



#### Special points of interest:

- Region 3 Planning Meeting
- National Convention Highlights
- Big Slough WPA Project
- Minnesotans at the National Convention

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Summer-Fall 2018

Official Newsletter of Minnesota Ducks Unlimited

## UPPER LIGHTNING LAKE ILLUMINATION



Above: Ducks and hundreds of sandpipers crowd the bottom of Upper Lightning Lake last summer as the lake was at maximum drawdown with most of the lake having water only inches deep.

Right: A tracked ATV shows the height of the bulrushes growing on the lakebed during last summer as the lake blossomed with vegetation.



**More about the Upper Lightning Lake Project on page 4**



## State Chair's Chatter



Ruth Hoefs, State Chair

### Your Minnesota DU State Committee

#### State Chair

Ruth Hoefs  
LeCenter, MN  
612-756-1500  
[rhoefs@mnducksvolunteer.org](mailto:rhoefs@mnducksvolunteer.org)

#### State Council Chair

Brian Ross  
Baxter, MN  
218-825-0996  
[bross@mnducksvolunteer.org](mailto:bross@mnducksvolunteer.org)

#### State Chair Elect

Kyle Thaemlitz  
Lakefield, MN  
507-840-0550  
[kylethaemlitz@gmail.com](mailto:kylethaemlitz@gmail.com)

#### State Treasurer

Dan Scheffler  
Dundas, MN  
507-291-0311  
[danielscheffler1@gmail.com](mailto:danielscheffler1@gmail.com)

#### State Volunteer Recruitment Coord.

Gordon Winstanley  
Minneapolis, MN  
231-642-0052  
[gwinstanley.ducks@gmail.com](mailto:gwinstanley.ducks@gmail.com)

#### State Convention Chairs

Gordon & Loree Winstanley  
Minneapolis, MN  
231-642-0052  
[gwinstanley.ducks@gmail.com](mailto:gwinstanley.ducks@gmail.com)

#### State Campaign Chair

Jim Demgen  
East Gull Lake, MN  
218-829-7438  
[james.demgen@gmail.com](mailto:james.demgen@gmail.com)

We finally went from winter to summer and skipped spring. In my area, it was awesome to see all the waterfowl that took a layover in my area due to the frozen north.

I had a wonderful time with DU CEO Dale Hall the middle of May. Dale was here for a Critical Conservation Club (CCC) event in Minneapolis, had breakfast with volunteers at Fulton Brewery, had lunch with the Garrison Volunteers and praised them for their great job with putting on the largest Ice Fishing Contest, and attended the CCC event at the historic Anderson Boat Museum in Nisswa. It was a day that I will never forget. To all the great volunteers that we have in Minnesota, Dale was very impressed with and enjoyed his time with you.

The DU 81<sup>st</sup> National Convention was exciting knowing that we are going to go above our 'Rescue our Wetlands' goal campaign of \$2 Billion. We also had the inaugural Ducks Unlimited Wings Over Wetlands Celebration Dinner. I know other volunteers that I talked with from across the United States loved the event. MN was one of the top 10 states in 18 different categories. We also learned the Dale Hall, DU CEO, will be stepping down after 10 years at the helm. He will be outgoing at our next National Convention in Hawaii along with DU President Rogers Hoyt. We will miss Dale as he came on when DU was struggling and help DU get to where it is today.

We had a Region 3 workshop at Trapper's Landing, organized by Dave Flink our Region 3 Flyway Senior Vice President. Region 3 is made up of Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota (see article on Page3). The volunteers that attended from out of State and anyone from Minnesota that had not been at Trapper's were impressed with the facilities and all they have to offer. The staff at Trapper's and the Arnold Family's hospitality was overwhelming. The Region 3 meetings had great information that the volunteers were excited to take back to their area and work on. Great job by everyone involved with putting on the presentations. While at Trapper's we also had our Summer Council meeting. I was surprised at the great turnout of volunteers we had and I want to thank everyone that took time to attend the meeting. We had a few out-of-staters join us and they were impressed with our meeting.

Goals I want to see us as MN Volunteers work on is our state structure, getting the tools to the volunteers that they need so they know what their volunteer position is accountable for. Getting more volunteers involved, as they don't have to be duck hunters, we are a conservation organization, we conserve wetlands and grasslands for all of nature's animals from ducks, geese, deer, pheasants, butterflies and many more animals. With our conservation practices, we also conserve our water so there is clean water for us and for generations to come. I want to increase our event income so we are able to conserve more acres and increase our major donors. Most of all we want to have fun doing this and getting people in the door and support our mission - "DU conserves, restores, and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people".

Have a Great and Safe Summer and enjoy all the acres DU has conserved.



Ruth with Dale Hall and Regional Director John Marx at Fulton Brewery.



Here is Ruth enjoying the "watercraft" at the Trapper's Landing Region 3 Planning Meeting.





## DU Region 3 Planning Meeting

The DU Region 3 Planning Meeting was held in late June at Trapper's Landing Lodge on Leech Lake. It included senior volunteers and staff from all the Region 3 States of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. The meeting was spearheaded and hosted by DU Flyway Senior Vice President, Dave Flink (seen kicking off the meetings in the photo to the right) with the theme being learning about the Big Three: 1) Fill the Halls, 2) Increase Bronze Sponsors, and 3) Recruit more senior volunteers.

It began with a Thursday night fish fry where folks could meet and greet and enjoy some deep fried walleye prepared by the Reed's Outdoor Outfitter's crew. The work started on Friday with morning meetings that covered: effective leadership/state officer responsibilities, Volunteer Awareness, state sponsor program, special events, and online raffle opportunities. After lunch, attendees could choose from a wide range of activities including golf, fishing, shopping in Walker, or sporting clays at a local shooting course. A Happy Hour at the lodge patio followed by pontoon rides and a bonfire marshmallow roast were included in the evening festivities.

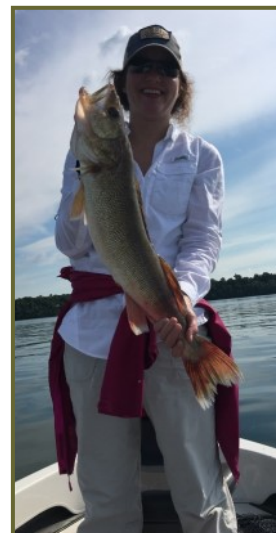
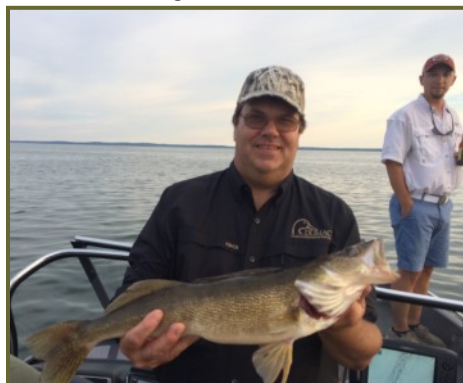
Saturday had more morning meetings that included a presentation about the DU conservation projects occurring in Region 3 and discussions about volunteer recruitment, state campaign programs, and state policy teams. A recap discussion was included at



A fish-eye view of the DU fish fry area on the left and the Trapper's Landing Lodge on the right.

the end to see what folks gleaned from the meetings. Everyone felt the meeting was very successful and took some new knowledge home to help raise money for the ducks. After the meetings, a BBQ and tour of the Reeds Distribution Center was provided followed by a gun fitting and trap shooting event with Browning and Benelli factory Reps. More opportunities for fishing, pontoon tours, and another marshmallow roast were held Saturday evening.

The planning event was not all work as can be seen from the photographs below. From left, volunteers enjoying Friday evening Happy Hour, incoming State Chair, Kyle Thaemlitz and his "guide" RD Andrew Limmer, show off a nice walleye, and Amy Batson, DU Chief Fundraising Officer shows she can fish too.



*Planning Meetings like this have helped make Region 3 one of the top DU Regions in the Nation.*



## Upper Lightning Lake Illumination

Upper Lightning Lake, in Otter Tail County, has been illuminated by a large Ducks Unlimited Living Lakes Initiative project, so is receiving considerable attention. The lake has had a similar history to many shallow lakes in Minnesota and Iowa. It was known as being a great duck hunting lake in the 1950s through the 1970s, but by the early 1980s it started experiencing problems with higher water levels and less duck use. Because of the habitat degradation caused by high water and carp, the lake then got the attention of the MN DNR to try to fix the problem.



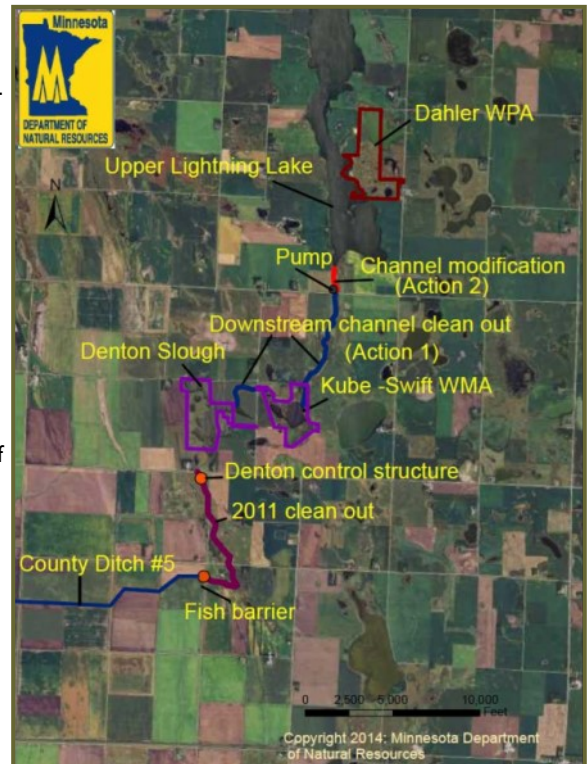
reduced by forcing water to flow downstream. By the late 2000s, the DNR was able to generate interest in lowering the water levels, but were not able to move the project forward because of limited funds. With the advent of the Outdoor Heritage Fund from the Legacy amendment in 2008, funds were available for lake enhancement projects so they contacted DU to design the project.

Before the project on Upper Lightning Lake could begin, however, the downstream flooding concerns needed to be addressed and a fish barrier needed to be created to prevent carp from reinfesting the lake after it was drawn down. To take care of these issues, DU worked with the DNR on a downstream project at the Kube-Swift Wildlife Management Area (see map to right). The Denton Slough project on the Kube-Swift WMA was also designed and built by DU and included a ditch cleanout downstream of Denton Slough, with a velocity fish barrier. The Denton Slough project was completed in 2011 and was drawn down in 2012 through 2013. The drawdown resulted in a resurgence of emergent vegetation resulting in redheads and canvasbacks returning to use the slough for nesting (see photo below from May 6, 2018).

With the downstream concerns addressed, DNR and DU moved to work on Upper Lightning Lake. The project was designed in two stages, with the first stage (Action 1) being cleanout of the channel from Upper Lightning Lake to Denton Slough, including replacement of some



DNR pursued water level management and Wildlife Lake Designation in the early 1990s and again in the mid-2000s. By 2006, the lake was four feet over its ordinary high water (OHW) level of 1084.2 and 100+ year-old oaks were dying along the shoreline due to the flooding. One problem was Upper Lightning Lake was at the upper end of the watershed and downstream property owners were concerned about flooding if water levels in the lake were



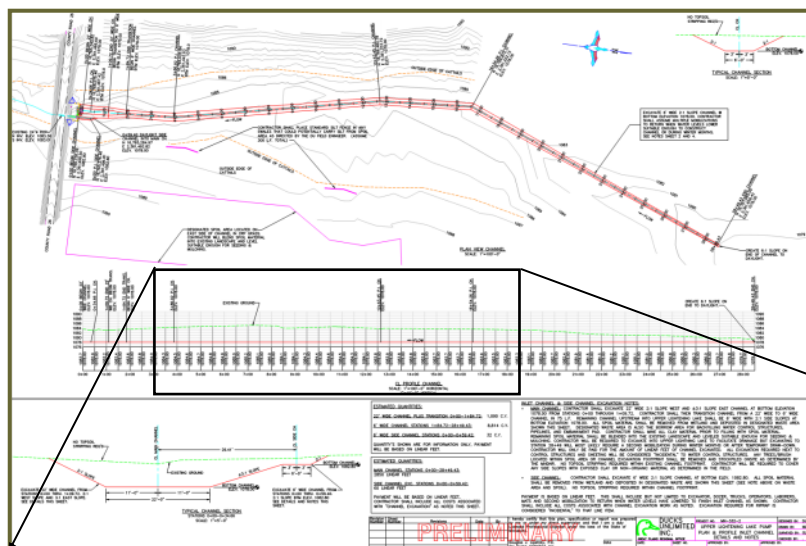
culverts under field crossings to allow better water flow. The material cleaned out of the channel was hauled up to nearby farm fields and spread out on the fields. The second stage (Action 2) was a channel modification from Upper Lightning Lake to the location of the water control and pump structures at County Highway 26. The channel modification extended out into the lake as seen in the

Left: Canvasback and redhead pairs on Denton Slough this past spring as the nesting season began.



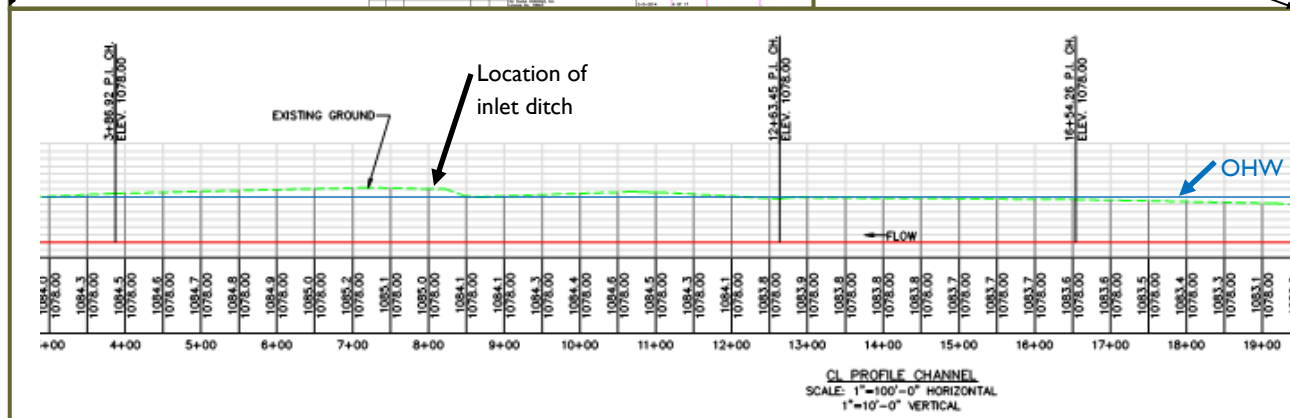


## Upper Lightning Lake Illumination (Continued)



project engineering plans to the left. Again, materials from the channel excavation were hauled to upland locations in nearby fields and spread out on the fields. The channel modification was needed to drawdown the lake as far as possible and to clean out the sediment that had filled the outlet channel over the years.

The blowup below shows a cross-section of the outlet. From the cross-section, it is plain to see why the lake level rose to above its OHW, as the bottom of the channel in one location is at almost 1086, two feet above the OHW. It turns out the reason the lake kept rising was the outlet channel was filling with silt and other sediments; this coupled with the growth of non-native, invasive hybrid cattails resulted in a constriction of the channel and the much reduced outflow. Not by coincidence, the highest



Below: Channel cleanout work progressing on Upper Lightning Lake. Note the tracked dump trucks required to haul the silt and muck out to adjacent fields.



point in the channel is also where a field ditch that drained wetlands in fields to the west entered the channel, depositing eroded topsoil into the channel.

Construction of the outlet structure began during the early summer of 2016 after the lake was partially dewatered by cleaning out the channel to the culvert under County Highway 26. The outlet structure included a large grated inlet structure with two 5,000-gallon per minute pumps



Above: Construction begins on the control structure along County Highway 26 for the Upper Lightning Lake outlet.



## Upper Lightning Lake Illumination (Continued)



Above: The two bay inlet structure being installed. Note the worker in the inlet area on the left for scale.

to pump water to the outlet bay which was connected with a pipe to the culvert under County Highway 26. The outlet bay also had stop logs to control outflow during normal outflow operation and prevent backflow from the outlet bay, when the pumps are running.

The drawdown continued after the control structure was complete, with the pumps turned on to take the water down to the planned drawdown elevation of 1078 feet. In addition, a nearby small lake, known as Dahler Slough, was temporarily pumped to Upper Lightning Lake in an attempt to kill fish in this upstream lake as well. The Upper Lightning pumps were run into the fall, though by December, skim ice was forming and the pumps needed

stopped. The deepest part of the lake at the north end still had three to four feet of water present, so there was concern that the drawdown would not provide the needed fish kill. During late winter, DNR shallow lake specialists drilled holes in the ice to test the oxygen levels. They found oxygen levels below 2 parts per million, which should kill the carp and bullheads.

The DNR staff assessment was correct as 2017 spring thaw revealed hundreds of dead fish (see photograph below). A July

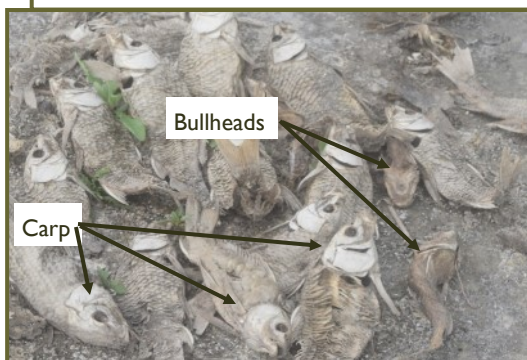


Above: April thaw revealed the mud flats in areas that have not seen air for several years. Note the lack of vegetation.



2017 project tour for the editor by DU Engineering Technician Matt Olson revealed all the dead fish were carp and bullheads and, not only hundreds of them, there were thousands of dead carp and bullhead ringing the north basin of the lake (see photos below). Interestingly, the fish had all moved to the north basin because the southern portions of the lake had lower water levels and less oxygen earlier than the north. Also interesting, was there were no game fish viewed by the editor during his tour. The drawdown appears to have been a major success for killing rough fish.

Below and right: Dead carp and bullheads litter the shore of the north basin of the lake.





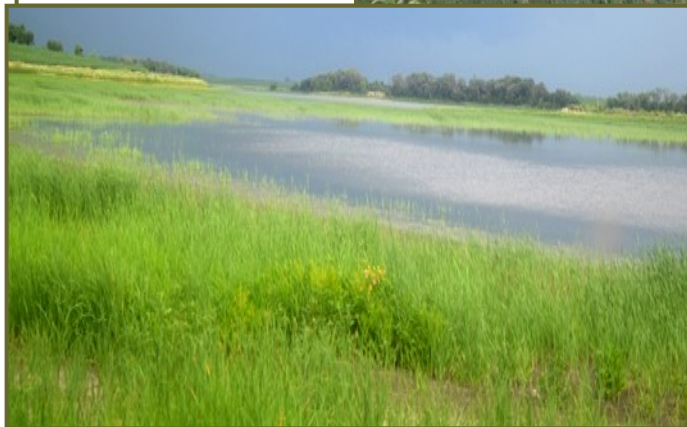
## Upper Lightning Lake Illumination (Continued)



Above: The south end of the lake had fields of soft-stem bulrush. Right: Hard-stem bulrush repopulates a point on the west shore of lake. Below: Cattails sprout to vegetate the deeper portion of the lake basin.



The vegetation response to the drawdown has been nothing short of amazing. Fields of bulrushes were growing by mid July when the editor took his tour. Some hardstem bulrush plants were over seven feet tall and were re-establishing their historic beds along the points found on the lake. Cattails were growing up farther out in the lake basin, but they were already being flooded as the water levels had risen some with the summer rains. The water was crystal clear and muskgrass (chara) could be seen growing in the three to four inches of water along the shore. Smartweed and a smorgasbord of other



waterfowl foods such as arrowhead (also known as duck potato), sago pondweed, water plantain, and giant burreed were growing in the drained lake bottom,

The ducks response was also amazing as mid-July had hundreds of puddle ducks using the lake even though the much of the water was sheet water (see photos to left). Thousands of shorebirds were also using the shallow water to feed on the myriad of small invertebrates. The duck use continued into early fall as blue-winged and green-winged teal began staging on the lake for the fall migration.

***The vegetation response to the drawdown has been nothing short of amazing!***



Above: Ducks fly away from the track ATV and can be seen just below the horizon as the sandpipers continue to feed.

Right: Pintails and gadwalls get up and fly away in a clip from the editor's video.



By the duck opener, there were hundreds of teal using the lake, with several mallards as well. The editor was lucky enough to get invited to hunt a duck club at the south end of the lake for opening weekend. Fall weather had been warm and stormy up to opening day. The temps had stayed in the 60s and 70s, so the teal were still around and using the lake. The opening day hunt was "epic" as





## Upper Lightning Lake Illumination (continued)



**Above: Wet Dog, Good Hunt!** Fritz the DU Cattails Newsletter dog takes a break as he waits for his next retrieve on Opening Day. He had quite a work out with the thick vegetation and heavy mud in the shallow bay.

numerous flocks of teal and other ducks continuously worked around the lake. Opening day included rain much of the night before and a heavy downpour just before dawn. We were hunting a very shallow bay on the southeast corner that the teal had been using for feeding, and they wanted to get back into it. It was almost continuous action as the flocks of teal came over the point we were on and worked back into our decoys. Eight guys took 46 ducks by 10 am, with most being



**Above: A marsh wren** flitted around our blind on opening day. Note, the bulrushes are as wide as the wren.

blue-winged teal. The bag also included several green-winged teal, two drake mallards, a drake redhead, two gadwalls, and five shovelers. We were hiding in the new vegetation consisting of soft-stem bulrush and a few cattails in an area that was devoid of vegetation only one year before. We also got to enjoy all the other birds using the lake including marsh wrens, herons, greater yellow-legs, and an American bittern.



**Above: A Fergus Falls Greenwing** holds a couple of the teal he helped retrieve.

So how was the lake this spring? As you can imagine, it was filled with breeding ducks. The editor visited the lake in early May and found dozens of pairs of blue-winged teal using the lake, with a pair every 50 yards along the shore and a courting group chasing a female. Several hundred coots were using the lake indicating the submerged vegetation was abundant. There were fifty bluebills using the lake feeding on invertebrate and signaling the tail end of the migration was at hand. Pairs of ringbills, redheads, and a few lone male ruddy ducks indicated the diving ducks were using the lake for nesting.

The effectiveness of DU's lake enhancements are unparalleled in the state as illuminated by the Upper Lightning Lake project. Although the projects are expensive and large, we need more of these projects to restore Minnesota's prominence as a waterfowl breeding and hunting mecca.

**Duck use  
was heavy  
this  
spring.**



**Above: A courting flight of blue-winged teal** take off in chase of a unpaired female. **Right: A pair of redheads, a male ruddy duck, and several coots** use the south portion of the lake.





## Minnesota Artists' Corner—Sue Mooney

Sue Mooney loves to see people laugh. During the 13 years this self-taught artist managed group homes for clients with severe and profound developmentally disabilities, she was known to stand on chairs and dance to make clients smile. Plus, she worked with patients who have HIV/AIDS for 18 years to get the medical care they needed. A co-worker of Mooney's saw a photo of her pup wearing goggles suggested they'd make great greeting cards. Not long after, Mooney and her Yorkies chose a life of art and adventure and Wild Barking Moon was born.

Mooney built a whole new life selling her art at shows and online. She definitely loves to see shock give way to snorts of laughter. She still remembers the moment when a toddler kissed one of her dog portraits square on the lips. And she's continued pursuing her dreams – letting them grow along the way, expanding from portraits that people say truly capture the depth of animals to creating equally vibrant pictures of cities, landscapes, and those animals' humans. All of it includes Mooney's signature take on the world: a POV that is at once witty, compassionate, and genuine.

Artwork provided courtesy of Sue Mooney and Wild Wings, LLC, Lake City, Minnesota.  
800-445-4833  
[www.wildwings.com](http://www.wildwings.com)

Right: Mooney's portrait paintings of labs shows her unique style and comic relief. We included labs because of the connection to waterfowl, but she also does a wide variety of other subjects.





## Project Hall of Fame—Big Slough WPA

Ducks Unlimited has been conserving habitat in Minnesota since 1984. There are literally hundreds of DU projects scattered across Minnesota. In fact, many of the water control structures on waterfowl production areas (WPAs), national wildlife refuges (NWRs), and state wildlife management areas (WMAs) were designed and built as DU projects. This column is a regular feature devoted to describing some of these older projects.

The Big Slough WPA is a large land tract of 812 acres, located just southwest of Slayton and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). It is also adjacent to the Big Slough WMA, another large tract managed by the MNDNR. Together, the two units encompass the Big Slough basin, which is 610 acres in size. DU designed and constructed a large water control structure to manage water for the entire basin because the main water course runs



Above: The Big Slough WPA was featured in a recent article about live-stock grazing contracts on WPAs so we decided to feature it here.



between the two public land tracts. The Big Slough watershed is large, covering 38.5 square miles, so the structure is large and stores approximately 1,400 acre-feet at full pool.



Above: A downstream view of the upper structure shows the large size of the 90-foot weir crest and the 60-foot catwalk across the downstream ditch.

Like many shallow lake basins in southern Minnesota, Big Slough was ditched in the early 1900s with the ditch roughly in the middle of the basin. Attempts were made to farm the basin, but the frequent flooding made that hard so the land owners sold the land

to public wildlife agencies that work to restore waterfowl habitat. Those agencies look to DU to assist with those restorations and that is how DU got involved.



The DU water control structure actually consists of two sheet-pile weir structures, one main, three-sided structure with a 90 feet of crest and the down-

Left: This June 2004 photograph shows water flowing over the upper structure.





## Project Hall of Fame—Big Slough WPA (Continued)

stream one with 30 feet of crest. The combination drops water 10 feet to the channel bottom. The upper larger weir contains two stop log bays for water level control and drops the water five feet.

The project was designed by DU engineer Doug Lipetzky in early 1996. Construction began in September 1996 and was completed in spring 1997. It involved 13,700 cubic yards of embankment construction, 570 tons of rock rip-rap, and 3,587 square feet of steel sheet piling for the weir structures. The general contractor was Minion Excavating, Inc., with subcontractor Conrad Heggeseth actually doing the work. The project cost only \$121,739, small potatoes compared to the cost of today's structures. DU paid most of the cost of the structures, including the design and permitting. In the fall of 1997, DU restored nine other wetlands on the WPA, adding 33 acres of wetland breeding habitat at a cost of an additional \$17,831.

In 2003, USFWS/DNR requested a mechanical fish barrier (hanging vertical rods on horizontal bars with screen above) on the downstream side of the lower structure to prevent carp from making it upstream. This work cost \$49,120, with DU bidding and contracting the work. Conrad Heggeseth again did the work.

This project is very successful in that it creates many acres of prime waterfowl nesting, molting, and migration habitat. In fact, the DU editor visited Big Slough during the spring of 2016 and found hundreds of snow geese, Canada geese, and ducks of all types using Big Slough as a migration way stop. Big Slough also provides great access for fall hunting with many places to hunt because it is such a large basin and has an access road with boat landing that extends to almost the middle of the basin.



Above: This photo taken a few years after the structures were installed, shows both of the weirs and their position on the channel.



Above: The work on the mechanical fish barrier included adding vertical I-beams to attach the horizontal bars, screens, and catwalk across the top of the structure.



***The Big Slough project shows that restoration of these drained shallow lake basins in southern MN creates great duck habitat.***

The completed fish screen addition to the downstream structure is shown above in a late fall 2003 and in operation in the summer of 2004 to the right.



## Gull Lake Critical Conservation Club Event a Huge Success



Two of the event hosts, Andy Anderson (above) and Adam Arnold (below) welcomed the attendees and discussed his plan for the future of the Gull Lake Critical Conservation Club event.



The event generated over \$150,000 in pledges and revenue, making it a 2018 Diamond Event and helping the Paul Bunyan Chapter reach the President's Elite Chapter. Next year's event should be bigger and better.

The third annual Gull Lake Critical Conservation Club was a great success with a larger group of nearly 80 folks attending at Anderson's Boat Museum in Nisswa. The event was hosted by Andy Anderson, Adam Arnold, and Jim Demgen with assistance by several Paul Bunyan Chapter volunteers.

DU CEO Dale Hall was the keynote speaker and, as he always does, gave an inspirational talk about the need for DU conservation programs. The highlight of the evening was the live auction as auctioneer Cary Aasness auctioned everything from vintage boat rides on Gull Lake to trips to the Fiji Islands.



Above: Dale CEO giving the keynote talk. Below: Auctioneer Cary Aasness calling and taking bids.



## Volunteer Spotlight—Doug Claseman and David Meyer

This edition's volunteers were suggested by MNDNR Sauk Rapids Area Wildlife Manager, Fred Bengtson, as a way to recognize their help to MNDNR. About three years ago, Doug Claseman and Dave Meyer, Rogers/St. Michaels' Full Choke Chapter members, approached Fred Bengtson to offer their assistance with the MN-DNR/DU Pelican Lake Enhancement Project near St. Michael after a project tour. It just so happened that about that time the water control structure and pumping facility had just been completed and efforts were underway to drawdown the 3,800 acre lake. One issue that DNR staff were facing was periodic cleaning of a grated entrance to an underground pipeline where lake water flows downstream.

Because of the large volume of water leaving the lake, a sizeable amount of debris consisting of lake vegetation and driftwood was finding its way downstream and piling up at the "slant box". Doug and Dave came to the rescue and set up a weekly schedule to visit and clean the slant box, freeing up a sizeable amount of time so DNR Wildlife staff could work on other land and lake management issues. For three years now, both men have dependably been keeping the water flowing such that the lake is down nearly 5 feet with 3 feet to go.

The results of their efforts are quite noticeable. Lake water quality has improved dramatically over the past couple years and thick beds of important aquatic vegetation that waterfowl depend on is everywhere in the lake. The number of breeding and migrating waterfowl using Pelican Lake has also noticeably increased. Beyond that, hundreds of species of other wildlife are benefiting from this project. The area has become a birding destination.

With Doug and Dave's help, the DNR will keep the lake at a low point for 2 years and then allow it to come back to approximately the level it is at today. Future drawdowns may happen every 10 years, but work at the water control structure and slant box will continue and both men are determined to keep helping and pulling their weight.

MN-DNR and Ducks Unlimited thanks Doug and Dave for their outstanding volunteer assistance!

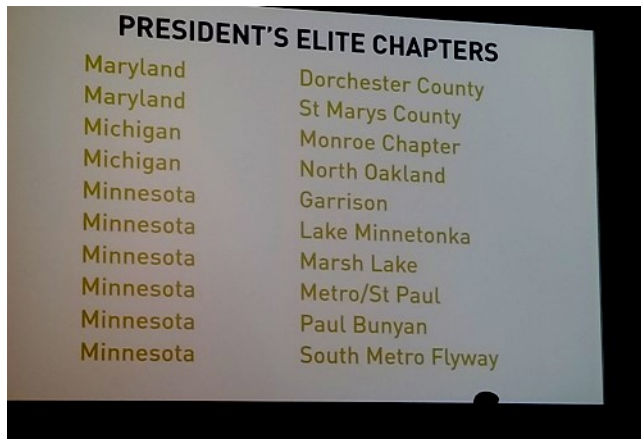


Here are Doug Claseman and David Meyer on the water control Structure at Pelican Lake.

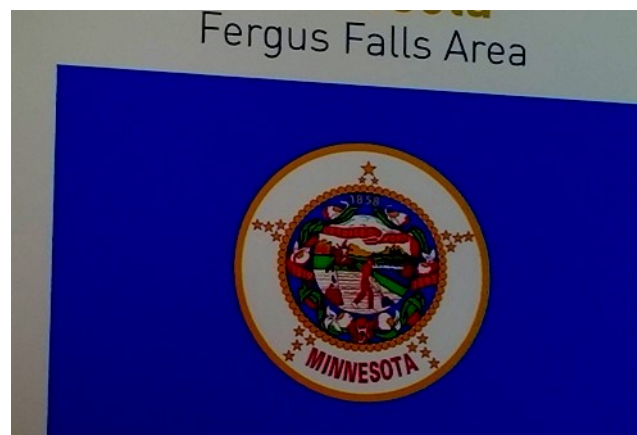




## HIGHLIGHTS AT THE DU NATIONAL CONVENTION



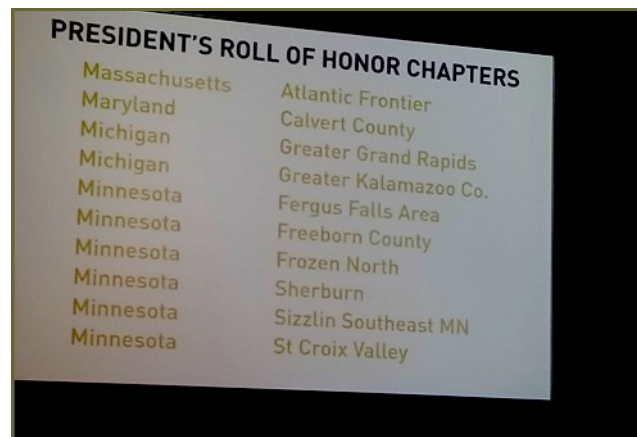
Minnesota was well represented with six President's Elite Chapters who each raised between \$100,000 and \$250,000.



Minnesota had a top ten Greenwing Event in the country by the Fergus Falls Area Chapter.



Minnesota had four Diamond Events, a level where each event raises over \$100,000 in cash and pledges for the ducks.



The Roll of Honor Chapter recognized for Minnesota for six chapters that raised between \$65,000 and \$100,000.



DU National Conventions are well known for securing U.S. Presidential Cabinet members as key-note speakers. Here Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke is welcomed by DU CEO Dale Hall, President Roger's Hoyt, and Chairman of the Board, Paul Bonderson.



DU CEO Dale Hall interviewed FedEx CEO Fredrick Smith about how successful organizations work to be strong and what the future may bring for FedEx and DU.



MINNESOTA  
DUCKSUNLIMITED

6101 Kaymar Drive  
Edina, MN 55436

Phone: 952-820-8174  
Email: mndu@mtn.org

**ducks.org**

For articles and inserts, please  
send to Cattails Editor:

Brian Ross  
14380 Memorywood Drive  
Baxter, MN 56425

Phone: 218-825-0996  
E-mail:

bross@mnducksvolunteer.org



Cattails



*You are Ducks Unlimited*

**Ducks Unlimited is the world's largest non-profit organization dedicated to conserving North America's continually disappearing waterfowl habitats. Established in 1937, Ducks Unlimited has conserved more than 13 million acres, thanks to contributions from more than a million supporters across the continent. Guided by science and dedicated to program efficiency, DU works toward the vision of wetlands sufficient to fill the skies with waterfowl today, tomorrow and forever.**



**Minnesotan's take the opportunity to get a picture with the DU President Rogers Hoyt, Jr.. From back left, they are, Cassie Carlson (Wild Wings), Scott Storm (Minnesota Artist), Tony Paul (Northern Zone Chair), Brian Ross (State Council Chair), Glen Bean (Major Donor), Adam Dehaan (Senior DOD), Rogers Hoyt, Dominic Lawrence (MN-Iowa DOD), Jim Demgen (State Campaign Chair), Carol Demgen, Paul (Non-Minnesotan), Kyle Momsen (Central MN RD), John Marks (Senior RD Metro). Front row: Doug Frey (Advisory Senior VP), Donna Pittenger (Emeritus Board Member), Ruth Hoefs (State Chair), Bill Aldinger (Emeritus Board Member), Shari Flink, and Dave Flink (Flyway Senior VP).**

