

## Policy Brief Series

### 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) was passed by Congress in 1989 to support activities in the NAWMP.<sup>2</sup> Mexico signed on to NAWMP when the plan was updated in 1994.<sup>1</sup>

#### 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).<sup>3</sup>

NAWCA provides grants for wetland conservation projects in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. Project proposals are reviewed and ranked by the North American Wetlands Conservation Council, a nine member appointed council which recommends projects to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission for final approval. 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.<sup>4</sup> 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; therefore, the projects are typically smaller in scope than those in the standard grants program.

#### Results

NAWCA grants have supported protection, restoration, and enhancement of wetlands in all 50 U.S. states, all 10 Canadian provinces and multiple territories, and all 31 Mexican states.<sup>2</sup> Over 2,550 projects have received nearly \$1.4 billion in grants since 1990.<sup>3</sup> Partners have contributed an additional \$2.9 billion in matching funds.<sup>3</sup> Over 30.7 million acres of habitat have been restored by projects using NAWCA funds.<sup>3</sup>

#### Discussion

NAWCA has expanded its scope from covering projects in the 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.<sup>2</sup>

While NAWCA continues to receive appropriations, the act's authorization expired in October 2012, putting the program at risk of being discontinued. The reauthorization of NAWCA would enable Congress to continue their conservation of wetlands.

#### 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.<sup>4</sup> Wildlife professionals are needed on grant projects to assess appropriate restoration requirements, evaluate habitat management needs, and propose project criteria that will benefit wildlife.

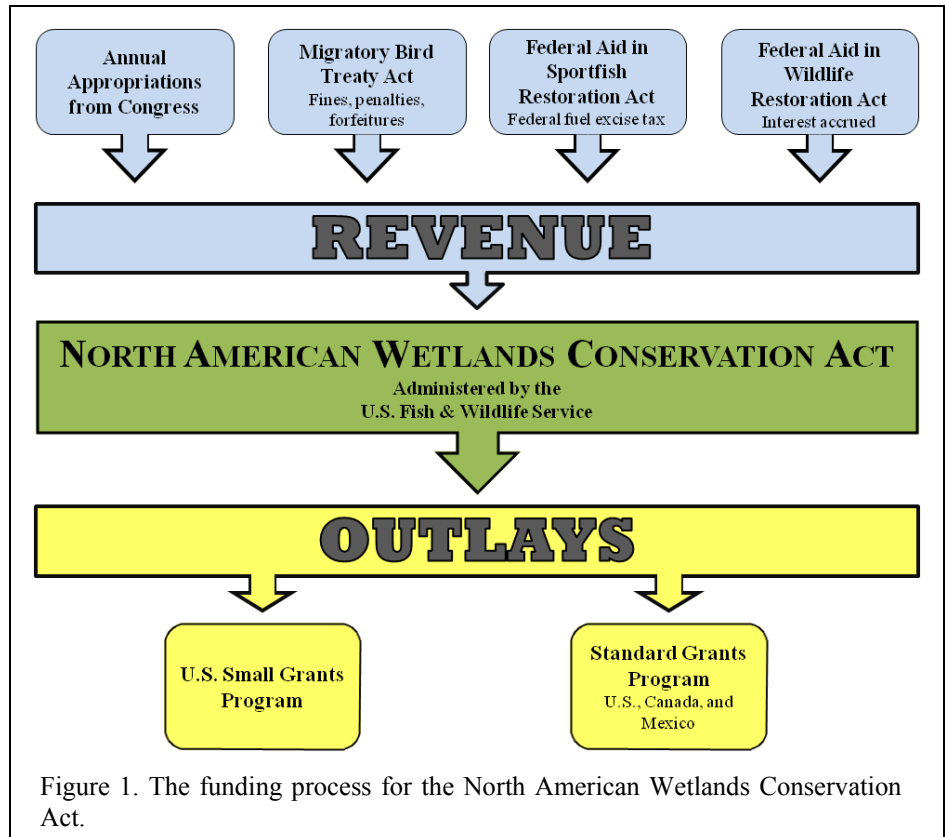


Figure 1. The funding process for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act.

# North American Wetlands Conservation Act: Features



## Small Grants Program<sup>5</sup>

The Small Grants Program was created in 1996 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. Over 1,500 partners in 700 projects have been involved in the Small Grants Program, affecting 300,000 acres of habitat. Over \$39.6 million in grants have been given since 1996; partners have contributed another \$144.3 million in matching funds.

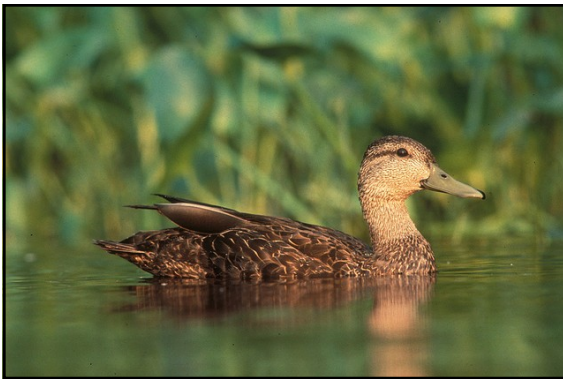
NAWCA protects nesting habitat for waterfowl like these Cackling geese (Credit: Nathan Graff, USFWS).

## Duck and Geese Conservation in Canada<sup>6</sup>

NAWCA grants have funded over 500 projects in Canada since 1991, awarding over \$462 million in funds. The Nature Conservancy of Canada received \$982,428 in 2014 to conserve 2,396 acres of land that will benefit at risk species of ducks and geese in the Canadian Prairie and Pothole Region.



Canada geese (Credit: Alex Galt, USFWS).



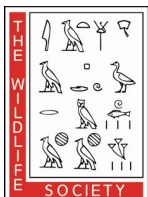
American black duck (Credit: Scott Nielsen, USFWS).

## Protecting the Acadia Archipelago<sup>7</sup>

The Maine Coast Heritage Trust received a million dollar grant in 2010 from NAWCA to conserve parts of the Acadia Archipelago. The grant, along with \$4.45 million in matching funds, was used to permanently protect interior wetlands on Mount Desert Island and five entire islands. Many migratory birds have benefited from these improved coastal wetlands including the American black duck.

## Sources

- 1 USFWS Division of Bird Habitat Conservation. 2014. North American Waterfowl Management Plan. <<http://www.fws.gov/birdhabitat/NAWMP/index.shtm>> Accessed 15 Sept 2014.
- 2 USFWS. 2014. North American Wetlands Conservation Act Fact Sheet.
- 3 USFWS Division of Bird Habitat Conservation. 2014. North American Wetlands Conservation Act. <<http://www.fws.gov/birdhabitat/Grants/NAWCA/index.shtm>> Accessed 29 Apr 2016.
- 4 Land Trust Alliance. 2012. The North American Wetlands Conservation Act Fact Sheet.
- 5 USFWS Division of Bird Habitat Conservation. 2015. Small Grants. <<http://www.fws.gov/birdhabitat/Grants/NAWCA/Small/index.shtm>> Accessed 29 Apr 2016.
- 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](http://www.fws.gov/birdhabitat/Grants/NAWCA/Standard/US/2010_Sept.shtm)> Accessed 17 Sept 2014.



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