



DUCKS UNLIMITED  
**STRATEGIC PLAN**  
2012 - 2016



**WHO WE ARE**

Ducks Unlimited is a waterfowl and wetlands conservation organization supported by waterfowl hunters and other conservationists. Our conservation efforts produce a broad range of benefits for society, hunters, wildlife viewers, anglers, and many other outdoor recreationists. This wetlands conservation work provides habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife and helps to mitigate flooding and improve water quality for wildlife and people alike.

**DU'S VISION**

Wetlands sufficient to fill the skies with waterfowl today, tomorrow, and forever.

**DU'S MISSION – a common mission statement for DUI, WAT, DUC, and DUMAC**

Conserve, restore, and manage wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people.

**CORE VALUES**

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- |                                      |                                                                                                          |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Waterfowl and wetlands .....         | We conserve North America's waterfowl and wetlands.                                                      |
| Ethics .....                         | We act to uphold the reputation of DU, treating people and wildlife with respect.                        |
| Science-based decisions .....        | We evaluate our programs to guide us and ensure credibility.                                             |
| Team DU.....                         | We work together as volunteers and staff.                                                                |
| Superior talent .....                | We seek the best talent and diversity among volunteers, supporters, and staff to accomplish our mission. |
| Waterfowling .....                   | We value and enjoy the sport and heritage of hunting.                                                    |
| Collaboration, not confrontation ... | We partner with those who share common goals and values.                                                 |
| Wise investments .....               | We commit at least 80% of our resources to conservation.                                                 |
| Passion and commitment .....         | We celebrate the culture of DU as we serve our members.                                                  |



## CHARTING OUR COURSE



Throughout life, we find motivations that inspire us to work hard and make a difference. But to achieve our goals, we must chart our destination.

The same is true for Ducks Unlimited, whose vision and mission have been clear since 1937. The passion of our volunteers and staff demonstrates a powerful commitment to the vision of “wetlands sufficient to fill the skies with waterfowl today, tomorrow, and forever.” Strategic planning requires us to think about DU’s future in a way that transcends the tendency to focus on immediate opportunities. Instead, the planning process forces us to look on the horizon for long-range goals that will require integrated approaches to science, communications, fundraising, management, and systems development.

A great challenge in business planning is staying on target. The urge to dive into the tactical phase of planning—implementation—occurs at almost every stage, but above all, the Ducks Unlimited/Wetlands America Trust planning team has been committed to developing a comprehensive and relevant strategic framework.

This document presents three fundamental goals that will drive DU’s tactical efforts over the next five years. The strategic plan will serve as a basis for development of business plans that identify key tactics and clarify the role Team DU must play if we are to reach our destination.

### FUNDAMENTAL GOAL

*Landscapes capable of sustaining North American waterfowl populations.*

**Desired Future Condition:** *“Wetlands sufficient to fill the skies with waterfowl today, tomorrow, and forever.”*

DU’s vision describes the key elements important to waterfowl conservationists:

- Landscapes with sufficient wetlands and associated habitats to ensure water, food, and cover for breeding, migrating, and wintering ducks and geese
- Abundant populations of ducks and geese with the resiliency to rebound from periodic droughts and other environmental variation



Extensive wetlands and nesting cover on waterfowl breeding grounds are essential for annual production, but sufficient food and refuge must also be in place during migration and winter so that birds will be healthy enough to breed when they return north in spring. Achieving the necessary scale of landscape conservation will require the combined efforts of conservation partners in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The challenge is great. Conservation actions centered on restoration and protection must ensure that habitat capacities remain in place in key waterfowl landscapes. DU periodically reviews landscape priorities for our conservation programs, and an assessment during the early stages of this strategic plan will help drive development of business plans supporting DU's strategic objectives.

Effective public policy work, direct conservation delivery, and science support will be essential. Because land use changes will continue to affect waterfowl habitat adversely, DU and partners must ensure protection and restoration efforts to offset these effects and result in net landscape changes favorable to waterfowl.

Waterfowl populations are highly variable over time. Over the long term, waterfowl conservationists should strive to maintain populations that have the capacity to recover from short-term environmental impacts such as drought on the prairies.

Breeding population estimates provide the most reliable long-term measure of duck population trends and serve to establish a desirable range of abundance. During drought periods (the early 1960s and late 1980s) as few as 25 million breeding ducks were tallied. During the last 15 years, liberal hunting opportunities have prevailed, and breeding duck numbers have ranged between 31 million and 43 million. Conservation efforts should "set the table" in waterfowl landscapes to ensure recovery to this range following the occurrence of drought conditions and the resulting decline in breeding numbers.

The primary conservation actions required to achieve success over the long term must involve policy and conservation delivery efforts (habitat protection and restoration) at landscape scales.





## Objectives for 2012-2016

- Protect or restore at least 480,000 acres over the next five years through direct conservation delivery in the highest priority waterfowl landscapes in the United States. Direct conservation delivery is an annual balance between opportunity and the realities of DU's budget. Philanthropic revenue projections for 2012-2016 yield a projected range of 480,000 to 545,000 acres in conservation delivery.
- Establish evaluation criteria and a process by which landscape priorities will be assessed and potentially amended at least at five-year intervals. The evaluation process and criteria will be driven by waterfowl ecology and business considerations.
- Strengthen the international network of conservation support among Ducks Unlimited organizations (DUI, DUC, DUMAC), and ensure an annual commitment to DUC and DUMAC for highest priority waterfowl conservation landscapes.
- Influence public policies and regulations that will ensure the long-term protection of landscapes important to waterfowl by maintaining federal FY10 levels of support for waterfowl conservation. Among DU's priorities in the public policy arena are:
  - Foster greater member engagement in important public policy issues.
  - Support legislation to ensure \$47.6 million in annual funding for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), and submit grants from DU for at least 30 percent of available funding.
  - Continue as the lead organization moving NAWCA's approval and funding through Congress every year.
  - Support legislation increasing the price of the Federal Migratory Bird Conservation and Hunting Stamp from \$15 to \$25. An increase of \$10 is required simply to keep pace with the increase in land and restoration costs.
  - Ensure inclusion of the following waterfowl-friendly elements in the 2012 Farm Bill:
    - A Sodsaver provision protecting native prairie grasslands
    - A minimum Conservation Reserve Program enrollment of 6.8 million acres in the U.S. Prairie Pothole Region
    - An annual minimum enrollment of 262,000 acres in the Wetlands Reserve Program
  - Restore federal Clean Water Act protections of wetlands important to waterfowl to the levels that existed prior to 2001.



- Maintain strong DU representation on all North American Waterfowl Management Plan habitat joint ventures important to waterfowl with emphasis on DU priority landscapes and actively pursue involvement in Landscape Conservation Cooperatives.
- Establish new and strengthen existing public and private partnerships responsible for protecting and restoring landscapes important to waterfowl.
- Influence management of waterfowl habitat on private lands through technical assistance that enhances the habitat value to breeding, migrating, and wintering waterfowl.



## FUNDAMENTAL GOAL

*A strong and lasting waterfowl hunting tradition and growing public support for the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.*

*Desired Future Condition: Annual increases in the number of waterfowl hunters and others who support DU's conservation mission*

The dedication of waterfowl hunters is central to our conservation heritage, and DU must retain and increase support from sportsmen if we are to ensure abundant waterfowl populations and sufficient waterfowl habitat. Shared benefit and responsibility are at the root of wildlife management on this continent. The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation captures the principles of hunting and conservation as inextricably linked tenets of both our heritage and future.



A great challenge facing today's conservationists is maintaining sufficient numbers of sportsmen and others needed to ensure the long-term viability of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Specific to waterfowl conservation, this involves reversing the decline in numbers of waterfowl hunters. Contemporary peaks in numbers of hunters and sales of the Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp occurred in the 1970s. Since then, numbers have gradually declined by about 40 percent over the last 40 years. In the near term, recovery to at least the 1997-2001 levels of 1.35 million waterfowl hunters and 2001 numbers of duck stamps sold (1.7 million) would reflect increasing support for waterfowl habitat by hunters and other conservationists. Ducks Unlimited is uniquely positioned to foster growth in waterfowl hunting participation and support for waterfowl conservation. The proportion of waterfowl hunters associated with Ducks Unlimited is more than 10 times higher today than during the early 1970s. Thus, we have a greater influence on the waterfowl hunting and conservation community.

### **Objectives for 2012-2016**

- Recruit more Ducks Unlimited members through greater market penetration with an objective of 675,000 adult members and a stretch objective of 700,000.
- Engage future generations of DU supporters through targeted communications and active mentorship, with a goal of halting and reversing the current trend of an annual increase in the median age of DU members.
- Renew members at a minimum of 60 percent retention by 2016.
- Increase the number of active waterfowl hunters to 1.35 million from 1.1 million.
- Increase appreciation for the traditions of waterfowl hunting and Ducks Unlimited's role in perpetuating waterfowling's culture, methods, and history through effective marketing and communications.
- Strengthen Ducks Unlimited's presence in the waterfowl hunting community as the primary source for wetland and waterfowl information.
- Increase the American public's appreciation for the value of waterfowl and wetlands (water quality and quantity, flood mitigation, recreation, etc.) and for Ducks Unlimited's role in protecting and restoring wetlands.



- Increase DU's capacity for understanding, monitoring, and acting on changing attitudes, motivations, and demographics (societal trends such as increasing urbanization, an aging population, and proportional shifts among ethnic groups) regarding waterfowl and wetlands conservation and associated recreation.

## FUNDAMENTAL GOAL

### *Long-term sustainability for DU's mission delivery*

**Desired Future Condition:** *Annual improvement in financial strength reflecting an organizational commitment to fiscal conservatism, sound operational decisions, and growth in fundraising*

Since its founding in 1937, Ducks Unlimited has embraced a “singleness of purpose,” a goal-oriented devotion to its mission of conserving habitat for North America’s waterfowl. DU volunteers, staff, and supporters have inspired and sustained a culture based on allocating every available penny for mission delivery. Rooted in the bold vision of DU’s founding fathers, this tradition has resulted in the conservation of more than 12 million acres of waterfowl habitat across the continent. This achievement helps ensure that waterfowl populations can endure periods of drought on the breeding grounds and thrive again as water conditions improve.

Historically, ensuring Ducks Unlimited’s ability to endure periods of economic “drought” has not been an organizational priority, but the economic challenges of recent recessions point to the necessity to strengthen DU’s balance sheet to safeguard long-term sustainability. Conservation is DU’s business, but above all DU must remain *in business* in order to deliver its conservation mission. The strategic plan places significant emphasis on strengthening DU’s balance sheet and building reserves that will allow the organization to weather economic downturns. Achieving success as we go forward may require budgetary reallocations and staffing reassignments. We will





accomplish our economic goals through operational decisions grounded in cost-benefit analyses, sustained growth in all fundraising channels, and a dedication to recruiting and retaining superior volunteers and staff . . . all rooted in an organizational commitment to fiscal conservatism.

### **Objectives for 2012-2016**

- Increase Ducks Unlimited's unrestricted net assets to \$31 million by the end of FY2016 by budgeting and achieving annual operating surpluses of \$2 million, plus gains from land transactions and other non-operating sources. Unrestricted net assets are a critical measure of a nonprofit organization's (NPO) financial strength. Unrestricted dollars are important for achieving the balance sheet strength needed to weather economic downturns and enable strategic investments in research, innovation, and program growth.
- Increase endowment funds to \$35 million with a stretch objective of \$50 million. Endowments are important because they provide a consistent source of revenue that can fund a host of program needs. Attaining an endowment objective of \$50 million by FY2016 will be challenging and will require an aggressive campaign focused on raising direct endowment gifts from donors. This endowment campaign would be supplemental to current planned giving efforts.
- Maintain a minimum efficiency ratio of 80:20 to demonstrate to DU's current and potential supporters that DU remains the best investment for their conservation dollars. DU's efficiency ratio is a measure of its ability to deliver its conservation mission while minimizing administrative and fundraising costs. DU's historic commitment to achieve an efficiency ratio of 80 percent or more has set the organization apart from other NPOs. An efficiency ratio of 80 percent or greater demonstrates to DU supporters that we use their philanthropic dollars responsibly, practicing sound administrative management while remaining steadfastly focused on mission delivery.
- Increase philanthropic revenue to \$82 million by FY2016 with a stretch goal of \$92 million. Philanthropic revenue reflects event proceeds, major gifts, royalties, and direct mail.
  - Philanthropic fundraising provides critical revenues for DU's conservation mission. Aggressive growth in philanthropic revenues will require all business units to work collaboratively to accomplish the shared vision of "wetlands sufficient to fill the skies with waterfowl today, tomorrow, and forever."



- DU's grassroots fundraising activities provide opportunities to support waterfowl and wetlands conservation by building and empowering a community of volunteers and members. These communities provide significant annual unrestricted resources and are the foundation for major and planned gifts, organizational leadership, membership, brand recognition, and public policy strength. In addition to our core fundraising activities in grassroots, DU employs a direct response marketing strategy that builds on the mission awareness created by our volunteers and staff. Multiple channels of solicitation and communication—mail, e-mail, telephone, television, radio, and social media—allow our members to give and demonstrate support.
- Development fundraising encompasses our Major Sponsor program, recognizing individual, corporate, and foundation cumulative giving of \$10,000 or more, plus the Feather Society program, honoring those who have included DU in their estate or deferred giving plans. Highly personalized attention to this group of donors helps cultivate long-term philanthropists and leaders for DU. The Development program encourages personalized philanthropy, helping donors create their legacy by giving to our highest conservation priorities or supporting critical national, regional, or local efforts.
- DU must accelerate efforts to explore and develop nontraditional sources of revenue that provide significant new funding for mission delivery. Development of such nontraditional revenue sources as mitigation banking, contracting services for hire, and major corporate philanthropy (for example, corporate foundations) could strengthen DU's financial position and enable us to conserve more acres of habitat in priority landscapes. The strategic plan calls for 5 percent of DU's total revenue to stem from nontraditional sources by FY2016.



## STAYING ON COURSE

A mallard hen and her mate take flight from flooded timber in Arkansas and begin the first leg of a journey to the breeding grounds. The pair will travel nearly 1,700 miles to reach their destination, a Saskatchewan wetland very close to where the hen was hatched less than a year ago. Using skills and instincts science does not yet fully understand, the pair will navigate the breadth of the continent, and, ultimately, the hen will find her way home to nest and successfully raise a brood.

Think about that remarkable accomplishment. Could you travel across the continent and find one specific square mile within the 270,000-square-mile Prairie Pothole Region? Probably not without the help of a good map.

For organizations like Ducks Unlimited, the journey toward success requires more than skill and instincts. To navigate the challenges we will encounter along the way, we need a map that clearly shows the path to success, and over the next five years, DU's strategic plan will serve as our map. For our organization to thrive in the years ahead, everyone on the journey must follow the route that has been chosen, and using our professional skills, commitment to excellence, and passion for conservation, we must support each other along the way to ensure that we reach our goals.

The journey ahead will require each of us to embrace new challenges, to see change as a doorway that opens to opportunity, and to react nimbly and with an open mind as we assess progress and adjust tactically to achieve our objectives.

To help with the task of assessing progress and adjusting to challenges that arise along the way, DU has established a Senior Advisory Vice President for Business Planning, who will chair a Business Planning Committee charged with keeping our organization on course and aligned with the strategic plan. The committee will evaluate progress as we work to achieve the goals established in the plan and will ensure that we adjust as necessary to hit our five-year targets. Just as our mallard hen will be required to adapt to habitat conditions and changes that may occur in her nesting area from year to year, we must become skilled at adapting efficiently and effectively as circumstances warrant.

This strategic plan represents a defining moment for Ducks Unlimited. It carries forward the vision of the far-sighted conservationists who founded our organization in 1937, but it also charts a path to success in a world that is vastly different from the one those early conservationists knew. Today, the challenges are great, but the opportunities are even greater. We will be positioned to seize them only if we follow our strategic plan and its supporting business plans and annual budgets.

Far too often, strategic plans ultimately reside in desk drawers or collect dust on shelves. For Ducks Unlimited to prosper in the next five years and beyond, our strategic plan must be both a living document and a document that we live. We must use it as our roadmap to success, or we surely run the risk of losing our way.

## THE NORTH AMERICAN MODEL OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION



Wildlife conservation policy in the United States and Canada has its roots in more than a century's work by dedicated conservationists. The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation has seven principles which provide the foundation for the success of wildlife conservation in North America. It espouses the ethics that have become the hunters' creed...

**Wildlife is public property.** The government holds wildlife in trust for the benefit of all people.

**Wildlife cannot be slaughtered for commercial use.** This policy eliminates trafficking in dead game animals.

**Wildlife is allocated by law.** Every citizen in good standing—regardless of wealth, social standing, or land ownership—is allowed to participate in the harvest of fish and wildlife within guidelines set by lawmakers.

**Wildlife shall be taken by legal and ethical means,** in the spirit of “fair chase,” and with good cause. Animals can be killed only for legitimate purposes—for food and fur, in self-defense, or for protection of property.

**Wildlife is an international resource.** As such, hunting and fishing shall be managed cooperatively across state and province boundaries.

**Wildlife management, use, and conservation shall be based on sound scientific knowledge and principles.**

**Hunting, fishing, and trapping shall be democratic.** This gives all persons— rich and poor alike—the opportunity to participate.

*“The nation behaves well if it treats the national resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired, in value.”*

—Theodore Roosevelt

