



Delta Makes Conserving Small Wetlands a Top Priority

Maintaining high-quality breeding duck habitat ensures large fall flights

Delta Waterfowl's Policy Team is an experienced, dedicated group of conservation professionals, all of whom are deeply concerned about maintaining and enhancing the fall flight both this season and for generations to come. The team rarely finds the spotlight, but their work — most of it accomplished behind the scenes — is absolutely critical for ducks and duck hunters throughout North America.

Led by Chief Policy Officer John Devney, the team advocates tirelessly for all manner of waterfowl conservation and hunting initiatives on behalf of the continent's waterfowl hunters. Simply put, we have more ducks and more opportunities to hunt them because Delta's Policy Team effectively advances important waterfowl

initiatives and programs in the United States and Canada. Jim Fisher serves as vice president of Canadian policy, while Cyrus Baird is senior director of government affairs in the United States and Brian McRae is director of



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

government affairs in Canada.

Whether it's in the halls of Congress in Washington D.C., in Canadian provincial legislatures, at a statehouse or local board room, Delta's efforts have a huge impact — particularly in con-

“Small wetlands are the engine that drives duck production in North America. They're continually at risk of being lost, so Delta Waterfowl is always working on solutions to conserve this critical breeding habitat and keep duck production high.”

John Devney
DELTA WATERFOWL CHIEF
POLICY OFFICER





serving the most productive and at-risk habitat for breeding ducks. Recently, Delta has championed monumental wins for habitat conservation programs in both the United States and Canada.

Implementing GROW in Canada

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

Small, shallow wetlands, which are often wet in spring and dry by early summer, serve as territorial pair ponds and important food sources

for breeding ducks. These wetlands warm quickly and provide critical protein-rich invertebrates that fuel hens to form and lay eggs. During wet years, these wetlands often provide habitat to ducklings, too.

Small wetlands are the engine that drives duck production in the Prairie Pothole Region. Mallards, pintails, gadwalls, wigeon, teal and many other duck species rely on these wetlands every April, May and June. Most of them occur on private lands, imbedded in crop fields, pastures and hay lands on working farms and ranches. These potholes are 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.

In 2018, the province of Manitoba

adopted Delta's model of wetland conservation as part of the Growing Outcomes for Watersheds, a.k.a. the GROW Program. GROW was established as a \$200 million trust that provides working funds of \$2.5 million annually for wetland conservation. Local watershed districts administer 10-year contracts to conserve type 1 and 2 wetlands. Fisher has invested a lot of time explaining the importance of protecting these wetlands and helping districts implement GROW on the landscape. As a result, about 4,000 additional acres of critical breeding duck habitat are being enrolled each year. The overall goal of GROW is to conserve 90% of the province's small, shallow wetlands.

Further, the success of GROW in Manitoba serves as a model for Sas-



katchewan and Alberta — provinces with millions of small wetlands — to expand on Delta’s quest to ensure the remaining breeding duck habitat in prairie Canada continues to produce ducks.

Scaling Up Working Wetlands

Delta Waterfowl scored a monumental win for ducks and duck hunters with the inclusion of the organization’s innovative Working Wetlands into the 2018 U.S. Farm Bill.

Working Wetlands, following a successful five-year pilot project in North Dakota, was adopted in the Farm Bill as the U.S. Department of Agriculture Prairie Pothole Water Quality and Wildlife Program. Ever since, Delta’s Policy Team has been working with government leaders to realize the full potential of the

DELTA PILLAR: HABITAT CONSERVATION

Small wetlands on the breeding grounds are the fuel that propels the “Duck Factory.” These small wetlands provide nutrient-rich food and territories for breeding pairs, as well as food and cover for waterfowl broods.

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

Delta works to create voluntary, incentive-based habitat conservation approaches to stem the tide of wetland losses. Delta programs are designed to collaborate to reward farmers who retain small wetlands on their working lands.

Delta pioneered the Working Wetlands Program (now USDA’s Prairie Pothole Water Quality and Wildlife Program) and Growing Outcomes in Watersheds (GROW) in Manitoba, both of which large-scale programs conserving critical breeding duck habitat.

We’re also actively working on the 2023 U.S. Farm Bill, which contains critical components such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Swampbuster that are so important to maintain breeding duck habitat.

Ultimately, Delta’s habitat conservation work maintains carrying capacity for ducks on the prairie. More breeding habitat leads to more duck production and a stronger fall flight.





program to conserve small, seasonal wetlands in the Dakotas, Minnesota, Iowa and Montana — the U.S. portion of the PPR.

Delta is advocating for \$50 million annually to protect small wetlands, which would conserve 336,277 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 490,000 acres of wintering grounds habitat for waterfowl.

Delta's policy efforts to conserve, enhance and create waterfowl habitat truly help ducks and duck hunters up and down every flyway.

Delta's Impact for Waterfowl Habitat

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.

Recently, Delta's habitat conservation work has been boosted by key support from Gary Bechtel/Foothills Foundation, the Guilford Foundation and the Hearst


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

Foundation. Several state conservation funds also contribute annually to Delta's habitat initiatives and partnerships.

Delta's habitat conservation efforts provide the perfect complementary strategy for the Million Duck Campaign, a transformative \$250 million fundraising initiative to add 1 million

ducks to the annual fall flight, year after year. Maintaining a strong habitat base ensures that Delta's duck production programs have the greatest impact to maximize the number of ducks that hatch and survive to migrate. And all of us certainly want to see more ducks on our favorite wetlands.

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. Thank you for your support, and have a great holiday and waterfowl hunting season!

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