

STATEMENT OF JOE SATROM
DUCKS UNLIMITED, INC., GREAT PLAINS REGIONAL OFFICE

REGARDING H.R. 3908 TO REAUTHORIZE THE
NORTH AMERICAN WETLANDS CONSERVATION ACT
BEFORE HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES
CONSERVATION, OCEANS, AND WILDLIFE
April 11, 2002

This is the third time Ducks Unlimited has testified before the House on the reauthorization of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. In the past as part of our testimony, we have congratulated Congress on creating a program that is achieving marvelous progress in helping to secure a habitat base to sustain waterfowl populations despite the continuing pressures created by man and nature. This habitat base is especially important in the periods when the primary waterfowl production areas of the continent are drier than normal and every piece of habitat becomes precious for sustaining birds that breed on the prairies. Unfortunately that may be the case with the summer we're heading into. You deserve commendation again, the program is a success story of which Congress and the American people should be proud.

Since its inception, support for the Act has been a bipartisan effort. That continues today. Right now a letter in support of funding for the NAWCA program is being circulated in the House. So far it's attracted support from over 185 House members with strong representation from both sides of the aisle. Those co-signers include more than half of the Resources Committee. This bipartisan effort over the years is one of the great conservation success stories in American history.

Since the last reauthorization, the Act has continued with its tradition of amazing progress and tangible results. There are now over 1000 NAWCA projects located in nearly every state as well as Canada and Mexico. Despite this progress, the need for NAWCA continues. Based on below average rain last year and lack of precipitation this winter, it likely will not be a good summer for waterfowl production in the key areas. Pond counts will likely be down and nesting production will suffer. The most important component that drives population increases and decreases is Mother Nature. If rain comes at the right times across the prairies and the northern great plains; the "duck factories" of North America will contain nearly ideal conditions for waterfowl to breed and migrate south in the fall. The projects created thanks to NAWCA fill with water mitigating possible downstream flooding and then fill the fall skies with birds. But it's during dry years like the one we think is coming that the North American Wetlands Conservation Act perhaps plays its most critical role, since every square foot of wet ground is precious then, and having habitat in key places becomes essential to sustain the population.

The Act continues to work. Year after year it is demonstrated that the demand is there. Over the life of the program, \$432 million in NAWCA funds have generated \$1.2 billion in partner funds. Despite the impressive appropriations increases we've seen in the last few years, in the last two years over 130 projects were unable to be funded. They could have used \$24 million in NAWCA funds and they contained another \$71 million pledged in partner support. In order to respond to that proven interest we ask that you increase the authorization ceiling for FY'03 by \$5 million to \$55 million and then increase it by \$5 million per year, up to \$75 million in FY'07.

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan set a goal of sustaining 100 million ducks in the fall flight. It laid out a strategy to achieve the migration goal by providing critical landscape habitat for the ducks to use. This Act is the primary vehicle for reaching the North American Plan's goal. As other interests in the conservation world have witnessed the success realized under this Plan, parallel plans for other bird species have been devised and are being implemented. There have been plans developed to conserve species that use wet habitats, like shorebirds, and colonial nesting water birds and those species are well served by NAWCA.

On occasion there has been some confusion about how broad the intent NAWCA is to be interpreted. We ask the Committee to make changes that would clarify the Wetlands Conservation Act should focus on wetland and related habitats. This is especially appropriate since some plans and laws have been developed to that serve species whose habitats are often of a primarily upland nature, unrelated to wetlands. Those initiatives and the related Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act serves many birds but their principal habitats are not use wetland habitats. Since that Act is now being funded to serve upland habitats, we believe references to migratory birds and wildlife in the NAWCA law should clarify the intent to focus on needs in wetland and associated habitats.

Because of the migratory nature of the birds the Act was designed to benefit, it is important to invest in habitat across the length of the continent. Therefore the Act requires that a portion of these funds be invested in each of the three countries of North America. In fact it requires that 50-70% of the funds authorized in this bill be spent in Canada and Mexico. While that has worked well, the highest demand for projects and highest number of non-funded projects has always been in the U.S. Additionally, for projects within Canada the Act requires that the match come from within the U.S. While the increase in appropriations has been beneficial and still doesn't meet demand, it has tested the ability of U.S. partners to meet the required match for Canadian projects. Therefore we ask that you amend the ratio in the Act to require that the portion of these funds spent outside the U.S. change to 25-50%. This will allow the Wetlands Council and Migratory Bird Conservation Commission that approves the projects to balance the ability of required partner dollars against the need.

The NAWCA program has an impressive track record of success. We are proud of that success because we are very experienced with this Act having been actively supportive since the beginning and witnessing it's accomplishments. The changes we propose are not done lightly. We believe they are important for future success of the NAWCA program. We thank the bill's sponsor, Chairman Hansen and the Committee for their support of the program. We thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee for inviting us to testify today and we again congratulate Congress on the success of this program. We stand ready to answer any questions.