

Ducks Unlimited fires writer over stream access fracas

By Ben Goldfarb, High Country News

On Nov. 9, Don Thomas was headed out his backdoor in Lewistown, Mont., for some whitetail deer bowhunting when his phone rang.

On the line was Matt Young, executive editor at *Ducks Unlimited* magazine, the member publication for the vaunted waterfowl conservation group. Thomas, a physician-turned-journalist, served as the magazine's field editor, and over the years he'd attended more Ducks Unlimited banquets and volunteer events than he could count. He'd also written a back page column since 2001.

But no longer. Young was calling with some stunning news: Effective immediately, Thomas was fired.

The reason had nothing to do with *Ducks Unlimited* magazine. Instead, Thomas was losing his position over an article he'd written for another publication, *Outside Bozeman*. The offending story had detailed the saga of James Cox Kennedy, a billionaire who'd fought for years to block public access to the Ruby River where it passed through his ranch. Thomas' article wasn't impartial – it called Kennedy a “selfish man” with ethical shortcomings, though it did nod to his conservation contributions – but the facts were indisputable. “I think it's within journalistic license to call someone selfish and arrogant when they're clearly being selfish and arrogant,” Thomas says.

Unbeknownst to Thomas, however, Kennedy was a major Ducks Unlimited donor and former board member. Now the group's current board, Young said, was in an uproar. “We simply cannot condone this type of vitriol directed by one of our

contributing editors toward a dedicated DU volunteer, who is among the nation's most ardent and active waterfowl conservationists," Young told Thomas in a follow-up email. (Ducks Unlimited denies Kennedy had a role in Thomas' firing.)

Read the whole story