

Ducks Unlimited Podcast with Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Martha Williams
August 11, 2022

Dr. Mike Brasher: Hey everyone, welcome back to the Ducks Unlimited Podcast. Thanks for joining us here on this particular episode, and it's going to be an exciting episode because we have a very special guest with us. One of the things that I enjoy most about this podcast is it does give us an opportunity to connect with so many of our partners, so many of our colleagues in the waterfowl and the wetlands conservation field, and today is certainly no exception. It's also pretty special because in studio with me here I have a co-host, very special co-host, Dr. Karen Waldrup, Ducks Unlimited's very own Chief Conservation Officer. Karen, welcome.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: Thank you. Excited to be here.

Dr. Mike Brasher: And then joining us remotely is our very special guest, the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ms. Martha Williams. Martha, thank you so much for joining us and for being here with us today.

Martha Williams: Thank you, Mike. And it's always nice to be here with you too, Karen.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: Good to see you.

Dr. Mike Brasher: Martha, I'll start out by congratulating you on your confirmation earlier this year on becoming the new Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We, within Ducks Unlimited, have so many friends, so many professional colleagues within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that we pay attention to what happens in your agency and those type of decisions on who is going to be the next leader of that agency. You're so important to us because we care about those friends, those people that work for the service, both as friends as well as professional colleagues. Congratulations on that, and we certainly look forward to your leadership for that so important agency.

Martha Williams: Thank you so much, and I look forward to it as well. I completely understand how critical Ducks Unlimited is to the Fish and Wildlife Service and our achieving our mission. That longstanding partnership has been terrific.

Dr. Mike Brasher: Director Williams, one of the first things that we typically do when we have a guest is get to know that person a little bit at the very start. Then we'll have some other questions about your priorities for the agency as we go forward here. But first, let's just let our listeners learn a little bit about you. I have a series of questions here. We'll start with this one. Just tell us generally about your personal and professional background for those that may not be aware of it.

Martha Williams: Thanks, Mike. I grew up on a farm north of Baltimore, where my parents in their 90s still live, and they still actively farm it. Right now one of the benefits, the beauties of being back in D.C., as hard as it is to leave Montana, one of the benefits of being back here is I go up to the farm on the weekends when I can and I really help out. I'm learning the patterns of how to mow the fields and

when they plant and harvest. I'm learning from them. What I've come to understand, going back to the farm and helping out, is just how intertwined the outdoors and the landscape place was to us as a family growing up. That was so instilled in us.

Then I went West when I was ... In 1976. I guess I won't say how old I was in 1976, but it was a formative experience. I went West every opportunity I had after that, working in Wyoming on a ranch, and eventually going to law school there. And falling in love with wildlife issues and conservation generally. It's been very much a part of me as a person, as well as my professional or my career throughout time. I've learned a lot and always have a lot more to learn too.

Dr. Mike Brasher: Director Williams, you answered part of my next question in your earlier response, but I want to explore it a little bit more. We oftentimes ask our guests, what was the one thing, or was there one thing that set you on your path to your certain career? Or has there been any other type of very influential, very memorable moment along that path that has stayed with you to that point, that has helped shape you and further your maturation as a professional in this field? Anything of that to add to your previous question?

Martha Williams: I love that question, Mike. I used to ask it of my students and I think, as a parent, what opportunities we provide our kids that are formative later on in life for them. I think when we took that trip across the country and I fell in love with the West and kept going back there, what was it about it? I think it was the wide open spaces. I think it was the wildlife that we could see. It was a way of life that I really resonated. Probably that.

I think also, going back to the first question, being an attorney for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and working on the wolf litigation early on and gaining this understanding of how complex many of these issues are, and that everybody comes to them with very real perspectives and the need to listen to those perspectives and try to really understand them and sort through them, I think that has been formative as well for me in how I approach those issues now at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Dr. Mike Brasher: One more related question, then I'm going to hand it over to Karen for a few questions. Along that journey, any type of particularly influential people in your life, personal or professional? A lot of times this question is fun because it gives our guest an opportunity to pay tribute to those people that have been very influential in their lives. Any people like that for you, Martha?

Martha Williams: Oh, I think so many. It's hard to just pick a few. But I did go to the University of Montana, to law school, to study under Marjorie Brown. She was a natural resources, public lands, Indian law professor. She went about her work with such humility and wisdom that I was really drawn to her as a mentor. I think also of Michael Bean, who is so knowledgeable and yet so soft spoken. Those are probably two key ones.

For what it's worth, at the time, I thought of Ruth Bader Ginsburg in that she was so incremental and very strategic in how she set out her opinions. I think what I learned from that is knowing how to lay a groundwork or framework for later decisions to create opportunities. It's so important. When those circumstances come up, if you've done your homework, then you have those opportunities before you. But maybe not if you haven't done your homework all along the way.

Dr. Mike Brasher: That's great. Thank you for sharing that. That's pretty cool to hear. Karen?

Dr. Karen Waldrup: Yeah. Martha, you talked about being able to go out West and the experiences, and falling in love with everything that has to do with the outdoors and being out West. I was just wondering if you could share with us some of your favorite outdoor activities from over the years.

Martha Williams: Thanks, Karen. That's so funny. I would say anything, anything outside. But gosh, I love being on rivers. I love waking up camping and waking up next to a river. I love hunting, because I love getting out early in the morning and being so attuned to the sounds and things going on around you.

But I think what I've also learned over time, even being here in D.C., is it can be as much as being in your backyard or going to the local park. That while these wild places are so compelling and draw me and many others, it's just being outside and paying attention to your backyard and local places are pretty special too.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: I could not agree more. If you had a couple of your favorite hunting experiences, is there a couple that you would be interested in sharing?

Martha Williams: Sure. I have one. It's not hunting, it's shooting. On my honeymoon, we went to Hawaii. My husband, who loved to hunt and fish, there was a sporting clays course there, and he took me to the sporting clays course. I can't pretend to be very good. I had one those days, those lucky days, where I just nailed it. He looked at me like, "Wow, score. I'm excited that we got married, but whoa, I didn't know you could shoot so well. Double score." That was just a one-time deal that I shot that well.

But I think of the first time I went elk hunting and how spiritual and magical the experience was of being by myself in a place where I was, again, so attuned to my environment. I envisioned an elk coming across this draw. I was very aware of how far I could shoot or not, and only wanting to take a clean shot. Unbelievably, four hours later, a bull elk came right where I had imagined, stopped very much within the line of fire. Stopped sideways to me, turned and looked at me like, "Are you going to do something or not?"

I did shoot it in one shot. I put sage in its mouth to honor it, and very much appreciate having that meat in my freezer and knowing where it came from. But

it was a very incredible experience. I think, oh my gosh, for my first time out elk hunting that it could happen in that way, it was pretty special.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: That does sound special. There is something special about the majestic elk. That's a great story. Both of them are wonderful stories. If it's all right, I'll switch gears a little bit. I want to talk about what I think was probably a very exciting day for you and your family. But I was just wondering if you could share with us, what did it mean to you and your family when you learned that the President, our President Biden, had nominated you to lead the agency that has all this great responsibility that we talked about, and the partnerships, and managing and conserving our nation's fish and wildlife resources?

Martha Williams: Oh, great question. I think back to how I talked about Marge Brown. It was incredibly humbling. Exciting, nervous excitement. It was just such an honor. I think about it. I think of all of the sum of experiences I've had that led up to that moment and how I need to draw on every single one of them. Ones that might be obvious and then other ones, perhaps not so obvious. I just felt like it was this culmination of a lot of factors, and mostly it was just a feeling of deep appreciation and corresponding responsibility. It's an honor.

Dr. Mike Brasher: Director Williams, I have a question for you. And then as we get into these next ones, we're going to be talking about some of your priorities as the Director for the Fish and Wildlife Service. But I guess before we go too far down there, this is Ducks Unlimited. Our members, our supporters are avid waterfowl hunters. I will say, I'll take the liberty of saying that we have video here that's enabling us to interact, and I'm looking over your right shoulder, I think. Is that a common eider that I see mounted over there?

Martha Williams: It is.

Dr. Mike Brasher: I'm very happy to see that we have a waterfowl species there prominently in your office there. Thanks for that.

Martha Williams: And a trumpeter swan, too. You can't see it quite as well. There.

Dr. Mike Brasher: Oh, there it is. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Martha Williams: That's my guardian back there.

Dr. Mike Brasher: That is great. It is the time of year when traditionally, waterfowl hunters and waterfowl managers get so excited about, because we're all looking north to the breeding grounds of the Northern U.S. and Canada. Of course, this is when our Fish and Wildlife Service partners, Canadian Wildlife Service partners, state and provincial partners, have been out there conducting the Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey. You know the story as well as anyone about us being without it for the last two years due to the pandemic.

We have spoken with the Chief of the Division of Migratory Bird Management, Dr. Ken Richkus, and he has told us and shared with us, yes, that the survey is being conducted. But I wanted to give you an opportunity as the Director of the agency, anything that you're able to share about the status, the completing of that survey? You probably don't have the numbers, can't give us a sneak peek, but anything worth sharing about the status of that survey?

Martha Williams: Excellent question, because it's one that I've gotten a lot, so I'm glad to be able to address. I know Dr. Ken Richkus was on your podcast. Super helpful for him to give that detailed information. But the story is so important that for the first time since the pandemic, our aerial survey crews were able to enter Canada to conduct the Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey, that May survey. It was such a relief that we were able to do so. I think it's really cool that there were nine Fish and Wildlife Service air crews, there were two ground crews. And then we worked with Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service for three of their air crews and three of their ground crews.

I think it's a testament to what it takes collectively for all of us to manage and steward these incredible species, waterfowl species, and to our pilots, to everything that goes into them. I can't give you much of a hint. It's still early for us to know what those surveys will mean as far as an estimate population size and waterfowl production. But I know everyone's super busy to be able to get those draft reports out. I wish I could give you an indication, but in this instance, I don't know any more than you do. We'll all find out probably around the same time. But they're really key, and I'm glad those surveys were able to happen.

Dr. Mike Brasher: Yeah. I figured that was the case, but I had to ask.

Martha Williams: Darn. Yes.

Dr. Mike Brasher: But no, thank you for that. And thank you to all of your staff for the great work that they do on that survey. We'll look forward to that report.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: It's a lot of hard work, but what an incredible database as far as the series of flights over the years. There's really nothing that compares to the data that has been able to come in from those surveys, so it is wonderful to have.

Martha Williams: Yeah. Thanks, Karen. I think it's a good reminder. We need to remind ourselves, I think, in these days, of those pieces that are so cool about what we do and all that it takes to provide that really important data.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: It is. Partnerships are also extremely important. Really, to meet all of the needs of migratory birds, it takes lots of partners and lots of coordination and communication, and these strong relationships. In my previous role with the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife, I know how important that relationship and that partnership is with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I was wondering, how do you view and really describe the partnership that exists

between state and federal agencies, to make sure that we have effective management and sustainable waterfowl populations?

Martha Williams: Great question. I think it's pretty fun, Karen, that you and I both worked together while in Kentucky and Montana, and then now we're in these positions where we're still working together on a more national scale. I think the first answer is, those partnerships are absolutely critical. I don't think any of us could get our work done, achieve our missions alone. These are definitely and necessarily collective efforts.

What does that mean, really? There's that longstanding coordination and sometimes corresponding tensions between the Fish and Wildlife Service and the states, understandably so. That's very important, those relationships are. But then there are also, like Ducks Unlimited, the NGOs and our other partners that have been part of this work for so long and get it, get the processes. And are incredibly supportive and effective.

Then I think of the Migratory Bird Joint Ventures as key components to addressing migratory birds, the challenges they face, and the opportunities that we have to address them. I think about collaborative conservation. For me, that is the model going forward, because it's necessary that we all work together. I think also, we have a chance to show the value of collaboration. We have a chance to show that these are issues that cut through politics.

Politics influence some pieces of it, but there's so much of what we do that cuts through that and requires us to work together well. I think of voluntary efforts by private land owners. We're talking about public land, private land, governmental parties, tribes, local government, and NGOs and business as well. I can elaborate a ton, but all I would say is, those partnerships are absolutely critical.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: Critical. Well, and you alluded to it some with private land owners, but we always talk about that hunters and anglers. They pay for conservation. We say that a lot, and it's true. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about the importance of their contributions, hunters, anglers, to habitat management, to funding conservation, influencing policy, and then also, social science and helping provide a lot of the data that we need, especially with waterfowl populations.

Martha Williams: I'm so glad the way you framed that question, Karen, because I think often, we talk about hunters and anglers, about the financial contributions they make, which are incredibly important. I hope you see. The listeners can't see it. I have a Duck Stamp pin on, and I just purchased my Duck Stamp last week that I have right here. I get how incredibly important the migratory bird hunting and conservation Duck Stamp is to conservation.

But what you mentioned too is, it is that financial component. It is also that key part of public education efforts, that historical political engagement. And also, gathering information and data, whether it's the hard data or the social science as well. I think hunters and anglers are so important to this bigger picture of how we all work together toward these common goals. It's integral throughout all of our work.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: Absolutely.

Martha Williams: I should say, I am also greatly appreciative to all these partners and the hunters and anglers. I don't want to miss that point.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: They play a very important role. As we are also, all of us here are also hunters and anglers as well, and so we understand both sides of how important that information that we gather. Them being involved, hunters and anglers and their involvement, and caring about conservation is so vitally important to the future of waterfowl, wildlife, fisheries, everything in our future in this country. So definitely, I echo your thoughts of appreciation.

Martha Williams: It makes me think, Karen, we support that which we know. You love things that you know. I think those who have been engaged in this work and nature, waterfowl for a long, long time, are so engaged because they know it and love it. That's really important.

Dr. Mike Brasher: And the support for legislation.

Martha Williams: Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Mike Brasher: Their investments of time and resources, just it's pretty remarkable. They are true leaders. Really, as you said, Director, we invest in the things that we care about and that we know about. Hunters and anglers do it in so many different ways.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: Right. Speaking of the legislation, we've seen a lot of legislative initiatives lately that have the potential to deliver so many great benefits for waterfowl and other migratory birds. Things like the Great American Outdoors Act, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, America the Beautiful, there's many others. Actually, Director Williams, during your time as director and in the future, what do you think some of your greatest priorities are going to be for supporting refuges, waterfowl and habitat conservation, and other migratory bird issues, given a lot of those legislative pieces that we're seeing?

Martha Williams: Yes, thanks for that. Priorities related to the National Wildlife Refuge system, I think about how important conserving habitat for waterfowl and migratory birds is. And the refuge system is such a key part of that. The refuge system has a strategic growth policy, where we really are focused on our priorities of conserving North American waterfowl and migratory birds. Very grateful for the

permanent Land and Water Conservation Fund money directed toward acquiring that important habitat.

I think also of expanding, continuing to expand opportunities for recreational hunting and fishing on public lands. But also, to continue to expand access and engagement to some of those urban wildlife refuges too, and to some of those communities that haven't always traditionally been engaged to pay attention to our traditional constituents and continue to expand.

And then I think of our Coastal Program and our Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, working through both, and with Ducks Unlimited, to enhance conservation and promote habitat connectivity and ecosystem resilience. I think of that work. A component of that is this restoration economy that's really important nationally, but also helps communities in so many different ways. Lots of priorities for the refuge system and excited for all of the work we do together.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: Yeah. Speaking of some of those other benefits of the work that we're all doing, the work on refuges and throughout the country, I love hearing how you're talking about some of the gains and things that you guys can make in these areas, given the legislative priorities. You mentioned helping communities, and I know that there have been times and there'll be more times where the refuges can hold water during certain flood events that will help from flooding issues downstream. Or for groundwater recharge, or creating more habitat to hold water during critical times.

I think that's wonderful that you guys are looking at all of those aspects of what we can do with some of these legislative priorities and some of these funds. I'm glad you mentioned Land and Water Conservation Fund as well, which is extremely important. That's great. Is there anything else on that, that you think of to expand on some of those opportunities that maybe you guys are investigating?

Martha Williams: Sure. I think of, this administration has prioritized and has explicitly recognized the value of conservation. Whether it's through addressing climate change, whether it's through the restoring America the Beautiful report, it's an investment, a recognition of its importance and an investment in those practices that I think all of us in this profession have learned, those lessons we've learned over the years. That voluntary, locally-led conservation is most durable, that we honor and respect private property rights, that we work with communities, that we work with tribes. Those key components we will only be amplifying, and that we have a real investment in.

I think of supporting joint ventures, and our support for joint ventures aligns so well with this administration's efforts under America the Beautiful. And then I worry about the declining birds, the three billion birds that we have lost, and then our investments. How do we turn that around and how do we do that collectively? DU's been incredibly helpful. Our joint ventures are critically

important to that. NAWCA or Duck Stamp are flyways. There are so many ways we can work on this together, and have been, and create that really important partner foundation that we then build from as we get these investments.

RAWA, Recovering America's Wildlife Act, would be a game changer. I feel like that would be pretty darn exciting were that to pass. We're all getting ready for it, right? For hopefully, when it does pass.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: Absolutely. That's wonderful.

Martha Williams: Yeah. I think the theme I want to convey is just how important our partnerships and voluntary efforts are, and that we have a foundation to work on there. What we really want to do is to continue to build on that and invest in it.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: I was wondering if it would be okay if I made a plug for a very important area of the country for our listeners, the Prairie Pothole Region. Just wondering, anything there as far as efforts on maintaining that priority status there or some things that you guys are thinking about?

Martha Williams: Well, you bet we'll continue to make that a priority area. It's so important, right? To our waterfowl species?

Dr. Karen Waldrup: Of course.

Martha Williams: We continue to be very engaged there and I'm committed to that as a priority area. I think you asked the question in part because our efforts really align with the DU's priority conservation area.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: 100%. I'm not sure that everyone realizes how much work the service employees are doing as far as work in conservation of the Prairie Pothole Region, and working with landowners voluntarily and building those relationships. Because as you mentioned earlier, how important private landowners are and landowner rights. And we need them. We need them and their partnership to help us with this.

Martha Williams: Absolutely. Absolutely understand the importance of working with private landowners and building those relationships over time. I think of our Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program as an excellent example of that.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: It's a great one.

Martha Williams: To remember that we, the Fish and Wildlife Service, we are there to provide technical and financial assistance, that sometimes we're there to help figure out how to be supportive. And it doesn't always have to be us. We get that sometimes the messenger is really important, and we're there in a support role as well. Another program that has had a huge role in conserving bird habitat is the NAWCA program. That's the North American Wetlands Conservation Act,

and it grants increased bird population. Its grants support, increased bird populations, wetland habitat. As we've just talked about, also supports local economies and those traditions of fishing, hunting, birdwatching, family farming, cattle ranching, keeping families on the land.

It's amazing what NAWCA has achieved over the years, providing these benefits from flood control, reducing coastal erosion, improving water and air quality, and recharging ground groundwater, as I think you mentioned, Karen. In the past three decades, NAWCA has funded over 3,000 projects totaling over \$2 billion in grants. I think it's just worth a pause to recognize what an incredible investment and contribution the NAWCA program has provided over the years. And has included over 6,000 partners along the way, affecting over 31 million acres of habitat, on a voluntary basis. Pretty awesomely.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: Which is just simply amazing.

Martha Williams: Yeah.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: Yeah. It is. Ducks Unlimited would have found it extremely difficult to do the work that we do for wetlands and grasslands habitat work with all the partners if it were not for NAWCA. We're extremely grateful.

Dr. Mike Brasher: Yeah. I'll go into our last question here and build off this discussion about NAWCA and your previous reference to joint ventures. One of the things that Director Williams, you probably don't know about, my previous position with Ducks Unlimited was as a staff member for the Gulf Coast Joint Venture. I worked alongside in the same office with several Fish and Wildlife Service employees. I was a part of that joint venture community. I know you talked several times in your responses about the importance of joint ventures and the role they play for migratory bird habitat conservation.

So many of the other different parts of your agency, Science Apps, Inventory and Monitoring, I know periodically names change for some programs, so if anything has changed there, my apologies, but all of those different components of the Fish and Wildlife Service, they rely on the gains through NAWCA and so many of the other programs that you've mentioned. But it's increasingly challenging to think about what the future landscape is going to look like, because it is changing so much. And this gets into the question.

We are living in a time of abundant rapid change in so many different ways, whether we're talking about longstanding land-use change, the conversion of our native habitats, whether we're talking about more recent changes of sea level rise, or the challenges with limited water supplies in the Western US. Are droughts going to become more frequent with changing climate? All of these. There are so many things that are going on right now, it's sometimes very difficult to think. How are we going to ensure that the conservation decisions

we're making today are resilient, and are able to adapt to all those different changes?

I know, all those people that I've mentioned, all those programs that I've had the pleasure of working with, take those things into mind. But as the person at the head of that agency, what opportunities do you see, or will you try to promote to ensure that the service's conservation decisions are appropriately considering all those changes? Where does science fit into that? It's a big question, but I know it's a big issue for you and your agency. What opportunities do you see, and how will you promote that among your priorities?

Martha Williams: Wow. Thanks for that softball, but totally fair.

Dr. Mike Brasher: Sorry.

Martha Williams: No. No. No, it is totally fair. Let me say that, this is what I think about every night, or it keeps me up at night in a good way. I think what you laid out are some pretty extraordinary challenges that come with impacts of climate change; drought, fire, invasive species, concern about losing longstanding ranches and farms to development, biodiversity crisis, sea level rise, encroachments from saltwater. I'm probably missing a bunch. So lots of challenges before us. How do we pivot and be ready for them?

I just last night went to the Jefferson Memorial with my son, my teenage son, and was reading an inscription there. Pretty remarkable that Thomas Jefferson recognized that we must adapt to a changing world. He used the analogy of what if a little boy puts on a coat and that same coat doesn't carry that little boy throughout his life? Recognizing now, what does that mean for us? I would argue it's the Fish and Wildlife Service's responsibility to be looking to the future, and to be pivoting to be relevant going toward the future.

How do we do that? I think we absolutely stand by our traditional constituents, realize the value of all the work that's gotten us to where we are. And yet, I think we absolutely have to focus on how we do our work. Are we being inclusive? Are we creating within the service, the leadership and modeling, what it means to have a workforce that feels valued? And has then the support to pivot toward the future, to be prepared to bring more into the fold? What does that mean? How do we do it well?

I'm very much focused internally on making sure the service is as healthy as it can be to address these issues as they come in. And then it goes back to the way I started, so that we've done our homework and we are ready for the opportunities that come our way. Have we done our homework and are we ready for RAWA to pass? I would argue yes, and we need to keep working on that. Are we ready and poised to put the bipartisan infrastructure law projects on the ground? I think yes.

How do we be poised for those opportunities coming our way? Can we engage with tribes more? Can we think about these other ways of knowing and learning? And frankly, be thinking for the long game? Are we thinking generations to come and can shift toward that long game and not just be focused on the next five years? But how do we be poised for our own communities to be healthy, and supporting these wildlife and stewarding these resources for the long term? I think it's, control what you can. Be prepared where you can so you can meet those opportunities as they come your way, and even create them.

I think we are in challenging but also very exciting times for the relevancy of all of our work. And the partnerships, like the partnership we've built with DU, to have that ready to be the best it can be in these challenging times.

Dr. Mike Brasher: That's an amazing response. Thank you for that.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: Very inspirational.

Dr. Mike Brasher: It is. If I could follow up on one thing. Ducks Unlimited, and I know the service as well, has long prided itself on using great scientific investments and great scientific information investing in the development of that, the application of that. How important is that in the preparation that you just talked about, both within your agency, as well as partnering with scientific institutes, universities outside the agency?

Martha Williams: Yeah. Perfect segue. It's incredibly important. That I think is that homework, that foundation, that scientific foundation, the scientific integrity that we keep that going, that it informs our decision-making. I would add, we are learning in addition to that. Not to supplant it, but in addition to that. We understand more and more how important social science is, and as I mentioned, these traditional ways of knowing, to bring that into the fold as well. But it is the scientific data and foundation that we build through partners, through universities and ourselves, and say the USGS, all of us working together on that scientific foundation. It's the underpinning of all of our work. It should be.

Dr. Mike Brasher: Well, I can think of no better way to end the podcast than talking about science and data and its importance in conservation decision-making.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: I think you might have planned that.

Dr. Mike Brasher: No, not me. No me. Director Williams, thank you so much. I'm going to toss it to Karen here for, I guess, a thank you on behalf of Ducks Unlimited. But personally, thank you so much. This has been awesome.

Martha Williams: Thank you, Mike.

Dr. Karen Waldrup: This has been a lot of fun. I'm hoping, Director Williams, we get to get together soon. Maybe doing some hunting as well. I know it's been a little while since I've seen you. I think it's been six months or so when I was up there for that event, but it's been wonderful visiting with you today. I honestly, wholeheartedly would like to thank you for being on here today.

I would like to thank you for your leadership, for your friendship, for your partnership, as well as all of the staff members with US Fish and Wildlife Service. Incredible partners for us at Ducks Unlimited, and doing an amazing job for all of our wildlife and fisheries and all the conservation work across the country. So grateful for the work that you guys do. Thank you so much for being on today.

Martha Williams: Thank you, Karen. As always, I'll take you up on that offer. I'd be remiss to say that I just feel joyful in the work that I get to do, and it's because of the incredible staff at the Fish and Wildlife Service around me and these longstanding relationships that we've all built. It's a pleasure.

Dr. Mike Brasher: A very, very special thanks to our guests on today's episode, Director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Martha Williams. We greatly appreciate her time, appreciate the work of her entire agency and all that they do for natural resource conservation in this country.

I also thank my co-host, Dr. Karen Waldrup, our Chief Conservation Officer, for being here with us today. As always, we thank our producer, Chris Isaac, for the great job he does with these episodes. And then to you the listener, we thank you for your time and we thank you for your support of wetlands and waterfowl conservation.