

Responsive Management



A Programmatic Evaluation of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) in the United States and Canada:

Personal Interviews and Focus Group Findings (Phase 3)

Conducted for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service

May 2002

Conducted by Responsive Management

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(Phase 3)**

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A Programmatic Evaluation of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) in the United States and Canada

Report Series:

Phase 1: Program Overview and Literature Review

Phase 2: Quantitative Analyses of NAWCA Projects

Phase 3: Personal Interviews and Focus Group Findings

Phase 4: Opinion Research Survey of NAWCA Stakeholders

Phase 5: Case Studies

Phase 6: Evaluation of Economic Impacts

Phase 7: Final Report

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The views contained in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the North American Wetlands Conservation Council

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Introduction & Methodology

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) was enacted in 1989 and provides matching grants to private or public organizations or individuals to carry out wetlands conservation projects in the United States, Canada, and Mexico (www.northamerican.fws.gov now www.birdhabitat.fws.gov). A major focus of the Act is to encourage partnerships for the conservation of North American wetland ecosystems in order to benefit waterfowl, other migratory birds, fish and wildlife (www.northamerican.fws.gov). The Act has funded 928 projects throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico (NAWWO Grant Database System now DBHC Grant Database System). These projects represent a diversity of partnerships, goals and achievements in the overall protection of wetland and wetland associated habitat for waterfowl, migratory birds and other fish and wildlife. Participating partners range from nonprofit organizations to state/federal governments to private landowners.

This report is Phase 3 out of a series of seven reports for a programmatic evaluation of NAWCA in the U.S. and Canada during its first ten years of implementation. This report summarizes the findings of personal interviews and focus groups as part of this evaluation. The purpose of the personal interviews and focus groups was to identify initial perceptions of successes, challenges and future directions for NAWCA. This study was conducted by Responsive Management on behalf of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for the North American Wetlands Conservation Council (NAWCC).

Responsive Management conducted a total of ten focus groups and thirty-seven personal interviews during May 2001 – September 2001. The average size of the focus groups was 8-10 people, although some groups contained more people and others contained fewer. Individuals to be interviewed were first contacted by email and then with follow-up telephone calls. Focus group participants were recruited by email and telephone calls. Several resources were used for recruiting, including the NAWWO Grant Database System, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan Contact List 2000, the President of the Society for Wetland Scientists, and numerous joint venture coordinators.

All interviews (except for two) and focus groups (except for three) were conducted over the telephone and Sprint Conferencing Services recorded the conversations. Participants were notified that they were being recorded but that their responses would be confidential. They were informed that their comments might be used in the final report but that their name would not be

associated with those comments. Evaluation questions, as listed in the approved work plan, were used as a guideline for the interviews and focus groups. The following general questions were used for evaluation purposes:

Evaluation Questions

- What are the major strengths and weaknesses of NAWCA?
- How successful has NAWCA been in the past ten years?
- What have NAWCA and partners learned from each other?
- What are potential threats and opportunities to NAWCA over the next five years?
- What are the positive and negative outcomes of the program and how substantial have those outcomes been on partners and the environment?
- What are the unintentional positive or negative outcomes of the program and how substantial have those outcomes been on partners and the environment?
- What evidence is there to show that the Act has been successful?
- How thoroughly and effectively has the program been implemented and how could it be improved (especially in terms of grant administration and relationships)?
- Are policies and procedures adequate and fair (especially in terms of grant administration)?
- Are the program's goals being adequately addressed?
- How, if at all, should the goals and objectives of the program be revised, modified or expanded?
- Should more work be done in other areas that are currently not being done (riparian, urban, etc.)?
- Is NAWCA changing the way people think about wetlands and wetland conservation?
- If partners had not been involved in NAWCA, would they still be engaged in wetlands conservation?
- Has NAWCA been a major influence on policy, and if so, how?
- Are the needs of all stakeholders being adequately addressed?

- Is NAWCA achieving an appropriate balance among benefits to waterfowl, other wetland associated migratory birds and other wildlife dependent upon wetland ecosystems?
- Will the project selection criteria stand up to closer scrutiny? Are the criteria affecting the type or number of proposals being submitted?
- What levels of accountability exist and are they adequate?
- How is/how should impact be measured?
- Should NAWCA be continued and/or emulated?
- Will the contributions of NAWCA be sustained?
- Relative to cost, how valuable are the results of the NAWCA program?
- What do the overabundance issues mean to NAWCA?
- Where should NAWCA be going in terms of the other bird conservation initiatives and NABCI?
- Is the shift to an all bird conservation initiative logical? Is it well conceived? Is it well received?

Personal Interviews and Focus Groups:

The following personal interviews were conducted:

- North American Wetlands Conservation Council Members (current and former)
- North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) Canada Council Members
- Selected U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees
- Selected Canadian Wildlife Service employees
- Individuals from nonprofit organizations.

The following focus groups were conducted:

- North American Wetlands Conservation Council Staff
- Division of Bird Habitat Conservation Staff I (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
- Division of Bird Habitat Conservation Staff II (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
- Present Grantees
- Joint Venture Coordinators
- Members of the Society for Wetland Scientists
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees
- Canadian Implementers

- Unsuccessful Grantees
- Tangential Stakeholders (individuals not directly involved with the NAWCA program but familiar with wetlands conservation issues)

Focus groups are an important method to begin studies such as this one because they allow for extensive probing, follow-up questions, group discussion, and observation of emotional reaction to various topics – aspects that cannot be measured in a traditional telephone or mail survey. Focus group research is considered “qualitative” research. Qualitative research sacrifices reliability for increased validity. This means that although focus group findings cannot be replicated statistically as can sample surveys (high reliability), they often give researchers a more valid understanding of issues at the heart of a study (high validity). Focus groups produce results with extremely high content validity, the total range of opinions (Babbie 1989), but are not random sample surveys.

The analysis of these focus groups and interviews was an iterative process. The moderator/interviewer took notes and observations at the time of the focus group or interview. Next, the audiotapes were reviewed and detailed notes were taken, including quotes that would be used for the final report. After all of the audiotapes were reviewed, they were analyzed for content and the personal interview/focus group report was written. The interviews and focus groups were analyzed together to identify major themes and were then combined into a single report, taking care to differentiate attitudes and opinions where appropriate. Quotations are always written verbatim unless otherwise noted, and are written in *italics* to differentiate them from the text.

Chapter 1: NAWCA Overview

Opinions on NAWCA's Greatest Strengths

Although many strengths of NAWCA were identified, the responses generally fell within three main areas, in order of significance: 1) partnerships, 2) habitat conservation on-the-ground and 3) funding and leveraging of federal funds. Partnerships were mentioned as a strength in every focus group and by almost all of those interviewed. The overarching opinion was that partnerships were seen as the building blocks of NAWCA, which facilitate federal dollars being matched by partner dollars to create a cost effective program that serves to protect habitat on the ground. Partnerships were seen not just as one-time occurrences, but rather as working relationships that last over time. Partnerships were viewed as a strength not only because of their achievements in habitat protection but also because of their role in federal dollars leveraging partner contributions. Partnerships were also viewed as a strength for their effect on different groups coming together to pool their resources and work toward a common goal. Partnerships were also perceived to be a strength because they have encouraged the participation of many types of groups in conservation projects in which they might not otherwise have participated.

Partnerships

"[NAWCA] has cultivated partnerships to put conservation on the ground, which is one of the most outstanding achievements because it has been able to leverage state and federal agencies, NGOs [non government organizations], and private landowners to put the program on the ground, with results in the form of acquiring habitat or improving habitat on the ground. Think globally, act locally. Here's a federal act that is being implemented throughout North America irregardless of borders and getting the concept of partnerships and conservation on the ground in Mexico and Canada which is a big plus."

"[NAWCA's greatest strengths are] the partnerships - bringing partners together to run a collective program on the ground."

"[A major strength] is the partnerships and partner organizations - public and private conservation working together; it's not just agencies and big NGOs but individual landowners too."

"Partnerships and relationships don't go away after the grant."

"No single agency can do the work themselves to protect wildlife-you need partners."

“In the United States and Canada, it [NAWCA] has done tremendous work over a huge portion of the continent. Its fingerprint is wide.”

In addition to partnerships, achieving habitat conservation on the ground was seen as a major strength of NAWCA. NAWCA was viewed as a tool that has been used to address actual resource problems and accomplish specific goals because funds have been applied to on-the-ground habitat protection resulted in a tremendous amount of protected wetland acres. Within the general area of habitat protection, several different opinions arose in terms of how the Act has been implemented and how it has provided funding for the objectives of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP).

Some opinions expressed NAWCA’s greatest strength being its focus on wetlands and migratory birds. Another opinion was that NAWCA’s greatest strength was in the support that it has provided to the NAWMP. The people who felt that support for NAWMP was a strength were NABCI Canada Council members, or were part of the Joint Venture Partners, Present Grantee, or the NAWCC staff focus groups. In both the United States and Canada, much of the coordination occurs at the joint venture level. Since the joint ventures were formed in accordance with NAWMP goals and objectives, the Joint Venture Partners focus group would be more likely to identify support for the NAWMP as a strength of NAWCA.

Habitat Conservation

“The greatest strength is the product which is the projects out on the landscape. The goal of the Act was to put a significant amount of habitat on the ground and it has done that.”

“The number one strength is that it has provided funds for on the ground habitat conservation, it targets wetlands and associated uplands and it provides a great mechanism for the NAWMP, the JVs [Joint Ventures], and partners.”

“It has been proactive in having tangible on the ground results, especially for a government program.”

Focus on Wetlands and Migratory Birds

“The strengths are the partnerships and continued funding at a level I consider adequate for a program of this scale; also that we were focused on migratory birds and wetlands.”

“The greatest strengths are getting dollars on the ground, projects, and building partnerships. The people that come together are getting to know each other; there have been a few consistent players like Ducks Unlimited and the Nature Conservancy, but a lot of local groups have gotten involved. It has also been fairly focused on wetlands and wetland wildlife.”

“It has been a continuous source of funding for wetlands projects.”

Funding for the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP)

“The way that NAWCA became the mechanism for the NAWMP actually working. So then the greatest strengths are the strengths of NAWMP, which up front I would say are promoting and sponsoring a real ethic of wetland conservation and laying out the idea of the joint venture to include a wide range of organizations with different interests and allowing them to come together and work effectively.”

“It has been the fundamental component of the largest and most effective wildlife management program, the NAMWP, that I know of in the world; it is the premier example of how coordinated landscape level, large scale, forward thinking wildlife programs would be built.”

“NAWCA dollars were a catalyst to forming partnerships, especially in Canada because Canada did not have very much money before NAWCA. It jump-started NAWMP.”

“Funding the NAWMP because it [NAWCA] was the first source of funding for the Plan.”

A third area that was considered a major strength of NAWCA is the *continued* source of Congressional appropriations that the program has seen over the years, as well as how federal funds have leveraged partner funds. Funding was mentioned as a strength in all focus groups and by a majority of individuals interviewed, including individuals from each facet of the implementation process (such as the NAWCC, the Canadian Wildlife Service, etc.) Congressional appropriations were initially under \$10 million dollars but rose to a record of over \$40 million in the last two fiscal years ('01-'02). Generally, NAWCA funding levels average \$14-\$15 million dollars per year, and although the required ratio of federal dollars to partner match is 1:1, partners often match at much higher levels, most commonly at 2.5:1 or as high as 3:1 or 4:1. Therefore, participants viewed NAWCA as being a cost effective program in terms of how much “bang for the buck” it gets as a federal program. Yet, without the continual funding,

focus group participants and those interviewed believed that the accomplishments by NAWCA partners would have not been as great.

Funding and Leveraging of Funds

“The leverage that [NAWCA] has been able to produce; it has been a really solid record of responsible spending.”

“The financial strength can’t be overlooked. It is a good return on investment for taxpayers.”

“A strength has been having a source of funding that would then generate other money through matching funds to work toward the same objectives and goals.”

“It is cost effective; I don’t know of another program that is as cost effective as this one.”

“Without the funding I don’t think we would be where we are with the Plan [North American Waterfowl Management Plan].”

Partnerships and What Has Been Learned

As previously stated, partnerships were viewed as one of the greatest strengths of NAWCA. However, in addition to being viewed as a strength of the program, partnerships were seen as being important in and of themselves, especially in terms of what has been learned over the past ten years. The overall opinion was that partners have learned positive things from each other over the years, including how to overcome philosophical differences in order to work together toward a common goal. Diverse groups of people have learned to work together, including government agencies (both federal and state), NGOs, and private landowners. The meaning of “partnerships” translates into several things, such as an environmental organization sitting down at the same table with a farmer, or a government agency working with a private corporation. Working with private landowners was viewed as one of the greatest accomplishments. The overall opinion was that commitment and enthusiasm from the grassroots level is imperative for the process to function well.

The general perception was that partners take a great deal of pride in their projects, especially new partners that have worked on very specific, local issues. It appeared that taking part in a NAWCA project made partners feel that they were contributing to the “greater good.”

“There is strength in unity. If they [partners] pull in the same direction, they are viewed as cooperators and not competitors for limited dollars. The conservation community is sometimes viewed as disorganized, and NAWCA has helped people focus on one important segment and brought them together. They have learned how to build partnerships, like getting together and making something happen, bringing in people that may not have been viewed as partners. Also, a lot of smaller partners locally are taking pride in getting federal grants.”

“Partners have helped to solidify the environmental community. It has been a process that brings people together with a common interest. Even though there may be some philosophical differences between the groups, they can come together on this common goal, get together and put money up, volunteers, and time to get good projects on the ground, with the common interest being habitat and improving habitat for certain species.”

“The ability of diverse groups to cooperate has brought corporations in, landowners, agencies, NGOs, individuals and foundations to the table; they have learned more about one another. This has made things easier in terms of cooperation in the future; and it has helped strengthen the NAWMP joint ventures.”

“Partnerships have provided an incentive for people to pool resources and partner with people that they might not otherwise have an incentive; on the ground, some partners had been restricted to local conservation, and by participating in NAWCA, they have come to feel like they are participating in something bigger.”

“We’ve learned a lot about how each country looks at conservation and how they are organized for conservation...Canada to a large extent differs from the U.S., but yet we are all doing good conservation work.”

“[What partners have learned] is that you can get a [seemingly] impossible thing done, you can work together even if you have different mandates. A lot of the partners are very diverse but they have found that they can work around that.”

“This is not a top down program; it is grassroots. You need the commitment from landowners and land management agencies; and you need active involvement for it to work.”

“It has been learning to work better together, to have better cooperation and to understand that we are looking at the same objectives—we’ve all given up some autonomy to give us the greater good.”

“We’ve learned how to work as partners, and it must always be nurtured; funding pressures change, issues change year to year. It helps if you have dollars; you need money on the ground for partnerships to work.”

“Joint ventures have taken instruction from private business...the network of joint ventures is the most effective and largest in terms of conservation in the world. The funding is a catalyst.”

Opinions on NAWCA’s Greatest Weaknesses

Although NAWCA has many strengths, focus group participants and those interviewed identified weaknesses as well. The weaknesses generally fell into the following categories: 1) not enough funding, 2) too much focus on wetlands and migratory birds, and 3) not enough evaluation/monitoring. In fact, many of the identified weaknesses related to some of the strengths that were identified. For example, even though continual appropriations were seen as a strength, *not enough* funding was consistently mentioned as a weakness of the Act. Although there have been yearly appropriations, funding levels have been inconsistent. The overall opinion was that there are many more good projects that can be funded, resulting in an unfulfilled demand. Although insufficient funding was clearly defined as a weakness of NAWCA, it is not necessarily a weakness of the Act, but rather a difficulty with funding allocations. Everyone was highly supportive of the funding increases that occurred in the past two years, and were hopeful that the level of support will continue. However, one individual (from Canada) pointed out that funding inconsistencies sometimes made it difficult to deliver projects as effectively in Canada, especially when funding increases suddenly. This individual felt that funding inconsistencies are challenging because different infrastructures must be in place to handle and distribute larger amounts of money and it takes preparation to have these infrastructures in place and ready.

Congressional Appropriations

“The uncertainty about the appropriation amount. In Canada, there aren’t many organizations on the delivery side, so you need a certain infrastructure to deliver \$10 million and a different one to deliver \$30 million.”

“There is not enough money to meet the demand.”

“A weakness is the issue of funding. It’s always been around \$14-\$15 million a year. Growing the program hasn’t really been an option until last year.”

“Funding - most of the proposals are really good, but there is not enough money to fund them all.”

Opinions were expressed regarding NAWCA's focus on wetland habitat and waterfowl populations. Generally, those in favor of expanding NAWCA to incorporate the goals and objectives of the major bird initiatives (as discussed later) also had the opinion that NAWCA has been too focused on wetlands and waterfowl. In their interpretation of the language of the Act, those individuals who strongly support the other bird conservation initiatives felt that the Act is much more permissive with the type of work that can be done than what is and has been done. However, only a few individuals on the NAWCC and the NABCI Canada Council had this opinion, as well as some representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Canadian Wildlife Service. On the other hand, those of the opinion that NAWCA's strengths is its focus felt that a weakness of NAWCA was that it has not remained *focused enough* on wetlands and waterfowl.

Focus of NAWCA

"The Act itself is very permissive in terms of the type of work that can be done, and the Council's focus on wetlands is smaller than the Act permits."

"A weakness is not fully addressing broad habitat needs, while the language of the Act allows for a broader interpretation. There has been too much emphasis on waterfowl with only secondary benefits being touted to other species."

"I don't have a real sense of weakness, but I would like to see it evolve more to an all bird program."

"This is more of a constraint; there has been too much focus on wetlands. The strength is that it has been focused, but the weakness is in not moving beyond that."

Too Little Focus on Wetlands and Migratory Birds

"In 1986 when everything was starting...one of the purposes of NAWCA was to support the priorities of NAWMP, and at some times there has been difficulty making sure that expenditures of funds have been tied closely to NAWMP priorities; trying to make sure that the priorities as identified for waterfowl are ultimately getting the highest levels."

"A weakness is that the program is starting to increase; that it is trying to be all things to all people. Suddenly we went from a program benefiting waterfowl to all wetland wildlife to benefiting all types of unique wetlands to now a discussion of upland species. The primary objectives are becoming weaker."

“Greed. People who just want the money but don’t share the same objectives. NAWCA has moved from a focused project to one that is unfocused. It is trying to be everything to everybody. Those who want federal dollars are working the system so that they are minimizing the new money that they have to come up with to get the maximum federal dollars. They are trying to do more in terms of broader conservation issues that were never part of the original plan. When you start having that kind of fractionation, you start losing the strength of partnerships.”

The third area of NAWCA that was identified as a weakness was the level of evaluation and monitoring that has occurred (see detailed analysis later in this report). There was concern that although placing as much money on the ground as possible is inherently important in accomplishing habitat protection goals, it is equally important to evaluate the impact that projects are having on the environment. This opinion was shared by a variety of members from the NAWCC and NABCI Canada Council, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Canadian Wildlife Service. The need for monitoring and evaluation can be broken down into two categories: 1) project evaluation on a site specific scale, to ensure that partners are actually accomplishing what they propose to do and 2) project evaluation on a landscape scale to gauge the overall impact of projects.

Evaluation/Monitoring

“The evaluation components - aside from this sort of programmatic evaluation, NAWCA has almost conscientiously avoided looking at, funding or supporting that kind of evaluation on an ongoing basis.”

“Not having some sort of systematic follow-up of funded projects. We know they are completed, but there has been no systematic follow-up of getting a better appreciation of projects on the ground.”

“There has been too little emphasis on good biological information backing of projects; there’s too little quality assurance built into the Act. On both counts, it is likely that there has been a million dollars spent on a project that really had little contribution to continental waterfowl or migratory bird populations. There has been a lack of interest in questioning if there is a better way to spend the money. The explicit intent of Council [NAWCC] has been to not support that kind of information gathering. I think it is related to a lack of funding in the past and the perennial administrator’s fear that money will be used for nonessential research efforts. So much basic research in the past has been bad. Underwriting the decisions that the Council [NAWCC] has made, there has been a triage attitude to spend the money on projects. I don’t think there is a corporation out there

that doesn't spend 5-10% of its budget on quality assurance; NAWCA is reflective of the federal government that that kind of quality assurance is not done."

"The and staff should think about monitoring past projects; we need to think about how often that should be done. How are they [projects] doing on the ground? What leverage has the Act brought to certain areas?"

"The projects are evaluated project by project; we don't have a good way to collectively look at NAWCA projects that have been undertaken in a certain state or area and then against that backdrop, to evaluate new projects coming in."

"There is an absence of an evaluation function in NAWCA, by NAWCA, to know what the money is producing and what it is doing. All of us beat our chests to say that our efforts have increased waterfowl populations, but a cynical person could say that it's because of the weather. The only way you can evaluate that is by developing a good solid evaluation mechanism. I know that it's hard, and it's expensive and whenever you get into multi-year conservation it's a bear to figure out, but it is a weakness."

"The Plan in terms of the inability to monitor the relative success of habitat programming. We can't tell you if the overall landscape is getting better or worse. It wasn't a priority in the first five years, but it was recognized in later reauthorizations. Now, I think there is more consideration being given in that area. It doesn't mean that we've implemented it, but people are more aware of the issue. I don't think it was a funding issue. People were concerned with getting money on the ground but I think that after a ten year start-up we've realized that is a deficiency in that area."

Opinions on the Overall Success of NAWCA and Evidence of Success

Considering all of the strengths and weaknesses of NAWCA, the overwhelming opinion was that NAWCA has been extremely successful over the past ten years. In fact, not one person thought that NAWCA has been unsuccessful. However, a few participants felt that gauging the level of success depends on the objectives that are measured. For example, if the objective of NAWCA is to cultivate partnerships, then it has been very successful. However, if the objective is waterfowl conservation, then the level of success is uncertain because NAWCA's actual effects on population increases compared to the effects of good weather conditions are unknown. The fact that NAWCA's objectives were unclear suggests that stakeholders may not be aware of the actual intent of NAWCA, or that the goals and objectives of NAWCA are subject to several different interpretations.

Overall Success of NAWCA

“It has been extremely successful. We wrote letters to the new Administration saying how much “bang for the buck” that NAWCA gives. For every dollar of federal money that is appropriated, we have received a match of \$2.5 dollars from private partners and few federal programs compare [to NAWCA].”

“It has exceeded my expectations; it has been very successful. This is obvious from the continuing number of applications, the number of people coming to NAWCA for money, the partnerships and the increasing money that Congress puts in.”

“What is the objective of the Act? If the objective is to stimulate broad, durable partnerships then I think it has been very successful. If it is the strategic conservation of migratory birds then we have no idea how successful it has been.”

“It has been very successful. I never would have thought that there would be nearly the support for the Act and the Plan [NAWMP]. Millions of dollars of new money has allowed a variety of partners to do a lot of good work on the landscape that wouldn’t have otherwise been possible.”

“Waterfowl conservation has been a big success, but you can’t determine how much is due to NAWCA. We had droughts and it has rained more, so it is probably in conjunction with that. The test will come with the next drought to see if NAWCA can keep populations up. The more land set aside the better so it almost can’t be a failure, but I think the jury is still out on [how effective NAWCA has been in] conserving waterfowl populations until the next drought. We haven’t stopped wetlands destruction completely but we’ve helped to decrease it. [Measuring success] depends on how you define your goals.”

Numerous examples of evidence for success were cited. Many of the examples directly related to identified strengths of the Act, such as the number of partnerships and joint ventures that have developed, acres of habitat that have been protected, number of projects and the amount of leveraged funds that have been generated, including the high match ratio of partner dollars to federal funds. Other examples were: more potential projects than can be funded, which suggests a high demand, continued appropriations from Congress, and increases in waterfowl populations. However, several focus group participants argued *against* the idea that increases in waterfowl populations can be used as indicators of success. They felt that there currently is not enough evidence to directly link NAWCA to population increases. Rather, good weather conditions, especially after the droughts that have occurred, were thought to have played a larger role.

“In terms of habitat, the number of acres protected over time, the fact that we are getting measurable responses in terms of waterfowl populations, measurable economic and socio-economic benefits from projects, the fact that we’ve got stable partnerships within the joint ventures - they have formed strong teams that will continue - also the leverage, the amount of other funds that were attracted.”

“There are thousands and thousands of acres, and the partnerships are effective and working well together. Politicians are recognizing the need for wetlands and conservation. The landowner portion – major landowners, conservation organizations and timber companies are talking with a single voice.”

“In the prairie region [of the U.S.] we have thousands of wetland acres on the ground that were restored, created or enhanced because of NAWCA and it most likely would not have been done without NAWCA. In our region we have lost 95% of our wetlands and NAWCA has been the cornerstone of what we’ve done. It has made the Joint Ventures effective and influential. They might not otherwise have gained their steam in keeping partners focused on the goals.”

“The North American Waterfowl Management Plan; 13 species were designated for management and 11 of those have responded positively except for two, the Lesser Scaup and Pintail, which shows that the Plan is successful. We are working on it now to update the plan to address these species.”

“We set population targets under the NAWMP and we have achieved those targets. Also, the amount of wetland habitat secured or enhanced across the continent.”

“Evidence includes acres, more demand than available money, the fact that Congress has increased funding indicates that Congress is comfortable with the program, local partnerships within states and people coming together and taking pride in a project.”

“The number of partner dollars generated, but on the biological side, there is no evidence aside from anecdotal evidence.”

Chapter 2: Program Effectiveness

Opinions on Positive Outcomes of the Program

Many positive outcomes have resulted from implementation of the NAWCA program. One positive outcome that was consistently mentioned was the number of acres that have been protected. With that, an issue arose whether an appropriate level of evaluation of those protected acres takes place. The overall consensus was that a large number of valuable acres have been protected, but relatively little is known about how those acres are doing over time, or how they are benefiting the species dependent upon them. Another positive outcome and strength of NAWCA was the number and diversity of partnerships. The unexpected *extent* to which partnerships have developed were seen as an additional benefit of NAWCA. Most of the positive outcomes related to partnerships have already been discussed earlier in this report. Partnerships and acres protected were mentioned by individuals from the NAWCC and the NABCI Canada Council, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Canadian Wildlife Service and other focus group participants as positive outcomes of NAWCA. Acres, dollars and partnerships are things that people can identify with easily, and are not as difficult to measure as the actual impact that these outcomes are actually having, such as on the landscape as a whole.

“Over seven million acres have been affected. It is hard to tell how they were affected, but NAWCA has probably done more than most other government programs.”

“Look at the facts; the areas that have been affected, the number of partnerships and the types of partnerships. From a resource perspective, what matters is the habitat conserved and the commensurate response by waterbirds; that is the purpose of the Act ”

“We don’t measure it, but we can look at which local organizations are participating now that weren’t ten years ago. Maybe it is not due entirely to NAWCA but it has played a big part. It would be nice to develop an educational program, but NAWCA doesn’t fund that; maybe we should.”

“It has encouraged partnerships and protected a lot of habitat.”

“More acres on the ground that wouldn’t otherwise have been there which leads to further partnerships.”

“It has taught people the power of partnerships and cooperation and the environment has been the better for it in terms of migratory birds and wetlands, which provide a suite of benefits to other species.”

“One of the purposes was to manage an appropriate distribution and diversity of wetland ecosystems and in one technical question, we score what type of wetland it is. You could probably pull that information out of proposals that were funded, and link it with a map of wetland types and where they are to show that they match up. Current and improved distributions of migratory birds is another purpose, and the waterfowl world through the flyways have much more data [on waterfowl], but for the other birds like shorebirds, passerines and colonials, we are not there yet.”

Opinions on Positive Unintended Outcomes of the Program

In addition to assessing the intended outcomes of NAWCA, there were also “unintended” positive outcomes, or “extra value” effects of the Act. A wide range of responses was provided when this question was asked. Unintended positive outcomes ranged from increased funding, greater interest in the program, and greater respect for organizations representing the other bird initiatives, to a heightened level of knowledge about wetlands.

One member of a non-profit organization stated that additional positive outcomes were expected, but had occurred at a much higher level than expected. For example, it was expected that partnerships would develop, but the sheer number and diversity of partnerships that actually developed may not have been expected. This opinion lends great support to the statement that NAWCA has been very successful over the past ten years. Several of the comments focused on partnerships and referred to the unlikely, unexpected relationships that have occurred. S

Several individuals from Canada pointed out the effects that NAWCA had on people’s perceptions of wetlands, as well as the positive “spin-off effects” the program had on other joint ventures and conservation initiatives. Any positive outcome that was identified was perceived to have had a substantial, positive effect, both on partners and the environment.

“NAWCA, through its support of the NAWMP, has had an effect on areas that NAWCA has not been funding so the Act makes the Plan implementation go, which brings in other government agencies and bodies that do other things besides waterfowl but aren’t directly supported by the Act. An example is the efforts of the three species Joint Ventures, which are Black Ducks, Arctic Geese and Sea Ducks. These are Joint Ventures that fit into NAWMP but don’t receive funding through NAWCA, but yet they have received a philosophical model from NAWCA and they have been highly successful. It’s

a positive spin-off effect. NAWCA makes those types of Joint Ventures possible, even though they are not funded through NAWCA.”

“In terms of positive unintended outcomes, they are what was anticipated but they have accrued at a higher level.”

“Some of the anti-hunting attitudes have been quelled; there is more belief in us that we are doing things for conservation and not just hunters. The merging of the other bird initiatives into something similar to NAWCA, I don’t think they envisioned that ten years ago.”

“The perception that people have about wetlands is a direct result of our program, and that wasn’t a goal of the Act. I think we have done more than we thought we would. Twenty years ago people would have called wetlands a swamp and now they equate it with water quality and quantity.”

“The model of the Joint Venture, reinforcement of the landscape approach and a model for other resource management questions.”

“Some feelings of frustration by people whose projects were not successful or accepted. Maybe we just have to live with this. Some people lay guilt trips because they didn’t get the money.”

“The number of partners, an evolution in the thinking of NAWCA partners that wetlands are important for more birds than ducks, which helps make them think about other things too.”

“Unexpected partnerships with ranchers and farmers with different interests but whom have been able to find common ground.”

“Other flyway initiatives are starting to look at NAWCA’s initiatives and view it as a way of doing business, rather than just looking at NAWCA as an international aid program.”

“Exposure to wetland issues, making people more aware, word of mouth that when a project is funded it gets out and people want to do more. NAWCA is like a big snowball and will continue to get bigger.”

Opinions on Negative Outcomes of the Program

Although NAWCA has experienced many substantial positive outcomes, a few negative outcomes were also identified. The negative outcomes were less substantial than the positive outcomes. When asked to identify *unintended* negative outcomes of the program, almost everyone had difficulty answering. In particular, most Canadians had a difficult time coming up

with *any* negative outcomes. All negative outcomes were seen as unintended side effects of the program. Negative outcomes included too much competition for grant money, the development of interests in expanding the program, and resentment from groups that feel “left out” of the process. In addition, some expressed the opinion that not enough information is being received by the NAWCC regarding project opposition in certain areas.

“It may just be growing pains, but there is an interest in expanding to other types of migratory birds other than just wetland birds. This is such a successful program that everyone wants to have part of that action. We didn’t have Congress set up the Joint Ventures and partnerships to deal with some of these other areas.”

“There is a lot of competition for money; I’m told that it can be stressful on the partnerships.”

“Ducks Unlimited and the Nature Conservancy are the big partners involved. I suspect the small grants program hasn’t stimulated little partners into coming back for standard grants. We need to encourage small partners to come back and get a bigger chunk of the money. There is competition among the big NGOs; we need to be serious about spreading the money around, more so than what the small grants program is doing now.”

“Some jealousy maybe; other interests feel like they miss out, but at the same time it has made them more organized.”

“They [negative outcomes] are minor in nature; we get a low percentage of applicants from people who don’t seem to understand the program, or that the program isn’t designed to meet their needs, such as a very local value urban wetlands project.”

“We don’t hear about many private landowners or affected people because of NAWCA grants. In one project, we saw a positive attitude about the project, but then I saw an article about local farmers that were in an uproar because they were concerned about salt getting onto their land. We don’t hear about those people who are opposed to projects.”

“Because it has been so successful, people attempt to change the program to fit their needs.”

Attitudes Towards NAWCA’s Goals and Objectives

Overall, the feeling was that the program’s goals are being adequately addressed, but that there is room for expansion with some of the goals. Some felt that the goals should be expanded

to allow NAWCA to be more comprehensive in terms of the types of projects that get funded, and that a goal should be set to develop a priority list where the funds would be best spent. The expression “becoming more comprehensive” was widely interpreted. For example, for some individuals, this meant revising the goals to encompass the other bird initiatives with additional funding. For others, it meant expansion of the geographic scope such as involving other countries like South America. The same people who supported expanding NAWCA to the other bird initiatives also supported changing NAWCA’s goals and objectives to reflect this expansion.

Another opinion held by some individuals on the NAWCC was that NAWCA should remain flexible and not be “stuck in one place.” Interest was expressed in eliminating the Act’s requirement for a U.S. non-federal match in Canada. Furthermore, Canadian implementers felt that the definition of a “project” should be reassessed to better suit the “program” idea implemented in Canada. On the other hand, participants from the U.S. Joint Venture partners focus group felt strongly that the goals and objectives of NAWCA should not be revised at all. Since much of the implementation occurs at the joint venture level, those groups who wish to expand the goals and objectives to incorporate broader habitat and species protection might find it challenging to convince joint venture partners that the expansion should occur.

“They [the goals and objectives] are rehashed almost every 6 months. It is dynamic. They are right on target now, as long as the focus is on wetlands and wetland related species.”

“We should try to think comprehensively—where are the most important places to spend NAWCA money?”

“I come back to NABCI—if funding stays the same, we need to focus on wetlands and waterbirds. If we are to do a decent job of all birds, it needs to be expanded but needs more money.”

“How do we get to NABCI? I think there are two directions to go, legislation in support of all birds and all habitats would be welcome and NAWCA could evolve into that, or it could be part of that. Most importantly, we must not go backwards in terms of the commitment to wetlands.”

“Yes, I feel comfortable [with the goals and objectives]. But I think we should remain flexible and not be stuck in one place.”

“Interpretations of the goals/objectives need to be clarified. We don’t get a huge amount of money, but we have a broad range of ability under the current goals.”

“The definition of a project applies more to the U.S., where in Canada, it is a program that is a project. Sometimes the whole province in Canada is involved. We can’t have the money spent prior to the two years of the signing of the grant agreement for match dollars on a project. But in the provinces, the money may have been spent one year before. I think it is something we need to work on with the Act.”

“They should be revised to all birds (not just relating to wetlands)...seems like the only solution would be to add an amendment to the Act. The geographic scope should be both hemispheres, because many birds go to South America.”

“If we go to supporting NABCI, then the goals and objectives should change in that way.”

“Congress is seeing value in the program as it is – a program for wetlands and wetland species. I don’t think that we should go to Congress to revise it. I don’t think it is broken now so why should we fix it? It wasn’t intended to be all things to all people.”

Attitudes Towards the “Fairness” of the Program

The issue of “fairness” may be evaluated in several ways, such as whether the needs of the stakeholders are adequately met, or whether NAWCA is achieving an appropriate balance of benefits to the species it was intended to protect. The general consensus was that when evaluating if NAWCA effectively serves the needs of all members of the stakeholder community, consideration must be placed upon who the stakeholders actually are. If the stakeholders are those groups that have the same focus and goals of NAWCA, then most felt they are being effectively served. However, smaller stakeholders have a harder time “plugging” into the system, unless they are closely associated with one of the larger partners such as Ducks Unlimited or The Nature Conservancy. The issue of money provided one reason why certain stakeholder groups are left out. Interest was expressed in expanding the partnership base, but with the caveat that if stakeholders want to be involved, they must be able to provide matching dollars. Generally, the small grants program was viewed as the avenue that smaller partners should explore for grant money. Ideally, the small grants program should act as a gateway to the standard grants program. Whether or not small grant applicants move on to standard grants is unknown, but the perception was that this does not occur. Lastly, a few individuals felt that whether all of the stakeholders’ needs have been adequately met was not important, since the Act was not intended to meet everyone’s needs.

Stakeholder Needs

“If we can constrain that to stakeholders that are really looking at conservation of wetlands and migratory waterbirds, then I would say an overwhelming majority are getting their needs met. I think that their needs will be met less in the future if the program expands without commensurate funding expansion. But, if someone is interested in say, bottomland hardwood wetlands for migratory warblers, and if the project is just geared towards one species of warbler, I think they would probably like to see the program changed so that they could get some of the money.”

“Not all stakeholders have the same focus on wetlands, but stakeholders who have that interest or have interests that impinge on wetlands...I think that their needs are being met. But there may be other stakeholders that have interests in wildlife that aren't as associated with wetlands and they probably think their needs aren't being met, but I don't think that's a problem with NAWCA, I think its how the Act is written and applied.”

“I don't think that it is important to serve all needs; that is not the intent of the Act and it never was the intent. It is supposed to put wetland habitat on the ground for the benefit of migratory birds and other wildlife. If stakeholders have this objective, then it has been good. It [NAWCA] was never intended to serve a bunch of organizations.”

“Everyone gets a fair chance, but I think there are people who get shut out. I think that 75%-80% would say they are satisfied.”

“Some stakeholders' needs are probably not being met...there have been attempts to expand the small grants program, which have not been successful. We brought some new memberships on the Council, like Pheasants Forever. But interests of DU, TNC are served very well while others are probably served less well.”

“Stakeholders with other interests (other birds) want to be included but we need to find the money first.”

“We have talked about the move toward being inclusive of a broader group, and there is some tension about that. We are still dominated by the big organizations because they have the organization and money, but I hope we will see more local groups coming in, like land trusts, as long as they have the capability.”

“Once you get a reputation it is hard to turn it around. Council [NAWCC] staff resent that they are seen as only funding duck projects. It is going to take awhile. The current staff composition is open minded enough but the perception is out there that if you are not focusing on waterfowl you won't get funded, so there are probably a lot of good projects not being sent in. It seems as though there was always a perception of 'don't bother unless you have a duck project.' It is not really true now.”

“I think it is getting better. A couple years ago primary stakeholders were tied to the NAWMP, but now you are seeing Partners in Flight and others getting to the table.”

The opinions were varied as to whether NAWCA is achieving an appropriate balance among benefits for waterfowl, other wetland-associated migratory birds, and other wetland-dependent wildlife. As mentioned previously, some stakeholders might have the perception that NAWCA is too focused on wetlands and waterfowl, especially if they are new to the program or have been actively involved with the other bird conservation initiatives. However, several NAWCC members felt that this is only a perception and not reality, because in their opinion, benefits to species other than waterfowl and other waterbirds will automatically accrue even if the focus is on wetland habitat. Still others had the opinion that the appropriate balance occurs even though there is not enough quantifiable data to prove that it is happening. A minority opinion within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was that there have not been enough benefits for species that are not migratory birds, because the current technical scoring process does not allow applicants to fully describe the benefits to these other species. A minority opinion in the NABCI Canada Council was that the balance is not occurring, but that it was never the intent of NAWCA.

Balance of Benefits

“Yes. One Director proposed to take \$10 million out of the \$40 million and use it for the new bird initiatives, but I thought it was inappropriate because there were projects on the table that deserved access to those dollars and close to 40% of the projects had already touched upon the other bird initiatives, so it would penalize the people that were being innovative by including the new initiatives in their proposals already.”

“Probably [the appropriate balance is occurring], but it [NAWCA] needs some study to document some secondary impacts such as impacts to amphibians, and secondary species.”

“Yes, unless certain species are in direct competition with each other, all species that use the wetland generally benefit, not just waterfowl.”

“We are seeing and encouraging more multi-species wetland related approaches. Some people will say that we are just concerned with waterfowl, but it is not true. Many species use wetlands for habitat.”

“There is too much concern about NAWCA being able to benefit every wetland critter. If we have a focus that brings partners together, such as ducks, then the benefits will be

there for other wetland species too. I don't believe that NAWCA has ever had too much emphasis on waterfowl at the detriment of other things. The majority of projects turned into teaming biological areas, even though they may have been set up for waterfowl."

"The only imbalance would be for animals and plants that aren't migratory birds. We had an endangered species question and a biological diversity question [on the technical scoring] but got rid of it. There has to be a focus, but we don't allow the applicants to tell us about benefits of things like river otters, or crayfish. There are probably a lot of good projects out there that are good but not great for migratory birds, but are great for these other kinds of animals."

"No, not right now, [the appropriate balance is not occurring] and this is not a criticism but an observation. It wasn't intended to – the focus was on waterfowl primarily and wetlands. I don't think that in general it has tried to produce a balance for waterfowl and other wetland dependent species. It wasn't intended to fund nor do I think it should fund, say, a project in Minnesota for moose that are wetland dependent. It hasn't tried to do that, so the question really becomes what is the focus, and if the focus is on waterfowl and wetlands, then I think it is doing great."

Opinions on Grant Administration

The NAWCC was generally comfortable with the current process, but a few individuals thought that changes in the scoring process should be made to simplify the process and to better incorporate high quality projects outside of the joint venture boundary. Problems with grant administration were seen to lie in the area of evaluation and monitoring, but a constraint on this was seen as the current low staff numbers of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, DBHC to accomplish this task. Members of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Canadian Wildlife Service, Joint Venture partners, and unsuccessful grantees felt that the proposal process is very complex, but that proposal writers can gain assistance if they need it. Present grantees did not mention the complexity of the process, but rather that it can be slow. The NAWCC staff focus group felt that the grant administration is a flexible process that is capable of evolving. Canadian implementers were generally comfortable with the process in their own country, but preferred the five-year grant agreement to the one-year grant agreement, two types of grant agreements offered in their country. A few representatives from the Canadian Wildlife Service believed that the process is more streamlined in Canada than in the United States. A minority opinion expressed by representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was that the NAWCC staff has too much influence in project selection, especially since they often review proposals from their own

organizations. Several comments were made regarding the role that politics play in project selection in the United States compared to the smaller role of politics in Canada.

“I think it has been good but it can be slow, from the time you get approved to getting the grant agreement to getting the money dispersed. There are bottlenecks in approvals of appraisals or lands tied to conservation easements. You can hire your own approval team but there are some bottlenecks. Usually the regional offices handle that but they have so much to do. We’ve had appraisal reviews last from three months to over a year. When you are trying to move quickly to buy a piece of land, you sometimes need to move fast and it has caused us to lose some pieces of land.”

“It seems fine, the requirements are clearly set out. You have to deliver what you say you will. We all have to provide the match and report it consistently. I think it is transparent and everyone sees what they are doing. We have two processes in Canada. One is the Ducks Unlimited program, which is a five-year grant agreement. And then we have Wildlife Habitat Canada or Nature Conservancy Canada, which have a one-year agreement. With the DU program, it works better because you have five years to complete the program and it is more efficient. Performing in a one-year period can be difficult especially when environmental factors work against you. Last year in Ontario, precipitation caused delays. If you have a poor season in project work, it puts a lot of pressure on to finish before the deadline.”

“The process is more streamlined in Canada and since politics aren’t involved, they are driven by the biology and the Joint Venture structure.”

“Your [U.S.] system is different than ours; your politicians are part of your management system, and ours are not.”

“Like any kind of program of this nature, staff play a very influential role and sometimes the staff have more influence than they should in terms of pursuing projects and general directions to pursue. One criticism I have made in the past is that when staff is reviewing projects, they often review proposals from their own organizations and I think it would be better if proposals were blind. This would eliminate the opportunity at the staff level for collaboration among staff to get certain projects funded.”

“The Fish and Wildlife Service is probably inadequately staffed to handle it at the level they should, but they probably only have resources to spot check a few projects, they are supposed to have a monitoring responsibility for 25 years but it is hard for them with current staffing. I think they do a better job with the grant process than other parts of the federal government and parts of Fish and Wildlife Service. The biggest shortcoming is with the application process and the staffing review that goes on. People who get funded are generally very good at grantsmanship and the process is precise but not necessarily objective, because of the staffing review process that is set up. Sometimes you tend to get someone looking at projects answer by answer and they are not qualified at looking at whether the project is really something that benefits wetlands, so basically it benefits

people who are better at putting things down on paper, not necessarily people who's projects might have a better or more important outcome."

"Grant administration is complicated; it takes groups a number of years to get used to it, and it is always changing. You can only go so far there too because you need to maintain the integrity of the system, a need for accounting and evaluation. Yes, there are ways we could be doing a better job. We probably scare some people away, but I'm not sure what the answer is."

"There has been a lot of discussion about scoring. The changes seem to be good and moving in the right direction and the Joint Venture rankings are important factors, but we should look at how we deal with projects outside of the Joint Ventures, which is really difficult. There aren't good criteria for judging those and these come at a disadvantage even though they may be good projects."

"You have to be flexible. A couple of proposals were excellent but in between two Joint Ventures but they were brought to the attention of Board members. Some areas are not part of a Joint Venture for NAWCA but they should be looked at."

"I am comfortable now, but I wasn't three years ago. The grant applications were simplified and we tried to make them more available, such as on the Internet. The small grant application has been reworked well. It is still lengthy and still takes a lot of work to fill out. But, the program could stand up under an oversight test and we could justify that with a certain amount of money, benefits, outputs and values have been received, which is a strength of the program."

"It all comes back to having a clear understanding of the goals and objectives and measuring and monitoring results. We struggle with the scoring...we have to balance between conservation on the ground but also be sensitive to the politics. The scoring system is probably over- complicated."

"It [the application process] is very complex, the regulations are complicated and it requires highly trained specialists that are in short supply. We need to put additional attention into monitoring grants that are given, such as with follow-up site visits or monitoring a subset. The Council [NAWCC] has put great weight on the proposal process, and making selections and it is appropriate to choose the right ones, but I think more attention should be placed on monitoring and what is actually achieved. It is fair and open to the point of being a flaw. We've gone so far to make it transparent and open. It is scored and you will know your scores and why it was scored if you call. Often there is a site visit, where a couple of staff members tell you how the project could be better. If you aren't selected in the first round, then you are automatically considered in the second round. If you want to resubmit and capitalize on some of the things you've learned, you can do that. We give a lot of help to people in making proposals. A consequence of this is that the process is very laborious, and organizations that don't have time to do a proposal like this won't make it."

“It is not easy to communicate with grant applicants to get their feedback on the program, but I don’t feel comfortable pushing people on their feedback. I’ve heard this is the most customer-oriented program by some people, but I don’t feel there is a good mechanism to talk to the clients, especially people that don’t apply. I want to know how to change things so that people will apply and know why they are not applying.”

Project Evaluation and Accountability

Some concern was expressed over the current system of accountability that is in place, but others felt that the current system is adequate. However, the problem was seen as one of inadequate staffing in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, DBHC. As mentioned before, inadequate evaluation and monitoring of projects was seen as problematic for NAWCA. Some concern was expressed over the level of evaluation that is currently taking place, in terms of measuring how well projects are doing, or what types of impacts and benefits they have on the environment. However, there was equal concern with taking money away from on-the-ground projects and applying it to evaluations. Perhaps the more important question is, how should (if at all) impact be measured, and by whom? A difference of opinion was evident between some individuals who felt that more evaluation is needed and individuals who felt that it is not necessary. Individuals who felt that increased evaluation is not necessary justified that partners look over each other’s shoulders, and in terms of environmental benefits, if a certain type of wetland ecosystem is saved, then it is accepted that positive benefits will accrue, so there is no need to “check” to see if the benefits actually occurred. Participants of the DBHC focus group mentioned that efforts are being put forth to standardize the final reports that partners are required to submit so that post-project follow-up can occur more easily.

Currently, the overall perception was that impact is measured by the number of acres protected and dollars spent. However, many suggestions were given as to *how* impact could be measured. Some of the suggestions were to measure the public’s awareness of the issues that NAWCA addresses, measure what the acres and dollars are actually accomplishing, how the acres fit into the larger landscape profile, population numbers, and number and diversity of projects. There were few suggestions of who should measure and consider the impact, or perform evaluations. Participants of the Unsuccessful Grantee focus group suggested that it should not occur at the Council level (NAWCC or NABCI Canada Council), but rather by state

agencies. Placing the responsibility of monitoring and evaluation on the partners was also suggested.

“Yes, most groups are probably spending the money like they say they will because there is a lot of looking over your shoulder.”

“There is good accountability but FWS doesn’t have adequate staff for audits and reviews over the life of the projects (more than 25 years). All the standard things are in place..there are AI audits, so wrongdoings get found out if they happen. I haven’t heard of a single lawsuit filed against the Act, so there hasn’t been any negative press.”

“FWS, as the host organization, is accountable to the partners to make a smooth administrative process and support implementation of the program, and I think they are satisfied overall. We are all accountable to Congress for expenditure of the dollars-how they are spent, and making sure that matches are maximized. Accountability should be with Congress...if they had problems they would tell us about it, or cut funding.”

“We could spend a lot of money on long-term monitoring and get quantified research on the number of sparrows, etc., but most of the money should be spent on the ground. We should know (from past studies) that if we purchase or protect a certain amount of elements in a wetland complex, then we know there will be production. Impact should be measured in quality and quantity of wetlands and wetland complexes and associated uplands, and that’s all we need to do.”

“A weakness lies in the accountability of partners to the Council [NAWCC] to complete the project like they propose in the proposal. Maybe we should have sporadic inspections or audits to make sure that once the money is given, the money does what they told us it would do, so that we can stand up in front of Congress and say that it’s on the ground. It is a tradeoff between doing this and taking money away from projects. We may be faced with the decision in the future, such as taking \$500,000 and putting it towards evaluation initiative, such as checking eight projects that have been done in the past three years to see if they did what they were supposed to do. But not in terms of things like number duck eggs, because that is so variable by year, but rather by looking at the quality of wetlands and making sure that they aren’t being used as a municipal water supply when they weren’t supposed to, things like that.”

“Monitoring; we need to do a better job; it is a weakness of the program. We should look at the project 5-10 years later and see if the project could have been done better. It hasn’t been done in any systematic way, only some ad hoc trips to look at numbers only such as dollars and acres.”

“Partnership mechanisms is where the answer lies: we should collectively try to get good data and information on how the resources are doing and then to what degree that NAWCA is contributing. I don’t think that we have the resources under the NAWCA program itself or the scientific expertise to do it. The Council [NAWCC] got really

concerned about spending a lot of money of systematic biological monitoring. It seems like something the program is not capable of, or willing to, or should support.”

“I define accountability by being able to know where the money went, how much went where, and be able to track the mechanisms of it. I think that the NAWCA office has done an exceptional job with the limited number of people doing that accountability work. I think that most partners are quite accountable, but they need to continue to improve their ability to summarize projects, and project benefits. An area that may be lacking is the accountability of the use of partner dollars, especially if they are real dollars or manufactured dollars. For example, some organizations use easements, which they may try to use as matching dollars over a period of five years, which may be stretching it a bit.”

“We need to go back and evaluate past projects. To get at that, unless grantees specify in the final report, you have to go by the proposal in terms of doing any kind of tally. We need to compare the final report against the proposal. We need to do follow-up site visits. In the final report, partners are supposed to put numbers down in terms of acres. We are trying to standardize what information is required in the reports. Some are given as one-page reports, while others are binders. We need to take the time to read them all, and follow up on things that are not in accord.”

Project Selection Criteria

There were mixed opinions on whether the project selection criteria currently in place are fair. Some individuals in the NAWCC felt that changes should be made in the weight that is placed on certain question categories. Others from the Unsuccessful Grantee focus group had the opinion that the criteria are broad and sometimes difficult to answer precisely. Individuals within that group also noted that a few of the questions seemed unnecessary because the answers were so “obvious.” Other people expressed the opinion that the process favors larger organizations because they have more resources to figure out the process, and the staff necessary to spend the time to write the proposal. There was also concern that the proposal process, including answering the technical questions, is too complex for the amount of money that is being requested. Canadian implementers (focus group) were satisfied with Canada’s criteria for choosing project sites within a “program.” The NABCI Canada Council was also quite comfortable with how project sites are chosen and feel that their process ensures a high degree of quality control before the proposals are submitted to the NAWCC. Interestingly, a minority of individuals on the NABCI Canada Council actually preferred the American model of

competition for funded projects, but was not sure that the system would be compatible with Canada's social and political structures.

"The process is very fair. I think there may be systematic problems with the scoring; maybe we weight things inappropriately. I think the proposal process is over complicated, but every time the staff tries to chop it back, it doesn't seem to work. It gives an advantage to the bigger players who know how to work the system, and have the resources to figure the process out. Maybe the Council [NAWCC] should think about tweaking the legislation to allow us to put more money into capacity building, and by that I mean helping people deal with the proposal process and the scoring system."

"The Canadian program is different; as we go through the process it goes very well. You see investments, and all the audits have been good. There is close internal scrutiny. Partners have to defend themselves at the JV Board. The Canadian programs are well grounded and it suits our society. The current process is different than what we had in the 1990s. In the 1990s, we had something similar to that of the U.S., where we were putting in proposals for specific projects and we were putting in a lot of proposals for projects and in a year or so we found that we couldn't get the land, so we would have to go back to the U.S. and ask permission to change it and it was a nightmare. So we came up with the program idea."

"I only look at the Canadian projects, which go through a multi-level review process. They go through the joint ventures and technical teams. There is a steering committee that operates at the provincial level and the joint venture level, and then it comes to the Council. The projects go through a lot of examination before they come to the Council, so as a result, a large percentage of those Canadian projects are approved, but I think that is good because I think they are looking at a high level of quality control at every stage in the development of a project, so I think they are quite effective. The processes are clear and fair, and as a result, good projects are being approved."

"I prefer the American model, a true competition for the money. In Canada, the Canadian Council [NABCI Canada Council] is made up of the players who will benefit, and they only put proposals forward that fully subscribe to the Canadian portion of the appropriation."

"I think there is still some subjectivity in the scoring. I can't really come up with a better way to do it though. When you submit an application and the staff reviews it for completeness and assigns a score, there doesn't seem to be a real tight objective way to do that. You can have three people look at it and come up with three different scores."

Attitudes Towards NAWCA's Influence (Policy, People)

The extent to which NAWCA has influenced the way that people think about wetlands and wetlands conservation, as well as policy development, is an important consideration. This

degree of influence may be used to gauge how successful NAWCA has been in promoting itself, or making people aware of the contributions the program has provided to habitat conservation. The overall opinion of NAWCA stakeholders was that the general public is not very aware of NAWCA, what the program does, or what it has accomplished. For example, if a person were to drive past a NAWCA project, the perception was that few people would realize that it was a NAWCA project. Similarly, it was believed that the average person would most likely never have heard of NAWCA. However, among those that had been involved with NAWCA, they felt that it has influenced how they think about wetlands and the importance of wetland conservation. So while it was perceived that NAWCA has had a low level of influence on the public, NAWCA was thought to have had a great degree of influence on the partners. Although almost everyone believed that partners might still have been involved in wetlands conservation regardless of NAWCA, their involvement might not have been as large in scope or magnitude.

Although NAWCA may not have been the sole influence in terms of changing the way that people think, the opinion was that it has been one of several factors. In Canada, Canadian stakeholders felt that NAWCA's influence can be seen in the development of provincial wetland policies, conservation easement programs and some changes in agricultural policy. In addition, most Canadian stakeholders felt that NAWCA is having a positive influence on the practices of the forest industry.

"It [NAWCA] is beginning to broaden people and increase their perspective. But the average layperson probably has no idea what NAWCA is. We haven't really gone to the newspapers or broad spectrums. In many ways this is a strength, because we deal with key stakeholders. The message is getting out to the important stakeholders."

"The Act has shaped a large amount of policy development in Canada - it's the reason why we see JVs focusing on habitat across Canada, the reason why we've established a Canadian Wetlands Council, which has spun off into a whole series of activities in support of wetlands and wetland policy development in Canada."

"I think that [historically] in general the public has learned more about the importance of wetlands and I think that NAWCA has not been the only force, but I think its been a substantial force in keeping the interest in those issues."

"NAWCA is the crown jewels of conservation programs out there. The story hasn't been told to folks on the outside effectively enough."

“I think that the U.S. is ahead of Canada. Wetlands conservation is part of the land use decisions made in the U.S. Conservation reserve programs have probably had more influence than NAWCA, but would we have had those programs if we didn't have NAWCA? I don't know.”

Chapter 3: The Future of NAWCA

Opinions on Future Opportunities for NAWCA

One of the most important considerations for NAWCA is the direction that it should take for the future. Several potential opportunities were identified for NAWCA. A majority of NAWCC and NABCI Canada Council members felt that an opportunity exists for expansion of the program into other types of habitat and species protection, as long as the funding base also increases. An opinion expressed by a few NAWCC members was that an opportunity lies in strengthening the small grants program to bring in more partners and potential funds. Tangential stakeholders also saw the small grants program as a potential opportunity for bringing in new partners. Expanding the NAWCA program to other countries in addition to the U.S., Canada and Mexico was brought up several times by various individuals, including members of the NAWCC, the NABCI Canada Council, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, some nonprofit organizations, and the Canadian Wildlife Service.

Expansion of NAWCA

“We can use NAWCA to build a larger constituency and influence for all bird conservation, but NAWCA should be used to facilitate, and other programs can be used to model after NAWCA.”

“...the way that the other bird initiatives have embraced the NAWCA model; we have the opportunity to expand to other habitat types if more funding is there...”

“How do we use NAWCA to go to the next level in terms of migratory bird conservation? It was written and designed primarily as a wetland waterbird waterfowl habitat conservation program but in the last five years there has been a concern for all migratory birds. We are working towards that, so the challenge I see is how to expand goals and funding to deal with that, without losing what the program has been able to do for wetlands and waterfowl.”

“Make the vision of NABCI a reality. The vision that is there now puts me in mind of where we were 10-15 years ago in respect to the NAWMP. The next step would be to take that process across the hemisphere. The way that migratory birds connect from the

Canadian arctic to the Argentinean border; there are few other issues that demonstrate how the continent is so connected. We can deal with habitat issues on a broader scale.”

“Expanding the program for all bird conservation. I think it has already moved in that direction. The question is whether Congress sees NAWCA as towing that role. It has the threat of becoming a one-note song on waterfowl; other groups may be suspicious on putting all their eggs in the NAWCA basket. It is an opportunity to convince the other groups that it can be a tent for the other bird groups. Working together with good solid plans can help you accomplish a lot of things.”

“Expanding to all birds is a threat and an opportunity. If NAWCA were willing to take leadership and work with the other groups to find ways to maintain support for wetlands but also consider other birds at the same time it would go a long way to minimize effects of competition for funds. In the southeast JV, they got the four bird groups to sit down and prioritize their areas and then looked at overlapping areas and moved them up on the priority list of the JV.”

Other countries

“To go to other countries, such as Latin America and the Caribbean to deal with wetland bird issues. Couple NAWCA with another funding source or augment or redefine the current source to address the needs of all birds that cross our borders, not just wetland systems. So that five years from now, we’re funding conservation for a diversity of habitats and birds throughout the Americas.”

“We have to go beyond the three countries such as the Pacific countries and the Caribbean states. Bird populations go beyond North America.”

Small grants

“To save more land, bring more people into the program, like the small grants program has done. Some of these applicants are now applying for standard grants. That is one of the ways to build more support for the program, especially to bring different kinds of partners into the program.”

“The small grants program; broaden the base of support to bring in more non - conventional partners. A lot of local groups could do some significant things and help educate people but I think it needs to grow to make that happen.”

Opinions on Future Threats to NAWCA

Looking ahead to the future, several factors were identified as potential threats to NAWCA over the next five years. These factors directly related to funding issues and expansion of the Act to incorporate the objectives of the other bird conservation initiatives. As mentioned

before, future funding cuts were viewed as a possible threat. Related to the actual appropriation of funds, another area of concern is the potential dilution factor that might occur if NAWCA funds are stretched beyond projects that focus on wetlands, wetland-associated ecosystems and the species that benefit from these habitats. Funding and expansion of the Act was brought up several times, indicating an issue of concern. The potential threat was seen not in the idea of NAWCA becoming an all bird all habitat program, but rather doing so at the expense of its focus. A related, but separate issue brought up was the appearance of “scandal” within the program from outside groups, especially since evaluation and monitoring was brought up as a weakness of the program.

Loss of NAWCA's Focus

“Diversification and dispersal of the funds. There has been a strong push by a few people to accomplish other objectives under the Act, but I think there are still things that need work under the original purposes of the Act that Congress wanted. Some people think the Act can be pushed beyond this. It would take away from the principle need that the Act was put in place for and it is potentially threatening to the support base within Congress and the traditional support base for the Act.”

“NAWCA has been successful because of its focus. It has provided a wide range of migratory bird benefits, but we need to focus on wetland related species, wetlands, and high quality projects. We shouldn't become a bathtub of money that everyone runs to to get money for their own priorities and concerns. We shouldn't start working on endangered species, or habitats related to upland species.”

“As the other bird initiatives mature and want a piece of the pie, NAWCA has to make sure that we work in concert with those interests and allow this process to include their interests, and not create other Councils or processes to manage it. We need to move with some speed, but still maintain the current Council's goals but understand that the Act gives latitude to other interests. If we don't move quickly enough, we may be passed over, resulting in competing interests. We should keep all the bird interests united. The Council [NAWCC] should show a positive reception to other bird interests in the coming years or else they will try to get their own authority, money and processes.”

“It [expansion] depends on the appropriations. If we had unlimited resources, I would have no problem having an element of that into the uplands, but the focus now is wetlands and migratory birds and it should continue. Council [NAWCC] has never really defined what “additional funding” is, and with the \$40 million last year, some people were really disappointed that some of that didn't go into uplands migratory birds projects. The Act is designed for more than waterfowl and we've always had projects that included habitat for wetland related landbirds and shorebirds, and we do work in

uplands if it is directly related to wetlands. Also, if there were some large initiative by the Administration to divert the funding, our program would suffer.”

“Internal, within the program. It [NAWCA] doesn’t know who it is anymore. It’s battling with an identity crisis because for so long it was tied to the NAWMP and its leadership was very duck oriented. People are afraid to speak out about the future of the program and argue over what the intention of the Act is, when I think it appears to be a conflicting dynamic of duck versus all birds. The FWS has been trying to position the program to be a recipient of some all bird dollars, so they have been trying to change the program somewhat to be able to get this money. There hasn’t been buy in into that and there is a lot of distrust in that process.”

Public Relations

“Scandal or appearance of scandal, such as if NAWCA were portrayed as a golden fleece award in terms of public relations. By scandal I mean accountability to make sure results are documented, that projects and money are documented.”

Other Work that NAWCA Should Do

Opinions on the type of work that NAWCA should be doing touches on many of the aspects in this report that have already been covered, such as the need for post-project evaluation. There were some differences in opinion over whether other types of work should be done compared to what is currently being done by NAWCA. For example, a fair number of individuals, including Tangential Stakeholders, felt that work in urban areas would be beneficial, while others, including individuals from the NABCI Canada Council, felt that this type of environment would not produce high value impacts, and should be avoided. There was interest in expanding the NAWCA mandate to conduct work in the boreal forests of Canada. Canadian Implementers felt that public policy work could be done. Once again, the subject of evaluation and monitoring was brought up, as a potential area to address.

“I would like NAWCA to address some of the public education needs out there by having demonstration wetlands near large urban centers and doing more projects from an educational standpoint.”

“Public policy work, but I’m not sure if this is stated in the Act. It takes a lot of resources to operate effectively, so in the interest of continental conservation, funding and supportive research for public policy could be done.”

“Riparian work yes, but urban work, no. We don’t need more urban species like grackles. In urban environments, because of the constraints of the city, habitats tend to be linear with a lot of edge to promote species that are already doing well on their own. The cost is at the expense of doing more work outside the urban area, where it is better to protect blocks of habitat before the city gets there.”

“Other than boreal forests, no. I hope that we don’t get involved in urban projects and other types of landscapes because it is not obvious what we can do. Urban projects are fine now and then as demonstration projects, but the amount of money required is tremendous, and it gets back to the idea of focus.”

“More emphasis on scientific evaluation. I am a strong believer in feedback and knowing what you are doing. When the Canadian auditor general comes to me and asks where the money has gone, you need that evaluation process to say how we are doing. The evaluation is just sound management and there is reluctance on the NAWCA side to fund evaluations. And I think it is a little short sighted because I think we need to make sure we are doing the right thing.”

Attitudes Towards NAWCA and the All Bird Conservation Initiatives

A clear difference of opinion existed on where NAWCA should be going and if, or how far the program should expand to incorporate the goals and objectives of the other bird initiatives. Among those who did not support the expansion of NAWCA, the principle reasons for not supporting it were because of the issue of funding, foregoing benefits of the current program and lack of clear objectives of the other bird initiative groups. Many NAWCC and NABCI Canada Council members supported the fact that NAWCA has been focused on wetlands and migratory birds associated with wetlands, and felt that NAWCA should not become “all things to all people.” These stakeholders supported the idea of all bird, all habitat conservation, but did not think that NAWCA’s funding should be used for projects that are not directly associated with wetlands.

Even among those that showed support for NAWCA becoming an all bird all habitat protection program, almost everyone said they would support it as long as there is a separate funding source. Only a minor constituency felt that there is currently enough funding for such an expansion, and that the NAWCC should be taking a leadership role in moving toward expanding NAWCA. A prominent concern was the fear that NAWCA would forego benefits to the current program if it were to move into other areas without increasing the funding base. The fear was that NAWCA would, in “trying to be everything to everyone,” become “nothing to anyone.” Another concern was that while the other bird initiatives wanted to get involved they do not yet

have clear objectives that fit into the current NAWCA framework. This lack of objectives made stakeholders feel as if they do not fully understand the benefits that will accrue from protecting other bird species. Therefore, these stakeholders were hesitant to put money into those areas.

“I would rather give money to help people keep operating rather than put money into something where I don’t know the benefits (such as colonial waterbirds).”

“The program should be everything, but it needs to soul-search and make a cognizant decision about where it wants to go. There is a benefit of being a niche-marketer in terms of focus, but I think that the real growth and future will be with our ability to protect bird habitat more broadly than just wetlands; to serve broader objectives but enhance our ability to conserve wetlands too. Current funding should be used but the question is how much? We don’t want to lose focus and end up looking back in 5 or 10 years and realizing that in trying to do more, we didn’t do anything. We need to maintain focus on the goals in NAWMP and make sure we make progress there, but at the same time make sure we try to serve some of these broader migratory bird objectives. I think we can do that because we’ve had projects that had a lot of benefits to “non target” birds, be it shorebirds or grassland nesting birds. If we set that as an objective in conjunction with conserving wetlands, then we will be able to do that a lot better.”

“The future rests with additional funding going to NAWCA, and the process expanding to all birds and all habitats, that the wetland funding remain as it has been but that the vision expands with additional money to promote bird conservation. But, it may be easier for the conservation community if NAWCA remained focused and there was instead a parallel program that was focused on other birds. It would give some assurance to current wetland and duck partners that we won’t be robbing their money.”

“We shouldn’t become a bathtub of money that everyone runs to to get money for their own priorities and concerns. We shouldn’t start working on endangered species, or habitats related to upland species.”

“If NABCI, etc think they should have a seat at the table, they need to have money to bring. The problem is that a lot of people mean well, but organizations like Audubon, Defenders, etc don’t have money and can’t get people to bring dollars to the table.”

“If groups want to expand NAWCA they need to show that Congress didn’t intend or wasn’t lobbied hard by NAWMP people to get NAWCA to support the Plan, OR they need to increase or supplement money from Congress with money that the Council [NAWCC] could use to take off in a new direction to support a wider range of birds. They need to quantify priorities, give focus areas, and show where money should be spent. They are having trouble because they can’t agree.”

“I think that NAWCA has taken baby-steps to move in the direction of the other bird initiatives, but I think they should take leapfrogs, especially since the process is in place. We need to roll it out for all birds and all habitats. With a 5 million increase in appropriations this year, it is odd that leadership can’t be demonstrated. There will

never be enough for ducks, or bird conservation, but we need to look at what is the smartest thing to do in conserving biodiversity.”

Where should NAWCA go in terms of NABCI?

“How do we get to NABCI? I think there are two directions to go: legislation in support of all birds and all habitats would be welcome and NAWCA could evolve into that, or it could be part of that. It is most important to not go backwards in terms of the commitment to wetlands.”

Attitudes Towards Overabundance Issues

The overall opinion was that there is no direct link between the work that NAWCA has done and the overabundance of some species such as Canada Geese or Snow Geese. The overall attitude was that other factors have contributed more to species overabundance, especially at the local level, such as land use laws or agricultural practices. A few individuals thought that NAWCA should be concerned about negative public perception and should work to communicate to the public that NAWCA is not the direct cause of overpopulation. Some people may make the connection between NAWCA and overabundant species, but overall the perception was that this type of connection has not been made. Strong opinions were expressed that NAWCA funds should not be used to manage overabundant populations, and should only be utilized for management when there is a direct relation to the wetland habitat.

“NAWCA should not take responsibility [for overabundance issues] or allow anyone to attach responsibility to NAWCA.”

“NAWCA would only be a problem if you could directly relate actions in the habitat from NAWCA to that overpopulation and that doesn't appear to be the case.”

“We won't put money into Snow Geese projects...we'll take it [overabundance] into account in project selection. I think the Snow Geese went up because of farm practices, like when they started producing corn. Maybe some climate change has to do with it but not really NAWCA. Now it is a matter of harvest regulations. We should be aware of it [overabundance] but it's not really important to NAWCA.”

“It's a tangential effect maybe...I don't think that people are blaming NAWCA for too many Canadian Geese.”

Chapter 4: Major Issues

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) is immense in its scope, achievements and potential capabilities. Like most programs, it has its obvious strengths and weaknesses, but is considered to be a success story overall. Attitudes and opinions varied considerably on most issues directly relating to NAWCA, but several important conclusions may be drawn from the results of the personal interviews and focus groups. NAWCA appears to be in a stage of transition: caught between the successful results it has already produced, such as the amount of habitat it has helped to protect, and the potential direction that it might take in the future, especially regarding the other bird conservation initiatives. The focus groups and personal interviews revealed that a wide variety of opinions exist about NAWCA, but several conclusions may be drawn regarding NAWCA's achievements, weaknesses and future direction.

Overall Achievements of NAWCA

Taking into account the opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of NAWCA, the Act and the program were viewed as an overall success. Partnerships were consistently mentioned as a major strength, in terms of the number, diversity and breadth of the relationships that have formed since the inception of NAWCA. Habitat conservation on the ground, in terms of the acres protected, wetlands conserved, and benefits to waterfowl, other migratory birds, and other species was also viewed as a major accomplishment. In addition, the amount of funding that Congress has appropriated, as well as the amount of dollars that have been generated by partners was considered to be a major strength. NAWCA was seen as having had some influence on the public's perception of wetlands, as well as some policy development, but not to the scale that is desirable for a program of this size. The general perception was that impact is being measured by acres and dollars, and opinions varied on whether or not this constitutes a sufficient level of evaluation and monitoring.

Evaluation and Monitoring

A general concern over evaluation and monitoring was expressed by almost half of the focus group participants and those interviewed. A large element of trust is built into the current

system, especially in terms of trusting partners to accomplish what they say they will in their proposals. Several NAWCC members would like to increase their comfort level with the project selection processes in Canada. However, Canadians felt that their system (the program versus project approach) has a high degree of quality control because the proposals are screened several times before they are presented to the United States.

The perception was that impacts of NAWCA projects are being measured by acres protected and dollars invested. However, the actual impact of these factors is not being measured, such as how the acres are benefiting wildlife, or how the acres fit into the overall concept of biodiversity at a landscape level. Perhaps more importantly, however, is the concern of whether site-specific post project follow-up should occur in order to ensure that the funds were used as proposed, to assess how the land is being managed, and to measure the benefits that have accrued from protecting a certain parcel of land. The question then becomes, how, or should, impacts beyond the general measurements of acres and investment (dollars) be measured? The general opinion was that the monitoring and evaluation aspect needs improvement, but at the same time, when high quality wetlands are protected, the notion was that there are inherent values that will accrue, and certain variables do not need to be measured, such as the number of duck eggs, since these types of measurements tend to vary so much every year. Several suggestions for evaluation included allocating a percentage of funds (between 5% and 10%) for monitoring and evaluation each year, or randomly selecting some completed projects for follow up evaluation. Opinions were divided as to who should conduct the monitoring and evaluation if it were to take place. Suggestions included partners or grantees and state agencies.

Grant Administration

Concerns were expressed over the current grant administration process, especially in terms of project selection and the application process. Many stakeholders felt that the proposal process is very complicated, and can be slow. The slowness (in proposal approval) may have detrimental effects on project delivery, especially when time-sensitive land purchases suffer from delays. Some concern was expressed over the level at which politics get involved in project selection, more so in the United States than in Canada. In terms of funding distribution, a minority opinion existed on the NABCI Canada Council that although the funding ratio for the joint ventures and provinces in Canada was established based on NAWMP objectives, there is a

good chance that high quality projects are not being funded if they are outside of a joint venture or in a province that does not receive as much funding. Several individuals from the United States expressed this concern as well regarding projects in the U.S.

Another important issue relating to grant administration was the concern that some potential partners might be “shut out” of the process, especially if they are smaller and not as well established as groups like Ducks Unlimited or The Nature Conservancy. This is more likely to happen in Canada, where the funds predominantly go through a “banker” who acts as the principal grantee. However, this reflects the current process in place, in terms of the requirement of a U.S. non-federal match. This makes it difficult for small, local groups to serve as the principal grantee, although it was pointed out that these groups are free to join in as an active partner. Nevertheless, this may be an area worth exploring in terms of how to better serve stakeholder needs.

The Other Bird Initiatives

Whether or not, and how far, NAWCA should expand is a question of great debate. Stakeholders appeared to group themselves into two primary schools of thought – those who felt that NAWCA should remain focused on wetlands and migratory birds versus those who felt that NAWCA should become an all bird all habitat program. Stakeholders that believed NAWCA should remain focused have generally had more experience with the program and either took part in the original planning of the Act or were heavily involved in the implementation of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. These stakeholders were hesitant to move towards a broader outlook for NAWCA, whether because of insufficient funding, or the fear that the original partnership base will be lost if their objectives are no longer being served. Although these stakeholders were supportive of the *concept* of an all bird initiative, they simply did not believe that NAWCA funds should be directed towards projects that are not specifically focused on wetlands, wetland-associated uplands, and the species that depend upon these ecosystems. These stakeholders felt that NAWCA could be the delivery mechanism for the other bird initiatives but that they should get their own funding source. In contrast, supporters of NABCI and the expansion of NAWCA felt that NAWCA should become broader and it is not a question of “becoming all things to all people” but rather linking the goals and objectives of NAWCA to the larger landscape level and to biodiversity as a whole. These stakeholders felt that NAWCA

should be taking a more prominent role in moving forward to incorporate the objectives of the other bird initiatives. Interestingly, this is directly related to the reasons why the other group had the opposite opinion; they (stakeholders that did not support NAWCA expanding) felt that the other bird initiatives do not have clearly defined goals and that there is an insufficient biological foundation supporting their objectives.