



NEWS RELEASE

GREAT PLAINS REGIONAL OFFICE

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RICE LAKE ENHANCEMENT UNDERWAY

Water level management is the key to maintaining good duck habitat

WINNEBAGO, Minn., Sept. 28, 2010 – Water level management is the goal as one of Minnesota’s first designated wildlife lakes and a major waterfowl migration stopover gets a facelift. The project is funded by an Outdoor Heritage Fund grant to Ducks Unlimited (DU) as recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council and appropriated by the 2009 state legislature. Construction crews will complete the project on Rice Lake this fall.

“Large wetlands such as Rice Lake provide important spring and fall migration habitat for several species of migratory birds and are great places for hunters to enjoy the outdoors in fall,” said Jon Schneider, manager of Minnesota conservation programs for DU.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources requested DU’s help to engineer improvements to the more than 1,000-acre Faribault County lake. Specifically, DU was asked to design a fish barrier feature and improve water management capability of the existing structure that was problematic for DNR field staff.



Ongoing construction of culvert at Rice Lake

On the lake’s outlet, crews will install two fish barrier culverts that are set at a steep angle with high water flow to prevent carp and other invasive fish from swimming up and entering the lake. DU will also make improvements to the outlet water control structure for periodic water level draw-downs.

Due to an average depth of four feet, Rice Lake frequently experiences winter fish-kill conditions. DNR managers can effectively induce natural fish-kill conditions by conducting temporary fall water level draw-downs. In 1971, these attributes prompted the DNR to name Rice Lake as one of its first designated wildlife lakes. It is now one of only 44 designated wildlife lakes in Minnesota.

Aquatic vegetation important to waterfowl varies among years in Rice Lake, but has generally responded very well to past water level management efforts. However, carp and other invasive fish have historically quickly re-entered the lake and degraded waterfowl habitat conditions, thus negating the DNR's efforts over the years to improve the lake for ducks and hunters alike.

"It is imperative that we actively manage and enhance our remaining wetlands in Minnesota for ducks and other wildlife," Schneider said. "With so much wetland habitat lost, we simply must maximize the remaining habitat functions of those wetlands while we try to restore others."

The project is part of DU's *Living Lakes* Initiative and the Minnesota DNR's *Duck Recovery 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.

DU events help make this work possible. The Steele County banquet is Thursday, September 30 in Owatonna. Also, the first ladies DU event, "Girls with Guns" is Friday, October 15 in Faribault. For more information on these and other events in Minnesota go to <http://www.ducks.org/states/48/index.html> and click on "Local Events."

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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