

A 2023 Survey of Organizations in Support of the 2024 Update of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan

**FINAL REPORT
Update Steering Committee
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Submitted by D.J. Case & Associates

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As part of the assessment of the NAWMP 2024 Update, a qualitative survey was sent to waterfowl and wetland conservation stakeholders in North America. This summary is intended to inform discussions of the Update Steering Committee.

The Organizational survey was an open-ended, qualitative survey, designed and conducted in the same manner as the 2017 organizational survey. Requests were sent to representatives of 102 organizations. These organizations included state and federal agencies and conservation not-for-profits across North America. A total of 20 responded to the survey, though respondents did not always answer all questions. Due to the qualitative nature of the survey and the response rate, it is important to not treat the information as quantitative data. Rather, here we provide a summary of the responses to each of the questions posed to reveal important information about the direction and concerns of NAWMP related organizations that responded to this survey request.

Results

Respondents included representatives from JVs, organizations, and agencies. The survey and email invitation to participate can be found in the appendix of this document. Summaries of responses are provided below for each of the qualitative questions asked.

Has your organization changed the way it operates in response to the 2018 NAWMP update? (Q3)

Many of the responses mentioned adding an emphasis on people to their operations. This could mean now employing social scientists, including HD work in their projects, providing educational opportunities, reaching out more to groups who are underrepresented in conservation, or having more focus on communication efforts.

A few of the respondents mentioned they had added some focus on the training and recruitment of future waterfowl professionals, creating more specific geographic foci, and creating more species-specific foci. A few respondents said that nothing had really changed in response to the 2018 NAWMP update.

Has your organization engaged new or more diverse stakeholders or partners in response to the 2018 NAWMP update? If yes, please provide some examples of these outreach efforts. If no, please indicate none. (Q5)

While most said they were reaching out to more diverse stakeholders, they also often noted it was not in direct response to the 2018 update and that there are many reasons beyond NAWMP to diversify their stakeholders and partners. About a quarter of the respondents indicated this was not something their organization had done.

Some of the examples provided include water focused offices and organizations (such as ground water management districts, state and regional water offices), Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, more

local conservation organizations, ecosystem services focused groups, engineering groups, land policy organizations, agricultural representatives, and Indigenous Peoples.

Overall, how has your organization been involved in addressing the 2018 NAWMP update recommendation #1: focus conservation actions on waterfowl habitat and population management objectives and incorporate social science into planning and program delivery? (Action(s) taken, Stakeholders impacted, and Results of Action(s)) (Q7_1, 2, 3)

As noted in the summary of Q3, many of the respondents noted the inclusion of social science in their activities in response to the 2018 NAWMP update. Some of the specific actions taken included hiring social scientists, working with private landowners and Indigenous communities, conducting surveys of citizens, landowners, or hunters, and creating management initiatives that were responsive to these surveys and feedback, or creating new committees focused on HD.

Stakeholders impacted by these actions often included the full suite of organizations' stakeholders. Responses ranged from "all Canadians" to "waterfowl hunters" to "landowners" to government and non-governmental organizations.

Some examples of actions taken, included: land securement, wetland enhancements, increased investment in waterfowl habitats, money raised or new funding partners found, perceptions of more awareness of things like ecosystem services among stakeholders, and management decisions responsive to survey input – such as changing hunting season dates.

Overall, how has your organization been involved in addressing the 2018 NAWMP update recommendation #2: help people understand the opportunities for conservation and outdoor recreation resulting from NAWMP and how society benefits from waterfowl habitat? (Action(s) taken, Stakeholders impacted, and Results of Action(s)) (Q8_1, 2, 3)

Primary actions in response to recommendation #2 dealt with education and outreach initiatives. Several respondents stated they were using websites, social media, or other outreach materials to help people understand these connections. There were a few respondents who said they did not know of any actions their organization had specifically taken in response to the 2018 NAWMP update. Actions impacted a variety of stakeholders, reflective of organizations' missions, including the public, visitors, water users, private landowners, and other not-for-profits. From these actions, some respondents reported perceptions of greater support (at times specifically from non-traditional conservationists), increased knowledge of stakeholders, and more impactful accomplishments due to the increased awareness and support.

Overall, how has your organization been involved in addressing the 2018 NAWMP update recommendation #3: compel people to take action to conserve waterfowl habitat? (Action(s) taken, Stakeholders impacted, and Results of Action(s)) (Q9_1, 2, 3)

Responses to this question were very similar to the question above (Q11), noting the role of communications in reaching people. However, several also responded that they were not involved in directly compelling people to take action for conservation. Again, reaching the general public, other agencies, conservationists (including hunters and birders), as well as specific outreach to agriculture were listed for this question. While there were fewer responses to this question, for some groups highly impactful outcomes were listed such as congressional legislation being introduced, leading to increases in habitat acreage protected.

Overall, how has your organization been involved in addressing the 2018 NAWMP update recommendation #4: Identify key geographic areas where the best opportunities exist to meet the needs of waterfowl and people? (Action(s) taken, Stakeholders impacted, and Results of Action(s)) (Q10_1, 2, 3)

Habitat prioritization for many of the organizations is primarily based on population and habitat modeling. A couple respondents mentioned stepping down habitat models (the NSST was mentioned specifically). For some, the habitats that matter the most for waterfowl conservation happen to overlap with human needs (such as in more arid regions) and for others their focus is on a broader landscape with species conservation priorities within that. Stakeholders impacted were again broad and could include partner organizations, landowners, hunters and birders, as well as the general public. Focusing on key geographic areas led to outcomes such as habitat acreage protection outcomes, finding new audiences, new funding sources, new collaborations, and new partners.

Overall, how has your organization been involved in addressing the 2018 NAWMP update recommendation #6: share knowledge from all work to integrate and balance the needs of habitat, waterfowl, and people? (Action(s) taken, Stakeholders impacted, and Results of Action(s)) (Q11_1, 2, 3)

Organization representatives responded in several ways to this question. For some the way they have addressed recommendation #6 is by communications work – such as talks, website updates, publications, or reaching out to constituents such as landowners. For others the challenge with this recommendation has been staff turnover and lack of expertise or capacity to fully pursue this recommendation. Results of these actions include reaching wider audiences, better integration of wildlife management with things like One Health¹, influence on strategic plans, and just greater knowledge and understanding of how these needs integrate with one another.

¹ The One Health philosophy is founded on the principle that human health is dependent upon animal health (both wild and domestic) and ecosystem health, and that all components must be addressed in a cohesive, comprehensive manner to support and improve global health security. *Conservation Visions. 2022. "The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the One Health Approach: Providing the Foundation for a Leadership Role." White paper. p.57.*

What are the strengths of the 2018 NAWMP update? Please provide some specific examples of where it has succeeded. (Q12)

Overwhelmingly, respondents stated that the integration of people into the Goals and Recommendations of NAWMP is the greatest strength of the 2018 update. Habitat conservation must include humans and the organizations appreciated this inclusion. Explicitly integrating human populations into conservation also provided clarity for how to move forward and how to work on conservation issues on complex landscapes.

A few respondents noted that this is both a strength and a challenge: “The challenge is to engage other stakeholders that may not agree with hunting but have similar goals and finding ways to tap into their interests and potential funding sources as well.”

One respondent voiced concern that the leadership of NAWMP seemed to be moving toward retirement and not as active since the pandemic. Maintaining relevance will be a key challenge as new and younger leadership takes up the work of NAWMP.

How has your organization leveraged the 2018 NAWMP update to increase the impact of your conservation actions? (Q14)

Many responded that this has not happened in relation to the 2018 update specifically. However, NAWMP itself remains a galvanizing force that links those concerned with waterfowl and wetland protection.

What are the weaknesses of the 2018 NAWMP update? Please provide some examples of where it has fallen short. (Q16)

Some of the primary concerns addressed in responses to this question included that quick timeline between NAWMP updates, occurring much more quickly than organizational structure can respond to. Furthermore, NAWMP keeps adding new priorities but not taking any of the previous priorities away. This is a problem in terms of capacity and expertise for organizations to meet all the priorities. The plan also lacks specific metrics and goals and so it can be challenging to determine if an organization is achieving those goals. Finally, there needs to be greater leadership in how to do some of the things that are recommended. For example, while the integration of HD sounds like a good thing, there is a lack of knowledge about how this should be done. Leadership is sometimes viewed as inaccessible, and the specifics needed to truly reach the goals and recommendations are limited.

Regarding NAWMP as a whole, what are some examples of how your organization addresses climate change in conservation planning and/or program implementation? (Q17)

Nearly all the respondents stated that their organization is working to address issues around climate change in their conservation planning. Some examples include:

- carbon capture and carbon offset work

- incorporating climate models into habitat and population models
- addressing management of wildlife diversity in the face of a changing climate
- link between climate issues and habitat protection

Regarding NAWMP as a whole, what are some examples of how your organization addresses biodiversity loss in conservation planning and/or program implementation? (Q19)

Since most organizations responding are conservation focused, the need to address biodiversity loss is at the heart of what most of them do. Some examples include:

- defining population targets
- defining target habitats
- adding and enhancing priority habitats
- documenting rare species sightings
- all work to protect habitats
- investments in partnerships
- communication efforts

Regarding NAWMP as a whole, what are some examples of how your organization addresses diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA) in conservation planning and/or program implementation? (Q21)

Many of the organizations are making DEIA efforts in their work. Examples include:

- DEI training of staff
- having social scientists on the team offering helpful expertise
- being more inclusive in general
- making concerted efforts to include Indigenous groups in conservation planning
- forming strategic partnerships

However, as with some of the other NAWMP recommendations, some organizations noted they need more guidance on this issue as with other human centered goals and recommendations.

How can the governance bodies of NAWMP best assist your organization in communicating successes, outcomes, and benefits for waterfowl and wetland conservation? (Q23)

There were many recommendations provided by respondents to this question, including:

- there is a need for NAWMP itself to better communicate
- shift away from consumptive use and to foci such as One Health
- need for specific population indices
- provide assistance on integration of HD
- more direct communication from NAWMP to state and federal agencies about the benefits
- maintain relevance by communicating via social media (meet people where they are)

- one-page infographics produced annually touting successes of NAWMP
- be sure that NAWMP committees support organizations' needs

What are some of the biggest opportunities for achieving NAWMP goals when looking ahead over the next five years? (Q24)

Maintaining relevance is vital for NAWMP to achieve its goals. Finding common goals with other conservation focused groups and addressing head on the challenges of climate change are two ways to maintain that relevance. Several of the respondents noted the important role of the Farm Bill in the United States for conservation outcomes as well as for shaping responses to climate change. Furthermore, creating new partnerships and broadening the tent of conservationists to be more inclusive of non-consumptive users offer opportunities for NAWMP. Finally, continuing to focus on habitats for conservation, for climate resiliency, and for human enjoyment will be important over the next five years.

What are some of the biggest challenges to achieving NAWMP goals when looking ahead over the next five years? (Q25)

The need to form new partnerships and broaden the tent beyond consumptive users in conservation was seen by many respondents as both an opportunity and a challenge. It is an opportunity for growth and relevancy, but it is also challenging to reimagine a future that builds on the past but also looks quite different than where NAWMP has been. However, several respondents saw this as a needed area for growth. Staying relevant means understanding how both natural and cultural landscapes are changing. Any changes, however, should come with research and monitoring to assure that goals are being met and exceeded.

Furthermore, the success of NAWMP means that many do not have the same concerns for waterfowl populations as they do for other populations. Maintaining the relevance of waterfowl, while recognizing the need to also broaden the tent of species included in NAWMP conservation priorities will be challenging but also open new opportunities.

Please feel free to use the space below if you would like to share any additional thoughts about your organization's NAWMP-related initiatives. (closing)

There were only a few responses to this question. A couple conveying their gratitude to the work of NAWMP and the important role the plan has played in conservation. One respondent did express some concerns (seen in previous questions) that is worth sharing in full here:

"I fear that the great new ideas and challenges articulated in the 2012, 2018, and (I'm sure) 2023 NAWMPs will founder without a significant influx of new resources. One thing we haven't (to my knowledge) done with any NAWMP update/revision is identify resource-intensive activities that we will cease, in order to make room for the new things. We just keep adding expectations."

Conclusions

There are some similarities in this survey to the organizational survey conducted in 2017. Overall, there is a respect for and appreciation of NAWMP. However, as in 2017, NAWMP updates do not necessarily directly guide what organizations are doing. This may be because there are competing priorities, or the timescale of updates is just too quick for organizations to directly respond.

While NAWMP may provide guiding principles, it is difficult for agencies to always translate those principles directly into changes in mission or actions. Furthermore, one compelling explanation mentioned was that NAWMP keeps adding priorities but does not necessarily provide the guidance needed to implement those priorities. Similar concerns were expressed in the 2017 survey.

Due to lack of staffing and time, organizations are often unable to address all NAWMP recommendations and goals, particularly as more priorities are added and no priorities are removed. What was not as evident in this survey as in 2017 was a concern over social science research competing with biological science research. This does show some progress for the views of human dimensions work as legitimate components of NAWMP conservation initiatives.

The successes of NAWMP should not be downplayed - populations of North American Waterfowl are doing far better than many other avian species. However, there is the need, noted by several organizations, to begin to pivot as the conservation landscape and priorities pivot. Not all the organizations who share NAWMPs vision are working exclusively with consumptive conservationists. Many of the organizations are beginning to focus on birders and other nature enthusiasts as well as groups like watershed conservation interests whose conservation activities overlap with NAWMP, but whose participants who are not necessarily hunters. Making this pivot will be challenging and does not mean hunters should not be considered, rather they must be part of a larger suite of conservation stakeholders.

Finally, we highly recommend that to capture this sort of data in the future, one-one-one interviews should be conducted with important organization representatives. This will allow for more richness in the responses. Often responses were short, or questions were skipped altogether. Several respondents even offered to talk more about their responses in a follow up call. It is too much to ask people to fill out a long qualitative survey and for the sort of information sought after here, interviews would work much better.

Appendix: Survey email invite and survey questions

Invite:

Hi [firstname] –

Since 1986, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) has guided waterfowl and wetland conservation across the continent. The plan requires updating every five years to ensure that guidance remains adaptive and relevant. Last done in 2018, a NAWMP update is currently underway, and we need your help!

The NAWMP Update Steering Committee is reaching out to a select number of key waterfowl and wetland conservation organizations in North America involved in delivering NAWMP-related initiatives. This effort aims to better understand your organization's actions and views on the 2018 NAWMP update by asking you to complete an assessment survey. This survey will be used as the foundation for the 2024 NAWMP update.

You have been selected to receive this survey based on your participation in [Organization]. The questions included here are similar to questions asked in 2017 and are intended to help identify changes, over the past five years, in NAWMP implementation. On average, this survey takes about 30 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time. We will only report summaries of our findings.

The assessment is available online at [survey link].

Thank you for your time. Your input is vital to a successful 2024 NAWMP update!

Organizational Survey Questions:

As part of the 2024 NAWMP Update assessment, the Update Steering Committee (USC) is reaching out to key waterfowl and wetland conservation organizations in North America involved in delivering NAWMP-related initiatives. This effort aims to better understand your organization's actions and views related to the 2018 NAWMP Update. Where possible, the USC requests that you provide electronic copies of materials that exemplify the actions your organization has completed in implementing the 2018 NAWMP Update.

If you would like to reference the 2018 NAWMP Update, you can access it online at NAWMP.org or through this link: [2018 NAWMP Update](#)

- Q1. What is the name of your organization?
- Q2. If the Update Steering Committee has any clarifying questions about the examples you provide, who in your organization is the appropriate point of contact?
Name : Email:
- Q3. How has your organization changed the way it operates in response to the 2018 NAWMP Update?
- Q4. Please feel free to upload examples of changes here.

Q5. Has your organization engaged new or more diverse stakeholders or partners in response to the 2018 NAWMP Update? *If yes, please provide some examples of these outreach efforts. If no, please indicate none.*

Q6. Please feel free to upload examples of outreach efforts here.

Q7. Overall, how has your organization been involved in addressing the 2018 NAWMP Update recommendation #1: **focus conservation actions on waterfowl habitat and population management objectives and incorporate social science into planning and program delivery?**

Action(s) taken:

Stakeholders impacted:

Results of Actions:

Q8. Overall, how has your organization been involved in addressing the 2018 NAWMP Update recommendation #2: **help people understand the opportunities for conservation and outdoor recreation resulting from NAWMP and how society benefits from waterfowl habitat?**

Action(s) taken:

Stakeholders impacted:

Results of Actions:

Q9. Overall, how has your organization been involved in addressing the 2018 NAWMP Update recommendation #3: **compel people to take action to conserve waterfowl habitat?**

Action(s) taken:

Stakeholders impacted:

Results of Actions:

Q10. Overall: how has your organization been involved in addressing the 2018 NAWMP Update recommendation #4: **identify key geographic areas where the best opportunities exist to meet the needs of waterfowl and people?**

Action(s) taken:

Stakeholders impacted:

Results of Actions:

Q11. Overall, how has your organization been involved in addressing the 2018 NAWMP Update recommendation #5: **share knowledge from all work to integrate and balance the needs of habitat, waterfowl, and people?**

Action(s) taken:

Stakeholders impacted:

Results of Actions:

Q12. What are the strengths of the 2018 NAWMP Update?
Please provide some specific examples of where it has succeeded.

Q13. Please feel free to upload examples here.

Q14. How has your organization leveraged the 2018 NAWMP Update to increase the impact of your conservation actions?

Q15. Please feel free to upload examples here.

Q16. What are the weaknesses of the 2018 NAWMP Update?
Please provide some examples of where it has fallen short.

Please consider NAWMP as a whole (and not just the 2018 Update) when answering the remaining questions.

Q17. Regarding NAWMP as a whole, what are some examples of how your organization addresses climate change in conservation planning and/or program implementation?

Q18. Please feel free to upload examples here.

Q19. Regarding NAWMP as a whole, what are some examples of how your organization addresses biodiversity loss in conservation planning and/or program implementation?

Q20. Please feel free to upload examples here.

Q21. Regarding NAWMP as a whole, what are some examples of how your organization addresses diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA) in conservation planning and/or program implementation?

Q22. Please feel free to upload examples here.

Q23. How can the governance bodies of NAWMP best assist your organization in communicating successes, outcomes, and benefits for waterfowl and wetland conservation?

Q24. What are some of the biggest opportunities for achieving NAWMP goals when looking ahead over the next five years?

Q25. What are some of the biggest challenges to achieving NAWMP goals when looking ahead over the next five years?

Thank you for your valuable time completing this survey. Please feel free to use the space below if you would like to share any additional thoughts about your organization's NAWMP-related initiatives.