

Maryland Wood Duck Initiative

Activity Report

April 18, 2006 – updates January 31, 2006

1. Organizational Status & General

Sounds like broken record but Website IS plodding along as content development grows but field efforts have dominated. Feedback from MD DU and MAEOE presentations has been substantive. Discussing a collaborating role for MD Waterfowl Assoc.

Bass Pro has agreed to allow us to install a “show box” & guard at the Arundel Mills “pond”.

2. MWDI / DNR Partnering Projects

9 public habitat, “Best Practices” projects are now active with 279 new boxes installed since late 2004. 22 of these have been donated by other groups (IWLA, MD Waterfowl Assoc/ Potomac River DU). These projects will expand in 2007 involving another 300-350 boxes for replacements and new sites. Private volunteer assistance has been very timely and most appreciated. Kudos for these efforts will be forthcoming. A brief summary follows, including special recognition to our DNR hosts:

Millington (Kent) – finalized replacement of old boxes after major new box / refurbishment program in 2005. Net capacity decreased to 111 from 114 as old, highly visible nest box clusters were removed. 38 new boxes including 8 Freon canisters were installed. Housing quality substantially upgraded (96% A grade) and favorable productivity gains are expected this nest season from the 47% use, 74% success factor and 372 ducklings hatched in the FIRST YEAR! Major thanks to DNR’s Josh Homyack, Bill Martin and Edmund Cook.

McKee Beshers (Montgomery) – 42 new boxes (4 freons) were installed. Izaak Walton replaced several old boxes already in operation (60+/-) and MD Waterfowl Assoc / Potomac River DU added 10 new boxes. DNR’s Dave Long has been instrumental on pathway cutting and access logistics while Brent Evans has helped with field work, materials procurement & mapping.

Dierssen (Montgomery) – Izaak Walton installed 8 new boxes, re-establishing this small WMA to productive capability! DNR’s Ken D’Loughy goes to the head of the class for getting access cooperation from Nat’l Park Service.

Myrtle Grove & Chicamuxen (Charles) – added 30 new boxes to the existing 56 including 10 freons. DNR’s Jim Bennett and his crew have one of the most active WD programs on state land and have embraced MWDI’s efforts with enthusiasm.

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2. MWDI / DNR Partnering Projects continued

Smallwood State Park (Charles) – 15 boxes were installed in good habitat and excellent access with the timely support of Bill Moffat, his crew and Jim Bennett's Myrtle Grove crew. Jenny Hill, our first Md Conservation Corp participant, was an energetic installer.

LeCompte / Idylwild (Dorchester) – 20 new boxes have been installed at Idylwild to supplement the 20 existing boxes at LeCompte. Greg Schenck and his staff have matched the very positive response experienced elsewhere and promptly installed the boxes to get some use this nesting season. Greg has helped experiment with Freon canister cutting and his region is earmarked for more expansion in 2007.

Calvert Cliffs (Calvert) – 20 new boxes are being installed after Herb Reid (Calvert Co DU) responded to the MD DU presentation call for more county initiative nominations. After a detailed habitat tour with DNR's Bob Cantin and logistical support from the Friends of Calvert (Mike Burns), Calvert DU volunteers are installing the boxes. MWDI provided poles, guards and wood which Herb used to then construct the boxes to MWDI's preferred design.

Swan Harbor (Harford) – 10 boxes were allocated to help support this combined county / state project in a combination of habitats which will also feature an observation "blind" and the local school system to monitor the nests. Fred Gillotte has done a great job coordinating between entities and making this project happen.

2007 Season Projects

In addition to some phase 2 expansions in the current project areas, new DNR areas being considered after habitat reviews are Chapman's Landing (Charles) and Island Pond - Fishing Bay & Taylor's Island (Dorchester). Aberdeen Proving Grounds has also agreed to initiate a phase 1 program comprising perhaps 50 nest sites (12-15 freons). A Patuxent River Initiative has also been formed as a result of the interest expressed by Patuxent River Park - Jug Bay officials. A 2-3 year total of some 150-200 new and replacement boxes may be involved – see comments below.

MWDI has several areas to contact and evaluate within the DNR and MD public habitat inventory but we encourage nominations for nest box & related material allocations. Nominations in good habitat that are accompanied w/ offers to help build, install and monitor boxes are prioritized. Projects must be on public land with good access.

3. County Initiatives

Kent Co (Cliff Brown, Coordinator)

At Chesapeake Farms, 31 new & refurbished boxes were installed and 8 boxes were relocated. 9 boxes were horizontals intended to thwart starlings and 2 freons were added. Net capacity increased by only 6 as 15 boxes in visible clusters were removed and 10 boxes replaced other poor condition boxes. Box locations and quality are now substantially improved. The goal is to improve on the relatively low 34% hatch rate (625 eggs wasted!) even if box use drops some from the 98% level. Nest dumping & starlings are simultaneous problems in one area. At Eastern Neck Refuge, 8 new nest sites and a "show box" were installed. Both of these project areas are funded by the Chestertown Wildlife Exhibition & Sale.

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3. County Initiatives continued

Kent Co - *A series of boxes previously installed by Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage in Morgnec Creek were inspected and some horizontal nest conversions are planned to try and alter starling use. A more substantive program is likely here for the 2007 nest season. In addition, various private programs have installed 31 new boxes across the county.*

Harford Co Initiative (HCI) - (Fred Gillotte, Coordinator)

A Participant's meeting was held March 1 and notes were compared about use and hatch rates. A second review will occur after this nest season. Overall use averages about 60% within a wide range with successful hatches about 50%. Nest dumping is not a factor. Predation is not regarded as being a problem either although closer analysis (mid-season inspections) will increase to improve data quality and help determine if success rates are accurately perceived or if they can be improved. New programs exceeding 100 boxes are expected during the next 2 years. 34 boxes are installed for the 2006 season. Karen Cifranik of Harford Glen introduced MWDI to Aberdeen Proving Grounds' Natural Resource Officials and deserves great credit for their enthusiastic response in re-starting a WD program. Internal APG constituents are being canvassed & coordinated to finalize the initial scope of the project, possibly a 50 box program. The Ladew Topiary and the Todd Wildlife Fund are two new "institutional" participants in the HCI.

Patuxent River / Charles Co. Initiatives

In addition to expanding the DNR programs in proximity to the Myrtle Grove, Mattawoman NRMA, Chicamuxen and the Stump Neck Potomac River areas, other areas along the Patuxent in PG, Anne Arundel, Charles and Calvert Counties could be involved as the historically active Jug Bay program (230 boxes+/-) is enhanced and grown. Project funding has been tentatively indicated from the Maryland National Capital Parks & Planning Commission. Greg Kearns and Kyle Lowe have been instrumental in embracing MWDI's mission. Coordination with several other "stakeholders" along the river will occur. Phase 1 will involve detailed review of the existing boxes to establish a data reference, condition and idealized positioning relative to habitat and monitoring access issues as well as identify proximate expansion sites. Expansion of existing sites will require some volunteer support for monitoring. The area is thick with woodies and identification of a roost observation site is likely. MWDI will likely allocate a portion of our 2007-2008 box allocations to supplement MNCPPC authorities.

4. Research Projects

Freon heat tests and field acceptability expanded. Construction technique breakthrough. 38 freon canisters are now in the field (6 in 2005). To independently develop heat buildup data under differing conditions, Harford Glen Educational Center will monitor Freon (air vents, beige color) and a wood box in shade and semi-shade conditions. The Harford Christian School will monitor a Freon nest (air vents, dark color) and a wood box in a shaded position while DNR's Myrtle Grove staff will monitor a Freon nest without air vents in a semi-shaded position.

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4. Research Projects continued

Various cutting techniques have been tried to simplify nest construction from blank freons beyond the use of jig saws or reciprocating saws. Greg Schenck (DNR LeCompte) found a chop saw to work pretty well (3 turns, lid removed in about 1 minute). Jim Bennett (DNR Myrtle Grove) found canisters to be relatively easy to cut (including the opening hole, weep and vent holes) with an oxy-acetylene torch (16 lids & misc) in 90 minutes. Edges were a little rough looking but not sharp. George and Hank Schumann (Chesapeake Coatings) tried plasma cutting and this appears to be the most efficient. George and Hank are building custom jigs to remove the lids and make the opening hole. Weep and air vents can also be easily cut out. The cans will even be powder coated "camel sand". Two Freon-a-thon cut & assemble sessions are planned to make 50 nests each time. Come to Baltimore and help out one evening in May!!

Predator Guards – cost effective supply – almost finalized !

George and Hank Schumann (Chesapeake Coatings) also get the award (we'll make one up soon!) for their efforts to produce cone shaped predator guards. An initial run of 300 has been completed using a plasma cutter. The current remaining supply will be used for MWDI DNR projects. Discussions are in progress to expand the availability of these guards for private use.

Other Projects

Field research is also underway on horizontal nest use as a starling deterrent. This will likely be expanded in 2007.

Predator guard effectiveness is being evaluated and data collected from previous studies. More on this after the nest season. If you have observations in this regard, please forward them.

Nest Monitoring – If you have any interest to "bird watch" and come inspect nests, please contact me. Trips are being made 2-3 days a week. If you or your group wish to manage the monitoring of nest boxes (1 or 2 trips annually), MWDI can arrange any venue desired. We're also building a nest inspection manual and photo library as an interpretative field reference so if you have digital pictures of nest happenings...predators, competitors, please send them along.

Your continued interest and support is appreciated.

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