

MARYLAND WOOD DUCK INITIATIVE

“ A Total Wetlands Experience “

June 29, 2006 Activity Report

Updates the April 18 report

1. Organizational Status & General

MD DNR has offered to host the website and its being revised so that's my excuse for more delay! An "Other Creature" use summary is also being compiled. The Hooded Merganser survey will be finalized as well although the 29 confirmed nests are unlikely to change. MWDI has had the privilege and benefit of having our first intern help us this summer, Will Jeffery, a senior at St. James in Hagerstown. Will has been a great help. I think has learned a lot about exploding eggs, that snakes can actually fly, that only 52% of all crawling bugs are actually ticks and that less than 18% of all green plants cause you to scratch....thus our new theme...." A Total Wetland Experience".

2. MWDI / DNR Partnering Projects

The first Maryland survey of WD nest boxes on public lands will be completed in September. Over 1,000 boxes have been inspected since the last report (my second excuse for no website launch). There are now 23 public land project areas participating in the MWDI data base, up from 9 in April. There are 4-6 more additional ones to be included later this summer. Detailed project area reports and 2007 plans will be included on the website.

DNR's Wildlife & Heritage Service has recently agreed to extend the MWDI / DNR Partnering Agreement to 7 years (5 remaining) to provide additional project continuity as we requested given the long term nature of the Initiative and the need for extended forward planning given budget and pragmatic implementation issues. Their cooperation continues to expand and the website assistance, public relations and anticipated educational program development assistance will be extremely beneficial to the accomplishment of our goals. We thank them.

2007 project activities and allocations will be decided by September. A meaningful portion of the effort will be directed towards "phase 2" work in current project areas but we will start new projects and seek to leverage our funding by providing predator guards and salvaged pole materials into new project areas where we have a source of joint venture or donated box materials and a defined volunteer management interest (assuming habitat criteria are acceptable).

3. Research

Final heat study results will be published this summer on Freon canisters. MWDI has also initiated studies on predator guard effectiveness, hatch count accuracy relative to nest exam timing, the merits of double versus single boxes, horizontal nest acceptance and starling deterrence among other things. Many of these issues have been examined by others historically, some have not. Our goal is to put these issues into a Maryland context (if that matters) and to simply tweak the substantive data that we are now starting to accumulate to see what aspect of "best practices" might be more or less important to advocate.

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4. Wood Duck Nest Inspector / Instructor Certification Program

USF&W and DNR have agreed to MWDI's proposal to establish a formal certification program. The concept is to pattern it roughly after the Hunter Safety program at two levels. Classroom work, reading, a written test, some field experience and a field exam are envisioned to develop adequate skills to interpret nest use & results, habitat variables, generalized box placement strategies, predator guard effectiveness, etc. A more substantive program will be involved for Instructor level certification. This program will take several months to develop. The first step will be development of the training manual, presentation materials and format. A technical committee will be formed soon to guide the process. Once finalized, the program may be used nationwide. The training manuals and the certification process itself will also be designed to integrate into appropriate school curriculum and continuing educational programs for teachers and other wildlife professionals.

5. Predator guard nominations and wood purchase synergies

If you have interest in ordering predator guards, we're looking for non-binding expressions of interest for the 2007 nest season. The 3 foot diameter cone shaped guards will be powder coated, 26 gauge galvanized metal that will have the central area snipped out to fit over or around a 4x4 or other pole, ready for installation. As indicated previously, we have a supplier arrangement worked out but idle inventory will not be maintained and access to guards that are not pre-ordered is not a high probability. Final pricing will depend on metal prices when ordered but my guess is a retail price of about \$10 a guard. Shipping extra. Pickup and delivery assistance will be provided by MWDI if feasible.

MWDI will be ordering cedar by mid-August. 10" wide, 1" nominal thickness, rough cut one side. If you have interest to have us include your wood purchase to obtain our pricing, we can do that with pre-payment and off-take delivery logistics worked out. Or we'll try to get our supplier to honor our price for private orders and you can deal directly but nominations would be welcomed if we can help get you good quality lumber. Our last price was \$1.48 a linear foot, 10 feet per box. If you got a better supplier for high quality grade A (tight knot) cedar, we'd also like to hear about that!

6. Volunteers – our thanks!

Our appreciation for the more than 1,900 hours of volunteer help on public lands projects over the last 6 months is very high and we commend these efforts to all email recipients. We'll all see more ducks as a result of these efforts and we'll provide more specific recognition as we finalize the MD survey.

Your continued interest and support is appreciated. Check those boxes now for better quality information and remember that down without eggs = snake snack. Check and fill any gaps in that guard (1" is all they need!).

Cliff Brown