

Minnesota

2021 CONSERVATION REPORT



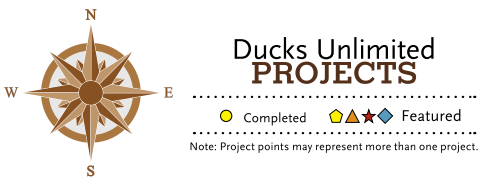
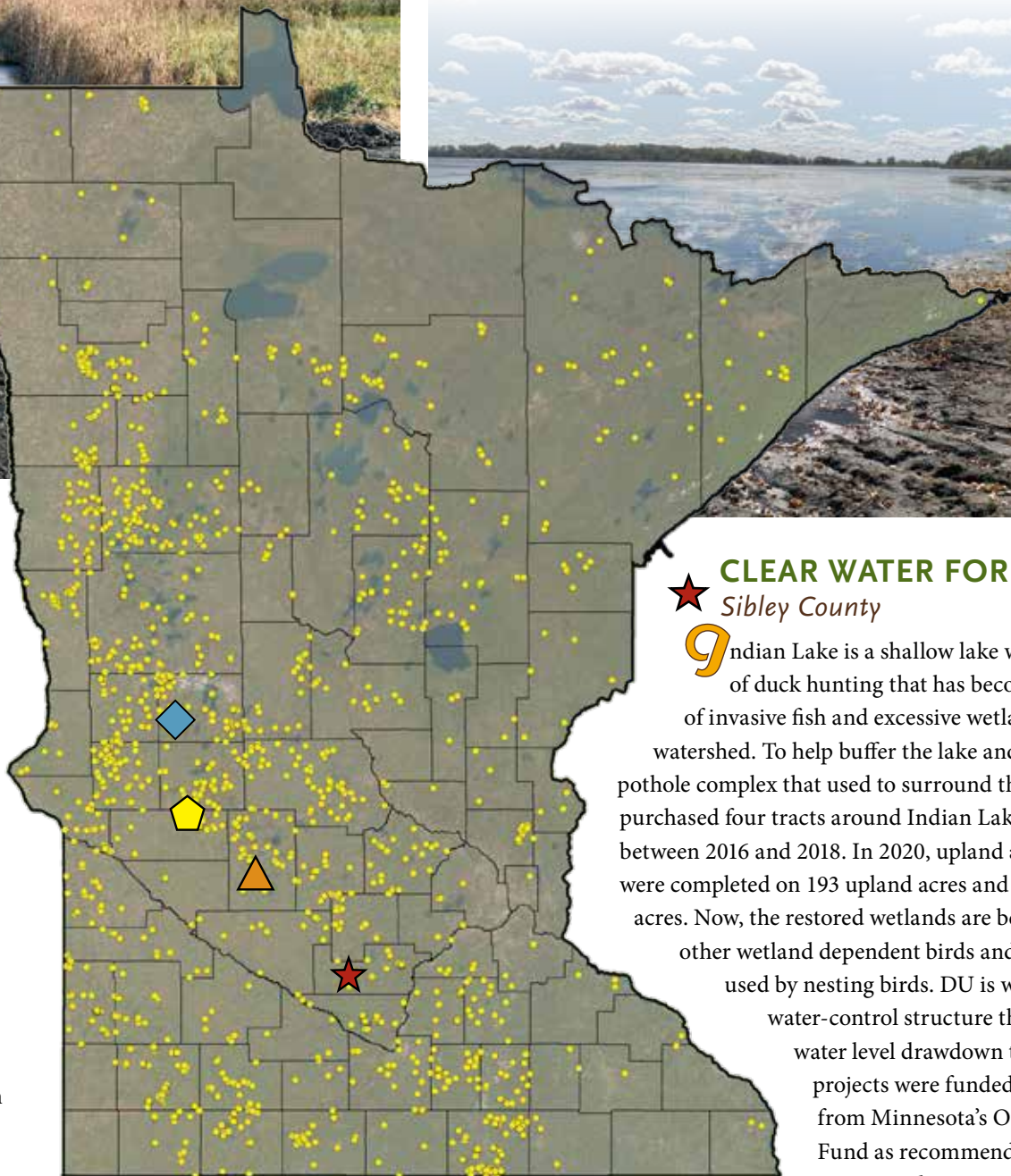
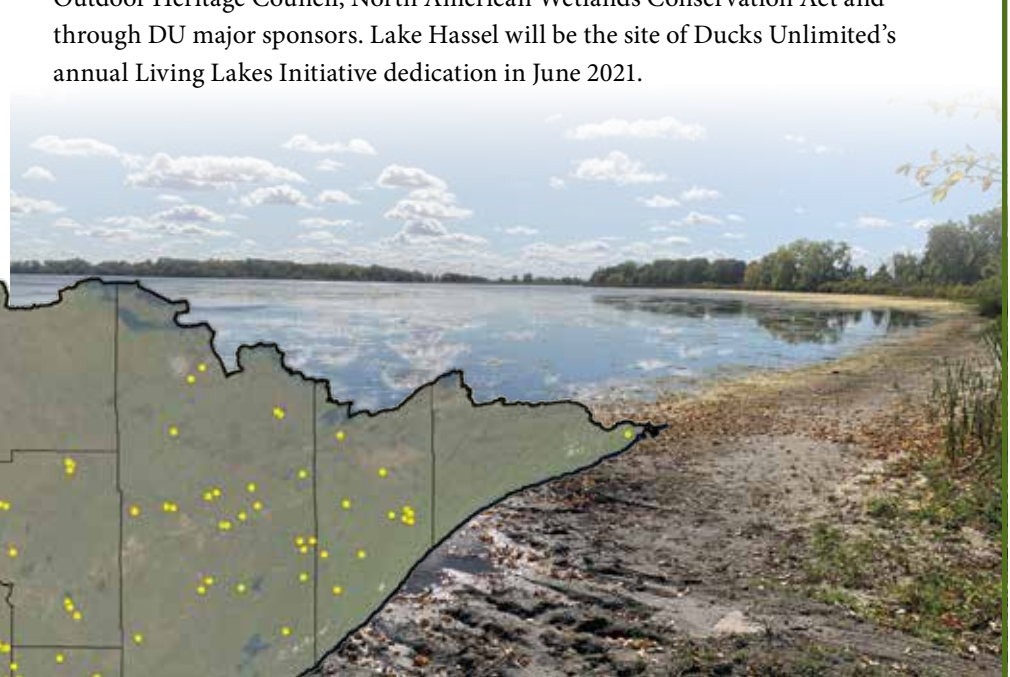
◆ CATTAILS CONTROLLED AT ENG LAKE WPA *Douglas County*

Eng Lake Waterfowl Production Area west of Alexandria is 54 acres of public land with one managed wetland basin and associated upland habitat. Failed infrastructure led to the invasion of cattails and decreased use by waterfowl and other wetland-dependent wildlife. Ducks Unlimited and several partners in 2020 enhanced the 25-acre wetland by engineering and constructing a new variable-crest water control structure on the outlet of the basin. This wetland will attract more waterfowl and other wildlife and will provide improved public waterfowl hunting and birdwatching opportunities. Wetland habitat conditions will improve over the next several years as the basin fills up from rainfall and snowmelt. Partners include the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council, North American Wetlands Conservation Act, United States Fish and Wildlife Service and private Ducks Unlimited Major Sponsors including the local Pioneer Heritage Conservation Trust.



◆ INVASIVE FISH REMOVED AT LAKE HASSEL *Swift County*

Lake Hassel is a 706-acre shallow lake with a long history of hunting and waterfowl use. Conditions have deteriorated over time due to high stable water levels, watershed changes and undesirable fish. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources had attempted to enhance the lake by installing an electric fish barrier and applying a fish toxicant. Earlier attempts to manage Lake Hassel long-term had proven unsuccessful as the electric fish barrier would often fail, allowing carp and other invasive fish to repopulate the lake. Ducks Unlimited partnered with the Minnesota DNR to rebuild the electric fish barrier and install new water-level infrastructure in 2018. A drawdown in 2019 resulted in a fish winterkill in early 2020 and the lake refilled quickly. The DNR again has the lake drawn down to build upon the benefits from last year's success. Funding came from Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund as recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council, North American Wetlands Conservation Act and through DU major sponsors. Lake Hassel will be the site of Ducks Unlimited's annual Living Lakes Initiative dedication in June 2021.



▲ WHITEFIELD WMA GROWN, RESTORED *Kandiyohi County*

Northern Kandiyohi County has some of the best waterfowl habitat in the prairie section of Minnesota. Unfortunately, in the central and southern parts of the county, most wetlands have been drained and the native prairie grasses have been lost. To add habitat and buffer the watershed of Lake Wakanda, DU purchased the 64-acre Erickson Tract as an addition to Whitefield Wildlife Management Area. The acquisition allowed DU to restore a 34-acre wetland basin that had been drained for nearly 100 years. Restoration was completed in fall 2020 and the wetland will refill with snow runoff in the spring of 2021. Also, in summer 2020, DU purchased the 234-acre Leason tract as a second addition to Whitefield WMA. This tract is a quarter mile from the Erickson Tract and dotted with numerous wetlands which DU plans to restore over the next several years. These projects were funded by state appropriations from Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund as recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council, a North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant, foundation and corporate partners, Kandiyohi County, and Living Lakes Initiative Ducks Unlimited Major Sponsors.



★ CLEAR WATER FOR INDIAN LAKE *Sibley County*

Indian Lake is a shallow lake with a storied history of duck hunting that has become turbid because of invasive fish and excessive wetland drainage in the watershed. To help buffer the lake and restore the prairie pothole complex that used to surround the lake, Ducks Unlimited purchased four tracts around Indian Lake totaling 356 acres between 2016 and 2018. In 2020, upland and wetland restoration were completed on 193 upland acres and 49 wetlands totaling 70 acres. Now, the restored wetlands are being used by ducks and other wetland dependent birds and the uplands are being used by nesting birds. DU is working to engineer a new water-control structure that will allow temporary water level drawdown to enhance the lake. These projects were funded by state appropriations from Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund as recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council, a North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant, and foundation, corporate, and private Living Lakes Initiative Ducks Unlimited Major Sponsors including the Van Sloun Foundation, Carl and Verna Schmidt Foundation, Caterpillar Foundation, Conservation Partners of America and local Gaylord Game Protective League.



2020 CONSERVATION ACHIEVEMENTS ACROSS MINNESOTA

Despite the COVID-19 Pandemic, Ducks Unlimited continued to deliver conservation projects throughout Minnesota, with the Prairie Pothole Region being our Level 1 priority for habitat conservation delivery.

In 2020, DU and our partners completed 27 conservation projects in Minnesota affecting 28,281 acres through our Living Lakes Initiative. This included 2,638 acres of shallow lakes, wetlands and grasslands in 19 projects across southern prairie Minnesota and 24,861 acres in 86 wild rice lakes in forested northern Minnesota. Key to our continued success in 2020 were strong partnerships and robust state grants from Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund as recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council complemented by federal North America Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grants. Key to leveraging these state and federal public grants was the private philanthropic donations to Ducks Unlimited from foundations, corporations and individual DU Major Sponsors.

In northern Minnesota, DU helped fund Minnesota DNR's management of 86 wild rice lakes acres to keep them free-flowing and clear of beaver dams and other debris to help wild rice flourish and produce abundant seeds sought by both ducks and wild rice harvesters.

Further south in prairie Minnesota, DU purchased four new public lands totaling 441 acres for the Minnesota DNR, including 234 acres on Whitefield Wildlife Management Area (WMA) near Willmar in Kandiyohi County, 15 acres on Monson WMA near Sunburg in Swift County, 72 acres on Henry X WMA near Benson in Swift County and 120 acres on Expandere WMA near Windom in Cottonwood County. Restoration of each tract is now under way.

DU also continued our new partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect and restore prairie grassland and wetland habitat by purchasing three new habitat conservation easements from private landowners that permanently protects 341 acres of private land in Douglas and Pope County.

DU completed three wetland enhancements improving 1,819 acres and 16 projects that restored 819 acres back to prairie wetlands and grassland on public land or private land under permanent conservation easements.

Thanks to all who continued to provide the critical private funding support to help us leverage the public grants needed to accomplish all this important waterfowl habitat conservation work in Minnesota.



Water in 2020 returned to Ward Lake following DU work in 2019.

CREATIVE DURING A CRISIS

In early spring 2020, longtime friends Les Morgenstern and Brad Karel wake up in their camper trailers in southwest Minnesota, cook breakfast on a stove and get ready for their day. Morgenstern and Karel weren't leisurely recreating. Their campsite at Talcot Lake Wildlife Management Area was their new, temporary base of operations and a creative solution for executing vital engineering work on Ducks Unlimited conservation projects during the COVID-19 pandemic.



"This traditionally is the season we do most of our project mapping and topographical survey work, and this way we're not subjecting ourselves to the hotel rooms and the risk," said Karel, manager of conservation services for DU's Great Lakes/Atlantic Region.

DU staff have been following guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. Most are working from home and video conferencing like much of America. But you can't physically rebuild a 1,000-acre wetland or prairie from a kitchen table.

Morgenstern and Karel had several projects 450 miles from their house, so day trips aren't practical. They normally live in hotels during April while they survey. Sticking to their northern state roots, they leased a pair of mobile ice fishing house campers that were just pulled off frozen lakes for the season.

Strong partnerships with other organizations also make new challenges easy to conquer.

"We are able to do what we do because of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, which provided us with a special use permit to park these trailers where they are," Morgenstern said. "This really fit as an alternative, so here we are. It is a team effort, we're just one piece of the solution."



Minnesota by the Numbers 2020

- 27 projects
- 28,281 acres conserved

HISTORICAL

- 237,292 total acres conserved
- \$114.1 million invested

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Ducks Unlimited conserves, restores, and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT US ONLINE AT WWW.DUCKS.ORG/MINNESOTA



GREAT LAKES & ATLANTIC REGION

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