



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
USDA FOREST SERVICE

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For Release March 14, 1984

VITAL U.S. WATERFOWL HABITAT TO BE RESTORED
UNDER MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN
FEDERAL AGENCIES AND DUCKS UNLIMITED

Vital U.S. waterfowl nesting areas will be protected and restored under a new agreement between the Federal Government and a private conservation organization, Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

Under the Memorandum of Understanding, Ducks Unlimited will fund projects to restore wetlands and increase waterfowl production on lands owned or leased by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Land Management and the Agriculture Department's (USDA) Forest Service. The agreement was signed March 14, 1984, at a ceremony in Washington, D.C., by Robert Jantzen, director of the Fish and Wildlife Service; Robert F. Burford, director of the Bureau of Land Management; Max Peterson, chief of the Forest Service; and Dale E. Whitesell, executive vice president of Ducks Unlimited.

"This agreement is the most ambitious cooperative public and private effort to improve and develop wildlife habitat in U.S. conservation history," said Interior Secretary Clark. "Through its generosity, Ducks Unlimited is enabling Federal agencies to carry out important habitat improvement projects that will benefit waterfowl and other wildlife that depend on wetlands."

Ducks Unlimited has previously focused its habitat production activities in Canada, where most North American waterfowl nest, and in Mexico where many waterfowl winter. Since it was founded in 1937, Ducks Unlimited has raised \$237 million and now maintains 3.2 million acres in Canada and 50,000 acres in Mexico, making it one of the largest private land conservation organizations in the world. The organization decided last year to expand its activities into the United States, and expects to spend up to \$2 million on habitat improvement in the United States in 1984 and increasing amounts in subsequent years. The activities will involve cooperation with State agencies as well as the Federal Government and will be carried out principally in Alaska, Montana, the Dakotas, and Minnesota, which together produce the vast majority of ducks and geese hatched in the United States.

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Ducks Unlimited will review proposals from Federal and State agencies for high priority habitat improvement projects that the agencies themselves cannot presently fund. Several projects are under consideration as Ducks Unlimited's first conservation projects in the United States:

Big Lake Complex, Montana: Located 35 miles northwest of Billings, this 10,000-acre area serves all manner of nesting waterfowl as well as endangered peregrine falcons, sandhill cranes, and mule deer. The complex and much of its surrounding uplands are owned by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Development plans call for a system of water control structures in the drainage system to improve nesting habitat for diving and dabbling ducks and Canada geese. Ducks Unlimited also plans to add numerous nesting islands to Big Lake to enhance waterfowl production.

Chippewa National Forest, Minnesota: Located in north-central Minnesota, this 1.3 million acre area serves as a nesting area for mallards, ring neck ducks, blue winged teal, wigeon, wood duck and goldeneye. It is particularly valuable because many waterfowl nest there when their traditional prairie potholes are dry. The area also is habitat for bald eagles, whose survival depends upon wetland creatures.

Red Lake, South Dakota: Located just east of Chamberlain, the 3,600-acre area is owned by the South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks Division and at one time was considered one of the best natural marshes for waterfowl production and staging in the prairie pothole region. The area's water table has dropped drastically in recent decades, causing the marsh to become overgrown and less suitable for waterfowl. Development will include pooling existing water and constructing nesting islands.

Rice Lake, North Dakota: Roughly 27 miles northeast of Bismarck, Rice Lake is leased to the North Dakota Game and Fish Commission. Large numbers of waterfowl nest there, including redheads and canvasbacks, and endangered whooping cranes have used Rice lake during migration. The shallow marsh goes dry about one year of every five and holds little water about one year of every three. Water control structures and man-made islands funded by Ducks Unlimited will permit better management of water levels and improve nesting habitat.

Palmer Hay Flats, Alaska: Located about 20 miles northeast of Anchorage, this 30,000-acre area is owned by the Alaska Fish and Game Department. It is one of two U.S. nesting sites for the Tule white-fronted goose and is an important staging area for trumpeter swans.

"Efforts like these to restore and manage wetlands already protected by government agencies are ever more important today, when nearly half a million acres of wetlands -- including important waterfowl habitat areas -- are being destroyed in the United States every year," Secretary Clark concluded.