

fowl TALK



DUCKS UNLIMITED

THE FUTURE OUR WATERFOWL HERITAGE

By Don Thorpe

There was a famous television commercial 40 years ago showing a Native American Chief looking across a polluted landscape as a tear rolled down his cheek. I often wonder if 100 years from now will there be a child in camo looking across a barren field where once a wetland teeming with waterfowl and other wildlife once existed as a tear rolls down his cheek. Or will that child be smiling as he sits with his dad, in a blind on that protected wetland as mallard's wing across the water to their decoy spread. Which version of the future occurs is dependant on what we do now.

Ducks Unlimited has protected and conserved over 13 million acres of wetland and associated habitat over the last 72 years. But there is so much work left undone. The grasslands that support the duck factory in our own back yard are disappearing at an alarming rate. We are racing to help conservation minded landowners to protect native grassland thru grassland easements. We are seeing thousands of acres of CRP plowed black. From nesting grounds to the wintering grounds habitat needed by waterfowl is at risk of being permanently lost. Ducks Unlimited is the only waterfowl conservation organization that delivers conservation projects across the entire North American continent. These projects protect and restore habitat that help fulfill the needs of waterfowl throughout their life cycle.

You can sit on the sideline as our precious resources are taken over by urban spread, wetlands are drained and the native prairie is plowed under to be converted to crop land. Or you can rise with other concerned and dedicated waterfowl enthusiasts to take a stand to protect our Waterfowl heritage. We need your help! I am asking you to join your local DU committee to work for a future where those who come after us can experience the excitement of skies full of waterfowl.

Please call me at 605-630-8696 or email dthorpe@ducks.org to join the DU Team.



The last week of September I was invited to participate in a migratory bird hunt in Saskatchewan. The hunt included geese (light & dark), sandhill cranes and ducks. What an incredible week it was. Every pothole had some type of bird in it. To multiply this, the prairie landscape was covered with many potholes and lakes. Most parcels of land averaged over a dozen potholes per section, almost fifty per square mile.

NORTH AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

By Bill Marketon,
South Dakota Ducks Unlimited State Chairman

Imagine your best day hunting during the migration, seeing the sky filled with waterfowl and migrating birds. That was every day in Saskatchewan. Birds were everywhere. There were so many mallards that I almost became a greenhead snob. On my last hunt, greenheads were the only ducks on my mind. There was one beautiful drake pintail that joined my eight-bird limit.

Over the last couple of years, I have heard about how important all North America is to our migratory birds. Canada as breeding grounds, United States as breeding, travel and wintering grounds and Mexico for wintering habitat. Never would I have imagined how important our neighbor to the north is. Ducks Unlimited Canada is instrumental in conserving habitat for migratory birds. DU Canada owns over 300,000 acres in Saskatchewan alone. Through easements with landowners, they manage significantly more acres.

It is not a simple task. Government conservation funds are not easy to come by in Canada. They rely heavily upon support from conservatists in the United States. They also apply for and receive significant funding from NAWCA (North American Wetlands Conservation Act). The US dollar goes very far in Canada. For example, a permanent Conservation Easement can be placed on an acre for less than \$280 US dollars. That same easement in the US would be 8-10 times as much. Major donors to Ducks Unlimited have directed funds to be used in Canada to assist in this conservation effort. It is simply amazing what they are doing with our dollars.

NAWCA GRANT Awarded to SD Ducks Unlimited

Additional funds will soon be available to SD landowners interested in improving soil health and enhancing wildlife habitat. DU's new Soil Health Initiative is one of the projects that received funding as part of a \$1 million grant from the North American Wetlands Conservation Council.

The grant will be spent on a variety of wetland and upland conservation activities in the Prairie Pothole Region of eastern SD. The Prairie Pothole Region stretches from southern SD to the Canadian prairies and is the most important waterfowl breeding habitat in North America.

Soil Health Initiative funds will be available to eastern SD landowners interested in establishing cover crops, diversifying crop rotations, reducing tillage, conserving wetlands and planting grasslands.

One of the key aspects of the program is the importance of integrating cattle into cropland management.

"Cattle and ducks get along just fine. We have long known that grasslands managed for livestock production also provide excellent habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife species," said Steve Donovan, DU's manager of conservation programs. "Establishing cover crops on cropland and then later using those acres as livestock forage will provide similar benefits to wildlife while also improving soil health and providing additional income to producers." In fact, DU researchers are already documenting the use of cover crops as nesting habitat by ducks, pheasants and other ground nesting birds.

The grant also includes funds for various wetland restoration and protection projects, including the acquisition of conservation easements from willing landowners. The grant and partner contributions will enhance more than 30,000 acres of wetlands and associated upland habitats in eastern SD, benefiting waterfowl, ring-necked pheasants, white-tailed deer, songbirds, waterbirds and a wide variety of other wildlife species.

Partners in the project include John and Cheryl Dale, the David and Margaret Grohne Family Foundation, James River Water Development District, Roberts Conservation District, First National Bank of Omaha, the SD Habitat Conservation Fund and SD GFP.



Ducks Unlimited Mexico also helps to maintain the mangrove forests that provide wintering grounds for many of our migratory birds. This land is conserved at a fraction of the cost of US real estate. I have yet to see this area, but I am certain to be impressed if Canada is any example.

If you have not been to this North American waterfowl paradise, I would suggest a trip to Saskatchewan. The landowners are friendly. The hospitality at local hotels and restaurants is great. They welcome dogs in the hotel rooms, so bring your favorite retriever. Get ready to be inspired and energized. As hunters, we owe it to future generations to conserve our landscape. Please join DU to help us reach that common goal. Better yet, become a major donor and direct a portion of your funds to Canada and Mexico.

For the Ducks!!



Photos & Articles Courtesy of Ducks Unlimited

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DU Announces New PROGRAM AVAILABLE FOR SD LANDOWNERS

Ducks Unlimited is excited to announce a new opportunity for South Dakota landowners interested in improving farm profitability and wildlife habitat at the same time. Through this program, DU agronomists and wildlife biologists will help producers design long-term farm management plans that promote profitable agriculture while also benefiting wildlife, including waterfowl, ring-necked pheasants, white-tailed deer and other species. In addition to providing key technical assistance, DU may also provide financial incentives to producers to help implement new conservation practices. "It has been an interesting evolution in our conservation strategies since we hired Brad", said Steve Donovan, DU's Manager of Conservation Programs. The "Brad" he is referring to is Brad Schmidt, DU's lead agronomist in South Dakota. "Brad has opened our eyes to all the potential that exists for promoting profitable agriculture and wildlife habitat at the same time on the same acres, something many wildlife biologists were trained to think impossible", he added. The addition of agronomists to DU's staff of wildlife biologists and engineers has resulted in the development of new concepts in waterfowl habitat management. One example is the use of cover crops to improve soil fertility. "Producers are starting to recognize the importance of increasing soil carbon levels and retaining soil fertility using cover crops, but those cover crops can also provide benefits to wildlife, including spring nesting habitat", said Schmidt. Winter wheat also provides suitable nesting cover and while it is generally considered a low profit crop, producers are starting to recognize the value of winter wheat in a crop rotation plan because of the significant boost it gives to soil carbon, which then benefits the next crop grown on those acres. "The key to promoting both profitable agriculture and wildlife is to recognize the particular resources you already have on a property, manage those resources responsibly and implement a crop rotation plan that also meets the needs of wildlife", said Donovan. One example of such a program is to use wetlands wisely. Wetlands, even wetlands that are partially drained, can be very difficult to farm. Input costs are often a total loss when a heavy rain will generate standing water and result in crop loss. A better use for wetlands is for grazing purposes. "When cover crops in cropland areas are grazed, which is good for soil health improvement, those cattle will also graze within wetlands embedded in those cropland acres, putting on pounds and generating profits for landowners, while also maintaining plant diversity in those wetland habitats, something wildlife needs", said Donovan. Landowners interested in pheasants should be interested in this new program too, according to Donovan. "Ducks and pheasants often use the same habitats", he explained. Cover crops and winter wheat can provide nesting habitat for pheasants. A field planted to season long cover crops, and then grazed during the late winter, can greatly improve soil health while also providing late summer brood habitat and excellent hunting opportunities for pheasants. Add to that scenario a few cattail wetlands that provide the best winter cover for pheasants and you have an ideal scenario to benefit ducks and pheasants, while also realizing farm profitability. "These practices can really benefit a producer's bottom line, particularly in these tough economic times", added Schmidt. "Improving soil health can significantly reduce a producer's input costs, while also sometimes resulting in improved yields. This combination is something you can literally take to the bank", according to Schmidt. Landowners interested in hearing more about this new program can call Donovan at (605) 633-0270, or any of the other DU biologists and agronomists in South Dakota.



SD Ducks Unlimited STATE CONVENTION

The South Dakota Ducks Unlimited State convention will migrate to the Pierre Ramkota Hotel and Event Center January 25 & 26, 2019. Our theme this year is "Catch a Wave to Hawaii".

SDDU Convention is a celebration of conservation minded sportsman recognizing the importance of protecting not only South Dakota's precious wildlife habitat but habitat across North America. Our convention is open to DU volunteers, members and those who would like to become members, so make plans now to join us at the South Dakota Ducks Unlimited State Convention.

This year we will host a Friday Night Lua, so come dressed in your favorite Hawaiian attire. Saturday highlights are General Business brunch followed by activities for all members of your family!

Saturday, we conclude the convention with the South Dakota DU Gala featuring a fine meal and a live auction with original art and other DU collectibles.

Register for the 2019 South Dakota Ducks Unlimited State Convention by Midnight December 31st and you will be entered in a FREE drawing for a Stevens 20 Ga. Shotgun!!!!

To purchase your tickets online please at <http://www.ducks.org/south-dakota/events>.

Come & support Ducks Unlimited in Your Hometown

Join in the fun and attend your local Ducks Unlimited event! You can find a list of upcoming events on the South Dakota Ducks Unlimited web page at <http://www.ducks.org/south-dakota/events>. It is easy to locate your favorite event, just "click" on link and you will open a new page featuring full event information. There is even an option to register online for most events. The newest feature to the event info page is easy mapping available to direct to event location.

So come have fun and support waterfowl conservation!

Bring DU Home with you!

Is DU in your Hometown? Ducks Unlimited volunteers have hosted events in many communities in South Dakota.

Many new chapters have started in the last few years in small towns and have had great events. But DU has disappeared from other towns.

We want you to have DU in your hometown. Help us get there!

Contact: Don Thorpe Regional Director,
605-630-8696 or dthorpe@ducks.org

DU Hires New AGRONOMIST GRATTEN ALLEN

Ducks Unlimited is excited to announce the hiring of Gratten Allen, an agronomist who will specialize in delivering DU's "Soil Health Program" in northeast SD. Mr. Allen started working for DU in July and has hit the ground running. He will make his home and office in Webster, and he will be working with producers in the Bitter Lake watershed and surrounding landscapes on efforts to improve soil health and wildlife habitat by implementing a variety of conservation practices, including: promoting no-till systems, planting cover crops, diversifying crop rotations to include small grain crops like winter wheat, integrating grazing systems on cropland and many other practices. DU believes these practices will enhance wetland habitats and provide additional upland nesting cover for ducks, pheasants and other upland nesting birds. "I've been thoroughly impressed with the number of producers he has already contacted and developed projects with", said Steve Donovan, DU's Manager of Conservation Programs.

Gratten Allen



DU Among Finalists For NRCS' 2018 Excellence in COOPERATIVE CONSERVATION AWARD

Ducks Unlimited was one of three finalists nominated for the 2018 Excellence in Cooperative Conservation Award from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as announced by Jeff Zimprich, NRCS State Conservationist, Huron, SD. "This year all three finalists have done amazing work to further conservation across South Dakota (SD)," he said at the time the nominations were announced. Ducks Unlimited has several cooperative ventures underway with the NRCS in South Dakota. These efforts are geared around promoting soil health improvement practices and monitoring the benefits of those practices to waterfowl and other wildlife species.

The award recognizes excellence in natural resources conservation. "The award winner is recognized for working side-by-side with the NRCS to augment the value of the NRCS' technical assistance and support implementation of conservation programs of the Farm Bill." Their teamwork to blend resources of individuals, private organizations, universities, local, state, and federal government entities, has strengthened overall relationships.

Most importantly these joint efforts are making a difference on the health of our natural resources. "Our partners have been incredible in their ideas and activities for helping SD's farmers and ranchers," says Zimprich. For 23 years, the NRCS has presented the award at the state convention of the SD Association of Conservation District which was held in Pierre, SD, September 16-18, 2018. The three finalists for the 2018 award were the SD Corn Growers Association, Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, and the South Dakota Ducks Unlimited. While the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe was the eventual recipient of the award, it was still a great honor to be selected as a finalist for the award, said Brad Schmidt, DU agronomist who leads the soil health program. "It is an honor to be recognized by the NRCS for our work to promote soil health practices in the most important waterfowl habitat in North America", said Schmidt. "When agricultural lands are managed correctly, using practices that protect natural resources, protect soil health, and promote long-term sustainability of these resources, wildlife will also benefit, something that everyone should be excited about", he added. For more information on DU's Soil Health Program, people are encouraged to call Brad at (605) 592-1277.

DU Major Donor UPDATE

South Dakota's Major Sponsor fundraising efforts were outstanding in 2017, under the guidance of Director of Development, Terry Kostinec, the state campaign committee produced astounding results. Team South Dakota rose to the #1 position in the Ducks Unlimited nation for the first time. More than \$2.7 million to DU's conservation mission was raised. The year 2018 has been "good for the ducks" also. Presently, 9 new Life Sponsors, 18 upgrades and 1 Feather Society member have signed on the dotted line. State Campaign Chairman, Maynard Isaacson said, "This South Dakota Campaign Committee has accepted the challenge to go 'back to back' as #1! We appreciate the outstanding support of all our Major Donors!"

Spencer Vaa, Major Donor

