



North American Wetlands Conservation Act

Waterfowl populations in North America reached historic lows in the 1980s due in part to decreasing wetland habitat in the U.S. and Canada.¹ The two countries acknowledged this decline and signed the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) in 1986 to restore waterfowl populations through habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement.¹ The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) was passed by Congress in 1989 to support activities in NAWMP.² Mexico signed on to NAWMP when the plan was updated in 1994.¹

Methods

NAWCA receives annual appropriations from Congress in addition to funding from provisions in the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act, and the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (Figure 1).³

NAWCA provides grants for wetland conservation projects in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. Eligible proposals are reviewed and ranked by The North American Wetlands Conservation Council—a nine member council appointed by the Secretary of Interior—which then recommends projects to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission for final approval. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Division of Bird Habitat Conservation awards and administers the approved grant projects.

NAWCA requires that projects match at least \$1 in non-federal funds for every \$1 received in grant funds.⁴ The standard grants program is open to projects in Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. The small grants program is only open to projects in the U.S. with grant funds limited to \$75,000 per project; which allows smaller partners and projects to successfully compete for NAWCA funds.

Results

NAWCA grants have supported protection, restoration, and enhancement of wetlands in all 50 U.S. states, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands; all 13 Canadian provinces and territories; and all 31 Mexican states.² Through fiscal year (FY) 2015, over 2,500 projects have received nearly \$1.4 billion in NAWCA grants with partners contributing an additional \$2.8 billion in non-federal matching funds—thus providing greater than \$2 in eligible match for every standard NAWCA dollar awarded (Small Grants leverage almost \$4 for every NAWCA dollar awarded).³ Through these funds, more than 5,000 different partners have helped conserve over 28 million acres of wetland and associated upland habitats.³

Discussion

NAWCA has expanded its scope from covering projects in NAWMP to the conservation of wetland migratory birds listed in the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, the North American Wetland Conservation Plan, and the Partners In Flight Conservation Plan.²

While NAWCA continues to receive annual appropriations, the act’s authorization expired in October 2012, putting the program at risk of being discontinued. Though last authorized at \$75 million for each of the years FY 2008–2012, the program currently receives approximately \$35 million per year. Reauthorization of NAWCA would enable Congress to continue this cooperative, non-regulatory, incentive-based program that has shown unprecedented success in maintaining and restoring wetlands, waterfowl, and other migratory bird populations.

Implications for Wildlife Professionals

NAWCA provides funding for public-private partnerships carrying out wetlands conservation projects that benefit wetlands-associated migratory birds and other wildlife. NAWCA grants generate approximately 7,500 new jobs annually in the U.S.⁴ Wildlife professionals are needed on grant projects to assess appropriate restoration requirements, evaluate habitat management needs, and propose project criteria that will benefit wildlife.

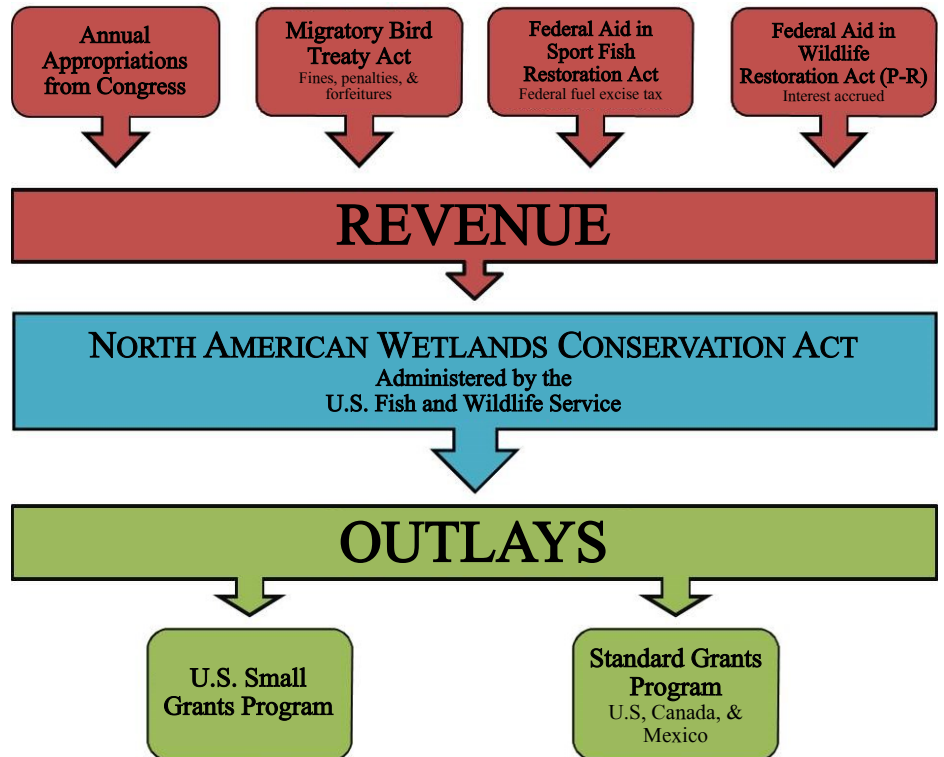


Figure 1. The funding process for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act

North American Wetlands Conservation Act: Features



Small Grants Program⁵

The Small Grants Program was created in 1996 by the North American Wetlands Conservation Council to fund smaller-scale, long-term wetlands conservation projects that might not be able to compete in the Standard Grants Program. Projects are eligible to receive up to \$75,000 in funding. Through April 2016, over 1,600 partners in 750 projects have been involved in the Small Grants Program, benefitting over 359,000 acres of wetland habitats. Furthermore, over \$43.2 million in NAWCA grants have resulted in partners contributing an additional \$155 million in matching funds.

Cackling geese (Credit: Nathan Graff, USFWS)

NAWCA in Canada⁶

Since 1991, NAWCA Standard Grants have contributed over \$500 million dollars to 547 projects on more than 19 million acres across all 13 provinces and territories in Canada. Moreover, these funds were matched on a one-to-one basis by over 160 partners, thereby doubling the impact of the NAWCA grants. In 2016, NAWCA grants contributed \$20 million to 9 projects, including \$5 million to Ducks Unlimited Canada to help secure and enhance 8,809 acres in the prairie potholes region. The prairie potholes region serves as a breeding ground for about 50 to 70 percent of North America's waterfowl population.

Dabbling ducks (Credit: Ducks Unlimited)



Protecting the Acadia Archipelago⁷

The Maine Coast Heritage Trust received a \$1 million grant in 2010 from NAWCA to conserve parts of the Acadia Archipelago. The archipelago provides habitat for waterfowl, seabirds, and shorebirds. The grant, along with \$4.45 million in matching funds from partners, was used to permanently protect interior wetlands on Mount Desert Island, in addition to five entire islands. Many migratory birds have benefited from these improved coastal wetlands, including the American black duck (*Anas rubripes*), yellow rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*), American woodcock (*Scolopax minor*), and olive-sided flycatcher (*Contopus cooperi*).

Wetlands in Acadia National Park, Maine (Credit: Petr Kratochvil, PublicDomainPictures)

1. USFWS Division of Bird Habitat Conservation. 2016. North American Waterfowl Management Plan. <<https://www.fws.gov/birds/management/bird-management-plans/north-american-waterfowl-management-plan.php>> Accessed 18 July 2017.
2. USFWS. 2014. North American Wetlands Conservation Act Fact Sheet.
3. USFWS Division of Bird Habitat Conservation. 2014. North American Wetlands Conservation Act. <<https://www.fws.gov/birds/grants/north-american-wetland-conservation-act.php>> Accessed 18 July 2017.
4. Land Trust Alliance. 2012. The North American Wetlands Conservation Act Fact Sheet.
5. USFWS. 2016. Small Grants. <<https://www.fws.gov/birds/grants/north-american-wetland-conservation-act/small-grants.php>> Accessed 5 May 2017.
6. USFWS Division of Bird Habitat Conservation. 2014. North American Wetlands Conservation Act, The Canada Program Fact Sheet.
7. USFWS Division of Bird Habitat Conservation. 2013. September 2010 Standard Grants. <http://www.fws.gov/birdhabitat/Grants/NAWCA/Standard/US/2010_Sept.shtm> Accessed 17 Sept 2014.

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