



NEWS RELEASE

GREAT PLAINS REGIONAL OFFICE

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SMITH LAKE ENHANCEMENT DRAWDOWN BEGINS

HOWARD LAKE, Minn., Dec. 21, 2010 – Thanks to a new water control outlet structure on Smith Lake in Wright County, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources managers are currently drawing down lake levels as winter arrives. The enhancement project is a partnership effort between Ducks Unlimited and the Minnesota DNR to improve water level management capabilities and habitat conditions for waterfowl and other wildlife.



Installation of pipe on Smith Lake project

“Smith Lake is a wonderful natural resource, and now with our ability to manage water levels, the reality of improved water quality and wildlife habitat is taking shape,” said Fred Bengtson, DNR Sauk Rapids area wildlife manager. “This project would not have been possible without exceptional partners, lakeshore landowners and public support.”

Smith Lake, west of Howard Lake on Highway 12, is a 330-acre shallow lake managed by the DNR. DU engineered the project for the DNR in 2008 and recently hired Landwehr Construction to construct the project. Work began in mid-November to clear the outlet channel and install nearly 1,000 feet of 24-inch pipe before winter conditions arrived. Due to snow and cold, the contractor temporarily suspended construction last week but will resume work sometime early next spring with completion anticipated during summer 2011.

Due to an abundance of invasive fish, Smith Lake has been in a very turbid, degraded state for years and no longer supports migrating and brood-rearing waterfowl. To remedy the situation, Smith Lake was the 42nd of 44 shallow lakes legally designated for wildlife management

purposes by the DNR in May 2009. This status allows for the installation of a water control structure and management of water levels on the lake.

The Smith Lake project was made possible by a strong partnership between DU, the DNR, local stakeholders and the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council, which recommended a state grant to DU from the Outdoor Heritage Fund in 2009 for this and seven other shallow lake enhancement projects around the state.

“The Council is glad to see progress to enhance shallow lake habitat for migratory birds, and is pleased to see that public money from the Outdoor Heritage Fund is being spent on the ground,” Council Executive Director Bill Becker said.

DU will allow water levels to recede up to four feet before construction resumes in the spring. With a maximum depth of only six feet, Smith Lake has a good chance of experiencing a major fish winterkill this season to reduce numbers of invasive fish in the basin. The fish barrier, located immediately downstream, should prevent any new fish from entering the lake again. The temporary drawdown may last a maximum of two years to rejuvenate fully the aquatic health of the lake.

Temporarily lowering water levels in Smith Lake will not only help clear the wetland of invasive fish through natural winterkill, but it will also promote the germination and growth of the aquatic plants and invertebrates favored by ducks and other wildlife. The removal of fish and return of aquatic plants and invertebrates to the basin will improve water quality as well, which will benefit downstream water resources.

The project is part of DU’s *Living Lakes* conservation initiative, Minnesota DNR’s *Duck Recovery Plan*, and advances the state’s newly implemented Shallow Lakes Plan. These cooperative efforts call for the enhancement, restoration and protection of shallow lakes and large marshes for both waterfowl migration and brood-rearing habitat.

Ducks Unlimited is the world’s largest nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving North America’s continually disappearing waterfowl habitats. Established in 1937, Ducks Unlimited has conserved more than 12 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.

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