



2020 Colorado State Report

CONSERVATION FY 2019

FY19 impacted acres

3,861 acres protected, re-stored and/or enhanced

FY19 dollars invested

\$2,341,228



Ben Vaughn is the new regional director for Colorado. He originates from eastern Kansas and served in the Marine Corps from 2003 to 2007. He received a bachelor's degree from Sterling College in Sterling, Kansas, and worked as a police chief and teacher before joining Ducks Unlimited in 2016 as a regional director in Delaware. Ben will work closely with Sr. Regional Director Erik Wettersten to organize volunteers in the state. Ben resides in Rye, Colorado, with his wife, Melanie, and their three children.



Colorado conservation report

By Martin Grenier, Manager of Conservation Programs

Ducks Unlimited is excited about the future of conservation programs in Colorado. During the last year, we worked closely with the state to strengthen our partnership and streamline administrative processes. With the support of Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), we are refocusing efforts and investing in public lands. Our staff is working with local CPW field staff to identify needs and opportunities, and to pursue funding to restore degraded wetlands that are vital to people and waterfowl throughout Colorado.

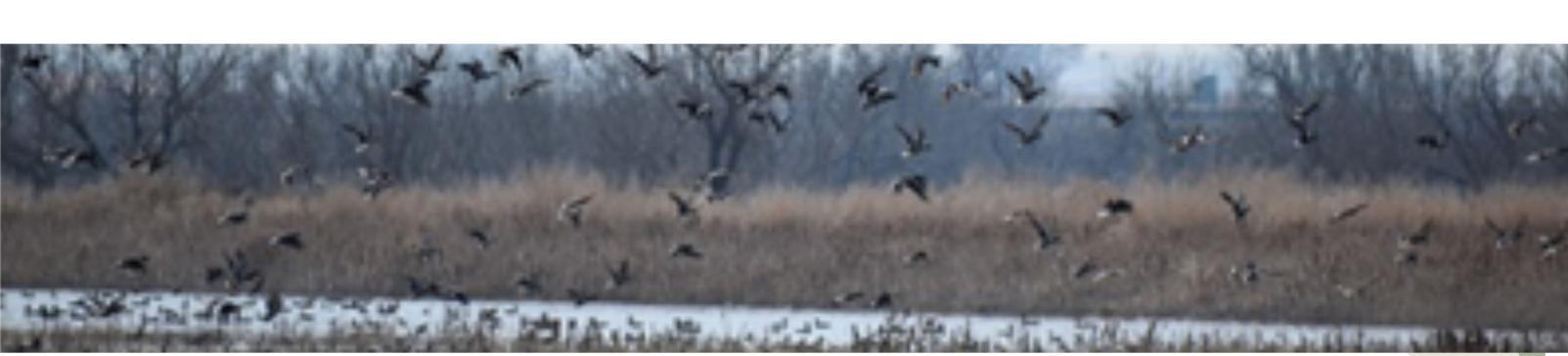
In addition to the stories in this report, we have \$6.5 million in grant funds secured to restore, enhance and protect wetlands in Colorado. With the support of CPW, Colorado Water Conservation Board and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, we

expect to spend this funding throughout Colorado in the next 2 to 3 years. Planned projects include many areas that will improve public outdoor recreation.

With the state strongly supporting DU's conservation efforts, projects are being planned and delivered in other important landscapes. Some of the projects not mentioned but that we plan to deliver soon include Navajo State Park in LaPlata County, Horsethief Canyon State Wildlife Area (SWA) in Mesa County, Yampa SWA in Routt County, Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge in Jackson County, Kinney Lake SWA in Lincoln County and Andrick SWA in Morgan County. We hope you are as excited as we are to see these projects come to fruition in the coming years.

For information on DU's conservation programs

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Bijou Ranch habitat enhanced

Water is a precious resource in western states like Colorado. It is increasingly important to identify project opportunities where water resources can be used efficiently to benefit communities, agriculture and waterfowl. This is exactly what Ducks Unlimited accomplished through the recently-completed Bijou Ranch project.

Located in the South Platte River Basin, a priority landscape for DU in Colorado, the Bijou Ranch project restored more than 200 moist-soil wetland acres that will provide ideal habitat for birds looking to fuel up on their migrations. These wetlands are also used for groundwater recharge, administered through a local irrigation company. The water helps nearby farmers offset pumping of their irrigation wells.

The project site became degraded over the years from a lack of water control and a major flood. “The landowner and the irrigation company knew something had to be done to restore these basins for wildlife and farmers,” said Billy Gascoigne, DU conservation project manager. “It was a perfect fit for DU.”

Ducks Unlimited engineered new embankments, water-control structures and rebalanced more than 30,000 cubic yards of dirt.

“This project exemplifies the unique role DU can play in bringing together an array of partners,” Gascoigne said.

The partnership included Bijou Creek Ranch, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Bijou Irrigation Company, Gates Family Foundation, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, North American Wetlands Conservation Act, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Thomas Parker started with DU in November 2019 as an engineer in the Fort Collins office. Thomas is from Memphis, Tennessee, and holds a Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering from Louisiana State University and a Master of Science degree from Colorado State University, with a focus in hydraulic engineering, stream restoration and river mechanics. His expertise includes hydraulic modeling, stream and habitat restoration, stormwater drainage and detention design, water distribution design, topographic and construction surveying, bank stabilization and slope reinforcement, CAD drafting and construction management. He works with biologists, landowners, regulatory agencies and contractors in the survey, design, and construction or rehabilitation of wetland habitats. He enjoys hiking, backpacking, mountain biking, and skiing with his wife, Sarah, and two dogs, Wilma and Presley.



Kalli Wegren joined the engineering team in Fort Collins in May 2019. She previously worked for Kimley-Horn in Phoenix, Arizona, where she focused on water resources and roadway drainage. She graduated from Colorado State University with a degree in civil engineering and brings a knowledge of water resource design, hydraulic analyses, Civil 3D design and other skills that will benefit DU’s mission. Kalli is a Certified Flood Plain Manager and has passed her professional engineering exam. She has a strong family history of waterfowl conservation and was a DU Greenwing in her youth. Kalli will be responsible for projects in Colorado, Wyoming and western Nebraska.



New research on wet meadow habitat in North Park



DU volunteers help build research traps

Ducks Unlimited is supporting research that will discover the value of high elevation wet meadow habitat restoration for waterfowl. Colorado State University (CSU) PhD student Casey Setash is monitoring waterfowl nesting and brood use on wet meadow irrigation projects before and after restoration in Colorado's North Park Region.

"We want to know if restoring irrigation on wet meadow habitats influences waterfowl productivity, habitat use and recruitment," Setash said. "I'm particularly interested providing evidence to guide the use of increasingly limited conservation dollars."

Ducks Unlimited has been working in North Park for nearly 10 years to improve wet meadow habitats so they will continue to be irrigated in ways that benefit waterfowl. This restoration is conducted on public and private lands and involves repairing dams and fixing or replacing water-control structures.

"We know wet meadows are important to waterfowl, we just aren't sure exactly how important they are," said Matt Reddy, DU regional biologist in Colorado. "This research will help us get a sense of best management practices and help us direct resources."

To conduct her research, Setash is trapping mallard and gadwall hens and fitting them with GPS transmitters so she can follow their movements. She is also searching for nests and conducting brood surveys. Last spring, Setash recruited some DU volunteers to help her build the decoy traps needed to catch hens. "Volunteers from the Fort Collins and CSU DU chapters came out on a cold and rainy day to help me build traps. Clipping and bending wire for the traps is tough and I'm glad I had help," Setash said. Setash began her control and impact study in 2019 assessing waterfowl use on four DU irrigation projects before restoration took place. In 2020, she will evaluate three more sites prior to restoration, and in 2021, she will assess post restoration impacts.

Setash is excited about the use of drones to count ducklings and find nests.

"Counting ducklings with a drone saves time because we can spot them easier and it helps us get a more accurate count. We are still working on our techniques with nest searching as nests are harder to spot, and we need to determine how close we can get to a hen before flushing her off the nest."

Setash's academic advisor is CSU Associate Professor Dr. David Koons who manages a research lab dedicated to waterfowl and wetland ecological research. Dr. Koons also holds the James C. Kennedy Endowed Chair of Wetland and Waterfowl Conservation that was established by DU Wetlands America Trust trustee Jim Kennedy. Kennedy gifted the university \$3.1 million to maintain a faculty position dedicated in perpetuity to waterfowl conservation. This research is funded by Ducks Unlimited, CSU, Colorado Water Conservation Board and Colorado Parks and Wildlife.



Sean Stone rejoined the Ducks Unlimited Development Team as the sr. director of development for Colorado and Kansas. Sean has a solid history with DU. Previously, he held positions as a California regional director and Texas director of development and senior director of development. Sean has a strong understanding of DU's mission, organizational structure, and volunteer and supporter base. Recently, Sean was the executive director for the Coastal Conservation Association Habitat Program in Houston where he helped expand their development and fundraising operations. Sean, his wife, Kathleen, and their children, Caden, Cameron and Colby have relocated to Denver.



DU and partners restore state wildlife areas in San Luis Valley

Ducks Unlimited (DU), Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and Wetland Dynamics LLC have initiated two important wetland restoration projects on key State Wildlife Areas (SWA) in the San Luis Valley. Wetland Dynamics is a small, woman owned, ecosystem management, monitoring and technical services business in the San Luis Valley. Russell Lakes and Rio Grande SWAs will benefit from an investment of more than \$640,000 in 2020. The projects are funded by CPW and DU.

In 2018, CPW reached out to DU and Wetland Dynamics to improve water conveyance, hydrology and habitat conditions on these SWAs. When completed the two projects will enhance nearly 730 acres of riparian and shallow water wetlands in the San Luis Valley.

“The goal of the Rio Grande and Russell Lakes projects is to improve available resources for waterfowl and migratory birds that use these areas,” said Martin Grenier, DU manager of conservation programs in Colorado. “With these enhancements for waterfowl also comes improved waterfowl hunting and other recreational opportunities for the public that use these SWAs at various times of the year.”

Water management is difficult and at times impossible in the proposed project site at Rio Grande SWA. By replacing dilapidated water control infrastructure and installing new structures, the partnership will improve management capabilities in the Mason-Jones, Davis and South-Central units of the SWA.

Restoration efforts at Russell Lakes SWA will be focused along Russell Creek with the goal of promoting efficient use of water during late winter, spring and early summer, and will include Units C, F and G. The enhancements will increase plant community diversity and function.

Elliot State Wildlife Area filling the skies



Ducks Unlimited’s mission to fill the skies with waterfowl today, tomorrow and forever includes restoring and enhancing existing wetland habitat. The Colorado DU team’s project at Elliot State Wildlife Area (SWA) is a great example.

Elliot SWA in northeast Colorado has numerous shallow wetlands spread over hundreds of acres. These wetlands routinely flood in the spring and fall, but many of the basins had deep sections that pooled water for extended periods of time, limiting water flow and hampering bird and hunter use.

“Elliot SWA is one of the Colorado’s premier managed wetland complexes in the South Platte basin,” said DU Water Specialist Jason Roudebush. “There are 15 independent wetland basins Colorado Parks and Wildlife managers can now efficiently manage to give migratory birds better access to shallow water food sources during migrations. Outdoor public recreation, like hunting, hiking and bird watching, has also improved.”

In partnership with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Ducks Unlimited engineered and regraded about 200 wetland acres. Repairing the basins increased habitat acres, created quality recreation opportunities, allowed for efficient water use and improved management capacity. Funding from a North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant helped complete the project.

For information on event fundraising

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