



CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

Ducks Unlimited



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—Govan Hornor, Chief Information Officer

Since its founding in the Dust Bowl era, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., has conserved 14 million acres to protect waterfowl. To continue that work and provide an exceptional experience that will grow members and volunteers for decades to come, the organization needed the right CRM partner.

Conservation Giant Ducks Unlimited Partners with Blackbaud to Meet its Unique CRM Needs

Ducks Unlimited’s volunteers represent diverse groups of people around the country committed to waterfowl conservation. Their efforts result in over 4,000 events each year, more than 700,000 members across the country, 14 million acres and counting conserved, and more than \$220 million in annual revenue dedicated to the cause.

For years, Ducks Unlimited handled its constituent resource management in house, building a system from scratch to accommodate its unique funding structure. But along the way, the very language of that technology became less and less widely used.

Ducks Unlimited is powered by:
Blackbaud CRM™

The homegrown system started presenting challenges around the time Govan Hornor retired from leading IT efforts at a major multinational package delivery company for nearly three decades. Hornor, who grew up duck hunting along the Mississippi River, likes to explain business challenges with metaphors. When he learned about the situation at Ducks Unlimited, he put it like this: “The platform wasn’t on fire, but you could smell smoke.”

Hornor stepped out of retirement and took his dream job as chief information officer with Ducks Unlimited—and immediately looked for the right partners to prevent that impending fire from occurring. This included reaching out to Blackbaud for constituent resource management. “If you don’t have a good system in place to support your work in today’s world, you’re not going to survive,” Hornor explained. “It was necessary for us to evolve and grow.”



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Dust to Donors

Ducks Unlimited began in the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, as a windy drought swept the United States and Canada, threatening agriculture and ecology in its wake. A group of hunters worried about declining duck numbers and began raising money to protect the birds’ nesting grounds in Canada.

The group ran into an immediate challenge, because a United States entity cannot purchase land in Canada. So, Ducks Unlimited Canada was formed as a partner organization. By the 1980s, research revealed the importance of the ducks’ entire migration path, so Ducks Unlimited began protecting not only nesting grounds, but wintering and migration habitats as well.

During that time of growth and expansion, the organization implemented its highly customized constituent resource management system. When Hornor joined the team, he took six months to evaluate the current situation and determine the best course forward. “We need to flip this thing over and see how well it’s serving the business,” he told his colleagues.

As a nonprofit, Ducks Unlimited had to conduct its technology overhaul in stages to avoid large, unforeseen expenses that would put a strain on mission-critical conservation work. Hornor and his colleagues addressed the most urgent need first—financial systems—and soon partnered with Microsoft for its Dynamics 365 enterprise resource planning.

Next, the organization looked at its constituent resource management with three clear goals in mind: building a modern member experience; creating a compelling event environment; and offering a simpler, more efficient process for the entire team, including the dedicated volunteer base. “None of the other players in the nonprofit space were big enough to handle us,” Hornor said. “Blackbaud CRM is a perfect fit. It’s in the cloud, so Blackbaud has to worry about the underpinnings. With any advancement that comes along, Blackbaud is going to take care of most of the heavy lifting for us.”

Customizations for Conservation

The partnership began with a six-month discovery process to ensure that Blackbaud thoroughly understood Ducks Unlimited—from its funding structure to its culture. That discovery process uncovered unique needs, and the nonprofit recognized the value of Blackbaud’s robust out-of-the-box capabilities and extensibility options.

“Over the years it’s been difficult to keep up with technology, and in today’s environment, nonprofits are competing for the same dollar,” said Ducks Unlimited’s Chief Fundraising Officer Amy Batson. “Our fundraising success relies on an efficient, modern technology footprint to be a leader in the nonprofit conservation space.”

Ducks Unlimited raises funds primarily from private individuals, corporate partnerships, and grants. The organization prides itself on leveraging every dollar raised into \$3 or more dollars toward its mission—but that requires careful, thoughtful accounting and reporting.

“It takes a sophisticated system to marry rules and regulations to leverage each dollar raised,” Batson added.

Ducks Unlimited plans to go live with Blackbaud CRM in summer 2020. “Blackbaud has been the premier nonprofit fundraising supplier of technology, and we want that expertise,” Hornor said. “We will add our special recipe and magic potion into that mix to raise money for our mission and be more efficient in the process.”

Looking toward the CRM launch and beyond, Ducks Unlimited aims to expand its membership and supporter base, as its work benefits wildlife and people across North America.

“We know we can continue to honor our hunter-based history and traditions while also appealing to a larger, more diverse audience,” Hornor said. “A key is that our CRM system keeps up with people interested in our work. We want to leverage technology in ways that Ducks Unlimited isn’t even thinking of yet. To do that, you need something industrial strength, and we found that in Blackbaud.”



“It’s table stakes to have a modern technology footprint to be a player in the nonprofit space, particularly conservation.”

—Govan Hornor,
Chief Information Officer

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About Blackbaud

Leading uniquely at the intersection point of technology and social good, Blackbaud connects and empowers organizations to increase their impact through cloud software, services, expertise, and data intelligence. We serve the entire social good community, which includes nonprofits, foundations, companies, education institutions, healthcare organizations, and the individual change agents who support them.