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Harder Lake WPA enhancement project complete

Migrating birds find plentiful resources in Cottonwood County

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WINDOM, Minn. – April 11, 2012 – As migrating waterfowl pass through Minnesota’s Harder Lake Waterfowl Production Area (WPA), they are finding abundant resources on the way to the breeding grounds. Thanks to enhancement efforts by Ducks Unlimited, the WPA has a new water-control structure and fish barrier to help improve the habitat conditions, which were in poor shape for waterfowl and other wetland dependent wildlife.

“The new structure allows the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service better to manage water levels to help rejuvenate the aquatic ecology of the wetlands,” said Rob Baden, assistant area wildlife manager with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

“Drawdowns are used to winterkill the undesirable fish, consolidate bottom sediments and enhance aquatic vegetation in the basin. Since last fall, the water levels have been increasing, and spring migrating waterfowl are finding the newly flooded basin full of protein-rich aquatic invertebrates.”



Harder Lake Waterfowl Production Area in Cottonwood County

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s (USFWS) Windom Wetland Management District manages Harder Lake WPA, which contains 160 acres of wetlands and grasslands. DU’s enhancement targeted a 43-acre wetland on the WPA with a failing outlet water-control structure. The outlet kept water levels too low and allowed rough fish easy access to the basin for spawning. DU partnered with the USFWS in 2009 to replace the water-control structure, which now provides better management capabilities and limits rough fish movement into the basin.

DU engineers completed survey and design of a new water-control structure in March 2010. Heavy rain delayed the project until spring 2011 when construction crews resumed work, completing the enhancement that fall. The new structure allows the USFWS to properly manage water levels to mimic natural wetland wet and dry cycles.

Funding for the construction of the Harder Lake project was provided by a state grant from the Outdoor Heritage Fund, as funding recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor

Heritage Council, and a federal grant from the USFWS . DU and the Cottonwood County Game and Fish League provided additional support. Special thanks go to the Jorgenson family, who graciously allowed access to the construction site from their property.

The project is part of DU's Living Lakes initiative, which calls for the enhancement, restoration and protection of shallow lakes and large marshes in Minnesota and Iowa for 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, DU is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year, with special events, projects and promotions across the continent. 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. For more information on our work, visit www.ducks.org. Connect with us on our Facebook page at facebook.com/ducksunlimited, follow our tweets at twitter.com/ducksunlimited and watch DU videos at youtube.com/ducksunlimitedinc.