

# ILLINOIS

great lakes/atlantic region • 2016 state conservation report

## STEWART LAKE PURCHASE TO PROVIDE GREATER WATERFOWL ACCESS

Waterfowl hunters and birders alike will soon have greater access to Stewart Lake, one of the best remaining and least disturbed backwater lakes in the Illinois River Valley.

Located next to Sanganois State Fish and Wildlife Area in a large, wilderness-like area of Mason County, this 1,500-acre shallow lake wetland is an important natural rest area for migrating teal, pintails, mallards and other ducks.

In early 2014 DU purchased 745 acres on the west end of Stewart Lake. In 2015, DU secured purchase agreements to the remaining 800 acres on the east end of Stewart Lake.

DU will donate the west half of Stewart Lake to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources as a new public hunting area. The east end will be donated to the Illinois Audubon Society to become a permanent sanctuary for waterfowl and other migratory birds.

“This is a rare opportunity to acquire and protect a backwater lake in its entirety,” said Eric Schenck, DU manager of conservation programs in Illinois. “Waterfowl hunters and birders share many of the same passions for the outdoors and the same commitment to conservation.”

Stewart Lake is a showcase project of DU’s Big River Initiative. Funding support for the acquisition of Stewart Lake is being provided by Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation and the Grand Victoria Foundation.



*Main: A full 1,500 acres will soon be accessible to hunters and bird watchers on Illinois' Stewart Lake.*

*Inset: Representatives of the Illinois Audubon Society and the Illinois Natural History Survey scan for birds at Stewart Lake in 2015*

## OTHER BIG RIVERS INITIATIVE UPDATES FROM ILLINOIS

**Northwest Illinois — Chillicothe Bottoms:** This 232-acre property, located along the Illinois River in Peoria County, will be the first DU project completed under the Big Rivers Initiative. Several improvements have been made at Chillicothe Bottoms this past year to better manage wetland habitat, control invasive spread of phragmites and provide public access. Volunteers from Peoria Audubon Society are documenting bird use and helping with stewardship. DU plans to donate the property to the Peoria Audubon Society but will continue to be a partner in maintaining habitat at Chillicothe Bottoms by permanently protecting the site with a DU conservation easement.

**Northeast Illinois — Morainal Wetlands:** DU assisted the McHenry County Conservation District with the acquisition of nine acres of wetlands in the recently established boundaries of the Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge. DU also hosted a “Morainal Wetlands Experience” at the conservation district’s Glacial Park. The experience provided DU volunteers, members and guests an opportunity to learn more about wetland and waterfowl habitat conservation in northeastern Illinois. Visitors also were able to visit a 55-acre Morainal wetland restoration project which DU supported with funding from a North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant.



**Southern Illinois — Oakwood Bottoms:** Working with our partner the U.S. Forest Service, DU has made Oakwood Bottoms in Jackson County more attractive to migrating ducks. DU contracted with local forestry consultants to thin 390 acres of bottomland hardwood habitat and to create small openings at Oakwood Bottoms, which is a “greentree” management area along the Big Muddy River on the Shawnee National Forest in Jackson County. On Dec. 11, 20 people participated in the “Oakwood Bottoms Experience” event, which featured a dinner, presentations on the project and the chance to hunt the flooded timber. The event was DU’s way to showcase the work done at Oakwood Bottoms.

**Statewide Illinois—Upper Peoria Lake:** Under the Big Rivers Initiative, DU has been restoring a complex of wetland habitats on the east side of Upper Peoria Lake in Woodford County. The centerpiece

of this work is Jenkins Marsh, a 246-acre property that DU plans to restore and transfer to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. This past year DU also completed an 83-acre wetland and water quality demonstration project under the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) as part of this strategic wetland conservation effort.

## JENKINS MARSH/VANZELST HABITAT RETURNING

DU’s Jenkins Marsh/VanZelst Farm project in Illinois is on its way to becoming an outstanding natural area and fantastic habitat area for ducks that migrate through the Illinois River Valley.

One of DU’s major projects of the Big Rivers Initiative, DU in 2010 purchased the 246-acre property with funding support from Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, Grand Victoria Foundation and Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

DU’s goals are to restore the site as a semi-permanent emergent marsh to provide habitat for ducks during their fall and spring migration. DU biologists and engineers are developing a plan to restore 100 acres of emergent marsh habitat on the property. An additional \$500,000 in support is needed to complete that restoration. DU’s plan is to transfer ownership of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources for long-term protection and stewardship.

Meanwhile, part of the former farmland is starting to rejuvenate itself. A portion of the land now features wet meadow habitat associated with natural springs that flow from the toe of the bluff that overlooks the Illinois River Valley. This unique type of wetland is called a “fen” and is very uncommon in the river valley.



*The Jenkins Marsh project in Illinois already is starting to return to a natural state.*

ducks unlimited  
**PROJECTS**

- Completed    ★ Featured
- DU priority landscape

Note: Project points may represent more than one project.

Chillicothe Bottoms

Morainal Wetlands

Upper Peoria Lake

Stewart Lake

Oakwood Bottoms

2015  
accomplishments

- 5 Projects
- 2,733 Acres Conserved
- 4,283 Acres of Technical Assistance
- \$596,450 Invested

**MEET YOUR ILLINOIS CONSERVATION STAFF**



*Eric* Schenck, an Illinois native, has nearly 30 years of experience in wildlife conservation, 22 of which have been with Ducks Unlimited. Eric's educational background includes a bachelor of science degree in wildlife management from the University of Idaho and a master's degree in forest science from Yale University. Eric previously worked as director of conservation for the Wildlife Management Institute and chief of environmental services for the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks. Prior to being named regional biologist for Illinois, he served as DU's manager of agricultural policy in Washington, D.C.

**Contact:** 309.647.5651 • [eschenck@ducks.org](mailto:eschenck@ducks.org)

## DU AWARDED CLIMATE ADAPTATION GRANT TO CONSERVE BOTTOMLAND HARDWOODS

Ducks Unlimited has been awarded a \$250,000 grant from the Wildlife Conservation Society to help Illinois' habitat adapt to climate change.

The grant will allow DU to implement adaptive conservation strategies to counter the effects of climate change on bottomland hardwood habitats within the Central Hardwood Region of Southern Illinois and Southwest Indiana. The grant pays for the restoration, enhancement and improvement of 1,225 acres of bottomland forest and wetland habitat. The U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be DU's partners.

The project's goal: Make wet bottomland hardwood forests along rivers more resilient to flooding that is expected to increase in frequency, depth and duration because of climate change. Of concern to DU is the future of pin oaks, swamp white oaks, pecans and other nut producing trees that grow in the floodplain, which are important food sources to migrating waterfowl.

DU also is paying attention to potential changes in waterfowl migration patterns that may result in ducks wintering farther north, which would place a greater need on the conservation of bottomland hardwood habitat within the Central Hardwood Region.



### A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Illinois is part of Ducks Unlimited's 21-state Great Lakes/Atlantic Region, a diverse landscape of habitats ranging from Prairie Potholes in the Midwest to coastal estuaries in the Atlantic Flyway.

Waterfowl know no boundaries. Because of that, conservation work done in Illinois in 2015 was a pivotal part of the overall wetland management strategy DU has established based on conservation science.

Ducks Unlimited had a record year in terms of support and acres conserved. Here in the Great Lakes/Atlantic Region, DU in 2015 used private donations and public funds to invest \$27,193,473 in conservation projects. That strong support and enabled our biologists and engineers to deliver focused, effective habitat conservation on 12,686 acres of wetlands.

The work contained in this report reflects Ducks Unlimited's commitment to Illinois. We appreciate your support and are eager to build on this success in 2016.



David Brakhage  
GLARO Director of Operations

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



**GREAT LAKES /  
ATLANTIC REGION**

1220 Eisenhower Place, Ann Arbor, MI 48108  
734.623.2000 • 734.623.2035 (Fax)