



# ALBERTA **NAWMP** PARTNERSHIP

2023-2024 PROGRESS REVIEW  
APRIL 2023 TO MARCH 2024





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### CITATION:

*Alberta NAWMP Partnership. 2024. Alberta NAWMP Partnership 2023-2024 Progress Review: April 2023 to March 2024. Ducks Unlimited Canada, Edmonton, AB. Alberta NAWMP-075.*

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# PREFACE: 'THE POWER TO TURN TRENDS AROUND'

A northern pintail  
DUC

The [State of Canada's Birds 2024](#) report has some sobering information about our country's bird populations. The report's analysis shows that almost 40 per cent of all birds in Canada have declined since 1970. However, it also shows that when we take appropriate actions, we can make a substantial difference.

This heartening finding is especially true for Canada's waterfowl population, which has increased by a remarkable 46 per cent since the low levels of the 1970s.

**"...WHEN WE TAKE APPROPRIATE ACTIONS,  
WE CAN MAKE A SUBSTANTIAL DIFFERENCE."**

The report points out that, although some waterfowl species are still struggling, waterfowl as a group have "recovered well from past declines thanks to informed, targeted, and sustained conservation action. Much of this action has been international and collaborative, like the North American Waterfowl Management Plan [NAWMP]. This success shows that we have the power to turn trends around."

The Alberta NAWMP Partnership is very much guided by the informed, targeted, sustained and collaborative approach that is the hallmark of NAWMP. The activities highlighted in this 2023-24 Progress Review are great examples of this approach to conserving waterfowl populations and their key habitats, as well as NAWMP's more recent additional emphasis on conserving all types of birds.

In *Advances in Landscape Conservation Planning*, we learn about an initiative of the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), an Alberta NAWMP Partner, to improve targeting in its conservation planning process. NCC relies on conservation plans to focus its resources for tangible advances in conservation. With funds from Alberta NAWMP and others, NCC collaborated with Carleton University to develop an open-access planning tool to prioritize where in a landscape to deploy conservation efforts for maximum effect.

As an example of continental-scale collaboration, we have *Stewardship across Borders* about the 2023 Annual Meeting of the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies in Calgary. At this very successful meeting, held in Canada for first time in 35 years, participants from across North America tackled

priority issues in fish and wildlife stewardship, including NAWMP implementation. Travis Ripley, who was my predecessor at Alberta NAWMP and Alberta Environment and Protected Areas (EPA), was the meeting's MC and host. My branch at EPA helped with meeting arrangements, and Alberta NAWMP was a meeting sponsor.

*Helping At-Risk Waterbirds Through Better Data* features an Alberta NAWMP-funded project towards improved targeting of monitoring and better informed management of five at-risk waterbirds. Led by two Partners, EPA and Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), this project consolidated diverse datasets to produce maps of the most important breeding and staging waterbodies for the five species. It also assessed the potential of some data sources for monitoring the white-winged scoter, a duck species with decreasing numbers.

Another duck species that has suffered a population decline over the past five decades is the northern pintail. That's why DUC prioritizes landscapes with high pintail breeding potential for conservation projects with Alberta landowners. These projects are a win for everyone because conserving wetland and upland habitat for ducks also has benefits for other wildlife, landscape health, and landowners. *A Legacy in Ranching and Conservation* looks at one such project that is helping the landowner sustain his family's ongoing commitment to ranching and conservation.

*Celebrating the Joy of Spring Migration* showcases the Snow Goose Festival in the Tofield area of Alberta. With help from a long list of volunteers and sponsors, including Alberta NAWMP, this collaborative festival has again become an annual event since its relaunch in 2023. It is bringing together people from all walks of life for firsthand encounters with nature that can captivate hearts and minds, and hopefully lead to sustained actions that will reduce our impacts – as individuals and a society – on the environment.

On behalf of Alberta NAWMP, I thank the many agencies and individuals who share our passion for conserving wetland and upland habitat and helped make this past year a success.

I am pleased to present the Alberta NAWMP Partnership 2023-2024 Progress Review.

**Sue Cotterill**  
Chair, Board of Directors  
Alberta NAWMP Partnership

# NAWMP IN ALBERTA

Created in 1986, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) is a vibrant partnership between Canada, the United States and Mexico for habitat conservation to sustain continental waterfowl populations.

This transformative, landmark agreement defines and prioritizes geographic regions across the continent based on their biological values for waterfowl and other wetland-associated birds. NAWMP acts through coordinated initiatives that address regional and continental priorities, working collaboratively at local, regional, national and international levels.

NAWMP achieves its goals through voluntary regional partnerships that implement local actions. The Prairie Habitat Joint Venture (PHJV) regional partnership has responsibility for prairie, parkland and boreal landscapes in western Canada. Combined, these landscapes are the most important waterfowl breeding areas in North America. Conserving these landscapes is vital to the maintenance and recovery of mid-continent waterfowl populations.

The PHJV was one of the original six joint ventures when NAWMP first started. Since

then, the PHJV has developed a series of science-based Implementation Plans (IPs) to guide its activities. Nowadays, the PHJV has separate IPs for the Prairie Parklands and the Western Boreal Forest. The current IPs, which run from 2021 to 2025, continue the PHJV's enduring commitment to conserving waterfowl populations and their key habitats, while increasing its more recent emphasis on conserving all types of birds. The plans also continue to advance the work launched under the 2013-2020 IPs to heighten efforts to engage with hunters, other conservationists and the general public.

The PHJV works with its provincial NAWMP organizations in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba to carry out these IPs. The Alberta element of the IPs provides the framework for the Alberta NAWMP Partnership's activities. The Partnership is composed of three government and two non-government organizations. It is directed by a Board of Directors and a Management Committee, which are advised by Policy and Communications subcommittees. The board and committee members are mainly drawn from the five Partner agencies.

Alberta NAWMP coordinates joint projects, planning, communications and policy support, and facilitates funding opportunities among the Partners. It supports Partner activities through

technical and logistical assistance and by advancing innovative ideas through facilitation, funding support and capacity building.

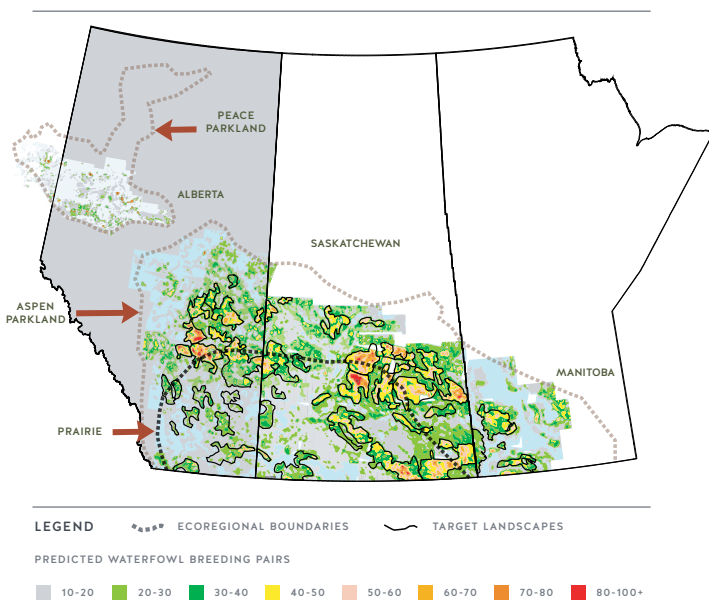
## ALBERTA NAWMP (PHJV) VISION

**HEALTHY PRAIRIE, PARKLAND AND BOREAL LANDSCAPES THAT SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE BIRD POPULATIONS AND PROVIDE ECOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS TO SOCIETY.**

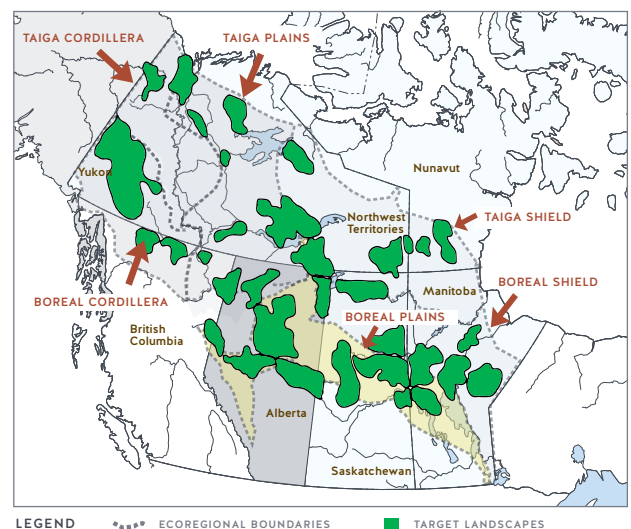
## ALBERTA NAWMP (PHJV) MISSION

**PROVIDE LEADERSHIP TO ACHIEVE HEALTHY AND DIVERSE WATERFOWL AND OTHER BIRD POPULATIONS THROUGH CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIPS. THESE PARTNERSHIPS STRIVE FOR SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT OF THE LANDSCAPE TAKING INTO ACCOUNT SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS.**

### PRAIRIE PARKLANDS TARGET LANDSCAPES



### WESTERN BOREAL FOREST TARGET LANDSCAPES



## WHO IS ALBERTA NAWMP?

*Advancing Conservation Together* – The Alberta NAWMP Partnership's motto gets to the heart of what we do and how we do it. Our successes in conserving waterfowl, other birds and their key habitats come from the invigorating energy of collaboration as we bring together fresh ideas and diverse perspectives to help us move forward.

The Partnership is composed of one federal and two provincial government departments and two non-government organizations that each have a responsibility for Alberta's wetlands as part of their mandates. The five Partners continually seek opportunities to work with each other and with regional and municipal organizations and other stakeholders. These collaborative networks enhance existing wetland and upland stewardship efforts, launch innovative initiatives that otherwise might not happen, and build interest in and capacity for landscape conservation in Alberta.

Together, the Partners and their collaborators are making exciting progress on key conservation goals.

### HOW WETLAND LANDSCAPES RELATE TO EACH PARTNER AGENCY'S ROLES, OBJECTIVES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

#### GOVERNMENT

**Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation** includes a number of agencies, boards and commissions that support the agriculture and food sectors. Among the Ministry's responsibilities are policies, legislation, regulations and services necessary for those sectors to grow, prosper and diversify while supporting environmentally sustainable resource management practices and inspiring public confidence in the quality and safety of food.

**Alberta Environment and Protected Areas** is the lead provincial agency responsible for the stewardship of Alberta's air, land, water and biodiversity. It administers the Alberta Wetland Policy, the objective of which is to conserve, restore, protect and manage Alberta's wetlands to sustain the benefits they provide to the environment, society and economy.

**Environment and Climate Change Canada** is the lead federal department for a wide range of environmental issues. The department's programs focus on minimizing threats to Canadians and their environment from pollution, and conserving and restoring Canada's natural environment, including water, air and soil quality.

#### PRIVATE, NON-PROFIT

**Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC)** is a registered charity with over 85 years of experience in wetland conservation and restoration. DUC partners with government, landowners, industry, Indigenous peoples and other non-profit organizations to conserve, restore and manage wetlands and associated habitats to benefit waterfowl, wildlife and people.

**Nature Conservancy of Canada**, in partnership with corporations, governments, individual donors and landowners, works to achieve the direct protection of Canada's most important wild spaces through property securement and long-term stewardship of these properties. This work maintains critical lands and waters for wildlife and ensures clean air and water for our future generations.

## ALBERTA NAWMP PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEES, 2023-24

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**Lindsay McBlane**, Ducks Unlimited Canada (Boreal) (Incoming)  
**Alain Richard**, Ducks Unlimited Canada (Boreal) (Outgoing)  
**Tracy Scott (Chair)**, Ducks Unlimited Canada (Prairie-Parkland)  
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**Raina Mithrush**, Ducks Unlimited Canada (Boreal)  
**Nathalie S. Olson (Chair)**, Alberta Environment and Protected Areas  
**Melissa Orr-Langner**, Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation

### COORDINATOR

**Greg Hale**, Alberta NAWMP Partnership



DUC





A restored wetland on Baird's land

DUC

## A LEGACY IN RANCHING AND CONSERVATION

Through time, trust and working together, rancher Russell Baird and conservation specialist Bob Thomson with Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) were able to work out a plan for preserving the Baird family's ranching and conservation legacy.

Baird's ranch lies near Endiang in the 'knob and kettle' landscape of east central Alberta. This landscape is dotted with numerous wetlands and offers diverse wildlife habitat. "Russell has a mix of hayland, tame pasture and native prairie-parkland because their land is on the transition between the prairie and parkland," notes Thomson.

He adds, "The area supports amongst the highest pintail duck breeding pair densities in North America. Pintail populations are not doing well, so we want to do whatever we can to help that species. Of course, the area provides habitat for a multitude of species, but it is certainly great for pintail ducks."

Baird's first encounter with DUC was about two decades ago through his sister and brother-in-law, who had DUC projects on their land. DUC offers various [landowner programs](#) that provide financial incentives for converting annual cropland to perennial forage and for restoring drained wetlands to their historic water levels. These practices can have such benefits as improving water quality, providing livestock water, reducing flood impacts, providing forage, and recharging groundwater, while also providing habitat and encouraging biodiversity.

"We then worked directly with Russell on some wetland restorations and forage projects," says Thomson. "Over time, we gained trust and respect and the

realization that a conservation easement for the native habitats was a natural progression."

A conservation easement (CE) is a voluntary legal agreement between the landowner and DUC to permanently protect the natural habitat and features of the property. Eligible land placed under a CE can qualify for financial compensation, which is based on the land's fair market value.

**"I LIKE SEEING THINGS TAKEN CARE OF. IT JUST COMES DOWN TO THAT."**

"The easements are pursued in an agricultural-wildlife-waterfowl friendly agreement on a working ranch," explains Thomson. "The structure of the various habitat types - wetland habitat, native prairie, native parkland - will remain in perpetuity. And the landowners still manage the land [for uses such as grazing and haying], and they control public access."

Baird now has two CEs, which total 618 acres of habitat area. He and his family take exceptional care of the native habitat on their land through a rotational grazing system that maintains healthy plant cover. Baird says this care is simply a part of his everyday life: "I like seeing things taken care of. It just comes down to that."

He is also very interested in wetland restoration, given how much wetland drainage he has seen on farmland in the

region over the years. "Wetland restoration is a necessity moving forward."

His CEs have some built-in flexibility, including designated non-habitat areas. Such areas are typically small, around five acres, and situated in a corner of the CE parcel. Thomson explains, "We still maintain a substantial block of conservation easement habitat area which will stay as habitat in perpetuity. But in the non-habitat areas, the landowners are not bound by the same restrictions on development."

Baird's latest CE also allows forage rejuvenation. Thomson says, "Russell has a 61-acre forage conversion within his second easement. Let's say in 17 years, the stand gets overly sod-bound. Since a healthy forage stand provides good nesting cover for waterfowl, rejuvenating the stand is mutually beneficial." So, DUC would grant Baird a Work Consent Form, giving him two years to till the area and reseed it to forage.

"Russell has been a first-class individual to work with. When he gives his word, you can bank on it. He will do whatever he can to conserve the natural features of his family's land," notes Thomson.

Baird says, "Bob has been very excellent to work with. He explained everything about the land, about what the Ducks Unlimited Canada people look at. And it has worked out really well."

Thomson adds, "It has always been a privilege of mine to help the landowners commit to their family legacy in ranching and conservation. It is one of the best parts of my job."

## HELPING AT-RISK WATERBIRDS THROUGH BETTER DATA

“For managing at-risk waterbird species, we need high-quality datasets at our fingertips. Where are the most important breeding areas? Where and when do staging and breeding activities occur?” says Dr. Richard Hedley, a species-at-risk biologist with Alberta Environment and Protected Areas (EPA).

Having answers to such questions could help Alberta NAWMP Partners like EPA and Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), as well as other conservation agencies, to improve management efforts for these at-risk species. And, in a broader context, such datasets could help better inform land use decisions that aim to strike a balance between economic and environmental concerns.

Hedley was the government lead on a project team with some EPA and DUC colleagues for an Alberta NAWMP-funded project about five waterbird species in Alberta that are classified as ‘at risk’ provincially or federally. Those species are the white-winged scoter, harlequin duck, trumpeter swan, western grebe, and horned grebe.

“The project’s main goal was to consolidate multiple information sources to produce maps of the most important breeding and staging waterbodies for these at-risk waterbirds,” he explains. “Secondarily, we wanted to assess the potential of certain data sources for monitoring some of the more challenging species, like the white-winged scoter.”

Robb Stavne’s company, Sora Ecological Consulting Ltd., carried out the project, compiling and processing data from a wide variety of datasets.

One key data source used in the project is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) [waterfowl population survey](#) dataset. The USFWS conducts these aerial surveys in northern Alberta and elsewhere, in

collaboration with Environment and Climate Change Canada and other Canadian partners. Since these annual surveys have been conducted for many decades, population trends can be estimated from the data. Stavne notes that Sora Ecological analyzed the USFWS white-winged scoter data as part of the project: “Those annual surveys show a pretty steady decline in white-winged scoter populations over the last 24 years that we looked at.”

Stavne lists some of the other datasets included in the project: “We reviewed Alberta’s Fisheries and Wildlife Management Information System (FWMIS) database, which includes data from provincial biologists’ projects and consultants as well as other observations. We also used citizen science databases like eBird and iNaturalist.” Other examples include waterbird datasets from some DUC studies and datasets from researchers specializing in particular waterbird species.

“A realization that really struck me during this project is that there are many more people working on waterbirds than I had expected,” notes Hedley. “So many different organizations are out there collecting really valuable datasets for their own monitoring programs. Consolidating these datasets can have real value for conservation efforts by giving a more complete picture of key habitats.”

Stavne encountered various challenges in compiling and interpreting the different datasets. One issue is that some datasets are no longer accessible. “All kinds of datasets are sitting in boxes or on bookshelves of biologists who have now retired... A lot of data may have been lost because it was not digitized.”

As well, the citizen science datapoints are of unknown accuracy and are sometimes incomplete. He says, “For instance, the observer might not identify if the bird is male or female. So, it’s challenging to interpret some of the datapoints – does this indicate a breeding pair, a staging pair, a wandering migrant?”

**“CONSOLIDATING THESE DATASETS CAN HAVE REAL VALUE FOR CONSERVATION EFFORTS BY GIVING A MORE COMPLETE PICTURE OF KEY HABITATS.”**

Other challenges related to linking a bird observation to a specific waterbody, in order to build the spatial data files. “For example, often an observer is standing on dry ground looking at birds over water, so they might collect a GPS location that isn’t on a lake. ...Another challenge is that horned grebes like to hang out in dugouts and borrow pits, which are not identified in available GIS layers. So, linking those observations to waterbodies is nearly impossible.”

This project was recently completed, bringing together the diverse datasets into a single, easily interpretable resource. Currently, the project team is looking into possible next steps such as filling some of the identified data gaps.

The team would like to thank all the people and organizations that shared datasets and provided connections to people and links to databases.



White-winged scoters

DUC





DUC

## STEWARDSHIP ACROSS BORDERS

“Richly productive and continentally unifying” – that is how a resolution of appreciation for the 2023 Annual Meeting of the [Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies](#) (AFWA) described this event in Calgary. Meeting participants from across North America grappled with shared challenges in fish and wildlife stewardship and moved forward on important issues, including cross-border initiatives like NAWMP.

“IT TURNED OUT TO BE A REALLY GREAT EVENT!”

“This was the first time in 35 years that AFWA’s annual meeting had been held in Canada,” notes Sue Cotterill, executive director of the Fish and Wildlife Stewardship Branch of Alberta Environment and Protected Areas (EPA) and chair of the Alberta NAWMP Partnership.

“That came about because Travis Ripley, my predecessor at the branch and at the Alberta NAWMP Partnership, was deeply involved with AFWA and made a proposal that was supported and endorsed to bring the 2023 meeting to Calgary.” Ripley was the Canadian ex-officio representative on AFWA’s Executive Committee for close to seven years until 2022, and a member of AFWA’s International Relations Committee.

Ripley, now an assistant deputy minister within EPA, was the 2023 meeting’s MC and host, while Cotterill and her branch supported meeting preparation and logistics in collaboration with AFWA. Alberta NAWMP was one of the meeting’s sponsors.

“AFWA annual meetings are about networking with colleagues and peers across the U.S. and Canada and to some extent other jurisdictions,” explains Ripley. “Each meeting addresses topics that are most relevant to fish and wildlife agencies across North America.”

The annual meetings include face-to-face sessions for AFWA’s approximately 80 committees and working groups. These committees work on an array of issues from amphibian conservation, to impacts of green energy development on wildlife, to habitat conservation, to management of game species, to bird conservation, including cross-border programs like [Fall Flights](#) and NAWMP. Cotterill says, “AFWA’s Waterfowl Working Group brings jurisdictions together to discuss

a number of issues related to waterfowl management and conservation, including implementing NAWMP.”

Beyond this link, AFWA plays a critical, ongoing role for NAWMP by helping ensure that the North American Wetlands Conservation Act in the U.S. is regularly renewed, or ‘reauthorized.’ “This Act is the mechanism that provides funding from the U.S. Congress to partners in Canada – the Prairie Habitat Joint Venture partners being the biggest beneficiary – who receive money that is matched by U.S. partners and Canadian partners to put waterfowl habitat on the ground in Canada,” explains Dean Smith, AFWA’s NAWMP Director and Wildlife Liaison for Canada. Reauthorizing this longstanding legislation allows the funding to continue to flow to NAWMP projects in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico.

As host of the 2023 meeting, Ripley had the opportunity to showcase Alberta to the participants. As part of that, he organized a plenary presentation by Dr. Leroy Little Bear and a directors’ field tour to Stoney Nakoda First Nations land.

“Highlighting Indigenous perspectives and bringing in that way of thinking around what it means to value fish and wildlife from an Indigenous point of view was a huge attractor for many of the participants, particularly to hear this wisdom from Professor Little Bear,” notes Ripley. Little Bear’s highly distinguished career includes achievements in such areas as academics, policy and advocacy for Indigenous peoples in Canada and internationally.

On the field tour, directors like Cotterill and her counterparts in other jurisdictions met with Stoney Nakoda knowledge-keepers for a down-to-earth, thought-provoking session.

Overall, the 2023 meeting was a resounding success. “In Calgary, we had extremely good participation from both U.S. and Canadian organizations – governments, non-governmental organizations, industry groups and so on. We had some fantastic U.S. and Canadian sponsorship of the meeting, and we had near-record attendance at the face-to-face meetings,” says Smith. “AFWA decided to take some of the meeting’s proceeds to create a \$1,000-per-year bursary for about 10 years, for an Indigenous student entering environmental studies at the University of Lethbridge.”

“I’ve received an immense amount of appreciation notes for hosting the meeting here in Alberta,” says Ripley. “It turned out to be a really great event!”



# ADVANCES IN LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION PLANNING

A 2023 pilot project showed that a new planning tool, called Where to Work, is effective, fast and user-friendly. The project successfully used this tool in creating a new landscape conservation plan for Alberta's Aspen Parkland/Boreal Fringe, a key region for conservation of waterfowl and other wildlife.

This Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) project is part of NCC's current initiative to update its conservation planning process. "Conservation plans are an important foundation of our work at NCC. They help us to focus our resources on where we can make tangible impacts for conservation," explains Katelyn Ceh, NCC's lead for the project.

Where to Work is one of a suite of open-access conservation planning tools that NCC has recently developed in partnership with Carleton University. The tool's purpose is to prioritize where in a landscape to deploy conservation efforts for maximum effect. Guided by user-specified criteria, the tool draws on various datasets about climate, soils, vegetation, water, species and more, to rapidly generate a conservation priority map.

"Once you get all the data and make some decisions about what is important on the landscape and how much you want to protect, the tool can usually run the analysis in a minute or so," says Ceh. Previously, that analysis was done manually, requiring days of staff time.

"I really like that the tool allows you to test a lot of different scenarios. If you have a question about how changing a scenario impacts the output, you can just run the

scenario and answer your question right away."

The Aspen Parkland/Boreal Fringe region in Alberta was selected for the pilot in order to test the tool in developing a plan for a landscape that is much larger than

THE TOOL'S PURPOSE IS TO PRIORITIZE WHERE IN A LANDSCAPE TO DEPLOY CONSERVATION EFFORTS FOR MAXIMUM EFFECT.

the Natural Areas that have been the focus of NCC's conservation plans. The new plan encompasses three pre-existing Natural Area Conservation Plans for smaller areas within the region.

"Zooming out to the larger landscape scale helps us think more holistically about the landscape, what is important here, what do we want to achieve, who could we be partnering with, and so on," Ceh notes.

Another reason for using this region for the pilot was to evaluate the tool's effectiveness in an impacted landscape. This region has been considerably altered by human activities, and much of the connectivity between the remaining intact habitat areas has been lost. But the region is also part of North America's Prairie Pothole Region, known for its remarkable diversity and density of ponds, or 'potholes', and its highly productive habitat for waterfowl, other waterbirds and shorebirds.

According to Ceh, the tool was a real bonus in NCC's multiple sessions with stakeholders and partners across the region during the plan's development. The tool and its map output enabled NCC to more easily share information about its planning process, gather input on the draft plan, foster interest and collaboration, and provide real-time results on how different ideas from the participants would affect the map.

"It is really important to include others' values, knowledge and perspectives in these conservation plans," she says. "I think it gives you a much better plan at the end of the day and a much higher chance of successfully implementing the plan."

The map formed the basis for developing the written part of the Aspen Parkland/Boreal Fringe conservation plan. The document explains the region's significance, describes the plan's goal to foster healthy, connected, resilient habitat, and explains how that goal will be achieved.

Given the tool's benefits, Ceh is pleased that Where to Work is freely available at [ncc.carleton.ca](http://ncc.carleton.ca). "Sharing the tool open-source hopefully will be helpful to others who could use the tool for their own conservation planning work. I'm interested to see how it will be used and where it all goes."

The project's funders included the Alberta NAWMP Partnership, the Government of Canada, NCC private donors, and Carleton University private donors.



An Aspen Parkland landscape in Alberta

# CELEBRATING THE JOY OF SPRING MIGRATION

Every spring, the Beaverhill Lake region near Tofield, Alberta, is thronging with snow geese and the air is filled with the clamour of their honking. Tens of thousands of these majestic geese and other migratory birds return annually to this region to rest and refuel on their way north to nest. For many years, this awe-inspiring event was celebrated by the Snow Goose Festival. Now the festival has returned!

The Snow Goose Festival is once again bringing together people from all walks of life for direct encounters with nature that can captivate hearts and minds.

Dr. Geoff Holroyd, co-chair of the current Snow Goose Festival, helped out with the original festival. It ran from 1993 to 2002 with around 5,000 people attending each year. But then the festival was put on hold, in part because Beaverhill Lake's water level was dropping due to drought, causing many of the geese to shift their migration pathway farther east, away from the Tofield area. Bob Parsons and the Edmonton Nature Club kept the idea going as a smaller annual event until 2018.

"In 2019, I thought it was time to see if we could revive the festival," explains Holroyd. "In June, I called a meeting of all the groups I could think of that might be interested in being involved, and a dozen responded. We met at the Tofield Arena and agreed that

it was worth starting to recreate the festival. We had everything planned to go for April 2020, and then the pandemic hit."

Undeterred, they relaunched their plans in late winter 2023, picking right up from their March 2020 meeting. He says, "All the planning we had done put us in good shape, and we pulled off the festival in April 2023. With the success of the 2023 festival, it was an automatic decision to keep it going in 2024, and now into 2025."

**"WE'RE AFFECTING PEOPLE'S LIVES, CHANGING HOW THEY VIEW THE ENVIRONMENT."**

The 2023 and 2024 festivals each involved a tremendous grassroots undertaking. Holroyd says, "Pulling off this festival each year is a huge collaborative effort. We estimate that we had in April 2024 about 150 volunteers." The volunteers and the festival's sponsors, including the Alberta NAWMP Partnership, are drawn from environmental organizations, municipalities, businesses and other agencies in the region. Holroyd represents the Beaverhill Bird Observatory on the festival's committee, and the festival's other co-chair, Vanita Eglauer, represents the Town of Tofield.

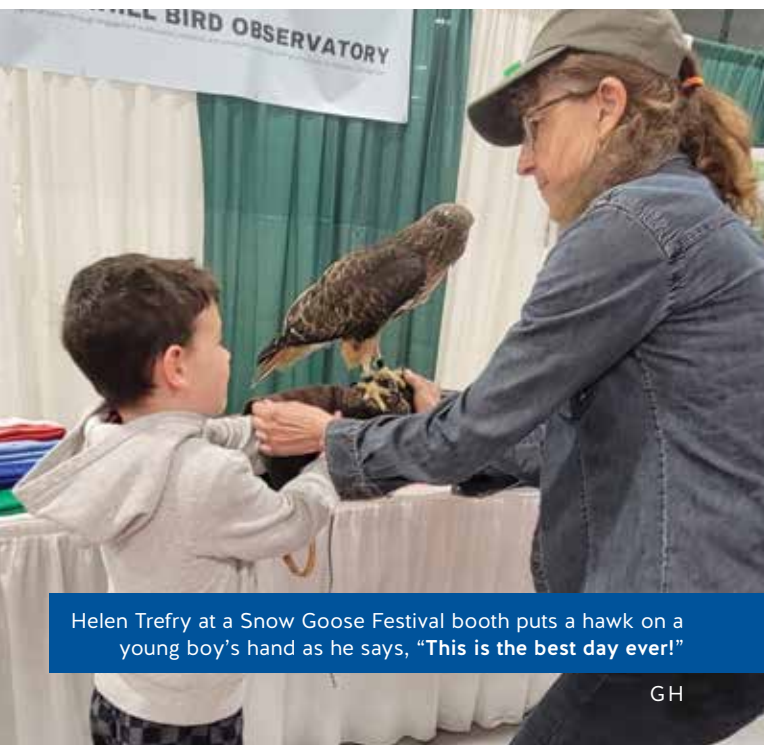
During each festival, participants get to experience nature close-up and learn from knowledgeable biologists and naturalists. There are guided bus tours and hikes, and a trade show at the Tofield Arena featuring environmental groups and vendors, with kids' activities and speaker sessions, plus a banquet.

Over the years, Holroyd has encountered many people whose love of nature has been ignited by the Snow Goose Festival. He highlights one example: "In 2019, a couple donated \$12,000 to sponsor internships with the Beaverhill Bird Observatory, and when I asked how they got involved in nature, they said that the wife's father had insisted they go on a Snow Goose Festival trip in the 1990s. ... they have been hooked ever since," he says.

"This year, a young boy holding a red-tailed hawk at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory's booth at the festival said, 'This is the best day ever!' It was such a heartfelt comment. I think that is what the festival is about: giving you firsthand experience with wildlife, with birds – whether they are in captivity like at the Bird Observatory booth or the wild ones – and capturing your imagination."

Holroyd concludes, "We're affecting people's lives, changing how they view the environment. Hopefully by appreciating birds and the environment, they will take seriously human impacts on our planet, like climate change and habitat loss, and begin taking individual actions, like protecting our windows from bird collisions and keeping our cats indoors, to reduce our impacts on nature and the environment."

In 2023, the festival had over 1,000 attendees. In 2024, that rose to about 1,500. Holroyd hopes to see it grow even bigger. The next [Snow Goose Festival](#) will be held on April 26 and 27, 2025. Mark your calendars!



Helen Trefry at a Snow Goose Festival booth puts a hawk on a young boy's hand as he says, "This is the best day ever!"

GH



# COMMITTEE REPORTS, 2023-24

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

*Members are director-level executives from each Alberta NAWMP Partner agency. They are responsible for: defining Alberta NAWMP's vision, mission, goals and strategies; directing medium-term implementation plans; approving annual work plans and budgets; and ensuring accountability for work plans and budgets. They also facilitate information exchange and engagement opportunities between their own agency and Alberta NAWMP.*

The Board of Directors held quarterly meetings in the fiscal year 2023-24 (FY24), providing guidance to the Management Committee and Policy and Communications subcommittees. The FY24 Work Plan and Budget was successfully implemented, and final report completed. In addition, FY25 Work Plan projections were developed. Board members participated in and engaged with the Prairie Habitat Joint Venture (PHJV) Advisory Board and various subcommittees, including hosting internal presentations and discussions related to human dimensions and a wetland policy initiative. Support was provided to various grant funding initiatives through the Partnership and the PHJV. Support to the PHJV Implementation Plan (IP) continued.

## MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

*Members are senior managers from each Partner agency who facilitate integration of operational opportunities between their own agency and Alberta NAWMP. This Committee shares responsibility with the Alberta NAWMP Coordinator for project-based decision-making and expenditures established in annual work plans and medium-term implementation plans.*

The Management Committee held monthly meetings including additional topic-specific meetings. Two joint meetings were held with the Board. The Committee approved Science Fund support to two projects on: scientific foundations for human dimensions in the PHJV; and landscape-level conservation planning for the Aspen Parkland/Boreal Fringe. The Committee provided support to the Policy and Communications subcommittees. All-birds conservation continued to be highlighted, emphasizing native grassland stewardship. Continued support was provided to PHJV Policy, Human Dimensions, Science and Communications Committees. The FY24 Workplan and Budget was successfully implemented.

## COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

*This Committee leads information sharing, event hosting and promotion among the Partner agencies and beyond. Members are typically communication specialists from each Partner agency.*

The Communications Committee met monthly including project-specific meetings. It continued to implement the Partnership's

Communication Strategy, including revising [www.abnawmp.ca](http://www.abnawmp.ca), refreshing [www.wetlandsalberta.ca](http://www.wetlandsalberta.ca), and rebranding some communication materials. Ongoing communication efforts included the quarterly eNewsletter and the Science Stories series profiling Alberta NAWMP-funded research. Also, it promoted events such as World Wetlands Day and increased promotion of understanding about landowner rights and responsibilities under the Alberta Wetland Policy. Other projects included: reprinting the Landowner Guide to the Alberta Wetland Policy due to high interest in the booklet; developing sector-specific engagement and evaluation tools including finalizing outreach videos about wetland classification and carbon cycling in Alberta wetlands; and developing a draft municipal wetland guide. The Committee supported and participated in events including the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies annual meeting (first time in Canada since 1988), Alberta Chapter and Canadian Wildlife Society Joint Conference, and Town of Tofield's Snow Goose Festival, to help raise the profile of Alberta NAWMP and its Partners. The Progress Review for 2022-2023 was completed.

## POLICY COMMITTEE

*Committee members monitor relevant policy, planning and program developments in their agencies and advise on opportunities for Alberta NAWMP support. Members are usually senior policy specialists within the Partner agencies.*

The Policy Committee met monthly including specific project meetings by working group members. Several key projects were implemented including: review and consolidation of datasets for five at-risk waterbird species in Alberta; a review of regional and sub-regional plans in Alberta to understand wetland and grassland conservation and protection measures; and a review of current grassland monitoring datasets and initiatives in Alberta. In addition, a literature review and summary report on wetlands and drought resiliency was completed along with an additional focus group session with experts on ecosystems services and the value of wetlands on private lands. The Committee continued to examine key issues such as: rural communities' role in stewardship in wetland and grassland conservation; the increased risk of conversion of native grasslands to other land uses; the value of wetlands for drought and flood mitigation; increased land use pressure for wetland drainage; and the ongoing need to identify performance measures for evaluating wetland policies and grassland conservation.

# CONTRIBUTIONS TO NAWMP IN ALBERTA, 2023-24 AND 1986-2024

AGENCY TYPE	AGENCY	2023-24 TOTAL	1986 - 2024 <sup>a</sup> CUM. TOTAL
<b>CANADIAN CORPORATIONS</b>		\$411,053	\$25,514,114
<b>CANADIAN EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS</b>			\$475,281
<b>CANADIAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT</b>	Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada		\$38,532,523
	Canadian federal - unspecified		\$484
	Environment and Climate Change Canada		\$21,482
	Environment and Climate Change Canada - Canada Nature Fund	\$3,182,038	\$9,969,528
	Environment and Climate Change Canada - Canadian Wildlife Service	\$426,308	\$43,536,840
	Environment and Climate Change Canada - EcoAction		\$85,571
	Environment and Climate Change Canada - Habitat Stewardship Program		\$3,655,828
	Environment and Climate Change Canada - Natural Areas Conservation Program		\$28,599,754
	Environment and Climate Change Canada - Natural Heritage Conservation Program		\$779,684
	Environment and Climate Change Canada - Nature Smart Climate Solutions	\$473,317	\$3,287,108
	Fisheries and Oceans Canada		\$3,940
	Human Resources and Skills Development Canada		\$18,761
	Millennium Bureau of Canada		\$1,120,100
	Natural Resources Canada		\$40,000
	Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada		\$194,736
	Parks Canada		\$54,660
Public Works and Government Services Canada		\$500	
		\$4,081,663	\$129,901,499
<b>CANADIAN NOT FOR PROFIT</b>	Agriculture and Food Council of Alberta		\$275,000
	Alberta Beef Producers		\$954,531
	Alberta Conservation Association		\$4,571,184
	Alberta Conservation Tillage Society		\$125
	Alberta EcoTrust Foundation		\$22,542
	Alberta Environmental Farm Plan Company		\$240
	Alberta Fish and Game Association		\$1,506,348
	Alberta Native Plant Council		\$600
	Alberta Research Council		\$5,000
	Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation	\$6,221,029	\$17,760,420
	Antelope Creek Habitat Development		\$5,000
	Canada Trust Friends of the Environment Foundation		\$5,500
	Canadian Circumpolar Institute		\$3,500
	Canadian Nature Federation		\$1,800
	Canadian non-government organizations - unspecified		\$180,264
	Carthy Foundation	-\$1,050	\$6,162
	Climate Change Central		\$5,000
	Cropmasters		\$46,300
	Dairy Farmers of Canada*	\$11,360	\$11,360
	Ducks Unlimited Canada		\$3,377,366
	Eastern Irrigation District		\$75,085
	Edmonton Community Foundation		\$72,075
	Edmonton Springer Spaniel Club		\$200
	George Cedric Metcalf Foundation		\$50,000
	Imperial Oil Charitable Foundation		\$5,818
	Institute for Wetland and Waterfowl Research		\$5,500
	Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Scholarship		\$2,000
	James L. Baillie Memorial Fund		\$2,000
	Lakeland Industry & Community Association		\$14,051
	Land Stewardship Centre of Canada		\$18,000
	Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation		\$45,317
	Nature Alberta		\$15,000
	Nature Canada		\$1,128,000
	Nature Conservancy of Canada	\$114,663	\$15,260,553
North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance		\$234,023	
Peace Parkland Naturalists		\$600	
Pheasants Forever	\$21,359	\$38,759	
Project Second Life Society		\$6,000	
Richard H. G. Bonnycastle Graduate Fellowship		\$15,000	
Richardson Foundation Inc.		\$374,788	



AGENCY TYPE	AGENCY	2023 - 2024 TOTAL	1986 - 2024 <sup>a</sup> CUM. TOTAL
CANADIAN NOT FOR PROFIT	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation - Canada		\$4,500
	Samuel Hanen Society for Resource Conservation		\$350
	Shell Conservation Internship Program		\$7,296
	Shell Environmental Fund		\$25,123
	Soil Conservation Council of Canada		\$3,417
	Southern Alberta Land Trust Society		\$613,119
	Sustainable Forest Management Network		\$20,000
	The Calgary Foundation		\$47,444
	The Flanagan Foundation		\$29,049
	The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation		\$6,999
	The Kahanoff Foundation		\$701
	United Farmers of Alberta		\$18,447
	Waterton Biosphere Reserve Association		\$100,000
	Western Irrigation District		\$673,433
	Weston Family Foundation	\$497,358	\$2,063,879
	Wildlife Habitat Canada	\$140,109	\$4,537,041
World Wildlife Fund Canada		\$36,000	
		\$7,004,828	\$54,287,809
CANADIAN PROVINCIAL & TERRITORIAL GOVERNMENTS	Agriculture Financial Services Corporation		\$446,527
	Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation		\$10,570,726
	Alberta Culture and Community Spirit		\$8,000
	Alberta Energy and Utilities Board		\$8,300
	Alberta Environment and Protected Areas	\$176,296 <sup>b</sup>	\$43,167,573
	Alberta Transportation		\$9,246
	Alberta Treasury Board and Finance		\$771,967
	Saskatchewan Water Security Agency		\$10,000
		\$176,296	\$54,992,339
CANADIAN REGIONAL & LOCAL GOVERNMENTS	Big Hay Lake Drainage District		-\$34,639
	Bonnyville (Municipality of)		\$22,653
	Calgary (City of)		\$269,669
	Camrose County		\$14,907
	Carstairs (Town of)		\$96,000
	Edmonton (City of)		\$211,005
	Flagstaff County		\$41,337
	Grande Prairie (City of)		\$7,832
	Grande Prairie County		\$2,022
	Greenview (Municipal District of)		\$6,962
	Lakeland (County of)		\$2,800
	Lamont County		\$30,425
	Manawan Drainage District		\$34,750
	Medicine Hat (City of)		\$8,005
	Minburn County		\$78,080
	Newell County		\$28,750
	Ponoka County		\$2,310
	Red Deer County		\$1,811
	Rocky View County		\$721,759
	Special Areas Board		\$325
	St. Albert (City of)		\$17,820
	St. Paul County		\$19,287
	Stettler County		\$2,780
Strathcona County		\$87,629	
Strathmore (Town of)		\$198,627	
Sturgeon County		\$68,085	
Sylvan Lake (Town of)		\$30,000	
Wheatland County		\$3,200	
			\$1,974,191
CANADIAN OTHER	Canadian - unspecified	\$1,445,653	\$61,479,731
UNITED STATES - ALL SOURCES	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. state governments, Ducks Unlimited Inc., Anonymous Foundation, other	\$9,169,871	\$337,309,222
INTERNATIONAL	Conservation International Bahamas		\$59,744
	<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$22,289,364</b>	<b>\$665,993,930</b>

a. Includes data from Prairie Habitat Joint Venture - Alberta (Source: NAWMP National Tracking System).

b. Funds as reported are part of an overall annual contribution exceeding \$400,000 and could be in addition to, or part of, those reported.

\* New contributor in 2023-24

# ACTIVITY EXPENDITURES AND HABITAT ACCOMPLISHMENTS, 2023-24 AND 1986-2024

AGENCY	ACTIVITY	EXPENDITURES 2023-24	HABITAT ACRES 2023-24	NET HABITAT ACRES 1986-2024
ALBERTA AGRICULTURE AND IRRIGATION (includes Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, a former Alberta NAWMP Partner)	Securement			425,195
ALBERTA ENVIRONMENT AND PROTECTED AREAS	Securement			10,507
DELTA WATERFOWL FOUNDATION	Communication and education	\$7,301		
	Management (habitat assets)	\$7,230	188	2,140
	Wetland restoration			11
<b>DWF TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>		<b>\$14,531</b>		
DUCKS UNLIMITED CANADA	Communication and education	\$4,086		
	Compensatory mitigation	\$4,335,368	1,244	4,961
	Habitat Joint Venture science	\$993,233		
	Habitat restoration	\$1,367,015	200,373	1,266,956
	Habitat retention (≥10 years through permanent)	\$4,973,427	20,056	2,451,897
	Habitat retention (<10 years)	\$894,171	4,639	504,183
	Land and water policy support			-175,320*
<b>DUC TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>		<b>\$16,984,395</b>		
ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE CANADA - CANADIAN WILDLIFE SERVICE	Communication and education	\$1,200		
	Habitat Joint Venture science	\$113,000		
<b>ECCC TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>		<b>\$114,200</b>		
NATURE CONSERVANCY OF CANADA	Conservation planning	\$38,106		
	Habitat restoration	\$80,757	125	73,142
	Habitat retention (≥10 years through permanent)	\$4,322,329	19,071	386,622
	Management (habitat assets)	\$374,259	19,071	388,734
<b>NCC TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>		<b>\$4,815,451</b>		
OTHER AGENCIES	Communication and education; Conservation planning; Habitat Joint Venture science; Land and water policy support	\$117,261		4,133
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES 2023-24</b>		<b>\$22,045,838</b>		
<b>TOTAL HABITAT RETENTION ACRES (≥10 Years through Permanent), 2023-24 and 1986-2024</b>			<b>39,127</b>	<b>3,274,221</b>

## NOTES

This table shows expenditures and habitat activities for the Alberta Prairie and Parkland eco-regions (Source: NAWMP National Tracking System). Variable timing of funds both contributed and received under NAWMP may result in differences between total funds received versus expended each fiscal year. Related habitat retention or restoration acres are similarly affected.

## ACTIVITIES:

- Communication and education: communications specific to activities in approved proposals under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA). NOTE: all other communication activities are not eligible for NAWCA funds.
- Compensatory mitigation: involves creation, preservation, restoration and/or enhancement of wetlands or uplands as compensation for impacts on other wetlands or uplands.

- Conservation planning: biological, agrological and engineering planning and targeting activities that occur prior to actual program delivery.
- Habitat Joint Venture science: activities that evaluate the effects and inform future improvement of the NAWCA program throughout the Prairie Habitat Joint Venture.
- Habitat restoration: actions to increase carrying capacity for wetland-associated migratory birds and other wildlife.
- Habitat retention (≥10 years through permanent): protection of wetland and/or upland habitat through land title transfer or binding long-term conservation agreements with landowners.
- Habitat retention (<10 years): activities that promote or directly result in the sustainable use of land for the purpose of conserving wetland-dependent birds and their habitats.

- Land and water policy support: activities that identify or support development of policies benefiting wetlands or associated uplands. NOTE: these activities are not eligible for NAWCA funds.
- Management (habitat assets): actions to maintain carrying capacity for wetland-associated migratory birds and other wildlife on habitat retained for ≥10 years through permanent.

## HABITAT ACRES:

- Habitat Acres, 2023-24: habitat acres retained, restored or managed between April 1, 2023 and March 31, 2024. NOTE: total acres are not cumulative.
- Net Habitat Acres, 1986-2024: cumulative total of habitat acres since 1986, less expired agreements.

\*Denotes change in acre status from 2008 reporting period.



## A HEARTFELT THANKS TO OUR COOPERATORS

The Alberta NAWMP Partnership sincerely thanks all the individuals, companies, governments, conservation organizations, charitable foundations, academic institutions, and others who have contributed funds, conducted research, and collaborated with our Partners, to successfully deliver NAWMP programming across Alberta. A key partner to the [Prairie Habitat Joint Venture](#), Alberta NAWMP's motto is Advancing Conservation Together.

As a cooperator, you have played a vital part in our progress toward achieving our vision of healthy prairie, parkland and boreal landscapes that support sustainable bird populations and provide ecological and economic benefits to society.

**A COMPLETE LIST OF OUR COOPERATORS  
FROM 1986 TO 2024 IS AVAILABLE AT  
[ABNAWMP.CA](http://ABNAWMP.CA)**

### PHOTO CREDITS

**DC** Darwin Chambers, Ducks Unlimited Canada  
**DUC** Ducks Unlimited Canada  
**GH** Geoff Holroyd, Snow Goose Festival  
**SF** Sean Feagan, Nature Conservancy of Canada

DC

## ALBERTA NAWMP PARTNERSHIP AND ITS PARTNERS



Environment and  
Climate Change Canada  
Environnement et  
Changement climatique Canada



## OTHER NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL NAWMP PARTNERS

North American  
Wetlands  
Conservation Act



*North American Waterfowl  
Management Plan*



prairie habitat  
*joint venture*



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