THE PLATTE RIVER INITIATIVE

Flowing past the challenges of a changing river
FY11 Progress Report
Tradition runs deep in the shallow waters of the Platte River. The river is essentially the main artery that feeds life-giving water to the people and wildlife of eastern Colorado, Wyoming, and Nebraska. Annual migration spectacles and fall hunting traditions are a solid part of the river’s heritage.

Unlike its faster and deeper brethren, the Platte River is wide and very shallow, with slow mean-ders and a sandy substrate bottom. However, it is a critical water and habitat source for wildlife and people. Ducks Unlimited’s Platte River Initiative focuses on several strategies to restore and protect the river’s integrity.

In Wyoming and Colorado, DU is seeking out new partners with sometimes-uncommon interests to work together for a common purpose. Water resources are drying up in these states, and waterfowl are often the last users to be considered. DU is helping change that by developing wetlands and wildlife areas that support water resources for waterfowl and people.

Platte River conservation activities in Nebraska focus on conservation easements, wetland restorations and the revolving land strategy. Under the strategy, properties are protected with an easement. As part of the revolving land strategy, DU acquired its third Nebraska property this year. When it is sold, DU will pour those dollars into additional conservation projects.

DU cannot conserve waterfowl habitats along the Platte River without private funding. DU looks to public and corporate sources to accelerate the goals of the Platte River Initiative. However, major sponsors like you provide the base funding for DU’s work. These private contributions also make obtaining funding from additional sources possible as many grants require matching funds from the private sector.

Recently, some of the most successful public funding sources for conservation have been jeopardized. These funding threats make our supporters all the more important in helping DU achieve habitat goals on the Platte.

Our most treasured habitats are constantly facing challenges, and you can help secure the future of the Platte River with your donations. Please fuel your passion for waterfowl conservation and take the steps to help DU support the traditions and migration spectacles that characterize the Platte River. Contact your local development director today.

**CONTACTS:**  
Kirk Davidson (CO/KS)  
303.927.1949; kdavidson@ducks.org  
Ron Stromstad (NE/ND/SD)  
701.355.3518; rstromstad@ducks.org
Reversing the trend of habitat degradation

What a difference a few years make! It seems like only yesterday we were in the middle of a long, extended drought. The day I moved to Nebraska in 2005, the Platte River at Grand Island was dry. In 2011, the drought is over, and the Platte experienced extensive flooding.

The rapid change in water conditions reminds us how dynamic this system truly is and demonstrates the ability of the river to shape waterfowl habitat within its floodplain. However, the degree to which humans have altered the river has severely and permanently affected waterfowl habitat. Flooding does not occur with the same frequency or magnitude as it once did, so its ability to shape habitat is limited. We have witnessed the continued loss of waterfowl habitat as it is converted to other land uses, such as gravel-mine operations and housing developments. The relative “taming” of the Platte River and extensive habitat conversion have significantly reduced the quantity and quality of habitat available to waterfowl.

The good news is our Platte River Initiative is growing dramatically and reversing the decades-long trend of habitat degradation. With every successful conservation project, we have additional landowners inquire about restoring and protecting waterfowl habitat on their own ground. We now have a long list of landowners who want to protect Platte River habitats with conservation easements, and, are working with these landowners to achieve their conservation dreams.

We have incredible challenges and opportunities ahead of us, but we also have the best volunteers and major sponsors in the world. I am confident we will continue to see success and growth in our efforts to restore and protect vital waterfowl habitat along the Platte River.

DU volunteers and major sponsors invest and inspire

Enthusiasm is catchy. The fever generated by Ducks Unlimited’s volunteers inspires me as I celebrate my tenth year with DU in Colorado. Together, we have conserved more than 75,000 acres in Colorado, and we look forward to celebrating 100,000 acres in the near future. Developing wetland projects has been my life’s ambition, and DU allows me to work daily with some of the greatest innovators in conservation. Being so focused on our mission and delivering great on-the-ground product, I sometimes forget to thank you, our real champions of conservation.

This past year, our conservation program has connected with passionate volunteers and donors who dedicate hours away from work and family to making DU the strongest conservation organization in the United States. They understand society must invest in conservation if we are to assure a bright future for our kids. We must educate children, so they understand what we are trying to pass on to them. Individuals invest their hard-earned cash into projects to assure the future economic health of Colorado and Wyoming is strong through the wetlands and water they protect. We continue to strive toward innovative projects and new partnerships.

Biologists are trained to spend our time restoring and protecting the environment. However, as we spend time with DU’s army of conservation enthusiasts, we rediscover the passion that first led us to be conservation professionals.
The Spotted Tail Wetlands Complex, along the North Platte River in western Nebraska, is a great example of dedication, perseverance, partnerships and successful wetland conservation. By spring 2012, the results of an ambitious and time-consuming project on the complex will be evident for all to see.

Platte River Basin Environments (PRBE), a local conservation group and key Ducks Unlimited partner, owns most of the impressive complex, which is located just west of Scottsbluff, Nebraska.

Conservation efforts began at Spotted Tail over a decade ago when PRBE members identified this landscape as a priority for protection and restoration. From a wetland restoration perspective, the main attraction to the site was Toohey Spill, a source of ample available water during the migration period from late fall through spring. DU engineer Roger Smith developed a project concept to restore several hundred acres of historic seasonal wetland habitat along the Platte by diverting Toohey Spill water.

For the next eight years, DU and PRBE diligently and methodically pursued the project, jumping countless hurdles along the way. By late 2010, the last obstacles for this project were removed. DU had successfully acquired a 250-acre property, the last remaining tract of land needed. Regional Engineer Mitch Messmer had developed a plan that adequately addressed all the concerns raised by three irrigation districts, local landowners, three permitting agencies, the county highway department, a natural gas company and many others. Along with dollars from DU major sponsors, DU secured several grants from the Nebraska Environmental Trust, North American Wetlands Conservation Council, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, providing the funds needed to implement the project. DU completed earlier phases of the project, such as installing water-control structures and additional water diversion capability.

The project will provide a major source of water to manage seasonal wetlands across the entire Spotted Tail Complex. They say good things come to those who wait. The ducks have been waiting long enough. When waterfowl arrive on site in the spring of 2012, they will find a vast wetland complex that has been missing for the better part of the last century.

Celebrating conservation and conservationists
On April 28, 2012, Ducks Unlimited, Platte River Basin Environments and other conservation partners will celebrate two Nebraska conservation heroes while dedicating the Spotted Tail Wetlands Complex on the North Platte River, near Mitchell, Nebraska. The group will honor Clive Ostenberg and Chet Fliesbach, brothers, fighter pilots, avid outdoorsmen, philanthropists and passionate conservationists who generously donated to the protection of wildlife habitat in western Nebraska, creating a legacy that will inspire future conservationists for generations to come.
During the peak of the 2011 annual spring migration of the some 300 endangered whooping cranes through Nebraska, nine of these majestic birds were spotted on a single wetland along the Platte River. Having nine whooping cranes in a single group is rather unusual and was the subject of many conversations among wildlife biologists.

What was this special wetland? It was Ducks Unlimited’s very own Anderson property. DU acquired this property in 2009 as part of its revolving land strategy, an innovative approach to conserving wildlife habitat.

In December 2010 with the help of partners, DU completed a large wetland restoration project on the Anderson property, located just west of Elm Creek on the south side of the Platte River. With the first spring rains in early March, the restored wetlands began to fill with water. Ducks found the new wetlands immediately and the whooping cranes a few weeks later.

DU designs wetland conservation projects to provide significant benefits to waterfowl, as well as provide suitable habitat to hundreds of other species, such as whooping cranes. Along the Platte River, DU projects are intended primarily to provide migration habitat to the millions of ducks and geese that migrate through this landscape each spring and fall. Providing ample resting and feeding habitat along migration stopovers serves to keep birds in good physical condition.

DU intends to improve the condition of the grasslands on the Anderson tract over the next two years, prior to the eventual sale of the property to a conservation buyer through its online auction system. While in DU’s ownership, the property is open to the public for hunting and other recreational purposes.

The Nebraska Environmental Trust, North American Wetlands Conservation Council, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Nebraska Public Power District all provided significant contributions to the wetland restoration efforts on Anderson.

For more info www.ducks.org/landsales
THE PLATTE RIVER RUNS THROUGH KAY CHURCH’S BLOOD

“"The Platte River runs through your blood,” said the exasperated mother of a young Kay Church. As always, Kay had been down by the river exploring all of nature’s wonders and losing track of time.

That same statement is true today. Encouraged by her father, Ms. Church is a waterfowl hunter, sporting clays competitor and stalwart supporter of Ducks Unlimited.

Kay began attending DU events in the 1990s. Her dad asked her to go with him to a DU dinner near Valley, Nebraska. As they walked in, he looked at Kay and said, smiling, “You know this is a stag event, don’t you?”

Kay said he then started to laugh. "It was too late to do anything but make the best of it,” she said. "While I did receive some strange looks, everything worked out fine. That was my first DU experience.”

Kay began her DU volunteer efforts with the Omaha chapter, working as the Underwriting Chairperson. She has also been involved locally with the Southwest Omaha chapter, working closely with the K Church Classic Sporting Clay Shoot. She served as the State Shoot Chair and, most recently, the State Pin Chair.

Kay has also been a member of DU’s National Shooting Committee.

Kay began her major giving with DU in 1998 by pledging as a Life Sponsor. Over the years, Kay has contributed all the way to the Benefactor Roll of Honor level for her total giving of over $100,000.

Because of Kay’s close relationship with the Platte River and DU’s ability to leverage private gifts, her most recent cash pledge of $37,000 has been restricted to conservation delivery on the Platte. A cash pledge over multiple years helps our conservation team plan projects, manage budgets and deliver an effective conservation program over a period of several years. Private gifts can be used as match for other grants and gives the Nebraska conservation team seed money to explore new opportunities, an expense that cannot be reimbursed with grant monies.

When we asked why Kay supports DU, she said, “During my lifetime, the Platte has become so degraded I can barely believe my own eyes at what I see. We must protect the river and adjacent wetlands in order to preserve the migrating and wintering waterfowl. The Platte River is a living thing. It brings life and gives life to so many creatures and plant species. It is vulnerable and needs our help.”

Kay concluded by saying, “This is why I support Ducks Unlimited. It is the best organization in place for preserving and maintaining the Platte River and the surrounding wetlands. I have a great love of all wildlife whether it is flying, walking or crawling. The Platte River Initiative benefits it all.”

THE SCHAFER CONSERVATION EASEMENT: Protecting vital Platte River property forever

Dr. Clint and Jennifer Schafer of North Platte have a long-standing appreciation for the wildness and beauty of the Platte River system. Owning more than 400 acres along the South Platte River, the Schafers enjoy the diversity of wildlife that frequents the property and the valuable habitats it provides. One stroll around the grounds will likely produce sightings of deer, turkey, songbirds, raccoons, and lots of geese and ducks.

One of the primary reasons the Schafer property is so wildlife-rich is its large, contiguous block of unfragmented habitat. The Schafers decided to place a Ducks Unlimited conservation easement on the land to ensure the habitat would remain in that condition for a very long time. DU restored more than 15 acres of wetland sloughs and warm-season grassland on the Schafer property and restored the old river channel’s natural hydrology by excavating sediment and releasing the groundwater. Thanks to the dedication of folks like the Schafers, DU has protected more than 4,600 acres through eight conservation easements on the river, with an additional 2,500 acres scheduled for easements by early 2012.
The North American Wetlands Conservation Act showcases the power of cooperative investment in natural resources conservation. With the loss of at least half of the nation's wetlands and with new threats pressuring the waterfowl habitats that remain, DU recognizes the strong foundation NAWCA dollars have provided to conservation efforts in the Platte River watershed.

Since 1991, NAWCA grants have funded more than 17 Platte River habitat projects, involving more than 70,000 acres. DU has invested nearly $13 million in NAWCA dollars to support and leverage more than $50 million worth of additional conservation in Colorado, Nebraska and Wyoming. Matching funds from state resources and gifts from DU supporters have tripled the initial NAWCA investment in Platte River habitats.

DU’s NAWCA investments in the newly flowing warm-water slough outside Scottsbluff, Nebraska, the shallow-water marsh near Brush, Colorado, and the irrigated meadows near Torrington, Wyoming, all support waterfowl and other wildlife. However, the American people also gain from these ventures. The Nebraska slough receives the Platte’s flood flows and lessens its destructive power downstream, while the marsh recharges the Platte’s aquifer, replenishing water supplies for municipalities and agricultural producers in the region. The wet meadows set the autumn scene for world-class waterfowling.

NAWCA dollars also positively affect the American economy. The conservation activities funded under NAWCA have created, on average, 3,800 new jobs annually in the United States, generating nearly $840 million in worker earnings each year.

“Contractors are hungry for the construction work funded by our major sponsors and NAWCA,” said Mitch Messmer, DU regional engineer. “Not only do they benefit from the additional work supplied by the program, especially in these lean times, but they enjoy the satisfaction of contributing to the conservation of some of our best natural places.”

DU has been successful in NAWCA grant requests because of the organization’s ability to provide matching dollars. “Our major sponsors are instrumental in helping us achieve our conservation aims under the NAWCA program,” said Julia Firl, DU lands protection specialist.

The Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET) was established in 1992 to conserve, enhance and restore the natural environments of Nebraska. The NET provides funding to organizations through a competitive grants process. The lottery-funded trust especially seeks opportunities that bring public and private partners together to implement high quality, cost-effective projects.

“DU is the type of partner the Nebraska Environmental Trust was designed to work with in Nebraska,” said Mark Brohman, NET executive director. “DU brings a project forward and finds matching funds to stretch our funds and get the most benefits for ducks and all species of wildlife.”

DU has been the recipient of a number of competitive NET grants, which have funded wetland conservation projects along the Missouri River, in the Rainwater Basin and along the Platte River. Grants from NET not only provide a significant source of the dollars needed for wetland projects, but NET funds are non-federal dollars DU can use as the required “match” to secure federal wetlands grants from the North American Wetlands Conservation Council.
The recharge project was funded in part by grants from the Colorado Water Conservation Board and the North American Wetlands Conservation Council. Other central partners included the Lower South Platte Water Conservation District, the South Platte Water Related Activities Program and the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program.

In addition to the recharge project, DU secured a permanent conservation easement on the entire ranch in early 2011, providing permanent protection of the recharge wetlands and other valuable habitat on the property.

Recharge wetlands work by diverting water into the wetland basins during times of excess river flow. The water then gradually seeps back to the river, recharging the alluvial aquifer in the process. Water that returns to the river generates water credits, which farmers and other water users can use to offset the depletions created when they take water out of the river for irrigation or other uses.

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We have a landowner who has accomplished everything our mission entails, providing wetlands for waterfowl, other wildlife, and people,” Kernohan said. “This recharge project has multiple benefits. From our perspective, the waterfowl benefit was huge and it went beyond its borders to help others, namely farmers who were trying to stay in business.”
Colorado Easement

PROTECTS VITAL PLATTE RIVER HABITAT

Ducks Unlimited’s conservation team closed its ninth conservation easement within Colorado’s Platte River focus area. DU purchased a conservation easement on the 706-acre South Platte River Ranch, near Ovid, at a reduced price. The easement provides permanent protection of exceptional wildlife habitat, including a mix of cottonwood riparian forest, cropland, native prairie and a one-mile stretch of the Platte River. The easement also protects 26 acres of recharge wetlands DU constructed on the property. Flooding of the basins coincides with the migration of waterfowl and shorebirds.

“The primary purpose of the easement is to protect the significant wildlife habitat on the property,” said Julia Firl, DU’s land protection specialist for Colorado and Wyoming. Pheasants, turkeys, deer and many species of migrating and wintering waterfowl will benefit from the habitat, including mallards, pintails, scaup and teal. “This easement also provides a connecting link for a growing corridor of protected lands in the Ovid area,” Firl said.

The protected land will provide a buffer for the state wildlife areas and other properties protected by Colorado Open Lands and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wetlands Reserve Program. The ranch is also near DU’s Winterhaven tract, which is open for public hunting and recreation.

The South Platte River Ranch conservation easement was funded in part by grants from Great Outdoors Colorado, the North American Wetlands Conservation Council and the Playa Lakes Joint Venture – ConocoPhillips partnership. The landowner, Dr. Kent Heyborne, also contributed to the endowment fund to cover the costs of long-term stewardship of the easement.

Colorado land program receives accreditation

Securing a permanent easement on a property can involve a cumbersome process. Ducks Unlimited’s Colorado land program now has a new designation that should reassure landowners. The Colorado Division of Real Estate has certified that DU and its affiliated land trust, Wetlands America Trust, can accept conservation easements where the landowner will be claiming a state tax credit.

“The certification means landowners can trust we know what we’re doing,” said Julia Firl, DU land protection specialist. “The designation demonstrates our commitment to completing high-quality conservation work.”

The Colorado Division of Real Estate, in consultation with the Conservation Easement Oversight Commission, reviewed 25 aspects of DU’s organization. The oversight commission certified DU meets or exceeds all criteria necessary for qualified easement holders.

Firl says the designation ensures new easement donors will be able to claim state tax credits on their donated easements.
GREAT OUTDOORS COLORADO
AND DUCKS UNLIMITED
Find common ground in youth and families outdoors

Fewer hunters equal fewer dollars for conservation. Ducks Unlimited in Colorado is doing something about the national trend of decreasing hunter numbers. With help from a Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grant, DU is putting together a program to recruit more hunters.

GOCO awarded DU a “Conservation Excellence” grant to explore and recommend public access programs that could be applied to private lands. The Youth and Families in the Outdoors grant will bring landowners and conservation agencies together to increase public hunting access opportunities on private grounds. DU will increase the number of hunters being recruited and help maintain a high level of enthusiasm as hunters access some of the best hunting areas available.

Nearly every public funding source asks about the potential to gain access to private lands. By improving our ability to meet this demand from agencies, we will greatly increase the rate of private lands conservation.

GOCO has adopted a strategic plan with Youth, Families and the Outdoors as one of its top priority goals for funding. In May 2010, independent of the adoption of GOCO’s new plan, DU’s board of directors set similar mission objectives in the new strategic plan to “emphasize recruiting youth to ensure a better future for waterfowling and conservation.”

Public hearings held by GOCO over the year leading to its new strategic plans made clear two things of interest to DU. People want assurance their land and water will be protected for future generations, and they want future generations to care about and understand land, water and the outdoors.

Great Outdoors Colorado has truly been “great” since it began awarding grants in 1994. Funded through a special legislative initiative that diverts funds from the Colorado Lottery, GOCO has committed nearly $757 million to 3,400 projects across the state. DU has successfully partnered with GOCO on several projects along the South Platte over the last decade, including protection of the Pritchard Tract at Centennial Valley State Wildlife Area, and the South Platte River Ranch (see story on page 7).

As the leading wetland conservation organization, DU is capable of engaging our members in the outdoors and assuring young people have places to hunt, fish and learn. Most landowners resist inviting the public to roam their lands unrestricted, as it diminishes the overall value of the property to provide high-quality hunting experiences. DU is looking to develop programs to be implemented on private lands receiving public dollars that allow public access without diminishing the values of that property.

DU has always been concerned about ensuring we have young, enthusiastic hunters supplementing our ranks for generations. As we reach our 75th anniversary, DU faces a challenge to get youth and families outdoors. The GOCO grant will allow us to improve one aspect of that mission and demonstrate success to the rest of the nation.
To protect habitat in Colorado, Ducks Unlimited most often works with private landowners to place conservation easements on their properties. However, some properties are so special, DU purchases them in fee-title. Usually, these properties become part of DU’s revolving land strategy. More on the revolving land strategy on page 4. Winterhaven is one such special property that DU projects will provide solid financial return to the Colorado program when DU sells it.

Winterhaven, located south of Ovid, will provide the first opportunity to strengthen the program’s balance sheet through land assets, while investigating the role other assets will play in long-term revenue generation. Although the property provides a diversity of wildlife and hunting experiences, wetlands on the property can earn “recharge” credits, which have huge market demand in Colorado. In keeping with the state’s “Water for the 21st Century” initiative, DU is developing projects through diverse partnerships that include the Colorado Water Conservation Board, the federal North American Wetlands Conservation Council and the South Platte Water Related Activities Program.

Most of Winterhaven’s 808 acres are upland grass and sage in the sandhills, which hosts ring-necked pheasants and whitetail deer. The land’s large riparian area has two warm-water sloughs and a piece of the South Platte River channel, as well as a floodplain planted in corn. DU converted about 32 of the row crop acres to irrigated wetlands, with funds from the Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife.

Designed for dabbling ducks as they migrate north in the spring, the wetlands are flooded to a maximum of eight inches. This is the best depth for producing seeds and invertebrates needed by ducks for protein to strengthen feathers and eggshells.

DU plans to sell the property around June 2013, when it will return to private ownership. Having been protected through a conservation easement held by Colorado Open Lands, the property will forever provide those mission objectives important to DU. The land is currently open to the public through the management of the Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife.

For information on DU properties currently for sale, go to www.ducks.org/landsales

Asnicar purchase brings together two dedication sites

Ducks Unlimited, in cooperation with the Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife and the North American Wetlands Conservation Council, has purchased 80 acres of high-quality waterfowl habitat that bridges the gap between two of the most important wetland complexes along the Platte River in Colorado.

The Asnicar parcel separated the Travis Family and Hamilton dedication sites that are part of the Elliot State Wildlife Area (SWA). This parcel presented problems for the CDPW, as staff tried to manage the sites through irrigation and other activities. Also, the integrity of the two wetland complexes was threatened should any non-conservation-minded landowner have taken possession of the parcel.

The CDPW now owns the land, with the accompanying water shares to ensure the continued viability and increased conservation value of the entire Elliott SWA. The Travis and Hamilton families can rest assured DU will continue to protect the investments they have made in Platte River waterfowl habitat.
Concerns persist about environmental disasters, such as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. However, fossil fuels remain an important part of our nation’s economy. DU’s number one priority is wetlands conservation, and we applaud industry efforts to safeguard wildlife habitat, water quality and community well-being. If oil and gas companies are willing to invest in conservation, DU will work with them to achieve our mutual goals. Protection and responsible stewardship of our natural resources benefits all, and partnerships are crucial to the success of DU’s conservation efforts in Colorado and Wyoming.

Colorado and Wyoming are experiencing an oil boom and thanks to some forward-thinking petroleum companies, conservation is booming as well. Over the past 12 years, Colorado and Wyoming annual drilling permits have grown by more than 600 percent. Ducks Unlimited’s Platte River Initiative area intersects the Denver-Julesburg basin in Colorado and the Niobrara Shale play in southeastern Wyoming, which has led to the development of some new corporate partnerships for DU.

Several oil and gas companies, active along the Platte River, have expressed an interest in giving back to local communities by partnering with conservation organizations. DU’s Colorado program recently received $50,000 in grants from ConocoPhillips, in partnership with the Playa Lakes Joint Venture, to support land protection and wetlands restoration projects. Whiting Petroleum Corporation, very active in oil extraction on the western edge of the Prairie Pothole Region of North Dakota and in Colorado recently donated $100,000 to restoring wetlands. Other companies want to work with DU and private landowners to find mutually agreeable solutions for seemingly incompatible activities. The DT Ranch, a 2,000-acre property with conservation easements held by DU, was able to negotiate an agreement with an energy exploration company to allow the ranch and DU to enhance and maintain the property’s conservation values, while accommodating profitable use of the land. The company carefully crafted the lease to ensure minimal habitat and ground disturbance would occur on the property. This allowed DU and the landowners to close the easement deal without a hitch, while still allowing for ecologically responsible mineral exploration and development. QEP Energy Company is working with DU and the landowners on a pending 120-acre conservation easement in Goshen County, Wyoming.
EXPERIENCE THE PLATTE

From classroom to muddy boots, attendees at Ducks Unlimited’s third Platte Experience in Colorado got hands-on training in wetlands conservation and waterfowl biology. Mirrored after the Prairie Experience held each spring in North Dakota, the event is designed to engage current and potential major sponsors in DU’s conservation actions and achievements along the South Platte.

Attendees spend an afternoon in a classroom environment where they learn about basic duck science and DU’s conservation and public policy initiatives. DU’s CEO Dale Hall was on hand to address the group and answer questions. Participants also visit field sites to see, firsthand, DU’s on-the-ground achievements, as well as to observe the biological aspects of healthy wetlands.

“The lectures on the tools and strategies for conserving land were outstanding,” said attendee Marty Schlumberger.

Every Platte Experience has lots of time for camaraderie and fun events, such as a Cajun feast, fun shoot and a bird identification contest.

“The Platte Experience was an awesome day of learning and discovery,” said participant Curtis Woodard. “The curriculum was a perfect combination of conservation with a lot of camaraderie and fun to boot.”

Platte River Hunt in Nebraska

Ducks Unlimited conservation and development staff, with some help from their friends, have turned the last weekend of the Canada goose season into a great conservation and hunting opportunity.

Local Scottsbluff major sponsors and volunteer supporters open their blinds and hearts to about two dozen major sponsors each winter for the Platte River Hunt. Participants hunt geese three mornings in the Scottsbluff area, followed by conservation programs, tours, dinners and camaraderie throughout the afternoons and evenings.

The Platte River Basin Environments is a strong conservation force in the area and a great partner for DU on conservation projects. PRBE leadership joins in hosting the DU sponsors, who often give to DU’s conservation work along the Platte River and the Rainwater Basins. In addition to supporters from Nebraska, Minnesota and areas nearby, DU Director of Development Sean Stone, Texas, brings some of our southern friends to the Platte each year. Life-long friendships develop, and the conservation message and hunting memories last a lifetime.

“Platte River Hunt participants (L to R) Jack Henry Jr., Jack Henry Sr., Doug Frey and DU Director of Development Ron Stromstad.
**Our Donors and Partners**

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**Donelans give through IRA**

For the third year in a row, Jim and Patty Donelan of rural Fremont, Nebraska, have donated to Ducks Unlimited through their Individual Retirement Account. The IRA gifting opportunity expired at the end of 2011.

The Donelans have a long association with DU. They began as banquet attendees and leaders through DU’s grassroots event system and eventually became major sponsors. They continue to support DU through their local event and as major sponsors.
MAJOR SPONSORS
MAKE THE MISSION HAPPEN

As a fourth generation Coloradoan, it is an absolute pleasure to work with you, the major sponsors and potential major sponsors of Colorado, who have and will continue to make a significant impact in wetlands conservation along the Platte. Many of you have elected to restrict your philanthropic giving to our colorful state and specifically to the Platte River Initiative. Others have desired to split their donations to a very critical area impacting Colorado waterfowl, the Prairie Pothole Region. Finally, there are those who designate DU as the decision maker for their funds, leaving the money unrestricted to be applied to DU’s highest conservation priorities. Regardless of your preferences, you, the major sponsors of Ducks Unlimited, are providing those vital private dollars, which allows us to continue our mission.

I spent my early Colorado waterfowling years along the Arkansas River in southeast Colorado. However, once enrolled at CSU I began exploring those wetlands along the South Platte, specifically near the Fort Morgan area. It was the early seventies, and it was still a time when a knock on a farmer’s door could often result in an afternoon of duck hunting. Although it’s hard to comprehend now, at that time a significant portion of the South Platte area near Fort Morgan was closed to goose hunting (i.e. the Owl Creek closure). Of course, times have changed, primarily in the need to maintain and preserve what we have along this great river. The demand and challenges for that precious water is here to stay for the long haul, and the need for DU presence and active involvement is more critical than ever.

Through Ducks Unlimited’s efforts and assistance from numerous conservation partners, we are making a difference, and it is being accomplished through your monetary support. I truly thank you for making a difference, and I remain available 24/7 to support your philanthropic support for the ducks.