

2025



Hunter3  
STATUS UPDATE



University of Florida

## Hunters Fuel Conservation

The recruitment, retention, and reactivation of waterfowl hunters is critical to secure our future

Wildlife conservation in North America—particularly for waterfowl—is funded by hunters.

Hunters are the backbone of The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, a system that has been admired and lauded worldwide for maintaining healthy wildlife populations while allowing regulated harvest through informed science-based management. Under this model, sportsmen and women willingly pay for the right and privilege to hunt.

Your dollars from hunting licenses and stamps, excise taxes collected on purchases of guns, ammunition, and outdoor gear, and memberships and

donations to groups such as Delta Waterfowl fund wildlife conservation in North America. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 14.4 million hunters contributed \$45.2 billion in 2022 in the United States. Migratory bird hunters account for about \$4 billion in revenue annually.

Although wildlife species in North America are considered public trust resources for all people to enjoy, hunters largely fund management work that benefits both game and non-game animals and the habitats they use. Hunter funding also pays for the acquisition and leasing of public lands.

Sales of U.S. federal duck stamps since

### What Is Hunter3?

Delta's mission is to produce ducks and secure the future of waterfowl hunting. Our key Hunter3 pillar programs—First Hunt, University Hunting Program, and Defending the Hunt—aim to recruit, retain, and reactivate waterfowl hunters, which strengthens waterfowl hunter numbers and ensures a bright future for waterfowl conservation.





1934 have contributed \$1.1 billion used to purchase and conserve more than 6 million acres of wildlife habitat in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Started in 1985, the Canadian Wildlife Habitat Conservation Stamp Program has raised \$64 million, resulting in more than 1,600 conservation projects.

Not surprisingly, Delta Waterfowl's founding fathers, beginning in 1911 with President John Bird Burnham, were visionary, conservation-minded hunters who wanted to make sure the continent's wetlands and flyways are always filled with waterfowl. We've never stopped striving to ensure a future of abundant waterfowl and plentiful opportunities to hunt.

Delta Waterfowl takes tremendous pride in being The Duck Hunters Organization. Everything we do is for the benefit of ducks and duck hunters, including the critical core programs under our HunteR3 pillar: University Hunting Program, First Hunt, and Defending the Hunt.


Thanks to Delta's strong partnerships with major donors, agency partners, chapter volunteers, and corporate sponsors, all of Delta's programs to recruit, retain, and reactivate hunters continue to grow and thrive.

### University Hunting Program

Delta Waterfowl's University Hunting

Program has continued to grow exponentially, establishing a new record of 131 colleges/universities offering UHP courses during the 2024-2025 program year. A total of 682 students took part across North America, representing wildlife management programs from 42 states and nine provinces.

In 2021-2022, Delta delivered UHP at 36 universities. The program doubled in 2022-2023 to 72 universities and jumped to 103 in 2023-2024.


  
**ONLY 3 IN 10 WILDLIFE  
 RESOURCE MANAGEMENT  
 STUDENTS ENTER COLLEGE  
 OR GRAD SCHOOL WITH ANY  
 CONNECTION TO HUNTING**

The phenomenal growth in just a few years is a testament to hard work and the value contained in Delta's UHP.

In addition, Delta has formed partnerships with the state natural resource agencies in Pennsylvania and Alabama to deliver HunteR3 programs. These partnerships will allow Delta to deliver even more UHP events, expanding the impact of the program to include more universities and future wildlife management professionals.

Delta's innovative UHP is necessary because over the past 25 years, the

backgrounds of university students seeking degrees in wildlife management and biology have shifted. Previously, most students seeking these degrees grew up in hunting and fishing families, or at a minimum, had exposure to outdoor pursuits. Today, however, it's estimated that 70% of students pursuing these career paths have little or no exposure to hunting.

We believe it is critical for these future wildlife management professionals to be exposed to waterfowl hunting now so they understand the important role it plays in conservation. Delta's UHP introduces students to the full hunting experience, including completing a hunter education course, a shooting range day, a mentored hunt, and cleaning and eating game. UHP provides a waypoint for students, while also aiming to recruit them to become lifelong waterfowl hunters who will introduce their families and friends.

Delta continues to expand the program, striving to deliver UHP at all of the more than 540 universities in North America that offer degrees in wildlife management or related fields.

The HunteR3 team is led by Joel Brice, Delta's chief conservation officer, and Stephen Sowell, R3 program manager. Alan Cattrysse serves as R3 coordinator in Canada, while Aidan Flores, Ryan DePietro, and Joey Searcy







are regional R3 coordinators in the United States.

### First Hunt

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.

First Hunt is approaching an impressive milestone, currently having hosted 90,833 participants since the program was formalized in 2003.

Delta's First Hunt Program enjoyed another year of excellent success, with 230 events already held during the 2024-2025 program year. With several more events to go, 6,868 First Hunt participants had learned about waterfowl conservation and hunting, while gaining an appreciation for all of the elements such as duck calling, setting decoys, shooting

shotguns, duck identification, field dressing birds, and working retrievers.

First Hunt aims to achieve a balance between youth and adult recruits. Delta values all avenues that lead toward successful recruitment, retention, and reactivation of duck hunters.

Delta's staff applauds a legion of more than 5,000 active volunteers throughout North America who generously give their time at the local level to help boost waterfowl conservation and mentor new waterfowl hunters. Throughout First Hunt's history, an incredible 22,965 people have served as mentors.

### Defending the Hunt

Delta works diligently across every level of government to address threats to duck hunting, create new and expanded opportunities for

sportsmen and women, to fight for conservation funding where it's most needed, and to press for new and innovative habitat conservation approaches. From the halls of Congress and Parliament to state and provincial capitols across the United States and Canada—and right down to the local level—Delta's policy team aggressively fights for ducks and duck hunters.

The team is led by John Devney, Delta's chief policy officer. Jim Fisher serves as vice president of Canadian policy, and Brian McRae is director of government affairs in Canada. Cyrus Baird is senior director of government affairs, with Jeff Wardlaw working as senior manager of government affairs for the Central and Mississippi flyways, and Christopher Hoon as manager of government affairs for the Pacific Flyway.

Delta serves as the "voice of duck hunters" throughout North America. We work to promote sensible hunting regulations and seasons, to remove barriers to becoming a hunter, and to increase hunting access. Maintaining and increasing hunting access is critical to providing quality hunting experiences, which leads to stronger recruitment, retention, and reactivation of hunters.

Delta continues to lead a conti-

**2024 DELTA WATERFOWL UHP SUPPORTERS**

Shelby Van Beek  
James T. Hatfield III  
North Dakota Game and Fish Department  
Rod and Tammy Springer  
James M. Hood/Argent Foundation  
Camp Fire Conservation Fund, Inc.  
Wildlife Habitat Canada  
The Buchanan Family Foundation  
Ruth Camp Campbell Foundation  
Frederic C. Hamilton Family Foundation  
Scotty Searle  
Mark and Mary Davis Foundation  
Safari Club International Foundation  
Manitoba Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Fund  
Keith DeHaan  
Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources  
Pennsylvania Game Commission  
Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency  
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources



nent-wide effort to repeal antiquated laws that prohibit waterfowl hunting on Sundays. These outdated prohibitions hurt hunter recruitment, because Sundays often represent about 50% of the days students and families have available for outdoor recreation. Delta spearheaded successful efforts in Delaware, Prince Edward Island, and six Ontario municipalities—Amaranth, Oro-Medonte, Mapleton, Minto, Scugog, and Springwater—to open up Sunday hunting. In addition, hunters throughout Canada’s Maritimes were afforded the full allotment of 107 days during the 2024-2025 waterfowl season.

Expanding hunting access and opportunity is critical, and a key tenet of Delta’s mission to produce ducks and ensure the future of waterfowl hunting.

Delta continues to work toward expanding hunter apprentice licensing in Canada. While hunter apprentice programs are available in 47 states, only British Columbia and Quebec offer it in Canada. Making it easier for new people to try hunting has proven to attract more hunters.

In Saskatchewan, Delta’s Policy Team helped enable a regulation change to allow all-day hunting of dark geese—Canada geese, cackling geese, and white-fronted geese—throughout

the season and province.

Delta has been working with the Canadian Wildlife Service to advocate for a sandhill crane hunting season in parts of Ontario and Quebec. A modest season has been proposed for 2026.

In Wisconsin, Delta continues to work toward establishing a regulated sandhill crane season. Delta staff member Paul Wait served on a legislative study committee formed to recommend options to manage Wisconsin’s sandhill crane population. In December, the committee voted 8-4 to move forward with legislation to establish a hunting season. Delta will continue to advocate for hunters as bills are introduced into the state legislature in 2025.

Delta worked hard in California to successfully push through legislation that clarifies and allows access to navigable waterways for waterfowl hunters. In essence, hunters can hunt flooded waters as long as they don’t trespass and stay 150 yards from residences and buildings.

We’re continually defending against threats to hunting, too. In Missouri and Illinois, Delta invested time and resources into a regional issue that threatened to end hunting access on public lands that were purchased using

hunters’ money.

In Ontario, Delta successfully defended hunting against firearms discharge bylaws in the towns/municipalities of Caledon, Innisfil, Kingsville, Perry, Ramara, Seguin, Temagami, and Trent Hills. In addition, Delta staff helped fend off a nuisance bylaw in South Stormont and a noise bylaw in Mono.

Delta testified before the California Dept. of Fish and Game to successfully thwart an effort to ban hunting on Southampton Bay near Benicia, California. Duck hunting continues to be legal there.

Delta’s policy staff also helped rebuff California legislation that would have required gun owners to register firearms annually and imposed a tax of \$250 or more per gun.

In Florida, Delta helped push through Ballot Amendment 2, which guarantees the right to hunt and fish in the Sunshine State.


### Ensuring the Future

Delta Waterfowl’s staff works all year long to ensure autumn skies are filled with waterfowl so hunters can enjoy the pursuit of ducks and geese.

It has never been more critical to continue to advance Delta’s innovative Hunter3 programs. Together, we can recruit a strong generation of new waterfowl hunters and educate our future wildlife management professionals while we defend and enhance hunting opportunities across the continent.

Thank you for your support of Delta Waterfowl.

Let’s continue to create a bright future for ducks and duck hunters!



DELTA WATERFOWL

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