

MARYLAND WOOD DUCK INITIATIVE

“A Total Wetlands Experience “

May 29, 2008 Activity Report #25

*Updates the January 3rd report
See www.mwdi.net for prior reports*

1. External Affairs & Education – expanding as fast as we can manage it

Several Youth Box Assembly projects were completed or formulated. 3 Scout troops fabricated 57 wood boxes and obtained donations for 18 of these. The Courtland Lilley's Transportation Technology Class at James M. Bennett High School in Salisbury, MD recently transformed 50 empty Freon canisters into 25 nesting canisters. The J.M. Tawes Technology & Career Center in Somerset Co. fabricated 29 boxes which MWDI sold on their behalf to private program sponsors to fund ongoing box fabrication. (Sale of some 50 cedar boxes is now expected this fall).

95 box kits were cut and prepared for the Harford Co DU Greenwing event to be held June 7th and for the June 18th Maryland High School Envirothon. 10 box kits were cut for the Federalsburg, Md scout troop to install and monitor along the Marshyhope on city wetlands. A site inspection was also conducted by MWDI and DNR. 20 kits for a private Dorchester Co program were also prepared for scouts to assemble.

In April, MWDI made 6 presentations (and membrane counting sessions) to rotating groups of 54 kids (and 26 adults) as part of DNR's Youth Wildlife Event held at the Isaac Walton League – Rockville facility. 23 boxes were also assembled as part of this affair. A presentation will also be made at the Maryland Envirothon in June.

Our known youth participation to date exceeds 500 hours including box assembly and field work. By July, presentations to more than 300 kids will have occurred. Box assembly events are planned for DNR's National Hunting & Fishing Day in September and the Chestertown Wildlife Exhibition in October.

Efforts are underway to secure a wood duck monitoring project for the Colonel Richardson High School in Federalsburg. Discussions have been held with Maret School in Washington DC to formulate an integrated and recurring wood duck/ wetland research component for their junior and senior science class curriculum.

In March, a presentation was made to DU's Maryland State convention by Scott Jasion and John Chew gave a talk to 50 folks at Kent County Bird Club on MWDI's activities resulting in MWDI now being included on the Maryland Ornithological Society's Speakers List. He must have done a super job! An activity update will also be given to the DNR Wildlife Advisory Committee in July.

Website support has been super from DNR's Linda Wiley. Several website originated projects have occurred and as we build content, our activities and mission are being increasingly leveraged by it. Volunteer hats have become collector's items and we have almost distributed them all (300+) with very few left over. Takes 2 volunteer outings to get one while they last!

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Photo contest submissions have increased nicely and an interim award of two of Jim Taylor's award winning duck stamp prints will occur soon. The contest will continue as we have 2 other prints to award as well as 35 miniature wood duck castings for honorable mention prizes compliments of the Annapolis DU chapter. Jim has also graciously agreed to donate on MWDI's behalf another framed Autumn Glory, Maryland's duck stamp print, to Delta Waterfowl's August 17th extravaganza. (see website for details).

Funding support for boxes has been exceptional – again, including M-NCPPC PG County's Jug Bay 5k Marathon (20), Indian Head Naval Station (12), National Wildlife Federation (25), Delta Waterfowl (25), Isaac Walton League – Rockville Chapter (10), Harford Co DU via a grant from HSBC bank (100), American Mill Works – Mark Salvaggio's Troop 617 (6), Maryland Envirothon (35), Washington Co Boy Scout troop (12), Federalsburg City (10), Chestertown Wildlife Exhibition & Sale (20), and the J.M. Tawes Center (50 for private program sale in fall 2008). This support allows our DNR funding to be directed towards everything else that is required to get the boxes assembled in some cases and installed on poles (literally the nuts and bolts) as well as the predator guards. Metal for 300 was purchased and fabricated into cones by the Hagerstown Correctional facility which should last through the 2009 nest season.

In May, 18 volunteers including 4 from the HSBC bank gathered at Steven's Tools for the annual box kit -a-thon. Over 3,700 linear feet of cedar, sufficient to make about 350 boxes, was delivered thanks to Scott Jasion's trailer and DNR's Brent Evan's pickup as well as my old SUV. More than 250 kits were cut up and almost 180 were partially pre-assembled for youth events. 85 kits were for private programs. The 1,210 LF of uncut lumber will be used by Harford DU and the J.M. Tawes Center for more boxes to be utilized on DU sanctioned projects or for sale in the fall as indicated. A portion of the crowd then retired to Davis' Pub to celebrate Cinco de Mayo day.

Predator guards for private programs can be obtained from Chappel Central – see website for details. MWDI does not maintain an inventory of guards (or boxes) to sell.

The Maryland State Highway Administration continues to strongly support MWDI's efforts as we salvage and utilize recovered street sign poles from six yards across the state.

2. Field Operations

Detailed activities are now too numerous to list individually. A separate report will be generated once the nest inspections are completed to profile every MWDI public project and summarize recent and planned activity. The website lists most field trips before they occur to seek volunteers and then archives them when completed. I wish I could give kudos on each volunteer effort in this report as before but I hope folks understand for space reasons if we do not. We do, however, put every volunteer's picture in action on the website in some manner after each outing ! We know who "butters our daily bread", I can assure you.

In sum, there were 57 sites operative for the 2008 nest season compared to 41 in 2007. In 2004, there were 20. IN 2009, there will be more than 60 sites. Two are all ready box allocated (+8 boxes) and habitat inspections are competed / planned on 3 others (+ 30 boxes).

2008 functional boxes will number approximately 1,528. Recent floods and other normal trauma may have reduced box count slightly. Approximately 500+ boxes have had interim or final inspections conducted thus far. June and July will be very busy.

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2. Field Operations continued.....

Box count was 1,256 in 2007. Adding to this in 2008 were 162 existing boxes that were "inherited" from an adopted project. 67 of these were removed to de-cluster box placement. New box locations added this year in the 41 existing sites were 85 but we removed another 31 boxes from these sites as well. We replaced 40 boxes with new ones as upgrades. 123 new box locations were added in the 16 new sites. The net impact of these efforts was to increase net functional boxes by 272, a 22% gain to 1,528 boxes covering 57 sites.

Absent the identification of new large scale projects or the adoption of other existing public waterway boxes into the data base, functional boxes for the 2009 season may increase by a net 100-150. Continued re-placement of old boxes, some relocations and some capacity manipulation by temporary box closures will also occur.

MWDI is seeking new sites only where we have project management post installation lined up. This approach has been very useful which together with new volunteer managers for several existing sites will help us insure monitoring and maintenance continuity. Data collection particulars are still in need of further enhancement but this will come with more collective field experience. Organizationally, the Maryland Waterfowlers' Association, Delta Waterfowl, Isaac Walton League-Rockville Chapter, Maryland Sportsman's Association and the Harford and Annapolis Ducks Unlimited Chapters in addition to various Boy Scout troops and their leaders have been especially helpful in supervising youth events, field installations and nest box monitoring the past 5 months.

3. Nesting Outlook

With more than 600 boxes inspected thus far, a perception is developing about nest box use and productivity. The drought effects were still very apparent in early spring. Many project sites dependent on flooded timber, emergent wetlands and pond habitats were dry. This was expected to have an impact by either delaying nesting or pushing the hens elsewhere. Box use by hooded mergansers is definitely down....possibly by 1/3 or more with only a portion of known hooded territory left to inspect. Hoodeds nest earlier than woodies. While we have only about 40 documented nest sites within 9 project areas, the sample breadth is pretty diverse geographically and habitat – wise to form a decent perception.

Box use by woodies in established projects also appears to be down modestly although the data has not been fully aggregated or analyzed yet. In certain projects, catch size appears lower, observed nest strife incidents reduced, nest abandonments / unsuccessful nests fewer and hatch % higher in successful nests but with fewer nest boxes utilized. MWDI steps taken to reduce dumping and strife may have been partially effective but the observations are too pervasive to suggest that these steps are primarily responsible for the nesting pattern observed thus far.

Productivity in terms of ducklings generated may not be affected much if the hatch success improves due to fewer strife induced abandonments and if success nest hatch efficiency is higher. Contributions from new project sites will be a net plus although box use in certain of them is also below initial year expectations. With brood habitat now essentially fully charged, duckling survival could be enhanced.

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Having good quality, statistically significant nest data is increasingly useful to discern and interpret changes in nesting behavior and we continue to encourage all program sponsors to get it in a timely manner and to consider it in the context of the public site reference statistics we'll be publishing to help evaluate and manage their programs.

Volunteer support has now surpassed 12,000 hours since late 2004 and will certainly exceed 13,000 hours by the end of 2008. Your continued interest is most appreciated

Cliff Brown