



# Evaluation at a Glance

## Evaluation of the National Wetland Conservation Fund

### About the program

In recognition of the vital role and importance of Canada’s wetlands, the Government of Canada established the National Wetland Conservation Fund (NWCF) in 2014, as part of the National Conservation Plan (NCP). The fund was created as a five-year (2014 to 2019), \$50 million investment to support on-the-ground wetland conservation and restoration activities across Canada, with a focus on working landscapes.

The NWCF is one of seven components of ECCC’s Habitat Conservation Partnerships Program.

**Figure 1: the seven components of ECCC's Habitat Conservation Partnerships Program**



Over the five-year period from fiscal year (FY) 2014 to 2015 to FY 2018 to 2019, ECCC received \$50 million for the NWCF. Typical funding for approved projects ranges from \$50,000 to \$250,000 per project.

In February 2018, ECCC announced its decision to reallocate some of its NWCF funds toward other key departmental priorities, including the recovery of species at risk. As such, there was no NWCF call for project proposals in FY 2018 to 2019. The NWCF will continue to fund the completion of 55 previously approved NWCF projects for FY 2018 to 2019.



**i** The NWCF sunsets on March 31, 2019. ECCC remains committed to the conservation and protection of wetlands across the country through the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. As well, ECCC continues to offer funding, to groups, organizations and individuals, through various programs, for local action projects that protect or conserve our natural environment, including wetlands. Details on the various programs, including the types of activities funded, can be found on the [Environmental funding programs](#) webpage. Further, ECCC will continue to provide the revenue from the sale of the Canadian Wildlife Habitat Conservation Stamp to Wildlife Habitat Canada to implement on the ground wetland conservation projects. The lessons learned found in this report were considered in the implementation of the Canada Nature Fund.

## What the evaluation found

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- The evaluation found a clear and ongoing need for conservation efforts targeting wetlands.
- Overall, the NWCF made progress in restoring and enhancing degraded wetlands, and projects were generally successful in achieving their stated objectives.
- The NWCF demonstrated efficiency in the application process, the selection of high quality proposals, support to project implementation, overall administration and in leveraging funds.
- The timeliness of project approvals was flagged as a key inefficiency, both in terms of the NWCF itself, as well as in the procurement of associated provincial and municipal permits required to complete funded projects. The delays in receiving approval for projects had an impact on the timely completion of projects.
- Wetland restoration and enhancement projects funded by the NWCF provided benefits to biodiversity, habitats and wildlife, including species at risk in some cases, as well as benefits associated with ecological functions.

## Lessons learned

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Based on the analysis of the information collected during the evaluation, the evaluation team developed some lessons learned on performance measurement, the sustainability of conservation gains, the funding application process, and project reporting.

- The development and implementation of a performance measurement strategy, with expected outcomes and targets, will allow the program to track all of its expected outcomes.
- Having appropriate support mechanisms in place is key to ensuring the long-term sustainability of conservation gains.
- The development and implementation of an application process that includes a realistic application timeline and a timely approval process is critical to project implementation.



- A simple, user-friendly project reporting process that ensures the collection of information is needed to be able to demonstrate sound stewardship of public funds and accountability.

### **Management response**

The degradation and loss of wetlands in certain parts of Canada continue to be a conservation challenge, and will continue to be a focus of funding under various initiatives. From FY 2014 to 2015 to FY 2017 to 2018, the National Wetland Conservation Fund (NWCF), an application-based funding initiative, effectively contributed to the restoration and enhancement of degraded wetlands across the country. The ADMs of the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) agree with the evaluation's findings, in particular that the NWCF was successful in building partnerships and engaging Canadians around wetland conservation that will continue beyond the funding period.

While there are no specific recommendations for the NWCF since it is sunsetting in March 2019, the four lessons learned identified in the evaluation are valuable and transferrable to the entire department's Grants and Contributions portfolio. Specific to CWS programming, the branch will consider the lessons learned as it moves forward with implementing the new \$500 million Canada Nature Fund over the next five years. In particular, CWS will take note of the need for the development and implementation of a performance measurement strategy and the timing of launching calls for proposals.

On the whole, the department continues to improve its delivery of Grants and Contributions and in doing so is addressing some of the lessons learned identified through this evaluation. For example, the department recently completed a review of its entire Grants and Contributions portfolio and the department is committed to changing its approach to Grants and Contributions to respond to key challenges: results; innovation; and communication. Focusing on Indigenous, youth, and small and medium enterprises engagement is also part of the new approach. Starting in FY 2018 to 2019, the department is aligning its Grants and Contributions spending to the new Departmental Results Framework, namely Core Responsibilities. This will lead to better integration across all branches and a stronger alignment of all program activities to the department's mandate and priorities. Additionally, the department has recently approved the development of a Grants and Contributions Enterprise Management System. The purpose of this system is to improve applicant and recipient experience by providing an user-friendly online application and reporting tool for grants and contributions programs. This system will be implemented in two phases, with the first phase (the application intake phase) planned for September, 2018 and the second phase (internal management of contribution agreements) targeted for March, 2019.



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## About the evaluation

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The evaluation was conducted by ECCC's Audit and Evaluation Branch in fiscal year 2017–18 and covered the period from FY 2014 to 2015 to FY 2017 to 2018. As the NWCF will sunset on March 31, 2019, the evaluation team examined elements of the initiative that worked well and those that could be improved. While the report does not present any recommendations, the evaluation team developed lessons learned to inform the design and delivery of future, similar initiatives.