

EVENT RECAP: USACE WATERFOWL WORK DAY BRINGS IMMEDIATE RESULTS FOR MINNESOTA BHA MEMBERS

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Public Lands Month is not only a chance for BHA members to celebrate our wild places and be thankful for the opportunities they have given us, but it is also our chance to give back to them.

Minnesota BHA and AFI members gathered on the shores of Big Sandy Lake in east-central Minnesota on Sept. 27 in partnership with the U.S Army Corp of Engineers for a workday installing wood duck houses and mapping locations to record future nesting successes.

After a morning of introductions of members and dogs and emblazoning each duck house with “USACE X BHA” and ID Numbers, volunteers were split into two teams – land and water. Each team took four of the wood duck houses to areas previously scouted by the USACE staff. As a team, members were able to weigh in on location, height, cover type, and cardinal direction to vary the house locations and later determine the preferences of nesting hens, and which parameters allowed for the most successful hatches.



After lunch, which included Canada goose pastrami and freshly foraged chicken-of-the-woods mushrooms, teams swapped, and the land team finished the remaining boat-based houses. The boat team placed eight more houses around locations accessible on land. In total, 16 wood duck houses were installed, recorded, and mapped using onX maps. Houses will be maintained and inventoried by the Big Sandy USACE Team.



Following an evening of scouting and game planning, volunteers rose from the USACE campsites before dawn to take to the backwaters and channels of Big Sandy Lake to see if conservation karma would reward them for Friday's work. The foggy sunrise of National Public Lands Day and National Hunting and Fishing Day yielded plenty of birds in the area, though bluebird conditions made the hunting increasingly difficult through the morning. New dogs were trained, and hunters Mark Preston and Phil Honzay both connected on ducks, including the teal 59-year-old Preston shot on his first-ever duck hunt! Congratulations, guys!

Public lands and waters provided volunteers with new experiences, friendships, and waypoints. It was an incredible opportunity to improve both our hunting opportunities and our public lands, and then turn around and immediately use them and see the benefits they provide. BHA's national partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was strengthened through the continued dedication to the boots-on-the-ground work that BHA members are so well known for. Minnesota BHA hopes to continue the work at Big Sandy with more access and habitat projects in the coming years.



