

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF GARY TAYLOR,  
DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
DUCKS UNLIMITED, INC.**

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

**CONCERNING:  
H.R. 2208, THE NORTH AMERICAN WETLANDS CONSERVATION  
EXTENSION ACT OF 2013  
AND  
H.R. 2799, THE SPORTSMEN'S HERITAGE AND RECREATIONAL ENHANCEMENT  
(SHARE) ACT**

**AUGUST 2, 2013**

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Gary Taylor. I have been Ducks Unlimited's Director of Governmental Affairs since June 2012. I was previously Legislative Director for the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, a trade association for the 50 state Fish and Wildlife Agencies, for 21 years. Prior to that, I worked in various capacities for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources in the Wildlife Division.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify on behalf of Ducks Unlimited, Inc. (DU) regarding the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), the most effective wetlands conservation and restoration program administered by the federal government. The NAWCA program has been a critically important tool used to conserve migratory bird populations over the last two decades, and Ducks Unlimited strongly supports H.R. 2208 to continue authorization of this vital program.

Founded by waterfowl hunters in 1937, Ducks Unlimited has more than 1 million supporters and is the world's premier wetlands conservation organization. We work in all 50 states and across the North American continent to further our mission of conserving, restoring and managing wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl, as well as for the benefits these resources provide to other wildlife and to all Americans. Our work is science-based, so we are using substantiated and reliable information to develop, implement and adapt wetland habitat conservation actions. DU's collaboration in a robust suite of public and private partnerships over our 76-year history has resulted in the conservation of more than 13 million acres in the most important landscapes for waterfowl including breeding, wintering and migration habitats.

**H.R. 2208, To Reauthorize the North American Wetlands Conservation Act:**

Since enactment in 1989, NAWCA has played an invaluable role in wetlands conservation in North America by helping to stimulate local partnerships aimed at habitat conservation for wetland-dependent wildlife species and the many people who benefit from functioning wetlands. NAWCA continues to be an extraordinarily popular program with proposals submitted for funding far exceeding the funds available. This reflects both the amount of habitat work that

needs to be accomplished and the success of the program in delivering conservation on the ground. NAWCA is a non-regulatory, incentive-based, voluntary habitat conservation program that works with only willing landowners to implement habitat conservation through various mechanisms on their property. We commend Congress for their foresight in creating NAWCA and for repeatedly taking appropriate action to ensure the long-term success of this important program.

NAWCA has accomplished measurable success in all 50 states, Canada and Mexico since its enactment. The creation of the program more than 24 years ago was a bipartisan effort and NAWCA has consistently attracted strong bipartisan support in Congress. Furthermore, presidents of both parties have signed legislation relating to NAWCA. Reauthorization of NAWCA is critical in order to build on this success and ensure the health of high quality wetlands in the United States for wildlife and our citizens alike.

The program works well because Congress identified their priorities for the program in enabling legislation and the Council devised a scoring system that is directly tied to those priorities. These priorities include landscape-level conservation, a science-based approach to bird conservation and collaboration through partnerships. The proposals that do the best job in addressing the priorities of NAWCA rise to the top and get funded. Unsuccessful applicants see this and actively seek to develop future proposals that do a better job of integrating proposed projects into existing landscape-level conservation plans, building new partnerships, and bringing in more match dollars. It is a positive feedback loop that is simple, elegant and effective, and actively promotes the ideals of NAWCA. This grant process successfully steers conservation in the direction in which it ought to be heading, and in which Congress has directed.

Over the program's history, NAWCA funding involving federal and partner, or non-federal, dollars has resulted in the conservation of approximately 27 million acres of wetlands and associated uplands across North America. These wetlands and uplands provide not only habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife, but also deliver services to our citizens in the form of flood attenuation, filtration of sediments and nutrients in runoff, re-charging groundwater and buffering communities from coastal storm surges. I include in the appendix a description of NAWCA projects in the states of Florida, Louisiana, New Jersey and Virginia as illustrative of the types of projects implemented under the program.

The lower 48 states have lost approximately 53 percent of their original wetlands.<sup>1</sup> Louisiana, for example, loses nearly 17 square miles of its coastal wetlands a year – that's equivalent to the size of a football field every hour.<sup>2</sup>

In Louisiana, 53 NAWCA projects have been completed or are underway, with more to be approved this year. Nearly 550,000 acres of wetland and upland habitat has been conserved using these dollars, of which almost \$106 million out of a total \$144 million are non-federal match.

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<sup>1</sup> Dahl, T.E. 2000. Status and trends of wetlands in the conterminous United States 1986 to 1997. U.S. Department of the Interior: Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup> Couvillion, B.R., Barras, J.A., Steyer, G.D., Sleavin, William, Fischer, Michelle, Beck, Holly, Trahan, Nadine, Griffin, Brad, and Heckman, David, 2011, Land area change in coastal Louisiana from 1932 to 2010: U.S. Geological Survey Scientific Investigations Map 3164, scale 1:265,000, 12 p. pamphlet.

One of the more successful NAWCA projects in Louisiana was completed in 2010, in the Black Lake Terracing Project. The Black Lake Terracing Project was a cooperative effort of 16 partners from numerous state, federal, corporate, nonprofit and other private groups who worked together to build more than 50 miles of marsh terraces to benefit 2,500 acres of vital marsh habitat.

These kinds of results have been replicated all over the country with the help of more than 5,000 NAWCA partners. More than 2,250 on-the-ground, voluntary conservation projects have been delivered in North America with multiple benefits for wetlands, wildlife and people. NAWCA is a rigorously competitive grant program that encourages a wide variety of partners to create effective and long-lasting habitat conservation projects on the ground where they will be most beneficial to waterfowl and other wildlife. The multi-partner list includes all 50 state Fish and Wildlife Agencies, hundreds of private landowners, a diverse group of conservation organizations, small businesses, corporations, tribes and local governments.

NAWCA serves as a vital tool for cooperative efforts to address landscape-level habitat challenges in vital areas for waterfowl and other wildlife, including inland wetland systems such as the Prairie Pothole Region of the Great Plains and the Lower Mississippi River Valley, as well as the iconic coastal communities such as the Chesapeake Bay, Gulf Coast and Great Lakes, to name a few.

Wetlands provide a home for more than 900 wildlife species at some time during the year, of which only approximately 6 percent are waterfowl. The diversity of wildlife found in wetlands arises because of the uniqueness of the habitat. The plants, water and soils of wetlands provide homes to species of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish, crustaceans and mollusks. Insects, invertebrates, bacteria, algae and decaying plants create a rich foundation for food chains that lead to incredible variety and abundance of species. While the habitat provided by these ecosystems is crucial to DU's mission, wetlands also directly benefit all citizens of the United States in a variety of ways.

Functioning wetlands act like a natural sponge. They capture and retain water, reducing the severity of flooding and providing a buffer to coastal storm surges. Just one acre of wetland can store more than 1.5 million gallons of flood water.<sup>3</sup> According to the Environmental Protection Agency, bottomland hardwood wetlands along the Mississippi River once stored at least 60 days of floodwater but now only have capacity for 12 days of storage because most have been filled or drained.<sup>4</sup>

Plants and soils in wetlands play a significant role in improving water quality by removing high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus. I offer a few specific examples of the value of wetlands as water purifiers:

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<sup>3</sup> Environmental Protection Agency. *Functions and Values of Wetlands*. Environmental Protection Agency, Sept. 2001.

<sup>4</sup> "Wetlands and People." <http://water.epa.gov/type/wetlands/people.cfm>. Environmental Protection Agency, 06 Mar. 2012. Web. 26 July 2013.

- New York City avoided spending \$3.8 billion on new wastewater treatment plants by investing \$1.5 billion in conserving land, including wetlands, in the watersheds around its water supply reservoirs in upstate New York as well as instituting other water quality protective measures.<sup>5</sup>
- A Florida cypress swamp can remove 97 percent of all phosphorus entering the wetland from wastewater before it enters the groundwater supply.<sup>6</sup>
- A Ducks Unlimited Canada study found that the drainage of wetlands contributed to an increase of phosphorus in Lake Winnipeg that is equivalent to dumping 10 semi-truck-loads of fertilizer in the lake every year. The study also estimated that it would cost approximately \$15 million to replace the ecosystem services lost in a small southwestern Manitoba watershed in 2005 alone, or \$19 million by 2020 if wetland drainage was not stopped.<sup>7</sup>

Conservation of wildlife and its habitats grow both national and local economies. The economies of local communities are boosted by \$646 billion in yearly spending on all outdoor recreation.<sup>8</sup> America's sportsmen and women benefit from the outdoor recreation opportunities provided by wetland habitats supporting fish and wildlife. In 2011, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) found that hunting and fishing, in particular, contributes almost \$90 billion to the U.S. economy annually. Hunters pay \$5.4 billion in state and local taxes, which is enough to pay the wages of 37 percent of the nation's firefighters.

A 2002 study from the USFWS specifically on the NAWCA program, showed that NAWCA funding created 7,500 jobs that generated more than \$200 million in worker earnings each year. These jobs range from engineers, construction workers and biologists to sporting goods employees and hotel workers.

Finally, these voluntary conservation projects serve as a model of good government and fiscal responsibility, as NAWCA provides an excellent return on a relatively modest federal investment. The law requires every federal dollar put into the program to be matched by at least \$1 in non-federal money. More than 5,000 partners, including private landowners, state and local governments, and conservation organizations, have joined together to match federal NAWCA funding by \$3.20 on average. Over the life of the program, NAWCA grants totaling more than \$1.24 billion have leveraged contributions from partners of more than \$3.4 billion. These contributions have far exceeded the match requirements, and have allowed for the successful implementation of voluntary wetland habitat restoration projects all over the North American continent.

We believe that the number and quality of projects delivered, the fact that the program is well over-subscribed, the remarkable match ratio of more than three non-federal dollars brought in by partners to one federal dollar, and the broad and diverse partners involved, warrants retaining the

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<sup>5</sup> Navarro, Mireya. "\$1.5 Billion Plan Would Cut Sewage Flow Into City Waters." *The New York Times* 28 Sept. 2010: n. pag. Web. <[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/29/science/earth/29sewage.html?\\_r=2&](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/29/science/earth/29sewage.html?_r=2&)>.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas J. Dolan, Suzanne E. Bayley, John Zoltek, Jr. and Albert J. Hermann. *Journal of Applied Ecology*. Vol. 18, No. 1 (Apr., 1981).

<sup>7</sup> Ducks Unlimited Canada. *The Impacts of Wetland Loss in Manitoba*. Web. <[http://www.gov.mb.ca/waterstewardship/iwmp/willow\\_creek/documentation/ducks.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/waterstewardship/iwmp/willow_creek/documentation/ducks.pdf)>.

<sup>8</sup> Outdoor Industry Association. *The Outdoor Recreation Economy*. 2012.

current authorization level. We believe this is a realistic expectation of the potential delivery of projects that could be realized under the program. Congress will of course decide at what level to appropriate program funding, but \$75 million is a target well within the program needs and delivery capabilities.

What began in 1989 as a way to deal the loss of more than half of the wetlands in the continuous United States, and to implement the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the landscape-level agreement between the United States, Canada and Mexico on how to manage continental waterfowl populations, has grown into a highly successful program with widespread support and success. NAWCA has stimulated hundreds of conservation partnerships that would not exist otherwise. The result is millions of acres of habitat conserved that provide a myriad of benefits for wetlands, wildlife and the public.

With these many benefits in mind, we cannot afford to keep losing wetlands. Ducks Unlimited strongly supports H.R. 2208 and urges the Committee to take expeditious action to report it to the House floor.

**H.R. 2799, the Sportsmen's Heritage and Recreational Enhancement (SHARE) Act:**

Ducks Unlimited supports H.R. 2799 in concept but would like to work with the bill sponsors and Committee staff on some perfecting language. We concur with incorporating the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council (WHHCC) into statute to ensure its utility and vitality. We do believe that representation on the Council should be from as broad and diverse a suite of wildlife conservation, hunting and shooting sports organizations as possible, and important private land constituencies, and we therefore believe that the full suite of categories from which discretionary members are chosen in the existing WHHCC charter is more fully representative of that universe. We would like to better understand the rationale for eliminating some categories from which members could come.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspectives on H.R. 2208 and H.R. 2799.