

▲ SWAN LAKE NWR CONSERVATION EVOLVES

Chariton County

In 2020 Ducks Unlimited completed its Lower Grand River Basin North American Wetlands Conservation Act project at Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge. The overall project enhanced 1,110 wetland acres, restored 487 new wetland acres and restored 293 new native grass acres. DU is now planning additional work at Swan Lake and anticipates submitting a second NAWCA proposal in July 2021 to conserve an additional 1,100 acres. Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge is the core component of a wetland complex within the Lower Grand River Basin of northcentral Missouri that includes over 22,000 acres of state and federal lands and 16,000 acres of privately owned United States Department of Agriculture Wetlands Reserve Program easement properties.



RICE PARTNERSHIP BOOST MISSOURI DUCK HABITAT

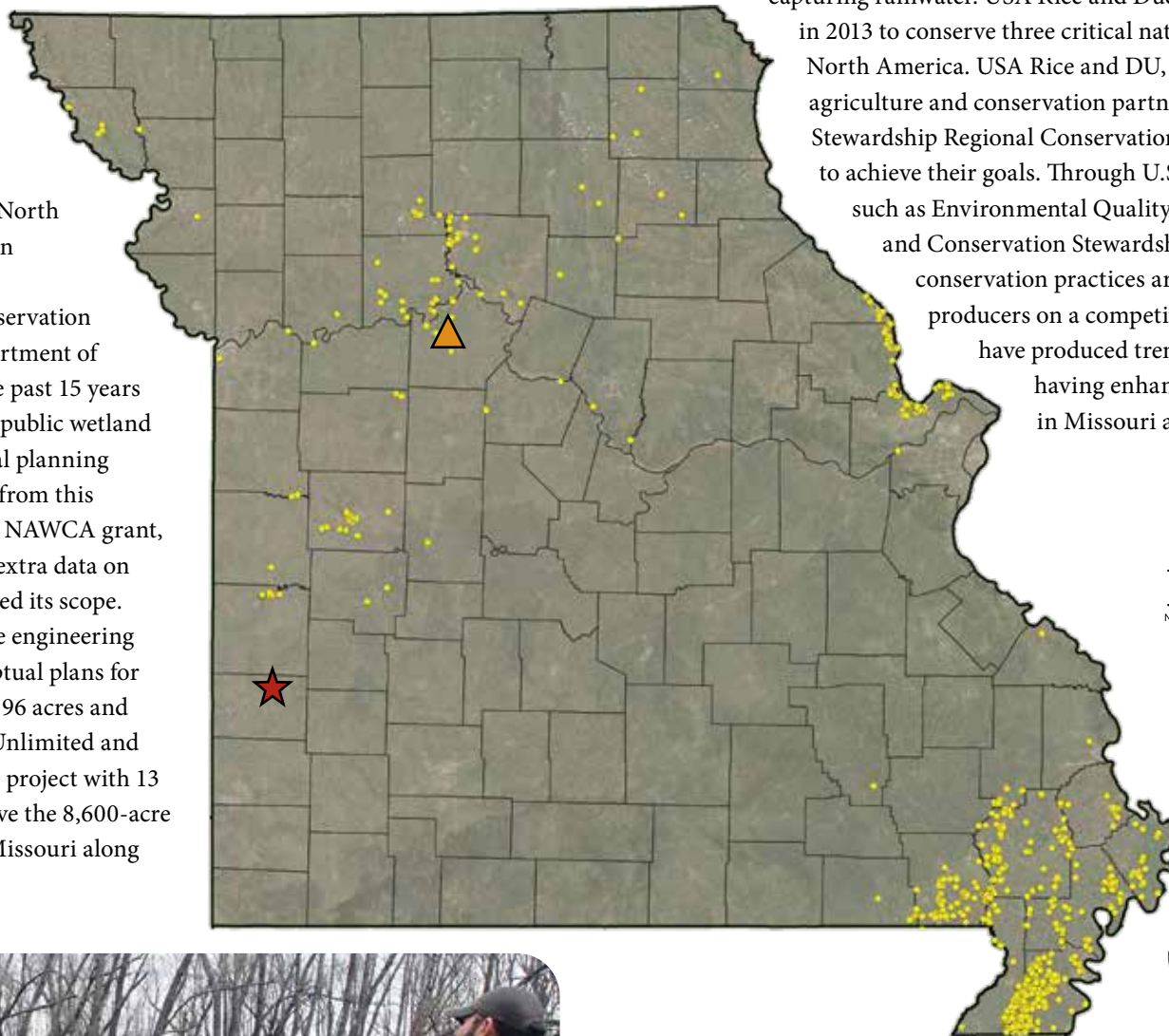
Southeast Missouri Bootheel

Reflooding of harvested rice fields in fall, winter and early spring benefits waterfowl, improves water quality and promotes water conservation since it is achieved by capturing rainwater. USA Rice and Ducks Unlimited partnered in 2013 to conserve three critical natural resources in North America. USA Rice and DU, backed by over 40 agriculture and conservation partners, developed the Rice Stewardship Regional Conservation Partnership Program to achieve their goals. Through U.S. Farm Bill programs such as Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program, funds for conservation practices are made available to rice producers on a competitive basis. These programs have produced tremendous results, having enhanced 25,584 acres in Missouri alone.

★ EXTRA PLANNING, EXTRA BENEFITS AT SCHELL OSAGE

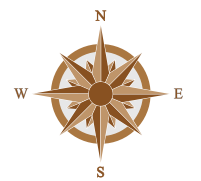
St. Clair, Vernon Counties

In 2018, DU secured a \$1 million North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant to support engineering and construction of the Schell Osage Conservation Area. DU and partner Missouri Department of Conservation have learned a lot in the past 15 years about restoring these large and aging public wetland complexes in Missouri and conceptual planning efforts at Schell Osage have benefited from this knowledge. Since receiving the initial NAWCA grant, DU and the MDC have accumulated extra data on the project which has greatly broadened its scope. This has resulted in significantly more engineering time spent on developing final conceptual plans for the overall project, which will restore 96 acres and enhance another 3,839 acres. Ducks Unlimited and the MDC are leading the \$4.5 million project with 13 other conservation partners to improve the 8,600-acre property on the west-central side of Missouri along the banks of the Osage River.



Ducks Unlimited PROJECTS

● Completed ▲★ Featured
Note: Project points may represent more than one project.



PRIVATE AGRICULTURE PARTNERSHIP IMPROVES HABITAT

Statewide

The Missouri Agriculture Wetland Initiative (MAWI) continues to provide a successful private lands partnership with Ducks Unlimited, Missouri Department of Conservation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture and private landowners being key partners driving big conservation numbers. To date the partnership has delivered 53 projects on the Missouri landscape. These projects directly restored 1,785 acres of native wetland habitats and enhanced flooding opportunity on another 1,278 acres of adjacent rowcrop fields. The MAWI partnership has invested \$755,000 into the projects.





DU IMPROVES 2,000 ACRES AT LOESS BLUFFS REFUGE

Ducks Unlimited has helped bring a consistent supply of water to Loess Bluffs National Wildlife Refuge in northwest Missouri, a 7,000-acre refuge comprised of wetlands, grasslands and forests reserved primarily as feeding and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife.

The project installed wells in areas of the refuge critical to migrating birds. The wells are in areas that have proven difficult to supply water through existing infrastructure and will provide water to nearly 2,000 acres of wetlands.

The first well is in the northeast portion of the refuge, near 350 acres of moist soil units. The second is located on the west boundary of the refuge and provide water to three managed units totaling 424 acres. These are seasonal wetlands that are shallowly flooded during fall and spring migration and heavily used by foraging waterfowl and shorebirds. The final well is on the south end of the refuge, improving 1,200 acres.

The project's next phase will be to construct a new berm across the north side of the Eagle Pool. DU expects to design the 6,000-foot-long berm in 2020 and construct it in 2021.

Infrastructure upgrades give the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service the tools needed to provide quality habitat for hundreds of species of plants and animals, including more than 400 bald eagles which reside at the refuge. In late 2020, 1.3 million snow geese were observed at the refuge.

Several partners collaborated on this project, including the Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative, River Bluffs Audubon Society, National Wild Turkey Federation Audubon Society of Missouri, Missouri Waterfowlers Hall of Fame, Columbia Audubon Society and other Missouri DU major donors. Enel Green Power North America Inc. also committed \$100,000 to Ducks Unlimited to enhance the refuge, near the organization's Rock Creek wind project in Atchison County.

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS: LEGACY FOR LANDOWNERS *By T. Edward Nickens*

The opportunity to make a permanent mark on the legacy of waterfowl conservation draws landowners to the concept of conservation easements. And the variety of other benefits offered by these voluntary agreements often seals the deal.

Consider the Confluence floodplain of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. Here, just north of St. Louis, Missouri, these great rivers meet in a giant matrix of lowlands, river bluffs, sloughs, flooded timber, and farmland. More than 200 established duck clubs in this area have created one of the most cherished waterfowling legacies in the country. But even that kind of history has a challenging time turning back a tide of rampant development.

Rick Holton Sr. and his family first bought 200 acres in the Confluence area in 1986, and in the years since they've amassed a 600-acre mosaic of fields, sloughs, and timber in the very heart of the Mississippi Flyway protected by easements. And while taking care of migrating ducks was a primary consideration for putting their property under easement, it was hardly the only one. This storied bend in the Mississippi is less than a 30-minute drive from upscale neighborhoods in the sprawling Saint Louis megalopolis.

"The city was engulfing us," Holton laments. "Over the years, we saw the lights coming." Massive new levees built after the deadly 1993 floods have attracted millions of dollars in new residential and industrial development. Nearly 30% of the floodplain was under threat of loss.

Helping to fit the larger pieces together is a useful way of thinking about Ducks Unlimited's conservation easement programs. The voluntary legal agreements limit the uses of a parcel of land as a means of protecting and improving its conservation value. Typically, landowners sell or donate development rights while retaining rights to inhabit, farm, timber, enjoy recreational pursuits, and otherwise utilize valuable property. In return, they receive either a one-time cash payment or substantial tax savings derived from the donated value of the easement. Most DU conservation easements are held by Wetlands America Trust (WAT), the organization's foundation and landholding arm.

Holton has long been a passionate voice for conservation. Year-round, landowners like him collectively improve habitat by managing timber, sloughs, and fields for the overall health of the Mississippi Flyway's mighty populations of migrating waterfowl.

It hasn't come quickly, and it hasn't come without sacrifice. "Conservation takes time," Holton says. "It takes a lot of planning. And often, it takes one person passionate about conservation to get the ball rolling in a duck club or other organization. DU has been very good about identifying those people and showing them how we can work for even larger goals."



Rick Holton's son, Rick Jr., and granddaughter, Lotsie, are the future legacy of conservation on their family property in Missouri's Confluence floodplain. Photo courtesy Rick Holton.

Missouri by the Numbers

2020

- 2 projects completed
- 1,926 acres conserved
- \$576,123 invested

HISTORICAL

- 119,084 acres conserved
- \$21.3 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/MISSOURI



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