

**STATEMENT OF SCOTT SUTHERLAND, DUCKS UNLIMITED
DIRECTOR OF THE GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS OFFICE**

**BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS, OCEANS AND WILDLIFE**

SEPTEMBER 22, 2009

CONCERNING:

**H.R. 3433, TO AMEND THE NORTH AMERICAN WETLANDS CONSERVATION ACT;
H.R.2213, TO REAUTHORIZE THE NEOTROPICAL MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION ACT;
AND
H.R.3537, TO REAUTHORIZE THE JUNIOR DUCK STAMP CONSERVATION AND DESIGN
PROGRAM ACT OF 2009**

Ducks Unlimited (DU) is pleased to testify before the Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee On Insular Affairs, Oceans And Wildlife, regarding three conservation bills: H.R. 3433, to amend the North American Wetlands Conservation Act to establish requirements regarding payment of the non-Federal share of the costs of wetlands conservation projects in Canada; H.R. 2213, to reauthorize the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act; and H.R.3537, to reauthorize the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program Act of 2009.

I am the Director of the Governmental Affairs Office of Ducks Unlimited, a non-profit wetlands conservation organization. In my role at DU, I lead a small group of professionals who educate and advocate on behalf of federal conservation policy initiatives to benefit the waterfowl resource.

H.R. 3433: Amending the North American Wetlands Conservation Act

I have led DU's efforts to increase funding for federal programs that support the North American Waterfowl Management Plan since joining DU 19 years ago. I have also worked with the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) program since it was started, and assisted the work of Congress on four reauthorizations of the Act.

Background:

One of the key purposes of NAWCA is to support the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), which was signed in 1986. The Plan is an international agreement between the governments of the U.S., Canada and Mexico. It recognizes the continuing loss of habitat and resulting declines in waterfowl populations and creates a unified continental effort required to restore this valuable resource to long term average population levels. NAWMP is a broad framework based on biological science that describes the problems facing North America's waterfowl. Far more importantly it outlines the scope and goals needed to recover and sustain waterfowl populations at a long term average level and suggests general strategies and tactics for addressing the problems. NAWCA recognizes that waterfowl are a continental resource and they depend on a wide geographic range of habitats throughout their life cycle. This was an extension of the idea that led to the first migratory bird treaty between the U.S. and Canada in 1916.

Since its enactment in 1989, NAWCA has played an invaluable role in wetlands conservation in North America by helping to stimulate local partnerships aimed exclusively at habitat conservation for wetland-dependent species. NAWCA continues to be an extraordinarily popular program. We commend Congress for their foresight in creating NAWCA and repeatedly taking action to ensure the long-term success of this effective program.

NAWCA has accomplished remarkable success, with projects in all 50 states, Canada and Mexico. The creation of the program 20 years ago was a bipartisan effort and NAWCA has consistently attracted strong bipartisan support in Congress. The House members serving on the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission are routinely joined by between 100 and 200 members of the House supporting annual funding for NAWCA. Those supporters include many members of this Committee and Subcommittee. The level of interest and enthusiasm in Congress for the program is a testament to NAWCA's success in fostering public-private partnerships in a cost-effective and results-oriented manner.

NAWCA has also enjoyed consistent support from the Executive Branch. President Obama's FY2010 budget proposal envisions full funding of the program at \$75 million by 2012. NAWCA has been identified as an Administration priority to protect America's wetlands. Previous Presidents have also strongly supported the program. During his tenure, President Bush announced a goal to go beyond the no-net loss of wetlands to achieve an overall increase in wetlands each year in the United States. NAWCA was identified as a key program to accomplish the Bush Administration's goal to restore, improve or protect 3 million acres of wetlands over a five-year period. President Obama has now called for full funding at the authorized level for the program by FY 2012. This consistent support by the current and past administrations demonstrates how important NAWCA is to the priorities of our nation and our neighbors to the north and south.

Historically, the lower 48 states of the United States have lost approximately 53% of their original wetlands. The state of California has lost a staggering 91% of its original wetlands and Maryland wetland loss is 73%. While NAWCA is helping to slow this trend of wetland loss, the United States continues to lose more than 80,000 acres of the wetlands most important to fish and wildlife each year and faces increased threats from changing land use patterns and the recent withdrawal of Clean Water Act protections. These losses have dramatic negative impacts on waterfowl and other fish and wildlife.

How NAWCA Works:

NAWCA facilitates efforts by resource managers and a wide variety of partners using strategies to restore and enhance degraded habitat along with protecting the quality habitat that remains. The habitat work that is completed on both public and private lands improves recreational opportunities while providing additional economic benefits for landowners and their communities. Wildlife-related recreation generates over \$100 billion of economic output each year. In many cases, this economic activity is vital to the incomes of rural Americans and it serves as the base for major industries that produce outdoor equipment and a wide range of other products.

The law requires each federal dollar put into the program to be matched by at least \$1 in non-federal funds. The partner investment in NAWCA so far has been two non-federal dollars for every federal dollar invested and the combined total is more than \$3 billion so far. The original law, written in 1989, required that all non-federal match money be raised from United States sources, no matter where the money was to be spent. Because of challenges to raise sufficient match dollars for projects in Mexico, a 1994 amendment changed the match requirements for projects located in Mexico, allowing non-United States sources to be used to pay costs of the projects. However, no such change was made for projects completed in Canada. The amendment proposed in H.R. 3433 will allow funds raised in Canada to be applied as a portion of the required match for habitat projects that will benefit waterfowl and other wetland dependent species across the continent.

Canadian Projects:

Canadian NAWCA projects have made strides in raising money from local sources to supplement the federal and non-federal matching funds. The law as currently written does not recognize this money raised from Canadian non-profits and provincial agencies as matching funds, and they therefore do not count towards the match requirement. NAWCA has served to encourage entities in Canada to increase fundraising for local wetland conservation projects, and the Committee should foster further Canadian investment in local conservation efforts benefiting the continent.

Unfortunately, sometimes Canadian projects can face difficulty raising enough money from United States sources to meet non-federal match requirements. Typically, the average partner match in the U.S., Mexico, and Canada combined has been \$3 for every \$1 in federal money. For Canadian projects, however, the typical partner match has been 1:1. American non-profits and state agency partners contribute funds to send to Canada, and that money is becoming more and more difficult to find. With a difficult economic situation American partners are under pressure, and find it challenging to raise sufficient money to match the cost of Canadian projects. In order to increase the return on a relatively modest federal investment and fund these vital habitat projects, it is important that Congress pass H.R. 3433 to allow funds from Canadian sources to comprise a portion of the non-Federal share of the costs of each project.

After 20 years of being one of the federal government's most effective conservation programs, it is appropriate to ask why the match requirements should be changed. Starting in September 2001, fundraising for many of the nation's charities has become more difficult, and has hampered the abilities to produce match money. Fundraising challenges have continued into this current tough economic climate, resulting in even fewer matching funds from state governments and NGOs. The proposed amendment would open more non-federal revenue streams, and allow for more NAWCA projects to benefit habitat on the Canadian breeding grounds and the waterfowl and other migratory birds that are produced there.

Projects in Canada are critically important to the sustainability of the North American waterfowl population. When NAWCA was passed in 1989, Congress stated that one of the purposes of the Act was "to protect, enhance, restore, and manage an appropriate distribution and diversity of wetland ecosystems and other habitats for migratory birds and other fish and wildlife in North America." Because migratory birds routinely cross national borders, wetland protection and

restoration must occur across North America. Federal NAWCA funds were and are used in all three countries, Canada, Mexico, and the United States, and H.R. 3433 will provide new incentives for U.S.-Canadian partnerships to raise funds so that federal dollars can be leveraged for the most impact.

Success of the Program:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports that through September 2009 more than 4,000 partners have been involved in over 1,850 NAWCA projects. The federal funding portion through NAWCA has leveraged partner contributions of over \$3 billion in matching and non-matching funds. This funding has stimulated the conservation of almost 25 million acres of wetlands and associated uplands across North America. The success of NAWCA is exemplified by the growing list of project partners, which is now above 4,000. The list of partners includes all 50 state fish and wildlife agencies, hundreds of private landowners, a diversity of private conservation efforts, corporations and other business, tribes, and local governments.

NAWCA is successfully implementing the habitat objectives of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) and other national and international conservation plans for wetland-associated migratory birds. Regional Joint Ventures, established to support the NAWMP, play a substantial role by fostering partnership to successfully implement NAWCA projects. DU is an active member of most of the Joint Ventures. It would be impossible to fulfill our collective habitat goals without the critical support provided by NAWCA.

The benefits of NAWCA extend well beyond waterfowl. Wetlands provide a home for more than 900 wildlife species at some time during the year. As intended by Congress, the criteria for NAWCA projects include waterfowl as well as other wetland-associated migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, and other wetland-dependent wildlife and plants. Under this guidance, NAWCA projects are proven to benefit a diverse array of species, including fish.

NAWCA serves as a vital tool for cooperative efforts to address landscape-level habitat challenges in vital areas for waterfowl, including the Prairie Pothole Region of the Great Plains, the Lower Mississippi River Valley, Chesapeake Bay, Gulf Coast and the Great Lakes, to name a few. NAWCA has made a significant impact in coastal communities, but the value and importance of NAWCA to inland areas is also remarkable. Projects in Canada have focused mainly on the Canadian portion of the Prairie Pothole Region and the Western Boreal Forest.

Conclusion:

What began as a small funding mechanism to accelerate implementation of NAWMP in the early 1990's has grown into a highly successful program with widespread success and support. NAWCA has stimulated hundreds of conservation partnerships that would likely not exist otherwise. The result is millions of acres of habitat conserved that provide a myriad of benefits for wetlands, wildlife, and the public. We support the legislation and urge the Committee to approve this bill to allow a portion of the non-federal share of the costs of Canadian projects to include contributions from Canadian sources.

H.R. 2213: Reauthorization of the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act

Since its inception 72 years ago, Ducks Unlimited has recognized that maintaining North America's waterfowl populations requires conservation well beyond the borders of the U.S. Responsible stewardship of these migratory species often requires conservation of habitats from the boreal forests of Canada to the mangrove wetlands of South America and numerous points between and beyond. The same is also true for a variety of other bird species including neotropical migrants—those that breed in the U.S. and Canada and spend the winters in Mexico, Central and South America. Therefore, since its inception, DU has been an active supporter of the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act.

Modeled after NAWCA, the Act has been successful in fostering public-private partnerships and international cooperation to conserve habitats for migratory birds and there is a significant potential to expand these on-the-ground efforts in the future. In total, nearly half of all North America's bird species are dependant upon the natural resources of the Canadian boreal forest, and 94% of the birds that use the boreal forest migrate south into the U.S. and Mexico. Approximately 50% of neotropical migrants breed in the boreal forest north of the lower 48 states. To deliver a full spectrum of habitat conservation for migratory birds, particularly neotropical species, it is important to reauthorize this Act to offer assistance for conservation projects in the most important areas in the range of their migration.

Besides the ducks, geese, and swans, 225 other migratory bird species can be found in the prairie pothole region (PPR) of the U.S. and Canada during portions of the year. The PPR forms the core of what was formerly the largest expanse of grassland in the world: the Great Plains of the United States. Pothole complexes have supported populations of breeding waterfowl unmatched anywhere in the world. These same complexes make the region vitally important to other migratory species as well.

At least 16 waterfowl species that breed in North America, including blue-winged teal, pintail and lesser scaup, spend the winter in Latin America and the Caribbean. These areas have experienced many threats to wetlands including wide-scale deforestation and erosion in the surrounding watersheds, inappropriate agricultural practices, improper use of agrochemicals, and destruction of wild lands for banana and sugarcane plantations. Despite their importance for biodiversity and mankind, the majority of wetlands have been modified due to human activities, such as agriculture, intensive use of chemicals, urban development, and improper use of water. Habitat deterioration continues at a high rate, further impacting the security of waterfowl and other wetland species.

DU is strongly in favor of reauthorizing and expanding the Act. Protection of grassland, wetland, and other waterfowl habitats through private, state, and federal partnerships that effectively deliver habitat conservation projects has been proven as a model for successful conservation. Reauthorization of this Act will continue to benefit numerous migratory bird species that are important to the U.S. and North America from a recreational, aesthetic, and economic standpoint.

H.R.3537: The Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program Act of 2009

For 20 years, this program has provided strong partnerships with public and private schools, after-school programs, and many other youth-based education programs all over the country. It is one of this country's oldest and most successful government-sponsored, youth-focused conservation education programs, and involves students in all fifty states and the District of Columbia.

The Junior Duck Stamp program teaches students the importance of conserving our wetlands and migratory birds and pairs science and the arts to teach greater awareness of America's natural resources. This program has provided a valuable role in fostering not only an appreciation of art in the natural world, but a better understanding of the habitat needs of migratory bird species. This program is complementary to DU's efforts on behalf of habitat conservation and education. DU believes this program has been and will continue to be a strong teaching tool to encourage our youth to become stewards of America's irreplaceable wild places and treasured outdoor heritage, and we strongly support its reauthorization.