

# Funding Proposal

## The Saskatchewan Legacy FY 2013 - 2015

A WATERFOWL HABITAT CONSERVATION PROPOSAL SUBMITTED TO  
THE LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

by

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Ducks Unlimited Canada  
Conserving Canada's Wetlands



DUCKS UNLIMITED



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## Conservation Vision



### *"CONTINUING YOUR LEGACY"*

*The PHJV Implementation Plan contains habitat objectives designed to restore the waterfowl production capacity of the Canadian Prairies to that of the 1970s, a time when landscape conditions were capable of sustaining abundant populations of prairie waterfowl. Partnerships are key to realizing the goals of this plan and the LDWF has played an important role in ensuring the success of DUC's conservation efforts in Canada. The Canadian Prairies remain a landscape under siege. Wetland drainage and native prairie destruction continues in many of the high waterfowl densities areas. Inadequate habitat protection legislation drives DU to deliver strong habitat protection programs. Within our waterfowl priority areas, remaining native habitat must be protected, landscape impacts must be restored and more sustainable agricultural practices must be employed. The support of the LDWF in achieving this mission is critical.*

## Ducks Unlimited Mission

*"Ducks Unlimited conserves, restores and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people."*

Ducks Unlimited (DU) is the world leader in wetland conservation. Since 1938, DU has invested over 1 billion dollars in conserving habitat for waterfowl and wildlife in the United States, Canada and Mexico. In Canada alone, DU has completed over 8,880 habitat projects, securing 6.2 million acres and positively influencing 95 million acres of habitat. Many species of wildlife, including many threatened or endangered species, live and flourish on DU projects.

## Prairie Pothole Region of Canada

The Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) is rated one of the highest priority areas for waterfowl conservation in North America by DU, internationally, and DU has committed more resources to this area than any other region in North America. It is estimated that up to seventy per cent of the continent's waterfowl breed in this region. This area is particularly critical for mallard, northern shoveler, gadwall, northern pintail, blue-winged teal, American wigeon, canvasback, and redhead.

The PPR of Canada encompasses 212,000 miles<sup>2</sup>, stretching from the Peace Lowlands of northwestern Alberta southeast to southwestern Manitoba. When the glaciers from the last ice age receded across this landscape more than 10,000 years ago, they left millions of shallow depressions that today are wetlands known as prairie potholes. These fertile wetland complexes, rich in plant and aquatic invertebrate life, support populations of breeding waterfowl unmatched anywhere in the world.

DU has an aggressive conservation strategy to meet our continental vision. This strategy strives to restore the productive capacity of the PPR for breeding waterfowl and focuses on four habitat goals.

- ▶ Protection of Existing Wetland Habitats
- ▶ Restoration of Lost Wetlands
- ▶ Protection of Existing Upland Habitats
- ▶ Restoration of Lost Upland Habitats

## *The Habitat Challenge*



Native grassland and wetland habitats have been lost and degraded in the PPR for over a century. Soon after European settlement began in the late 1800s much of the pristine grassland was broken for agriculture. As the agricultural industry grew through the 1900s many of the prairie potholes were drained to make room for further cultivation. Based on historical landscape analyses, Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) estimates that in some of the key waterfowl production landscapes, as much as 90% of prairie wetlands have been drained in the past 100 years. The persistent loss of wetlands and natural upland cover combine to form a significant threat to the long term productive capacity of the landscape for waterfowl. It is DU's challenge to deliver programs that protect existing habitats, restore what has been lost, and develop new habitats that are compatible with the agricultural landscape in which they occur.

Wetlands are critical to attract ducks to the landscape and they provide habitat for successful brood production. Intact uplands (grasslands or haylands) are important to ensure suitable nesting habitat. DUC's focus in Saskatchewan continues to be on the protection and restoration of small prairie wetlands and the protection and restoration of upland nesting cover.

DUC uses a combination of strategically targeted direct program, agricultural extension and public policy efforts to advance its conservation goals. Direct habitat programs such as land acquisition and conservation easements help to secure the remaining habitat base, and provide restoration opportunities.

Agricultural extension programs focus on adding nesting cover and/or improving wetland conditions, while the promotion of waterfowl-friendly agricultural practices provide positive economic benefits to producers.

As agricultural and industrial pressures continue to increase, it is becoming more important for DUC to focus on retaining existing habitat while adding and improving breeding habitat. DUC has a secondary focus on retention and restoration of major staging and moulting marshes that maintain the integrity of spring and fall migration events.



## Priority Area

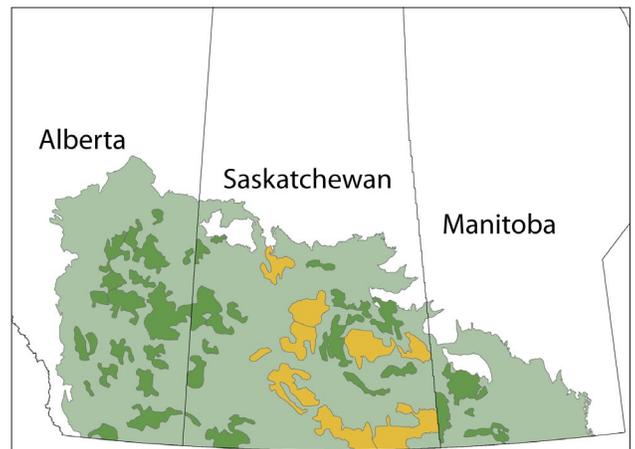


### Saskatchewan Prairie Pothole Region

At the heart of the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) are the moraine habitats that concentrate waterfowl during the breeding season. These moraine landforms support wetland densities over 100 ponds per square mile and attract waterfowl at densities over 100 pairs per square mile under average conditions. There are 27 target moraine areas in Saskatchewan of which 6 are the current priorities for program delivery. The Missouri Coteau, Allan Hills, Thickwood Hills, Touchwood Hills, Upper Assiniboine, and Lightning Creek landscapes offer the best opportunity for successful and impacting waterfowl habitat programs. Each priority area offers unique values to waterfowl providing the building blocks to add conservation programs that will improve the overall productive capacity for waterfowl.

The Saskatchewan prairies and parklands surrounding the priority areas are an expanse of mixed grassland, shrubland, woodland, cropland and wetlands. This area contains more than 1.5 million wetlands including over 600 DU wetland projects. These DU projects are essential to the breeding grounds and also critical staging and moulting habitat for ducks and geese in Saskatchewan. The future of the northern pintail and other upland nesting waterfowl hinges greatly on the recovery of the Saskatchewan PPR through broad landscape grassland restoration programs and positive agricultural policy advancements.

In the previous contract with LDWF, DUC positively **impacted 43,964 acres** (Table 1), in the priority areas of Saskatchewan and surrounding prairies.

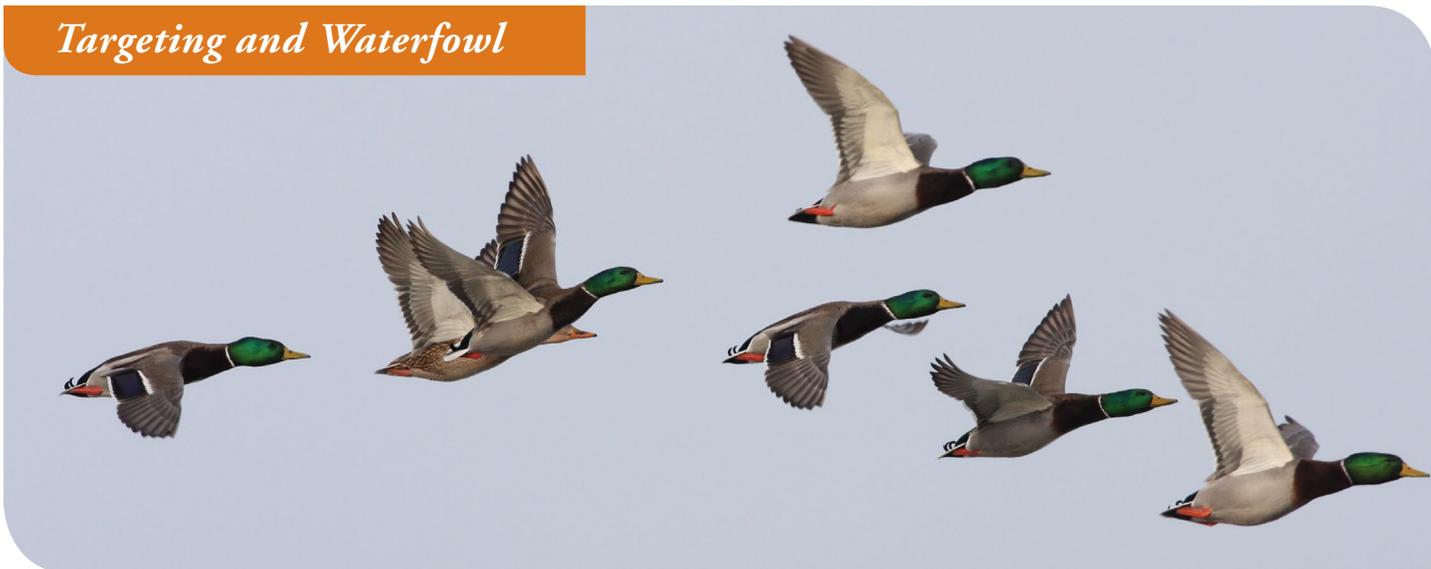


**Figure 1. Prairie Pothole Region of Western Canada**

**Table 1. Program Accomplishments 2011 and 2012**

Program	2011-12 Goal	2011-12 Total	% Accomplished
1. Habitat Retention	15,510	18,985	122
2. Wetland Restoration	67	42	63
3. Upland Restoration	12,000	24,937	208
<b>Total</b>	<b>27,577</b>	<b>43,964</b>	<b>159</b>

## Targeting and Waterfowl



### Targeting

DUC has developed a waterfowl distribution model based on long-term waterfowl population data and wetland inventory. This tool allows DU to target its conservation programs to areas that will have the highest duck pair densities. DUC applies direct program to areas that support a minimum long term average of 40 pairs of breeding ducks (mallard, northern pintail, shoveler, gadwall, blue-winged teal, canvasback and redhead) per square mile. The priority areas far exceed this minimum criterion over most of the landscape (Figure 2).

Once DUC has determined where to work, programs are then tailored to existing land use determined by the type of land cover, its current condition, and waterfowl needs. Areas with significant perennial cover are targeted for conservation easements to secure and restore wetlands and improve the condition of native cover. Areas with wetland densities and significant agricultural activity are targeted for wetland retention and programs to restore perennial cover or increase fall seeded cereals such as winter wheat.

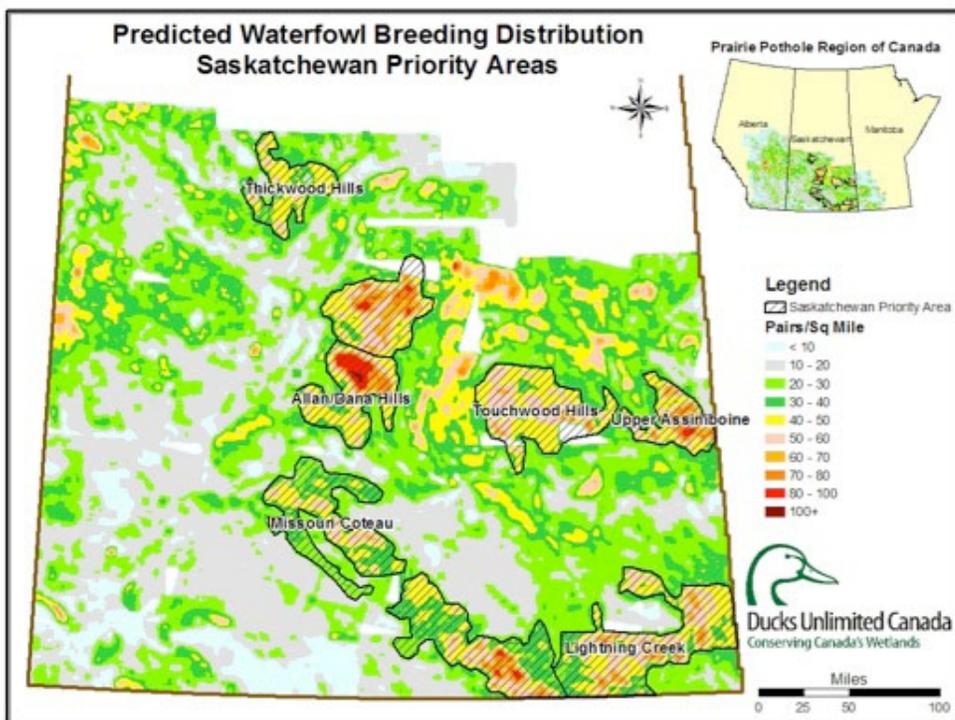


Figure 2. Predicted waterfowl breeding pair densities in the PPR of Saskatchewan.

## Waterfowl

Waterfowl band recovery data has established a clear link between waterfowl produced and banded in the PPR of Canada and subsequently harvested in the Mississippi Flyway. Saskatchewan and the priority areas in particular, stand out as the primary Canadian sources of ducks harvested in Louisiana (Figure 3).

Based on trends in the May U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services/Canadian Wildlife Services waterfowl survey data it is clear the majority of the decline in continental dabbling duck populations has come from those birds that typically settle in Prairie Canada. Given that the priority areas of Saskatchewan have some of the highest breeding densities in the Prairies, this area is critical to the recovery of these ducks.



Figure 3. Banded ducks recovered in Louisiana between 1986 and 2005.



### Joint Venture Partners

The Prairie Habitat Joint Venture (PHJV) has been a successful collaboration of over 200 Canadian and U.S. partners supporting and delivering programs to over 20,000 producers across the PPR of Canada. PHJV partners have impacted over 12 million acres. Over the first 25 years of PHJV implementation, directly attributable to partner achievements, the waterfowl recovery of prairie Canada is estimated at greater than 25% of North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) production goals.

### Industry Partners

DUC has expanded our industry partnerships to bring in new partners and build upon strong agricultural relationships. We are currently partnering with Bayer Crops Science in our Winter Wheat programs, Viterro in our forage program, Agrium, Sask Power, TransCanada Pipelines and Alliance Pipelines in our Conservation Easement program. Each of these industry partnerships offset the costs of program delivery and open new farm gates to deliver programs with private landowner across the prairies.

### NAWCA Health

The NAWMP is widely recognized as the most successful international conservation effort in the world. One of the primary driving forces behind its success has been the implementation of supporting legislation that designates directed funding. Funding sources like NAWCA hinge greatly on the commitment of a shared international obligation adopted by the partners of the NAWMP. The future health of NAWCA and the NAWMP requires a steadfast commitment by state agencies to support conservation efforts on the breeding grounds of Canada. This support will help ensure that NAWCA funding continues to be available for wetland conservation in the US. The future health of NAWCA is critical to the ultimate success of the NAWMP and waterfowl conservation.



### Protect and Restore

For nearly 75 years, DUC has worked hard at conserving habitat within Canadian prairies. Traditional strategies have made important gains but the future depends on using new approaches to protect and restore habitat in the face of a dominant agricultural industry. To meet the challenge the Saskatchewan Conservation Plan was developed to meet conservation goals.

Programs are targeted to areas of highest duck densities. Within these areas cost-effective programs that increase waterfowl productivity while working towards long term sustainability are delivered. Partnerships with producer groups and government agencies broaden conservation program impact and awareness. All programs are monitored and evaluated through an adaptive management process to ensure maximum effectiveness.

Habitat improvements are accomplished through the delivery of programs that positively influence DUC's four habitat initiatives. Programs are organized by the intent of the program and are referred to as initiatives.

### Initiatives

#### Habitat Retention

Drainage of wetlands and breaking of native uplands continues to be the most significant activities negatively impacting waterfowl. DUC uses a variety of program tools to protect remaining critical habitats, which are vital to the long-term productivity of the Saskatchewan landscape. Habitat retention activities are captured within three primary efforts:

- 1 Conservation Easements and Agreements** protect habitats on private lands through programs offering financial incentives for varying levels of protection. These programs range in cost from \$20/acre for 10 year agreements up to \$320/acre for perpetual easements. DU plans to protect 2200 acres in the next three years.
- 2 Land purchase** is the most intensive program that DU delivers and is a very important tool to protect high risk, high valued habitats. The cost of purchasing land continues to rise and DU will invest strategically to ensure the greatest waterfowl benefits are derived. DU plans to purchase 1500 acres over the next three years with the Louisiana contribution.
- 3 Wetland Rebuilds** is a re-investment into existing wetland projects that have been evaluated as highly productive and successful for waterfowl. These projects have met and surpassed their original design and agreement terms and required new infrastructure and agreements to ensure their productive capacity for another 30 years. DU will resign all of the landowners on the project and construct the required physical improvements to maximize wetland productivity and waterfowl recruitment. The goal for this program would be to rebuild 300 acres of wetland project habitat.



## Landscape Habitat Goals



### Wetland Restoration

Most wetland restoration work will occur on private lands. Nearly 70 years of program delivery has taught DUC that it takes a combination of intensive and extensive programs to successfully work with producers. Many wetlands are difficult to drain and are valued by landowners. However thousands of wetlands have been lost in our priority area and surrounding lands currently limiting the productive capacity of prairie Canada. DU is currently using other programs such as conservation easements, land purchase and forage conversion to initiate efforts to restore wetlands. The three year goal for wetland restoration is 145 basins or approximately 290 acres.

### Upland Restoration

Duck nest success is one of the most influential factors impacting continental waterfowl populations. Improving nest success in the priority areas will require the restoration of nesting cover. DUC will focus efforts on increasing the availability of better quality cover in the priority areas through its winter wheat program.

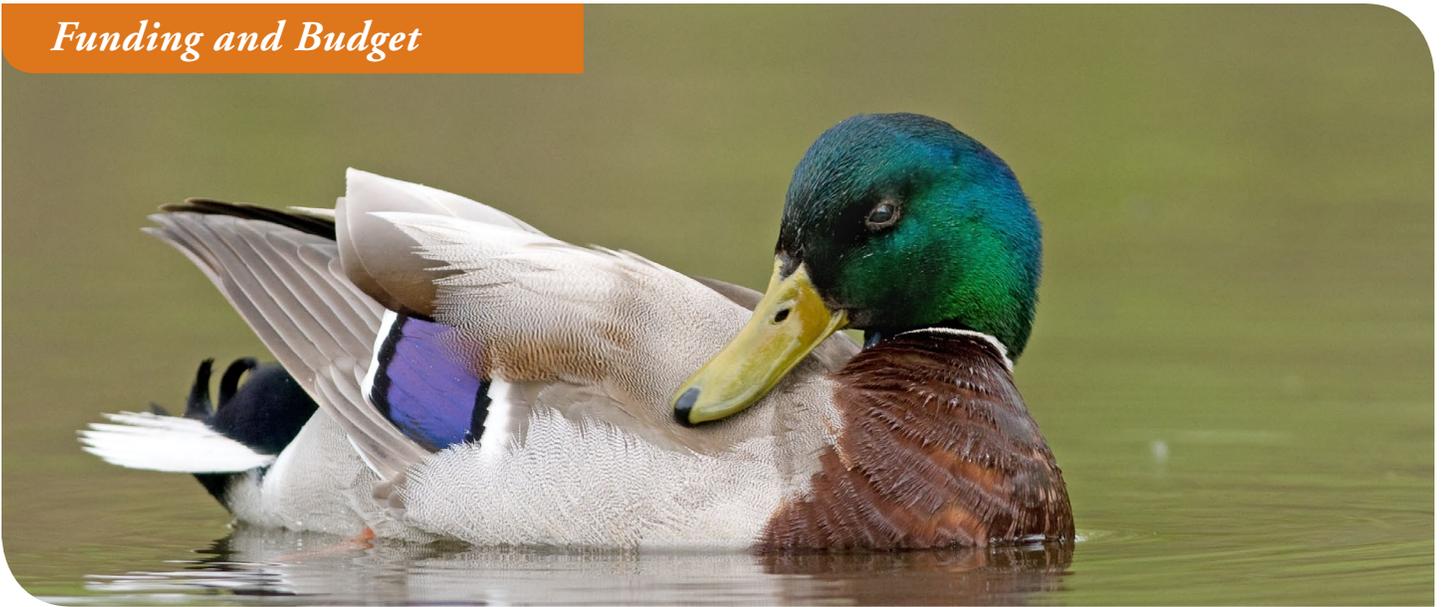
**Forage conversion** programs will be delivered with a primary objective to facilitate wetland restoration. There will be two programs: one is in partnership with Vitera which offers the landowner \$20 per acre and must be located in a area that meets DU waterfowl value criteria; the second is a program that requires the landowner to restore 1 acre of wetland for every 10 acres of grasslands. The payment for the wetland restoration is \$500/acre and \$20/acre for the forage. The three year goal for this program is 3000 acres which is a result of a higher cost per acre and it will be more challenging to find producers willing to restore wetlands.

Saskatchewan contains over 60 million acres of privately held farm land. In an average year there is approximately 12 million acres of wheat planted. Due to the direct efforts of DUC, supported by many funding partners, winter wheat acreage has increased in Saskatchewan from 100,000 acres 20 years ago to 550,000 acres last fall.

DUC's winter wheat programs focus on the agronomic and economic benefits of the crop to the producer. Approaches vary from supporting research to developing new varieties that are more successful in the Canadian prairies, to working more directly with the producers through incentive or extension programs. The three year goal for this program is 3,500 acres of winter wheat.

### Habitat Asset Management

Over the past 70 years, DU has delivered millions of acres of habitat programs. Most of these projects require additional attention after they are completed to ensure their long term production value. These activities are called Habitat Asset Management (HAM) efforts. HAM activities include wetland control operations, nesting cover management, habitat inspections and agreement compliance. Current program inventory in the priority areas and surrounding landscapes is over 1,450,000 acres. Each project requires some level of asset management on an annual basis.



## Saskatchewan Conservation Plan

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) State Grant contributions provide the critical first dollar which leaves additional funding that drives Canadian waterfowl habitat conservation. Over the past 10 years with the support of LDWF, Ducks Unlimited conserved, enhanced and restored **292,471 acres** and influenced an additional 1,760,000 acres.

Ducks Unlimited invites the LDWF to continue this important partnership and consider contributions in FY2013 - 15 towards the conservation and restoration of North America's most productive waterfowl habitat found in the priority areas of Saskatchewan. A contribution from Louisiana through the State legislated funding designated to support habitat conservation on the breeding grounds, approximately equivalent to \$325,000 annually, will be matched by Ducks Unlimited, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, and other U.S. and Canadian sources.

LDWF's contribution of \$325,000 will be **leveraged three-fold**, enabling DUC to put **\$1,300,000** annually towards conserving **critical waterfowl habitat** on North America's breeding grounds. The total partner investment over a three year contract will be \$3,900,000. The conservation of this vital habitat will help ensure that the Louisiana hunter experiences strong waterfowl flights from Saskatchewan for many years to come.

### SASKATCHEWAN PRAIRIE POTHOLE REGION PROGRAM BUDGET FY 2013 - 15

Conservation Goals/Programs	Proposed Program (ac)	Proposed Costs
1. Habitat Retention	4000	\$2,193,750
2. Wetland Restoration	290	\$438,750
3. Upland Restoration	6000	\$292,500
4. Habitat Asset Management	325,000	\$975,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,290</b>	<b>\$3,900,000</b>

\*Habitat Asset Management acres are not included in the total acre goals.

*The programs funded through this partnership will be tracked by DUC and the PHJV to measure the habitat contribution towards the NAWMP goals. Using the waterfowl productivity model we will be able to measure waterfowl population benefits over time. Completion of this proposal will add valuable pair and nesting habitat for thousands of ducks and geese each year. Your contribution will help protect, conserve and restore critical waterfowl habitat on private farmlands. It is only through the support of partners like the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries that makes this possible.*

## Securing the Legacy



The PHJV Implementation Plan and Ducks Unlimited have set habitat objectives to fully recover the Canadian Prairies and to sustain waterfowl production equivalent to the levels of the 1970s. Continued partnerships will be the key to success. DUC values its relationship with LDWF and recognizes them as a key player in supporting NAWMP conservation efforts in Canada. However, we will need increased support from all partners if the ambitious goals of NAWMP are to be met.

The waterfowl community continues to recognize habitat programs as the primary solution to waterfowl recovery. Ducks Unlimited Canada is the primary delivery agent of the NAWMP program in the PPR of Canada.

Continued action on the Canadian Prairies means that critical waterfowl habitat will be protected in the top waterfowl production area of North America. Your critical support is needed now as every year the cost of habitat conservation rises making it more difficult to achieve the goals of the NAWMP.

