



Ducks Unlimited's Conservation Activities on Ramsar Wetlands from March 1996 to February 1997

6 April 1998

At the 6th Ramsar Conference of the Parties in Brisbane, March 1996, Dr Alan Wentz, representing Ducks Unlimited, made an intervention which was summarized in the Conference Report (paragraph 267) as follows: "Ducks Unlimited, noting its previous financial commitments to Ramsar sites in several countries, pledged on behalf of Ducks Unlimited organizations in Australia, Canada, Europe, Mexico, New Zealand, and the USA, to commit at least SFR 3.1 million in fiscal year 1996-97 for habitat protection, restoration and management, wetland education and training programs at 21 Ramsar sites worldwide and in support of National Ramsar Committees and proposed listings of new sites, in addition to its US\$ 68 million earmarked in 1996/97 for other wetland initiatives outside of Ramsar sites but in support of Ramsar objectives."

This is a reprint of the text of Ducks Unlimited's 8-page printed report on its Ramsar-related activities from March 1996 to February 1997, just issued and available free from Ducks Unlimited, Inc., One Waterfowl Way, Memphis, Tennessee 38120-2351, USA (fax +1 901 758 3850). Table 1, listing expenditures at individual sites (pages 6-7) totalling SFR 3,028,714.63, has not been reproduced here, and the map of Ramsar sites on page 8 has been reproduced mainly ornamentally and not at a large enough file size really to be legible. Consult the printed report for these details. The text is reprinted here with permission.

Intro . . .

During the 1996 Ramsar Conference of the Parties in Brisbane, Australia, Ducks Unlimited pledged 3.1 million Swiss francs to be spent for habitat protection, restoration and enhancement, and wetland education and training programs at Ramsar sites; as well as support of National Ramsar Committees and proposed listings of new sites. These expenditures were to occur at 21 sites around the world and at sites to be proposed for designation in the next triennium. In addition, Ducks Unlimited pledged technical advice and training in wetland ecology, restoration, and

management to developing countries around the world.



This pledge represents the significant role that non-government organizations play in wetland conservation,

restoration, and education. Indeed, Ducks Unlimited organizations have a 60-year history of conservation activities that have protected and enhanced almost 4 million hectares of wetlands and adjacent uplands. Because our efforts are directed at diverse habitats rather than specific species, thousands of plant and animal species, as well as people, benefit from our habitat and educational activities. Partnerships in conservation allow us to complete work at Ramsar sites and other wetlands. These partnerships include not only donations from individuals, corporations, and foundations, but also funds delivered through various state, provincial, and federal government initiatives, such as the North American Wetlands Conservation Act and the U.S. Partners for Wildlife Program.

Activities . . .

During the period of March 1996 to February 1997, Ducks Unlimited spent a total of 3.0 million Swiss francs on conservation projects at 25 Ramsar sites in Canada, Mexico, and the United States (Table 1, Figure 1). A total of 1.8 million Swiss francs was spent for habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement of sites in North America.

In Canada, these expenditures included the purchase of an additional 7 hectares for the Long Point site and 18 hectares for the Matchedash Bay site to ensure permanent protection of these areas. Water supplies and control structures were repaired and upgraded at the Last Mountain Lakes, Quill Lakes, Alaksen, Creston Valley, and Oak Hammock Marsh sites, which improved water level management, thus increasing habitat quality and quantity for waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, and terns. Additionally, a new 30-year Conservation Agreement was signed between Ducks Unlimited and Environment Canada for long-term protection of 613 hectares at the Alaksen site. Annual water level manipulations were conducted at the Oak Hammock and Delta Marsh sites to enhance aquatic plant and invertebrate communities for breeding and migrant waterfowl and shorebirds. Seeding of native grasses and managed burns also were conducted on the uplands to enhance nesting cover for breeding waterfowl and shorebirds.

Research projects addressing a variety of ecological and management questions on Ramsar sites in Canada were conducted at an expense of 95,000 Swiss francs. These projects included evaluations of nutrient dynamics, vegetation, algae, and invertebrates of the Oak Hammock and Delta Marshes in Western Canada. The impacts of long-term land use changes on waterfowl populations and regional climate patterns in Western Canada were studied. Additional studies were conducted to increase understanding of waterfowl species endemic to Ramsar sites such as king eiders in Queen Maude Gulf and Canada geese in southern James Bay.

In the United States, expenditures included winter flooding of harvested agricultural fields in the Cache-Lower White River watershed to enhance water quality, reduce sedimentation and erosion, and provide habitat for migrating waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds. Research conducted on these sites not only found increased waterbird use of flooded agricultural fields, but also a reduction in sediment (from 1,000 kg/ha/yr to 30 kg/ha/yr) and nutrient runoff into the adjacent rivers and tributaries. These projects also included the signing of 10-year agreements with private landowners throughout the Cache-White River catchment to continue these valuable conservation practices.

At Horicon Marsh, the main pump supplying water to 440 hectares of marsh was repaired to improve water level manipulations. A 30-year management agreement was signed between Ducks Unlimited and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to insure that this site will continue to provide quality habitat for waterfowl, migratory songbirds, wading birds, and shorebirds. Mechanical and chemical control measures were employed at Catahoula Lake to retard invasion of woody plants into the moist soil zones of this valuable wetland. Research also was conducted to examine the effectiveness of deep plowing for the re-distribution of toxic lead shot in the wetland sediments. At the Delaware Bay site, activities included replacing water control structures to improve water level manipulations for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds and chemical control of invading *Phragmites*.

An additional 0.6 million Swiss francs were spent on wetland education programs at the Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Center in Manitoba, Canada. The Interpretive Center hosted 200,000 visitors during the 1996/1997 fiscal year to participate in a variety of interactive programs including tracking radio-marked mallards, nature photography, canoe tours of the marsh, and natural history exhibits.

Expenses to secure conservation easements in the Ashepoo-Combahee-Edisto (ACE) Basin of South Carolina totaled 275,000 Swiss francs. Ducks Unlimited now has protected a total of 19,422 hectares in this important coastal wetland ecosystem. This acreage total includes donations of perpetual easements for 14,655 hectares that have an appraised value of over 16 million Swiss francs. This area represents the largest undeveloped wetland along the Atlantic Coast. Working with local people, we hope to propose Ramsar listing for this area in the near future.

Finally, approximately 72,000 Swiss francs were spent in support of the Ramsar Convention, National Ramsar Committees, and the U. S. Ramsar web site to promote the conservation and wise use of Wetlands of International Importance. Our report does not document all of the funds we have contributed to public education related to Ramsar wetlands. Most of these costs are included in the printing of magazines and other publications.

Prospectus . . .

Ducks Unlimited remains committed to habitat and educational programs at Ramsar sites and to support of the goals of the Ramsar Convention. During the coming years, Ducks Unlimited will lead the way in re-forestation of thousands of acres of bottomlands in the Cache-Lower White River watershed in Arkansas, which will contribute to restoring a wetland ecosystem that has suffered >80% loss since 1960. We will continue to restore thousands of acres of fresh and salt marsh in and around the Connecticut River and Delaware Bay Estuary sites as well as assist in control of invasive species such as *Phragmites*. We will target public and private land in the Chesapeake Bay watershed to restore and enhance wetlands and promote sustainable agricultural practices with the goal of reducing sedimentation and nutrient loading into the estuary to foster recovery of submersed aquatic vegetation and the dependent fish and wildlife species.

In Mexico, research has been initiated on Pacific black brant survival and habitat use at the Marismas Nacionales and Humedales del Delta del Rio Colorado sites. Wetland restoration and enhancement projects will be conducted at the Pantanos de Centala and Cuatrocienebras sites. We also expect to increase our habitat inventory efforts through the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology which will offer additional baseline data for Mexican Ramsar sites.

In Canada, Ducks Unlimited will continue to purchase and protect land within designated Ramsar sites, enhance wetlands to increase productivity and biodiversity, secure uplands within catchment areas which are critical nesting sites for waterfowl and shorebirds, and discover new information that will aid in wetland and waterfowl conservation. The Long Point and St. Clair sites on the Canadian shore of Lake Erie are priorities for Ducks Unlimited's conservation efforts in the coming years.

Ducks Unlimited pledges to continue supporting the international Ramsar effort with funds, expertise, wetlands restoration, land acquisition, education, and participation in other related activities. We expect to maintain a high level of involvement in all these areas and to expand that involvement where possible.

Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Center

The Interpretive Center is located beside Oak Hammock Marsh, the reclaimed remnant of the sprawling St. Andrews Bog that once covered 450 square kilometers. The marsh was almost completely drained and converted to agricultural use until the 1970s when the federal and provincial governments, with assistance from Ducks Unlimited, restored 36 square kilometers of marsh and grassland on the original site.

Today 200,000 people, including school children, tourists, nature clubs, seniors groups, and families visit Oak Hammock Marsh and the Interpretive Center annually. The Interpretive Center has aquaria filled with beetles and fish, television monitors inside the building linked to remote cameras in the marsh and grasslands, computer terminals to record wildlife observations and explore the electronic wilderness, and an ever-changing line of feature exhibits. Workshops featuring bird and plant identification, shorebird carving, stained glass art, nature photography, and bird feeder construction also are offered. Naturalists conduct interpretive tours of the marsh and adjacent habitats. The Center also offers catering services, meeting rooms, and a 120-seat theater to host business and scientific symposia.

Quill Lakes

Ducks Unlimited began its first project on the Quill Lakes in 1948. Since that time we have spent 2.3 million Swiss francs on 22 projects in and around the site which has resulted in the enhancement of 22,000 hectares of wetland and upland habitat. This work has involved the securement and seeding of native grasslands, establishment of rotational grazing systems, creation of nesting islands for waterfowl, pelicans, and cormorants, and the impoundment of freshwater creeks to provide reliable surface water for breeding waterfowl and shorebirds. Sheet water also has been

released onto the gravel shores to provide water for nesting piping plovers.

Wetland projects at the Quill Lakes provide valuable feeding and roosting areas for shorebirds. Water levels within wetland projects typically are lowered in the fall to expose mudflats for foraging shorebirds, including a significant portion of the Canadian Prairie population of piping plovers. Ducks Unlimited also has been involved in public education on the Quill Lakes site by leading local school and festival field trips. Technical support also was provided for the development of the Quill Lakes Interpretive Center and promotion of ecotourism through the Land of the Living Sky Tourism Region.

Cache-White River

Restoring the Bottomland Hardwood Ecosystem in the Cache-White River Watershed

River CARE is a Ducks Unlimited conservation initiative targeting the Mississippi River Alluvial Valley (MAV) and associated tributaries which includes the Cache-White River Watershed. The MAV was historically a vast expanse of bottomland hardwood wetlands that flooded regularly when the Mississippi River and its tributaries left their banks. Large scale clearing and draining of the MAV, fostered by government programs, occurred during the 1960s and 1970s for agricultural production. By the early 1990s, only 20% of the original forested wetlands remained. Because of the extensive clearing, draining, ditching, and diking that occurred in the MAV, inundation of the floodplain now occurs less frequently, covers fewer acres, and is of shorter duration.

Millions of waterfowl, egrets, herons, and neotropical songbirds depend on the inundated floodplain of the MAV. Ducks Unlimited is developing habitat projects on public and private lands to create a habitat corridor for wildlife across the area. River CARE is helping to protect, restore, and enhance more than 60,000 hectares of wetland habitat in the MAV by the year 2000. To reach this goal, our public and private lands efforts are restoring hydrology to former wetland sites, developing seasonally-flooded agricultural and moist soil wetlands, fostering restoration of bottomland hardwood forests, and providing biological and engineering assistance to landowners involved in wetlands conservation.

Chesapeake Bay

Restoring the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

The Chesapeake Bay and its associated watershed provide a variety of wetland and upland habitats that support some 2,700 species of fish and wildlife. Within the Bay's watershed vast areas of forest and wetland habitat have been converted to accommodate agricultural, industrial, residential, and commercial development. Sedimentation and nutrient loading have had serious impacts, most notably in the loss of hundreds of thousands of hectares of submersed aquatic vegetation (SAV) that formerly supported 50% of the continental canvasback duck population. SAV also is critical to sustaining other fish and wildlife populations by providing food and cover, and to the maintenance of water quality by absorbing nutrients and filtering sediments.

The goal of Ducks Unlimited's Chesapeake Bay Initiative, working with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, is to improve water quality which will help to restore SAV in the bay, providing increased habitat for migrating and wintering water birds, as well as local marine fishes and invertebrates. The watershed initiative targets wetland restoration and enhancement projects on public and private lands and promotes sustainable agriculture within the watershed. This initiative demonstrates that good land stewardship improves the health and productivity of the land, which provides economic returns in the form of increased land values and decreased costs in agricultural operations.

The ACE Basin

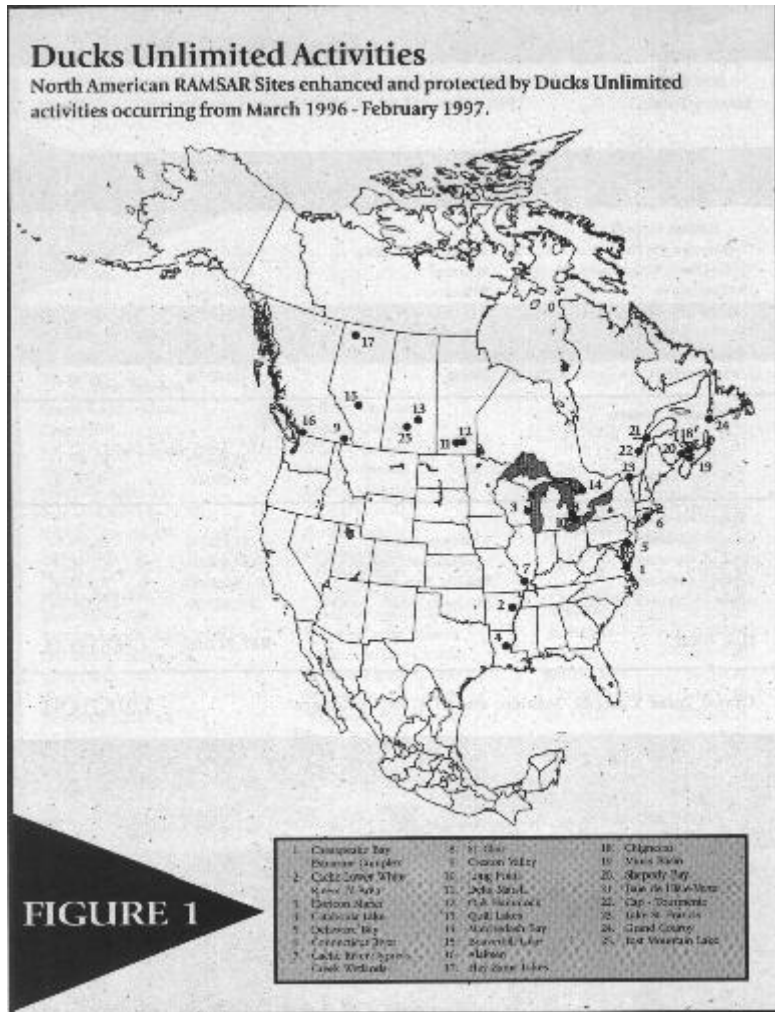
The Largest Undeveloped Coastal Wetland on the Atlantic Coast

Ducks Unlimited's Lowcountry Initiative is an internationally important wetlands conservation and perpetual management effort undertaken in coastal South Carolina. The Lowcountry Initiative provides a unique opportunity to protect wetland and upland habitats in perpetuity through conservation easements on private land. Over 19,422

hectares have been protected so far via easements and acquisitions by Ducks Unlimited and its partners in the ACE Basin alone. The ACE basin, which takes its name from the confluence of the Ashepoo, Combahee, and Edisto Rivers, is recognized as the flagship project for the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. A National Estuarine Research Reserve and a National Wildlife Refuge are located within the ACE Basin project area.

Major habitats within the ACE Basin include salt, brackish, and tidal freshwater marshes, old rice fields, barrier islands, cypress and hardwood forested wetlands, alluvial and blackwater rivers, pocosin swamps, pine savannas, and upland hardwood forests. Migratory shorebirds, waterfowl, raptors, and neotropical songbirds use this area in great numbers.

Ducks Unlimited and our partners hope to propose that this area be designated as a Wetland of International Importance in the future.



Ducks Unlimited, Inc.
One Waterfowl Way
Memphis, TN 38120
USA

Ducks Unlimited Canada
Oak Hammock Marsh
P.O.Box 1160
Stonewall, Manitoba,
Canada, R1C 2Z0

Ducks Unlimited de Mexico
P.O.Box 776
Monterey, N.L.
Mexico 6400

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