. The 50th anniversary event featured a sold-out crowd, with local supporters and many others who traveled from afar to celebrate this historic achievement.



# Uniting the community through conservation

DARCY MCWILLIAM NAMED DUC ONTARIO VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

BY KEAGAN PERLETTE

When you meet Darcy McWilliam, the first thing you notice is her enveloping warmth and enthusiasm. McWilliam is a true community builder with a keen talent for bringing people together and inspiring others to get involved. Her spirited attitude and passion for keeping people connected to the rich ecosystems that surround her hometown of Long Point has made her a go-to leader not only for her local Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) volunteer fundraising chapter, but for neighbouring chapters as well. We’re honoured to name McWilliam as Volunteer of the Year in Ontario for her outstanding contributions.

McWilliam joined the Long Point Ladies chapter in 2016, having attended DUC events with her mother over the previous 25 years. “In our small town, it was a girls’ night out for me and my sister,” she recalls. Her father’s participation in the National Wild Turkey Federation also influenced her investment in local conservation. Over the years, McWilliam got to see firsthand how the Federation’s efforts helped revive the local turkey population. “Back in 1991, there were no turkeys here,” she says. “Now, they’re everywhere.”

For McWilliam, joining DUC as a volunteer gave her the perfect opportunity to carry on her family’s conservation legacy and pass it on to future generations. “I tell my grandkids, ‘Without Ducks Unlimited, these ducks would be extinct like the dinosaurs!’” she laughs. “There’s such a



big community of wildlife here, there are so many wetlands. And that’s because people cared enough to protect them.”

McWilliam serves as treasurer for both her chapter and the Ontario Volunteer Committee. Beyond handling cash and managing the credit card machine at events, McWilliam is an all-star door knocker. Her background in sales, close ties with the Long Point community and infectious friendliness give her an edge when it comes to drumming up donations and welcoming new volunteers. “I’m a go-getter and I love talking to people,” she says. “I already know so many people from working in the industry here, it’s easy for me to go out and ask for donations.”

When McWilliam joined the Long Point Ladies chapter, the dinners attracted just over 100 people.

Today, the dinners are completely sold out at 250 people—with a significant waitlist to boot—pushing their venue to its limits. “We had to turn our volunteers’ money table into a dinner table so that we could open up the seats for 14 more people to attend,” McWilliam says.

She’s also helped the chapter significantly grow their donation contributions. Eight years ago, the chapter would bring in about \$15,000 per year. Last year, the chapter collected an impressive \$54,000. “I’m so proud of how these ladies have helped take this whole thing from just a small dinner, to a huge dinner,” she says. “People will stop me on the street to tell me how much they enjoyed the dinner. It’s wonderful to see everyone come together and have fun.”

Outside of DUC, McWilliam is currently facilitating a playground fundraiser. She also started a kids’ skating program this winter, gathering over 100 pairs of skates and 50 helmets so everyone can enjoy the ice. On top of it all, she’s raising her two young grandsons. Despite her packed schedule, McWilliam shows no signs of slowing down.

*There are approximately 490 DUC volunteers in Ontario and 3,030 across Canada. DUC is proud to recognize each of them—including leaders like Darcy McWilliam—as volunteer champions and conservationists who make waves and together, create ripples of change by serving with generosity, passion and dedication.*

## 2024 Ducks Unlimited Canada Volunteer Milestones

Sharon Leavere	45 Years	Port Colborne	James Holmes	30 Years	Brockville
Archibald McLarty	45 Years	Brantford	Robert Kebbel	30 Years	Aylmer
George Merry	45 Years	Wolfe Island	Andrew Laidley	30 Years	Brock
Dan Boehm	40 Years	Aylmer	Phyllip Pressey	30 Years	Aylmer
Gordon Mackay	40 Years	Cambridge Sporting Clays	Duncan Sinclair	30 Years	Aylmer
Daniel Salembier	40 Years	Long Point Bay	Daphne Rappard	25 Years	Mount Forest
Patricia Salembier	40 Years	Long Point Ladies	John Todd	25 Years	Brantford
Kenneth Hussey	35 Years	Long Point Bay	Trevor Kostyria	20 Years	Aylmer
Rick Wood	35 Years	Campellford	Chris Wagar	20 Years	Napanee
Paula Buck	30 Years	Campbellford	Justin White	20 Years	Frontenac





# JOIN DUCKS UNLIMITED CANADA'S EXCITING NEW MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM AND BE A PART OF SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY.

At Ducks Unlimited Canada, membership has always been more than just a commitment — it's a source of pride and a powerful force for change.

With our recurring membership program, your support goes further than ever in conserving and restoring vital wetlands across Canada. Enjoy exclusive perks like a complimentary *Conservator* magazine subscription, special event invitations, discounts on DUC Gear™ — and more.

For as little as \$5 a month, you can help keep our lakes clean, protect wildlife and combat climate change. You can do more for conservation by symbolically adopting a wetland and making an even bigger impact. **Don't miss the opportunity to make a real difference — renew your Ducks Unlimited Canada membership today and help secure a brighter future for our environment!**

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

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