



## Outdoor Heritage Fund Grant, December 2014 Report



This report summarizes Delta Waterfowl's activities during the first reporting period of our Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) grant entitled North Dakota Hen House Project I. The goal of this project is to install and manage 118 new Hen Houses (HH) near Woodworth, North Dakota. Hen Houses are a type of nest structure designed to provide a safe place for ducks to nest (Figure 1). Primarily used by mallards, HHs are the most efficient and cost-effective method of increasing mallard populations. Since awarded the grant, Delta Waterfowl has secured all necessary materials for the initial portions of this project and the Hen Houses are ready for installation. Delta Waterfowl sincerely appreciates the Outdoor Heritage Fund and this opportunity.



**Figure 1.** A Hen House is erected on a post in wetlands to protect duck nests from predators including coyotes, raccoon, red fox, and striped skunk.

### I. Hen House Inventory

In June 2014, Delta Waterfowl began purchasing the necessary materials for the project, including steel posts and cradles, as well as flax straw and welded wire fencing (for nest tunnels). Currently, all materials are on location in North Dakota. During early December, contractors John Mazur and Tom Sweet began constructing the tunnel portion of the Hen Houses. These are created by rolling a layer of flax straw between two layers of wire fencing (Figure 1). This provides a durable outer layer for the nest structure, protecting the hen and her nest from predators and weather. By 15 December, 118 complete HHs were ready to be installed in North

Dakota wetlands. The contractors also built 22 replacement tunnels for use in future maintenance of the structures.

## II. New Hen House Supersite

The OHF HHs will be installed in northwestern Stutsman County (Figure 2), creating what is called a Supersite. A Supersite is a collection of 100 (in this case 118) or more HHs installed within a relatively small geographic area to maximize duck production and minimize installation and maintenance costs. Delta Waterfowl currently has one HH Supersite in this area, located just north of Woodworth. These structures have been very productive, with nearly 60% of them used by nesting ducks annually. Most of this region hosts over 100 breeding duck pairs per square mile and contains numerous semi-permanent and permanent wetlands. These types of wetlands are optimal for nest structures because they have water nearly every spring, providing feeding and escape habitat for hens and their ducklings.

On 6 May 2014, Delta Waterfowl biologists met with staff at the Chase Lake Wetland Management District to discuss potential locations for the 118 Hen Houses. Chase Lake staff actively works with landowners in Stutsman County on conservation programs and projects. They are currently assisting Delta Waterfowl by locating suitable wetlands for the HHs, as well as securing landowner permission. Delta Waterfowl staff and contractors will have locations for all project structures by 31 December 2014.

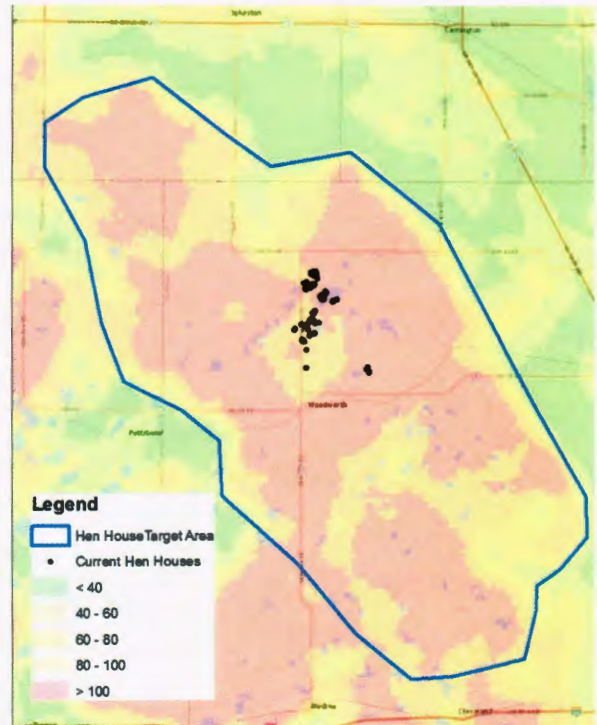


Figure 2. Target area for Hen Houses funded by North Dakota Outdoor Heritage Fund.

## III. Looking Ahead

Within the next few weeks, contractors will begin installing the HHs when ice thickness is safe for travel via ATV. They anticipate completion in mid-January 2015, well before mallards return from wintering grounds in the southern United States. Upon completion of installation, Delta Waterfowl staff will create a spreadsheet of all OHF nest structures, including GPS coordinates. After the first year, this spreadsheet will be updated with usage rates for all structures, providing an accurate estimate of duck production. Maps of the OHF HH project will be also be created and made available.

Delta Waterfowl greatly appreciates the opportunity to work with the State of North Dakota on this project. Please contact Matt Chouinard, Waterfowl Programs Manager, at 701-222-8857 (ext. 209) if you have any questions or comments.