



Evaluation of the Habitat Conservation and Protection Program

Environment and Climate Change Canada's
participation in the North American Waterfowl
Management Plan and
the Ramsar Convention

Final Report

August 2025



Cat. No.: En4-780/2025E-PDF
ISBN: 978-0-660-78843-2
EC 25019

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Acknowledgements

The Audit and Evaluation Branch thanks those who contributed to this project and acknowledges the support from Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) representatives who provided input and comments throughout this evaluation.

This report was prepared by the Evaluation Division of the Audit and Evaluation Branch, ECCC.

The report was approved by the Deputy Minister on August 25, 2025.

Accessibility Statement

As of the date of publication, the document has been verified for accessibility.

If you have any questions about this document, please contact us at: audit-evaluation@ec.gc.ca

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CWS	Canadian Wildlife Service
DEJI	Diversity, Equity, Justice, and Inclusion
ECCC	Environment and Climate Change Canada
GBA Plus	Gender-based Analysis Plus
GC	Government of Canada
HCP	Habitat Conservation and Protection Program
HJV	Habitat Joint Venture
NAWCA	North American Wetlands Conservation Act
NAWCC	North American Wetlands Conservation Council
NAWMP	North American Waterfowl Management Plan
U.S.	United States

1. Introduction

The Government of Canada has made several commitments towards protecting biodiversity through policies, funding initiatives, and legislation. These efforts are aimed at safeguarding Canada’s natural environment and the ecosystem services it provides, protecting wildlife habitats and connectivity corridors for species, and creating certainty for natural resource development.

The Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) Habitat Conservation and Protection Program (HCP) aims to secure, protect, connect, improve and restore ecologically sensitive habitat, including wetlands, to contribute to the conservation and protection of migratory birds, species at risk and other wildlife. It aligns with ECCC’s core responsibility to [conserve nature](#).

1.1. Background

The HCP program is nationally led and regionally delivered and provides mechanisms to engage with organizations and individuals. The program’s partners include provincial and territorial governments, landowners, environmental nongovernmental organizations, National Indigenous Organizations and Indigenous nations, governments, and communities, and other stakeholders. This program contributes to fulfilling ECCC’s obligations under the [Species at Risk Act](#), the [Migratory Birds Convention Act](#), and the [Canada Wildlife Act](#), as well as to delivering on the ministerial mandate. The program also contributes to departmental results indicators related to nature conservation: Canada’s wildlife and habitats are conserved and protected; Canada’s species at risk are recovered; and Indigenous peoples are engaged in conservation.

The HCP Program comprises the following 11 components:

- The Protected Areas Program;
- The Ecological Gifts Program;
- The Canada Nature Fund - Natural Heritage Conservation Program;
- The Canada Nature Fund - Target 1 Challenge;
- The Canada Nature Fund - Indigenous led Area Based Conservation Program;
- The Canada Nature Fund - Indigenous Guardians Program;
- The Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund - Indigenous Partnership stream;
- The Marine Conservation Targets Horizontal Initiative;
- ECCC’s participation in the Pathway initiative;

- ECCC’s participation in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada);
- ECCC’s participation in the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance.

This evaluation report presents findings related to ECCC’s participation in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) and the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention).

1.2. Overview of the programs

Canada is home to about 25 percent of the world’s wetlands, covering about 1.25 million square km of its terrestrial area. Wetlands are important, productive ecosystems considered to be one of the world’s most valuable habitat, second only to coral reefs. Not only do they provide important habitats to a wide variety of species such as waterfowl, fish and specialized flora, but they store large amounts of carbon, mitigate floods, and naturally filter pollutants out of the watershed. Wetlands also provide economic benefits as they generate revenue through fishing, hunting, and recreational activities.

According to a 2024 study by the Institute of Sustainable Finance focusing on two natural services provided by wetlands, namely water filtration and carbon sequestration, Canada’s wetlands are estimated to provide natural services worth around \$225 billion per year, or roughly 10 percent of Gross Domestic Product. They have also been shown to reduce the costs associated with wastewater treatment and stormwater surges. A 2017 modelling study in Southern Ontario found that flood damages can be expected to be 29 to 38 percent lower in areas where wetlands are maintained in their natural state.

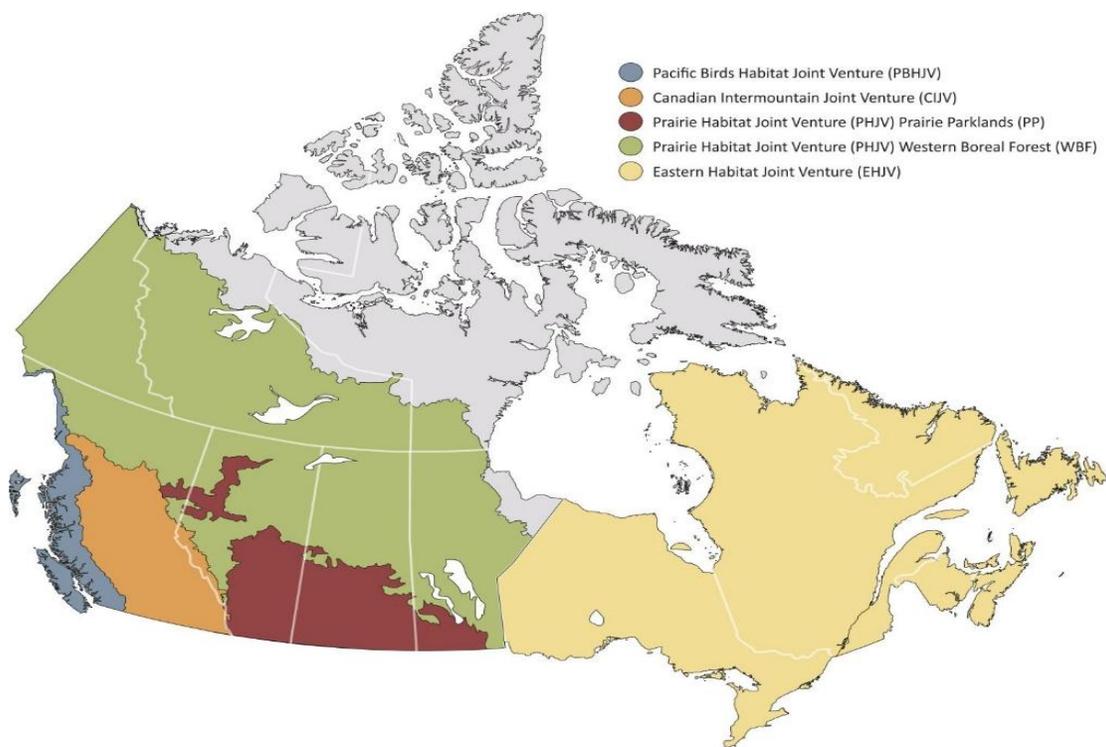
1.2.1. North American Waterfowl Management Plan

The first North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP or the Plan) was signed in 1986 by Canada and the United States (U.S.), with Mexico joining in 1994. The purpose of the Plan was to collaborate on the long-term conservation of ducks, geese, and swans. Although the first iteration of the Plan focused on waterfowl populations in support of hunting, it was recognized early on that the conservation of wetlands and other habitat is key to sustaining these populations. Over time the NAWMP evolved to prioritize wetland conservation activities and increase attention to non-waterfowl birds that benefit from their habitat conservation efforts, namely species of grassland birds, marsh birds, and shorebirds whose populations are in decline.

International coordination and strategic leadership of the NAWMP is spearheaded by the trilateral Plan Committee, which is responsible for updating the Plan every five years. Each member country has six representatives on this committee, with permanent membership reserved for federal wildlife agencies – the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) for Canada.

In Canada, the North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada) ([NAWCC \(Canada\)](#)) coordinates the development and implementation of the NAWMP nationally. At a regional level, Habitat Joint Ventures (HJVs) are responsible for implementing the NAWMP activities including researching, monitoring, and evaluating waterfowl populations, as well as delivering habitat conservation programs. Out of the 22 HJVs that span North America, four fall entirely or almost entirely in Canada (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Map of Canadian Habitat Joint Ventures



Source: [NAWMP Canada](#)

Note: The Prairie Habitat Joint Venture encompasses two regions: the prairie and aspen parklands and the Western Boreal Forest.

In addition, the NAWMP contributes to conservation in Canada by mobilizing funding from conservation partners from the U.S. and Canada, including federal, provincial, territorial, and

state governments, Indigenous peoples, conservation organizations, and private donors. Through grants established under the [North American Wetlands Conservation Act](#) (NAWCA), the federal U.S. government provides foundational funding for approved projects.

1.2.2. Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention)

The [Convention on Wetlands of International Importance](#) (Ramsar Convention) is an international agreement established in 1971 that provides the framework for cooperation for the conservation of the world's wetlands. Every three years, signatories to the Ramsar Convention meet to consider guidance on a range of ongoing and emerging environmental issues, and to agree on actions to implement the Convention for the next triennium. The Strategic Plan contains agreed-upon targets related to the wise use of wetlands that signatory countries are expected to meet. Over the evaluation period, the activities that fulfilled these targets were the focus of the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Canada.

Under the Convention there is a general obligation for the Contracting Parties to promote and support the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local, national, and international cooperation. This includes integrating wetland conservation in national planning, supporting research and the exchange of data and publications regarding wetlands, and cooperating internationally on trans-boundary wetlands.

Since joining the Convention in 1981, [Canada has produced national reports every three years](#) and has been a regular contributor to the operational programs of the Convention, particularly those related to policy development, program assessment, peatlands and carbon conservation, grasslands and wetlands restoration, economic valuation, mitigation issues and other topics. Canada also works with other Ramsar Contracting Parties to implement [UN Convention on Biological Diversity](#) resolutions.

1.2.3. ECCC roles and responsibilities

ECCC is the lead federal department supporting Canada’s participation in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance. For the NAWMP, ECCC plays a role in the implementation and administration of the Plan in Canada. This includes participating in several NAWMP committees including but not limited to:

- The international Plan Committee, which is co-chaired by an ECCC representative;

- The national implementation Council (NAWCC (Canada)), which is co-chaired by an ECCC representative, and;
- The individual Habitat Joint Venture committees, with each committee being chaired or co-chaired by an ECCC representative.

Additionally, ECCC acts as the NAWCC (Canada) Secretariat which supports and facilitates Council business. ECCC also provides financial support for the NAWMP through Contributions funding for conservation activities planned under the NAWMP.

ECCC is the administrative authority responsible for the administration of the Ramsar Convention in Canada. Responsibilities include fulfilling the triennial reporting requirement, and acting as the National Focal Point for Ramsar Convention matters. Canada serves on the Ramsar Standing Committee as the North American representative on a rotating basis with the U.S. and Mexico. Canada also pays annual dues to the Ramsar Convention, and provides voluntary funding for special Ramsar initiatives, on occasion.

Much of the work done to implement the NAWMP and the Ramsar Convention in Canada is done by the CWS Wetlands Office. The Office supports the administration of the 1991 [Federal Policy on Wetland Conservation](#) in Canada and works with other directorates to advance wetland priorities. With regards to the implementation of the NAWMP and the Ramsar Convention in Canada, CWS’s responsibilities, in addition to the ones outlined previously include:

- Coordinating the implementation of some NAMWP contributions;
- Coordinating the NAWMP HJVs; and
- Supporting Ramsar site managers.

1.3. About this evaluation

The evaluation of the HCP is part of ECCC’s [Audit and Evaluation Plan 2022 to 2027](#). It provides an assessment of the results, performance information, and resource allocation for ECCC’s participation in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance.

The evaluation covered the period from 2018-2019 to 2023-2024 and was conducted using the following methodology:

- **File review** including reports, program documents, contribution agreements, backgrounders, and literature reviews (more than 100).
- **Analysis** of program administration and financial data (1,000 data points).
- **Interviews** and informal discussions with program administrators and officials (5).

1.3.1. Limitations

This evaluation has certain limitations that should be kept in mind when interpreting reported observations:

- **NAWMP:** The scope of the evaluation is focused on habitat conservation. It does not extend to initiatives aimed at targeting individual species or populations. Additionally, its efforts are confined to the four Canadian HJVs, which means that Species Joint Ventures are out of scope.
- **Ramsar:** The scope of this evaluation is limited to ECCC’s role as focal point and coordination authority for the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Canada. Ramsar site management responsibilities lie with the landowners. The management of federally owned Ramsar sites that have a federal designation, such as a National Wildlife Area or Migratory Bird Sanctuary, are beyond the scope of this report and these activities are addressed in a separate report specific to the Protected Areas Program. The management of Ramsar sites owned by private entities or by provincial or territorial governments is also beyond the scope of this report.

2. Findings

2.1. Delivery and resources

Key findings: ECCC's involvement in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) includes financial contributions and key implementation roles. Despite challenges in integrating new priorities, the NAWMP supports effective wetland conservation through public-private partnerships and funding from partners. Delivery of the Ramsar Convention in Canada is achieved through Canada’s broader conservation plans and initiatives.

2.1.1. Conservation partners

Canada's participation in the NAWMP and the Ramsar Convention is supported by several conservation partners, including but not limited to:

- Provincial and territorial governments play a role in implementing conservation policies and managing natural resources, including NAWMP habitats and Ramsar sites, contributing financially, and ensuring efforts are tailored to local ecological conditions and community needs.
- Canadian conservation organizations provide funding, expertise, and support for various initiatives, engaging in habitat conservation and restoration projects.
- Other federal departments and agencies support these efforts through research, policy development, site management, and funding.
- Private landowners and donors are essential partners who help bridge funding gaps through donations and enable innovative conservation solutions by participating in voluntary conservation programs.

Additionally, in the case of the NAWMP, U.S. governments and non-government partners collaborate with Canadian counterparts, providing funding, policy support, and by conducting research to advance conservation efforts. Together, these partners ensure the implementation of both the NAWMP and Ramsar Convention, promoting the conservation of vital habitats for waterfowl and wetlands.

2.1.2. Delivery of the Ramsar Convention in Canada

Canada delivers on its commitments under the triennial Ramsar Strategic Plan through its broader conservation plans and initiatives. The CWS Wetlands Office collaborates with other ECCC directorates to ensure that the principles of the wise use of wetlands are incorporated into these conservation plans and strategies. The triennial [Ramsar National Report to COP15](#) lists the following as the five main achievements of the implementation of the Convention:

- The creation of [Canada’s 2030 Nature Strategy](#) which recognizes wetlands as areas of high biodiversity value and that they can provide nature-based solutions through conservation, restoration, enhancement and improved management.
- The implementation of the [NAWMP](#) which is identified as the cornerstone of wetland conservation in Canada.
- The establishment of the [Natural Climate Solutions Fund](#) which supports projects to conserve, restore, and enhance wetlands.
- The launch of the [Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership](#) which aims to accelerate the adoption of beneficial agricultural land management practices by producers. These practices include maintaining and restoring wetlands and native grasslands.
- The launch of the [Aquatic Ecosystems Restoration Fund](#) which will support aquatic restoration projects.

During the evaluation period \$103,460 CAD in HCP contributions funding was spent on the delivery of the Ramsar Convention. This includes \$50,000 CAD in 2018-2019 to support the participation of developing countries in Ramsar COP13, and \$53,460 CAD in 2023-2024 to support the advancement of gender equality, representation, and empowerment within the Ramsar Convention. The management of existing Ramsar sites that fall under federal managerial jurisdiction is also delivered through other conservation programs. For sites with additional designations, site management is delivered by responsible programs. On certain Ramsar sites under provincial responsibility, some of the management work was done through NAWMP funding.

2.1.3. Delivery of the NAWMP in Canada

ECCC plays a key role in the implementation and administration of the NAWMP in Canada. This includes participating in several NAWMP committees, providing support and coordination

to HJV coordinators, and running the Secretariat which coordinates the activities of the NAWCC (Canada). Table 1 presents the expenditures supporting this work.

Table 1: ECCC expenditures for implementing the NAWMP

Expenditure category	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	Total
Salary	\$1.2 M	\$1.2 M	\$1.2 M	\$1.2 M	\$1.1 M	\$0.6 M	\$6.5 M
Operations and maintenance	\$0.1 M	\$0.4 M	\$0.4 M	\$0.4 M	\$0.5 M	\$0.2 M	\$2.0 M
Total	\$1.3 M	\$1.6 M	\$1.6 M	\$1.6 M	\$1.6 M	\$0.8 M	\$8.5 M

Source: Financial information was provided by Wetlands Office administrators.

ECCC provides monetary contributions in support of the NAWMP. This money is used to fund conservation and restoration activities in the HJVs through contribution agreements. From 2018-2019 to 2023-2024, ECCC contributed \$205.4 million in support of the NAWMP. This funding comes primarily from the dedicated NAWMP-Habitat contribution agreements but may also come from other contribution agreements at ECCC. For example, NAWMP activities have been [supported with funding from the Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund](#) and from the [Natural Heritage Conservation Program](#). Table 2 presents the financial contributions supporting this NAWMP implementation in Canada.

The evaluation found that the NAWMP fosters cooperation between key stakeholders across North America, and particularly between the U.S. and Canada. This is demonstrated through the variety of financial contributors to NAWMP activities in Canadian HJVs (see Table 2). Program administrators noted that differences in national priorities posed challenges, but they were addressed through the trilateral governance structure. International cooperation is important for the success of wetland and waterfowl conservation initiatives as birds migrate across international borders.

Collaboration with local conservation partners is also important. The [2018 evaluation of the Habitat Conservation and Partnerships program](#) found that agricultural, forestry, and Indigenous stakeholders were underrepresented in the NAWMP. Since then, actions were taken to engage these groups in the NAWMP implementation in Canada. This commitment to collaboration with stakeholders, both international and domestic, contributes to the partnership model for cooperation, facilitating a [“whole-society approach”](#) to conservation.

Table 2: Financial contributions supporting NAWMP implementation in Canada

Financial supporters	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	Total
ECCC*	\$6.0 M	\$18.9 M	\$15.2 M	\$60.4 M	\$34.7 M	\$70.2 M	\$205.4 M
U.S. federal**	\$31.0 M	\$29.6 M	\$33.0 M	\$32.7 M	\$46.5 M	\$46.7 M	\$219.5 M
U.S. non-federal	\$14.0 M	\$16.3 M	\$12.6 M	\$13.0 M	\$28.3 M	\$28.8 M	\$113 M
GC other	\$1.6 M	\$1.6 M	\$0.9 M	\$1.1 M	\$2.1 M	\$4.2 M	\$11.5 M
Provincial and territorial	\$6.4 M	\$9.0 M	\$8.1 M	\$19.0 M	\$16.6 M	\$26.7 M	\$85.8 M
Canadian other***	\$29.8 M	\$25.8 M	\$36.6 M	\$47.4 M	\$70.5 M	\$48.2 M	\$258.3 M
Total	\$88.8 M	\$101.2 M	\$106.4 M	\$173.6 M	\$198.7 M	\$224.8 M	\$893.5 M

Source: Administrative data provided by Wetlands Office administrators.

Note (*): ECCC contribution includes ECCC expenditures from Table 1.

Note (**): U.S. federal contribution includes matching funds provided by the NAWCA.

Note (***): Canadian other include Indigenous Peoples, corporations, educational institutions, not-for-profits, private donations, and regional & local governments.

2.1.4. U.S. NAWCA funding

The U.S. [North American Wetlands Conservation Act](#) (NAWCA) for wetland conservation provided foundational funding to implement the NAWMP. To secure NAWCA funding, activities proposed under the NAWMP start at the HJV level and flow through an [approval process](#) involving both Canada and the U.S. Proposals are crafted by conservation partners in collaboration with Joint Ventures and regional delivery agencies. NAWCA funding has a one-to-one matching requirement, and leverages additional contributions well beyond the required match.

Between 2018 and 2024, a total of USD 227 million in NAWCA funding and USD 113.5 million in U.S. non-federal matching funds were secured by Canada for NAWCA proposals. ECCC has invested CAD 2.36 million annually through the NAWMP Habitat funding program, with

additional contributions from other sources on an ad hoc basis. Participation in the NAWMP offers good return on investment.

2.2. Results and performance information

Key findings: Activities under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan have positively impacted millions of hectares of priority waterfowl habitat in Canada. Participation under the Ramsar Convention has promoted the integration of wetland protection into national strategies and planning processes. Despite these efforts, habitat loss and degradation continue. The lack of a comprehensive wetland inventory and monitoring data impedes accurate performance measurement. Funding was allocated for 10 years up to 2030-2031 and work is underway to develop a Canadian National Wetlands Inventory.

2.2.1. Stewardship across Canada’s Ramsar sites network

Signatories to the Ramsar Convention are also required to designate at least one Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar site) and ensure its effective management. Canada’s 37 Ramsar Sites cover 13,086,771 hectares and represent all provinces and territories. Canada is home to one of the largest Ramsar sites in the world, the [Queen Maud Gulf \(Ahiak\) Migratory Bird Sanctuary](#) in Nunavut (6,278,200 hectares). The Ramsar site designation is intended to signify the landowner’s acceptance of the site’s critical value and need for conservation, and to foster accountability for the sites’ continued ecological health through the development of a management plan. In Canada, conservation partners work together to designate and manage Ramsar sites (see Table 3). These partners include the Government of Canada, provincial and territorial governments, private citizens, and conservation organizations.

Designation as a Ramsar site offers no legal protection, enforcement mandate, financial support, nor is the development of a management plan mandatory. As of February 2025, 27 Canadian Ramsar sites had a management plan, and of those 21 were being implemented. Some Ramsar sites are also designated as a Migratory Bird Sanctuary, a National Wildlife Area, or a provincial or national park. Overall, 19 Ramsar sites have an additional federal designation, and 13 sites have an additional non-federal designation. These additional designations confer legal protection and provide for regulatory enforcement and for resources towards site management. There have been no new site designations since 2005, and no site expansions since 2012.

Table 3: Count of Ramsar sites by management authority

ECCC	Other federal departments and agencies	Provincial or territorial government	Private organization
16	4	15	2

Source. This information was provided by Wetlands Office program administrators.

Note. Two of the 15 sites listed under “Provincial or territorial government” are jointly managed by a province and a private organization.

2.2.2. Promoting the wise use of wetlands under the Ramsar Convention

The results of Canada’s participation in the Ramsar Convention are less quantifiable than under the NAWMP. Canada is working to meet its Ramsar Convention commitments by focussing on goals set in the Ramsar Strategic Plan. This includes supporting the development and implementation of wetland policy, integrating wetlands into land use planning, and ensuring they are considered in relevant sectoral and budgetary provisions. In the most recent [triennial report](#), Canada reported that actions were taken under the guidance of each of the 19 targets in the Ramsar Strategic Plan.

Although no new Ramsar sites have been designated in Canada since 2005, Sackville (New Brunswick) became North America’s first accredited Wetland City under the Convention in 2022 for its “exceptional efforts to safeguard urban wetlands for people and nature” ([Ducks Unlimited Canada](#)). The Wetland City accreditation is intended to encourage cities near to and dependent on wetlands to highlight the value of these ecosystems and strengthen public support for conservation. Wetlands near large urban centers are particularly vulnerable: less than 0.2 percent of Canada's wetlands remaining within 40 km of urban centers, and between 80 to 98 percent of wetlands in or near major urban areas have been lost.

In its most recent triennial report to the Ramsar Convention, Canada has identified a lack of widespread public understanding and support for the responsible use and management of wetlands to be an ongoing challenge in wetland conservation. The Wetland City accreditation aims to address both these challenges as the international aspect and the prestige of a United Nations related designation attracts public and political attention to these areas, supporting cities in their efforts to safeguard urban wetlands.

2.2.3. Conserved and managed habitats under the NAWMP

Under the NAWMP, the expected results relate to the securement, the influence and enhancement of hectares of protected lands, as defined below:

- **Securement:** Involves the protection of habitat through land title transfer or binding legal agreements with landowners (10-year minimum).
- **Influence:** Involves direct actions that protect or enhance habitat without legal or binding agreements. These actions result in land-use change.
- **Enhancement:** Involves actions that increase habitat carrying capacity for waterfowl and other wildlife.

Table 4 shows the total hectares of land impacted by NAWMP activities from 2018-2019 to 2023-2024. Some NAWMP activities were conducted on Ramsar sites.

Table 4: Habitat impacted by activities under the NAWMP in Canada

Time period	Habitat secured (hectares)	Habitat influenced (hectares)	Habitat enhanced (hectares)
1986-2018	9.0 M	67.5 M	1.5 M
2019-2024	0.7 M	28.5 M	0.2 M
Total	9.7 M	96.0 M	1.7 M

Source: Performance data extracted from NAWMP [Habitat Matters reports](#).

2.2.4. Impacts on bird populations

The [2024 report on the State of Canada’s Birds](#) showed that population health varies by species group¹ and overall more bird species have decreased in population than increased. However, waterfowl populations are up 46 percent since 1970, having recovered from past

¹ The report presents findings by the following bird species groupings: waterfowl, birds of prey, wetland birds, marine birds, forest birds, arctic birds, long-distance migrants, shorebirds, aerial insectivores, and grassland birds.

declines thanks to informed, targeted, and sustained conservation action. Activities under the NAWMP have contributed to these results, but it is not possible to quantify their contribution.

Moreover, the evaluation found that work undertaken under NAWMP has been fundamental in advancing knowledge on habitat drivers of waterfowl populations. Documentary evidence and key informants indicated that HJVs use data they have collected about regional wildlife, habitats, and ecosystems as the foundation to their conservation work. This is important because efforts to address declines in bird populations have been constrained by limited availability of localized population data. A [2025 study](#) demonstrated the importance of this “fine-scale information” when they found that 97 percent of species showed separate areas of significantly increasing and decreasing populations and that populations tended to decline most steeply where species were most abundant. Identifying these micro-trends can help prioritize recovery efforts and guide conservation action.

2.2.5. Performance information

Every triennium, ECCC prepares a [national report](#) that measures Canada’s progress against the Ramsar Strategic Plan. Similarly, NAWMP publishes an [annual report](#) on the implementation of the Plan in Canada. However, there is no mandatory reporting requirement for HJVs under the NAWMP or in ECCC’s corporate performance information profiles. Because of this, program administrators have confirmed it is a challenge to provide this information to senior management upon request, in support of resource use monitoring and decision-making.

The Federal Policy on Wetland Conservation outlines seven strategies for the use and management of wetlands. [Strategy six](#) revolves around ensuring a sound scientific basis for policy, including that the federal government will support the development of the scientific information necessary to make decisions about wetlands.

In 2002 Ducks Unlimited Canada helped establish the Canadian Wetland Inventory, in collaboration with ECCC, to inventory millions of acres of wetlands across Canada using aerial photography and satellite imagery. Based on this early work, [wetlands extent across the national territory](#) was last measured in 2010, as the proportion of wetland in each 25 km by 25 km grid cell.

Over the evaluated period, Canada did not have a comprehensive and up to date national inventory of wetlands, as a result, there is a lack of current information about the extent, quality, and ecological properties of wetlands in Canada. This hinders accounting of ongoing habitat change, degradation, and loss. It also makes it difficult to assess the contributions of

NAWMP conservation and restoration activities to halting and reversing biodiversity loss in Canada.

Funded over 10 years from 2021-2022 to 2030-2031, work is underway to develop a [Canadian National Wetlands Inventory](#), which will compile, validate, and publish existing best-available wetlands mapping as well as ancillary ground data into a single, standardized, publicly available, national geodatabase. ECCC plans to use this data to train artificial intelligence models that analyze satellite images and create maps predicting where wetlands are. This will help track how wetlands change over time across Canada.

2.3. Relevance and alignment

Key findings: ECCC’s participation in the Ramsar Convention is aligned with its mandate. Participation in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan is also aligned and has further contributed to ECCC’s mandate to conserve nature by safeguarding and rehabilitating wetlands. Despite these efforts, habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation are ongoing. Additionally, climate change is an emergent threat to conservation values and the lack of baseline data on the extent of wetlands in Canada poses significant challenges in addressing climate change impacts and accurately assessing the full extent of conservation effort results.

Over the evaluated period, activities under the NAWMP have contributed to slowing wetland loss and degradation by safeguarding and rehabilitating wetlands, creating conservation agreements, and guiding the stewardship efforts of landowners, land managers, and conservation organizations. Canada’s participation and leadership in the NAWMP supports the conservation and restoration of ecologically important wetlands, associated upland habitat, and waterfowl populations in Canada, and is aligned with ECCC’s mandate to conserve nature.

Canada’s ongoing participation in the Ramsar Convention is aligned with ECCC’s mandate to conserve nature through the promotion of the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. It also enables Canada’s participation in international dialogue pertaining to wetlands. As Canada contains a quarter of the world’s remaining wetlands, these discussions are relevant to Canada. Moreover, as outlined in the recent [triennial report](#), the broader conservation initiatives that Canada is spearheading or participating in are aligned with the goals of the Ramsar Convention to promote the wise use of wetlands, including but not limited

to the Canada’s 2030 Nature Strategy, the NAWMP, the Natural Climate Solutions Fund, and the Aquatic Ecosystems Restoration Fund.

2.3.1. Climate change risks

Since Canada began participating in the NAWMP and the Ramsar Convention in the 1980’s the challenges facing wetland conservation have evolved. Climate change is an emergent and important threat to current conservation efforts. The evaluation found that the NAWMP had no centralized long-term planning for the impacts of climate change. This is important because entire habitats and their ecologies are at risk due to rising sea levels, changing salinity, higher mean temperatures, altered precipitation patterns, and extreme heat events. The [2024 NAWMP Update](#) highlighted climate change as a priority and recommended including climate science in action plans.

Additionally, the lack of baseline data on the extent, quality, and ecological characteristics of wetlands in Canada poses significant challenges in addressing climate change impacts. Without this foundational information, it is difficult to track changes over time, identify trends, and understand the specific vulnerabilities of different wetland types. Baseline data is important for developing effective management and conservation strategies, as it allows for the assessment of how climate change is altering hydrology, species distributions, and ecological processes. Moreover, wetlands play a vital role in carbon sequestration and flood mitigation, and understanding their current state is essential for leveraging these benefits in climate adaptation efforts.

2.3.2. Halting and reversing biodiversity loss

Since the [2018 evaluation of the Habitat Conservation Partnerships Program](#), work has been done to align Canada’s participation and leadership in the NAWMP and the Ramsar Convention with Canada’s broader conservation goals. For example, participation in these international agreements was integrated into Canada’s 2030 Nature Strategy under [Target 2](#) (commitment to restore 30 percent of areas of degraded ecosystem) and [Target 3](#) (commitment to ensure 30 percent of Canadian territory is conserved).

Program administrators indicated that the Ramsar site designation does not provide tangible benefits for conservation as it does not add value to the regulatory administration of protected or conserved areas, nor does it guarantee resources for ongoing monitoring and management. Over time, Canada’s participation in the Convention shifted away from a focus on establishing new Ramsar sites towards prioritizing the wise use of wetlands through other conservation

initiatives and plans such as the NAWMP, other HCP programs, and Canada’s 2030 Nature Strategy.

Despite the successful conservation and management of millions of hectares under the Plan, the [2024 Update](#) highlights that waterfowl habitat losses continue at scales and rates that challenge the NAWMP’s goal to sustain continental waterfowl populations. Beyond direct loss, wetlands are also being degraded, fragmented, and losing their ecological functions due to changes in water flow, agricultural and urban development, pollution, invasive species, recreational activities, and grazing. Additionally, climate change introduces impacts that may exacerbate the challenges the NAWMP faces in sustaining habitats.

Habitat loss is especially acute in the Northern Great Plains, where a significant proportion of continental waterfowl are produced annually. Across the Great Plains, grassland loss approaches 70 percent, with 32 million acres lost since 2012, and 1.6 million acres lost in 2021 alone, according to a [2023 report](#). Loss of grasslands in the Prairie Pothole (US) and Prairie Habitat (Canada) Joint Ventures² has been estimated to occur at an annual rate of 0.23 percent. According to a [2019 study](#), undisturbed grassland is projected to be lost at a rate 7 to 25 times faster than rates of protection, over the next decade. The rate of wetland loss is not known for other regions across the country, due to longstanding gaps in wetland inventory and monitoring data.

According to the Plan Committee co-chairs, the future success of waterfowl conservation in North America hinges on the Plan’s ability to achieve conservation at a scale that reverses habitat loss, through both securement and restoration. Currently, the results of ECCC’s participation in both the NAWMP and the Ramsar Convention only contributes minimally to the achievement of this goal. It should be noted that in addition to program level performance improvements, achievement of conservation at scale will require a “whole-society” approach.

2.3.3. Gender-Based Analysis Plus

Canada's participation in the Ramsar Convention and the NAWMP has incorporated Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) into ongoing program planning, management, and delivery. The NAWMP has updated its process to include a GBA Plus review every five years, ensuring that diversity, equity, justice, and inclusion (DEJI) principles are embedded in its overarching

² The Prairie Pothole Region is a large area of the northern Great Plains that contains thousands of shallow, seasonal wetlands known as potholes.

strategy. NAWCC (Canada) also drafted a DEJI Team Charter in March 2022. This charter aims to advocate for the proactive incorporation of DEJI principles in NAWCC (Canada), its staff, and the HJVs' conservation programs and decision-making processes.

The DEJI Team provides recommendations on how NAWCC (Canada) can meaningfully embed these principles into their practices, commitments, strategic planning, granting system, and policies. Additionally, the Ramsar Convention is coordinating its own approach to integrate these principles. For example, the next triennial strategic plan is intended to go through a GBA Plus review and Canadian contribution funding enabled the Ramsar Secretariat to advance gender equality, representation, and empowerment within the Convention by documenting and disseminating the stories of women in wetland conservation.

Furthermore, ECCC’s Wetlands Office has prioritized increasing diversity and inclusion and Indigenous engagement in wetlands programming. This commitment is reflected in their annual priorities and efforts to enhance Indigenous engagement ahead of meetings of the Ramsar Convention. The Wetlands Office’s approach to reconciliation has been to engage Indigenous partners to better address their needs and perspectives in wetland conservation efforts while respecting their priorities and capacities. The Métis National Council was also an official observer at the 14th meeting of the Ramsar Convention.

3. Conclusion

Canada’s participation in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the Ramsar Convention reflects a long-standing commitment to wetland conservation, biodiversity protection, and international cooperation. Over the evaluation period, these frameworks have enabled significant conservation outcomes, particularly through the NAWMP, which has mobilized over \$900 million in funding and positively impacted more than 100 million hectares of habitat through securement, enhancement, and influence activities. These efforts have contributed to measurable improvements in waterfowl populations and have advanced scientific understanding of habitat dynamics. Together, these initiatives contribute to Canada’s broader conservation goals, including commitments under the 2030 Nature Strategy.

The NAWMP’s strength lies in its collaborative model, bringing together federal, provincial, territorial, state, Indigenous, and private partners across North America. This partnership approach has fostered a “whole-society” commitment to conservation, leveraging Canadian and U.S. resources and expertise. In contrast, Canada’s engagement with the Ramsar Convention has been more symbolic than operational. While the Convention provides a

valuable international platform for dialogue and awareness, its practical impact on wetland protection in Canada is limited. Active participation in the Convention also aligns with and supports Canada’s other related international commitments, such as the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) and the [Arctic Council's conservation priorities](#).

Looking ahead, continued efforts are needed to address the growing pressures on wetland ecosystems. Current and expected climate change impacts on ecosystems also demand dedicated attention. Integrating climate resilience into NAWMP action plans and accelerating the development of the Canadian National Wetlands Inventory are important next steps. Given the uncertain future of the NAWMP and ongoing work at ECCC on the Canadian National Wetlands Inventory, no recommendations are made to senior management.