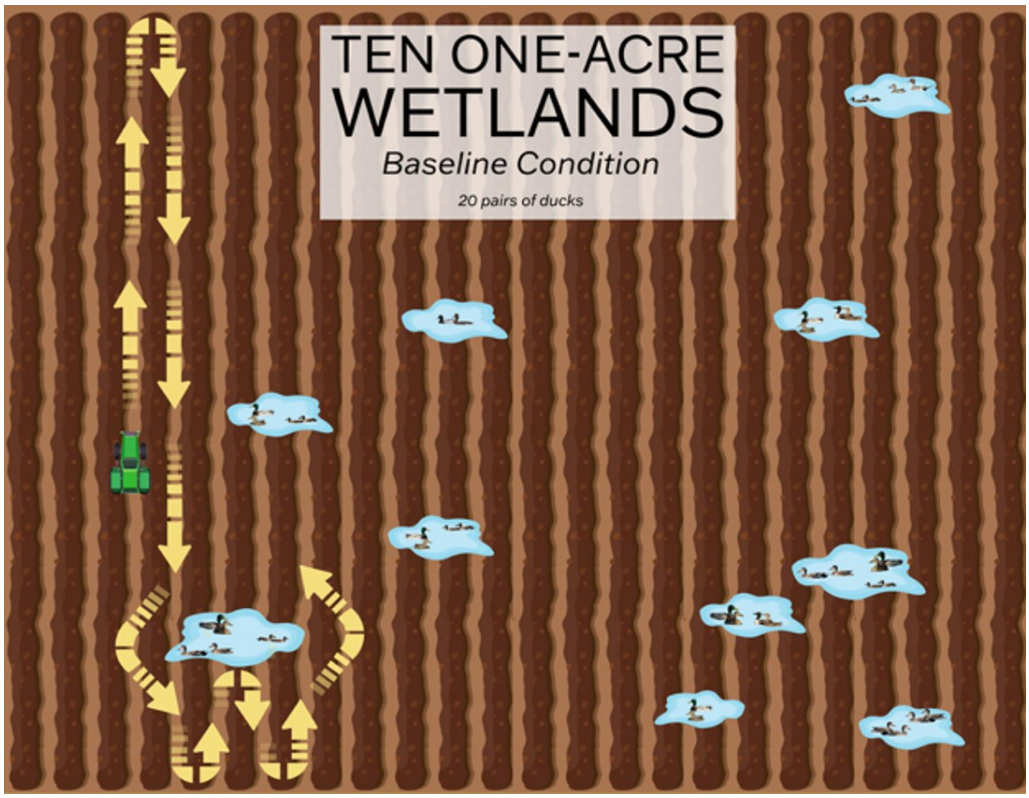
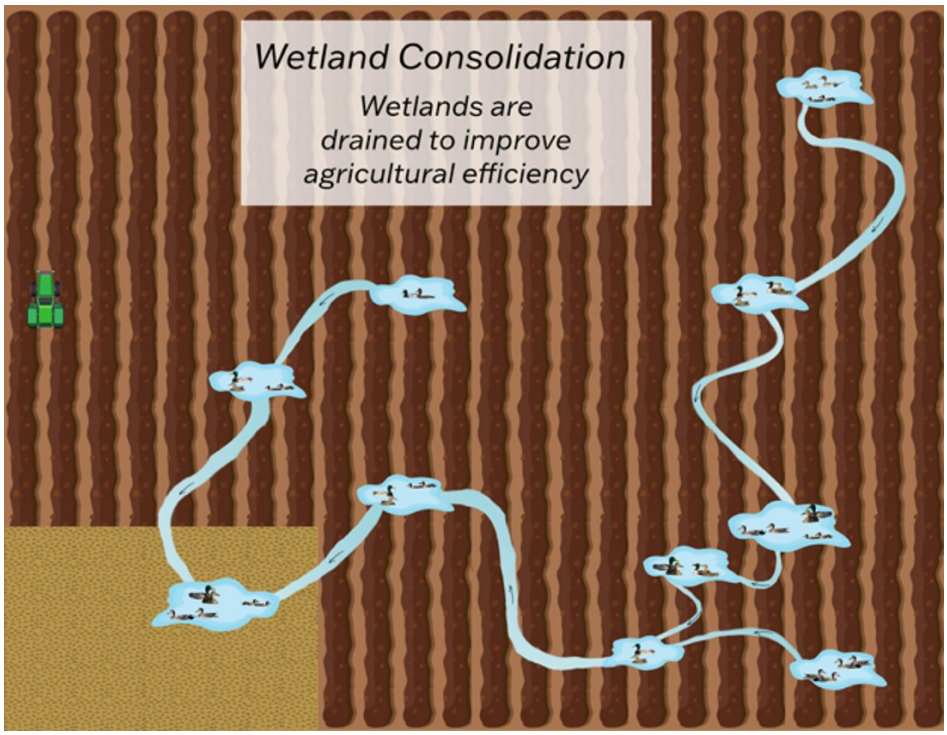
Learn More About SWIP

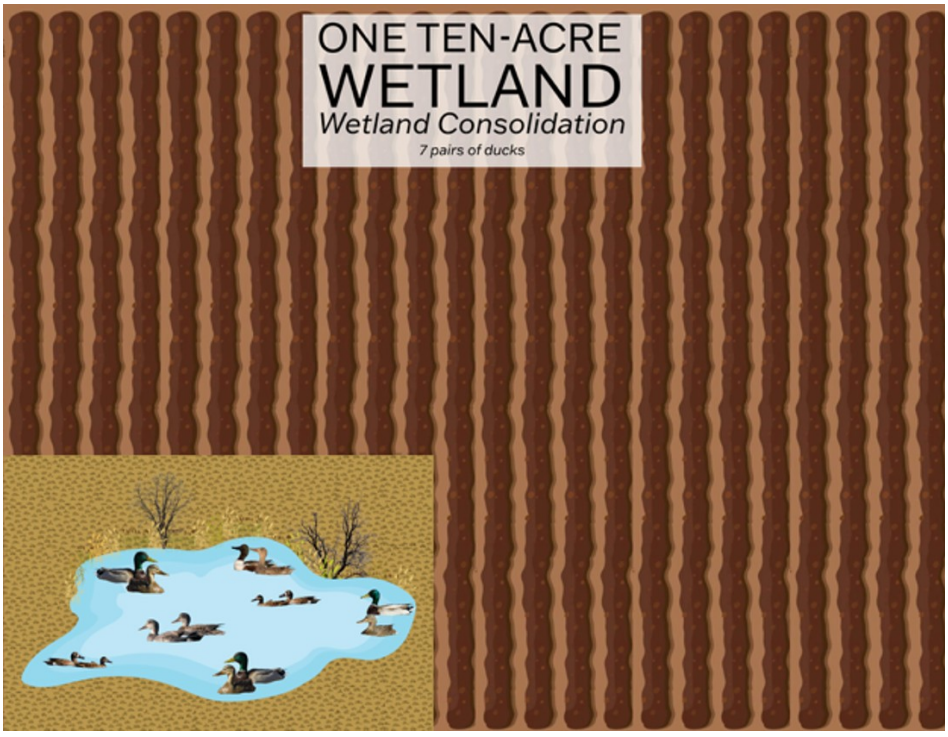
The most important wetlands to duck production, temporary and seasonal wetlands, are also the most at risk. Overall, annual wetland loss rates in the Canadian Prairies is 0.37%. For wetlands in cropland, the loss rate jumps to 0.88%, which equates to an additional 37% loss over the next 50 years, not a legacy we'd like to leave.

Conserving shallow wetlands in annually cropped fields has proven challenging. Farming around wetlands costs time, fuel and can increase input costs due to overlap. Water levels in these wetlands can vary drastically between and within years. During wet periods, these wetlands can delay or prohibit seeding in spring and cause crop losses when heavy rains occur during the growing season. This causes some producers to drain and consolidate shallow wetlands into one large, more permanent wetland or eliminate wetlands altogether.

At the same time, these shallow wetlands drive carrying capacity of breeding ducks. To illustrate how this works we can consider 10 acres of wetlands. While ten one-acre wetlands and one 10-acre wetland may seem the same on paper, there is a profound difference for breeding duck densities. Analysis conducted by the USFWS Habitat and Population Evaluation Team has shown ten 1-acre wetlands support 20 pairs of breeding ducks. Once consolidated into one 10-acre wetland, the number of pairs drops to seven.





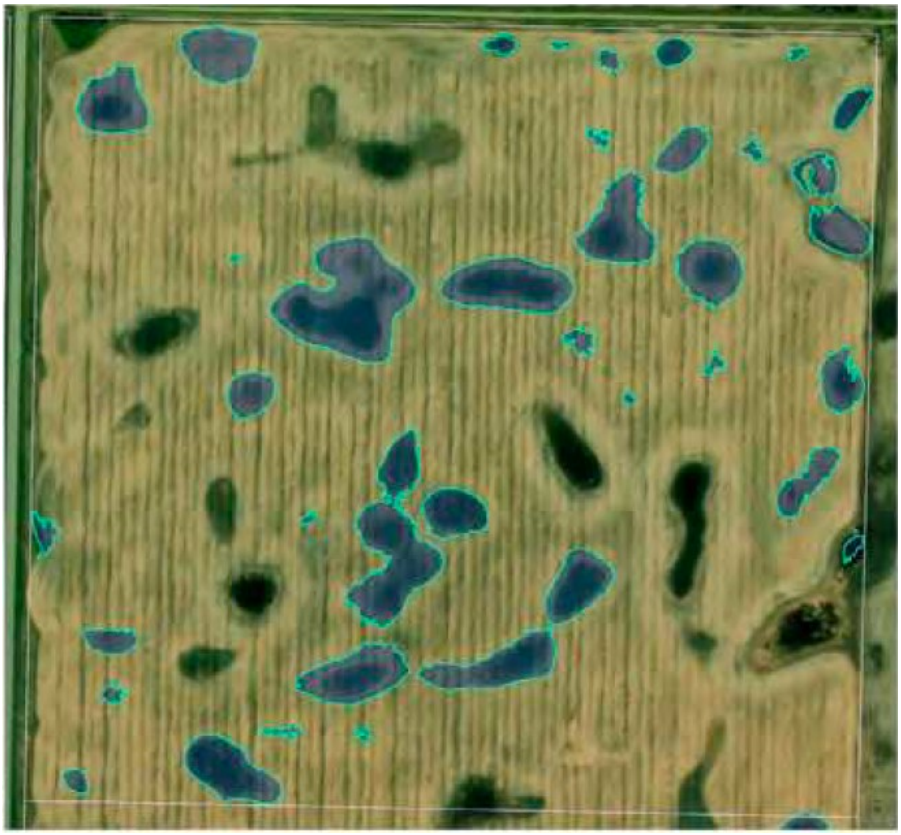


There are a number of tools currently being used to help conserve wetlands in Prairie Canada. These solutions have proven to be effective, with some limitations. Regulatory prohibition exists to some extent for certain wetlands in each province, but compliance and enforcement remain a challenge. Fee title acquisition is another approach, though financial and social limitations persist within farm communities. Additionally, permanent wetland easements have been used over the past 25 years, but uptake may be limited, especially for shallow

wetlands in cropland. Despite the use of these tools, we are still seeing significant wetland losses and the need for additional tools and financial investments is clear.

Since 2021, Manitoba has been utilizing one such additional tool to conserve vulnerable shallow wetlands which has shown scalability and a broad acceptance among producers. The Shallow Wetland Incentive Program (SWIP) allows farmers to plant, spray, harvest, and otherwise engage in traditional agricultural practices, with the only limitation that they cannot drain wetlands on their cropland. Farmers sign ten-year agreements with watershed districts and receive annual incentive payments. These payments are based on a percentage of local land rental rates and have been typically $70-$100 per acre.

The photo below is a quarter section of land (160 acres) in Manitoba. The light blue highlighted areas represent identified shallow wetlands enrolled in SWIP. There are 39 shallow wetlands totaling 19.58 acres and the resulting annual payment is $1,560.



Wetland densities on the breeding grounds drive carrying capacity for duck pairs (breeding densities). One hundred acres of shallow wetlands, will attract 158 pairs of breeding ducks. While the main benefit of retaining shallow wetlands is to attract duck pairs, they also are the first to thaw in the spring, providing an abundance of invertebrates for early nesting hens, an important protein source for egg development, as well as critically important brood habitat (food and cover) when seasonal wetlands remain wet into June.

Aside from the benefit to breeding ducks, these wetlands also provide a number of other biodiversity and societal benefits. They increase water quality by consuming phosphorus and nitrogen, capture carbon, store water that mitigates flood risks, recharge groundwater, and more. SWIP provides a much-needed positive

market signal to producers to help offset the financial implications of having wetlands on annually cropped farmland.

As with any program of this scale, one of the main questions is that of a funding mechanism. Some of these methods include an annual provincial line item and appropriation, federal funding and public/private partnerships. Manitoba has approached this in a novel way-in the creation of a trust fund to sustain programming in perpetuity. An initial investment of $204 million was made, with $50 million specifically dedicated to SWIP, and 4-5% annually are drawn and used for landowner payments. The endowment model allows the fund to grow to keep up with inflation and be available in perpetuity.

Since the launch of GROW in Manitoba in 2021 we've witnessed true conservation success. To date, $14 million has been allocated to watersheds for SWIP. This will see some 500 farmers enrolling in the program to conserve 17,400 wetland acres. Based on their small size this will be 94,000 individual wetland basins.

We are fortunate to have SWIP funded in this endowment model in Manitoba and are working to see this expanded in Manitoba and introduced to Alberta and Saskatchewan. Recognizing these shallow wetlands in cropland as the most vulnerable, we are working with partners to develop a SWIP program that conserves small temporary and seasonal wetlands throughout the prairie provinces.

SWIP provides a positive market signal that rewards conservation and stewardship and helps retain these wetlands. SWIP complements the other approaches to conserving wetlands, providing another tool that will help us achieve our goal of retaining these vital resources for future generations. The future of ducks and duck hunting relies on proactive solutions to conserve the breeding grounds, one that we believe SWIP can help provide.