



A Wetland Conservation Vision for Canada



*North American
Wetlands
Conservation
Council
(Canada)*

OUR CHALLENGE

This Vision Statement is offered as a road map for use by all Canadians to further understand, protect and conserve wetlands throughout the country. It addresses objectives and goals needed to work towards this Vision. We look forward to participating in strategies, many yet to be developed, that will help deliver these objectives and goals.

There is a need for all of us, groups and individuals, to be involved. It is the hope of the Council that the many and varied segments of Canada's social, economic and cultural institutions and agencies will take some part of the Vision Statement to heart and help move Canadians towards such a Vision for wetland conservation.

The Council Secretariat is interested in hearing from you and/or your organization about our or your efforts in wetland conservation.



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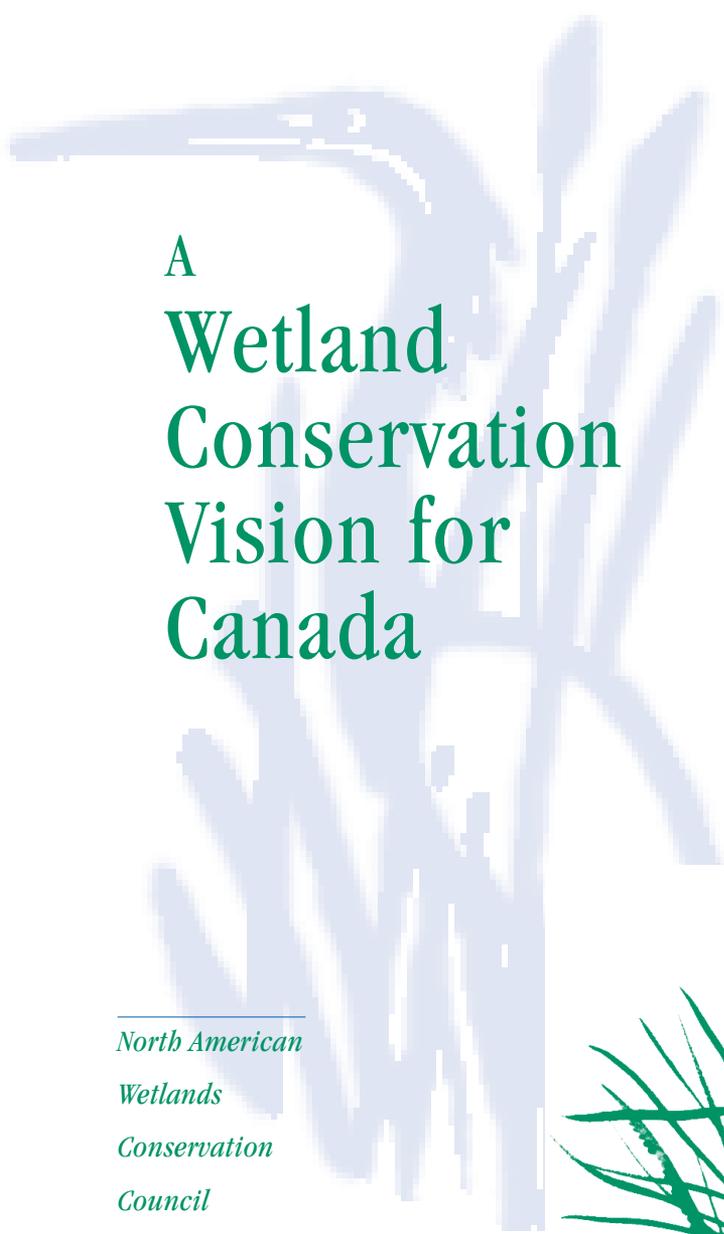
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SETTING THE SCENE

Why does Canada need a vision for wetland conservation?

Wetland ecosystems have historically been considered as wastelands, unworthy of consideration for conservation. As a result, wetlands have frequently been altered or lost because their ecological functions and resulting values to society have not been understood. Canada contains approximately 24 percent of the world's remaining wetlands. We have a responsibility to conserve and protect these resources for the social, economic and environmental benefit of Canadians and the international community.

Since 1800, an estimated 20 million hectares, almost 15 percent of Canada's total wetland base, has been drained or lost to other functions. Wetland alteration or conversion has reached 70 percent in our central prairie sloughs, 65 percent in our Atlantic salt marshes, 80 to 98 percent in our urbanized regions, 70 percent in our Pacific estuarine marshes, and 70 to 80 percent in southern Ontario and the St. Lawrence hardwood and shoreline swamps. These systems continue to be under pressure, and in some areas, Canada is falling behind in the conservation of these precious resources.

Along with being among the most threatened life-support systems around the world, wetlands are also among the most socio-economically valuable. Wetlands are exceptionally diverse and productive ecosystems that provide wildlife habitat, contribute to flood control, act as natural water filters and recharge groundwater resources.

Wetlands also store vast quantities of carbon, exceeding both temperate forests and agroecosystems. While they occupy 6 percent of the world's land surface, they contain 14 percent of the terrestrial biosphere carbon pool. In addition to the important role wetlands play in our environment, Canadians also enjoy many other benefits from wetlands, such as bird watching, hunting, fishing and other forms of outdoor recreation and education.

Many efforts are underway to stop the loss of wetlands. Many more are needed.

Objective 5

To Achieve Wetland Conservation On-the-Ground

(From Protected Areas to Local Backyards)

Goals



to promote wildlife conservation on wetlands and associated uplands through a landscape oriented approach.



to support programs such as the North American Waterfowl Management Plan to secure wetland habitats in all regions of Canada, the United States and Mexico.



to expand the national network of protected wetland areas in national, provincial, territorial and regional parks, wildlife areas, migratory bird sanctuaries, and other protected and wilderness areas.



to identify and secure priority wetlands such as coastal wetlands for targeted conservation objectives across Canada.



to proactively encourage land owners and land managers to incorporate wetland conservation strategies into land management plans.

Result: Canada has secured more of the nation's wetlands and has implemented wise use of wetland resources.

Objective 6

To Promote Knowledge About the Value of Wetland Ecosystems

Goals



to establish comprehensive wetland education and awareness programs in cooperation with the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments and the non-government and private sectors.



to highlight the economic, social and therapeutic functions and values that wetland ecosystems provide to our Society.



to promote public access to wetland information through existing and emerging communication technologies.



to produce targeted wetland science, policy and management publications on issues of greatest importance to Canadians.

Result: Canadians have increased awareness, scientific knowledge and expertise on the importance and use of wetland ecosystems.

Objective 3

To Ensure Effective Wetland Resources Data Management

Goals



to establish and widely apply a standardized national approach to wetland classification, inventory, monitoring and data integration.



to establish a National Wetland Status and Trends Survey on a 10-year monitoring cycle.



to establish standardized national protocols for the assessment and description of wetland functions and values.



to establish a national data base on the location and characteristics of wetlands, in particular the status of protected wetlands, for reporting on progress towards wetland conservation objectives.

Result: Canada has a comprehensive understanding of the distribution, characteristics and status of the nation's wetland resources.

Objective 4

To Promote Effective Wetland Science

Goals



to link wetland science agencies, researchers and managers in an effective national communications network to serve management and policy objectives.



to encourage regular national and regional wetland science symposia and workshops.



to establish catalytic programs to promote priority national and regional wetland research and centres of expertise.



to establish national wetland scholarships and awards to promote and recognize innovative scientific, socio-economic and technological research on wetland issues of importance to Canadians.



to support effective wetland research in alignment with national priorities and initiatives to conserve the nation's biodiversity and ecologically sensitive lands and waters.

Result: Canada has an adequate scientific base on which to make sound decisions regarding management of the wetland resource.

What is the North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada)?

The North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada) was established in 1990 by the Federal Minister of the Environment as a national organization committed to advancing wetland conservation efforts in Canada. The Council serves as a national forum to facilitate and monitor the development and implementation of wetland conservation policies and wetland awareness programs in Canada. The Council is also responsible for advising the Minister of the Environment on the development, coordination, and implementation of national and international wetland conservation initiatives including the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP).

The next few pages outline a *Wetland Conservation Vision for Canada* as seen by the North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada): a vision that will challenge Canadians and the wetland conservation community into the new millennium. The strength of the Council, the progress we have made, and our plans for the future are all founded on the partnerships we have developed with individuals and organizations, both government and non-government. This Vision Statement takes the same approach. It is offered as a road map for use by all Canadians to further understand, protect and conserve wetlands throughout the country.

The Vision

*Canadian governments,
non-government organizations
and the private sector
jointly envision a Canada-wide
landscape with ecologically
functional wetland ecosystems
that meet the needs of
the international community,
Canada's people and its wildlife.*

To realize this vision, Canadians must work cooperatively towards accomplishing the following six objectives.

Objective 1

To Develop and Implement Wetland Conservation Policies

Goals



to develop and implement wetland conservation and management policies and strategies in all jurisdictions in Canada.



to develop and implement sector-specific wetland management policies in our nation's resource-based industries.



to include wetland conservation goals in governmental land and water use policies.



to develop and support policies that foster an economic environment that promotes wetland and wildlife conservation using a landscape-based approach.



to convene a forum to evaluate and review national wetland conservation objectives.

Result: Wetland conservation is a matter of policy in all Canadian sectors.

Objective 2

To Improve Cooperation with National and International Jurisdictions

Goals



to promote support by all Canadian jurisdictions, and the non-government and private sectors, for the activities of the North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada) as outlined under its terms of reference.



to share Canadian expertise and experience among governments and the non-government and private sectors, nationally and internationally.



to support international wetland conservation initiatives and treaties such as the Convention on Wetlands and the Convention on Biological Diversity.



to implement national initiatives under the Convention on Wetlands leading to the securement of areas of international importance in Canada.



to promote partnerships among stakeholders within Canada and internationally, in particular those initiatives which are continental in scale.

Result: Canada is an international leader in wetland conservation.