

# **Status Report on Implementation of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan**

**Harvey K. Nelson**, *U.S. Office of the North American Waterfowl  
Management Plan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Twin Cities,  
MN 55111*

Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 42:13-18

---

It's fall again, time to observe the change of seasons. Already, our prairie pot-holes are freezing and waterfowl are arriving here in the wintering grounds. As we watch the age-old migrations, we remember how precious this natural resource is. Waterfowl are important to duck hunters, birdwatchers, and millions of citizens who view waterfowl as a symbol of wildness. Fall makes us reflect on our own actions and ask the question—"what we are accomplishing to ensure that generations to come may witness the natural wonder of migration?"

I'm here to suggest some answers and to inform you of the progress we are making on the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. By now, most of you have heard one or more presentations about the plan. Perhaps you've read about it in conservation journals or the popular press. Or maybe you are a partner in the Plan, on a joint venture team, a state project, or on the United States implementation board. For some of you who have traveled the same circuit I have the past 3-6 months, this may be a bit repetitious. You have heard our director, Frank Dunkle, pledge the full support of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Today, I want to bring you a more current message about the Plan, news of recent progress, and a bid about the future.

The Plan is a policy document that established an international partnership to conserve our continent's precious waterfowl resources. It lists habitat goals and population goals for 37 species of ducks, geese, and swans. It is a blueprint for action that was signed by the United States and Canada in 1986. The Plan clearly recognizes, on behalf of both countries, that the North American waterfowl resource is important. It established a 15-year planning horizon with implementation to be completed by the year 2000. It set up the North American Waterfowl Committee to coordinate implementation, a 12-member group with 6 members from the United States and 6 from Canada.

We have moved far beyond our preliminary work of organizational tasks and preliminary planning that was started 12-18 months ago. Although it was essential

to lay that foundation, I am pleased that the Plan is up and running, and things are beginning to happen in the marshes and on the ground. I'd like to concentrate on the gains we've made in some of our joint venture projects, on some of the problems we've solved and finally, on some of the larger challenges that remain.

First, I want to share our partners' enthusiasm for what is happening, both in the joint venture projects and in the conference rooms in Washington, D.C. and among the participating states, where we've been making decisions and developing support that will change waterfowl management and wildlife conservation in the years ahead.

Let me begin with an update on our joint ventures, the 6 priority habitat areas identified in the Plan. The joint ventures are the working terms of the Plan, coalitions of private, state, and federal organizations, and the public. This is where the habitat protection and enhancement is happening. The 6 United States joint ventures—the Great Lakes, St. Lawrence Basin, Atlantic Coast, the Central Valley in California, the Gulf Coast, the Lower Mississippi Valley, and the Prairie Pothole Region—are all in place. We are finalizing the geographical boundaries of these areas, and have identified, or are in the process of identifying, specific projects within each joint venture. The service has chosen 6 joint venture coordinators, all seasoned natural resource professionals, to guide the progress of these joint ventures and the projects within each.

Already, we've made gains on the ground. In the southern part of the country, partners have formed the Gulf Coast Joint Venture and the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture. Both have fast track projects that illustrate how, with ingenious ideas and teamwork, much can be accomplished.

In the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture, partners took an innovative approach to meet one of the plan's goals: to increase the waterfowl carrying capacity on national wildlife refuges. On the Big Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Arkansas, a team rallied to help waterfowl. First, the Fish and Wildlife Service staff lowered water levels of the lake to expose 1540 ha of mud flats. Another partner, Pioneer Seed Company, donated 23 tons of milo and Japanese millet to the project. A local crop-dusting service volunteered flight time to aerially seed the land. Local citizens pitched in to load the plane. The result was a bumper crop of grains that attracted more than 900,000 ducks the past week—an unusual concentration of waterfowl for this area.

The Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture partners are restoring wetlands that were drained for crop production. These acres are held in inventory by the Farmers Home Administration, but the Service, respective states, and other partners are now adding water control structures and improving these lands for waterfowl and other wetland wildlife. In 1 project alone, they have added 10.7 km of levee, 18 water control structures, and have improved habitat on 405 ha in Humphreys County, Mississippi. More acres are being restored by similar action on lands under easement arrangements in several midwestern and southeastern states.

The Gulf Coast Joint Venture is drawing support from 2 important sectors: private landowners and industry. We've known for a long time that public entities—

federal or state governments—cannot alone be expected to save our waterfowl and wetlands. We must have broad support from the private sector. In the Gulf Coast Joint Venture, folks are doing just that.

Scott Paper, a corporation that holds more than 1.3 million ha of timberlands in this country, became a partner in the joint venture when executives recently signed an agreement with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The 3-year agreement stipulates that Scott Paper will manage 10,900 ha of bottomland hardwoods in Mobile Bay, Alabama, to better accommodate waterfowl. Scott Paper has agreed to limit the size of their clearcuts; leave large, hollow trees standing; manage nesting cover; and contribute lumber for nesting structures. Scott Paper's executives are excited about their contribution to the Plan and, in fact, hope to extend their agreement to other sites.

Private landowners are also getting active in the Gulf Coast Joint Venture. In August, the first agreement was struck with a Kaplan, Louisiana, rice farmer who leased land to be managed as a "mini-refuge" for a waterfowl wintering site. This was the first of many of these agreements signed under the Gulf Coast Joint Venture. On 15 November near Houston, Texas, the joint venture partners will hold a ceremony to celebrate their progress with similar private landowner involvement there. They've planned a reception for the news media, a visit to the "mini-refuges," and appearance by local and national conservation leaders.

Partners in the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture are continuing a long history of wetland preservation by the Fish and Wildlife Service and the 5 states. Partners in South Dakota are acquiring sites in the flooded watershed of Lake Thompson which promise to be a premiere waterfowl area. They're also developing incentives for landowners who agree to modify their agricultural production techniques to accommodate ducks, geese, and other water birds. In the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture there are excellent opportunities for wetland restoration, sometimes in conjunction with the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The North Carolina Region (U.S. Fish and Wildl. Serv. Region 3) has about 2,200 wetland basins restored on private lands in 8 states.

The Service and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in the Central Valley of California have worked with California Game and Fish, the California Waterfowl Association, and others to develop cooperative funding to support a pilot project to determine incentives necessary to get farmers to leave rice and other grain stubble and maintain water for winter waterfowl habitat. The main thrust is to delay tillage until early spring, about the time waterfowl begin to leave for the north, thereby increasing the winter food base.

We're encouraging other federal agencies to become active in the Plan. For example, the Department of Defense, under the provisions of the Sikes Act, has offered to manage military lands for better waterfowl production and to improve the quality of wintering habitat. We're currently evaluating 30 military installments in 12 states for potential under this agreement, which will be funded by the Department of Defense through 1993. Three military bases have been chosen as pilot projects for the work. The Forest Service has its new \$1.3 million program, called

"Taking Wing," designed to enhance Forest Service lands for waterfowl production and wintering birds. The Bureau of Land Management is launching a new wildlife program, Habitat 2000; under which it will begin work with the Plan in the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture.

Other federal agencies including the Corps of Engineers, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Agricultural Stabilization Conservation Service, the Soil Conservation Service, and Farmer's Home Administration, have discussed further participation in the Plan. We established an inter-agency working group with the major federal land management agencies to coordinate work related to the plan at a meeting in Washington, D.C. on 20 October 1988.

Our office is working to coordinate many of these activities. One of my principal roles is to coordinate the implementation of the Plan with the Canadian agencies, our regional directors, your state directors and other organizations. We have Dr. Bob Streeter, deputy executive director, who assists me directly in this implementation process. Carl Madsen, habitat specialist, coordinates activities with U.S. Department of Agriculture programs, state habitat initiatives, and the Service's land acquisition programs. Madsen also works with other federal agencies, such as the Department of Defense, the Forest Service, and the Corps of Engineers. We will be developing monitoring systems to track our progress as time passes.

Dave Sharp, our migratory bird populations specialist, is taking on the challenge of determining how to better relate species objectives and habitat objectives under the Plan. Sharp is working closely with the Migratory Bird Management office to examine our data bases. He and a team will identify critical gaps in our knowledge of populations and develop a strategy for getting the data. We will need to know more about how the more intensive management of specific sites helps populations of ducks, geese, or swans. It's a big job, but it will add much to our knowledge of migratory birds and will increase our ability to measure performance and accomplishments.

The U.S. Implementation Board was officially organized on 2 June 1988, and held its first action meeting in August. This board, a group of key executives representing 18 national conservation organizations and foundations, will aid the North American Waterfowl Management Plan committee, specifically the U.S. section, in fund-raising, communications, and developing legislative support. The Board selected Matt Connolly, executive vice president of Ducks Unlimited, Inc., as its chairman for the first year.

Organizations represented on the U.S. Implementation Board are the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Ducks Unlimited, National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation, National Association of Conservation Districts, American Forest Foundation, The Wildlife Society, Nature Conservancy, National Rifle Association, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Izaak Walton League, North American Wildlife Foundations, Wildlife Management Institute, American Farmland Trust, Land Trust Exchange, and Berry B. Brooks Foundation.

At the August meeting, the Implementation Board members formed fund-raising, communications, and legislation action committees to speed implementa-

tion. The Board met again on 2 November to discuss these 3 areas of concern and to review the committee reports.

The Board's recommendations called for professional assistance in developing a large-scale marketing effort to "package and sell" the Plan. The Plan must be promoted as a broad program that will benefit waterfowl, other wetland and upland wildlife, and society as a whole. We need to stress the value of wetlands as ground-water recharge, pollution filters, and flood control. To succeed we will need the backing of an informed public. Communicating the proper message is one of our greatest challenges.

The Service recently hired Bill MacDougall as national communications coordinator, headquartered in Washington, to serve as the principal contact person for information and education activities of the Plan. We will continue to keep our own partners in the joint venture projects informed through an internal communications network conducted through my office, regional public affairs offices, the joint venture coordinators, the respective states and other organizations.

We must communicate the message that the Plan is truly a habitat program. It is also a land management program and a way to improve land use practices on the continent. It is much more than a duck plan or just another land acquisition program. We must inform the public that the Plan benefits many fish and wildlife species that use wetlands for food and shelter. The public needs to know the Plan will preserve the vital functions of wetlands and grassland committees it will indeed provide many other benefits to society as a whole.

Securing long-term funding is another primary challenge and the board will address this. I'm pleased to report the current status of the first-step matching grant program that was initiated by the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, under Gary Myers' committee with the support of 12 states, Duck Unlimited, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. It has resulted in a \$4 million grant going to Canada, where it will be matched by Canadian organizations and agencies. Approximately \$8 million in first-step projects this year will be used primarily in the Canadian prairies. However, some of the money is beginning to move across the border.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service budget was increased by \$6 million for fiscal year 1988 and \$10 million for fiscal year 1989. Ducks Unlimited has announced a new "Challenge Plus" program which it believes will generate \$300 million in the next 12-15 years over and above their current program of \$60 million per year. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation has a \$5 million appropriation for fiscal year 1989. Other state and federal sources of funding exist, but we need to identify larger funding sources for the future to attain the objectives of the Plan.

Now that the "first-step" projects are funded in Canada, we are working toward "second step" projects. We are hopeful for increases of \$4 million to \$6 million in the federal and state agency budgets for the Plan. We are searching for new sources to meet total habitat funding requirement of \$1.5 billion over the next 12 years. Simple arithmetic will tell you that we will need to develop a combined annual funding source of \$100 million to \$120 million annually over the next 12 years.

This was a pivotal summer for waterfowl and the conservation community. The summer's drought in the prairie region of Canada and United States was not kind to ducks, but through the winter months, we cannot falter or lose momentum in dealing with these issues. We have new opportunities through the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. When spring comes and the ducks head north again, we must have even more progress to report. We have a choice: each season that passes can bring a more serious decline of our waterfowl resources, especially ducks, or it can bring us closer to helping the population recover. Let's put our combined talents behind the plan to make this happen. We are indeed involved in one of the greatest conservation challenges of this century and as the lieutenant governor of South Carolina appropriately stated, we must begin planning for the 21st century now.