



Our continent's best-kept habitat conservation success secret

A LOOK BACK ON 30 (PLUS) YEARS OF SUCCESSFUL WATERFOWL CONSERVATION, THANKS TO A CROSS-BORDER PARTNERSHIP MODEL.

It's 1991 and Brett Calverley's green Chevy is bouncing along the dusty grid roads that slice through the knob and kettle landscape of the Buffalo Lake Moraine area of Alberta. Calverley's on the hunt for quarter sections (160 acres) of land, fresh to the market.

That land—prime nesting habitat for migrating waterfowl—was in desperate need of saving.

Fortunately, Calverley had the financial clout of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) in his back pocket as he drove along. The NAWMP is a remarkable example of international, inter-governmental, private sector and not-for-profit collaboration that provides long-term protection of wetland and associated upland habitats needed by the continent's waterfowl and other migratory birds.

Accompanied by a land agent, Calverley was fuelled by a youthful belief that he was changing

the world, one plot of land at a time. And he had a new computer model that told him which land purchases and leases would provide the biggest bang for the ducks.

"It was exciting because everything was so new," recalls Calverley. "What we were doing was going to solve the continent's waterfowl productivity issues."

Calverley was a Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) habitat securement specialist and coordinator of the NAWMP "First Step Project" in Alberta. His delivery of these initial NAWMP implementation efforts in the Buffalo Hills Moraine was one of the three such projects introduced in each of the Prairie provinces.

"We had so many stakeholders in Canada and the U.S. who were keen to see us be successful," says Calverley. "I was out in the field every day, but there were also a lot of meetings. And there was a lot of planning for the bigger

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picture going on at the same time."

When NAWMP was formed in 1986, waterfowl habitat was being drained, destroyed or polluted at an alarming rate.

The U.S. government responded by enacting the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) in 1989 to provide federal cost-share funding to support NAWMP. Those matching dollars came from a variety of Canadian federal and provincial bodies and private sector donations, enabling groups like DUC to seek out and save valuable wetlands. In Alberta, DUC staffers used software models that pinpointed the land most likely to help them hit the target of the NAWMP. That goal? To return waterfowl numbers to the levels they were in the 1970s.

Calverley already had experience trying to rescue at-risk upland and breeding grounds. In the mid-1980s he was part of a small wetlands

pilot project in Alberta. That project saw Calverley knocking on farmhouse doors around towns like Stettler and Viking to encourage farmers to voluntarily change their farming practices or sign on to a 20-year easement on the land to keep it safe for waterfowl.

"Back then we had no money to offer," he recalls. "What the pilot taught us, which was extremely valuable insight for the NAWMP, was that doing it piecemeal, without dollars, wasn't going to work. We needed a better solution," he says.

NAWCA turned out to be just that. Following the success of the First Step Projects, which demonstrated that Canadian and American agencies could partner and provide funds to secure strategic plots of land and save them from degradation or disappearance, became the model from which future NAWCA dollars could flow.

It's an international waterfowl conservation model that has support to this day, 30 years on.

When he looks back, Calverley, now retired, thinks that his role in implementation of the

NAWMP was one of the best things he's done. Why? "Because the plan worked," he says. For him, the secret of the plan's success was the partnerships. "The biggest thing I learned, and it was a surprise to me, was how important strong partnerships and listening to everyone's needs were."

Turns out those partnerships saved the day for ducks, despite the bumpy roads Calverley had to travel. "I feel like the plan is being successful, and we're on the right track and we're doing the right things."

NAWCA BY THE NUMBERS

➕ NAWCA represents a sound investment of limited federal dollars, as each dollar must be matched at least one to one. Funds are often doubled or tripled at the local level.

➕ NAWCA grants totalling more than US\$1.7 billion have leveraged more than US\$5.0 billion for NAWCA projects through both matching and non-matching funds.

➕ To date, NAWCA has helped to fund more than 2,900 projects on more than 30 million acres of wetlands and associated uplands across North America.

➕ More than 6,000 partners, including private landowners, industry and state governments have worked together to conserve wildlife habitat through NAWCA grants.

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