

AFTCO announces 2024 B.A.S.S. conservation grant recipients representing six B.A.S.S. Nation Clubs

SANTA ANA, Calif. — AFTCO upholds its longstanding commitment to conservation by awarding six Conservation Grants to B.A.S.S. Nation Clubs in 2024. This year's total contribution of \$25,000 will be distributed among six recipients. Since the program's inception in 2018, AFTCO has contributed over \$145,000 to support these initiatives. For 2024, the six recipients that have been selected to receive grants are:

1. Banner Creek Aquatic Vegetation Restoration Project with Leavenworth Bass Club
2. East Tennessee Lake Improvement Project with Tennessee B.A.S.S. Nation c/o Meigs County High School
3. Lake Brownwood Fish Habitat Enhancements with Texas B.A.S.S. Nation
4. Oregon B.A.S.S. Nation Reservoir Enhancement Project with Oregon B.A.S.S. Nation
5. Tennessee Statewide Habitat Project with Tennessee B.A.S.S. Nation
6. Georgia B.A.S.S. Nation Fish Care with Georgia B.A.S.S. Nation

The goals of these programs include enhancing aquatic habitats across various reservoirs and lakes, restoring native vegetation, improving fish habitats, increasing angler education, and promoting collaborative conservation efforts. Coordinated locally, these programs couldn't be done without the collaborative efforts of B.A.S.S. Nation chapters, governmental fishing agencies, local businesses, and the invaluable support of volunteers and youth organizations. "These grants are a great example of the efforts our B.A.S.S. Nation clubs are putting forth to enhance the fishing in their local lakes and reservoirs," said Gene



Georgia B.A.S.S. Nation Fish Care with Georgia B.A.S.S. Nation is one of six conservation grant recipients awarded by AFTCO in 2024. (Photo courtesy of AFTCO)

Gilliland, B.A.S.S. Conservation Director. "Our state chapters are blessed to be associated with a company like AFTCO that takes conservation to heart. That continued commitment to the B.A.S.S. Nation and to the fishery resources that our sport depends on is unmatched." Led by the **Leavenworth Bass Club**, the goal of the **first project** is to establish native aquatic vegetation along three miles of the currently barren shoreline at **Banner Creek Reservoir** in Holton, Kansas. This will be achieved by building a greenhouse at Perry State Park where plants will be propagated and transplanted back into the reservoir from 2024 to 2026. The greenhouse can produce nearly 3,000 plants per year. Monitoring

will be conducted through presence-absence surveys, bathymetric mapping, and snorkel assessments to track the spread and survival of the vegetation until 2031. Youth anglers will assist with transplantation, and a Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) biologist will educate local high school students on the importance of native aquatic plants. **The second project** will provide new habitat for bass in an aging reservoir, **Watts Bar Lake**. Tennessee B.A.S.S. Nation, in collaboration with Meigs County High School and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA), will construct artificial fish structures. These structures, built with the assistance of local high school bass clubs, college

students, coaches, and angler volunteers, will provide vital habitat for bass during various life stages, addressing the degradation of the reservoir's existing habitat. The AFTCO grant will fund phase 2 of the project, focusing on completing the construction and deployment of these structures, with a goal of successful deployment by the end of 2024. Additionally, the project serves as an outreach initiative, engaging youth anglers and local fishing clubs in conservation efforts and promoting outdoor work through volunteer construction days. The goal of the third project is to revitalize the structural fish habitat in Lake Brownwood, a major destination for tournament bass fishing in western Texas. The

reservoir has a history of fluctuating water levels, and much of it is devoid of aquatic vegetation and woody habitat. Spearheaded by Texas B.A.S.S. Nation, this project involves installing natural and man-made fish habitat structures across three designated areas of the reservoir. This will restore the structural fish habitat that has been lost and improve fishing for all anglers. Along with the AFTCO grant, financial contributions and resources from partners such as the Brown County Water Improvement District, Brownwood Bass Club, Major League Fishing Black Bass Stewardship Group, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) will support this project. TBN Youth Directors will engage youth, high school

teams, participating adults, club members, and encourage other project partners and the local community to involve youth and families in this effort.

The fourth project, led by **Oregon B.A.S.S. Nation**, aims to improve low water habitat at Cottage Grove Reservoir through the implementation of Spider Blocks and Stake Blocks. The project plans to conduct this enhancement in phases over a 3-5 year period, placing 200 blocks annually, with 100 blocks designated for Cottage Grove Reservoir and 100 for Fern Ridge Reservoir to help with the reduced low water habitat. Additionally, the project emphasizes youth angler involvement by collaborating with local bass clubs to engage young participants in the construction and placement of the blocks.

For the fifth project, **Tennessee B.A.S.S. Nation** aims to enhance reservoir habitats across the state through angler education, habitat construction, and partnership development. Collaborating with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) and various angler groups, the project targets multiple reservoirs in different regions of Tennessee, deploying a variety of artificial structures and recycled Christmas trees to improve fish habitats. The AFTCO grant will be used to fund the materials needed to construct fish attractors and habitat structures. The project also emphasizes the involvement of youth anglers, with hundreds of junior and high school teams participating in habitat construction and cleanup efforts, demonstrating a commitment to environmental stewardship and community engagement.

The final grant recipient in 2024 is Georgia B.A.S.S. Nation. The goal of their project is to enhance current fish care techniques at their youth events, recognizing the growing popularity of youth fishing and the importance of preserving the bass population. With a solid system already in place, they aim to improve their weigh-in system by incorporating pure oxygen and advanced aeration methods to enhance fish care/release tanks, allowing for more recuperation time for the fish before release. With the AFTCO grant, they plan to invest in equipment such as oxygen gas cylinders, air blowers, and dissolved oxygen meters to optimize the fish care environment. Furthermore, this project will educate youth anglers on fish care practices and set an example by implementing the best possible weigh-in system, aiming to instill a sense of responsibility and care for the resource among young anglers.

"AFTCO has been fortunate to work with great partners at B.A.S.S. and all their passionate B.A.S.S. Nation state chapters," said Matt Florentino, AFTCO Marketing Director. "Together we've been able to make a big impact to enhance these fisheries across the country and give back to both the resource and the angling community."

Remember, June 16th is Father's Day.

Ducks Unlimited surpasses wetlands conservation milestone for the first time in its 87 year history

From the Outdoor Wire.com

For the first time in its 87-year history, Ducks Unlimited has delivered 1 million acres of conservation across North America in one year thanks to more than a million supporters and partners including private landowners, hunters, corporations, major donors, state and federal agencies. This achievement happened in fiscal year 2024 and reflects a national surge in public and private interest to restore and protect wetland habitats.

One million acres of conservation - about the area of Rhode Island - includes long-term and permanent projects, such as conservation restorations and easements, and short-term or annual efforts, such as agricultural cover crop programs, as well as both new and revisited project sites. The announcement was made during Ducks Unlimited's 87th National Convention in San Diego, California. Since its founding, Ducks Unlimited has restored or protected more than 18 million acres. "One million acres of tangible conservation in one year is an achievement that's nearly 90 years in the making," said DU CEO Adam Putnam. "This is a testament to the hard work of our dedicated staff and volunteers following years of exponential conservation growth. We don't just advocate for wetlands - our mission moves dirt. Ducks see it. Communities see it. Partners see it. Each acre represents in-the-field success. Combined with our most ambitious comprehensive campaign in history, Conservation For a Continent, DU members and supporters are



more motivated than ever before to make an impact on the wetlands and waterfowl we love." The historic international fundraising campaign, "Conservation For a Continent. Our Wetlands. Our Legacy," aims to raise \$3 billion by 2026 to provide cleaner water for communities and wildlife. One of the largest fundraising efforts launched in North America devoted to landscape conservation and the future of our outdoors heritage, the campaign recently surpassed the \$2 billion mark with two years remaining. Also announced during convention was the largest-ever gift to Ducks Unlimited. Alex Taylor, CEO and Chairman Cox Enterprises announced a \$100 million gift to support conservation in honor of Jim Kennedy, chairman emeritus of Cox Enterprises and chairman of the James M. Cox Foundation. The gift will help support protection and restoration efforts of North America's Prairie Pothole Region. Jim Kennedy is DU's largest supporter, has been a volunteer with Ducks Unlimited for over 50 years, has served on its board of directors and was Wetlands America Trust's founding president. The gift directly supports the continental campaign and prepares DU to conserve millions more acres of habitat.

"Wetlands provide many services to our communities, including flood storage, groundwater recharge, carbon sequestration, enhanced fish habitat and more," said DU Chief Conservation Officer Dr. Karen Waldrop. "But we

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can't do this alone. The unprecedented success during FY24 is because of DU's industry-leading partnerships with state and federal agencies, private corporations, farmers and individual donors." Ducks Unlimited got its start during the Dust Bowl when North America's drought-plagued waterfowl populations had plunged to unprecedented lows. Determined not to sit idly by as the continent's waterfowl dwindled beyond recovery, a small group of waterfowl hunters joined together to form an organization that became known as Ducks Unlimited. Our mission: habitat conservation. Thanks to decades of abiding by that single mission, Ducks Unlimited is now the world's largest and most effective private waterfowl and wetlands conservation organization. Its conservation work improves biodiversity, cleans water and protects communities from flooding and coastal erosion and provides a landscape for hunters and other

outdoors enthusiasts.

What conservation looks like:

- Restoring and reconnecting the Klamath Basin in California, Oregon
- Rescuing Utah's Great Salt Lake
- Ohio Partners with Ducks Unlimited on progressive water quality management program.
- New York, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, DU enhance Montezuma Wetlands Complex
- Florida Cattlemen's Association, DU balance wetlands conservation and working agricultural lands
- DU employs innovative management practices at Arkansas' Greentree Reservoirs
- DU, U.S. Department of Agriculture improve soil health and rotational grazing capacity in North Dakota

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