



*Giving Wings to  
Cross-Border Waterfowl  
Conservation*

# FALL FLIGHTS

## Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies Presidential Task Force Report Summary

SEPTEMBER 2021



*The voice of fish and wildlife agencies*

Photo credit: Dale Humburg

**T**he federal governments, states, provinces, territories, and non-government partners have shared interests in North America's waterfowl and the habitats they use to breed, migrate, and winter throughout the continent. In 1986, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP, or Plan) was signed by Canada and the United States and the two nations (joined in 1994 by Mexico) embarked on one of the most important, influential, and ambitious wildlife conservation initiatives in the history of North America. The Plan has arrived at its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary and has proven

to be one of the world's most successful conservation programs.

The North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA), in 1991, became a significant source of funding for wetland conservation projects in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. NAWCA required matching funds at a ratio of at least 1:1, and for projects in Canada and Mexico, it required that the matching funds be non-federal funds originating in the U.S. In 2010, funds sourced in Canada became eligible for up to 50% of the non-federal match. The critical effect was that NAWCA funds for habitat conserva-

tion are available only to the extent that non-federal partners contribute matching funds for habitat projects in Canada and Mexico.

In support of the NAWMP and the recognition of the critical need for non-federal match funding, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) passed a resolution in 1991 that established a goal for state agencies to contribute up to \$10 million annually for breeding habitat projects in Canada. The goal was re-affirmed in 2005 and 2011 after Presidents' Task Forces reviewed state contributions. Ducks Unlimited Inc. matches each



dollar contributed by the states before they are matched again with Canadian partner and NAWCA funds. Delta Waterfowl provides matching funds for the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC). In 2019, the program became known as Fall Flights.

From 1991 to 2020, state agencies contributed \$US 85.7 million to Canadian projects, while Canadian provincial and territorial contributions have been \$US 272 million. Although this investment is significant, wetlands and the associated upland habitat continues to be at risk in the breeding grounds. The annual level of state contributions has been less than one-third of the Association's goal.

The Association's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan committed to facilitate partnerships among member fish and wildlife agencies to leverage existing resources and to maximize the impacts of existing conservation dollars. Consistent with this focus, the Association's President, Sara Parker Pauley of Missouri, established a Fall Flights Task Force in 2020. The Task Force was charged with updating the allocation of the \$10M program goal to each state, to identify immediate and longer-term actions to build the "Fall Flights brand" and increase participation in the program, and to identify an approach to enhance the strategic management of the Fall Flights program.

The Task Force used a benefit/cost approach to develop six new action statements. The new statements are focused on pragmatic actions that will improve Fall Flights program activities. The Task Force also examined the methodology used to allocate the Fall Flights goal among state agencies and concluded that applying the methodology of using the average number of active duck hunters and the duck harvest for each state over the period 2000 to 2019 was the most equitable approach to update the state goals.

The Association's goal of \$10M is ambitious but it is soundly based on the habitat need in the Canadian breeding grounds. The Task Force explored ideas for how to encourage state fish and wildlife agencies to increase their investments toward achieving the goal. It was concluded that developing a 'stepwise goal' was best and that the Association should establish an interim goal for Fall Flights of \$5 million and 100% participation by state agencies by 2026. If state agencies are going to increase their investments, so too will Canadian conservation organizations and provincial and federal governments. Therefore, targets were established for matching investments by provincial and federal governments.

State fish and wildlife agencies are all unique. However, they also have commonalities that can be used to

communicate better and more effectively with groups of agencies about the Fall Flights program. The Task Force completed a clustering analysis based on the importance of waterfowl, spending priorities, and other state and fish and wildlife agency characteristics. The analysis produced six clusters of states that have common characteristics and will help to target key messages or information that is most relevant to the interests and needs of the states within the clusters. The Task Force conducted a survey of state fish and wildlife agency directors and wildlife chiefs. The results of the survey can be used to develop the key messages for the state clusters and to improve the future management of the Fall Flights program.

Lastly, in response to the President's charge to enhance the strategic management of the Fall Flights program, the Task Force concluded that creating a 'Fall Flights Advisory Committee' based on a consultative governance model was best for the program. There should be representation from each of the regional associations, from at least one Canadian province, from the National Flyway Council and the chair of the Association's Waterfowl Working Group involved in the Advisory Committee. (see organization chart).



Photo credit: Ducks Unlimited Canada

# Recommendations Summary

In response to the analyses and significant deliberations the Fall Flights Task Force respectfully offers the following recommendations to the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies for consideration and action:

## RECOMMENDATION #1:

*AFWA Goal for the Fall Flights Program* — The Task Force recommends that the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) reaffirm its commitment to the \$10 million annual program goal and that state fish and wildlife agencies endeavor to maximize their investments in furtherance of the goal to collectively increase the required US non-federal match funding for North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) projects in the waterfowl breeding grounds of Canada.

## RECOMMENDATION #2:

*Stepwise Interim AFWA Goal* — The Task Force recommends that the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) adopt a stepwise interim goal of \$5 million in annual contributions and 100% participation of state fish and wildlife agencies by 2026.

## RECOMMENDATION #3:

*Apportionment of the \$10 Million Fall Flights Goal Among States* — The Task Force recommends that an equal weighting of the percentage of each state's active waterfowl hunters and duck harvest, relative to the national values, be averaged over the period 2000 to 2019 to provide the methodology for establishing new state goals for sharing of the \$10 million annual Fall Flights goal.

## RECOMMENDATION #4:

*New Canadian Goals for NAWCA Matching Funds* — The Task Force recommends that federal and provincial goals for Canadian NAWCA match be established. Goals shall be proportional to the current level of government investment as Canadian NAWCA match and adjusted for the science-based approach of allocation of NAWCA in Canada as outlined in the NAWCC (Canada) Strategic Plan for 2020-2030. Federal goals will be established at the Joint Venture level and provincial goals established at their respective jurisdictional level.

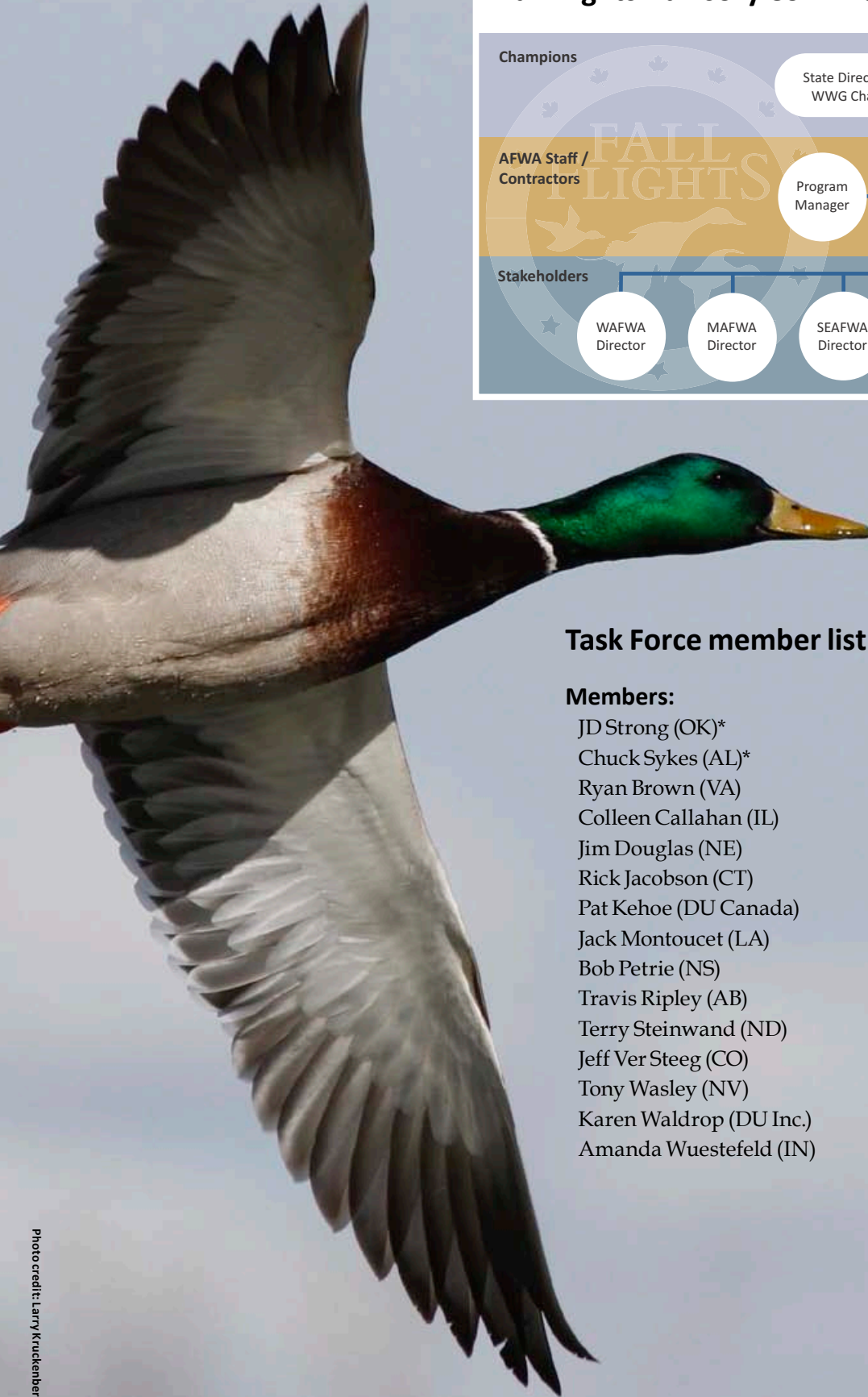
## RECOMMENDATION #5:

*Establish Fall Flights Advisory Committee* — The Task Force recommends that the AFWA President create a standing Fall Flights Advisory Committee to oversee the implementation of the Fall Flights program and to report annually to the Association's membership, as well as provide guidance and advice to the Association's President and Executive Director. The Advisory Committee members shall be at the state director level (or equivalent for NGOs) and appointed by the AFWA President to operate under a consultative governance structure.

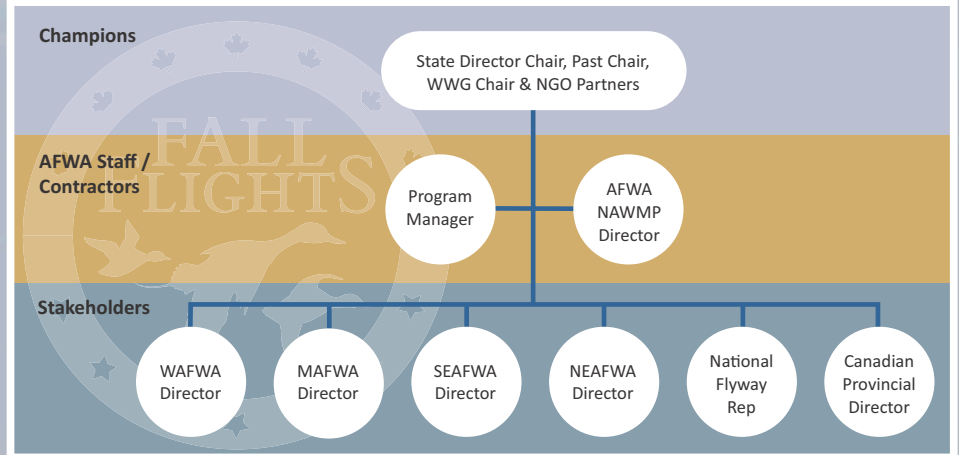
## RECOMMENDATION #6:

*Identify Financial Resources for a Fall Flights Program Coordinator and Other Program Activities* — The Task Force recommends that financial resources be identified in the Association's annual budget and matched, at a minimum of one-to-one, by participating non-government partners to support a contract-based Fall Flights Program Coordinator.





## Fall Flights Advisory Committee Governance Structure



### Task Force member list

#### Members:

- JD Strong (OK)\*
- Chuck Sykes (AL)\*
- Ryan Brown (VA)
- Colleen Callahan (IL)
- Jim Douglas (NE)
- Rick Jacobson (CT)
- Pat Kehoe (DU Canada)
- Jack Montoucet (LA)
- Bob Petrie (NS)
- Travis Ripley (AB)
- Terry Steinwand (ND)
- Jeff Ver Steeg (CO)
- Tony Wasley (NV)
- Karen Waldrop (DU Inc.)
- Amanda Wuestefeld (IN)

#### Ex-Officio Members:

- Stephen Carlyle (MHHC)
- Dave Kostersky (DU Canada)
- Craig LeSchack (DU Inc.)
- Dean Smith (AFWA)

#### Other Contributors:

- Corey Jager (OK)
- Emily McCallen (IN)
- Larry Reynolds (LA)
- Betsy York (OK)

\* Indicates Co-chairs of the Task Force

Photo credit: Larry Kruckenberg