



Fowl Talk

SPRING 2016



Conservation Fund Awards Grants to DU

The South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks has announced the recipients of the first round of grants from the Habitat Conservation Fund. Among the projects selected are several submitted by Ducks Unlimited.

In early January, the South Dakota Habitat Conservation Fund Board awarded over \$300,000 to Ducks Unlimited to support a series of projects across the state. Work to fulfill the grants is expected to begin this spring.

The Habitat Conservation Fund was created by an act of the South Dakota legislature during the 2015 session at the request of Governor Dennis Daugaard. The fund was one of eight recommendations generated by the Governor's

Continued on page 2



DU Partners with Climate Adaptation Fund to Restore Habitat in SD

Pg. 4



Continued Support Needed for Perpetual Conservation Easements

Pg. 7



Small Hunts for Big Ducks

Pg. 10

NON PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Bismarck, ND
Permit 280

National Headquarters, Ducks Unlimited, Inc.
One Watertown Way • Memphis, Tennessee 38120

Conservation Fund Awards Grants to DU

Continued from page 1



Pheasant Habitat Work Group to help spur the protection and enhancement of grass and other cover utilized by upland birds and other wildlife.

With an initial legislative appropriation of \$350,000, the fund was to be matched with private dollars, creating a source of funding for non-governmental organizations to work with South Dakota landowners and wildlife agencies on a variety of wildlife habitat improvement projects.

Those Ducks Unlimited projects approved for funding include:

RIGHT-OF-WAY PROPOSAL, HYDE COUNTY

DU received over \$5,000 to work with landowners along Highway 47 north of Highmore to improve nesting habitat in the highway right-of-way.

Poor quality brome will be replaced with a diverse mix of native species that will provide better nesting cover for ducks, pheasants and other ground nesting birds. Native grasses will provide taller and more diverse

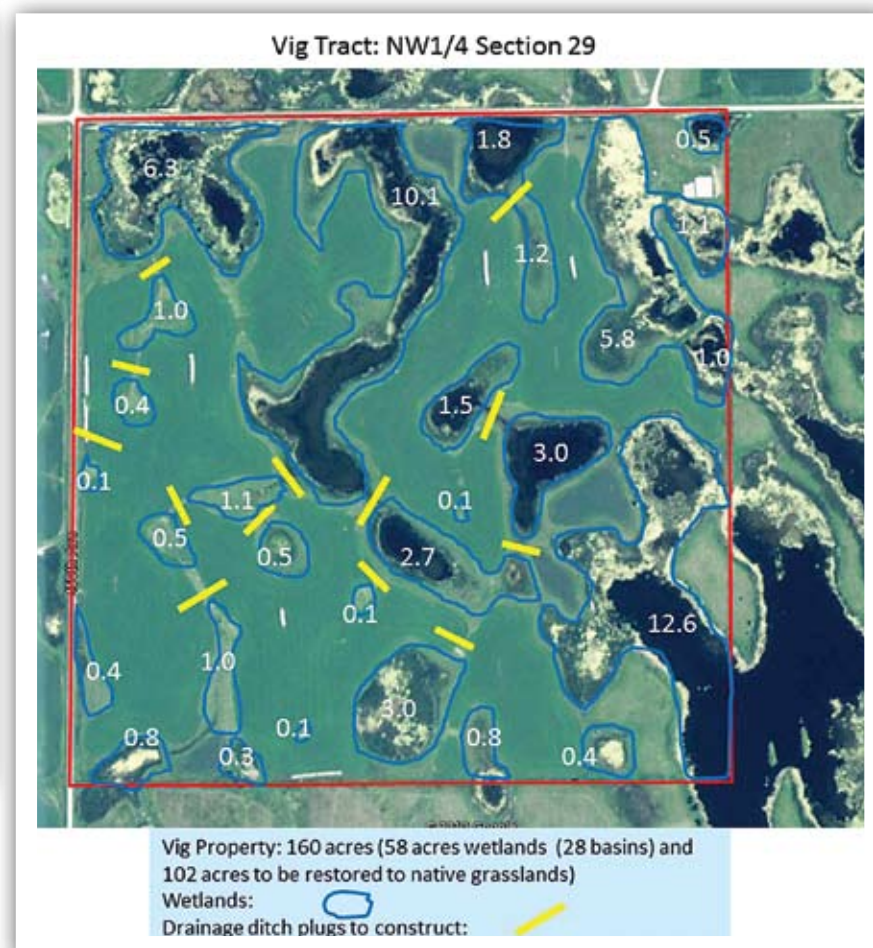
habitat for wildlife. In addition, the optimal haying date for this native mix is much later in the summer than most ditches are currently hayed, giving ducks and pheasants more time to successfully nest.

The High Plains Wildlife Association has agreed to partner with DU on this effort, and it is hoped that this project will serve as a model that will eventually result in the improvement of habitat along thousands of miles of road rights-of-way in South Dakota.

ENGSTROM PROPERTY RESTORATION

Located in Clark County, the Engstrom property is owned by Ducks Unlimited and will potentially be transferred to the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission as an addition to the Swan Lake Game Production Area.

As part of this \$15,000 grant, 128 acres of poor quality, non-native grass will be restored to a diverse mix of native species, improving habitat conditions for nesting ducks, pheasants and other



wildlife.

MALLARD DAM REPAIR

A \$20,000 grant from the Habitat Conservation Fund will be matched with funds from DU, the U.S. Forest Service and South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks to restore the Mallard Dam, which is located on the Ft. Pierre National Grasslands south of Pierre. The dam and the surrounding habitat are popular places for the public to hunt and fish.

With this funding, DU will be able to repair the structural damage that occurred to the dam from recent high water events.

VIG/KEMNITZ RESTORATION PROJECT

A \$100,000 grant will be used to completely restore the Vig and Kemnitz properties located near Veblen in Roberts County. This 480-acre block of land is part of DU's Revolving Lands Program, and plans for the project include

restoring over 75 wetland basins on the tract and seeding over 300 acres of cropland back to native grassland species.

Once completed, this property, with its large number of small, shallow wetlands, will be particularly attract to breeding waterfowl. Other partners in this effort include the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, Roberts County Pheasants Forever, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and the North American Wetlands Conservation Council.

JAMES RIVER WATERSHED RCPP PROGRAM

DU was awarded a grant of \$100,000 for the James River Watershed project. As part of this effort, DU and partners will work with private landowners on a number of conservation efforts, including grazing system improvements, grassland re-establishment, wetland restoration, integrating cover crops into crop

Conservation Fund Awards Grants to DU

Continued from page 2

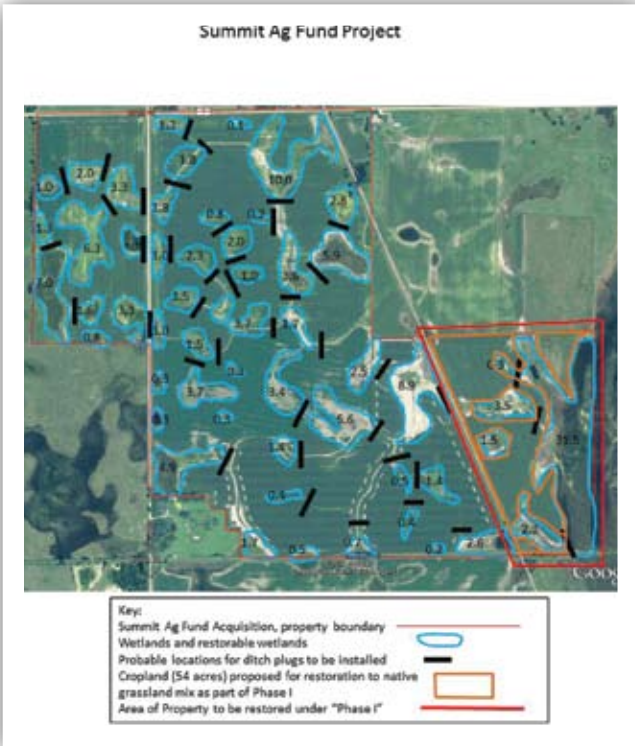
rotations and other conservation activities to promote soil health, improve water quality and provide wildlife habitat to ducks, pheasants and other wildlife.

Other partners involved include the Beadle and Davison Conservation Districts, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, South Dakota Grasslands Coalition, South Dakota Wheat Growers, and the James River Water Development District.

SUMMIT TRACT RESTORATION

A \$60,000 grant to DU will be matched with over \$196,000 from other partners for this Summit Tract restoration project in central Sanborn County.

The 524-acre Summit property is owned by Ducks Unlimited, and wetland and grassland habitat will be restored on this site, including a large number of drained wetlands



that are embedded in cropland. The restored wetlands will attract large numbers of breeding waterfowl pairs and provide

abundant benefits to other wildlife species.

Other partners involved in this project include: Pheasant Country Chapter 872, Wildlife Conservation Society, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, James River Water Development District, the Izaak Walton League and the North American Wetlands Conservation Council.

BROWN COUNTY RIGHT OF WAY PROPOSAL

The Habitat Conservation

Fund awarded DU with a grant of \$7,462 to improve right-of-way habitat along Highway 37 north of Groton. The project is very similar to the effort being completed in Hyde County and will also greatly improve habitat for nesting waterfowl and pheasants.

FIRESTEEL WETLANDS PROPOSAL

DU was awarded a grant of \$10,000 from the fund to assist with efforts to repair a large dam on private land in Aurora County. The project will restore a six acre wetland used by breeding waterfowl and other wildlife species.

In addition, several small wetlands will be restored on adjacent land enrolled into the Conservation Reserve Program, providing additional habitat benefits. The landowner and the James River Water Development District are also providing funds for the project.



Mercer County Fair
July 7-10



Dakota Walleye Classic
July 22-23

Beulah
www.visitbeulah.com

Eat, Sleep, Play, Live
Beulah Convention & Visitor's Bureau

DU Partners with Climate Adaptation Fund to Restore Habitat in SD



Ducks Unlimited has recently acquired \$174,900 in grant funds from the Climate Adaptation Fund to restore habitat in South Dakota.

The grant is administered by the Wildlife Conservation Society for projects that serve as innovative examples of on-the-ground efforts helping species and the ecosystems on

which they depend adapt to changing climatic conditions across the United States. The presence of shallow wetland habitat throughout the Prairie Pothole Region is conditional upon precipitation and temperature. Changes in these patterns can alter wetland productivity and geographic abundance, potentially reducing breeding habitat availability for wetland-dependent species like waterfowl.

Ducks Unlimited proposes to restore wetland and grassland habitat in South Dakota to mitigate potential climate change impacts to breeding ducks.

“Research has shown that reducing non-climatic stressors on the environment is one of the best ways to provide a pathway for species to adapt to changes in climate,” says Bruce Toay, a Regional Biologist

with Ducks Unlimited. “By restoring targeted wetland and grassland habitats, we can connect existing intact areas and impact resources on a landscape level in the Prairie Pothole Region.”

Projects in this proposal include the restoration of 62 previously drained wetlands basins and restoration of 647 acres of grassland habitat. These projects will be located in targeted areas across eastern South Dakota adjacent to intact and protected habitats, maximizing the potential to attract the highest densities of breeding waterfowl and other migratory birds.

Capital Notes - A review of the 2016 South Dakota Legislative Session

Public policies can and do have significant impacts on waterfowl, waterfowl habitat and every other fish, bird, mammal, bug, fly, and frog that crawls, flies, swims or walks in our state. Laws and other public policies can have both positive and negative impacts on the natural resources that we cherish, and Ducks Unlimited takes a very pro-active position on public policies when such policies can have a direct and significant impact on our mission: the conservation of waterfowl habitat.

On March 29, the South Dakota legislature completed its work for the 2016 legislative session, during which DU staff and volunteers were actively engaged in a number of areas. We want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who took the time and helped out with legislative efforts this year. Advocating for public policies that are friendly to waterfowl habitat and against policies that would have a detrimental impact is very important and we could not accomplish our goals without the participating of passionate volunteers from throughout the state.

4 • Spring 2016

Below is a quick summary of this year's session and some of the efforts we were involved with:

SB 136: On the last day of the session, Veto Day, the South Dakota legislature failed in an effort to override the Governor's veto of SB 136, a popular bill that had widespread, bi-partisan support to create property tax incentives for landowners who establish grassland buffers along lakes, streams and rivers. The Senate voted 32-1 to override the veto, showing great support for this bill. However, in the House, the vote was only 37-28 to override the veto, failing to get the 2/3 majority required. We believe this bill will come back next year and, after a few concerns are addressed, will get passed into law.

HB 1180: This bill would have limited the terms of conservation easements to 100 years in length. DU and many other individuals and organizations testified in opposition to this bill, which was defeated on the House floor by a vote of 23-46. This bill, or a similar version, has

been introduced in the legislature for approximately 10 years in a row, but thus far has been defeated every time. Conservation easements are an important tool used by many landowners and organizations to protect important natural resources for future generations to enjoy.

HB 1007: a bill to make an appropriation to revise and update the data and methods used to determine agricultural land production capacity and property taxes. DU supported this effort. It did pass and was signed into law by the Governor. We are hopeful that this initial step will ultimately lead to additional opportunities to incentivize landowners to keep grasslands as grasslands, and avoid the temptation to plow up grasslands and convert them to annually tilled cropland. Senate Bill 4 was introduced during the session that would have done exactly that – give landowners an opportunity to reduce property taxes on certain grasslands. However, the bill was withdrawn by the sponsors before DU had a chance to consider any action.

HB 1151 and **SB 56** were both efforts to limit the ability of the SD Game, Fish and Parks to purchase land. DU opposed both bills. The Senate Bill failed in committee while the House bill lost on the House floor by a vote of 23-45.

There were many other bills introduced that involved wildlife, hunting and natural resources. Those listed above were the bills that were most relevant to DU's mission of protecting and enhancing waterfowl habitat.

Once again, DU wishes to thank everyone who took a moment and contacted their elected officials on pending legislation that would impact waterfowl habitat in South Dakota. Your efforts are greatly appreciated and important in our work to support Conservation!

Steve Donovan
*Manager of Conservation Programs
in South Dakota*

DU Revolving Habitat Program Keeps Turning

DU's Revolving Habitat Program (RHP) in SD has had a busy year to date. For those of you unfamiliar with the program, or who need a refresher about the process, DU purchases land considered to be critical breeding and migratory waterfowl habitat from willing private landowners. Funds for the purchase of such lands have been raised by DU specifically for this purpose, and no "grassroots" dollars are used to purchase RHP land.

After habitat enhancement and restoration projects are completed during DU's ownership (typically 1-5 years – during which time the land is open to public hunting and leased out to farmers and ranchers), the conservation values of the land will be perpetually protected. Once habitat protection is in place, the land is typically sold at public auction. Proceeds from the land sale then will be used to purchase additional critical breeding and migratory waterfowl habitat to start the process anew.

During the current fiscal year, which began on July 1, 2015, the RHP has seen the addition of three new properties totaling 706 acres to its inventory. In addition, two properties totaling 800 acres have been sold, and plans are in place to sell 3 additional properties totaling 960 acres before the end of the fiscal year.

The properties added to the inventory include a 158-acre property

in Brown County and a 240-acre property in Marshall County that are both comprised of grassland and wetland habitat and will be leased out for grazing cattle this year. DU plans to make habitat improvements during the 2-3 year holding period and then protect the existing habitat with perpetual conservation easements before "revolving" these properties for sale and back into private ownership.

A 308-acre property purchased in Beadle County is a parcel of land that is currently comprised of cropland with a high density of wetlands that are at an elevated risk of being degraded. During the next few years DU plans to work with various partners to utilize this property as a demonstration and research site to promote the use of cover crops to improve soil health, water quality and infiltration rates, and crop yields.

Research is also planned at the Beadle County property to determine if cover crops (which are inter-seeded into a standing crop of corn or soy beans) will provide adequate cover for nesting ducks during the subsequent nesting season. Once the research project is completed and the existing wetland values are perpetually protected from being degraded, the plan for this property is to sell it back into private ownership as cropland.

Those properties that were recently sold from the RHP include a 320-acre property in Hughes County. While owned by DU, a large number of

shallow seasonal wetlands that were imbedded in cropland and at high risk of being degraded were protected with a perpetual easement. The property was sold back into private ownership as cropland.

Another property sold from the RHP is a 480-acre parcel located in McPherson County. This property was sold with a mixture of cropland and grassland habitat to a young local rancher with the wetland and grassland values protected by conservation easements.

The three properties that will be revolved out of the RHP by the end of the fiscal year include 320 acres of cropland in Brown County, where important wetland habitat was perpetually protected. As a provision of the cropland sale, adjacent privately

owned grassland habitat was also perpetually preserved.

The other two properties totaling 640 acres are located in Hyde County and will be sold a public auction on April 21st. They are comprised of native grassland and wetland habitat that have been perpetually protected by both wetland and grassland conservation easements.



Baker Metal & Recycling

We have Roll Scrap Containers

SELLING: Steel, Culverts, Cattle Guards, Welding Supplies, Sucker Rods & Guard rails.

BUYING SCRAP IRON

Open Mon. – Sat. 7am – 6pm

Lee, Bruce & Neil

Call for more info & delivery

406-778-2710

GRAHAM

YOUR TIRE STORE NEXT DOOR

You're in GRAHAM COUNTRY

<p>Aberdeen 605-225-2352</p> <p>Pierre 605-224-8643</p> <p>Sioux Falls North 605-336-0800</p> <p>Yankton 605-665-4406</p>	<p>Mitchell 605-996-7709</p> <p>Sioux Falls Downtown 605-336-2575</p> <p>Sioux Falls South 605-339-3334</p>
---	--

SOUTH DAKOTA 2016-2017 GUN RAFFLE CALENDARS

July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017

**SDDU 57 GUN CALENDAR
RAFFLES ARE NOW ON SALE!
\$50 EACH**

**WE WILL AWARD ONE GUN EACH WEEK
FROM JULY 1, 2016 THROUGH
JUNE 30, 2017**

**WE WILL ALSO DRAW 5 BONUS GUNS
DURING THE YEAR.**



**For more info on rules, gun list and where to
purchase your Raffle Calendars go to:**

**www.ducks.org/south-dakota
or www.ducks.org/sd-calendar**

For more information contact Don Thorpe at dthorpe@ducks.org

Continued Support Needed for Perpetual Conservation Easements

The 2016 South Dakota legislative session once again featured a bill seeking to eliminate perpetual conservation easements in the state. Thankfully the bill was defeated, but similar legislation will most certainly return to Pierre.

Efforts to ban perpetual conservation easements in South Dakota are turned back on a seemingly yearly basis during the state legislative session in no small part because they are very popular with landowners who want to promote profitable farming and ranching practices while also conserving habitat.

In fact, the demand for perpetual conservation easements in South Dakota far outpaces the federal funding for the program. At last count, nearly 700 South Dakota landowners remain on a waiting list for a perpetual conservation easement.

In 2012, the U.S. Department of the Interior announced a plan to help shrink this gap and protect North America's "duck factory".

The Dakota Grassland Conservation Area (DGCA) was introduced as a landscape-scale approach to conservation that looked to build upon established partnerships between the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, private landowners and various conservation organizations to accelerate the preservation of the Prairie Pothole Region through the acquisition of perpetual conservation easements on nearly 2 million acres of grassland and wetland habitat in North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana.

"These easements are extremely important for wildlife but they're also an important economic tool for landowners," Highmore rancher Jim Faulstich said when the Dakota www.ducks.org/states/62/



Grassland Conservation Area was announced.

Healthy and abundant grasslands are at the heart of South Dakota's role as a national leader in livestock production. With nearly 3.7 million head of cattle in the state, livestock production generates over \$2 billion annually in economic activity. Periods of drought in recent years made for tough times in ranching country, but they also provided a reminder of how important grassland reserves are to producer and consumer alike.

Faulstich said that including easements in the business plan of a ranch is often the only way a beginning rancher can add the ground necessary to support a sustainable career in a grass-based operation.

"I kind of think of young ranchers as an endangered species, and if we don't do something to keep them on the land we are going to have some real problems in the future," said Faulstich. "Conservation easements are a tool to put them in a financial position to stay on the land."

Conservation easements are also one of the most effective tools at keeping grasslands and wetlands on the land as well, helping stem

a tide of habitat loss that currently threatens some of North America's most productive duck nesting habitat.

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, 1.8 million acres of South Dakota's native prairie met the plow during a fifteen-year period beginning in the 1980's – a chunk of ground equivalent to the size of Minnehaha County three times over.

Another 100,000 acres were plowed under between 2005-2006, and while it is difficult to adequately quantify current conversion rates, conservative estimates indicate that nearly half of South Dakota's remaining native prairie will meet the plow in the next 35 years.

And while much has been said of how the Dakotas are losing acres of wetlands – as much as 13,000 acres a year – a person can contend that the loss of grassland acres is of more concern. When an acre of grass is turned over, any wetland found within immediately shifts from an asset to a liability. Even the smallest wetlands are valued in a grass-based operation, but those same ephemeral basins prove to be more of a headache for a producer growing corn or soybeans. Grassland conservation is truly our best form of wetland conservation, and perpetual conservation easements are one of the best forms of grassland conservation.

Ducks Unlimited members and other conservationists know that protecting grass and wetlands today means protecting the future of ducks and duck hunting for the next generation and beyond. But they also know that the benefits of a perpetual conservation easement extend well beyond mornings in the blind.

A strong showing of support of perpetual conservation easements from sportsmen and women and landowners across the state played a large role in the defeat of the bill this year, and similar action will remain vitally important in years to come.

Quality Hunting and Shooting Products



1-800-784-4331
www.ruggedgear.com



South Dakota Ducks Unlimited State Chapter Awards for 2015 Presented at 2016 SDDU State Convention



South Dakota Ducks Unlimited Chapters compete against their previous year's performance to qualify for performance awards. To receive a performance award chapter earn points calculated thru a matrix to determine award status.

There are 3 Divisions for award purposes: Honker, Mallard, and Wood Duck Divisions with the Honker Division being the highest award.

2015 STATE CHAPTER PERFORMANCE AWARDS

2015 HONKER AWARD

- Sioux Falls Sponsor Event
- Hartford Dinner
- SDDU Gun Calendar
- Custer Dinner
- Watertown Dinner

- Walworth County Dinner
- Lennox Dinner
- Lookout Mountain/Spearfish
- Yankton Dinner
- Tri-State Dinner/ Belle Fourche
- Pierre Dinner
- Big Sioux-DU (Renner/Crooks)
- Miller Dinner

2015 MALLARD AWARD

- Lake Alvin (Harrisburg) Dinner
- Springs (Wessington Springs)
- Sioux Falls 100for100
- Lake City Dinner
- Castlewood Dinner
- Choteau Creek (Armour) Dinner
- Rapid City Dinner

2015 WOOD DUCK AWARD

- McPherson County (Eureka)
- Aberdeen Sponsor Event

- Lake Poinsett Dinner
- Kingsbury County Dinner
- Gettysburg Dinner
- Aberdeen Dinner

TOP FLIGHT AWARDS

To qualify for the Top Flight Award events must attain a **65% or better net/net to gross** and have a minimum event net/net of \$5,000. Event must also meet 10/30 requirements as set forth by DU National handbook. Congratulations to all of the Top Flight Winners. Being a Top Flight Chapter is a great goal for all Committees to have so that we can maximize the dollars for "THE DUCKS".

- Sioux Falls Sponsor Event
- Watertown Dinner
- Lake City Dinner

- Hartford Dinner
- Walworth County Dinner
- McPherson Co. Dinner
- Custer

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION AWARDS

Volunteers recognised for service above and beyond the call of duty to South Dakota Ducks Unlimited fundraising efforts.

"Answering The Call" Award
2016 Ken Burnison

"Heritage" Award
2016 Terry Schutz

"Heidelbauer Award"
2016 Don Kallenberger



South Dakota Ducks Unlimited

Frank Heidelberg Award



Named after Frank Heidelberg of Sioux Falls, SD, this prestigious award is presented to an individual who, like Frankie, has worked diligently throughout the years doing it for "THE DUCKS". It is the highest honor bestowed upon an individual by South Dakota Ducks Unlimited.

2002 - Terry Boxdorfer	2010 - Rick & Pam Berg
2003 - Bob Fulkerson	2011 - Dennis Tilly
2004 - Gary L. Peterson	2012 - Don and Maynard
2005 - Gary W. Peterson	Isaacson
2006 - Craig Jones	2013 - Jim Adams
2007 - John Cooper	2014 - Jeff Heidelberg
2008 - John Green	2015 - Darrel Reinke
2009 - Marilyn & Bruce Krentz	2016 - Don Kallenberger

Thank You!!!

The officers and volunteers of South Dakota Ducks Unlimited would like to express their sincere gratitude for the generous contributions by the following in supporting of the 2016 South Dakota State Convention.

- Bass Pro, Council Bluffs IA
- Comfort Inn & Suites - Mitchell
- Tuned Up Entertainment
- Hampton Inn - Mitchell
- Heidelberg Wildfowl Calls - Todd Heidelberg - Sioux Falls
- Highland Conference Center - Mitchell
- Luckett Auction Service - Val Luckett
- Preston Burma, Auctioneer
- Ben Meyer Auctioneer
- South Dakota Trappers Association
- Spearfish Canyon Cabin

Getaway - Kent Burnison - Spearfish

A Special Thanks to the Convention Committee for organizing this year's convention: Harold Bickner, Kent Burnison, Don DeHaan, Steve Donovan, Paul DeHaan, Kevin Fuerst, Peder Lunde, Slim and Mary Schneider, Steve and Heather Schutz, Don and Holly Thorpe, and Dennis Tilly. Also thank you to all of the members of the chapters who volunteered to help run the convention.

If we have inadvertently missed someone for a donation or support, please accept our apologies and sincere appreciation for helping to make the 2016 convention a memorable one.

Ducks Unlimited National Convention



June 1-5, 2016

Captain Hook Hotel, Anchorage Alaska

Small Hunts for Big Ducks

A decoy shifting here or a shotgun case slipping there – I wasn't exactly sure of the cause, but the disruption to the delicate balance of hunting gear I had maintained for several hundred yards sent me crashing to my knees in the South Dakota muck.

Looking up from my unexpected resting place, I could see three bouncing lines of light from the headlamps of my hunting partners slogging along in front of me. With a level of athletic ability falling somewhere between "none" and "none-plus," I felt pretty good to get as far as I had, especially considering the full bag of decoys on my back, layout blind slung across one shoulder, a shotgun slung across the other and blind bag in hand - all challenging my equilibrium.

Thankfully, there was a silver lining to the nearly mile-long distance between point A and point B on this October morning: lots and lots of ducks.

"I don't think you could have fit another duck on this spot last night," encouraged longtime friend Steve Bierle, who paused his own trek through the muck just enough to let me catch up. "Mallards, pintails, a few widgeon - you should have seen it in here."

"Here" was a small depression no more than a quarter-acre in size smack-dab in the middle of a massive field of wheat in north-central South Dakota.

Broad as a plowman's back, the rolling hills of grass, small grains, sunflowers and corn make this big country. During the fall a person can have a hard time finding water – and ducks – in these parts, but a recent heavy rainstorm had brought both to this area where cattle outnumber people.

The greasy rows of wheat stubble eventually gave way to boot-sucking



mud as we neared our destination. A few more steps and water sloshed with every step, but even under the light of four headlamps, it was hard to see anything but weeds.

Bierle and I joined our other companions for the morning – Ben Burris and Mark Smith – in setting up blinds, tossing out the decoys, and readying for the action.

"Birds seemed to be coming from just about every direction last night," recalled Burris, who had helped find the field and secure permission. "It seemed that a lot of flocks came from the north and to the east, but it was tough to tell. There wasn't a lot of light left when we found the spot."

The amount of open water I discovered while dropping decoys was surprisingly small and none of it more than a few inches deep. The small drifts of feathers scattered throughout the weedy cover, however, suggested that we were indeed in the right spot.

As darkness gave way to layers of color in the east, the amount of winged-activity in the skies began to increase. At first we could only hear the sound of whistling wings, but eventually silhouettes of ducks began

to emerge. With head raised and ears perked, my yellow Labrador, Murphy, stared out from his blind as the first birds slid in to the decoys.

While the final minutes before shooting time ticked away, the crescendo of bird activity actually slowed. An inquisitive glance to Bierle earned another encouraging remark.

"They were shoulder-to-shoulder in here last night. It was getting dark, but I'm telling you, there was enough light to see that this little spot was absolutely covered," he said.

We sat quietly as shooting light came and went without a duck in the decoys. The sun had just about cleared the hills of grass to our east when the sound of a drake mallard broke through the distant clamor of cattle on the move.

"Small bunch – on the right," came the whisper from one of the layout blinds.

With backs turned against the sun, the radiant blue speculums of seven mallards glowed in the early light. A chorus of greeting calls met the birds as they made the hook and leaned in

to the stiff breeze from the north.

A mile of sweat and mud was wiped clean as we rose from the blinds to take this first flock of the morning, and Murphy made easy work of the four drakes scattered throughout the water and wheat stubble.

The morning progressed in a similar fashion with flocks of mallards and pintails descending from various heights in the big South Dakota sky – hundreds of birds all looking to find a place in this small wetland that two weeks prior didn't even exist.

And there in the shadow of a rock pile stacked high by the farmer who first broke this ground, four hunters made a pile of their own: limits of greenheads and pintails topped with a sense of satisfaction directly proportionate to the amount of work that it had taken to make it all happen.

Our backs laden with gear and shoulders strained from straps full of ducks, we made our way back through the muddy wheat stubble toward the grassy section line and our waiting trucks. Somehow, the load didn't seem as heavy on the walk out.

SCOUTING IN DUCK GUMBO

While cruising the countryside on the way back to town for a late breakfast, we discovered that there was actually quite a bit of standing water in the area. Most of the semi-permanent and permanent wetlands were full to the brim, and several cattle ponds had blown out of their banks, creating shallow-water loafing areas for hundreds of ducks.

Word of the "new water" had drawn us out to this area to hunt, and from the looks of it, we had made the right decision.

The only drawback to the moisture, it seemed, was that the once dry dirt roads had turned in to a greasy, muddy concoction known as "gumbo"

Continued on page 11

Fowl Talk - South Dakota Ducks Unlimited

Small Hunts for Big Ducks *Continued from page 10*

to the locals. The tough conditions – along with a mid-morning cattle drive that blocked our exit on a dead-end road – made scouting a slippery adventure.

We discovered, too, that there was a stark demarcation between where rainwater swelled the wetlands and where the land remained dry. A section or two too far in one direction, and you ran out of water...and ducks. So with a limited area to cover, we hoped our scouting mission that night would produce a clear choice for the next morning.

A hearty late-morning breakfast and a piece of pie (it's never too early for strawberry-rhubarb) did wonders for weary legs, and after a quick nap at our modest lodging quarters, the four of us divided into two scouting teams.

Smith and I traveled north while Bierle and Burris tracked south, and frequent phone calls between us indicated that the going was a little more difficult than initially expected. Permission was denied for one pond because of cattle nearby, while a landowner couldn't be tracked down on another.

The skies remained fairly quiet even as the sun touched the smooth line of the western horizon, and our hopes for a repeat performance of the morning's hunt began to wane with the fading light in the sky.

Smith and I were inching off a muddy road and onto a highway after a last-ditch effort and check of the morning's wheat field when motion opposite our position at the stop sign caught my eye.

I stopped the vehicle, and the two of us stared at a small flock of mallards buzzing what appeared to be a field of standing corn. The sun was completely set at this point, but there was enough light to see the dark shapes of ducks shifting above the field before dumping in.

Moving quickly up the road, we dis-

covered that the birds were actually hitting a narrow swath of the field that had been chopped for silage.

I couldn't tell exactly how many ducks had gone down, but it wasn't many. Smith agreed.

"Maybe seventy-five or eighty," he said. "Not much."

After a quick call to our hunting partners, it became clear that this was our best bet for the morning.

BIRDS OF A DIFFERENT FEATHER

The commute on morning number-two was much easier than that of the previous hunt. The ground was firm enough that we could drive our trucks into the field and drop our gear off at the top of a small rise.

"Near as I could tell, this is where they were hitting the ground last night," I offered while unloading bags of decoys. "There weren't many birds here, but those that were here were hitting the ground. There wasn't much milling about."

The swath of chopped corn was quite long but only forty-five yards wide, and a southwest breeze put us on the west side of the opening. The standing corn provided us with the luxury of remaining mostly vertical for the morning, too.

Shooting light arrived, but unlike the morning before, we didn't have long to wait.

"Here we go. Nice bunch out front."

A mixed flock of mallards and pintails – maybe 30 birds – made one swing downwind over the cut corn, hooked the corner, and piled in on the upwind side of the decoys.

Rising from my crouched position, I found that what sunlight there was to help pick out drakes was right in my eyes. I never fired a shot. Only one of us did. Thirty ducks in our face and only one drake mallard to show for it.

Considering that we may have already seen about half of the birds

using the field, we quickly decided to stand on the opposite side. The wind was quartering-in toward us, but the sun was at our backs. It turned out to be the ideal trade-off.

Another flock from the same

direction bore down on the field, and like the first bunch made the hook and began to drop in the decoys directly in front of the line of hunters. Ducks flared at the first shots, and the colors on the drakes popped even more when they cleared the low shadows created by the standing corn and found sunlight.

Murphy was busy making a retrieve when yet another flock emerged from the north.

"Are you sure you know how to count," asked Bierle. "There is a mob of birds coming!"

Though larger than the first two flocks, the next bunch behaved much the same, and five drake mallards plus a beautiful bull pintail rained from the sky. A pair of the mallards crashed deep into the standing corn, and after giving one line and then another, Murphy makes two of the best retrieves of his career.

We were well on our way toward another morning of limits when another flock appears, this time from the west and just clearing the tops of the corn.

Staring intently at the approaching flock, the pump-and-glide pattern of wings gives them away as being birds of a different feather: sharp-tailed grouse.

The birds land just over the rise from our position. Bierle and I have already finished our limits on ducks, and being that neither of us is too proud to add a quick sharp-tailed grouse hunt to the morning's activities we take Murphy up and over the hill. Burris and Smith stay in the decoys for to wait out the ducks.

We have to walk further than expected, but it isn't too long before Murphy's tail begins to swing in earnest. The birds flush a little wild, but close enough that we could add three grouse to the day's growing bag. They are certainly an unexpected bonus on a morning of unexpected success.

We near the rise in just enough time to watch Smith and Burris finish out their limits from another flock of mallards. Murphy quickly switches back to waterfowl mode, and more flocks of ducks are appearing while he picks up the morning's final mallard. All told, the number of birds that returned to the field was closer to 500 than 75.

"I don't think any of us thought we'd see that this morning," said Burris while walking back out to retrieve the trucks.

I agreed. Good hunts do happen when they are not expected - even in the smallest of places.





DIRECTORY

2016 SD STATE OFFICERS

State Chairman
Kevin Fuerst
109 S Dewberry Cir
Sioux Falls, SD 57110
605-271-1187 (H)
605-212-9259 (C)
sdringneck@hotmail.com

State Chairman-Elect
Harold Bickner
605-778-6103 (H)
605-680-0368 (C)
bickner@midstatesd.net

State Council Chairman
Jeff Heidelberg
605-673-4208 H
605-440-0772 C
218-338-6366Farm
jeff.heidelberg@heidelberg.com

State Council Secretary
Connie Girard
605-203-0710
cfaltinson@hotmail.com

State Treasurer
Terry Schutz
605-284-2440 W
605-284-2065 (Answering Machine)
tschutz@valleytel.net

Feather Society Chairman
Don Kallenberger
605-284-5121 W
605-284-2102 H
605-284-5327 Fax
kaldon@valleytel.net

Fowl Talk Coordinator
John Pollmann
605-370-8092
der_jaeger@hotmail.com

State Webmaster
Pam Berg
605-886-7403 (H)
605-881-5614 (C)
21berg@wat.midco.net

State Marsh Coordinator
Gary Peterson
605-225-9011 (W)
605-225-5907 (H)
605-225-9016 (Fax)

Public Policy Chairman
Darrel Reinke
208 Jamieson Drive
Pierre, SD 57532
605-224-5050 (H)
605-800-562-4015 (W)
darrel.reinke@investmentcenters.com

Bronze Sponsor Chairman
Kevin Fuerst
109 S Dewberry Cir
Sioux Falls, SD 57110
605-271-1187 (H)
605-212-9259 (C)
sdringneck@hotmail.com

State Greenwing Chairman
Jeff "Slim" & Mary Schneider

Slim's 605-770-7546 C
Mary's 605-770-7707419
slim4s@hotmail.com
sylvia@hotmail.com

State Major Gifts Chairman
Gary Peterson
605-330-0553 (Fax)
605-336-4411 (C)
gpinsfsd@aol.com

District Chairmen
Jim Girard
605-203-0170
damdiver@mchsi.com

Scott Schutz
605-359-3598
sschutz@grahamtire.com

Gary Hoscheid
605-224-9361
hoscheid@pie.midco.net

Dennis Tilly
605-999-7496
dtilly1@live.com

Steve Schutz
605-929-7147 (C)
sschutz@lampertlumber.com

Volunteer Recruitment Chairman
Jeremy Kills-A-Hundred
605-940-7689
bpkah216@hotmail.com

State Convention Chairman
Jeff Heidelberg
605-673-4208 H
605-440-0772 C
218-338-6366Farm

jeff.heidelberg@heidelberg.com

Senior Vice President Region 2
Clay Rogers
402-501-8112 (C)
402-392-0101 (W)
crogers@lawsgs.com

Regional Vice President
Howard Johnson
307-856-1145

Senior Regional Director
Robert Sathoff
785-640-1482 (C)
785-272-7125 (H)
bobsaathoff@yahoo.com
DU Support Staff

Senior Regional Director
Don Thorpe
605-630-8696
dthorpe@ducks.org

Regional Director
Robert Hathaway
rhathaway@ducks.org

Director of Fund Raising and Volunteer
Recruitment - Region 2
Greg Dinkel
NE, KS, CO, ND, SD, WY, MT
308-440-6413 (C)
308-233-5768(F)
gdinkel@ducks.org

Managing Director of Development
Great Plains Region
Matt Fenoff
845-242-9407
mfenoff@ducks.org



28731 E US HWY 12
Mobridge, SD 57601
605-845-3902



44414 SD HWY 50
Yankton, SD 57078
605-665-9351



**Eagle
Sales**

100 W 249th St.
Chamberlain SD 57325
605-734-0162



4815 N Northview Ave
Sioux Falls, SD 57107
605-336-2988



231 E Main St.
Rapid City, SD 57701
605-343-2490