



Answering a Call to Action

Recruiting, retaining, and reactivating waterfowl hunters has never been more important.

It's easy to scoff at the notion that North America needs more duck and goose hunters, especially on opening day or any fall Saturday morning at the public boat ramp two hours before the legal shooting light.

Applying the “eyeball test” at popular public hunting grounds in stronghold duck hunting states such as Arkansas, Wisconsin, and California might suggest that we have more waterfowlers now than ever. In reality, while hunting pressure is indeed high at some popular historic locales, the number of duck hunters across the continent has declined dramatically over the past few decades.

In 1970, there were an estimated 2.4 million active waterfowl hunters in

North America. By 2000, the number had slipped to 1.8 million. Just 20 years later, in 2020, only 1.15 million people went hunting for ducks and geese in the United States and Canada. We've lost more than half of the continental waterfowl hunters in the past 50 years.

Fewer hunters in the fields and marshes means “more ducks for me,” right?

On a given hunt, it might. But next week, next season and a few years from now, short-sighted attitudes could irreparably hurt all of our fortunes as duck hunters.

Let's look at the equation: Hunters fund critical conservation programs that keep wetlands from being degraded

WHAT IS HUNTER3?

Delta's mission is to produce ducks and secure the future of waterfowl hunting. Our Hunter3 pillar aims to recruit, retain and reactivate (R3) waterfowl hunters. Delta's key Hunter3 programs — First Hunt, University Hunting Program and Defending the Hunt — lead the way to strengthen waterfowl hunter numbers and ensure a bright future for waterfowl conservation in North America.



and drained. Hunters also support duck production programs such as Hen Houses and Predator Management that enhance habitat to maximize duck production. And when threats arise to access and hunting rights, it's hunters who stand tall to preserve the traditions of duck and goose hunting that we all enjoy.

“Hunters are the lifeblood of conservation in North America,” said Dr. Scott Petrie, Delta’s chief executive officer. “A strong base of passionate waterfowl hunters is critical to maintain healthy wetland habitat and ensure strong fall flights of ducks both now and in the future.”



Leaders in R3

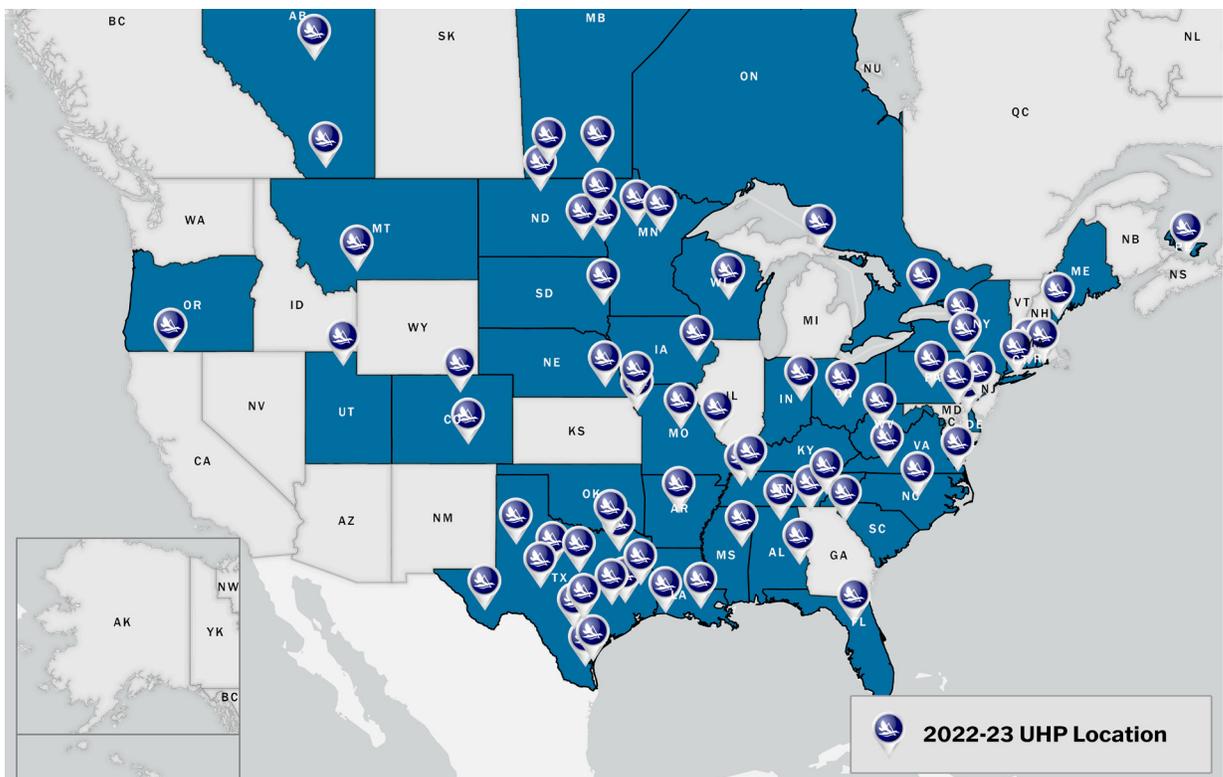
Delta Waterfowl leaders recognized the trend of declining waterfowl hunter numbers in the late 1990s, and began a leadership plan to address declining hunter recruitment and retention. In 2000, Delta successfully pushed to establish Waterfowler Heritage Days, a special

weekend set aside exclusively for youth hunters in Canada. Waterfowler Heritage Days led to the creation of Delta’s First Hunt Program shortly thereafter.

Delta has continued to be at the forefront of waterfowl hunter recruitment in North America ever since.

The organization’s HunterR3 pillar,

which encompasses three core programs — First Hunt, the University Hunting Program, and Defending the Hunt — has grown dramatically in scope and effectiveness. Certainly, COVID-19 closures and restrictions on gatherings created challenges in 2020 and 2021, but participation rebounded in 2022.



Delta Waterfowl University Hunting Program 2022-23

The impact of Delta’s University Hunting Program doubled in 2022-2023, with 415 wildlife management students taking part at 72 North American universities. Students learned how to hunt waterfowl and the important role of hunting in conservation.

FIRST HUNT: EVOLVING FOR MORE IMPACT

Delta's chapter-driven First Hunt Program is the largest waterfowl-specific hunter recruitment in North America, with roots back to 2000 at the Delta Marsh in Manitoba.

Like most event-based programs, COVID-19 seriously dampened First Hunt functions in 2020. After hosting 6,844 participants and 200 events in 2019, Delta could only hold 79 events with 1,882 participants in 2020. As the world began to reopen to gatherings, Delta's First Hunt logged 113 events and 3,119 participants in 2021. In 2022, the program returned to pre-COVID levels, with 203 events and 6,668 prospective new hunters.

Importantly, First Hunt is undergoing a shift in emphasis, with more attention being focused on mentoring people who are truly new to hunting and have the opportunity to continue hunting on their own after participating in the program.

"At many past events, First Hunt has been more of a retention program that cements the place of participants in the hunting community and nurtures their pathways toward becoming hunters," said Joel Brice, chief conservation officer of Delta Waterfowl. "We are working to shift the program to emphasize recruitment — to introduce people who don't have connections to friends and family members who hunt waterfowl. We want First Hunt to be impactful events that result in new hunters."

For 2023, Delta's First Hunt goals are to educate chapters about the value of increasing the number of adult-focused recruitment events, and to include a higher percentage of true first-time hunters as participants.

According to Aidan Flores, Delta's R3 coordinator for Texas, another specific aim is to involve entire families in First Hunt.

Partnering with groups such as Future Farmers of America and Texas Parks and Wildlife has helped find new people interested in learning how to hunt waterfowl, he said.

"The hunting community, guides, and landowners have all been very positive in Texas," Flores said. "People really like what Delta is doing here to recruit hunters."

Alan Cattrysse, Delta's R3 coordinator for Canada, said COVID-19 restrictions have only recently allowed First Hunt efforts to resume in the country. Delta did host a successful First-Time Waterfowlers Workshop at the Delta Waterfowl Center in Turkey Point, Ontario last summer, and plans to have another event in August 2023. The goal is to enroll people from non-hunting families, and through Delta's mentorship, for hunting to become a key activity for multiple members of those families.

"We're losing hunters quickly in Canada," Cattrysse said. "There are so many barriers to becoming a hunter in Canada, so these mentoring programs are critical to our future."

University Hunting Program: Flourishing for Wildlife Students

Delta's University Hunting Program, which had its genesis at Louisiana State University in the late-1990s when Dr. Frank Rohwer organized hunts for his wildlife students, has grown exponentially since becoming a formal Delta program in 2017.



**IN 2022, 415 WILDLIFE
MANAGEMENT STUDENTS
FROM 72 UNIVERSITIES
TOOK PART IN DELTA'S
UHP PROGRAMS**

Many of today's wildlife management students do not come from families with hunting backgrounds. UHP introduces these future wildlife management professionals to waterfowl hunting so they understand the important role it plays in conservation. In addition, UHP aims to recruit students to become lifelong waterfowl hunters who will introduce their families and friends to our world.

In 2021, Delta held UHP events at 36 universities with 222 students despite COVID-19 challenges. The program doubled in 2022, with 415 students from 72 universities taking part throughout North America.

"We met all of our UHP goals for 2022," said Jacob Bushaw, Delta's R3 coordinator for the United States. "We had great events at so many universities, including Cornell University, Ohio State University, and the University of Florida. We had 20 wildlife students at Florida, and most of them had never held a gun before that event."

Flores reports that 13 universities in Texas took part in UHP, and he hopes to add two to four more in 2023. In Canada, 87 students at 11 colleges/universities participated in UHP, according to Cattrysse. All of the Canadian students will go on a mentored hunt as part of UHP, although COVID restrictions have delayed the experience at three universities.





UHP participant surveys reveal excellent program success, with 95 percent of students indicating they plan to continue hunting, according to Bushaw. In addition, students rated UHP 4.8 on 1-to-5 scale.

“This program is incredible, and does a great job at introducing people to hunting,” said Aida Bagheri Hamaneh, a UHP participant from Virginia Tech. “It makes duck hunting seem way more accessible and attainable for someone like me who has no background in hunting or social connections to duck hunters.”

Defending the Hunt: Always Vigilant

Delta Waterfowl defends against threats to duck hunting anytime, anywhere. We serve as the “voice of duck hunters” throughout North America. In addition, Delta works with government agencies to promote sensible hunting regulations and seasons, and to increase hunting access.

Maintaining and increasing hunting access is critical to providing quality hunting experiences, which in turn leads to the recruitment, retention and reactivation of hunters.

Delta remains perpetually active to both defend and expand hunting.

Recent wins to expand access include the end of Sunday hunting prohibitions in Virginia and the passage of the Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund in Mississippi. Delta continues to advocate for increased hunting access and infrastructure improvements on state and federal lands.

Delta’s Duck Hunters Action Alert

System helped defeat a number of measures that would have restricted the ability to hunt. Delta strongly opposed legislation that would have repealed the Pittman-Robertson Act, which provides critical funding to state fish and wildlife agencies to manage wildlife, allows access for hunting and fishing, and provides hunter education.

“As a result of the Delta Action Alert, we sent more than 75,000 emails to members of Congress opposing this misguided legislation,” said Cyrus Baird, senior director of government affairs for Delta. “We were so successful that we were even able to get members of Congress who originally signed on as co-sponsors of the bill to remove their names from it.”

Delta was active in Oregon, opposing an anti-hunting ballot measure and joining a sporting coalition to challenge a firearm ban there. In Oklahoma, Delta mobilized volunteers to save waterfowl hunting blind draws and access. Delta opposed an onerous new tax on firearms and ammunition in California.

We are currently working on several bills in Maryland that would increase conservation funding and eliminate the Sunday hunting prohibition. Delta is promoting Sunday hunting bills in Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, and to add constitutional right to hunt and fish protections in Oregon, Missouri, New York, and West Virginia.

To see and sign up for Delta’s Duck Hunters Action Alert System, visit deltawaterfowl.org/hunter-action-alert-center.

Ensure a Strong Future

Delta Waterfowl works all year long to ensure that the skies over North America are filled with abundant waterfowl and that waterfowl hunters have ample opportunity to enjoy our passion for the pursuit of the birds.

Thank you for your support. It is critical for Delta to continue to advance the organization’s innovative Hunter3 efforts. Together, we can recruit a strong generation of new waterfowl hunters, educate our future wildlife management professionals, and defend and enhance hunting all across the continent.

We see a bright future on the horizon for ducks and duck hunters!



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