Covering most of the southeastern US and encompassing many of the nation's most recognized wetlands, the Southeast Wetlands Initiative focuses on the restoration, enhancement and protection of wetlands used by millions of waterfowl as they winter and return to the breeding grounds each year. The initiative also supports science, policy and outreach efforts important to waterfowl conservation. The Southeast Wetlands 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.

CONSERVATION UPDATE

North Carolina provides critical habitat for waterfowl produced in the prairies, Great Lakes and eastern Canada. In addition, the state winters upwards of 80 percent of the continental tundra swan population. DU has invested more than $25 million and conserved nearly 129,000 acres in North Carolina wetlands and other key habitats. DU and partners have protected more than 19,000 acres through conservation easements or public acquisition, and restored or enhanced more than 110,000 acres of wetland habitat on both public and private lands.

DU focuses on habitat conservation to provide waterfowl the resources they need across the continent, but providing hunters with improved and increased opportunities to hunt is also vitally important. DU projects on public lands like the Butner-Falls of the Neuse, Futch, Goose Creek, Texas Plantation, Roanoke River Wetlands, North River, and White Oak game lands and Mattamuskeet, Pea Island, Great Dismal Swamp and Alligator River national wildlife refuges enhance public hunting opportunities.

Ducks Unlimited's goal is to secure the future of waterfowl in North Carolina and throughout North America. By strategically focusing on local and breeding-ground conservation efforts, DU hopes to improve waterfowling opportunities and wetlands for waterfowl, other wildlife and the citizens of North Carolina.

VOLUNTEER REPORT

Volunteer fundraisers are the heartbeat of Ducks Unlimited, and North Carolina has some of the best. North Carolina boasts more than 33,400 members, including nearly 2,000 volunteers who hosted 167 events in 2015, raising more than $2.47 million to support DU’s conservation mission. This is the first time in the history of NCDU that more than $2 million net has been raised! Some of that success has been driven by a 33.7% increase in event attendance, an 8.4% increase in event sponsors and six Diamond Events in 2015.

David Turnage is one of these dedicated volunteers. David’s love of DU and waterfowl hunting have been passed down from his dad, Greg. David got an early start in duck hunting.

“I was 8 when I went with dad the first time and 9 when I killed my first bird. It was a wood duck, and I shot it with a 20 gauge Winchester pump DU youth legacy gun from the Wilson Chapter event. It was bought about the same time I was born, and the committee folks passed it around from family to family for years.”

That family atmosphere had David joining the local committee at 18. At 22 he chaired the local Greenwing event and made it a first-in-state event for several years and the 8th largest in the country. Now a Life Sponsor, he serves on the North Carolina major sponsor committee actively recruiting new major sponsors. He serves as State Vice Chairman for the Central Region of NCDU, helped organize the 2015 NCDU State Convention and assists with the NCDU Billfish Tournament.
MAJOR SPONSOR REPORT

North Carolina’s Campaign Committee surpassed all goals in 2015, including 25 new Life Sponsors, 14 upgrades and three new Feather Society members. Clearly the people of North Carolina understand that giving to Ducks Unlimited is the soundest investment they can make for the future of wetlands, waterfowl and waterfowl hunting.

Julian W. “Bubba” Rawl is one of those sponsors. He started waterfowl hunting with his dad at 9 years old, and he took his first Canada goose with a single shot .410 during one of his first hunts. When Bubba went to retrieve what he thought was his first kill, the show really started.

“I can still hear Dad laughing at my 10-minute battle with that nine-pound goose. At least I can say I won!” Bubba chuckled. “Dad introduced me to big water hunting and curtain blind hunts a few years later, and I was hooked after my first canvas back. Now I’ve been duck hunting for over 55 years.”

Bubba’s son, Jordy, and daughters, Julia and Allie, have taken the same path, starting at a young age hunting doves and soon after developing a love for the Ducks. “Dogs are a big part of our hunting experience, and Jordy’s dog, Hyde, and Allie’s new hunter, Dare, both named for counties, love it more than we do. Waterfowl hunting has provided my family with some unforgettable times together that just could not have happen doing anything else. I credit hunting as a large part of what molded my kids to be well rounded and grounded, but their mom comes in first place in that department,” Bubba said.

Dr. Rey Minges and John Farley brought Bubba to DU while he was in high school, and he will be forever grateful to them and all the other volunteers who have devoted their time and talents to help make duck hunting such a great sport for so many.

“I am certain that another generation of duck hunters is in my family’s future, and I look forward to sharing time and stories with them in a duck blind soon. I’m grateful to all the DU volunteers and contributors that continue to make that possible,” he said.

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT - NCWRC ENGINEERING AGREEMENT

The NC Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) recognizes DU’s unparalleled wetlands restoration expertise. As such, in 2015 DU and NCWRC entered into a cooperative agreement to facilitate the development of wetlands to provide habitat and maintain and increase waterfowl populations for the best interest of the people of North Carolina. The agreement goal is for NCWRC and DU to identify habitat and wetland restoration projects, perform feasibility studies, engineering surveys and designs, and facilitate the implementation of these projects on state owned lands.

Since the initiation of the agreement, we have identified opportunities on various game lands (GL). Engineering services have been utilized at White Oak, Goose Creek and Butner Falls of the Neuse GLs. DU will assist NCWRC with project oversight or delivery on all these projects in the next 12–18 months. Activities will improve wetland function and management for waterfowl and other wetland dependent species.

NC ENVIRONMENTAL ENHANCEMENT GRANTS

On July 25, 2000, the North Carolina Attorney General and Smithfield Foods, Inc. signed an agreement to identify environmentally superior technologies for hog waste disposal. Smithfield committed to provide money to promote environmental programs in North Carolina. To maximize the benefits to the state’s environment, the AG, after consultation with Smithfield, the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources and others, established the Environmental Enhancement Grants (EEG) Program in 2003.

The EEG Program seeks to improve the air, water and land quality of North Carolina by funding environmental projects that address the goals of the agreement between Smithfield and the Attorney General. The EEG Program funds projects to restore and protect impaired, degraded or endangered surface waters, groundwater and other natural resources. In addition, the EEG Program promotes long-term environmental enhancement programs to conserve and protect targeted natural areas. The EEG provides critical dollars which are combined with other contributions and often leveraged through the federal programs to maximize impacts for waterfowl. Since 2004, DU has received 8 grants totaling $2.35M and has leveraged an additional $4.3M to benefit over 5,000 acres.