Terrific weather, shared history, camaraderie, and fond remembrances of a great sportsman and conservationist combined to make the 2017 Great Rivers Habitat Alliance/Ducks Unlimited (DU) partnership event our largest and most successful gala yet. More than 300 people attended the dinner and auction on October 19 at the Danforth Center in St. Louis. The evening began with an outdoor cocktail party where attendees were able to experience their first view of the updated duck club maps, which were released that night.

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The most anticipated part of the evening was the auction of Map #1 for both the sixth printing of the St. Charles County duck club map and the inaugural printing of the Lincoln and Pike counties duck club map. Spirited bidding occurred for both maps, with the winning buyers purchasing a piece of conservation and hunting history that will stay in their families and clubs for a lifetime.

All the money raised at the event goes to support the conservation work of Ducks Unlimited and Great Rivers Habitat Alliance and our work to preserve the Confluence floodplain.
Improper Levee Heights Along The Mississippi River

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers came out with a long awaited report last spring confirming the truth of what has long been suspected, that numerous levee districts along the Mississippi River have built their levees higher than authorized by the Corps. Residents of Lincoln and Pike counties, including GRHA supporter Nancy Clayton with Neighbors of the Missouri, have long looked across the river and suspected that the levee districts on the Illinois side were improperly high. After receiving many comments along those lines through the years, the Rock Island District of the Army Corps decided to investigate. What they found was shocking, even to those who have suspected improper heights for some time.

The Rock Island District measured 202 miles of levees north of St. Louis up through Iowa, and found that 80 miles of levees were between 2 and 4 feet higher than allowed by law. That is 40 percent of the surveyed levees being significantly higher than authorized! As Scott Whitney with the Rock Island Corps told the Alton Telegraph, “That’s pretty significant.”

The most prominent violator of the levee rules is the Sny Island Levee Drainage District in Illinois. So far, it is the only levee district the Army Corps has punished for its actions. (The Corps has removed Sny from a reimbursement program.) Unfortunately, there are other levee district violators on both sides of the river in Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri.

Great Rivers Habitat Alliance (GRHA) has been encouraging elected officials to support the Army Corps and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources in their efforts to enforce approved levee heights. GRHA Executive Director David Stokes stressed the importance of compelling these levee districts to lower their levees in talks with Missouri Congressional representatives in Washington, D.C., this summer.

When levee districts flout regulations and improperly build higher levees than approved, they make it impossible for other communities to responsibly plan for flood impacts. Just as damaging, their own altered levees raise the heights of the flood they suffer. As the Corps has repeatedly been told — the water has to go somewhere.

Policy Updates

Maryland Heights: The city and levee district continue to try to quietly improve the stormwater control systems in the area north and west of Hwy. 141 and the Page Avenue Extension. While improved stormwater controls are not by themselves a bad thing, once they have made those internal improvements, they are expected to again move full steam ahead on destroying hundreds of acres of farmland in order to use tax subsidies to pay for the region’s newest mesa-development. Using tax dollars to subsidize the destruction of this irreplaceable floodplain would be shameful. GRHA was one of the leading groups opposing these proposals before they were temporarily shelved, and we will continue to oppose these plans in whatever way we can.

Valley Park: GRHA Executive Director David Stokes addressed the Webster/Kirkwood Rotary Club in October at Greenbriar Country Club about the issue of flooding and floodplain development. Many of the attendees were all-too-familiar with the Mississippi River floods of New Year’s 2015-16 and April/May of 2017. GRHA has been appointed to serve on an ad-hoc flooding committee that Missouri Rep. David Gregory of Valley Park established. Many other businesses and citizens in the area — in both St. Louis and Jefferson counties — are trying to work together to come up with solutions. They have been awoken by two 500-year floods within a span of 18 months, and it is time to make policy changes at the federal, state, and local levels to help decrease the threat of a third.

New Federal Floodplain Standards: The Trump Administration has, unfortunately, rescinded recently enacted tighter restrictions and requirements on federally funded projects within the new 100-year floodplain. GRHA submitted comments last year in favor of these Obama Administration changes, and we will continue working to see that these very modest improvements are eventually implemented.

National Flood Insurance Program: NFIP is up for renewal this year. The deadline for the program was recently extended to the end of 2020, but much work still remains. NFIP needs significant reforms, and the devastating hurricane season our country has experienced has put it under more financial pressure than ever. GRHA executive director, David Stokes, participated in two days of meetings in Washington, D.C., this summer that focused on NFIP reform and reauthorization.

Upcoming Missouri 2018 Legislative Session: Great Rivers Habitat Alliances’ priorities include once again seeking policy changes that allow rural Missouri counties to enact tighter floodplain development requirements if they so choose and pressing for enforcement of violations of levee height rules by Missouri levee districts (see the related article in this newsletter about that issue).

South County Times Runs Major Story on Great Rivers

In August, the South County Times ran a major story on the work of Great Rivers Habitat Alliance to combat levees and floodplain development in our region. The front-page article and accompanying podcast focused on the two major floodplains along the Missouri River in recent years and the effects of the Valley Park levee. As readers of this newsletter know, the never-ending pressure to develop the floodplain leads to choices that inevitably result in worse flooding and more environmental damage. Articles like this one in the Times (southcountytimes.com) help us spread our message as widely as possible. The online version of this newsletter includes a link to the podcast of that story if you would like to listen to it.

GRHA Welcomes New Board Member

Please welcome our newest board member, Bob Sweewright, to Great Rivers Habitat Alliance. Sweewright is a commercial banker for Enterprise Bank & Trust. He is a graduate of Auburn University and received his MBA from Emory University in Atlanta. He is an avid sportsman and conservationist with a particular fondness for all things waterfowl. Sweewright has spent time hunting ducks in North and South Dakota, and he has served on leadership teams for various Ducks Unlimited (DU) chapters. Sweewright and his wife, Amanda, reside in Warson Woods with their two dogs. He officially joined our board in September, and we are very excited to have him with us as part of GRHA.

This is my last column for this newsletter as president of Great Rivers Habitat Alliance. I have accepted the chairman position of GRHA and will start that role in December. I want to commend Chris Hyams for taking over as president next year, and I want to thank James F. Blair IV, for his service as chairman for the past two years. Jim Blair has been a tireless advocate for conservation in Missouri and has been devoted to GRHA mission during his many years on the board.

I believe that as I leave my presidency of this group, GRHA is as strong as we have ever been, both organizationally and financially. Because the efforts to preserve our floodplains and levee off our rivers never seems to end, our fight will continue. The long-term solutions are strong regulations, eliminating floodplain development and a wholesale change in flood protection away from new levees and back toward a more natural river management plan.

The short-term ways to address the flooding and environmental destruction of floodplain development is by convincing more people to enact conservation easements and oppose floodplain projects within their own communities. These aims — both long- and short-term — are what our educational and outreach efforts will continue to go toward. That is why it is so important to have your continued financial support.

I am proud to be associated with an organization that seeks to conserve the magnificent rivers, wetlands, and floodplains that were the reason for St. Louis’ founding (and GRHA’s founding) in the first place. Without that heritage and the environmental benefit that the river ecosystem provides, our entire region would suffer. You can trust that Great Rivers Habitat Alliance will continue to do all we can to preserve the Confluence.
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Improper Levee Heights will attempt to determine the effects of the unauthorized levee heights on the flooding over the past decade. (Great Rivers Habitat Alliance was able to submit high-water marks from recent flood events in order to help confirm the accuracy of the Corps’ modeling work.) The modeling may demonstrate just how serious the impacts of the high levees were during those floods, and how much damage they may have caused by neglecting the careful calculations of the Corps and other planners.

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President’s Column

By Andy Spann

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Duck Club Maps For Sale

If you are interested in purchasing one of the beautiful 2017 duck club maps, they are now available for sale. Both the sixth printing of the St. Charles map and the inaugural Lincoln and Pike counties map are available. Each map is $400, which is tax-deductible. Map sales will support the work of Great Rivers Habitat Alliance, Ducks Unlimited, and Delta Waterfowl. Maps are sold unframed, but we are happy to recommend a frame shop at your request. Please contact our office at (314) 918-1007 to arrange a time to come by and purchase your updated duck club map for your hunt club, office, man cave, or trophy room!
Great Rivers Habitat Alliance Partners

DONATIONS CAN BE MADE AT: WWW.GRHA.ORG

Great Rivers Habitat Alliance is a 501(c)3 public charity and donations to GRHA are tax deductible as allowed by law.
Partnership Gala with Ducks Unlimited: Another Great Event

In the morning hours of the event, we were able to capture the essence of the gala and its importance, and the joy it brought to all in attendance.

Terrific weather, shared history, camaraderie, and fond remembrances of a great sportsman and conservationist combined to make the event a success. The highlight of the evening was when Mr. Hager’s son, Rusty, addressed the room with recollections of his father’s great appreciation of conservation and his love of the outdoors.

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The most anticipated part of the evening was the auction of Map #1, a look into the history of the Confluence floodplain. Spirited bidding occurred for both maps, with the winning buyers purchasing a piece of conservation and hunting history that will stay in their families and clubs for a lifetime.

The event also featured the release of the new duck club maps every decade for the past 40 years. The highlight of the evening was when Mr. Hager’s son, Rusty, addressed the room with recollections of his father’s great appreciation of conservation and his love of the outdoors.

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