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Ducks Unlimited Canada
CANADA'S CONSERVATION COMPANY

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But as the years went on, it was these family values that provided the foundation for the Mannix-Turnbull friendship and fodder for their conservation efforts. Based on their love for hunting, the Mannix family built Richdale Ranch, a duck and goose camp near Hanna, Alta., in 1951 as a way of keeping contact with customers and rewarding employees. It also became a favourite place of young Fred Mannix.

“As a kid, I hunted with my dad and my uncle Don Wilson, who was with Imperial Oil at that time,” he says of the lodge, where he and Turnbull now hunt with their own children. “But this changed all our perspectives. For my father, it was a good relief from the stress of business. Instead of an occasional trip, it became a constant background of what we could do to enjoy the land and the wildlife as much as we could.”

Soon after meeting in 1981, Mannix invited Turnbull on board as a partner of the Richdale camp. It wasn't too long after that DUC began to have an enhanced presence, both in profile with projects on the land and in conversation around the camp.

“During the '80s and '90s, Fred and I would use Richdale Ranch to help steward possible contributors and those who care about the waterfowl resource,” says Turnbull. “You'd be amazed at how passionate people become about ducks and DUC when you show them through your eyes at the camp.”

The ability of wildlife and agriculture to coexist in harmony at Richdale Ranch led to one of those duck blind conversations between the pair that hatched a grand concept. The camp, and others just like it, could be a valuable prong of a two-part template designed to raise funds for wetland and waterfowl conservation. The first prong would be an invitation-only major gift dinner fundraiser just outside Calgary at Mannix's Chinook Downs home. The second prong would be taking attendees of the dinner to a duck and goose camp and showing donors first-hand the type of habitat conservation work their gifts would help.

Before too long, the pair had set the wheels in motion for three more camps – Eaglesham in Alberta's Peace Country, Oak Lake in Manitoba and The Bayou near Long Point, Ont., near where Turnbull learned to appreciate the great outdoors as a youngster – to bring their concept to reality. While Oak Lake and The Bayou are ongoing works, the conservation easement (CEs) legislation passed in 1993 by the Alberta government provided the perfect opportunity at Eaglesham to strategically acquire land parcels that can return the greatest waterfowl values.

“The whole easement program spawned out of Richdale, but Eaglesham is the jewel,” says Turnbull, acknowledging the efforts of then Prairie director of regional operations and current DUC executive vice-president Gord Edwards, and now-retired DUC area manager Ken Lumbis as critical to the success of the Alberta efforts. “We demonstrated, both economically and environmentally, how well thought-out CEs could become viable in a traditional agricultural landscape. These became living examples of how wildlife and agriculture both benefited from this collaboration and opened a lot of eyes in those local communities as well as at provincial levels.”