

MARYLAND WOOD DUCK INITIATIVE

“A Total Wetlands Experience “

September 7, 2006 Activity Report #16

Updates the June 15 report

1. Organizational Status & External Affairs

Logo developed, cards obtained, starting to crank out website content. Kent Co News covered the sign installation on the Eastern Neck & Chesapeake Farms tours acknowledging Chestertown Wildlife Exhibition support and MWDI's activities. A data display is being for an outdoor fair for Izaak Walton League depicting their success at McKee Beshers WMA. A presentation will be made at the Chestertown Wildlife Exhibition in October and new flyers will be distributed to all DU fall functions depicting MWDI's activities. A mini-speech was made at the MD Waterfowler Assoc picnic and volunteer support for selected projects was obtained. A growing role is expected.

2. Statewide Box Survey – Public Lands

The first statewide summary of publicly sponsored nest boxes will be finalized soon. The report will be considered preliminary each September as some inspections will not occur until late winter and several nests are still active when inspected. A Hooded Merganser and Other Creatures nesting report will also be compiled in conjunction with wood duck results. Some preliminary results:

1054 active nest boxes on 28 distinct project areas across Maryland on state, county, federal and selected quasi-public habitat. This total excludes most boxes installed by Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage on various Maryland public waterways. In 2007, 4-5 new project areas will be started.

858 have been inspected at least once during the 2006 nest season.

399 Unutilized boxes (47%)

459 were used. (53%). Another 3%+ (29 nests) were also used by Hooded Mergansers.

284 Successfully hatched (69% of boxes used, final results known)

49 Still Active (11% of boxes used)

126 Unsuccessful / Abandoned (includes drop nests of 1-3 eggs)

Note: % Use is conservative. Over 100 boxes (12%) were inspected in 2nd-3rd week of May; additional use is possible. Many of the 196 boxes not inspected are in highly used, traditional nest program areas. 2006 Use was also influenced by the installation of 132 new box locations, some of which were not placed until the nesting season was partially completed.

284 Success nests

3,827 eggs laid, 73% hatch = 2,792 wood ducklings. Another 100+ hooded merganser ducklings were also hatched from 29 nest attempts (Total box use including hooded's is 56%).

47 Active Nests

378 eggs - results pending.

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2. Statewide Box Survey – Public Lands continued

126 Unsuccessful Nests

1,132 eggs unhatched. Primary causes were 22+ snakes, 6 coons, 32 nest strife, 3 starlings, 14 drop nests, 49 unknown – most presumed to be nest strife (hen squabbles in dump nests), unconfirmed predation or predator harassment, some hen deaths off the nest likely.

64% Gross Hatch efficiency = Eggs hatched / Total eggs laid (SUC/ ABAN nests)

Details for each project area will be made available on the website.

Once all boxes are checked and active nests concluded, total production from the 1,084 functional boxes is estimated to be 3,600 – 3,700 wooded (and hooded) ducklings.

Since the 2004 nest season, MWDI has been active for 2 years on 3 public sites representing 20% of public land boxes. Duckling production has risen from 228 to 1,269 in 2006 including hooded ducklings. During the 2006 nest season, MWDI was actively involved in a 4th public project area representing another 10% of public boxes. Total duckling production increased to 340 from 162 in 2005. Thus, 2006 total production from project areas where MWDI has been actively involved (30% of public boxes) was more than 1,600 ducklings, an annual gain of 1,200 + ducklings above their former levels with further gains possible.

These productivity gains are not expected from approx. 40% of the remaining public box programs as they are considered relatively well managed with limited scope for significant alteration & expansion. Favorable productivity gains are expected from the other 30% and from several new projects areas which may be added at the rate of about 100 net new boxes annually. Many other new boxes will be installed as replacements to upgrade housing quality.

In sum, annual duckling production is projected to exceed 5,000 and possibly reach 6,000 from public lands within 3-5 years caused by a combination of (1) increased average utilization as existing programs mature, (2) from reduced abandonment & predation and (3) moderate expansion in total box numbers to the 1,400-1,500 level. Maryland has substantive remaining “undeveloped” private / public habitat. Ultimately, production will likely be limited by effort not finite natural resources or funding issues. This survey, which identifies and establishes the management status of public box programs, together with ongoing efforts to enhance them is the first step in MWDI’s plan to optimize statewide productivity.

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3. Materials Procurement

Two years ago, cone style predator guards were essentially non-existent. Delaware supplied, hand cut supply was oversubscribed and the Amish family quit making them. DNR's residual inventory of guards was also quickly exhausted. After obtaining 300 plasma cut guards from Chesapeake Coatings in Baltimore, George & Hank Schumann, the principals, have worked with MWDI to establish a more precise cut galvanized metal cone guard (water jetting process). An affiliate, PredatorGuards.com, LLC has been formed and they will provide guards at cost to MWDI's public projects and make others available to the private sector. An initial production run of 600 guards will be available by early October. Cost is \$12-18 each depending on what features are desired...plain, coated, holes drilled, assembled into cones etc. A website is being created for internet orders. Temporarily contact me or George @ gschuman@msn.com for more details.

MWDI has also been able to develop several box assembly sources in the past two years and has lowered wood costs by 45%. Our bulk purchase in August was very effective as 257 box kits were recently cut, partially assembled and distributed, primarily from Stevens' Tools' shop in Annapolis. They will all be assembled by Oct 1. We will repeat this program next year. We can now start field installation in the fall instead of scrambling in poor weather in late winter.

Salvage of metal poles from the Highway Department is working well and growing. We now have 3 active sites and are looking for more. More than 100 poles have been obtained at a favorable cost savings to the program.

Since 2004, MWDI has built, cut into kits or partially assembled 659 boxes and has directly caused another 315 boxes to be built & installed on public and private lands. Our goal is not more boxes per se but increased productivity. New boxes are needed to improve housing quality, to de-cluster programs, to achieve better accessibility and to provide general expansion where habitat is suitable. We also wish to facilitate and assist new private land projects by the development of cost effective materials' supply and we have almost fully accomplished that goal.

4. Project Updates (since June 2006)

Jug Bay (MD's largest nest box program) – a multi-year program to rejuvenate this historically successful wood duck program has been agreed with Patuxent Park officials following the inspection of 95 boxes and analysis of use patterns. The Jug Bay Marathon provides funding through the MNCPPC. Phase one will involve 50 boxes (already assembled) to replace existing boxes and to start the capacity expansion back to the 230+/- level from the 160+/- level in more dispersed areas. De-clustering by attrition and increased emphasis on a single box alignment from the predominantly double box setup will occur. In 4-5 years, all older boxes will be replaced. The program has experienced a significant increase in wood duck numbers over the past 10-15 years. However, as box numbers diminished to the current level into several clustered units, nest competition & strife were found to have exacerbated nest dumping, diminishing productivity and increasing nest abandonment. Productivity could exceed 2,000 ducklings annually within a few years. Special thanks to Park officials Greg Lewis, Greg Kearns, Kyle Lowe and volunteer Bill Schultz for their support and ongoing efforts. More volunteers will be needed to adopt & manage portions of the expanded program once installed.

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Aberdeen Proving Grounds – a new 100 box program is being initiated on this 72,000 acre project area. Army officials have agreed to inspect & clear, if necessary, unexploded ordinance in selected habitat areas to support the program. A grant has been obtained in conjunction with the National Public Lands Day (Legacy Program) to fund the program. Box kits have been prepared by MWDI with substantive involvement from the Annapolis and Harford Co Ducks Unlimited Chapters. The Harford Glen Educational Center is coordinating box assembly Sept 19th involving 70 high school students. MWDI, APG and Harford Co Ducks Unlimited volunteers will help supervise the students and provide the necessary tool and materials support. Another assembly program will be conducted at Walter Reed Hospital to help better develop fine motor skills of new prosthetics. Extended involvement in the nest monitoring phases is planned. Special thanks to Dr. Jim Bailey, APG Director of Safety, Health & Environment for his support and to Karen Cifranik and the staff at the HGEC, Scott Jason, Regional DU Director & his colleagues from the Harford DU chapter and from Annapolis DU (Mark Stevens, Buzzy Abbott, Jason Flynn and Jack Wallace) as well as Barry Yancosek at Walter Reed.

Ft Meade – a new 6 box program has been initiated by the Ft Meade DU Chapter. Col. Bob Shaw, DU Chapter President & project coordinator, originated the project and obtained base approval. MWDI has obtained APG agreement to support the project by allocating a portion of their boxes and guards from the Legacy funding. Habitat has been partially reviewed and site selection for phase 1 is almost complete.

Blackwater Federal Refuge – following a recent habitat & box inspection, Refuge officials agreed to replace all 32 existing boxes before the 2007 nest season. MWDI has arranged to supply new boxes. An established volunteer monitoring capability exists managed by Bill Reybold. USF&W's Roger Stone, has been most cooperative and supportive of MWDI's mission. A moderate expansion in the program may also occur by the start of the nest season once historic use patterns are assessed more fully.

Other 2007 project areas & plans

Black Hills – Little Seneca Lake (Mont) – predator guards will be replaced on this 14 box program.

McKee Beshers (Mont) – several new boxes will be relocated into the central wetland area and others will be removed to be used on other projects until utilization rises in the new wetland sectors. Several of the older boxes will be upgraded and new predator guards used.

Smallwood (Charles) – 5 boxes will be removed until utilization rises and used on other projects where near term use is expected.

Swan Harbor (Harford) – 16 new boxes and a viewing platform will be installed.

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Other 2007 project areas & plans continued

Gunpowder (Harford) - several new boxes will be installed, predator guards upgraded and several boxes relocated to single status from doubles. Capacity may not increase from 51 boxes as several older box locations will be abandoned.

Wye Island (QA) – 4 new boxes will be installed.

Chapman’s Landing (Charles) – a new 8 box program will be installed.

Piscataway (PG) – A 3 box program will be initiated.

Eastern Neck Refuge (Kent) – several new boxes will be installed to upgrade quality and others will be relocated. Total box numbers will likely remain around 28.

Chesapeake Farms (Kent) – box and guard replacements will continue w/ over 30 new boxes being installed. Some additional horizontal nests will also be used. Net capacity may increase to about 67 boxes from 58.

Millington (Kent) – several boxes will be relocated to upgrade housing and net box numbers will decrease by 6-8 to the 105+/-level.

Other programs at the Nanticoke, Cypress Swamp, EA Vaughan, Taylor’s Island and Fairmount WMA’s are still being evaluated and are subject to box availability. If independent funding for the 32 Blackwater Refuge boxes is obtained, these will be allocated to the above project areas.

Your continued interest and support is appreciated

Cliff Brown