



For Immediate Release
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OAK HAMMOCK SIGNS SISTER MARSH AGREEMENT *Partnership focuses on science and education*

Oak Hammock Marsh, Manitoba – Manitoba and Israel recently signed an agreement making Oak Hammock Marsh a sister marsh to the Hula Valley wetland in Israel. This new partnership agreement will link environmental experts working to preserve and enhance both the Hula Valley wetland and Oak Hammock Marsh.

With support from Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and the Jewish National Fund (JNF), the Sister Marsh agreement will allow both countries to share their expertise on protecting important wetlands. The agreement will promote environmental stewardship, ecotourism, provide the opportunity for the development of educational materials and promote both wetlands. Collaboration on science activities as well as professional exchanges will also be included in the partnership.

“Even though the climates are different – Hula Valley has a much warmer Mediterranean climate than here in Manitoba – both wetlands share a similar history,” says Pascal Badiou, research scientist for DUC. “Both wetlands were drained mid-century for the unsuccessful conversion to other land uses, but then restored in subsequent years. Oak Hammock Marsh was drained to make room for more crop production while Hula was drained to combat malaria.”

Badiou visited Israel in January 2010 – a trip facilitated by Manitoba Water Stewardship and the JNF. A couple years earlier in 2008, these same groups brought 10 top Israeli water scientists to Manitoba to discuss water issues with provincial water experts.

The Hula Valley is a very biodiverse region. It's an oasis in the middle of an area that is dominated by agriculture in northern Israel. Similar to Oak Hammock Marsh, Hula Valley is situated on a major flyway connecting Europe with Africa, with about half a billion birds migrating over the region every year.

Oak Hammock Marsh and Hula Valley both have educational curriculums built around the importance of wetlands.

“At Oak Hammock, we would like to educate youth and the general public on wetlands using Hula Valley as an example,” says Robert Laidler, general manager of the Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre. “This agreement is an avenue to discuss wetlands in another part of the world and to show that wetland loss is a global environmental issue, not just a local environmental issue.”

The first step of the agreement will be promoting the respective marshes at each facility. Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre is developing a display that will compare and contrast Oak Hammock Marsh to the Hula Valley with a similar version to be exhibited in the Israel facility.

The Manitoba and Israel wetlands not only have similar histories – the two also have similar designations. Both are classified as RAMSAR sites, which makes them wetlands of international importance and both are Important Bird Areas (IBAs) as deemed by BirdLife International.

The Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre, a joint venture of Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Province of Manitoba, fosters public awareness and knowledge of the inherent values of wetlands and their associated ecosystems and encourages support for their conservation through innovative education and outreach programs. The Interpretive Centre is located 20 minutes north of Winnipeg at Highways 67 and 220.

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