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CPW News Release

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Colorado Parks and Wildlife celebrates 30 years of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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Photo of wetlands at Elliott State Wildlife Area courtesy of Ducks Unlimited.

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Colorado Parks and Wildlife celebrates 30 years of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act

DENVER, Colo. - Colorado Parks and Wildlife is celebrating 30 years of the [North American Wetlands Conservation Act](#) this month. NAWCA, signed in December 1989, provides financial support for waterfowl habitat that also supports a multitude of other wetland-related wildlife species. NAWCA provides matching grants to wetlands conservation projects in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Over the past three decades, the acquisition and restoration of wetland habitat have provided healthy wetlands where:

- waterfowl populations have grown,
- waterways and water sources are cleaner,
- and recreation opportunities (birding, hunting, hiking and boating) have all increased.

NAWCA grants increase bird populations and wetland habitat, while supporting local economies and American traditions such as hunting, fishing, bird watching, family farming, and cattle ranching. Wetlands protected by NAWCA provide valuable benefits such as flood control, reducing coastal erosion, improving water and air quality, and recharging groundwater.

In the past two decades alone, NAWCA has funded over 2,950 projects totaling \$1.73 billion in grants. More than 6,200 partners have contributed another \$3.57 billion in matching funds to affect 30 million acres of habitat.

Since it began 30 years ago, NAWCA funds have contributed \$25 million to Colorado's wetlands.

"Colorado Parks and Wildlife's Colorado Wetlands for Wildlife Program has been able to leverage annual grant funding from Great Outdoors Colorado to expand the scope of projects in Colorado that are eligible for matching grant funding under NAWCA," said CPW Wetlands Program Coordinator Brian Sullivan. "These funds are critical to our ability to conserve wetlands in Colorado."

"Funding from the North American Wetland Conservation Act was critical to the success of our Rio Grande Initiative to protect 25,000 acres of private ranchland along the Rio Grande and its tributaries," said Allen Law, Executive Director of the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust. "Conservation easements on these ranches helped our agricultural community while permanently protecting thousands of acres of Colorado's most resilient and important wetlands."

Below are some examples of NAWCA-funded projects in Colorado

Elliott State Wildlife Area Shallow Water Wetlands - Completed September 2018

Elliott State Wildlife Area (SWA), adjacent to the South Platte River near Brush, Colorado is a complex of numerous shallow wetlands that are flooded in the spring and fall utilizing Union Ditch water rights for migratory bird habitat and fall public recreation. Unfortunately, many of the basins contained deep, scoured areas that tended to pool deep water, which then limited the capacity of the entire flow-thru complex and greatly hampered bird and hunter use.

Ducks Unlimited, Inc. (DU) utilized their professional expertise to engineer and regrade 15 of the existing basins, amounting to roughly 200 acres of wetlands. For this project, DU developed a professional engineering plan set that established ideal grading across 15 of the basins, amounting to roughly 200 acres of wetlands. DU then bid, contracted, and managed heavy equipment operators to fill and redistribute soil in the basins in order to disperse water better and provide additional flooded habitat.

CPW staff also worked to refurbish the water delivery ditch and diversion structures, and improve the water management structures between basins. NAWCA funds of more than \$150,000 secured by DU were matched by CPW and Great Outdoors Colorado contributions of nearly \$75,000 to enable this project.

The benefits of this partnership project are widespread, including increased habitat acres, higher quality recreation opportunities, more efficient water use and improved management capacity.

Cross Arrow Ranch Conservation Easement - Completed September 2009

Lying at the confluence of the Rio Grande and Conejos River, the Cross Arrow Ranch conservation easement held by the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RiGHT) protected 3,238 acres of productive ranchlands along with senior water rights. Over 2,000 acres of this property are wetlands, which provide habitat for a wide variety of migratory birds like waterfowl, sandhill cranes, and the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher.

Conservation easements are important to wetland conservation in the San Luis Valley because over 90% of wetlands regionally are on private lands. Similarly, the most resilient wetlands are on private lands because senior water rights and flood irrigation boost wetland function, especially during drought years. Conservation easements protect these critical habitats from fragmentation, water export, and residential development.

To preserve the wetlands on this spectacular ranch forever, NAWCA funding secured by RiGHT was matched by generous contributions from the landowners, Great Outdoors Colorado, and the Nature Conservancy.

Learn more about the 30th anniversary of the North America Wetlands Conservation Act by visiting nawmp.org/nawca30.

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CPW is an enterprise agency, relying primarily on license sales, state parks fees and registration fees to support its operations, including: 41 state parks and more than 350 wildlife areas covering approximately 900,000 acres, management of fishing and hunting, wildlife watching, camping, motorized and non-motorized trails, boating and outdoor education. CPW's work contributes approximately \$6 billion in total economic impact annually throughout Colorado.



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