

Conservation dollars on the ground



The North American Wetlands Conservation Act, or NAWCA, turns 30 this year. "It's all about partnerships," says Wendy Jackson, executive vice president of the Land Trust Alliance, who serves on the North American Wetlands Conservation Council. The matching grants program, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, helps migratory birds and other wetland wildlife in the United States, Mexico and Canada.

The accredited New Mexico Land Conservancy received a NAWCA grant in 2018 to restore and protect more than 3,500 acres of land in the heart of the southern shortgrass prairie in northeastern New Mexico.

The prairie represents one of the last remaining intact, landscape-scale grasslands left in North America – critical habitat for grassland birds, many of whose species have declined more than 70% since the 1950s. With the seasonal playa lakes scattered across this landscape, the grasslands also serve as a kind of "wetlands complex," essential stopover habitat for birds as they migrate between breeding and wintering grounds. "That's all the more important because of the scarce water resources within the region," says Connor Jandreau, conservation project manager for NMLC.

"We have an opportunity working with ranchers and others in this region who recognize the importance of this habitat and their role as stewards, and who are willing to support through matching funds and volunteer hours to help get conservation dollars on the ground," says Jandreau.

The NAWCA grant included seven partners (with NMLC and Fish and Wildlife): Union Land and Grazing Company (Fort Union Ranch), Hermit's Peak Watershed Alliance, Ducks Unlimited (accredited), Rio Grande Return and the Playa Lakes Joint Venture/ConocoPhillips.

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