

# STATE CONSERVATION REPORT

MONTANA • 2019

In 2018, your Montana Ducks Unlimited conservation team set a new benchmark by conserving 79,726 acres of wetlands and associated uplands, and provided technical assistance on 58,619 acres across the state. It takes a lot of work to accomplish this level of conservation and we sincerely thank our partners who worked hard to make Montana a better place for waterfowl, other wildlife and people.

Topping our list of accomplishments is our work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Ducks Unlimited conservation staff assist with the delivery of NRCS programs, including the Wetland Reserve Easement and the Agricultural Land Easement programs. During the past 12 months, the NRCS and DU secured 49,013 acres of permanent and term protection agreements and provided more than 58,619 acres of technical assistance on private lands.

DU's conservation easement partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and private landowners continues to focus on our highest priority landscapes along Montana's Hi-Line. Extreme weather conditions, including a heavy snowpack during the winter of 2017-18, followed by drought conditions this past summer, underscored the value of grass-based agriculture to landowners with many families converting marginal crop fields back to grass.

Ranchers pursuing easements on these lands receive a cash payment and qualify for cost-share on infrastructure improvements, such as stock water and fencing. In 2018,

FWS easements were completed with six landowners to permanently protect 16,567 acres. These easements allow ranchers to operate while keeping grasslands and wetlands intact.

DU's long-term partnership with the FWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife program continues to identify project opportunities and provide administrative support for habitat restoration and ranch infrastructure projects. During the past year, projects totaling 9,545 acres restored wetland habitat and improved upland nesting quality for waterfowl across the state.

- **Bob Sanders**  
*Manager of Conservation Programs for Montana*



On March 1, 2019, the Helena Ducks Unlimited chapter, on behalf of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, will auction a Montana Shiras moose license at its yearly banquet.



## DU helps Montana partners learn more about ducks and other wetland-dependent birds

Adam McDaniel, Ducks Unlimited conservation specialist and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) partner biologist, organized a waterfowl workshop for NRCS, Pheasants Forever, and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) employees.

The workshop was hosted by MFWP at Freezeout Lake Wildlife Management Area near Fairfield, Montana.

Participants learned to identify more than 50 bird species, with an emphasis on wetland-dependent waterfowl, shorebirds and wading birds. The group searched for duck nests to identify the species and age of the eggs. Instructors demonstrated how different ducks use different plants for nesting cover.

Bob Sanders, DU’s Montana manager of conservation, gave a presentation on waterfowl feeding ecology. Sanders led the group through identifying aquatic invertebrates that live in different wetland types. These protein-rich organisms are vitally important to nesting waterfowl and their developing ducklings.



## Habitat Montana builds public land legacy

Public lands are essential to Montana and the people who live there. Public lands support the state’s agriculture industry, provide natural resource jobs and support the booming outdoor recreation industry.

Habitat Montana grows public lands and helps conservation-minded landowners protect wildlife habitats on their land for the benefit of all.

Early on, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) scrambled to find funding for land protection projects. Funds often came from the Pittman-Robertson Act (PR), which is the excise tax on firearms, ammunition and sporting

equipment. However, PR funds require state matching dollars, and by the 1980s the need for predictable, state funding was apparent. That’s when Habitat Montana was created.

In 1987, several hunting and conservation groups encouraged the legislature to pass a bill to provide MFWP with nearly \$3 million per year from hunting license sales to protect wildlife habitat. This program became Habitat Montana and it continues to grow public lands. The program is used to purchase targeted lands with high wildlife habitat value, conservation easements from willing landowners, and fishing access sites. Landowners with

conservation easements also provide public hunting access to their lands.

Through Habitat Montana, the state now has more than 880,000 acres of land as Wildlife Management Areas or under a protective conservation easement. Conservation easement lands often join established public lands, meaning the public access footprint of Habitat Montana is much larger than the total acres directly impacted by the program. This greatly benefits wildlife, hunters, anglers and recreationists.

Habitat Montana also benefits farmers and ranchers. It provides working capital to help them secure their financial futures, whether through paying off debt or expanding their operations. And it has provided essential winter range for wildlife, which gives them alternatives to raiding haystacks, damaging crops and tearing down fences.

Support for this program is crucial because of its significance to our cherished wildlife, our agricultural economy and our incredible quality of life.

- Nick Gevock, conservation director for Montana Wildlife Federation, and Bob Sanders, Ducks Unlimited’s manager of conservation programs for Montana

## The late Jim Daugherty put the miles on for DU

Jim Daugherty had a passion for Ducks Unlimited that kept him on the road. Jim traveled across the state to Montana’s hotel lobbies, restaurants, sporting goods stores and other businesses to raise money through DU’s Sealed Bid Auction

(SBA) program. He led the nation four straight years as the top SBA fundraiser. In 2017 he raised \$84,000.

“I run this SBA program like I would my own business,” he said. “I work at it very hard.”

Jim passed away peacefully among family and friends at his home in August 2018. In addition to his SBA work, Jim and his wife, Linda, served as state chair, at separate times, and are recognized as Diamond Heritage major sponsors. He first got involved with DU in 1974 while living in California, when a local businessman asked him to help underwrite the cost of a gun for a DU dinner. The next year, he was given tickets to the dinner as thanks.

“It was Jim’s dogged determination to see DU succeed. That was his greatest contribution,” said Bruce Posey, DU state council chair in Montana.

For the SBA program, which Jim affectionately referred to as his trapline, Jim set up easels with framed wildlife pictures and small bidding boxes. Passersby would bid on the prints, and every two

weeks, he collected the boxes to determine the winners and call each one to congratulate them and coordinate payment and delivery of the winnings. Jim started working with the SBA program in November 2013 with three easels. He eventually had 75 and with plans to add even more. Since 2013, Jim raised nearly \$250,000 through SBAs.

Jim also used SBA as a chance to recruit new volunteers. He tried to deliver the art work in person to the successful bidder. That way, he could see if they were interested in becoming a volunteer.

“This also lets me see if enough volunteers can be generated to start a new event in the area,” he said. “The SBA program is the gift that keeps on giving, all you need to do is ask.”

“Jim was a tremendous salesman and a giving person. He loved talking with people and he was always looking for opportunities to connect people to DU. We will all miss him,” said Bob Sanders, DU manager of conservation programs for Montana.



Jim Daugherty (right) and Dan Lerum, the owner of Bushwakers Steakhouse and Saloon in Lincoln, which hosts sealed bid auctions.

## Pintail Flat property conserves wetlands and ranching



With a combination of word-of-mouth advertising, attractive conservation programs, and hard work by Ducks Unlimited and partners, a nearly 9,000-acre complex of protected Prairie Pothole Region wetlands and grasslands emerged in Phillips County.

“The vision was to create and protect an area with high waterfowl productivity,” said Bob Sanders, DU manager of conservation programs for Montana. “We restored several wetlands that were lost under row crops.”

DU first purchased the 1,760-acre Pintail Flat property with DU’s Revolving Habitat Program (RHP), which protects habitat at risk for conversion to cropland. DU worked with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) to make sure the grassland was protected and public access for hunting was maintained. The FWP easement requires the landowner to allow public access for 100 days a year. A sale to a local rancher is pending. “We want to help new ranchers get started. This partnership with MFWP on the Pintail Flat property does that and maintains hunting access,” Sanders said.

The rancher will set up a rotational grazing system on 858 acres of expiring Conservation Reserve Program land. With MFWP, DU can share the rancher’s costs of putting in water tanks and pipelines to bring water to the cattle.

“A clean water supply can mean a 100-pound or heavier weight gain for your cattle,” Sanders said. “Plus, if you can get good water on a ranch, you can keep the cattle out of the wetlands.”





## Volunteer would like to see more young women involved

Michaela Hystad's first hunt did not go well. She was handed a gun she wasn't familiar with on a cold morning and basically told to go hunt.

"It was a kind of bad first experience that led to better opportunities, along with slower and more communications. I got hooked after that," Michaela said.

She also became hooked on the guy who got her started. Today, Michaela and husband, Shawn, are avid hunters, chasing birds and big game in their home state of Montana and around the world. Shawn was also the one to suggest they volunteer for their local Ducks Unlimited chapter.

Shawn and Michaela now co-chair the Great Falls, Montana, event. The Hystads are also major donors and have earned Ducks Unlimited's Grand Slam Award, which requires major gifts to DU Inc., DU-Canada and DU-Mexico.

"I am a believer in giving something back," Michaela said. "I like the opportunity to volunteer for something I believe in and has a purpose. Ducks Unlimited just fits us, personality wise, both the people and what DU does."

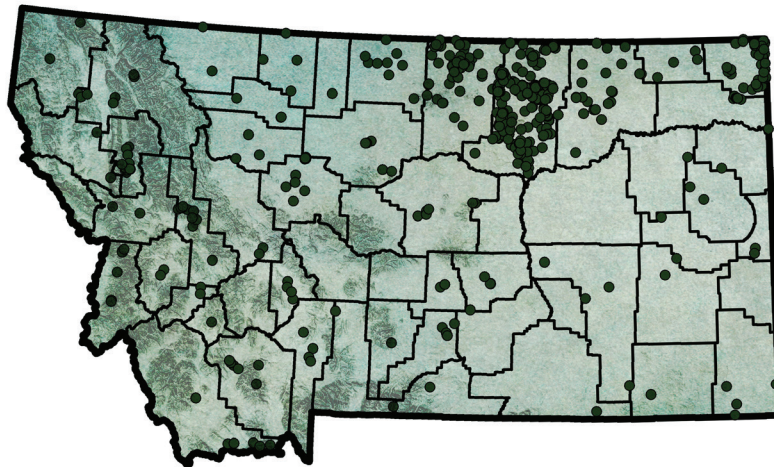
Michaela says she would like to see more women in their 20s and 30s get involved in DU, including women who didn't grow up in the organization.

"Montana does have a lot of women involved, but I would like to see more women around my age," she said. "It would help if they better understood the level of involvement. Banquet week is busy, but the rest of the year we have more breathing room."

## ducks unlimited MT PROJECTS 1984 - Present

● Completed projects

Note: Project points may represent more than one project.



## 2018 Accomplishments

79,726 acres protected, restored or enhanced • \$1,295,962 invested

### Major Sponsor information:

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