

MARYLAND WOOD DUCK INITIATIVE

“A Total Wetlands Experience “

May 9, 2007 Activity Report #21

Updates the March 10 report

1. External Affairs

A DNR press release will be released very soon formally announcing the MWDI-DNR Partnering Agreement. The photo contest has now begun, details on website. Baltimore Sun article is expected next week after Jug Bay tour May 9. River Hill Honor Society presentation (Howard Co) and box building session with 50+ kids occurred April 11. (Thanks to Tom Schmidt, Pete Dudley and Ron Kuipers for helping me “supervise” the process). MWDI will supervise a 50 box build for the 2008 program as part of a NOAA staff outdoor workshop at Jug Bay (PG County) June 12th (9-3pm). Could use 1-2 volunteer supervisors that day....free lunch!

2. Education & Research

A steering committee meeting was held May 3 between MWDI, USF&W and DNR to review the proposed WD Certification program with WD expert Mike Haramis and Kathy Reshetiloff (USF&W) and DNR’s resident WD expert, Bill Harvey, participating. MWDI is now tasked to assimilate suitable materials and develop a presentation format appropriate for the Inspector and more substantive Instructor level certification. The website has some additional details. As this program is developed, many aspects will become an integral part of the website’s “best practices” recommended guidelines. We know that this section is currently very deficient in addressing some very basic questions various program sponsors and volunteers have been asking. All such things will be covered in incredible detail supported by picture examples...in the “fullness of time”.

Preliminary findings on our Nest Data Quality versus Time study provide no surprise. Estimates of duckling production are substantially in error after 3-6 months elapse (conservative) and, even nest results (hatch or no hatch) can be difficult to determine at times. Final report ...in the “fullness of time”.

Partially completed Double Box versus Single Box Productivity study on one 66 box project (generally regarded as being placed in a visibly clustered setting) during 2006 had 94% utilization (62 of the 66 boxes had nests in them). One double was unutilized and two others had only one box used. The “first” or, in a couple of instances, the only box used successfully hatched 91% of the time while the second box hatched only 33% of the time. The egg hatch rate on the first box was 62% (264 eggs / 429 ducklings) while the egg hatch in the second box was only 12%. (66 ducklings from 557 eggs). . Doubles may indeed be a false economy although it may very well depend on their placement and habitat setting. Well hidden and spaced doubles may not fare nearly so poorly if nest dumping and strife are not exacerbated by their aggregated presence. The first box in this particular project had an average egg count of 13.4 per box while #2 box was 18.6. Final report ...in the “fullness of time”.

The 2006 Productivity Survey of Public Lands Sites is almost completed. Data from only a few boxes remains outstanding. As soon as we get the information, we’ll publish results and provide a website profile of each site, its performance and plans as well as nest monitoring opportunities. The comparative data and details should be a useful reference for private program sponsors.

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2. Education & Research continued

MWDI's hooded merganser survey is being drafted for inclusion in the 2002-2006 Breeding Bird Atlas Survey. Very few confirmed nests have been reported in earlier Surveys in Maryland. MWDI has documented and obtained data on 34 such occurrences attributable to the 2006 nest season after inspecting 1,025 nest boxes. One additional site is left to inspect. The 34 nests, some mixed with wood ducks and two from cavities, were found from within 577 nest boxes on 6 separate sites in Montgomery, Charles, PG (2), Carroll and Kent Counties. 28 of the nests hatched, producing a minimum of 150 ducklings. The Liberty Reservoir on the Carroll / Baltimore County line had the highest percentage of hooded use at 12.5% of boxes surveyed while the McKee Beshers WMA in Montgomery Co has the most nests at 11, 10% of their total boxes!

Interim nest inspections in several of these same areas are continuing to indicate active hooded merganser use and a new nest site has been confirmed in Somerset Co, only the second such nest on the Eastern Shore. No doubt more will be found as we expand the data sampling armed with the knowledge of what to actually look for!! No doubt they have been nesting in Maryland for some years but the data suggests the trend is building and broadening.

3. Field Activities – Busy times ! Admin backlog grows!

Public land sites participating in the MWDI surveys and best practices program have continued to increase and will total 37 sites in 2007 with at least three more defined for the 2008 season. (40 versus 35 indicated in March). Functional box totals are now estimated to exceed 1,200 this season net of a 117 box reduction this spring from various sites as part of ongoing project rationalizations towards a generally de-clustered housing placement and higher utilization goals elsewhere. Previously, we estimated 1,180 boxes before this 117 box reduction. 2008 totals will likely exceed 1,300 boxes from existing projects alone with program quality improving well beyond the modest gain in box totals projected. Volunteers have invested some significant field time and the duck response thus far has been pretty impressive.

Provide below is a very cryptic summary of recent activities and those who have helped make it happen. The website will have in a few days a more detailed summary complete with picture references of each outing. In no particular order:

Conquest Farms (QA) – 3 boxes installed (John Chew, Josh Homyack). Subsequent 12+/- boxes waiting for 30+ acre wetland creation which MWDI helped make happen.

Millington (Kent) – partial inspection, finalized 2006 results, removed 4 no use boxes. MWDI has learned that we played an integral role in obtaining funding for certain “ditch plugging” projects on this WMA to be completed in 2008 involving 3 sites and some 60 areas. (Josh Homyack, Edmund Cook, Bill Martin, C. Brown).

Patuxent Wildlife Research Center (PG) – Frank McGilvrey reports from this 144 box program that nest starts are at an all time high and, based on banding data of returning hens, that survival rates this past year may have been higher. He's found his hooded's again this year as well! This project area likely receives the most intensive monitoring under Frank's guidance every 10 days.

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3. Field Activities continued

Chesapeake Farms (Kent) – interim inspections indicate 11 of 12 new boxes are being utilized and nest use overall, if concluded as indicated, should provide a moderate gain from 2006 results (544 ducklings). Freon canister use is 100% (3 of 3). Starlings are popping up in new areas but the horizontals are working OK in the main wetland at 50% use. Farm staff confirm visual observations of wood ducks are well up over prior years. (C. Brown, Bill Susen)

Eastern Neck (Kent) – installed 3 new boxes. Interim inspections indicate a solid year, stable to modestly higher duckling production is expected (150+/- ducklings). (C. Brown, Bill Susen)

Jug Bay (PG) –first phase of a major project transformation accomplished. Installed 37 new boxes, replaced 8 others, added various guards, re-located a few boxes, removed some others and closed up 35 doubles to make singles. Interim inspections indicate very high use of new capacity. One hooded hatch confirmed. Kudos to park staff – Greg Kearns, Kyle Lowe, Derin Mills, John Dillon plus volunteers Brian Clauss (2)- the whooping crane specialist from PWRC, Bob Plunket, Trip Burdett, Andrew Brown, Scott Jasion and C. Brown. Site tour w/ Baltimore Sun May 9. Still have serious dumping but diminishing in some regions. Fingers crossed. 50 new boxes ordered for 2008. June 12 NOAA staff day to assemble.

Ft Meade (PG) – 2007 new site. Active inspections. 5 of 6 being used. Lt Col. Bob Shaw and wife, Meta, with several scouts have developed a nice project between his periodic trips to Iraq and Afghanistan...see website for new type of predator guard.

McKee Beshers (Mont) – removed 6 boxes, 2 stolen! Interim inspections, various guard and box replacements by IWLA's Ron Kuipers and his crew. Use excellent as before with new box use moderately rising from low levels last year. Hooded nest use strong as before.

Liberty Reservoir (Carroll / Baltimore) – first inspection of 57 box program. Good use, near normal nest use thus far. Active hooded use. Data based box & guard conditions, misc repairs. Many thanks to Reservoir officials Clark Howells, Mike Luh and Gene Scarpulla for their hospitality and support. Loch Raven (Baltimore Co) – inspection set for May 17.

duPont - Shehan Audubon Sanctuary (Talbot) – following MWDI site inspection w/ DU Jonas Davis, poles & guards provided and 10 boxes advanced to resurrect the program. Once new wetland installed, 10 additional boxes to be installed for 2008. Lindsey Goodwick, Manager, with Bob Petizon, Sal Simoncini, Vince DeSantis and Roger Williamson providing installation support.

Fairmount WMA (Somerset) – new 8 box program installed. (K. Colbeck, C. Brown)

EA Vaughan WMA (Worcester) – 8 new boxes, removed many other ones, refurbished others. Total 12 functional boxes. (Aaron Ward, Dave Barnes, C. Brown)

Cypress Swamp WMA (Worcester) – revamped old program, 12 new boxes, several additional new guards with support provided by a 4 boat flotilla organized by MDWFA's Aaron Ward, Dave Barnes, John Smullen, Sean Bostic, Tim Ward, Bob Mattie, Ben Ward, Tim Graham, C. Brown)

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3. Field Activities continued

Stemmer's Run WMA (Cecil) – new 5 box program. Frank Eisler initiated this project coordinating w/ Mark Cooper, DNR.

Nanticoke WMA (Wicomico) – Added 6 new boxes, some guard replacements, removed some old boxes. Garret Sheller will manage. C. Brown, K. Colbeck assisted)

Swan Creek (Harford) – 14 box new program installed w/ 18 eventual boxes. Project has observation blind. Many thanks to Fred Gillotte who initiated the project, his volunteers and Harford Co Park officials for their cooperation.

Muddy Branch Park (Mont) – new two box program initiated by Richard Latimer. Thanks to Ken Ferrari, Park Mgr, for support and cooperation.

Cheltenham (PG) – new 5 box program installed supported by Jug Bay, Lyle Lowe and the boys.

Calvert Cliffs (Calvert) – Carla & Scott Porter agree to adopt & coordinate nest monitoring of this 19 box program. 2007 will be its first effective functional nest season. Tim Roxey of the Friends of Calvert is also providing some logistical “Gator” support.

Various other interim inspections conducted, some program rationalizations concluded at Gunpowder (Harford - Scott Jasion and Jason Schlosser + others), Tridelphia and Lake Needwood (Mont – IWLA's Denis Mackey, Tom Waesche), CBEC (Dave Godfrey, Ernie Maher), Wye Island (Dave Godfrey), LeCompte (Greg Schenck).

Interim inspections planned for May – June:

May 14 – Indian Head Naval Station, Smallwood Park, Calvert Cliffs

May 15 – Wye Island, Pickering Creek, Shehan

May 17 – Loch Raven

May 24 – Chapman Landing, Piscataway

June 18-20 – Blackwater and Nanticoke, Vaughan, Cypress Swamp, Fairmount WMA's

June-August – get to as many boxes as possible for 2007 nest results....the payoff !!

Other news

MWDI has ordered wood for 100 public project boxes which we will cut into kits May 21 in Annapolis (Steven's Tools, Hudson Ave just off Rt 450 / 50 exit. Could use a few volunteers. We'll be finding a place for a pop afterwards. This is all we can handle this particular day. A second, larger lumber order will be placed in July to include final public and private sector box kits as ordered. Website will note specific dates, costs etc.

Volunteer support has been great and a tremendous amount accomplished this spring. The picture flow is rising and weekly we get offers to help in some manner. Coordinating these intentions and our specific time sensitive needs do not always mesh but we'll be persistent in finding a niche for anyone who wants one. Specific nest monitoring opportunities are growing in most regions.

Your continued interest is most appreciated. It is making a difference.

Cliff Brown