



Wetlands America Trust, Inc.

President
Steve Maritz

Vice President
Doug Oberhelman

Chief Operating Officer
Dan Thiel

Secretary/Treasurer
Robert S. Hester Jr.

Dear WAT Trustees,

As we are only days away from the dove opener and the beginning of the fall hunting season, it's time to send an update from Memphis. I apologize for the limited communication of late regarding activities within Ducks Unlimited and WAT, but I can assure you we're working hard to reach our goals on many fronts.

Because it's been a while since my last letter, this one is longer than usual. However, I hope you will agree that the good news reported here is well worth the additional time spent reading.

N.D. Ballot Initiative

One of the most important efforts in front of WAT this year is the Clean Water, Wildlife and Parks amendment in North Dakota. If passed, this ballot initiative could generate about \$100 million a year for conservation in one of DU's highest priority areas. Funding would come from existing taxes levied on the state's booming oil and gas industry.

The coalition began its drive to collect the required 27,000 valid signatures last year and has now eclipsed that number with more than 41,000, virtually ensuring placement of the initiative on the November ballot.

We are now engaged in campaign and marketing efforts to bolster our chances for success in the November election. The Farm Bureau, North Dakota Chamber of Commerce and a number of other groups are opposed to this ballot initiative. We are currently ahead in the polls, but as we all know, when it comes to politics, things can change overnight.

To that end, we have asked WAT trustees to help secure a total of \$2 million in contingency pledges. This means we will ask you to pay your pledge only if we need to utilize the contingency fund to increase our chances for victory. Several trustees have quickly responded to this request, and we are grateful for their support. Should you wish to join us, please contact me to secure your pledge. A special thanks to WAT President Steve Maritz for his continued leadership in helping to move the North Dakota ballot initiative forward.

Land Trust Update

At the end of FY14, DU closed on 25 easements protecting an additional 9,625 acres. Easements held in perpetuity now total 391 with nearly 400,000 acres under protection.

One of our most recent easements is the Paradox Wildlife CE in Adams County, Mississippi. Donated by Dr. Demarcus Smith and Mr. John Heaton, this easement protects 1,366 acres of bottomland hardwood forest, sandbars and riparian habitat along the Mississippi River. The land is located in the heart of the Lower Mississippi River Land Conservation Priority Area, just south of Natchez and across the river from the WAT-held Main Pass Conservation Easement. Protection of flooded bottomland hardwood forest is a priority for DU's Southern Region.

Conservation Easements

In the realm of land trusts, there is some exciting news out of Washington. In mid-July, the House of Representatives, as part of a larger charitable-giving bill, passed a provision (HR 2807) that would make permanent the enhanced tax incentive for private landowners entering a conservation easement on their property.

DU has worked for several years with the Land Trust Alliance and others in the conservation community to make this conservation easement tax provision permanent. Previously, the tax provision has been extended by Congress for only two years at a time. A two-year extension of this conservation easement tax incentive is part of a Senate comprehensive tax-extendors bill that stalled earlier this year on the Senate floor. Please continue to advocate with your Senators for permanent status for this tax incentive. Because WAT is one of the nation's largest land trusts, this effort is very important to us!

Federal Duck Stamp

More news out of Washington centers on the federal duck stamp price increase. Bipartisan companion bills were recently introduced in the House (HR 5069) and Senate (S 2621) to increase the price of the federal duck stamp from \$15 to \$25, and to dedicate the amount of the increase to conservation easements. Louisiana volunteers Skipper and Paul Dickson worked tirelessly to have Congressman Fleming (R-LA) and Senator Vitter (R-LA) lead as the original sponsors of the bill. Should these bills be successful, the increased funding would significantly impact habitat work across the country. The federal duck stamp is one of the most effective and efficient conservation programs in the country. Skipper and Paul have been instrumental in this effort, and I would like to thank them for their leadership in helping move these bills forward in Congress.

HR 5069 bipartisan co-sponsors include Congressman Dingell (D-MI) and Congressman Wittman (R-VA), the two House members of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission. In the Senate, the Democrat co-sponsors include Senator Begich (D-AK), Senator Coons (D-DE) and Senator Tester (D-MT), whose own duck stamp bill has yet to attract Republican co-sponsors.

At a House Natural Resources Subcommittee hearing on HR 5069 held July 23, Chief Conservation Officer Paul Schmidt shared DU's strong support. On July 30, the House Natural Resources Committee reported the bill to the House floor for consideration. We continue to seek bipartisan co-sponsors for the House and Senate bills and encourage you to ask your Representative and two Senators to co-sponsor the bills.

Farm Bill

Thanks to the great effort by both volunteers and staff, the 2014 Farm Bill provides \$28 billion over the next five years for conservation funding on private lands, streamlines several existing programs, and creates new programs like the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Since the bill was signed into law, DU staff, volunteers and conservation partners have been providing direct input to USDA officials regarding rules to implement the substantial gains made on behalf of wetlands and wildlife conservation in the farm bill. We are very pleased that several of the areas highlighted by USDA to receive funding under RCPP include DU priorities, such as the Prairie Pothole Region, Great Lakes, Central Valley, and Mississippi Alluvial Valley. DU staff is actively working with agriculture partners and landowners to submit proposals for funding conservation work in these critical areas.

North American Wetlands Conservation Act

For the last several years previous House Appropriations Interior, Environment and Related Agencies bills have zeroed out funding for vital conservation grant programs such as NAWCA. Because of the fruitful work of DU board member Al Montna in building a relationship with the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee Chair, Congressman Calvert (R-CA), several of these conservation grant programs are proposed for funding in the FY15 subcommittee bill at the FY14 enacted levels, with NAWCA funded at \$34.14 million. In the context of where we have been in previous House Interior Appropriations bills of having to work from a base of zero funding for NAWCA, level funding with FY14 established a

good starting place to negotiate with the Senate, which just released a draft of its bill with funding also at \$34.14 million. Much work remains to be done to get NAWCA reauthorized to ensure future funding.

Waterfowl 360

One of the most popular programs within DU during the fall season is our interactive Waterfowl 360 program. Waterfowl 360 is an online waterfowling resource that includes programs such as the Ducks Unlimited migration map and the extremely popular Beards for Conservation program. This year, participants will be able to raise money online for wetlands and waterfowl conservation. The program has its own accompanying app, which allows participants to vote, share and view others' progress.

The DU Waterfowl Migration iPhone App has spent many weeks during waterfowl season as a top-ranked sports app in the paid category of the App Store. The map generated more than 21 million page views last season alone. If you haven't had the chance to check out the great things DU's Web Team is doing, I'd encourage you to take a minute and download the DU apps on your phone. It's a great way to see how we're reaching all audiences.

Upcoming WAT meeting

We have a special location selected for our Winter 2014 WAT meeting. *Please make plans to join us at Hageman Reserve, December 3-5.*

Following the successful sale of Remington Seed in Indiana, Steve Hageman established Hageman Reserve north of Dallas, Texas. More than a hunting property, Hageman Reserve features fine dining, spa, fishing and numerous activities that make this meeting one for including spouses! More details will follow, but you can visit www.hagemanreserve.com for more specifics about the lodge.

For the Ducks,
Dan Thiel



WAT President Steve Maritz welcomes the crowd to St. Louis during DU's annual convention.

WAT COO Dan Thiel gives the WAT report during DU's annual convention in St. Louis.

Former DU president Bruce Lewis and WAT trustees Paul Bonderson, Steve Maritz, George Dunklin, Dale Hall and John Newman pose for a photo with Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia during DU's annual convention in St. Louis.