



North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA)

The Bottom Line:

“NAWCA is a federal grants program that funds wetland habitat conservation projects throughout North America. NAWCA projects protect, restore and enhance habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife that depend upon wetlands.”

What is NAWCA and what does it do?

- Passed by Congress in 1989, NAWCA provides federal matching funds to public-private partnerships for wetland habitat conservation projects in North America.
- The Act is critical for successfully implementing the habitat objectives of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and other national and international conservation plans for migratory birds that use wetlands.
- NAWCA funds long-term projects that protect, restore and/or enhance wetlands and associated upland habitats on both public and private lands.
- The NAWCA grant program is itself a public-private partnership. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service administers the grant program, while the North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Council) establishes the policies that govern the grant selection process.
- The Secretary of Interior appoints the U.S. members of the Council. The following organizations are represented on Council: 4 state wildlife agencies (1 from each Flyway); 5 non-profit organizations (including Ducks Unlimited); National Fish & Wildlife Foundation; and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

What is the source of the funds that NAWCA grants for wetlands projects?

- NAWCA funds come from a number of sources, including general appropriations (federal tax revenue), interest earned on various federal accounts, federal excise taxes, and Migratory Bird Treaty Act fines.
- NAWCA is not funded with duck stamp or hunting license sales.
- NAWCA’s portion of the federal excise taxes may only be used to fund projects in the U.S. Coastal Zone. These Coastal funds have made up 34% of NAWCA funds awarded to U.S. projects through 2006.

What are “matching grants?”

- These are grants that require applicants to match the federal dollars they receive. In the case of NAWCA, each federal dollar must be matched with at least one dollar from a non-federal source. Matching funds typically come from state agencies, private foundations, private landowners, and non-profit organizations such as Ducks Unlimited.
- Matching grants are important for generating the partnerships that are genuinely committed to accomplishing the long-term objectives of wetland habitat conservation.

What has NAWCA accomplished?

- NAWCA has stimulated the conservation of **more than 23 million acres of wetlands and associated uplands** in over 1,800 projects across North America.
- As of January 2009, more than \$900 million of federal funds have been invested through NAWCA. Partner contributions have added more than \$2.7 billion.

Where have all these NAWCA projects been conducted?

- Congress passed NAWCA to fund migratory bird habitat conservation throughout their entire North American range, and the Council has traditionally allocated 50% of the funds for projects in the U.S., 45% for projects in Canada, and 5% for projects in Mexico.
- In the U.S., the most extensive impact has been in North Dakota, with over **1.5 million** acres conserved as of January 2009. In Canada, approximately 70% of the funding has gone to the Prairie provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.
- Overall, approximately one-half of the Act’s non-coastal funds have been used to fund projects in the important waterfowl breeding grounds of the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR).

Couldn’t the Council elect to use Coastal funds to support more projects in North Dakota or other states of the Prairie Pothole Region?

- No, Congress dictated in law that coastal funds must be spent in the coastal zone, which occurs in a relatively narrow band along the Atlantic, Gulf, Pacific, and Great Lakes coastlines.
- Also, because Congress must allocate federal tax revenues among many competing programs, it is important to have broad, bi-partisan political and public support to insure that sufficient funds are annually appropriated to NAWCA. With significant wetland losses and impacts on waterfowl and other migratory birds all across the country, it is both politically and biologically important and appropriate that wetland conservation projects be funded throughout the U.S.

What is DU’s role in NAWCA?

- Inasmuch as Ducks Unlimited is a world leader in wetland conservation, and our mission is to conserve North America’s wetlands and associated habitats for waterfowl and other wildlife, DU has been able to help NAWCA be successful in many ways. DU has been responsible for designing and carrying out many of the wetland conservation projects funded by NAWCA. Perhaps most important, and thanks to our tens of thousands of volunteers and hundreds of thousands of members, DU is proud to have been able to stimulate many of the partnerships that have been most critical to the past and continuing success of NAWCA in restoring, conserving and managing these habitats for waterfowl and other wildlife across North America.