



HABITAT CONSERVATION 2025 STATUS UPDATE



Small Wetlands Drive Duck Populations

Delta is working to conserve critical breeding habitat

They might not look like much more than a springtime puddle in a farm field, but those small, shallow prairie wetlands — many of which dry up by June — are incredibly important for breeding ducks.

Ephemeral, temporary, and seasonal wetlands serve as territorial pair ponds and provide important food sources for breeding ducks. The water warms quickly and teems with protein-rich invertebrates that fuel hens to form and lay eggs. During wet years, these valuable wetlands can provide habitat for ducklings, too.

The prairie pothole region, which encompasses the Dakotas, western Minnesota, and parts of Iowa and Montana in the United States, and stretches in southern Manitoba,

Saskatchewan, and Alberta in Canada, is dotted with small, shallow wetlands. Most of them occur on private lands, imbedded in crop fields, pastures, and hay lands on working farms and ranches. These potholes are often



**10 ONE-ACRE WETLANDS
CAN SUPPORT 3 TIMES THE
NUMBER OF DUCKS AS ONE
10-ACRE WETLAND**

perceived to impede farming operations by lowering crop yields and making it more difficult for planting and harvesting machinery. As a result, they're the most at risk for drainage.

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WETLAND CLASSIFICATIONS

Type 1: Ephemeral

Small, shallow wetland that occurs during snow melt or rain event in early spring. These wetlands typically disappear after a short time, but ducks use them.

Type 2: Temporary

Periodically covered with standing or slow-moving water for a few weeks in spring. Water is retained long enough to establish wetland aquatic life, a.k.a. food for ducks.

Type 3: Seasonal

Stay on landscape well into spring and generally have water deeper than 6 inches. Ducks use them as territorial breeding ponds and they can be rich in invertebrates.

Type 4: Semi-permanent

Ponds that have sufficient depth to remain wet throughout brood-rearing season but might go dry in August or September. Over-water nesting ducks use them extensively.

Small wetlands drive duck production in the PPR, which is often referred to as North America's "Duck Factory" because up to 70% of the continent's ducks hatch there each year, making it the most important region for breeding waterfowl.

Delta Waterfowl's policy work prioritizes conserving small prairie wetlands in the United States and Canada. We have a long history of working with farmers and governments to create voluntary, incentive-based programs to ensure the wetlands that are so critical for breeding ducks remain on the landscape. North America's duck populations — and strong fall flights — depend on maintaining millions of small, shallow wetlands across the PPR.

Delta's U.S. Wetlands Work

From 1997 to 2009, an alarming 125,400 acres of wetlands disappeared across the PPR in the United States. Most of those wetlands were small, shallow wetlands in crop fields, lost to drainage to grow grain. And since

2009, wetland loss rates appear to be accelerating.

Delta Waterfowl continues to work harder than ever to slow the tide of wetland losses and ensure ducks have breeding habitat.

Delta scored a monumental win for ducks and duck hunters with the inclusion of the organization's innovative Working Wetlands program into the 2018 U.S. Farm Bill. Working Wetlands, following a successful five-year pilot project in North Dakota, has been implemented by the Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS) initially as the Prairie Pothole Water Quality and Wildlife Program and more recently as the Migratory Bird Resurgence Initiative (MBRI). For 2024, MBRI funding totaled \$3.4 million in the PPR states.

Delta's Policy Team continues to work with government leaders to realize the full potential of the program to conserve small wetlands in the Dakotas, Minnesota, Iowa, and Montana—the U.S. portion of the PPR. Delta is advocating for \$50 million annually

through a Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative to protect small wetlands, a measure which would conserve 336,276 acres of breeding waterfowl habitat in the PPR. At such scale, 56.7% percent of small wetlands would be conserved, supporting 507,524 breeding pairs of ducks.

In addition, Delta is pushing for \$25 million annually for wintering habitat — post-harvest flooding of rice acres — in Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, and California. The allocation would create 500,000 acres of wintering grounds habitat for waterfowl by keeping water on the landscape for 90 consecutive days between Sept. 1 and March 1. Importantly, the program would provide a habitat base to support the historic distribution of ducks and duck hunters in the south and in California's Central Valley.

Conserving Canadian Prairie Wetlands

On the Canadian prairie, wetland loss rate is estimated at 0.88% annually for wetlands in cropland. Just like



Type 5: Permanent

Deeper ponds, marshes, and lakes that retain water year-round. They are often ringed with cattails, phragmites, or other wetland vegetation.

in the United States, most of these losses are habitat is small, shallow wetlands - the very wetlands most important to breeding ducks. If wetland losses continue unchecked, another one-quarter of Canada’s wetlands in cropland will disappear during the next 30 years.

To address wetland habitat losses across prairie Canada, Delta Waterfowl began leading efforts to work with farmers to conserve small, shallow wetlands that are so important to breeding ducks. Delta developed a suite of voluntary, incentive-based programs to keep those vulnerable wetlands from being drained.

In 2018, the province of Manitoba adopted Delta’s model of wetland conservation as part of the Growing Outcomes for Watersheds by the launch of the Shallow Wetland Incentive Program (SWIP). GROW was established as a \$204 million trust that provides \$2.5 million annually for wetland conservation.

Since 2020, local watershed districts have annually administered 10-year

DELTA PILLAR: HABITAT CONSERVATION

Small wetlands on North America’s prairie breeding grounds provide nutrient-rich food and territories for breeding pairs, as well as food and cover for waterfowl broods.

Small wetlands in the prairie pothole region are most at risk of drainage because most of them exist on private lands. Historical wetland losses in parts of the PPR have topped 90%, in some areas, and small wetlands continue to disappear at alarming levels.

Delta works to create voluntary, incentive-based Habitat Conservation programs to slow wetland losses and keep high-quality habitat intact for breeding ducks. Delta’s programs collaborate with and reward farmers who retain small wetlands on their working lands.

Delta pioneered the Working Wetlands Program (the origins of the Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative) and the Shallow Wetland Incentive Program

- a component of Growing Outcomes in Watersheds in Manitoba, both large-scale programs conserving critical breeding duck habitat. In July, Delta’s advocacy led to the specific inclusion of small wetlands into the Alberta’s Private Land Conservation Program as a “high priority,” another great step toward conserving key breeding duck habitat in Canada.

We’re also actively advocating for the U.S. Farm Bill — whether in a new bill or another extension of the 2018 version — to contain critical components such as the Conservation Reserve Program and Swampbuster that are so important to maintain breeding duck habitat. Ultimately, Delta’s Habitat Conservation efforts help maintain carrying capacity for ducks on the prairie. More breeding habitat leads to more duck production and stronger fall flights.






contracts to conserve type 1 (ephemeral) and type 2 (temporary) wetlands. Through the Shallow Wetlands Incentive Program, about 4,000 additional acres of critical breeding duck habitat are being enrolled each year in Manitoba. Right now, 14,862 acres of wetlands are under SWIP contracts in Manitoba. The overall goal of SWIP is to conserve 90% of the province's small, shallow wetlands.

In July, Alberta announced the province's Private Land Conservation Program. In making the announcement, provincial leaders specifically called out the goal of conserving small wetlands in cropland as a "high priority." Delta has partnered with Red Deer County and the Battle Creek Watershed Alliance on a \$1.4 million proposal to roll out SWIP in Alberta.

Delta's Policy Team has also presented SWIP to Saskatchewan's leaders.

Delta's diligent efforts to conserve breeding waterfowl habitat on the Canadian prairies is critical to ensure large fall flights of ducks both now and in the future.



**70% OF NORTH AMERICA'S
DUCKS HATCH IN THE PRAIRIE
POTHOLE REGION**

Maximizing Delta's Habitat Impact

Delta Waterfowl is committed to Habitat Conservation as a foundational pillar of The Duck Hunters Organization™. We will always continue to create programs and champion policies that conserve

critical habitat for breeding ducks.

Delta's Habitat Conservation work complements our proven Duck Production programs to maximize the number of ducks that hatch and survive to migrate. Abundant waterfowl breeding habitat is essential, and Delta Waterfowl continues to lead the way with programs and policy advocacy to ensure a strong future for ducks and duck hunting.

All of Delta's Habitat Conservation programs are accomplished in partnership with you —our valued members, volunteers, and donors. Your support is essential to Delta's mission to produce ducks and ensure a strong future of waterfowl hunting throughout North America.

Thank you for supporting Delta Waterfowl. Have a great holiday and hunting season!