LAKE CHRISTINA COMEBACK

Sago pondweed as far as the eye can see. This photo of a bed of sago pondweed, a favorite of canvasbacks, was taken during the Lake Christina aquatic plant survey last August (photograph courtesy of the Minnesota DNR).

More on Lake Christina, a DU Living Lakes project, on Pages 6 to 9
State Chairman’s Chatter

Happy New Year! What a great year we are looking forward to at MN Ducks Unlimited. As 2013 has come to close, I would like to give a huge thank you to all the members of Ducks Unlimited for their membership and for attending a local DU event. I would like to also thank all the great volunteers we have in Minnesota; they are the ones who make all the difference when it comes to raising money for Ducks Unlimited’s conservation efforts. Although the final numbers are not in from around the country at press time, we are sure that Minnesota will rank at the top of the list for grass roots fund-raising efforts once again.

Something that has always impressed me about Ducks Unlimited is the ability of the conservation staff to utilize the money raised at the local events and to get that money matched, sometimes up to five times by government agencies and other organizations. This really makes the money raised at the local events go a long way when it comes to conservation right here in Minnesota. Be sure to check out the articles in this Cattails and past issues about the great conservation work DU is doing right here in Minnesota.

I would like to invite everyone to attend the annual Minnesota Ducks Unlimited State Convention being held in Willmar on Feb 14th and 15th. Be sure to check out the web site for more details. If ice fishing is more your style, then bring your crew to the largest Ducks Unlimited event in the country: the “Fishing for Ducks” event is February 22nd on Mille Lacs Lake, in Garrison. This is a really exciting event and a great chance to win some excellent prizes including a new pickup, fish houses, guns, cash and other great prizes. This year’s event will be loaded with lots of fun once again as the Garrison Wildlife Chapter of Ducks Unlimited does a fantastic job with this event and the other events they do throughout the year. It’s no wonder they are the top chapter in the state.

While the temperatures are below zero and the winds and snow keep coming, it is hard to think about the spring migration of waterfowl making their way back up to the breeding grounds. In no time at all, however, spring will be here with the marshes full of water and the returning ducks and geese. It gives me great comfort to know that the conservation work Ducks Unlimited is doing makes a difference for the birds. Thank you for your contribution also.

I wish you all the best. Hope to see you at the Minnesota DU State Convention or on the ice!
Unimin Donates to Living Lakes Initiative

OTTAWA, Minn. – January 9, 2014 – Ducks Unlimited (DU) is the beneficiary of a $40,000 donation from Unimin Corporation to help protect, restore, and enhance habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife in Minnesota. The gift provides merchandise underwriting at select DU fundraising events and invests in shallow lake habitat through the Living Lakes Initiative.

“Unimin operates two Minnesota mining and processing facilities with conservation in mind. Handling natural resources like they do, Unimin has a unique understanding of the positive environmental impact that wetlands hold,” said Tim Roble, DU Minnesota state chairman. “Their support helps DU enhance waterfowl habitat that at the same time provides clean water and sequesters carbon. Unimin has acted as an environmental steward for quite some time, and we’re pleased to begin this meaningful partnership.”

Ducks Unlimited has identified the prairie pothole landscape of Minnesota as a level one conservation priority. Plans for wetland acquisitions, enhancements, restorations and engineering survey and design efforts are underway to maximize the impact on this valuable waterfowl habitat. The generous gift from Unimin will help DU leverage nearly $1.5 million in public grants and an additional $400,000 in private funds provided by DU members and philanthropists. These projects will take place on a series of managed shallow lakes and wetlands in Minnesota that provide high-quality aquatic food and other benefits for migrating and breeding waterfowl.

“In the last 40 years, Unimin has reclaimed and preserved more than 1,500 acres of native prairie grassland, wetlands, and river bottoms along the Minnesota River Valley, following mining operations,” said Reid Gronski, Unimin Ottawa plant manager. “Ducks Unlimited is a great champion of the outdoors, and partnering with them coincides with our conservation ethic. Minnesota is a diverse landscape and we’re excited to engage with DU to enhance and conserve this habitat.”

Unimin is one of North America’s leading producers of non-metallic industrial minerals

Reclaimed prairie interspersed with seasonal wetlands at the Unimin site near Kasota.
Ducks Unlimited has been doing projects in Minnesota since 1984. There are literally hundreds of DU projects scattered across the state. In fact, many of the water control structures on national wildlife refuges (NWRs), waterfowl production areas (WPAs), and state wildlife management areas (WMAs) were designed and built as Ducks Unlimited projects. This column is a regular feature devoted to describing some of these older DU projects.

The Mud Lake WPA project was DU’s first cooperative project with the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Minnesota. It was constructed in 1984 to 1985 under DU’s U.S. Habitat Program. The project consisted of construction of a stop-log water control structure within a 84-inch corrugated metal pipe riser in the township road at the south end of the WPA. The structure includes a rough fish barrier and allows managers to control water in Mud Lake. It cost about $67,000 in 1987.

The project was dedicated to 20 Miller High Life beer distributors in Minnesota as recognition of their donating a percentage of their August beer sales revenues to MN DU banquets. The dedication ceremony was held on June 5, 1990.

The project was visited this spring and the cairn was as good as new. DU is working on a current project to improve the water control structure and give it better drawdown capabilities.
Heavily influenced by modern wildlife art master Les Kouba, Thomas Wosika communicates his intense sentiment toward nature in his work. "My whole life has been influenced by the stories Les Kouba tells with the strokes of his brush. For me, a sportsman, Les' work just puts me in the moment." Wosika tries to emulate that same emotion with his work. Thorough research including photography, observation and studying other artistic styles have helped provide him with ample reference material for his work and in developing his style. In the conservation art arena, Wosika has proved a serious contender. His honors to date include twice winning the Massachusetts Primitive Arms & Archery (deer hunting) and the Minnesota trout stamp competitions.

Wosika does a wide variety of paintings, from ocean surfing prints to dog portraits. Some of his paintings have a patriotic tone. Check out his work at: http://www.wildwings.com/DirectionsWEB/webcart_multiBuy.php?catid=WOSIKABIO

Artwork provided courtesy of Thomas Wosika and Wild Wings, LLC, Lake City, Minnesota 800-445-4833 http://www.wildwings.com/

Wosika’s paintings of ducks have an unique perspective, such as these scaup in “Nordern Bluebills”.

Many of his paintings highlight companionship such as “Pals II—Northern Lights”.

Thomas also does some patriotic paintings. Here is an example in a work titled, “On Behalf of a Grateful Nation”.

Wosika also has a decoy company that does very realistic mallard and diver decoys. Check them out at: www.spiritwaterdecoycompany.com
THE HISTORY—There are thousands of lakes in Minnesota with rich histories of waterfowling traditions, but arguably none as well known as Lake Christina in northwest Douglas County. According to an article in a 1966 Volunteer magazine (see graphic below), canvasbacks started coming to the lake shortly after 1900, with peak years being from the late 30’s into the early 50’s.

The cans would start arriving the first week of October and peaked by mid-October. Mingling with the cans were flotillas of coots numbering in the hundreds of thousands. In the early years, the lake saw its share of market hunting, but that was curtailed by the 1920s with game laws to outlaw the practice. There are many articles and accounts of the fabulous duck hunting found on the lake, which had several large duck camps and duck clubs.

Then, by the late 1950s, the ducks and coots were gone. The problem? High turbidity caused by an overabundance of bullheads and other rough fish. This set in motion the battle to restore Lake Christina to its waterfowl migration rest area and hunting area prominence.

The Dept. of Conservation (precursor to the DNR) began intensive lake surveys to uncover the reason for the lack of ducks and formulate a plan for recovery. The plan was put into action in 1965 with the removal of the gamefish, mainly northerns, and application of toxaphene into the lake to kill the rough fish. The plan, with the help of some severe winter kills in the late 60s, worked and the submerged vegetation flourished and with it came the ducks. The 1970s saw good duck use, but by the early 1980s the fish had come back and again the submerged vegetation disappeared and duck use dropped.

(continued on next page)
Lake Christina Comeback (continued)

The DNR applied rotenone in 1987 to again reduce the population of rough fish and an electric fish barrier was installed at the outlet to the lake to prevent carp from entering the lake. The results were immediate, by the next year the vegetation had returned and soon the ducks were back. The Cattails editor visited the lake in 1991 and saw rafts upon rafts of ducks, including widgeon, gadwalls, redheads, mallards, ringnecks, and canvasbacks. The rafts also included thousands of coots. The early 1990s saw phenomenal duck use, with 105,000 cans using the lake in 1994. The rough fish came back by 1999, so DNR again used rotenone in 2003, with less success, because by 2009 the water was turbid again.

The main reason why the rough fish have become a long term problem is because the water levels in Christina are too high. After the severe drought of the 1930s, dams were installed on many lakes including the lake just downstream, Pelican Lake. The dam caused water to back up into Christina and kept water levels two feet above historic levels. The lake would not winter kill unless a prolonged drought occurred.

THE PROJECT—DU and the DNR realized a more permanent solution was needed, something that could lower water levels in Christina without affecting water levels in Pelican Lake. The cost would be significant and money for the project was not available until voters approved the Clean Water Land & Legacy Amendment in 2008. That is when DU included the project in a $2.5 million funding request to the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOH), who oversee the Outdoor Heritage Fund. The request was a part of DU’s Living Lakes Initiative program to restore and enhance shallow lakes.

The project received funding in a 2009 Grant approved by the LSOHC and DU got to work with the planning and design. The official kickoff for the project took place on September 14, 2010 (see photo to the right).

The project required installation of major infrastructure including a large lift station, to pump the water over the outlet. A long drain pipe was needed to move water from the lake to the lift station/pump house (see plan sheet below). DU hired Houston Engineering to put together the plans for the structures. (The article is continued on the next page.)

Sen. Bill Ingrebigtsgen (left) and Jim Cox, vice-chair of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council at the Lake Christina project kickoff celebration.
Lake Christina Comeback (continued)

The project elements include a concrete inlet structure constructed with a vegetation screen to allow water to drain to the lift station in the pump house. A shallow channel was excavated in the lake bottom to maximize the amount of drawdown for that location. To minimize disturbance to the steep shoreline and protect a wooded hill, the 54-inch reinforced concrete drain pipe had to be bored and jacked over 300 feet from near the pump house. The lift station was constructed to a depth of 25 feet below the surface, so water could drain to it. Two large turbine pumps were installed in the lift station and they pump water into concrete manholes set at an elevation above the lift station. Two 36-inch concrete pipes allow the water to flow from the manholes to a riprap basin on the edge of a sediment collection pond. A dike was constructed between the sediment collection basin and the normal outlet channel for Lake Christina. A stepped ladder outlet allows water to flow from the sediment basin to the channel. During operation, water flows from the lake to the lift station in the pump house (photo above) and the pumps pump the water up to flow to the sediment basin. When the sediment basin fills, it overflows to the outlet channel and then to Pelican Lake.

THE DRAWDOWN—The construction was finished in 2011, but high water in downstream lakes and rivers prevented DNR from turning on the pumps in that year. Finally, in July 2012, dry summer conditions allowed for DNR to start the pumps and the drawdown began.

The Cattails editor visited the lake in early October 2012 after the lake had been drawn down to near its maximum extent. The lake had large mudflats and the public access was high and dry (see photos below). Swarms of green-winged teal were making the most of the shallow water and the bugs in the mud. The lake had been drawn down nearly three feet. (continued next page)
Lake Christina Comeback (continued)

THE RESULTS—The winter of 2012 to 2013 turned out to be cold, snowy, and long; just what the doctor ordered for a large winterkill. The spring melt showed thousands of carp, buffalo fish, and minnows were floating dead around the lake, but was there enough of a winter kill.

All of the partners involved (see list on sign to left) waited until DNR could complete their annual vegetation survey in August 2013. The DNR has been doing vegetation surveys of the lake since 1947 and started doing them every year in 1980. The results of the survey were fantastic with vegetation being found at 97% of sampling stations compared to 40% in 2012 (see graph below). Even better, the vegetation density rating for sago pondweed and muskgrass improved from around 1.0 last year to as high as 3.5, which are as high as the densities seen in the 1990s.

Hunting also improved with good numbers of blue-winged teal and some pintails and wood ducks early in the season. Adam DeHaan, DU director of development, hunted the lake on October 22nd and saw good number of cans and redheads, but only a few were coming over the pass they were on. Other hunters reported the hunting was the best it had been for several years and indicated it was a very encouraging season.

The DNR waterfowl counts showed peak coot numbers in late Sept. with nearly 50,000 birds. The peak count for ducks was 8,825 on Oct. 28th, including 6,400 cans and 2100 other divers. Although the duck numbers were not outstanding, the table has been set for next year. When word gets out among the ducks that the vegetation is back, the ducks will also make a Lake Christina comeback!

It is amazing how quickly the vegetation bounces back after a fish die-off.
These photos are from the 2013 tournament.

Please join Minnesota DU for Fishing for Ducks held on February 22, 2014, at Garrison.
Go to: www.fishingforducks.org

Greenwings with their duck houses

What can you say, but these guys are trying to have too much fun.

Some pretty ladies enjoying the refreshments and the event.

One of the tournament winners shows off his new generator.

Kids enjoying the Fishing For Ducks Event.

The weighing station with Greg Erickson, Chairman for the event (far left), checking the winning fish status.
MN DU News—2014 Public Policy Priorities

DU has been expanding their public policy activities both nationally and in Minnesota. The public policy activities are usually those that have the potential to contribute to DU’s mission and focus on conservation outcomes. In Minnesota, MN DU has stepped up our public policy activities by forming a Minnesota State Policy Committee and naming a state public policy chair. The policy committee consists of the state chair, state council chair, state chair elect, state policy chair, the Flyway Senior Vice President, MN regional directors, the director of fundraising and development, DU director of public policy for our region, and state conservation staff. The state policy chair is a volunteer who will assist DU staff with issues where we need to be at the state capital to be heard. A candidate for the state policy chair has been selected and is going through an approval process.

The MN State Policy Committee meets a couple of times a year to discuss issues and frame out approaches to our public policy advocacy and lobbying. The 2014 policy priorities fall into six categories:

1. Legacy Amendment and the Outdoor Heritage Fund
2. State Conservation Agency Support
3. Wetland Preservation Area Tax Credit and Conservation Easement Tax Issues
4. State Wetland Protection and Regulation
5. Public Land Acquisition
6. Shallow Lake Enhancement and Management

Check future issues of Cattails to see the name of the state policy chair and find out what is being done in the public policy arena in Minnesota.

Volunteer Spotlight—Scott Christensen

I got involved with DU about 14 years ago when I was asked by my neighbor and good friend if I would like to go to the Meeker County DU banquet. At my first DU banquet I won a gun.

The following year I was asked to be on DU committee; well, that’s all she wrote. I soon got involved by being the membership chairman, with the help of my wonderful wife Michelle. Michelle has also been a big part of our local chapter. I was the area chairman for 3 years and then moved on to a zone chair position for the Central Region. As zone chair, I helped restart the Little Crow Chapter in Spicer. I get a lot of satisfaction out of being a zone chairman when I can use my knowledge and experience to help other chapters, plan and set up and run their events. My latest volunteer opportunity came when I was appointed to the state volunteer recruitment coordinator position in 2013.

I am still very active in our local chapter. In 2013, we recruited five new Major Donor pledges through our Meeker County sponsor event. My wife and I also pledged to become life sponsors so that we could support DU’s Living Lakes Initiative program in Minnesota.

Some of my best memories as a senior volunteer include: attending the state council meetings with other volunteer leaders from around the state, going on volunteer field trips that included nest dragging in North Dakota, duck banding in South Dakota and going on tours with the DU biologists looking at new Minnesota DU projects. There is great personal satisfaction seeing the fruits of your labor translate into on-the-ground conservation work. DU has changed my life in many ways. I have met many wonderful people that have the same objectives. We all are committed to conservation of wetland habitats for future generations!

One last thing that I have learned from my volunteer experience: if not for all of the dedicated DU volunteers, there would not be a DU organization. Without DU, we would not have the waterfowl populations we see today.

“DU has changed my life in many ways.”
2013 Game Fair Update

Minnesota Ducks Unlimited had another great outing at Game Fair in 2013. Being the biggest of our Special Events, it is one of the most labor intense events that we put on. Spanning 6 days over two weekends it takes 50+ volunteers and some dedicated staff, spending hundreds of hours planning and staffing the event.

MN DU was one of the main focal point on Waterfowlers Hill. Again this year, we had great exposure to the fair goers and were able to have great interaction with those who stopped by our tent. Those that did took advantage of getting in on our many raffles, silent auction and SBA’s that were there on display. Folks were also able to view the many conservation projects exhibits that have been completed or are underway in Minnesota. Volunteers and DU staff had the opportunity to promote MN DU by answering questions and discussing what Ducks Unlimited is doing in Minnesota. We also took this opportunity to recruit new volunteers and renew memberships which is always an area where we like to focus much of our time and energy.

This 80-acre outdoor event is held at the Armstrong Ranch Kennels in Anoka. Approximately 50,000 visitors attend Game Fair each year where they are able to see hundreds of exhibitors displaying all of the latest and greatest outdoor products and gadgets. This was Game Fair’s 32nd year.

This year Minnesota Ducks Unlimited played a significant role at Game Fair’s Duck and Goose Calling Championship. The call was put out and the DU volunteers responded. Knowing that many of our volunteers are skilled in the waterfowling sport we gathered a group of avid duck and goose callers to judge this year’s contest. This paid off in a big way for MN DU because Chuck Delaney (owner of Game Fair) donated the contest money to us and presented us with a check for $2,100.00! Thanks Chuck!

All in all, MN DU had another successful event at Game Fair. We were able to accomplished several things at this year’s fair. We were able to promote MN Ducks Unlimited by showing people what this organization is doing here at home in Minnesota. There are a lot of great projects going on in this state and we were able to show the people what is being accomplished locally. We also wanted to take this opportunity to increase our memberships and recruit new volunteers and of course we wanted to make some money for the Ducks.

I would like to send out a special thanks to all the volunteers and staff that helped with this year’s Game Fair event. Whether you had a big or small part it was very much appreciated! These special events are very much a team effort and it would not be possible if we didn’t have all the help that we do. I think it just goes to show, how dedicated our volunteers are when the call goes out to make things happen for the DUCKS!
Come join us at the Holiday Inn, Willmar
February 14-15, 2014
New Venue, Lower Price!!

Friday
11:00 – State Council Meeting
3:00 to 7:00 – Registration Desk Open
4:00 to midnight – Hospitality Bar
4:00 to 6:00 – Let the fun begin! Social, Games, Raffles
6:30 to 8:00 – Ladies Valentines Champagne and Roses &
              Sportsman’s Night Out Valentine’s Buffet
8:00 to 9:00 – Raffles and Drawings
9:00 to 10:30 – Entertainment by The Dueling Guitars

Saturday
8:00 to 9:30 – Breakfast Buffet
8:00 – Registration Desk Open
8:30 to 9:30 – Bloody Mary Bar
10:00 to noon – Green Wing Camp
9:00 to 11:00 – New Area Chair Workshop
9:00 to 11:00 – Senior Volunteer Workshop
10:00 to 11:00 – Cooking Workshop
11:00 to 12:00 – Chapter Awards and Volunteer Recognition
12:00 to 1:00 – Buffet Lunch and Hospitality Bar
1:00 to 2:00 – Conservation Message
2:00 to 6:00 – Hospitality Bar, Games, Raffles
3:00 to 5:00 – Major Donor Reception
5:00 to 10:00 – Green Wing Camp
6:00 – MN Ducks Unlimited 2014 Annual Banquet Seating
6:30 – Seated service - meal
7:30 – Program and Live Auction
7:30 to 1:00 – Hospitality Bar
10:00 to 1:00 – Live music by Georgia Clay Band

All IODUs and auction slips must be paid by 10:30pm on Saturday.
The Bank will not be open on Sunday.

Hotel Information
Holiday Inn $89  320-235-6060
Holiday Inn Express $89  320-231-2601
Days Inn $69  320-231-1275

Questions? Contact Stevie at 952-820-8174
or email mndu@mtn.org

Register online: www.ducks.org/minnesota/events
DU project work continues through this brutally cold, unrelenting, unforgiving, long-lasting, below-zero, Minnesota winter. DU’s contractor, Landwehr Construction, has been working on and off throughout the winter (did we mention it has been a cold one?) to update the Swan Lake water control structure with a new catwalk, aluminum stop-logs, and a fish barrier system that will provide DNR with a better tool to manage and protect the lake. The fish barrier screens can be manipulated up/down independently with the winching mechanism attached to the catwalk (large wheel). These screens should help prevent undesirable fish from accessing Swan Lake regardless of where the run out elevation is being managed.