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The North American Waterfowl Management Plan Celebrates 20 Years

May 14, 2006, marks the 20th Anniversary of a historic turning point in wildlife conservation -- the creation of the world's first continental waterfowl conservation strategy. On this date in 1986, the Governments of the United States and Canada signed the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), a partnership designed to reverse alarming declines in waterfowl populations and their wetland habitat that were then occurring. In 1994, Mexico joined this partnership, fulfilling the continental vision of the Plan.

The plan established science-based population and habitat conservation goals. To make it work, regional, public-private partnerships termed "joint ventures" were created that continue to be a major driving force in conserving vital waterfowl and wetland habitat today. These projects not only advance waterfowl conservation, but make substantial contributions toward the conservation of all species dependent on wetlands.

"In the last 20 years, joint ventures have invested \$4.5 billion to conserve 15.7 million acres of waterfowl habitat," said Service Director Dale Hall. "These partnerships are the model for how diverse agencies, organizations, landowners, companies, and scientists can work together for wildlife conservation."

From the long-established joint ventures to those currently in development, there are nearly two dozen such partnerships at work across the continent. In addition to the habitat focused joint-ventures, there are three species-oriented focusing on black duck, Arctic geese, and sea ducks throughout their international ranges.

A significant source of support for joint venture projects comes from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. With these grants and money from partners, joint ventures can organize on-the-ground conservation projects that directly support waterfowl and other species. For example, this summer Ducks Unlimited and nearly 20 partners that include livestock companies; local, state and federal agencies; and other non-governmental organizations received \$1 million and matched that with another \$2.5 million to conserve nearly 6,000 acres on the Modoc Plateau/Pit River in California. This is a vital region for waterfowl, shorebirds, and other waterbirds migrating and nesting in California's arid Great Basin. In addition, seven endangered or threatened species will benefit by the conservation of this wetland.

Leadership for the Plan comes from the North American Waterfowl Management plan committee, an 18-member tri-national body representing federal, provincial, and state wildlife agencies, nonprofit conservation organizations, and research institutions. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is represented on the Plan Committee by David A. Smith, Chief of the Division of Bird Habitat Conservation and U.S. Co-chair, and by member Paul Schmidt, Assistant Director for Migratory Birds.

"International cooperation is a hallmark of the Plan and is the strength behind the Plan's achievements," said Schmidt. "Given the migratory nature of waterfowl, no one country can provide all of the needs waterfowl require during the stages of their lifecycle."

The Plan doesn't just benefit waterfowl, however. Wetlands conserved under the Plan recharge groundwater supplies, abate floods, reduce soil erosion and sedimentation in our waterways, and improve water quality by filtering out pollutants. Joint venture projects provide jobs and enhance ecotourism, contributing to the national and local economies. Also, habitats conserved under the Plan benefit many other species, adding to our outdoor experience.

For more information about the Plan and anniversary events, please visit
<<http://www.fws.gov/birdhabitat/NAWMP/20.shtm>>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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