SAVING OUR WATER, WILDLIFE AND WILD PLACES

DUCKS UNLIMITED CANADA AND THE NATURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Ducks Unlimited Canada

The Government of Canada's Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP) is a unique public-private partnership designed to support new protected and conserved areas on private lands.

Launched in 2019 with a $100-million investment from the Government of Canada, the program aims to conserve 200,000 hectares (494,211 acres) by 2023. Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) is a proud partner that's helping deliver the NHCP by conserving and restoring critical wetland and grassland habitats in areas at greatest risk of loss and degradation. We're also working alongside our passionate and generous conservation community by striving to raise the funds to match and exceed the government's investment with contributions from other sources.

This report showcases the conservation achievements realized by DUC and our supporters in the first two years (2019 and 2020) of delivering the NHCP. Together, we're finding new ways to protect our water, wildlife and wild places.

DUC is proud to work alongside the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Wildlife Habitat Canada, the Canadian Land Trusts Working Group and local Canadian land trusts in delivering the NHCP.

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PROGRESS THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

This past year and a half has underlined the importance of connecting with nature. As Canadians, we are fortunate to have an abundance of nature in our backyards—a gift that comes with tremendous responsibility to protect and manage it sustainably. Nature across Canada also supports iconic biodiversity and helps fight climate change by storing carbon and making our communities more resilient to its impacts.

Through the Canada Nature Fund, our government collaborates with Ducks Unlimited Canada and other partners to protect environmentally sensitive and biodiversity rich lands from coast to coast to coast.

In the last two years, Ducks Unlimited Canada completed numerous conservation projects through Canada Nature Fund's Natural Heritage Conservation Program, including many wetland projects. Canada's wetlands provide important habitat for waterfowl and other species, filter water, and mitigate against the impacts of climate change through the capture and storage of carbon.

The Government of Canada also works with Ducks Unlimited Canada and other partners on programs such as the Ecological Gifts Program that provides tax incentives to Canadians who donate ecologically sensitive land, and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, an international partnership that conserves and protects wetland and upland habitats. These programs support our conservation goals to protect 30 per cent of Canada's land and ocean by 2030.

On behalf of Environment and Climate Change Canada, I congratulate Ducks Unlimited Canada and its partners for their wildlife habitat conservation and stewardship achievements. I look forward to seeing what we will accomplish in the coming years.

The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, PC, MP

Minister of Environment and Climate Change Government of Canada (2019-2021)

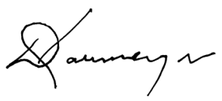
As Canadians, water, wildlife and wild places are ingrained in our identities. They are points of pride and part of treasured memories. They are also fundamental to our way of life, our health and our economy. That's why we understand the importance of working together to protect them.

Among the postcard-worthy landscapes that colour our country, wetlands and grasslands are some of the most important. Rich in biodiversity, these areas provide natural solutions to some of the most pressing environmental issues, including flood and drought prevention, water purification and climate change mitigation. The tremendous environmental benefits they provide connect us all.

Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) is proud to deliver focused conservation efforts, in partnership with the Government of Canada's Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP), to ensure wetlands and grasslands remain healthy and productive for generations to come. It's a privilege to work alongside so many other Canadians who share our desire to safeguard this significant part of our natural heritage.

On behalf of DUC, I'd like to express our gratitude to Environment and Climate Change Canada for this important investment in our future. We're proud and grateful to work alongside our NHCP partners at the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the country's land trust community to deliver this landmark program.

The results outlined in this report showcase the strides we've made in the first two years of the NHCP. From sprawling marshes that have become national, natural landmarks, to small potholes that are quietly cared for by private landowners, the properties DUC has impacted through the program are vast and varied. Each has their own story; each has their own unique value. We hope these successes provide the validation and inspiration needed to continue doing more for Canada's water, wildlife and wild places that mean so much to all of us.



Larry Kaumeyer

Chief Executive Officer Ducks Unlimited Canada

DUCKS UNLIMITED CANADA AND THE NATURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Building on a strong history

DUC is one of the largest and longest-standing conservation organizations in North America. Since establishment in 1938, we've conserved more than 2.67 million hectares (6.6 million acres) across the country. But we haven't done it alone. Our conservation work is made possible through the generous contributions of individuals, foundations and corporations, and through the partnership of funding agencies from Canada, the United States and beyond. Programs like the NHCP provide us with the means—and the motivation—to continue building on this strong history.

Supporting Canada's biodiversity goals

In 2015, Canada released the "2020 Biodiversity Goals and Targets for Canada"— identifying four goals and 19 targets that would contribute towards the global biodiversity targets (Aichi Targets) established by the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

The first target—Target 1—stated that: *"By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial areas and inland water, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, are conserved through networks of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures."*

The NHCP was established in 2019 to continue the legacy of the Natural Areas Conservation Program and grow Canada's protected areas with two objectives:

1. To contribute towards the terrestrial portion of Target 1 through the protection of at least 200,000 hectares of land across our country's treasured landscapes.
2. To contribute to the recovery of species at risk in Canada through protection of their habitat.

These objectives are met through the protection of ecologically sensitive lands and expanding the network of protected areas across Canada. The first two years of the NHCP contributed towards the 2020 Target 1. Since then, Target 1 has been extended to protect 25 per cent of Canada's lands and oceans by 2025 and 30 per cent by 2030. Years three and four of the NHCP will continue to contribute towards these extended goals.

CONSERVATION TOOLS AND TACTICS

Diversity and inclusion are foundational values at DUC. We believe in the transformative power of engaging many different perspectives and that the need for nature connects all people. Diversity in nature is also fundamental as it allows natural systems to adapt to a changing environment, provides spaces for species to shift their range or expand their populations, and also provides humans with essential goods and services, like pollinating food crops.

Diversity in the tools we use to deliver conservation solutions is also important in finding the best approach to achieve working natural landscapes and biodiversity. DUC has been a leader in developing innovative sustainability solutions that work for the diversity of landscapes across Canada.

Through the NHCP, DUC has applied a diversity of conservation tools to protect or restore landscapes across Canada. These include fee-simple acquisition of lands, conservation easements with landowners and our revolving land conservation program. We have also taken steps to implement other effective area-based conservation measures on projects that will be realized in future program years.

A **fee-simple acquisition** is when DUC purchases a piece of land to ensure it is conserved in perpetuity. This approach is often used when landowners are looking to sell or donate their ecologically sensitive lands.

Conservation easements allow landowners to retain ownership of their land but impose restrictions on activities that can take place (e.g., breaking or cultivating natural habitat) to maintain the ecological value of the land.

Our **revolving land conservation program** focuses on restoring the natural processes and habitat in a landscape by purchasing lands, restoring the wetlands and/or upland areas of the land, then reselling the land with a conservation easement on it.

Other effective conservation measures will apply to lands that don't have the same legal protection as parks or conservation easements, for example, but will be governed or managed in ways that achieve positive long-term outcomes for conservation. These may include biodiversity benefits, associated ecosystem functions and services, as well as cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values.

The specific tool selected for a given project is based on the interests of the landowner and the needs of the local community, as well as the conservation value and benefits of the land. Regardless of the conservation tools applied, nature and Canadians benefit from the ecological goods and services provided by these protected lands. This report provides some examples of how these tools are put to use on the landscape.

MEASURING OUR IMPACT

Funding received and leveraged

In the first two years of the NHCP, **DUC received $7,242,000 in program funds...**

which were used to leverage an additional $12,945,060 in matching funds (cash) — nearly tripling the effectiveness of the program at conserving lands in Canada.

These combined funds totalling $20,187,060 were used to conserve 12,126 hectares (29,964 acres), which have supported efforts towards Target 1 objectives under Canada's 2020 biodiversity goals and targets.

Supporting species at risk

One of the NHCP objectives is to secure habitat for Canada's species at risk. Many of these species occur in the Prairies, where DUC has focused its NHCP efforts. Species like the Sprague's pipit, chestnut-collared longspur *(above)* and ferruginous hawk are most adapted to native prairie habitat and have experienced declines because of habitat loss.

Through the NHCP, DUC has secured lands to ensure that these species at risk will always have areas to return to and raise their young. Ongoing efforts are needed to secure and restore enough land for these grassland species to recover to levels where they are no longer at risk, but these successes are an important step forward.

Contributing to Canada's biodiversity

The native grasslands conserved and the croplands restored to grasslands provide important habitat for Canada's fauna and flora. In addition to providing habitat for many of the country's species at risk, these conservation projects also provide a home for the wildlife and plants that make Canada a wild and wonderful place to live. Many of these species, like pollinators, provide important services to people.

Grasslands retained and restored by DUC through NHCP are estimated to provide habitat for over 5,300 nests per year for priority grassland-nesting species, such as the federally threatened chestnut-collared longspur or the Baird's sparrow — a species of special concern in the Canadian Prairies. These grasslands are also important nesting areas for species of ducks, like northern pintails, that remain well below desired populations levels. Prairie grasslands are Canada's Amazon rainforest, only there is even less of this ecozone remaining.

Pollinators, like bees, play a key role in the proper function of ecosystems, and are essential for a large part of food we produce and consume. Native grasslands, with their greater diversity of native flowering plants, support a higher richness of native bee species than non-native grasslands. **The native grasslands that DUC protected through the NHCP are expected to provide habitat for 80 documented species of bees,** and the restored grasslands will provide suitable habitat for 67 species. The diversity of plants found in these areas allows pollinators to feed throughout the growing season,

whereas monoculture crops tend to only provide food for the crop's short flowering period. Therefore, having these natural or restored areas available throughout the landscape is very important to a healthy pollinator population.

In addition to pollinator habitat provided by grasslands, wetlands also provide habitat for other flowering plants and beneficial invertebrate species. Wetlands conserved through the NHCP program support over 320 species of beneficial arthropods that help control crop pests and support natural functional ecosystems.

Water retention and nutrient management

The wetlands retained or restored on the DUC projects secured through NHCP help retain over 6.7 million cubic meters of water on the landscape **every year** (more than 2,700 Olympic-size swimming pools worth of water). Without these wetlands, precipitation runs off the land and makes its way into watercourses or catchment basins (e.g., lakes and large wetlands), which experience rising water levels. These floods are occurring more frequently, and for longer periods of time, especially with changing weather patterns from climate change.

DUC prioritizes conservation in areas where wetland retention and restoration offer natural solutions to preventing natural disasters, in addition to the other ecological benefits they provide. Wetland conservation in NHCP Key Conservation Areas, like the Upper Assiniboine in Saskatchewan, help prevent runoff into the Assiniboine River, which flows into the Red River in Winnipeg and then Lake Winnipeg where it causes flooding.

Along with the benefits of water retention and management, wetlands help mitigate agricultural runoff containing high nutrient loads. Wetlands are effective filters for these nutrients, which otherwise end up in lakes and rivers where they can cause algal blooms and pose health risks to humans, pets, fish and other animals. **The wetland retention programs DUC has implemented through the NHCP so far have prevented an estimated 10 tonnes of phosphorus and 32 tonnes of nitrogen from entering rivers and lakes.**

Carbon sequestration and storage

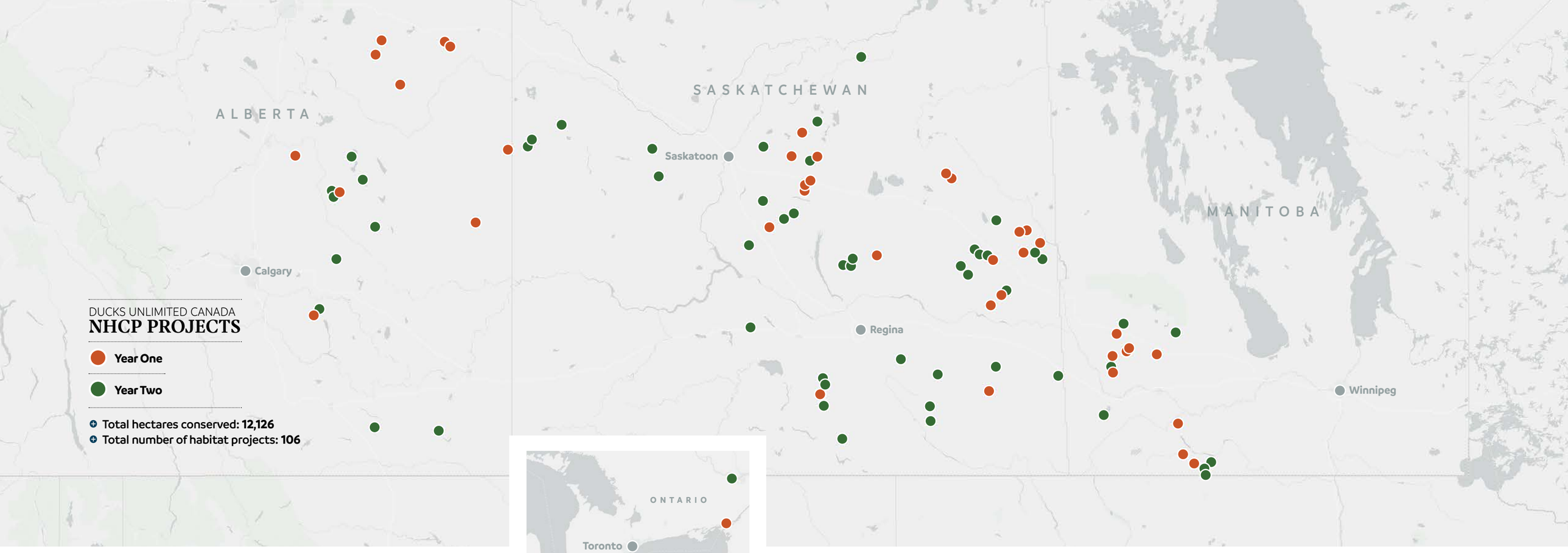
Wetlands and grasslands are effective natural carbon sinks. Native grasses have deep root systems that store carbon in the soil as plants grow each year, while wetlands store large quantities of carbon from plants in sediment. DUC's conservation programs are aimed at retaining existing wetlands and grasslands, or restoring them on previously disturbed lands. They have a primary objective of conserving biodiversity, waterfowl and providing clean water, but the carbon storage and benefits of lands secured through the NHCP can't be ignored.

By conserving these lands and preventing them from being broken or drained we've avoided the release of almost 1.9 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents stored in the soils and sediments. Over their lifetime, these projects will continue capturing carbon and store more than 127,000 tonnes of additional carbon dioxide equivalents.

Supporting working landscapes

With growing human populations, there is increasing demand for food and, simultaneously, a growing need for ecosystem goods and services, such as clean freshwater. DUC recognizes that conservation must work for the ecosystems we rely on, and for the people who inhabit these landscapes. In grasslands, for example, DUC offers sustainable grazing programs on properties we've purchased , which benefit agricultural producers through increased availability of pasture land, while the grazing disturbance improves grassland function.

DUC also recognizes the importance of annual crops for food production, and has programs that protect wetlands within annual crop fields. The mix of land cover types promotes water and nutrient retention, and provides habitat for pollinators and other wildlife, all of which benefit farmers and society more broadly.



MAPPING OUR PROGRESS

In the first two years of the NHCP, DUC conserved 12,126 hectares (29,964 acres) of land through 106 projects across four provinces in areas with the greatest conservation need. This included:

- Purchasing 366 hectares (904 acres) in **Ontario**.
- Establishing conservation easements on 1,382 hectares (3,415 acres) in **Manitoba**.
- Establishing conservation easements and revolving land conservation projects on 7,387 hectares (18,254 acres) in **Saskatchewan**.
- Establishing conservation easements on 2,991 hectares (7,391 acres) of land in **Alberta**.

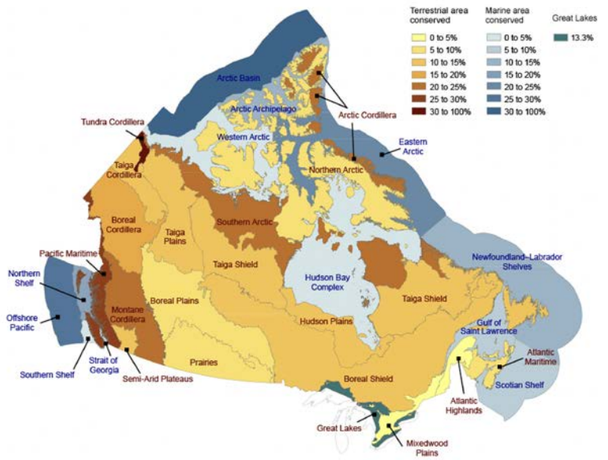
These results complement the conservation efforts of other NHCP partners, including the Nature Conservancy of Canada and Canada's land trusts in other regions of the country.

When asked which ecosystems are the most endangered in the world, many people think of the Amazon rainforest or great coral reefs. But in fact, among the most endangered are the grasslands of the Great Plains. There is only approximately 17 per cent of this ecozone remaining in Canada, and widespread loss has caused many grassland-dependent species to be extirpated in the wild or at risk of extirpation. That's why DUC focusses our delivery of NHCP projects here, in Canada's prairies. As shown in the map on the opposite page, working landscapes in the Prairies, Boreal Plains and Mixedwood Plains ecozones currently have the lowest proportion of lands protected. These areas are home to high numbers of species at risk and have experienced high rates of wetland loss.

Proportion of area conserved, by ecozone, Canada, 2020

This map (right) shows what proportion of each Canadian ecozone has been conserved. Only between 5 and 10 per cent of land has been conserved in the Prairies. This is a key landscape where much work needs to be done, which is why DUC is focusing its NHCP-funded projects here.

SOURCE: ECCC



PROJECT
SPOTLIGHTS

FEE-SIMPLE ACQUISITION

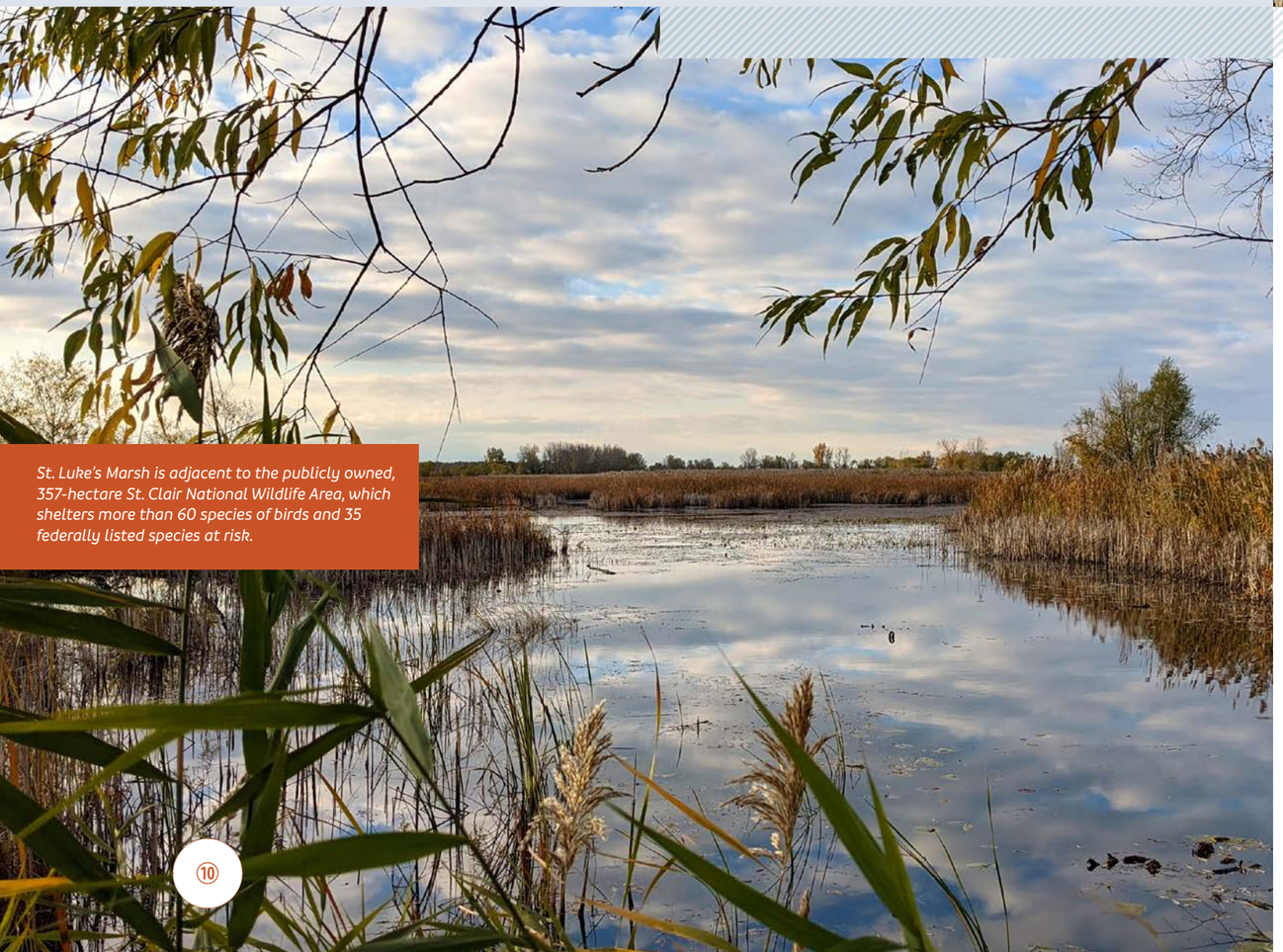
St. Luke's Marsh: An Ontario coastal gem, protected in perpetuity

"It's really hard to explain something that's in you," said Bob Lozon, looking out across the storied waters of St. Luke's Marsh. "It's been in me since I was a little boy. I mean, I was raised in the wetland."

Lozon is a local resident and hunting guide who has spent most of his life immersed in the coastal wetland along Lake St. Clair in southwestern Ontario. It is a rare site within the densely populated area of the province, where only 1.5 per cent of historic wetlands remain. Lozon is one of many conservationists who celebrated DUC's purchase of the 197-hectare (487-acre) property—and the protection of its habitats in perpetuity. Protection that was possible thanks to the NHCP.

Conserving these habitats saved vital space for wildlife. St. Luke's Marsh is part of an extensive system of waterfowl habitats around the lower Great Lakes, one of the most significant migratory stopover areas on the continent.

"If you don't conserve wetlands, you're losing a part of the environment that you can't ever replace," said Lozon. "You just can't afford to lose these types of habitats."



St. Luke's Marsh is adjacent to the publicly owned, 357-hectare St. Clair National Wildlife Area, which shelters more than 60 species of birds and 35 federally listed species at risk.

CONSERVATION EASEMENT

Baker Project: Saskatchewan farm family's roots anchor conservation ethic

Terry Baker's four-generation farm sits at the confluence of three major migration flyways in southwestern Saskatchewan. In this region of the Canadian prairies, grasslands are increasingly being converted to annual cropping, which makes a parcel like this critical for many wildlife species.

The optimal mix of perennial cover and water provide habitat for among the highest densities of nesting waterfowl in the prairies. Its habitat value is extraordinary—and so is the deep connection this conservation-minded family has to the land.

"The land was homesteaded by my grandfather in the early 1900s, then farmed by my dad. My wife, Nancy, and I moved back to the farm in the 1970s, where we raised our two sons and daughter," he said.

Baker and his family signed 125 hectares (309 acres) of grasslands into DUC's conservation easement program to preserve the land in perpetuity. The property also includes a special memorial in honour of his late father and other family members' commitment to conservation. An easement was the perfect instrument for the Bakers to live out their conservation values while protecting a precious family legacy.

CONSERVATION EASEMENT

Mappin Project: Alberta landowners boost biodiversity on the Prairies

Brad and Terri Mappin run a mixed farm just outside Byemoor, a small town located about 70 kilometres southeast of Stettler, Alta. It's a piece of Wild Rose Country where the rolling hills of the Alberta parkland meets the mixed prairie.

The Mappins believe their farmland is at its best when native grasses and wetlands are intact. That's why they recently signed a conservation easement with DUC that safeguards approximately 523 hectares (1,293 acres) on their property.

"We try to maximize what we have," says Terri. "And we're constantly looking for ways we can improve our farm."

While the wetlands and grasslands contribute to their farming operation by supporting soil health and providing clean water and quality forage for cattle, they also support the landscape's overall biodiversity. Terri, an avid photographer, is continually inspired by the range of species that frequent their property. From sharp-tailed grouse to mule deer, shorebirds and a host of waterfowl, there's no shortage of subjects to capture on camera. Last year, a dozen white-faced ibis were spotted on a wetland near their farm.

The couple has also started to talk with their boys, now young teenagers who are interested in joining the family farm operation in the future, about the value of the natural landscape. According to Brad, these conversations have an important focus. "It comes down to respecting the land and the wildlife," he says.

The conservation easement on their property, made possible by NHCP funding, will help write the next chapter in the Mappin's legacy—one where farming and biodiversity flourish together.

PROJECT
SPOTLIGHTS

CONSERVATION EASEMENT

McDonald Project: A significant habitat gain in the face of ongoing loss

In southwestern Manitoba, intensive annual cropping is the greatest source of wetland and grassland loss. A significant conservation easement signed with the McDonald family has now ensured 408 hectares (1,009 acres) will remain in perpetuity.

"A project of this size in this part of the province is rare," says Matthew Tower, DUC conservation specialist. "Working with these conservation-minded farmers, we've been able to secure a large, connected block of habitat for generations to come."

Located in Manitoba's Killarney landscape, the conservation easement will include the restoration of five wetlands, bringing the total number of basins on the property to 139. The property also contains a diverse upland component, including unbroken native grassland and aspen parkland habitat, and naturalized and tame grasslands.

It's an area of critical importance to breeding waterfowl, including northern pintails and canvasbacks. Both species are of particular interest to outdoor enthusiasts across North America and their populations have experienced declines in the past due to habitat loss.

Other noteworthy wildlife sightings on the property include several breeding bobolinks, which are recognized as a threatened species at risk. Endangered burrowing owls have also been spotted by the McDonalds in years past.

"The presence of an endangered species like the burrowing owl that relies on quality grassland habitat is a good indicator of a healthy ecosystem and provides additional justification for protecting habitat on this property," says Tower.

REVOLVING LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Eftoda Project: Conservation in a working landscape

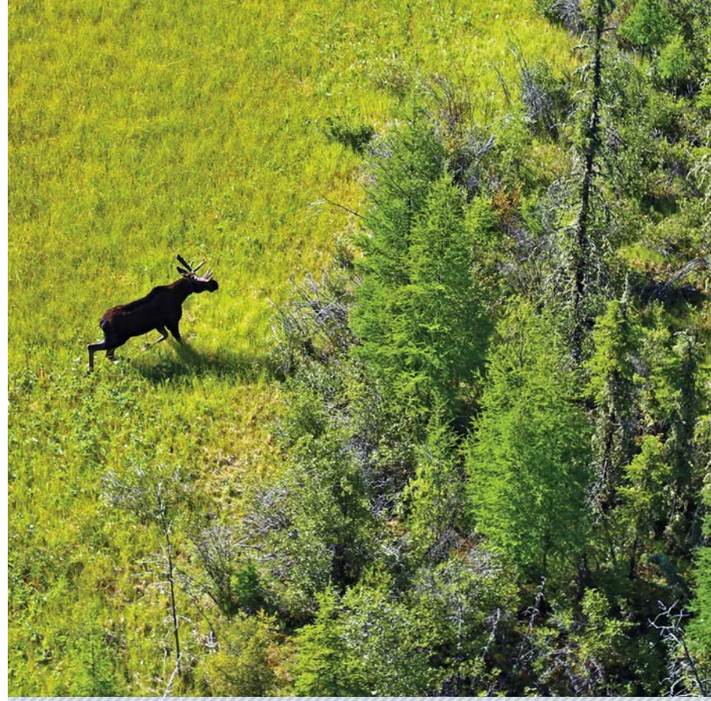
DUC has been working with Darren Keown for about six years to incorporate conservation into his farming operation located in east-central Saskatchewan. In April 2020, Keown purchased 190 hectares (469 acres) from DUC through our revolving land conservation program.

Known at DUC as the Eftoda 2 Project, the land Keown purchased is located within a productive agricultural area in the province's Upper Assiniboine landscape. It's also an extremely important area for waterfowl and wildlife. Prior to selling the property to Keown, DUC restored 29 wetland basins and several other existing wetlands on the property for a total of 39 hectares (96 acres). All were protected in perpetuity through a conservation easement placed on the property, which still allows Keown as the owner to use the land in his operation through haying or grazing.

"Even with the recent dry conditions experienced in the area, the majority of these restored wetlands were holding water in 2021 and will continue to naturalize over time," said Trevor Plews, head of conservation programs for DUC in Saskatchewan.

Today, the project helps keep water on the landscape (something that's been in short supply on the Prairies as of late) and connects a large block of habitat in a high-priority area for conservation. Better still, proceeds from the sale of the land have gone back into DUC programs for more conservation work. It's part of working together with farmers which contributes to a healthier, more sustainable economy and landscape.

"At the end of the day, conservation is only possible with the buy-in of landowners," says Plews. "We're fortunate to work with many people like Darren to grow Saskatchewan's conservation footprint while continuing to support agriculture across the province."



OTHER EFFECTIVE CONSERVATION MEASURES

Western Boreal Region: Expanding Canada's protected areas network

Other effective conservation measures (OECM) are a flexible new tool that promise to vastly expand Canada's protected areas network. DUC is among leading conservation organizations developing innovative ways to help Canada meet Target 1 with this type of protected area. Working closely with Environment and Climate Change Canada, DUC is helping shape the way we recognize working landscapes that have conservation benefits.

Though they can take substantial time to formalize, OECMs have immense benefits. OECMs balance conservation with other land management objectives and, as such, often extend protection to larger areas. Yet they conserve land through mechanisms that are very difficult to reverse, ensuring the protection is effective for the foreseeable future.

With NHCP support, DUC has advanced existing relationships with industry, provincial governments and Indigenous communities to develop several potential OECMs. Using geospatial analysis, DUC has identified areas of Canadian wilderness with high conservation value and is seeking collaboration with land-managing partners where there is geographical overlap. DUC is exploring promising opportunities in the western boreal forest where forestry companies are sustainably managing large landscapes in ways that provide and protect habitat for species in the region. DUC continues to engage with provincial governments to navigate options for formal recognition of OECMs through contracts, agreements and other effective long-term solutions.

LOOKING AHEAD: MAINTAINING OUR MOMENTUM

DUC and our fellow conservation partners are now halfway through delivering the four-year NHCP. Results to date are both impressive and impactful. However, tremendous work remains to be done if we are to achieve the program's ambitious goal of securing 200,000 hectares of land.

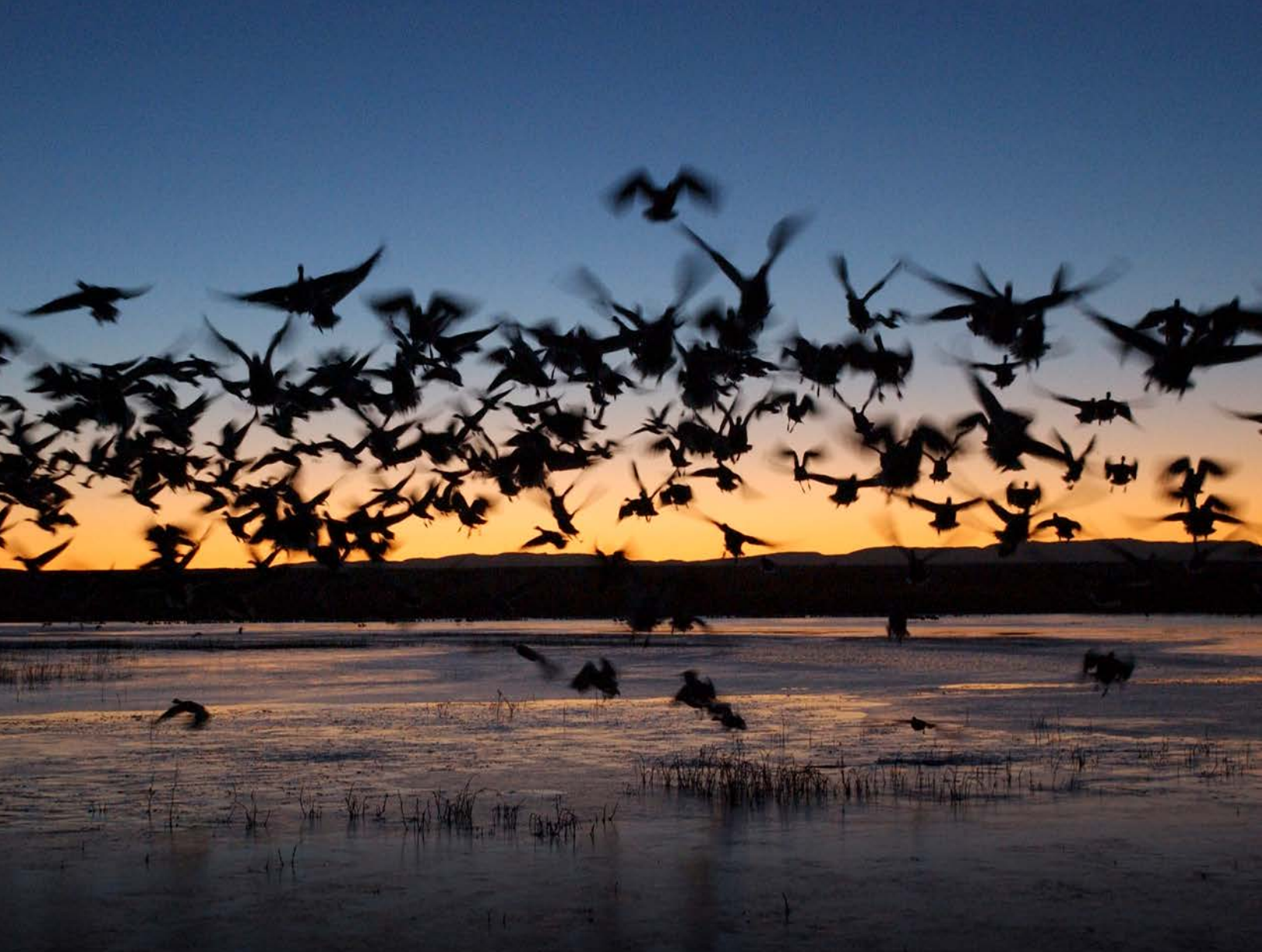
With the momentum created in the first two years of the NHCP, DUC will continue to deliver conservation over the next two years by securing some of the country's most valuable and at-risk habitat through our diverse and effective mix of conservation tools. We look forward to delivering on the NHCP with funding received from Environment and Climate Change Canada through our partners at the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

Our professional biologists, agronomists and community outreach specialists are working hard to find innovative solutions that will help ensure that habitat for the wildlife Canadians value dearly is protected, and the landscapes that we depend on continue to provide good jobs, stable food sources, and ecosystem goods and services, such as clean freshwater. We are as dependent on the functional natural landscapes as our wildlife neighbours.

BANDING TOGETHER

As Canadians, it's going to take all of us working together to address the current biodiversity crisis. Securing habitat for wildlife, especially in places that have already been heavily impacted, will give them the areas they need to adapt to a changing environment.

There is still more work to do. ***For Canada to achieve our biodiversity goals and target of conserving 30 per cent of Canada's land by 2030, ongoing support is needed. Continuing to partner with all who live and work on the landscape to deliver conservation through programs like the NHCP is critical.***



Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) *is the leader in wetland conservation. A registered charity, DUC partners with government, industry, non-profit organizations, Indigenous Peoples and landowners to conserve wetlands that are critical to waterfowl, wildlife and the environment.*

Ducks Unlimited Canada

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