

**STATEMENT OF PAUL SCHMIDT, CHIEF CONSERVATION OFFICER
DUCKS UNLIMITED, INC.**

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

**CONCERNING:
H.R. 1960, THE NORTH AMERICAN WETLANDS CONSERVATION
EXTENSION ACT OF 2011
AND**

**H.R. 1917, TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO
CONDUCT A JOINT VENTURE PROGRAM**

March 29, 2012

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Paul Schmidt. I am the Chief Conservation Officer for Ducks Unlimited. I worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for thirty-three years prior to joining Ducks Unlimited in May 2011. For the last six of those years, I was the agency's Assistant Director for Migratory Birds, overseeing all activities related to the management of migratory birds.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify on behalf of Ducks Unlimited regarding the reauthorization of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act and authorization of the Joint Ventures Program. Both programs have been important tools used to protect and conserve migratory bird populations over the last two decades, and Ducks Unlimited fully supports the passage of both of these bills. Indeed, they are models of how government can and should work.

Ducks Unlimited has been a strong and active proponent of waterfowl conservation for 75 years. Our mission is to conserve, restore, and manage wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl, and for the benefits these resources provide other wildlife and the people who enjoy and value them. We work in Canada, Mexico, and throughout the United States, and since 1937, DU has conserved more than 12.7 million acres of habitats important to waterfowl.

With more than a million supporters, Ducks Unlimited represents a significant conservation voice for birds and the landscapes that support them. Our work is science-based. We use reliable information from disciplines of wetland ecology, waterfowl biology, hydrology, civil engineering, and landscape ecology to develop, implement, and adapt waterfowl conservation actions. We work in partnership with agencies, organizations, and private landowners in the most important landscapes used throughout the lifecycle including breeding, migration, and wintering habitats. These kinds of partnerships are essential for efficient and effective conservation, and we support legislation and policy that advances these efforts.

H.R. 1960, To Reauthorize the North American Wetlands Conservation Act:

Ducks Unlimited (DU) is pleased to testify before the Natural Resources Committee on the fifth reauthorization of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA). Since enactment, NAWCA has played an invaluable role in wetlands conservation in North America by helping to stimulate local partnerships aimed exclusively at habitat conservation for wetland-dependent species and the many people who take enjoyment from them. NAWCA continues to be an extraordinarily popular program among all who are involved. We commend Congress for its foresight in creating NAWCA in 1989 and repeatedly taking action to ensure the long-term success of this important program.

Since enactment, NAWCA has accomplished measurable success in all 50 states, Canada, and Mexico. The creation of the program over 22 years ago was a bipartisan effort, and NAWCA has consistently attracted strong support in Congress. Presidents of both parties have signed legislation relating to NAWCA. This program has enhanced more than 7 million acres across the United States and many more in the breeding and wintering habitats in Canada and Mexico. Reauthorization of NAWCA is critical in order to build on this success and ensure the health of high quality wetlands in the United States.

Historically, the lower 48 states of the United States have lost approximately 53% of their original wetlands. The state of California has lost a staggering 91% of its original wetlands and Maryland wetland loss is 73%. While NAWCA has helped to replace some wetland losses, the most recent study of wetland trends showed that the net loss of wetlands across the United States increased by 140% between 2004 and 2009.

NAWCA facilitates efforts by resource managers and multi-sector partners to use a variety of strategies to restore and enhance degraded habitat along with protecting the quality habitat that remains. The habitat work that is completed on both public and private lands improves recreational opportunities and often provides additional economic benefits for landowners and their communities. Wildlife-related recreation generates over \$100 billion of economic output each year. In many cases, this economic activity is vital to the incomes of rural Americans.

The restoration and protection of wetlands and associated habitats made possible by NAWCA has many benefits for both people and wildlife. Scientific studies clearly demonstrate that wetlands not only recharge groundwater supplies but also act as filters to help purify water. Wetlands also trap and hold precipitation and runoff, and act as buffers in coastal regions, lessening the damage from floods and hurricanes.

In Louisiana, for example, 47 NAWCA projects have been completed or are underway, with more to be approved this year. Over a half million acres of wetland and upland habitat have been preserved using these dollars, of which \$88 million out of a total \$121 million are match. One of the most successful NAWCA projects in Louisiana—the Black Lake Terracing Project—was completed in 2010. Louisiana has the highest rate of coastal marsh loss in North America, and currently loses 25 to 35 square miles annually, which equates to losing an area the size of a football field every 30 minutes. Nearly 1,500 square miles of marsh have been lost over the past seven decades. 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 4,000 NAWCA partners. More than 2,200 on-the-ground, voluntary conservation projects have been delivered in North America with multiple benefits for wetlands, wildlife, and people. The multi-sector list includes all 50 state fish and wildlife agencies, hundreds of private landowners, a diversity of conservation organizations, small businesses, corporations, tribes, and local governments.

In addition to being one of the federal government's most effective conservation programs, NAWCA is a model of fiscal responsibility as it 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. On average, partner match has been \$3.20 for every \$1 in federal money. The partner investment in NAWCA totals more than \$3 billion during the life of the program. In FY 2011, a total of 109 projects were approved for the United States, Canada, and Mexico—94 in the United States, 6 in Canada, and 9 in Mexico.

Undeniably, the benefits of NAWCA extend well beyond waterfowl. Wetlands provide a home for more than 900 wildlife species at some time during the year and approximately 6% are waterfowl. As intended by Congress, the criteria for NAWCA projects include waterfowl as well as other wetland-associated migratory birds and threatened and endangered species. Under this guidance, NAWCA projects are benefitting a diverse array of species, including fish.

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

What began as a funding mechanism to accelerate implementation of NAWMP in 1989 has grown into a highly successful program with widespread success and support. NAWCA has stimulated hundreds of conservation partnerships that would not exist otherwise. The result is millions of acres of habitat conserved that provide myriad benefits for wetlands, wildlife, and the public. The Joint Venture Program, discussed below, has been a key part of the implementation of the Plan, and the joint ventures have been critical partners in the success of the NAWCA program.

NAWCA is the most effective wetland restoration program in the country, and we strongly support the legislation and urge the Committee to reauthorize NAWCA for an additional five years with annual appropriations of up to \$75 million.

**H.R. 1917, TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO
CONDUCT A JOINT VENTURE PROGRAM**

Regional joint ventures were established to support the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (Plan), which recognizes the importance of waterfowl and wetlands to North Americans and the need for international cooperation to manage waterfowl populations across the continent. The U.S. and Canadian governments developed a strategy to restore waterfowl populations through habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement. This plan was signed by both Canada and the United States in 1986, and Mexico joined as a co-signer in 1994.

To date, Plan joint ventures have put science and technology to work for our environment by coordinating and directing public and private funding to protect, restore, and/or enhance over 15.7 million acres of waterfowl habitat. Their projects not only advance waterfowl conservation, but make substantial contributions toward the conservation of all wetland-associated species. Additionally, the Plan's partner-based joint venture concept has been held up as the model to follow by conservationists endeavoring to address many other resource issues. Each joint venture operates as a self-directed regional partnership driving the Plan's conservation actions. They are as unique as the landscapes they conserve and the wildlife that benefits. In some joint ventures, federal government agencies play a prominent role. In others, they are one among many partners. Migratory birds rely on landscapes that are sometimes separated by thousands of miles but together provide the requisites for breeding, migration, and wintering. Diverse approaches to conservation planning and implementation are required because of the different ecological and social landscapes involved. The unique threats to each landscape, the diverse collaboration of partners necessary to meet these threats, the communities of people living there, and the biological requirements of the birds across seasons demand different approaches in different landscapes. Innovation, an entrepreneurial approach, and flexibility to invent effective strategies specific to each landscape have been hallmarks of the joint ventures' successes. The elements allowing self-direction and individuality must be retained in the future.

Ducks Unlimited has been an active partner in every joint venture important to waterfowl and wetlands conservation. We will continue to support joint venture activities, especially those that are focused on the highest priority waterfowl landscapes. From Ducks Unlimited's conservation perspective, these include the breeding grounds of the prairies, parklands, and boreal areas of the United States and Canada; the Central Valley of California; the Mississippi Alluvial Valley; and Gulf Coastal Prairie, as well as habitats in the Great Basin, Great Lakes/St. Lawrence, Mid-Atlantic Coast, Pacific Northwest, and Southern Great Plains. While these regions are critical for waterfowl, they are key landscapes for a much broader range of migratory birds.

Over the last 25 years, the joint ventures have been an important partner in maintaining migratory bird populations across the continent, and Ducks Unlimited supports H.R. 1917. This legislation will allow the joint ventures to work more efficiently and effectively on the ground, and ensure the continuation of this valuable program. It is important that this legislation carefully guard and preserve the characteristics that have provided the foundation and greatest strengths of the joint venture system.

Thank you.