Dear WAT Trustees,

Thanks to those who attended our recent WAT meeting at Bird Haven Ranch in California. As those in attendance are aware, our meeting at Hageman Reserve was cancelled due to unforeseen issues. Special thanks to Paul and Sandi Bonderson for hosting our meeting with only a week’s notice!

While at Bird Haven we had a great meeting and tremendous hunting. With more than 30 hunters in the field on the first day, and 20 hunters on the second day, our group averaged six ducks per person. That’s great shooting in quality habitat!

There are several updates I would like to pass along, so I’ll start with the legislative update given by John Tomke during our meeting.

**Legislative**

John gave a report from the Government Affairs Committee, which included the North Dakota ballot amendment and generated strong discussion from the group. In the end, WAT trustees have asked DU’s staff to develop and implement strategies that will help reinforce the organization’s position in the state. We will continue to keep you apprised on this effort.

John was pleased to share great news regarding the Duck Stamp Act of 2014, which was passed unanimously in both the House and Senate. This legislation will increase the price of the duck stamp from $15 to $25, providing more funding for conservation work throughout the U.S. With more than 1.1 million duck stamps sold last year, this will put an additional $11 million in the USFWS coffers for purchasing conservation easements.

A big thanks to Skipper and Paul Dickson who led the charge on this effort, getting it passed during a lame duck session. Both Skipper and Paul were instrumental in spearheading the act, and worked tirelessly with congressmen and senators from around the country to ensure its passage. Along with Skipper and Paul, several other WAT trustees stepped up and made calls when the legislation stalled before the Senate vote. A sincere thanks to all who had a hand in swaying the opinions of our nation’s leaders to pass this much-needed legislation.
Board Governance Report

Doug Oberhelman, chairman of the Board Governance Committee, reported to the group that Mark Pine and Kevin Albert have announced their retirement from the WAT board. We have acknowledged their service and philanthropy appropriately.

Doug also brought forward three candidates for consideration as trustees: Gary Butler, Doug Frey and Jim Konkel. They were unanimously approved and were welcomed to the WAT board. Profiles on our newest members were included in the meeting notebook and will be sent to trustees not in attendance under separate cover.

Social media update

DU hit a milestone recently when we reached more than 1 million Facebook fans. This means that DU has more Facebook fans than the American Red Cross, The Nature Conservancy, American Heart Association, United Way and the National Wildlife Federation.

Some interesting facts about our Facebook fans:

- 80 percent of our fans are under age 35 and 60 percent are under age 25.
- More than 250,000 of our Facebook fans are women.
- Over the last four years, more than 16,000 Facebook fans have joined DU online directly from a membership offer, generating $620,000.
- DU ranks in the top 1 percent nationally for fundraising on Facebook.
- Over the last year, DU’s Facebook page has gained an average of 680 new fans every day.
- Since 2010, Facebook has driven more than 2 million visits to the DU website, generating 9.5 million page views.

Land trust update

In FY14, we’ve closed on 25 conservation easements protecting almost 10,000 acres, giving WAT right at 400,000 acres held in perpetuity. We remain one of the nation’s largest accredited land trusts.

During our board meeting Paul Schmidt reported on recent legal action specific to one of our easements in Virginia. The owner of the property constructed a commercial winery operation that WAT asserts is in violation of the easement agreement. Unfortunately, we were not successful in our first efforts to litigate the matter in trial court. WAT appealed the decision to the Virginia Supreme Court, where the Virginia Attorney General filed a brief in support of WAT’s position. We will keep you informed as the appeal progresses. This case illustrates why WAT monitors each easement annually to ensure compliance and provide management assistance.

End of year numbers

One of the highlights of the meeting was the Development Committee report by Chairman Dan Ray. Together with Mike Woodward and Rich Smith, they provided updates for the Rescue Our Wetlands campaign. Several trustees were acknowledged for their recent commitments and everyone was encouraged to support the campaign’s initiatives.

To continue with the good news, all areas of DU – Major Gifts, Membership and Event Fundraising – DU’s philanthropic outreach is hitting on all cylinders and all areas are expected to exceed the business plan’s dashboard projections.
Major Gifts
As of December 10, we have secured $14.9 million in new commitments toward a goal of $29 million. For new cash received, we have secured $12.4 million toward a goal of $26 million through the major gifts program.

Both of these to-date figures have already surpassed our end-of-December figures from last year. In the case of new commitment, it’s an increase of 16 percent and in cash an increase of 18 percent over last year. We still have time this month for these numbers to grow.

Membership
As of the end of November, DU’s adult membership was up more than 4 percent over last year. This brings our total adult members to 609,547 adult members. This is counter to the trend in other membership-based organizations that are experiencing declines in members.

Event Fundraising
Our event fundraising team and their volunteer partners have posted the fifth straight fall of great performance through their events. We continue to project that we will meet budget for the fiscal year.

Our event attendance is growing as well with an increase of more than 5 percent, and our volunteers are increasing at a rate of 8 percent. All of these results are in excess of budget and divisional goals at this time.

Upcoming meetings

Please mark your calendars for next year’s meetings:

• May 18-19, Washington, D.C.
• July 28-30, Peoria, Illinois. Hosted by Doug Oberhelman at CAT’s Demonstration and Learning Center, this is a great opportunity to test-drive all manner of CAT equipment!
• Dec. 1-3 (tentative), Arkansas.

The dates for this meeting are dependent upon the 2015 waterfowl season dates.

Closing
With another record fall migration well underway, thank you for the important role you play in the conservation of North America’s wetlands. WAT trustees are among the most respected leaders in the conservation world. Thank for all you do for DU, WAT and the larger conservation community. It is an honor to work with you!

Merry Christmas and best wishes for the New Year!

For the Ducks,

Dan Thiel