Covering the most important and threatened wintering grounds on the continent, the Gulf Coast Initiative focuses on the restoration, enhancement and protection of wetlands important to the millions of waterfowl that winter on the Gulf Coast each year. It also supports critical science, outreach and policy efforts. The Gulf Coast Initiative is a crucial part of Ducks Unlimited’s Rescue Our Wetlands Campaign, a seven-year, $2-billion effort aimed at changing the face of conservation in North America. Rescue Our Wetlands is the largest wetlands and waterfowl conservation campaign in history.

MAJOR SPONSOR REPORT

Congratulations to the Louisiana State Campaign Committee! They achieved Top 10 results in 2015! Led by Mike Benge, Louisiana finished in a tie for 2nd place. Their accomplishments were impressive, including 53 new Life Sponsors, 48 upgrades and 5 new Feather Society commitments. In total, Louisiana secured more than 100 new commitments in 2015, and led the nation in new Life Sponsors and upgrades. Clearly, major sponsors in Louisiana are making a difference for the future of wetlands, waterfowl and waterfowl hunting.

Garrett Naquin (a.k.a. Frog), is one of these dedicated sponsors. Frog and his wife, Paula, are Diamond Life Sponsors from Houma, Louisiana. As chief executive officer of Frogco Amphibious Equipment, which manufactures and rents marsh-buggy excavators, Frog has a personal knowledge of our coastal restoration work. Marsh-buggy excavators are used in shallow water areas to build marsh terraces and other key restoration features. He has a son, John, that is 14 years old. He is a passionate duck hunter and supporter of DU’s conservation efforts because he wants his son to enjoy the wonders of the Gulf Coast as he has.

“I have seen first-hand the work that DU does along the Gulf Coast, and I appreciate DU’s ability to leverage private dollars for public funds to actually deliver coastal restoration projects,” he said.

CONSERVATION UPDATE

Louisiana provides continentally significant wintering habitat for waterfowl each year. DU’s mission in Louisiana is to ensure sufficient habitat is available to meet the life-cycle needs of migrating and wintering waterfowl as well as resident populations of mottled ducks, whistling ducks and wood ducks. These habitats also provide significant benefits to other wildlife, fisheries and people.

DU’s conservation staff had another outstanding year in fiscal year 2015, conserving more than 22,000 acres of wetlands and associated habitats in Louisiana and bringing total conservation accomplishments in the state to nearly 409,000 acres. Our private land restoration work continues through the Louisiana Waterfowl Project and the Rice Stewardship Program and two freshwater introduction projects in Southeast Louisiana. On public lands, DU has on-going or recently completed projects on Dewey Wills, Russell Sage, Pass a Loutre and Salvador wildlife management areas and Rockefeller and State wildlife refuges.

DU will continue to make significant habitat improvements on the wintering grounds and appreciates the investments of time and money from the many volunteers, supporters, landowners, foundations, corporations and agencies that make these great conservation accomplishments possible.
VOLUNTEER REPORT

Volunteer fundraisers are the heartbeat of Ducks Unlimited, and Louisiana has some of the best. Louisiana boasts more than 22,400 members, including 2,470 volunteers who hosted 102 events in 2015, raising more than $3.8 million to support DU’s conservation mission.

Volunteers on the St. Charles Ducks Unlimited committee held their first Greenwing event Aug. 29 at Wetlands Watchers Park in the Bonnet Carre Spillway in Norco. The St. Charles DU chapter partnered with the Harry Hurst Middle School Wetland Watchers program, Coastal Conservation Association, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, and DU’s conservation staff to host the event. Nearly 400 children ages 5-17 and 170 adults attended and learned about the importance of wetlands through fun, educational activities. Among the activities were canoeing, archery, cast netting, animal identification, plant identification, and touring nature trails. The kids had hands-on experience with over 40 animals including baby alligators, snakes and a 100-pound tortoise. Topped off with a chili cook-off for lunch, this event was a great way to spend a Saturday with the family.

LADU’s former largest Greenwing event attracted 76 children. Cost was $5 per adult and $15 for each child, which let them have lunch, participate in all activities and provided them with memberships to DU and CCA. Despite the design of the event to cover expenses, the event raised nearly $5,000. St. Charles Greenwing Chairman Russell Prima and Chapter Chairman Dr. Brian Brogle noted that while some kids came and went, most stayed the entire day. One parent told Prima he couldn’t get his son to leave. That’s a resounding recommendation!

RICE STEWARDSHIP PARTNERSHIP

The USA Rice-Ducks Unlimited Rice Stewardship Partnership continues to yield results for Louisiana rice growers. Our $10-million national Regional Conservation Partnership Program grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and our state-specific RCPP funds are largely dedicated to cost-share incentives for producers to implement conservation practices on their lands through Farm Bill programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the most relevant program to irrigated agriculture. In addition to the RCPP grant, new grants from the Walmart Foundation and the Mosaic Company Foundation will support our “boots-on-the-ground” delivery mechanism to provide professional advice to interested landowners in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley and along the Gulf Coast.

Rice Stewardship funders include the USDA NRCS, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Walmart Foundation, the Mosaic Company Foundation, Chevron U.S.A., Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold Foundation, Irene W. and C.B. Pennington Foundation, RiceTec, BASF, American Rice, Inc. – Riviana Foods, Inc., Farmers Rice Milling Company, Turner’s Creek & Bombay Hook Farms and MacDon Industries.

TOM HESS – ROCKEFELLER REFUGE PROJECT

More than 75 friends and family of Louisiana conservationist Tom Hess gathered at Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge in southwest Louisiana to dedicate a restoration project in his honor. DU and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries partnered on the project to enhance 6,800 acres of coastal marsh.

“It is with great memories of Tom that we dedicate this work to improve management of Price Lake Marsh,” said DU Director of Operations Tom Moorman, who worked with Hess on Rockefeller Refuge. “Hess called Rockefeller the center of the duck universe, and we want to keep it that way.”

Hess, who passed away in 2014, was hired in 1972 as a biologist assistant at Rockefeller. He concluded his career as program manager of Rockefeller Refuge. The $1.4-million project restored water management capabilities to the Price Lake Unit and expanded the fishing pier for better public access. Funding partners include LDWF, DU, Chevron U.S.A. and the Stuller Family Foundation.