Dear Trustees,

That time of year is upon us yet again when visions of waterfowl-filled skies go from dreams to reality. I hope everyone had great early seasons and wish you the best of luck with your regular-season hunts.

**DUI Board Meeting**

I was fortunate enough to spend time hunting in Manitoba in early October as part of the recent Ducks Unlimited board meeting. We met north of the 49th parallel to join in DU Canada’s 75th anniversary celebrations. Several board members had the opportunity to hunt the Waterhen area, and we had especially good field hunting for mallards as well as successful diver hunting on Lake Winnipegosis.

As part of DUC’s 75th anniversary, WAT Trustee and DU President George Dunklin updated the Canadian board on DU’s success during Fiscal Year 2013. It was great to spend time with the directors from DU Canada, and the camaraderie shared during the weekend’s festivities will certainly continue to strengthen our continental approach to conservation.

Fellow WAT Trustee Bill D’Alonzo, who serves as DU’s Senior Vice President of Conservation, provided an overview of DU’s on-the-ground conservation accomplishments for the past year. His report was well received as the directors learned DU’s conservation efforts exceeded the budgeted goal of 100,000 acres. Also during the recent board meetings, resolutions were passed by DUI, DUC and Ducks Unlimited Mexico to officially move forward with the campaign. Our next step is the Leadership Gift phase where all three organizations will solicit critical lead gifts from key supporters and prospects.

**Land Trust Easement**

The most recent addition to WAT’s portfolio of 467 conservation easements was made by Jim Blair, a DU major donor, who graciously donated a perpetual conservation easement on his 303-acre property in St. Charles, Missouri. The Bend conservation easement contains 40 acres of forested wetlands, 120 acres of emergent wetlands, 35 acres of sloughs, 11 acres of scrub-shrub swamp, 150 acres of cropland and three acres of buildings and grounds.
The property is located within the Cuivre River watershed and is completely surrounded by the Cuivre River Slough. Levees, wells and water-control structures provide water-level management for several moist-soil units on the property. The best part is that this easement is located adjacent to the President’s Club, a property on which WAT also holds an easement.

Land in St. Charles County is under threat of conversion to residential or commercial development, and Jim’s commitment to DU ensures that more than 300 acres will not be subdivided or sold to commercial ventures. Along with the easement, Jim gave more than $20,000 to the Easement Stewardship Endowment.

As WAT trustees, conservation easements are one of our highest priorities. As a result, we should keep this program at the forefront of our decisions, policies and future endeavors. Special thanks to DU’s Jamie Brown and Steve Spezia for their work in putting this great easement together and for all their efforts in land protection.

Public Policy
After a 16-day federal government shutdown, Congress passed an agreement to reopen the government and avoid debt default the night before the U.S. Treasury would have run out of money to pay the nation’s bills. The agreement reopens the government through January 15, 2014 and raises the debt limit through February 7, 2014. The government will be funded at FY13-enacted levels, including previous sequestration cuts of 5.1 percent and an additional cut of 2.1 percent as required by law, through January 15.

The agreement also set up a conference committee to reconcile the House- and Senate-passed budgets, with a final budget due before December 13, 2013. Without a finalized budget for FY14, a similar congressional showdown will likely occur next year.

Before the shutdown ended, the House of Representatives appointed members to the Farm Bill conference committee to finalize a five-year farm bill. This action allows conferees to officially begin reconciling the bills passed by the House and Senate. DU’s Government Affairs Office continues to work with conferees to ensure the final bill includes our priorities of re-coupling conservation compliance to crop insurance, creating a national Sodsaver program and limiting cuts to conservation programs. Some lawmakers have expressed hope of getting a finalized bill done in time to be included in a larger package, likely a budget deal. However, only time will tell if that is a viable option.

North Dakota Ballot Initiative
Ducks Unlimited is again playing a leadership role in a broad coalition of organizations and individuals working to get a constitutional measure on the North Dakota November 2014 ballot that would dedicate funding for conservation. If passed, the Clean Water, Wildlife and Parks Amendment could generate about $75 million a year for conservation in North Dakota.

The coalition has begun its drive to collect the required 27,000 valid signatures, with a goal of bringing in 40,000. So far, the coalition has gathered 2,500 signatures and has until August 2014 to complete the drive.

Organizations that are part of the coalition have been reaching out to other outdoors and conservation groups to seek their endorsements. Dale Hall and Pheasants Forever CEO Howard Vincent recently sent an email to members of the American Wildlife Conservation Partnership, asking them to support the measure. To date, some 21 groups have responded with their endorsement.

Members of our team have been visiting editorial boards at the state’s major newspapers to share the details of the measure. The reception has been great and our coverage has increased because of these visits.
Endowment Challenge
Throughout 2013 we have been able to retain strong momentum for the WAT Endowment Challenge. To date, we’ve had almost $95 million in commitments restricted to build Ducks Unlimited’s permanent endowment. Even though our totals approach $95 million since the Challenge’s inception, we’re expecting another $10 million from pending asks within the next few months. These numbers are ahead of budgeted goals, but we would definitely like to continue this trend.

Should you wish to participate in the Challenge, know someone who might be interested in contributing or if you and your advisors wish to discuss in more detail, please contact Jon Rich, managing director of gift planning at 901-758-3763. Now is the time to ensure that Ducks Unlimited remains a viable and sustainable force in the conservation world for years to come.

December Meeting Logistics
With the winter WAT meeting right around the corner, I’d like to share with you the schedule and logistics. The meeting will take place December 18-20 in Stuttgart, Ark., at Five Oaks Duck Lodge. Special thanks to Trustee George Dunklin for hosting our winter meeting.

Trustees should plan to arrive before 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, December 18. Private aircraft should make plans to arrive at Stuttgart Municipal Airport. Those flying commercially should book flights into the Little Rock, Arkansas, airport (LIT). Please note that the Little Rock airport is about an hour’s drive to the lodge. As usual, we will meet flights and provide ground transportation. Committee meetings will take place from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. on December 18 and dinner will be served at 6:30.

On Thursday, December 19, we will enjoy a morning of hunting in the famed flooded timber and rice fields of Five Oaks, and our full board meeting will commence at noon. We plan to conclude the meeting by 4:30 p.m. with dinner at 6:30.

The morning of Friday, December 20 will find us in the field again, and departures can be scheduled at any point on that day.

A more comprehensive schedule and agenda will be sent in the coming weeks. Should you have any questions regarding logistics prior to that, or if you need to make airport transportation arrangements, please call Pattie Kempka at 901-758-3844 or email her at pkempka@ducks.org.

We hope you will join us for the fellowship and camaraderie we share during these bi-annual meetings, and we look forward to seeing you in Stuttgart!

For the Ducks,

Dan Thiel