DUCKS UNLIMITED

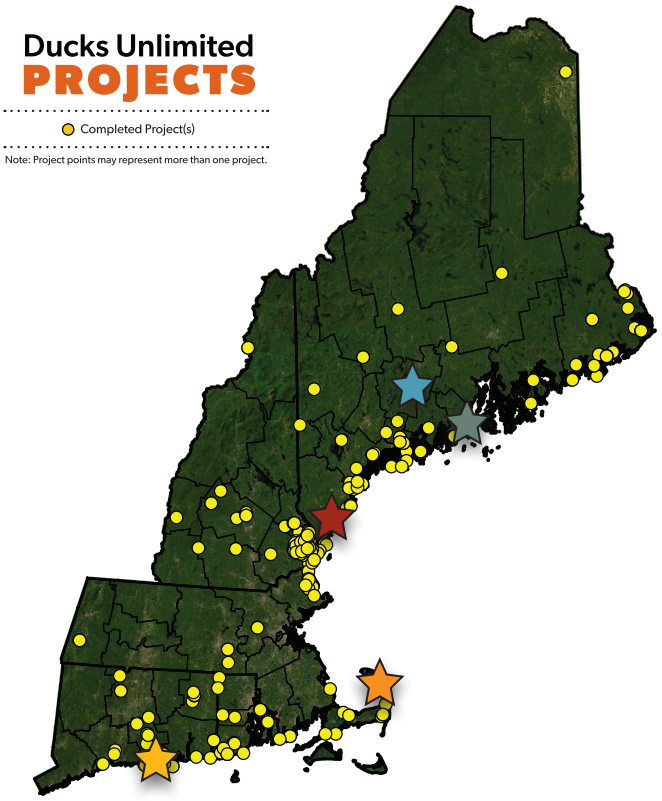
GREAT LAKES /ATLANTIC REGION

New England

2024 STATE CONSERVATION REPORT

REBUILDING WESKEAG SALT MARSH (MAINE)

With funding from the Maine Natural Resource Conservation Program, DU partnered with MDIFW on a $720,000 project to restore 126 acres of salt marsh at the R. Waldo Tyler WMA (Weskeag Marsh) located in South Thomaston. The integrity and long-term persistence of the marsh is dependent on the restoration of its tidal flooding patterns that allow tidal waters to naturally ebb and flow. Historic farming and previous management practices, such as man-made ditch plugs, have led to this rapid degradation of Weskeag Marsh. When tidal water is trapped on the marsh, it causes oversaturation of the marsh peat that ultimately leads to the peat breaking apart and sinking. The habitat restored through this project will support critical breeding and migration areas for waterfowl, waterbirds and shorebirds. In addition, this work will also improve carbon sequestration by reversing peat collapse and creating a stable marsh platform. The work is expected to support the public uses provided by the Weskeag Marsh for Maine residents and visitors by increasing wildlife viewing and hunting opportunities.



TWO PROJECTS RESTORE 304 ACRES OF PUBLIC MARSH (MAINE)

Due to coastal development and the historical production of salt marsh hay, Maine has lost more than 20% of its salt marshes. With less than 22,000 acres of salt marsh remaining in the state, it's imperative to safeguard and rebuild these native habitats, which provide essential wildlife habitat, protect coastal communities from flooding and support recreational opportunities. In 2023, DU and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) completed two salt marsh restoration projects (304 acres) at Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge, which protects over 5,700 acres of undeveloped land along Maine's southern coastline. DU and USFWS staff and volunteers dug runnels, shallow channels that are less than 12 inches deep, with hand tools and cleared collapsed farming ditches to restore the ebb and flow of tidal patterns. The strategic placement of runnels throughout degraded areas of the marsh helps to reduce oversaturation of the marsh surface and support vegetation growth to provide critical nesting habitat for black ducks and the endangered saltmarsh sparrow. Restoration of these marshes also provides critical habitat for birds to rest and forage during the fall and spring migrations.

LITTLE TOGUS ACQUISITION (MAINE)

In early 2024, Ducks Unlimited (DU) purchased the 589-acre Little Togus property in Augusta, Maine. The next steps for this property, which will be protected in perpetuity, are to transfer it to Maine's Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW). Little Togus will be added to the 996-acre Alonzo H. Garcelon Waterfowl Management Area (WMA), expanding the public access to 1,585 acres. The acquired property consists of uplands, forest, 3,050 feet of undeveloped shore frontage, streams, and beaver ponds. This area provides excellent nesting cover and brood rearing habitat for waterfowl, wading birds and shorebirds and other wildlife species.

VEGETATION CLEARED AT HERRING RIVER SALT MARSH (MASSACHUSETTS)

The Herring River Estuary was once a pristine 1,100-acre tidal marsh that linked freshwater to the saltwater bay of Wellfleet Harbor. But in 1909, a dike was built at Chequessett Neck Road that impeded the natural flow of water, altering the estuary's ecology and transforming it from salt marsh to freshwater wetlands. DU is partnering with the Cape Cod National Seashore (NPS), USFWS, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration, Wellfleet Conservation Trust, Friends of Herring River, the town of Wellfleet, and others on a $60 million project to replace the dike with a bridge and implement vegetation management and berm removal to reestablish the salt marsh. The bridge will be equipped with water control structures that allow the incremental return of tidal inundation to the marsh.

With the help of Cape Cod National Seashore, DU completed 126 acres of vegetation clearing in the Duck Harbor basin of the

Herring River estuary. This monumental work has already proven beneficial to the former salt marsh as native cordgrass began to take root during the first growing season. The return of salt water to the Herring River Estuary will continue to amplify the ecological and recreational benefits. The restored tidal flows will also improve water quality, promote shellfish expansion in the estuary and Wellfleet Bay, and allow Atlantic Herring to reach their historic spawning ponds.

HAMMOCK RIVER BRIDGE, TIDE GATES REPLACED (CONNECTICUT)

Thanks to a grant funded by NOAA along with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, DU, Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, the Town of Clinton and the USFWS are partnering on a 185-acre salt marsh restoration project at the Hammock River. An innovative bridge and tide gate structure will replace an outdated bridge, restoring the natural tidal ebb and flow of the river. This will improve the health of the marsh and benefit wetland-dependent wildlife—the Hammock River marsh supports a variety of birds, including the American black duck, Clapper rail and saltmarsh sparrow. Decades of tidal flow restriction due to the undersized bridge and failing tide gates have led to a one-foot elevation deficit in the upstream salt marsh. A sinking marsh combined with improper drainage due to the deteriorated tide gates is drowning native marsh plants and reducing nesting success for marsh birds. The construction of a new bridge, which will be the same width as the river (70 feet), and new tide gates will regulate the flow of water from the river to the salt marsh, allowing managers to control upstream water levels to support breeding birds.

"Our work will protect the surrounding community, allow for the sustainable management of the system for wildlife and ultimately provide the much needed first step in restoring the natural ecosystem of the Hammock River estuary," said DU Regional Biologist Bri Benvenuti.

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

NEW ENGLAND CONSERVATION STAFF

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NEW ENGLAND NUMBERS

2023

- 23 projects
- 396 acres conserved
- $1,179,823 invested

HISTORICAL

- 390 Projects
- 41,396 acres conserved
- $11.5 million invested

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