

CONSERVATION UPDATE

DU's Texas program continued to roll in FY2016 with just over 6,000 acres of conservation delivery and just over \$3 million in conservation expenditures. A cost of \$500 per acre for wetland restoration and enhancement is pretty efficient.

Private land efforts through the long-standing Texas Prairie Wetlands Project provided the bulk of the project acres. It continues to be DU's flagship program for habitat delivery at a landscape scale, and we re-signed the multi-agency agreement with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Natural Resource Conservation Service to continue this program through 2021.



Private land efforts are also underway in the Texas Panhandle, where we are partnering with TPWD, USFWS, and the Playa Lakes Joint Venture to restore playa lakes. Our initial efforts will involve about 500 acres of restoration, but plans are already underway to expand the program.

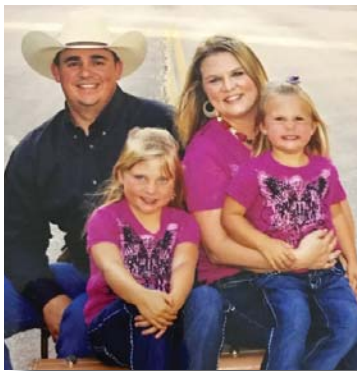
Public land projects move more slowly, ebbing and flowing based on survey/design, permits, funding and other variables. Some years are survey/design and permitting heavy, and some years are construction heavy. FY16 was the former, as we completed engineering plans for projects at Mad Island, Justin Hurst, and J.D. Murphree wildlife management areas on the Texas Coast and also at Richland Creek and Gus Engeling WMAs in east Texas.

In FY17 we will be construction heavy, as we are going to construction on the first of those projects in March 2017, with project completion extending through the summer. We also obligated over \$100,000 of DU state license plate funds for habitat projects across the state, and those projects are currently underway. Projects include efforts in west Texas at Sandia Wetlands near Alpine; the five previously mentioned WMAs; a project at Sheldon Lake State Park near Houston; and Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge near Winnie.

As a sidenote, this past duck season was one of record harvest for many WMA's and duck clubs along the Texas Coast. TPWD winter waterfowl counts showed record numbers of ducks in many areas in Texas. Our conservation efforts touch a lot of people and agencies, but most importantly, they set the table for the ducks.

VOLUNTEER FUNDRAISING REPORT

Volunteer fundraisers are the heartbeat of Ducks Unlimited, and Texas has some of the best. Texas boasts more than 54,000 members, including over 4,200 dedicated volunteers who hosted 205 events in 2016, raising over \$6.9 million to support DU's conservation mission. That gives the Lone Star State bragging rights as the highest fundraising state in the nation!



The Heftons. Photo by Zotz Photography

Matt and Lana Hefton are two of those dedicated volunteers. A duck hunter since age 10, Matt first joined DU after moving to a new town 14 years ago. "We were looking for something we could get involved in, so we went to a meeting and were welcomed in. That's when we realized DU is about much more than duck hunting, and that's when we knew it was for us!" Matt said.

The Heftons are invested in DU because of the family feel and the mission. "People don't always know that DU's habitat conservation does more than protect waterfowl, and I like to educate them on the other benefits of wetlands and our conservation efforts," Matt said.

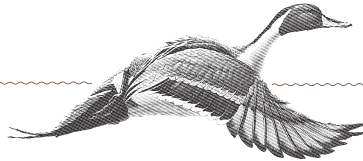
The Burkburnett residents fill several volunteer roles. Matt is the area chairman and Lana the treasurer for the North Central Texas Chapter around Wichita Falls. They are also both national and state delegates, and Matt is on the state campaign committee. When they're not working for the ducks, Matt is a troubleshooter for ONCOR Electric Delivery and Lana is an accountant for the Red River Authority of Texas.

"DU is more than an organization. It's a close-knit family," Matt explained. They keep up the family affair of DU with their two daughters, Griffin (11) and Whitney (8). "Seeing them get involved with DU at this age makes me proud," Matt said. Whitney even wanted her last birthday party to be DU themed.

Leaving something good for the next generation is important to Matt and Lana, and their membership in the Feather Society ensures their support for conservation will go on.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT - BLIND LAKE STRUCTURE

Ducks Unlimited recently completed construction of the Blind Lake Structure near the J.D. Murphree WMA in Jefferson County. This project will improve water-level and vegetation management on over 4,000 acres of coastal wetlands. The project represents a unique partnership among DU, TPWD, Jefferson County Drainage District #6, and private landowners. DU oversaw construction of the structure and procured the bulk of the nearly \$1 million funding via a North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant. The structure was designed and will be maintained by JCDD#6, who also provided nearly \$100,000 in funding for the project. The structure is built on state land, with the location critical to managing the marsh adjacent to the J.D. Murphree WMA. Lastly, the marsh that will benefit from the structure is held by multiple private landowners, who were all in agreement with the project and who agreed on a management strategy for the structure. Like many of our projects, pictures and a few words do not do justice to illuminating the complexity of the conservation partnership and process. Several times the project was stalled and looked to be cancelled. Persistence and compromise won out in the end, with the real winners being the many waterfowl that will benefit from over 4,000 acres of enhanced coastal marsh.



MAJOR SPONSOR REPORT

Congratulations to the Texas State Campaign Committee for leading the nation in new Life Sponsors! Their impressive accomplishments in 2016 included 40 new Life Sponsors, 47 upgrades and 5 new Feather Society commitments. In addition, this team secured more than \$2 million in new cash to benefit DU's highest conservation priorities. Clearly, major sponsors in Texas are making a difference for the future of wetlands, waterfowl and waterfowl hunting.

Mike Hruby is one of those dedicated sponsors. A decoy carving, dog loving, sea duck hunting, former bull rider, former Marine from coastal Texas, Mike's fervor for waterfowling was ignited by his dad. Mike spent his first four years in the blind as the designated retriever. His dad was Area Chairman of the Fort Bend chapter and took Mike with him from a young age.

"For the longest time I was just a regular member," Mike said. In 1997, when he got more involved with DU as a volunteer, he discovered the monthly pay option Life Sponsor pledge. "We're not rich, but people spend their money on things that matter to them, and waterfowl matter to us. I'm a blue collar guy, and anyone can do it just like I did - one month at a time."

Once he paid off that pledge, he and his wife, Theresa, agreed they should upgrade. Now they are Grand Slam Sponsors in Perpetuity/Heritage Sponsors and members of the Feather Society. He and Theresa also volunteer for the ducks. She is the District Chairman for the Fort Bend Chapter, and Mike helps on the committee.

"When you actually learn how DU works on the conservation side, you realize how vital every dollar is. You see DU dollars matched over and over again, leveraged to the maximum for the benefit of waterfowl and hunters," Mike said. "I look at my contributions to Ducks Unlimited as my secondary savings plan. For the money I'm investing in DU, I see returns every fall."



Mike Hruby and his first pacific eider.

Ducks Unlimited conserves, restores, and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people.



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