

April 15, 2010

To: NAWMP Revision Committee

From: John Devney, Delta Waterfowl Foundation

Subject: NAWMP Revision

Thank you for the opportunity to provide Delta Waterfowl's perspectives as it relates to the revision of the Plan by the Committee. Past iterations of the Plan have afforded a meaningful way to engage a wide array of stakeholders to ensure that the Plan's goals, objectives and strategy continue to advance the cause of waterfowl conservation across the continent. The adaptive nature of the Plan is one of its core strengths. The ability to capitalize on learning from past experiences, recognizing knowledge gaps and formulating strategies while acknowledging uncertainty ensures that the Plan can be a living document that makes it much more effective than a static strategy. We applaud the regular revisiting of the Plan and the Committee's work in this regard.

Below please find Delta's commentary.

### **I. Waterfowlers as the core clients of the Plan**

Delta heartily endorses the Plan explicitly acknowledging that waterfowlers are the principal constituency and beneficiary of NAWMP programming. As such, ensuring abundant waterfowl populations for the benefit of waterfowlers and seeking to ensure the future of waterfowling should be central to discussions in this iteration of the Plan. This affirmation by the Plan is a huge step forward, in our view, to drive the process together with the waterfowl hunters who continue to be the most significant supporters of the Plan's work.

Delta Waterfowl would like the Committee to consider the following specific items that we think will help the Plan better serve the waterfowling community:

- A. A mechanism through the Plan revision process to accommodate programming and actions aimed at recruitment of hunters would be beneficial.
- B. As access continues to be one of the most critical factors facing recruitment and retention of waterfowlers, Plan programming could yield important public access for waterfowlers if investments in public trust resources (state and federal refuges, state wildlife management areas, walk in areas, lands acquired by Plan partners, etc) were prioritized and access provided. While likely a challenge in Plan programming in the breeding grounds, many high density waterfowl hunter areas correspond with key staging and wintering habitats and as such could yield both biological requirements and a pressing need for waterfowlers. One example of such an approach could be for projects yielding public hunting access to receive additional scoring and NAWCA grants.

## **II. A Greater Focus on the U.S. Breeding Grounds**

Delta urges the Committee to continue to focus the Plan on addressing the pressing habitat challenges on the breeding grounds. Research has confirmed that breeding ground processes are the primary limiting factor for most duck species. Recent trends in the U.S. prairies indicate waning participation in CRP, losses of native grasslands and tenuous protections for small isolated wetlands. Certainly success on the breeding grounds will equate to reaching the Plan's goals for continental duck populations. Delta Waterfowl requests the Committee to evaluate the following:

- A. While chronically being “match starved,” the U.S. Prairie Pothole Region is a region of critical importance to North American duck populations. Recent legislative changes have loosened the match requirements for NAWCA dollars transferred to Canada and this may be the catalyst for considering adjustments to match requirements for the U.S. prairies. PPJV partners have identified significant acreages for conservation via easements, yet dollars remain scarce to take advantage of the opportunity for significant conservation achievement. Pursuing a new strategy, as the Canadian partners did, may yield an increase in NAWCA funding, resultant progress by the Joint Venture and important habitats secured in perpetuity.
- B. We urge the Committee to re-engage the discussion in regards to the distribution of duck stamp dollars to the U.S. breeding grounds. This action would allow the FWS to significantly increase their scope of work to conserve wetland and grassland habitat.

## **III. A New Look at the Canadian Challenge**

As evidenced by the most recent Continental Assessment, the Plan still has a tremendous amount of work to be done across the Canadian breeding grounds to meet its originally stated goals. Habitat losses, especially those of wetlands, and poor production continue to plague the Plan's conservation efforts. Unfortunately, while gains have been made, incremental impact has been muted by ongoing losses. We request that the Committee consider the following:

- A. The loss of small wetlands in Canada continues to erode the carrying capacity and duck production potential of the region. And while progress has been made on this important effort, wetland easements on small wetlands continue to represent only a mere fraction of the NAWMP actions in prairie Canada. We urge the Committee to place greater emphasis on the conservation of small wetlands, including temporary and seasonal basins, in prairie Canada in the next iteration. It is especially critical to conserve isolated wetlands embedded in cropland as these wetlands are vulnerable to drainage and are currently being overlooked. We

believe the approaches to the delivery of easements in Canada is a current matter of debate at the JV level and should be evaluated by the Plan Committee.

- B. Recent actions have provided the use of Canadian money as eligible match. This may mean a broader range of partners contributing to Plan programming. As such, we request that a ranking and scoring process be established in Canada similar to those used by JV's across the U.S.
- C. As documented in the Continental Assessment, there remains a major challenge in tracking progress towards habitat goals across the Canadian prairies. We believe a governmental agency (likely CWS) should be made responsible for maintaining the record keeping and management information of Plan projects. Similar to the function that the HAPET teams play in the U.S., this structure would provide a great planning tool for all of the partners and ensure new planning would be based on the best available information.

#### **IV. Policy and Agriculture** (Integrating the perspective of agriculture in planning and delivery)

In recent iterations, the Plan has continued to emphasize the importance of policy work to provide the foundation for enhancing habitat at the landscape scale. Delta appreciates this acknowledgement and asks that such perspective is included in the forthcoming revision. It is abundantly clear that in many landscapes (especially those on the breeding grounds), Plan direct programming on its own can simply not affect a large enough land mass to have the desired population level effect. In order to achieve our goals, policy perspectives from across the spectrum of partners should be considered and supported by the respective JV's. We urge the Committee to pursue the following as it relates to policy work:

- A. Develop a greater awareness and appreciation of the perspective of the farmer and rancher by all stakeholders, not only in developing direct programming, but also in regards to policy development. In many instances, actions taken by the conservation community have met with significant opposition by producers, agricultural groups and rural communities. The result is an impediment for developing partnerships for achieving direct programming goals on private lands as well as a barrier in policy innovation. We believe effectively engaging and integrating producers in the planning and delivery of conservation is our only legitimate hope for habitat change at the landscape scale.
- B. Undertake comprehensive review (potential human dimensions research) of the concerns, perspectives and attitudes of landowners and local communities towards past and current conservation actions (especially on the prairies). This information is critical in potentially overcoming misconceptions or altering programming to achieve meaningful impact.

## **V. A Focus on Outcomes**

A great deal of emphasis has emerged in recent Plan's in regards to the adaptive process by which Plan programming is tested, refined and delivered. This is one of the Plan's great strengths. However, assessing Plan's success by measuring impact on vital rates has been elusive in many instances. While we certainly understand the difficulty in measuring vital rate response for all actions, there are certainly examples where vital rate assessment is critical in ensuring success or providing the impetus for program alterations. Duck production metrics have been measured through a variety of research, evaluation and other means and should play a critical role in measuring the success of our conservation actions moving forward.

## **VI. Expanding the Partnership**

The successes of the Plan to date have largely been built on the strength of the broad partnership based around common objectives. We urge the Committee to renew the involvement of State, Provincial and Federal duck managers into the JV's and ultimately the Plan process as these men and women represent a vast pool of experience and oftentimes have close relationships with the public of waterfowlers who we are serving through Plan activities.

From all of us at Delta, thank you for eliciting our perspective and considering our input. We believe the process undertaken in the revision is a great opportunity to secure a brighter future for ducks and duck hunters across North America. We believe that with the challenging fiscal environment we all face, the role of partnership and leveraging the value of all individual partners is central in accomplishing great things for waterfowl and our constituents. In addition, we see this revision as an opportune time for Delta to become increasingly involved in the Plan process and at the JV level. We welcome any further opportunity to be involved in the revision or any other manner that will serve the Plan process.