



# NEWS

*from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

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## **Migratory Bird Conservation Commission Approves \$13.4 Million for Wetlands Projects in 19 States**

The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, a cabinet-level congressional commission chaired by Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, approved more than \$13 million to be used for expanding the National Wildlife Refuge System, and for 19 wetlands acquisition, restoration and enhancement projects in 15 states.

The refuge system, the world's most unique system of lands devoted to wildlife, will gain more than 6,300 acres to benefit a variety of fish, wildlife and plants, as well as provide recreational and educational opportunities for people, thanks to the \$3.4 million approved by the commission at its September 1997 meeting.

The wetlands acquisition, restoration and enhancement projects approved by the commission will be funded through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, which provides matching grants to private and public organizations and to individuals to carry out wetland conservation projects.

The commission approved more than \$10 million in funding under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act matched by nearly \$24 million from partners. Fifteen wetlands-related projects in Mexico will also be funded with \$1.3 million, matched by a total of \$1.6 million from partners.

"Now that it is spring our thoughts naturally turn to the millions of birds migrating from their wintering grounds in South America," said Jamie Rappaport Clark, director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which administers the 92 million-acre refuge system. "The wetlands acquisitions will provide more habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife to thrive, as well as improving the vitality and health of our National Wildlife Refuge System."

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"The projects funded under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act have been matched two-to-one by funds from private partners such as conservation groups, agricultural interests and small businesses," Clark said. "These diverse partnerships, which are completely voluntary, mean that taxpayer dollars are going further to preserve some of our most important natural resources."

### New National Wildlife Refuge System Acquisitions

**Cache River NWR in Arkansas** will acquire 740 acres of wetlands, facilitating the restoration of a large contiguous corridor of bottomland hardwood forest. The new acquisition at Cache River, which hosts large populations of wintering waterfowl such as mallards and wood ducks, will also offer recreational access in the form of a public boat launching facility.

Greater sandhill cranes and bald eagles, both listed on the federal endangered and threatened species list, use **Klamath Forest NWR in Oregon** as a nesting area and a migration route. Klamath Forest will purchase nearly 3,000 acres in the northern portion of historic Klamath Marsh. A variety of waterfowl species, including mallards, pintails, gadwalls and Canada geese, will also benefit from the acquisition of this prime migration and nesting habitat located within the Pacific Flyway and designated as a "waterfowl area of major concern" by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

**Cokeville Meadows NWR in western Wyoming** will gain 2,100 acres of wetland and riparian habitat for its migratory waterfowl population, and for the multitude of resident big and small game, furbearers and upland gamebirds. The acquisition will also allow the refuge to offer public activities such as hunting, fishing and wildlife watching.

Sixty-eight acres of low wooded wetlands and salt marsh habitat will be preserved at **Cape May NWR in New Jersey**, ensuring that the millions of birds that use Cape May during migration will have a place to stop over. The coastal wetlands of the refuge, located on the Cape May peninsula in southern New Jersey, provide habitat for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors, woodcock and a variety of neotropical migrants.

**Great Meadows NWR, near Boston**, will gain 9 acres of wetland habitat for black ducks, wood ducks, mallards and Canada geese, all of which nest on the refuge. The habitat at Great Meadows, which is nearly 80 percent freshwater wetlands, is also used during migration by peregrine falcons and bald eagles.

The purchase of 362 acres will allow enhancement of habitat at **Malheur NWR in Oregon**, and encourage increased nesting by sandhill cranes, considered a "sensitive" species in the state. In addition to cranes, the site will also be managed to provide increased nesting habitat for trumpeter swans, Canada geese, redheads, canvasbacks and dabbling ducks. The newly acquired property will also allow public access to

the refuge's 23,000-acre Malheur Lake waterfowl hunting grounds, and will add to the hunting area.

**Montezuma NWR in New York state**, which hosts large numbers of migrating waterfowl in both the spring and fall, gains 114 acres. The refuge, established in 1938 with an initial purchase by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, provides nesting, feeding and resting habitat each fall for some 50,000 Canada geese, more than 100,000 mallards, and 10,000 black ducks. In the spring, 100,000 Canada geese have been known to use the refuge.

**Wallkill River NWR in northern New Jersey** will purchase 34 ½ acres of upland and wetland habitat which will be used by migrating waterfowl such as black ducks and will also be open for recreational hunting. Wallkill River refuge straddles two major migration corridors for waterfowl moving between eastern Canada and the Atlantic coast -- the Delaware River and Hudson River corridors, both of which are used by a variety of shorebirds, raptors and neotropical migrants.

#### **North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) Projects**

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act provides matching grants to private and public organizations and individuals to carry out wetlands conservation projects in the U.S., Canada and Mexico. The Act was passed in 1989 and reauthorized in 1994; Congress appropriated \$11.7 million for Act projects in fiscal year 1998.

To date, Act-funded projects have been supported by more than 900 partners from federal, state and local agencies; private organizations, including environmental groups, small businesses, and farmers and ranchers; and private citizens. The partnerships these groups form develop projects focusing on wetlands acquisition, restoration and enhancement activities.

"I am pleased to see that year after year diverse groups have come together voluntarily to form partnerships aimed at preserving our valuable wetland resources," Clark said. "By providing matching funds for these important projects, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant program encourages a win-win situation, for wetlands and wildlife, and for people."

#### **Connecticut and Massachusetts:**

**Lower Connecticut River Wetland Restoration.** The commission approved a total of \$1.2 million for two wetlands conservation projects in Connecticut and Massachusetts. In Middlesex County, partners will contribute \$442,289 to restore 300 acres of state-owned wetlands at the mouth of the Connecticut River within an area designated as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance, and it is also one of The Nature Conservancy's 40 Last Great Places. Waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds and terns will enjoy long-term benefits as a result of the project.

**Calcareous Wetlands of Southwestern New England.** In Litchfield County, Connecticut and Berkshire County, Massachusetts, partners matched a \$1 million grant with more than \$3 million of their own for the project to acquire 2,300 acres of calcareous wetlands. These wetlands provide critical habitat for waterfowl and other wetland-dependent birds, as well as several dozen rare species of plants and animals.

**Idaho:**

**Teton River Basin Wetlands.** More than \$650,000 in funding approved by the commission will be used to purchase 1,000 acres in the Teton County. Partners, who contributed \$1.5 million to the project, will purchase several tracts of wetlands and associated uplands providing migratory, nesting, feeding and resting habitat for waterfowl, raptors, shorebirds and wading birds, as well as several rare, threatened or endangered plant and animals species. The Teton Valley Land Trust will manage the project area.

**Illinois:**

**Meredosia Wetland Complex.** Brown, Cass and Morgan counties will gain 1,160 acres of wetland habitat thanks to nearly \$525,000 from the conservation commission and \$1.8 million in funds from partners. This acquisition adds to an ongoing project to restore areas along the Illinois River in the Meredosia complex, which includes Meredosia, Chautauqua and Emiquon national wildlife refuges. Until the beginning of this century, the Illinois River was the second most productive river system in the nation, surpassed only by the Columbia River.

**Indiana:**

**Southern Lake Michigan Coastal Wetlands II.** In Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties, along southern Lake Michigan, a \$1 million grant will help purchase more than 1,200 acres of critical habitat for migrating waterfowl, raptors, shorebirds and neotropical birds. Despite urban and industrial development, this coastal area has continued to provide habitat for at least 337 avian species, and a high concentration of endangered, threatened and rare species. Partners will contribute \$4.2 million to the project.

**Maryland:**

**Conquest Farm Acquisition, Restoration and Enhancement.** In the first phase of this two-phase project in Queen Anne's County, 561 acres of wetland and upland habitat in the Chesapeake Bay watershed will be restored and enhanced. Using \$1 million in grant funds and \$2 million in partner contributions, biologists will recreate and improve habitat for the benefit of wintering and migratory waterfowl and other wildlife.

**Minnesota:**

**Prairie Wetland Heritage Conservation Initiative.** The two most endangered natural communities in Minnesota--prairies and prairie wetlands--will be preserved in 36 counties using \$785,000 in NAWCA monies and nearly \$2 million from various partners. Through the Prairie Wetland Heritage Conservation Initiative, biologists will preserve, enhance and restore more than 3,000 acres of prairie pothole habitat to benefit waterfowl, non-game animals and several federally-listed endangered and threatened species.

**Red Lake Farm II.** The Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians will manage more than 1,200 acres of wetlands and other habitat, including a portion of the Kiwosay Wildlife Area in Clearwater County. The area supports both residential and migratory wildlife populations, and the \$177,000 grant, plus \$388,000 from partners, will help restore nesting habitat as well as wild rice and small grain food plots, which are a food source for the migrating and breeding waterfowl.

**Nebraska:**

**Drover Island Wetland.** About 600 acres of wetlands, wet meadow, shrub savanna and other habitat along the Platte River in Buffalo County will be restored and maintained with a \$225,000 grant through the NAWCA and \$800,000 in partner contributions. The project area is adjacent to the Big Bend Reach of the Platte, which sustains more than 230 species of migratory and nesting birds and supports the annual spring staging of half a million sandhill cranes, the largest concentration of cranes in the world.

**New Hampshire and Vermont:**

**Upper Valley Connecticut River Wetland Conservation.** Fulfilling the goals of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge and the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture is the aim of this project. Using \$300,000 in NAWCA funds and nearly \$700,000 in partner contributions, state and local agencies will acquire and conserve 650 acres of rich wetlands along the main stem of the Connecticut River in north-central New England to benefit American black duck and other migratory waterfowl, arctic nesting shorebirds, and federal and state threatened and endangered species.

**Great Bay Estuary II.** In southeastern New Hampshire, a \$700,000 grant and \$800,000 in partnership monies will help acquire and restore high quality saltwater and freshwater wetlands in the Great Bay estuary. Migratory and breeding waterfowl, shorebirds and waterbirds depend on this habitat, as well as rare and endangered terrestrial and aquatic plants, migratory and resident fish, and shellfish.

**North Dakota:**

**Conservation Reserve Program Wetland Restoration.** A \$300,000 grant from the commission and \$700,000 from partners will allow the purchase of more than 3,000 acres in 36 counties in North Dakota. These restored wetlands will provide an ideal mix of wetland and upland habitat for nesting waterfowl and endangered and threatened species, such as black terns, piping plovers and Franklin's gulls, that use prairie potholes as breeding habitat.

**Mouse River Watershed II.** Nearly 7,000 acres of wetlands in five North Dakota counties will be acquired and restored for waterfowl, neotropical migratory birds and resident wildlife. This wetland and upland enhancement project, in the Mouse River watershed, will establish habitat management demonstration areas on J. Clark Salyer NWR and on several waterfowl production areas managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It will be carried out using \$200,000 in grant money and more than \$500,000 from partners.

**Oklahoma:**

**Hackberry Flat III.** More than 4,000 acres of wetlands and associated uplands in Tillman County will be acquired as migration, wintering and breeding habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds. A grant of \$900,000 and partner contributions of \$2.4 million will fund the project, which also contributes to the habitat goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan's Playa Lakes Joint Venture. The project area is in the direct migration route of whooping cranes, and provides habitat for bald eagles, thousands of ducks and geese, and sandhill cranes as well.

**Oregon:**

**Tualatin River Valley Ecosystem.** More than 500 acres of wetland-floodplain and uplands on the Tualatin River NWR in Washington County will be restored or enhanced to benefit a host of migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, anadromous fish, and other species. A \$400,000 NAWCA grant and \$900,000 in partner contributions will allow the Fish and Wildlife Service to construct dikes with emergency spillways, install water control structures, fabricate fish ladders and screens, and implement a number of other conservation measures.

**South Dakota:**

**James River Lowlands Acquisition.** This project encompasses lands in eight counties. More than \$100,000 in grant funds and \$300,000 from partners will go toward the purchase of some 1,500 acres of wetland and associated uplands in the heart of South Dakota's Prairie Pothole Region. These lands serve as essential habitat for breeding and migrating waterfowl, as well as providing water quality benefits and recreational and educational opportunities, such as hunting and birdwatching.

**Crow Creek Watershed.** This migratory bird project in Buffalo County will provide 200 acres of critical waterfowl brood and migratory bird habitat in the prairie pothole area. The project will be supported by more than \$100,000 in grant funds and \$150,000 in partner contributions.

**Texas:**

**Katy Prairie Initiative.** This project, in Harris and Waller counties, represents the inception of a watershed-based initiative that will permanently conserve critically imperiled migratory waterfowl and shorebird habitat in the Katy Prairie. Funded by \$700,000 in grant money and more than \$1 million in partnership monies, the project will focus on 630 acres of marsh wetlands that are valuable wintering or stopover habitat for more than 200 bird species. The area is also used by birdwatchers and hunters.

**Austin's Woods/Brazoria NWR Complex.** Grant money of more than \$300,000, matched equally by a number of partners, will be used to acquire more than 1,200 acres of bottomland hardwood forest.

In addition to the U.S. projects, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission will also fund 15 projects in Mexico, many of which will preserve wintering areas used by millions of migratory waterfowl. Partners contributed a total of \$1.6 million for the projects, for which NAWCA awarded \$1.3 million in grants.

Among the NAWCA grants awarded in Mexico:

- \$15,000 to train interpretive guides and plan environmental education strategies on wetlands in Baja California Sur. These coastal wetlands serve as wintering habitat for the Pacific black brant and a variety of shorebird species, as well as calving areas for the gray whale. Partners will contribute another \$35,000 to the project.
- \$120,000 to the Institute of Ecology, augmented by \$138,000 in partner funds, to design sustainable use practices for wetlands in the La Mancha-El Llano area of Veracruz. This area supports an array of wetland ecosystems, an ecological reserve and diverse species of migratory birds, as well as commercially valuable fish, molluscs and crustaceans.
- Nearly \$15,000 for establishment of trails and an environmental education program on a coastal mangrove estuary near the state of Campeche. The Los Petenes State Reserve, part of the unique coastal wetlands of the Yucatan Peninsula, is a stopover for millions of migrating birds and supports thousands of wintering blue-winged teal, as well as a large resident population of Caribbean flamingoes. Partners will contribute \$20,000 for this undertaking.

- More than \$45,000 to develop community-managed nature tourism and environmental education programs along the southern coast of Quintana Roo. This project involves two coastal wetlands, one of which, Banco Chinchorro, supports the most extensive coral reef system in Mexico. The other area, Sian Ka'an, is a large mangrove estuary which provides habitat for a number of endangered species. This project will also be funded by \$58,000 in partner funds.
- \$265,000, to be combined with nearly \$300,000 in partner funds, to inventory and classify coastal wetlands in the states of Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatan and Quintana Roo. The inventory covers some of the highest priority wetlands in Mexico for migratory birds and other wildlife.



# **FACTS**

*from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

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## **The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission**

With passage of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act in 1929, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission was established to approve land acquisitions for the National Wildlife Refuge System that are considered important to waterfowl.

Since its inception, the commission has approved more than 4.5 million-acres-worth of land acquisitions for the 92-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, the only network of federal lands dedicated to wildlife.

The commission's responsibilities increased significantly upon passage of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act of 1989, which provides funding to encourage partnerships to protect, enhance, and restore wetlands and other habitats for migratory birds and wildlife in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Since the wetlands conservation program's inception, the commission has approved more than \$205 million toward projects benefitting migratory birds and other wildlife, with an additional \$420 million provided by project partners, affecting more than 3.3 million acres in the United States and Canada. These funds also have been used in Mexico for its community education, management, and training programs affecting nearly 21 million acres in biosphere reserves.

The commission meets three times each year to review proposals for refuge acquisitions and wetlands conservation projects. Refuge acquisitions are financed by the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, including revenue collected from Federal Duck Stamp sales to hunters, stamp collectors, and other conservationists; appropriations; import duties collected on arms and ammunition; and receipts from national wildlife refuge entrance fees.

Commission-approved projects are financed by the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund, made up of appropriations; fines, penalties, and forfeitures under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act; and interest accrued on another fund the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service administers.

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Members of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission are the Secretary of the Interior, who serves as chairman; two members of the U.S. Senate (John Breaux and Thad Cochran); two members of the U.S. House of Representatives (John Dingell and Curt Weldon); the Secretary of Agriculture; and the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

The commission was established largely in response to public concern over plummeting waterfowl populations during the "Dust Bowl" days of the 1920s and '30s, reflecting the National Wildlife Refuge System's early commitment to waterfowl protection. Many national wildlife refuges acquired with Migratory Bird Conservation Fund monies are located along the four major waterfowl "flyways," serving as vital stepping stones for birds on their long annual migrations.

While its importance to waterfowl remains, the refuge system today hosts a variety of habitats supporting all kinds of wildlife, including many of the nation's endangered species, big game animals like buffalo and elk, prairie wildflowers and cypress forests, trophy trout and tiny butterflies.

Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the 95-year-old National Wildlife Refuge System is now made up of 513 refuges and 38 wetland management districts in all 50 states and U.S. territories. More than 30 million people annually visit refuges for a variety of recreational activities, such as birdwatching, fishing, hunting, and nature photography, while hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren visit refuges each year to learn about nature and the environment.