



Evaluation of the Habitat Conservation Partnerships Program

March 2018

Acknowledgements

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The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the 2009 Treasury Board (TB) Policy on Evaluation¹ and the Financial Administration Act requirements to evaluate all ongoing programs of grants and contributions and direct program spending at least once every five years. It was identified in the 2014 Departmental Risk-Based Audit and Evaluation Plan.

This report was approved by the Deputy Heads of Environment and Climate Change Canada on March 16, 2018. It is available on the Environment and Climate Change Canada website in both official languages.

This report was prepared by the Evaluation Division of the Audit and Evaluation Branch

¹ The [Policy on Results](#) replaced the Policy on Evaluation in 2016.

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land securement and retention. While the total cumulative number of hectares secured across all components of the HCP Program is not available, the individual components continue to acquire lands for protection and have made significant progress towards their respective land securement or retention goals.

All HCP Program components contribute to habitat management and stewardship. There is evidence that best practices, guidelines and processes for the management of secured properties are in place. The NAWMP—and since 2013, the NACP—are progressing towards their habitat management targets. The WHC Conservation Stamp Initiative contributes to habitat management through value-added funding to NAWMP and other partners. The EGP encourages the recipient organizations to establish and implement management plans for donated lands. Management plans have been developed for most Canadian Ramsar sites.

Levels of participation and engagement are mixed across the various HCP Program components. While several program components have good overall levels of stakeholder engagement and participation, the evaluation findings suggest there is still room for improvement. The evaluation identified a need for broader engagement and awareness of the EGP among potential donors, particularly those who may possess important and ecologically sensitive habitat. The NAWMP component is seen as a successful partnership model for co-operation among public and private stakeholders at various levels; however, agricultural, forestry and indigenous stakeholders have been under-represented. Though the WHC Conservation Stamp Initiative engages with its targeted audience of hunters, there is an opportunity to expand participation through increased outreach.

The HCP Program includes many internationally accepted best practices in wildlife habitat conservation. It supports a mix of mechanisms that contribute to wildlife habitat protection and conservation through partnerships in the conservation community.

The governance structures of the individual HCP Program components are clearly defined, appropriate and mostly efficient. However, a gap was identified in terms of any overarching governance that would provide for consolidated strategic planning across the various HCP Program components. This would support a more coordinated and integrated approach to priority setting and also enable greater collaboration, communication and efficiencies within the program.

The various components make effective use of leveraging mechanisms, building on ECCC funding to achieve habitat conservation results in an efficient manner. The use of external partners to deliver program components is also viewed as an efficient approach. For the most part, the administrative and operational practices of the various program components appear to be working well, with no significant inefficiencies identified.

All HCP Program components collect and report performance data. However, it is difficult to collect data and report on results at the overall HCP Program level. Overlap in reporting by the components results in some double counting. Although three of the five components have logic models, at the time of the evaluation, there was no overall logic model describing the program's expected results. Both these issues are being addressed by performance measurement planning related to implementing the 2016 Treasury Board (TB) [Policy on Results](#) and the introduction of

2.1. Continued need for the program

Findings: The need to conserve and protect wildlife habitat in Canada is greater than ever, given numerous stressors such as industrial development and climate change. Habitat loss is one of the biggest threats to species. Wetlands require particular attention since they are one of the most biologically productive habitats. They also provide economic and social benefits. The HCP Program addresses the need for habitat conservation through its various components. There was little evidence of duplication among the program components or between HCP Program components and other government programs. However, the evaluation team identified the potential for some overlap with activities under the Habitat Stewardship Program.

Habitat loss, including degradation and fragmentation, is identified as the most important factor driving biodiversity loss. Wetlands, in particular, require attention as they are one of the most biologically productive habitats, supporting a wide range of flora and fauna. Wetlands also provide countless economic and social benefits to humanity, ranging from freshwater supply, food and building materials, to flood control, groundwater recharge and climate change mitigation.

There is a continued need for interventions in the conservation, restoration and enhancement of wildlife habitat to address the potentially negative impacts of factors such as urban sprawl, increasing farm sizes, forestry practices, water drainage and intensive agricultural practices.

There is little evidence of duplication of effort among the various HCP Program components or with other government programs. The majority of interviewees reported that the program components are complementary. All of the HCP Program components contribute to habitat conservation goals, but accomplish this through the use of different mechanisms (discussed further in [4.3 Program delivery](#)).

There is, however, a potential for overlap with the Habitat Stewardship Program (HSP), a component of ECCC's Species at Risk Program. A few external interviewees expressed some confusion related to the similarity of activities funded under the EGP and NACP components of the HCP Program and the HSP with regard to species at risk. They also expressed an interest in greater integration of funding programs. Program representatives acknowledged the similarities, but noted that the HCP Program components and the HSP target different habitats and different actions. A review of program documentation confirms that the programs are similar. However, the HSP supports a broader range of activities or project types and favours stewardship activities as the primary means of achieving program goals. The EGP and NACP components focus more on land securement and protection.

2.2. Alignment with government priorities

Findings: The HCP Program is aligned with federal government and departmental priorities related to wildlife habitat conservation.

The initial focus of the NACP was on land securement. However in recent years, the NACP has put an increasing focus on habitat management. Since 2013, the NACP allows for stewardship and habitat management activities on lands secured under the program.

As a long-standing program, NAWMP continues to add to the total amount of land managed or enhanced. The WHC Conservation Stamp Initiative also contributes to habitat management through value-added funding to NAWMP and partner initiatives. The EGP contributes to habitat management by encouraging the recipient organizations to establish and implement management plans. Management plans have been developed for the majority of Canadian Ramsar sites.

Natural Areas Conservation Program

Funding under the NACP to support stewardship and habitat management was introduced with the 2013 NACP agreement. At that time, \$2.725 million of the \$10 million in funding was identified for the maintenance, improvement or monitoring of lands. The 2007-12 NACP agreement focused only on land securement. However, the 2014-19 agreement identified about \$15 million of the \$100 million in funding for use by the NCC for stewardship, and \$5 million for DUC to use for land securement and stewardship activities.

The NACP final report for the period from 2007-15 identifies that the NCC has raised over \$44 million in endowment capital, while other qualified organizations (OQO) raised an additional \$3 million. DUC also has a fund that provides resources to steward its secured lands, including land secured under the NACP. The NACP report also noted that the NCC and OQOs had spent about \$2.5 million on priority conservation actions and management activities to address urgent or necessary needs.

Table 9: Natural Areas Conservation Program land managed and targets (in hectares)

Land managed	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
	1 st Agreement			Amended 1 st Agreement	2 nd Agreement	
Total land managed	0	0	0	169,067	0	173,705
Target – total land managed	0	0	0	55,000	220,000*	

Source: Data received from Program as of June 2017.

*Represents target identified in 2014-19 Agreement, to be achieved by the end of 2018-19.

The latest figures show that, as of 2015-16, the NACP managed approximately 174,000 hectares of land by using stewardship in Priority Conservation Actions and Monitored Conservation Agreements. The program will need to continue to add to this number to meet its target of managing 220,000 hectares by the end of 2018-19. There is no indication that this target is not attainable.

The NCC makes long-term stewardship of secured lands a priority by requiring that 15% of the total land value is allocated to a Stewardship Endowment Fund to undertake future land

the high levels of funding the NCC receives. As well, smaller organizations that cannot meet the matching requirements may be excluded from receiving funding. Interviewees noted that this may be limiting overall conservation efforts.

North American Waterfowl Management Plan/North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada)

Many interviewees, both internal and external, mention NAWMP as a successful partnership model that supports co-operation among public and private stakeholders at various levels. NAWMP's success in this area is viewed as being largely due to the concerted efforts of partners and the sustained engagement of the broad waterfowl conservation community enabled by the significant funding support for this initiative, including substantial levels of funding from the U.S.

Case study interviewees commended NAWMP for working closely with landowners and farmers to establish stewardship practices for land conservation and provide habitat for migrating waterfowl. They also reported that the support and partnership provided by ECCC means that a broader range of targeted audiences and organizations can be reached.

Interviewees noted that different stakeholders, local farmers and the public have shown a great level of interest and involvement in the discussion on wetlands policy. This has had a significant influence on the development of provincial wetland policies and increased awareness within governments about wetlands conservation.

Despite these identified strengths, both internal and external interviewees identified opportunities for improvement related to engaging with industry, other government departments, provincial government partners and Indigenous groups. In particular, both internal and external interviewees identified an absence of federal and provincial agricultural partners. Agriculture and forestry industry stakeholders and Indigenous stakeholders were also identified as being inadequately represented. Since much of the current conservation landscape is driven by these partners, their absence was noted as having an impact on overall conservation efforts, moving forward.

Wildlife Habitat Canada Conservation Stamp Initiative

Documentary evidence indicates that the WHC Conservation Stamp Initiative component has been able to influence partner involvement in projects and has made a contribution to increasing the awareness of the need for stewardship activities through funding conservation projects. Case study interviewees reported that the transfer of knowledge and expertise and broad outreach into the community was adequate.

Survey respondents and key informants generally reported that this program component has adequate engagement from its target audiences; however, many indicated that audiences are only engaged to a limited extent. As the program relies on the revenues generated through the sales of stamps and hunting permits, maintaining an appropriate base of waterfowl hunters is key to success. Some external interviewees indicated that the WHC Conservation Stamp Initiative would

Program component	Governance
Wildlife Habitat Canada Conservation Stamp Initiative	WHC is governed by a board of directors composed of two ECCC-appointed members, two representatives of the Provincial and Territorial Wildlife Directors and five members selected by the Board (Directors at Large) including representatives from provincial and territorial wildlife agencies and representatives from non-governmental national wildlife organizations. ECCC sits as an observer on the board. The board has three committees: the Executive Committee, the Finance and Audit Committee and the Nominating Committee.
Ecological Gifts Program	The EGP is administered by ECCC in co-operation with dozens of partners, including other federal departments, provincial and municipal governments, and environmental non-government organizations. A national secretariat and regional program coordinators manage the EGP. It works with the independent Appraisal Review Panel (ARP), which reviews appraisals submitted by donors, and makes recommendations to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change Canada regarding the fair market value of ecological gifts.
Ramsar Convention	The Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP) meets every three years and promotes policies and guidelines to further the application of the Convention. ECCC's CWS represents the North American Region on the Ramsar Standing Committee, on a rotational basis with the U.S. and Mexico.

Natural Areas Conservation Program

The 2012 evaluation of the NACP component found that the NCC has a clearly defined and understood governance structure for setting priorities and funding approvals. Similarly, most interviewees for the current evaluation reported that the governance structure of the NACP is appropriate and very effective. External interviewees noted that the program committee, which involves both the NCC and ECCC, has been effective. They mentioned that ECCC has been approachable in clarifying any issues about the eligibility of expenses or land acquisitions.

North American Waterfowl Management Plan/North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada)

Interviewees reported that the NAWMP governance structure is fairly clear and effective. There is some confusion, however, about the roles and responsibilities of NAWMP and the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) and the degree to which NAWMP can be used to support conservation goals other than waterfowl.

One survey respondent suggested that a national body that delivers national wetland conservation initiatives beyond the scope of individual HJVs would add value. As well, an updated national wetland policy would assist the efforts of all programs targeting wetland management and conservation.

Comparisons between components should be made with caution because of the differences in focus, approach and underlying agreements that guide delivery, as well as variations in reporting assumptions. However, the table shows the important role of contributions from other partners. It also reflects the variations in delivery costs to ECCC associated with involving partners in the delivery of the component.

Table 14: program costs, land secured or retained and land managed by implementing stewardship actions, by program component, from 2010-11 to 2015-16

Program costs and land secured or managed	Natural Areas Conservation Program	North American Waterfowl Management Plan/North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada)	Wildlife Habitat Canada Conservation Stamp Initiative	Ecological Gifts Program	Ramsar Convention
Funding					
ECCC salary and O&M	N/A	\$4,110,000	\$17,000	\$6,751,000	\$361,000
ECCC G&Cs	\$131,865,000	\$13,979,000	\$10,304,000	\$376,000	\$1,230,000
Contributions from partners	\$301,428,000	\$543,942,000	\$53,740,000*	N/A	N/A
Total funding	\$433,293,000	\$562,031,000	\$64,061,000	\$7,127,000	\$1,591,000
Land secured or retained and land managed by implementing stewardship actions (in hectares)					
Incremental land secured (2010-11 to 2015-16)	276,000	325,000	N/A	43,000	20,000
Total land managed (as of 2015-16)	174,000	4,721,000	806,000	N/A	N/A

Source: Data received from Program as of 2017.

* Since data was not available for 2010-11 on contributions from other partners for WHC Conservation Stamp Initiative, total contributions for that year were estimated as the average yearly contribution from 2011-2012 to 2015-2016.

Natural Areas Conservation Program

The 2012 evaluation of the NACP found that the NCC was efficient in delivering the program and had exemplary administrative and operational processes. The current evaluation also found that the NCC's strong science-based approach contributes to efficiencies. It enables the NCC to be highly targeted in establishing conservation priorities and acquiring properties that address them. Interviewees were of the view that the NACP's approach of providing funding directly to the NCC to manage program delivery is more efficient than if ECCC were to undertake this role.

During the current evaluation timeframe, the NACP component matched the approximately \$132 million in G&C funding received from ECCC with approximately \$301 million in funds from other sources. This represents an overall ratio of approximately 2.3:1 or \$2.29 leveraged for every \$1 received.

Interviewees and survey respondents expressed the view that the ECCC funding could be spread more broadly. About half (51.3%) of survey respondents suggested that the funding eligibility criteria for OQOs were appropriate. However, some external stakeholders in both the survey and interviews said that it would be more efficient if ECCC resources were either distributed by ECCC to a wider base of conservation-based NGOs or if the OQO component of the NACP were more accessible. In response to a similar conclusion made during the 2012 evaluation of the NACP, the NCC developed a renewed OQO program. Among other changes, the renewed OQO program introduced a limit of \$250,000 per project for OQO program funding and limited the allowed number of project applications to 1 per organization.

North American Waterfowl Management Plan/North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada)

Interviewees reported that working with external government partners for the delivery of NAWMP works well. These partners are better positioned to leverage the funding received and build personal relationships in the communities. Similarly, the case study evidence showed that working directly with private landowners and with the agricultural community to conduct conservation stewardship activities is an efficient and effective approach. Interviewees indicated that regional HJVs are a strength in the design and delivery of NAWMP. The majority (96%) of survey respondents agreed that the HJVs are the appropriate mechanism for carrying out the goals of NAWMP.

Canadian federal sources, including ECCC, represent \$380 million (17%) of the overall \$2,218 million in funds that contributed to NAWMP goals in Canada from 1986 to March 2016 (see Table 15). Similarly, this represents only 33% of the overall \$1,143 million from Canadian sources that contributed to NAWMP from 1986 to 2016. During the same timeframe, the four Canadian HJVs:

- secured 8.1 million hectares of land
- influenced 56.4 million hectares
- enhanced 1.4 million hectares
- managed 4.7 million hectares

As of 2010, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act requires that up to half of the U.S. funding for Canadian projects be matched with contributions from other federal and non-federal sources. This requirement has helped Canadian conservation efforts and has had an impact on Canadian conservation capacity with minimal federal funding. As a result, the contribution level for wetland conservation has increased, which is having a greater influence on land retention, management and enhancement.

Table 15: contributions in support of North American Waterfowl Management Plan in Canada, 1986-2016 (\$CAD)

Country and jurisdiction	Contributions	Percentage of overall total
U.S. - federal	\$569 million	25.7%
U.S. - non-federal	\$506 million	22.8%
U.S. - total	\$1,075 million	48.5%
Canadian - federal	\$380 million	17.1%
Canadian - provincial and territorial	\$307 million	13.8%
Canadian - other	\$456 million	20.6%
Canadian - total	\$1,143 million	51.5%
Overall total	\$2,218 million	100%

Source: [Habitat Matters: 2016 Canadian NAWMP Report](#)

Wildlife Habitat Canada Conservation Stamp Initiative

Survey respondents generally considered the administrative processes of this program component to be efficient and well-functioning. The majority (71.4%) agreed that the WHC Conservation Stamp Initiative's program decisions are made in a timely manner. However, interviewees identified two opportunities for WHC to improve administrative processes and other operational efficiencies.

- The price of Canadian Wildlife Conservation Stamps has remained unchanged since 1998. Stamps are sold for \$8.50. They are affixed to the Migratory Game Bird Hunting Permits, which are also sold for \$8.50, for a total cost of \$17. At the same time, there has been a decline in the sale of waterfowl hunting permits. Several interviewees suggested that the price of stamps be raised to increase revenues for conservation.
- A more robust administrative process is needed to reconcile revenues and transfer money to the WHC, to improve alignment with the hunting season. Electronic permitting was identified as a potential solution. Documentary review indicated that steps in this direction have already been taken. As of August 2015, hunters can purchase the stamp online and the e-permitting system is accessible to hunters 24/7.

Since 2010-11, the WHC has invested \$10.3 million on funded projects, while the total funding from other partners is estimated at approximately \$53 million. However, this program component primarily (95%) supports projects conducted as part of the NAWMP component. As such, it is likely that much of this funding is also accounted for in funding for the NAWMP component.

Ecological Gifts Program

EGP land securement is driven solely by donors, so it was not possible to make an accurate assessment of land secured in relation to money spent. Instead, EGP expenses pertain mainly to the processes of donation, including assessing market value, certifying property.

The EGP engages in program tracking, which includes the creation and maintenance of an Ecogifts database, and in managing and streamlining of the donation process. A majority of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that EGP program decisions regarding certifying fair market value (55%), and certifying property as ecologically sensitive (60%) are made in a timely manner. Information and instructions about making an ecological gift are available online. The EGP has also published the [Canadian Ecological Gifts Program Handbook](#), which outlines information on ecological gifts and provides a checklist on the process of donating under the EGP. However, key informants indicated that website instructions for the EGP component could be made clearer for landowners who may not be familiar with the appraisal processes and financial concepts of the application procedure.

Ramsar Convention

Canada fulfils its international commitments to the Ramsar Convention, including submitting [national reports](#) related to Canada's implementation of the Ramsar Convention. This is done in a manner that keeps incremental spending specific to Ramsar to a minimum. During the evaluation period, spending for this component represented 1% of the overall HCP Program spending.

4.4 Performance data collection

Findings: The five HCP Program components collect and report performance data. However, it is difficult to collect data and report on results at the overall HCP Program level. Overlap in reporting by the components means that some double counting occurs. Further, although three of the components have logic models, there was no overall logic model for the program when the evaluation was conducted. These issues are being addressed by performance measurement planning related to implementing the 2016 TB [Policy on Results](#) and the introduction of revised reporting procedures to address the issue of double counting.

Overall

Although performance data is available for each of the HCP Program components, the evaluation was not able to compile a clear picture of overall performance for the HCP Program. Overlap between reporting on the various components would result in double counting if the reports are aggregated. However, the department has recently introduced measures to address the issue of double counting between components. For example, as of 2014, the program ensures the NCC subtracts ecogifts donated under the EGP from its reporting for the NACP and program representatives work closely with the WHC and other partners to avoiding duplicated reporting between NAWMP and the WHC Conservation Stamp Initiative in the NAWMP National Tracking System.

During the evaluation timeframe, there was no cohesive logic model or reporting mechanism in use for the program. To address this issue, an overall program logic model is being developed as part of the implementation of the TB [Policy on Results](#).¹¹

Natural Areas Conservation Program

The NACP has a logic model and performance data for the component is reported as a “year in review” in the [NACP Annual Progress Report](#), which is made public. This report details the number of hectares of land protected over the course of the reporting year. Overall, the NCC sets clear and specific goals and targets for each fiscal year and publishes reports on the progress towards their achievement. The NACP relies on strong compliance monitoring and land information systems to support performance measurement.

North American Waterfowl Management Plan/North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada)

NAWMP collects performance data and reports on the results. The program’s four Canadian HJVs report on performance data related to habitat that was retained, enhanced, managed and influenced¹² for their respective habitat areas. This information, along with data from other partners, is tracked through the NAWMP National Tracking System and is collated in an annual report titled [Habitat Matters](#). NAWMP data related to retention is also tracked through the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy and has been reported via the Canadian Environmental Sustainability Indicators.

ECCC targets for NAWMP are developed by adding individual targets established in the implementation plan of each HJV. These are based on overall NAWMP objectives identified as part of the NAWMP’s 2012 revised goals.

Wildlife Habitat Canada Conservation Stamp Initiative

As of 2012, this program component has a logic model and has implemented a Performance Measurement Framework, with 10 performance indicators. Performance reporting requirements have been incorporated into the grant application process, to support the collection of individual project details for each funded project. This data is presented in the [WHC Annual Report](#), which highlights the grant distribution accomplishments for the reporting year, including information on conservation activities and the amount of land conserved, among other indicators.

Ecological Gifts Program

The EGP has a detailed logic model, with defined outcomes, outputs and activities that address each of its core activities.

¹¹ This issue will be addressed in the Performance Information Profile for the Habitat Conservation and Protection Program, which is the program that these activities will fall within when the department transitions to the Departmental Results Framework in 2018-19.

¹² This refers to direct actions taken by landowners and land managers of conservation agencies that protect or enhance wetland or associated upland habitats without legal or binding agreements. These direct actions result in applied land-use changes.

The EGP monitors program expenditures, results and activities. It reports on areas protected under the EGP and the informal monitoring of the gifts by partners and regional coordinators. EGP program achievements are reported as a whole because donation amounts vary from year to year. The most recent cumulative and individual results are published in [ECCC's 2015-16 Departmental Performance Report](#).

Ramsar Convention

ECCC acts as the administrative authority for Canada's commitments under the Ramsar Convention and helps to prepare Canada's report to the Conference of Contracting Parties (COP). The [most recent report](#) was completed in 2015 for COP12.

5. Conclusions, recommendations and management response

5.1 Conclusions

The HCP Program supports a mix of mechanisms that contribute to wildlife habitat protection and conservation through partnerships in the conservation community. The program includes many internationally accepted best practices in wildlife habitat conservation.

Relevance

The HCP Program is aligned with the federal government priorities for wildlife habitat conservation, including the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy's goals and targets related to conserving and restoring ecosystems, wildlife and habitat.

ECCC's involvement in the HCP Program is consistent with federal and departmental roles and responsibilities set out in a number of Acts, related to securing and protecting ecologically sensitive habitat. It also supports a number of international commitments, including those associated with NAWMP, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention.

Performance

With respect to expected results related to land securement, there has been an increase in the area of suitable habitat protected over the years. The NACP and the EGP have exceeded their securement targets and NAWMP is making significant progress towards meeting its 2017 target. While four of the five HCP components contribute to protecting habitat through long-term land securement, it is currently not possible to identify the total amount of land secured under the HCP Program because the results presented for the various components may overlap.

With respect to expected results related to habitat management and stewardship, each of the HCP Program components contributes to increased levels of habitat management and land stewardship. There is evidence that best practices and guidelines, as well as processes and requirements for the management of secured properties, are in place.

- Management plans have been a successful aspect of the NACP; the NCC's science-based conservation planning approach ensures that secured properties are managed to contribute to biodiversity targets and long-term conservation.
- NAWMP activities have implemented science-based habitat conservation and management plans using an adaptive management approach.
- The WHC Conservation Stamp Initiative has supported habitat management by promoting awareness about waterfowl habitat conservation and by contributing to habitat management initiatives under NAWMP.
- Management plans have been developed for the majority of Canadian Ramsar sites.

Evaluation findings highlight the importance of engaging a broad range of partners and stakeholders in habitat conservation efforts, and of raising public awareness about HCP Program activities. The program has made progress with regard to expected results related to stakeholder

participation and engagement. Several program components display good overall levels of engagement and participation. However, the evaluation findings suggest there is still room for improvement.

- Though the NAWMP component is often mentioned as a role model of co-operation among public and private stakeholders at various levels, agricultural, forestry and indigenous stakeholders have been under-represented.
- The opportunity to increase participation levels in the EGP by increasing awareness levels among potential donors, such as those who may possess important habitat, was identified.
- The WHC Conservation Stamp Initiative could benefit from further efforts to improve awareness of how the stamp funds are used in an effort to increase stamp sales.

The governance structures of the individual HCP Program components are clearly defined, appropriate and mostly efficient. However, a gap was identified in terms of any overarching governance to provide consolidated strategic planning across the various HCP Program components. This would support a more coordinated and integrated approach to priority setting and also enable greater collaboration, communication and efficiencies within the program.

The various components make effective use of leveraging mechanisms to build on ECCC funding and achieve habitat conservation results in an efficient manner. The use of external partners to deliver program components is also viewed as an efficient approach. For the most part, the administrative and operational practices of the various program components appear to be working well, with no significant inefficiencies identified.

All HCP Program components collect and report performance data. However, it is difficult to collect data and report on results at the overall HCP Program level as overlap in reporting by the components would result in some double counting. Although three of the five components have logic models, there was no overall logic model for the program at the time of the evaluation. Both these issues are being addressed by the recent activities related to the implementation of the [TB Policy on Results](#) and the introduction of revised reporting approaches. As a result, a recommendation related to performance measurement has not been included at this time.

5.2 Recommendations and management response

The following recommendations are addressed to the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Canadian Wildlife Services, as the senior departmental official responsible for management of the Habitat Conservation Partnerships Program.

Recommendation 1

Recommendation 1: Take appropriate actions to increase participation of targeted stakeholders in program areas where they are under-represented.

Although the program successfully engages a broad range of stakeholders in habitat conservation, shortcomings were identified related to levels of awareness and the participation of certain stakeholder groups for some Habitat Conservation Partnerships (HCP) Program components.

In particular, an absence of federal and provincial agricultural partners and agriculture and forestry industry stakeholders was identified for the NAWMP component. Indigenous stakeholders were also identified as being inadequately represented. Because much of the current conservation landscape is driven by these partners, their absence was noted as having an impact on overall conservation efforts moving forward.

The evaluation also identified that the EGP has an opportunity to increase the number of land donations by informing landowners that they possess important habitat and by making them aware of the program and the important role they could play in habitat conservation.

The evaluation also flagged the potential for greater outreach to hunter groups, to improve awareness of how the stamp funds are used and to increase their levels of engagement.

Statement of agreement or disagreement

The Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) of the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) agrees with the recommendation.

Management response

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) is reviewing the mechanisms it uses to seek external advice on the Government of Canada's Conserving Nature priorities and their implementation. Views will be sought from a wide variety of partners and stakeholders (such as non-profit conservation organizations, Indigenous organizations, resource-based private sector, hunting and fishing organizations).

All Canadian NAWMP partners recognize the importance of engaging forestry, agriculture stakeholders and Indigenous peoples in activities that contribute to conserving wetlands and increasing waterfowl populations. CWS Regional Directors in their roles as the chairs of the four Habitat Joint Venture Boards will bring this recommendation forward to their respective Boards for discussion, with the intent of finding ways to bring the perspectives of forestry, agriculture and Indigenous peoples into the work under NAWMP.

The EGP recognizes that attracting landowners of ecologically sensitive lands is key to the program's continued success. The EGP will continue to implement its 2017-18 communications plan, focused on informing landowners about the program and will evaluate future promotion/outreach needs.

ECCC will work with Wildlife Habitat Canada (WHC) so that it continues to meet the terms and conditions of the current Contribution Agreement including effectively implementing activities aimed at reaching the hunting community and performance indicators for WHC's strategic plan are in place to monitor progress. Indeed, since the commencement of this evaluation, the WHC has

revised its strategic plan and performance indicators to aim outreach and conservation activities at the hunting community.		
Deliverable(s)	Timeline	Responsible party
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of advisory mechanisms for conservation 	Spring 2018	ADM, CWS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish an advisory mechanism for conservation 	December 2018	ADM, CWS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Habitat Joint Venture Board discussions on the engagement of agriculture, forestry, and Indigenous partners and the identification of next steps to engage underrepresented groups 	December 2018	Regional Directors, Stewardship and Regional Operation Directorate (SROD) (Habitat Joint Venture Board Chairs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2017-18 EGP promotional activities targeting landowners including social media and promotional video completed as planned 	April 2018	Director General, SROD and ECCC Communications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reassessment of promotional needs for EGP for 2018 and beyond 	June 2018	Director General, SROD and ECCC Communications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion with WHC so that activities targeting hunters are prioritized 	January 2018	Director General, SROD and WHC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of Strategic Plan activities targeting hunters, including providing grants for waterfowl recruitment projects and developing an information package about the Stamp Program for dissemination through hunter education/recruitment programs 	March 2019	WHC

Recommendation 2

Recommendation 2: Introduce a consolidated approach to strategic planning to align priority setting across the various Habitat Conservation Partnerships (HCP) Program components.

The various program components have their own governance structures that appear to be working well. However, a gap was identified in terms of an overarching governance that would provide for consolidated strategic planning across the various HCP Program components. This would support a more coordinated and integrated approach to priority setting and also enable greater collaboration, communication and efficiencies within the program.

Statement of agreement or disagreement

The Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) of the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) agrees with the

recommendation.		
Management response		
<p>CWS will develop a strategic plan for its Habitat Conservation Partnership Program that will be informed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2017 Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development Report on Federal Protected Areas and Conservation Objectives • This evaluation • The Biodiversity 2020 goals and targets including Pathway to 17% • CWS Strategic Directions • Advisory mechanism for conservation 		
Deliverable(s)	Timeline	Responsible party
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HCP strategic plan 	April 2019	Director General, Stewardship and Regional Operation Directorate (SROD)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CWS key strategic priorities are taken into account in the future development/renewal of HCP programs, where relevant 	April 2019	Director General, SROD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of an advisory mechanism for conservation • Establishment of an advisory mechanism for conservation 	<p>Spring 2018</p> <p>December 2018</p>	ADM, CWS

Appendix A: description of the Habitat Conservation Partnerships Program

The HCP Program funds projects and encourages partnerships and habitat conservation activities that secure, protect, improve and/or restore important and ecologically sensitive habitat for wildlife, including for migratory birds and species at risk.¹³ The program provides mechanisms to engage with organizations and individuals, including with landowners, environmental non-governmental organizations and others. Through the HCP Program, wildlife habitats on private lands, provincial Crown lands, indigenous lands, or in aquatic and marine areas across Canada are secured and managed in ways that are compatible with habitat conservation.

This program contributes to the delivery of ECCC's mandate under the Species at Risk Act (SARA), the Migratory Birds Convention Act (MBCA), and the Canada Wildlife Act (CWA). The program also contributes to targets related to protected areas and the conservation and enhancement of wetlands that Canada committed to under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and to commitments made under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance.

The HCP Program consists of seven program components:

- Natural Areas Conservation Program (NACP)
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP)/North American Wetlands Conservation Council (NAWCC) Canada
- Wildlife Habitat Canada (WHC) Conservation Stamp Initiative
- Ecological Gifts Program (EGP)
- Canada's participation in the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention)
- Expanding Family Oriented Conservation Programming
- National Wetland Conservation Fund (NWCF)

The evaluation looked at the first five program components from 2010-11 to 2015-16. The last two components (Expanding Family Oriented Conservation Programming and the NWCF) were added to the HCP Program in May 2014, when the Government of Canada announced the National Conservation Plan. They were excluded from the scope of this evaluation.

The five components addressed by the evaluation are described in greater detail below.

¹³ Species at risk refers to species assessed by the Committee on The Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) as endangered, threatened, or of special concern.

Natural Areas Conservation Program

The Natural Areas Conservation Program (NACP) helps non-profit, non-governmental organizations secure ecologically sensitive lands to ensure the protection of ecosystems, wildlife and habitat. The program came into effect in 2007, when the Government of Canada provided \$225 million in funding as part of a commitment to conserve and protect Canada's natural environment. An additional \$20 million was announced with Budget 2013. In 2014, the NACP was renewed for another five years, with an additional \$100 million in funding.

To deliver the program, the Government of Canada entered into an agreement in 2007 with one grant recipient. Under this agreement, the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) was responsible for holding, investing and disbursing the funds through a separately held Natural Areas Conservation Fund. The NCC uses the program's funds to support projects it undertakes. It also allocates some funding to other non-government conservation organizations (referred to as Other Qualified Organizations [OQO]), such as Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and provincial and regional land trusts and nature conservancies, to manage other projects. The NCC and the OQOs were originally required to provide matching funds for each federal dollar received in a ratio of at least 1:1. This requirement was subsequently revised so that a minimum of \$2 in matching funds is now required for every federal dollar received.¹⁴

Using a science-based process, the NCC and its partners work to acquire ecologically sensitive lands through donation, purchase or stewardship agreement with private landowners. Priority is given to nationally or provincially significant lands, lands protecting habitat for species at risk and migratory birds and lands that enhance connectivity or corridors between existing protected areas, such as national wildlife areas, national parks and migratory bird sanctuaries. The program's first agreement (2007) aimed to secure approximately 200,000 hectares of ecologically sensitive lands. This was expanded to 218,000 hectares, with the additional \$20 million investment in 2013. With the renewal of the program in 2014 for an additional five years, the program aims to:

- secure over 130,000 additional hectares of ecologically sensitive lands
- implement Property Management Plan actions on an estimated 120,000 hectares
- monitor the compliance of Conservation Agreements on an estimated 100,000 hectares of lands secured under the NACP since 2007, while providing for capacity development within the land trust community

The NCC is governed by a national board with support from seven regional boards. Together, these boards oversee all aspects of the NCC, including its management and activities. The NCC has established specific governance structures to deliver the NACP, including an Investment Committee that oversaw management of the Natural Areas Conservation Fund during the first NACP program; a Program Committee responsible for annual work plan and progress report reviews and approvals; and an OQO Committee focused on program activities conducted with OQOs.

¹⁴ Specific to the 2013 \$20 million investment, the NCC and DUC only required a minimum 2:1 match ratio in non-federal funds invested towards the securement of properties only. Under the renewed 2014-19 OQO program, the minimum match ratio is 2:1 for all funds.

North American Waterfowl Management Plan/North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada)

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) is an international action plan to conserve migratory birds throughout the North American continent. Developed in response to critically low numbers of waterfowl in North America, the plan was signed by Canada and the United States (U.S.) in 1986 and by Mexico in 1994. The goal of NAWMP is to return waterfowl populations to their 1970s levels by encouraging sustainable land use practices, improving habitat and protecting and managing wetlands important for all migratory birds.

In 2012, the following new goals were established for NAWMP:

- abundant and resilient waterfowl populations to support hunting and other uses without putting habitat at risk
- wetlands and related habitats sufficient to sustain waterfowl populations at desired levels, while providing places for recreational activities and ecological services that benefit society
- growing numbers of waterfowl hunters, other conservationists and citizens who enjoy and actively support waterfowl and wetlands habitat conservation

For the most part, external partners deliver NAWMP through Habitat Joint Ventures (HJVs), which are responsible for the overall planning, design and management of programs for key habitat areas. In Canada, there are four HJVs and three internationally linked Species Joint Ventures¹⁵ that focus on providing critical science to inform the management of habitat or species of concern identified through NAWMP.

The implementation of NAWMP in Canada is enabled by the support of many partners, including federal, provincial/territorial and state governments, non-governmental organizations and individuals. In particular, funds are made available to Canada, the U.S. and Mexico through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), which was enacted by the U.S. Congress in 1989. NAWCA allocates funds with matching grant requirements to wetland conservation projects in the three countries. Canadian projects require matching funds from both Canada (federal, provincial and non-government partners) and the U.S. (non-federal). Since the program's launch in 1986, U.S. federal and U.S. non-federal sources have provided approximately \$1 billion in funding. This funding covers nearly 50% of the total contributions for NAWMP in Canada and serves to significantly expand the reach and impact of wetland conservation efforts in Canada.

In Canada, administration of NAWMP and guidance for its implementation are the responsibility of the North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada) (NAWCC Canada) and the Habitat and Species Joint Ventures. Canada is also represented on the tri-national Plan Committee, which is responsible for:

- discussing international waterfowl issues

¹⁵ Activities related to the Species Joint Ventures are part of the Migratory Birds Program (sub-program 1.1.3) and as such, are not addressed in this evaluation.

**HCP Program representatives confirmed that no G&C funding was approved for EGP in 2012-13 and 2013-14.

Expected results

At the time of the evaluation, there was no approved logic model addressing all components of the HCP Program. However, for the purpose of the evaluation, the evaluation team developed a draft HCP Program logic model with identified expected outcomes. Program management reviewed the draft logic model and expected results during the evaluation planning stage. They agreed that it is an accurate representation of the program for the purpose of the evaluation.

For analysis and reporting and to avoid duplication, findings related to program performance are presented against three themes that include both the immediate and intermediate outcomes associated with that theme. These expected result themes are:

- land securement
- habitat management and stewardship
- participation and engagement

A mapping of the outcomes from the logic model to the three expected result themes used for reporting can be found in [Appendix B](#).

Appendix B: expected results of the Habitat Conservation Partnerships Program

Theme	Natural Areas Conservation Program	North American Waterfowl Management Plan/North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada)	Ramsar Convention	Ecological Gifts Program	Wildlife Habitat Canada Conservation Stamp Initiative
Theme I: land securement					
<p>Immediate outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased area of suitable habitat and/or protected habitat for species at risk - Protection of priority habitats is secured by landowners, NGOs, provinces and municipalities <p>Intermediate outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protection of priority habitats is achieved by NGOs (protection where legal securement of land is obtained by acquisition or other means and where those lands are managed for the purpose of conservation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	
Theme II: habitat management and stewardship					
<p>Immediate outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Priority habitats are managed sustainably by landowners, OGDs and NGOs - Individuals and organizations responsible for land management adopt standards, guidelines and best practices to maintain and improve wildlife habitat <p>Intermediate outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wildlife habitat is conserved through stewardship by Canadians, OGDs and NGOs (stewardship encompasses voluntary actions taken on land managed by individuals and organizations for the benefit of target species and their habitat) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •
Theme III: participation and engagement					
<p>Immediate outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Target audiences participate in conservation related activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

Theme	Natural Areas Conservation Program	North American Waterfowl Management Plan/North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada)	Ramsar Convention	Ecological Gifts Program	Wildlife Habitat Canada Conservation Stamp Initiative
<p>Intermediate outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wildlife habitat is conserved through stewardship by Canadians, OGDs and NGOs (stewardship encompasses voluntary actions taken on land managed by individuals and organizations for the benefit of target species and their habitat) 	•	•	•	•	•

Appendix C: evaluation strategy

Purpose and scope

The evaluation initially covered a five-year time frame, from 2010-11 to 2014-15, but was updated with financial and performance data from 2015-16 and additional program documentation from 2016-17.

The evaluation focussed on ECCC's activities related to five of the seven components of this sub-program, both collectively and individually:

- Natural Areas Conservation Program (NACP)
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP)/North American Wetlands Conservation Council (NAWCC Canada)
- Wildlife Habitat Canada (WHC) Conservation Stamp Initiative
- Ecological Gifts Program (EGP)
- Canada's participation in the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention)

Expanding Family Oriented Conservation Programming and the National Wetland Conservation Fund (NWCF), the other two HCP Program components, were excluded from the scope of the evaluation. When this evaluation was conducted, they were still too new to allow for an assessment of their performance. An evaluation of the NWCF will be conducted in 2017-18.

Evaluation questions

Table 17: evaluation questions

Relevance
<p>Continued need for the program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a continued need for the program?
<p>Alignment with government priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the program aligned with federal government priorities? • Is the program aligned with Environment and Climate Change Canada's strategic outcomes?
<p>Consistency with federal roles and responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this an appropriate area for federal government involvement?
Performance
<p>Achievement of expected results: Assessment of progress towards expected results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent have results on land securement been achieved? • To what extent have results on habitat management and stewardship been achieved? • To what extent have results on participation and engagement been achieved?

Efficiency and economy: Assessment of the degree to which the program is implemented in an efficient and economical manner

- To what extent is the cluster design appropriate?
- To what extent is the governance structure clear, appropriate and efficient?
- To what extent is the program delivery efficient and economical?
- To what extent is performance data collected?

Evaluation approach and methodology

For each evaluation question, the evaluation used multiple lines of evidence consisting of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods described below. Multiple data sources provide information from various perspectives, which helps for triangulation and validation of evaluation findings, thus increasing their accuracy and credibility and strengthening the validity of conclusions. The following methodologies were used to collect evidence for the evaluation.

Document review

The evaluation team reviewed various types of documents, such as descriptive program documents, departmental and Government of Canada publications, relevant evaluations, reports, communications, research studies, performance and financial information and other internal planning and operational documents.

Key informant interviews

37 key informant interviews were conducted with 39 respondents:

- 11 ECCC program staff and senior management
- 28 external stakeholders (NGOs, government, board/council members, site managers and international stakeholders)

Online survey

After factoring in invalid email addresses, online survey questionnaires were sent to 871 individuals representing non-governmental organizations, government (federal, provincial, municipal), conservation authorities, private sector organizations, private individuals, universities and registered charities involved in one or more of the HCP Program components. 167 individual respondents completed the survey, for an overall response rate of 19.2%. The lower response rate (typical response rates are about 30% for this type of survey) may be due to the fact that respondents were only provided with two weeks to complete the questionnaire.

Many of the 167 respondents were familiar with more than one program component. As such, we received 276 completed program component responses.

The distribution of completed responses by program component is presented in [Table 18](#).

Table 18: number of completed responses by HCP Program component

Completed responses by program component	Completed responses	Percent of total
Natural Areas Conservation Program	45	16%
North American Waterfowl Management Plan/North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada)	52	19%
Wildlife Habitat Canada Conservation Stamp Initiative	80	29%
Ecological Gifts Program	71	26%
Ramsar Convention	28	10%
Total	276	100%

Case studies

To provide further insight, the evaluation team conducted six case studies (two projects from each of three program components: NAWMP/NAWCC (Canada), WHC Conservation Stamp Initiative and EGP). The NACP component was excluded from the case studies because information from an independent evaluation conducted in 2012 provided sufficient insight. Ramsar was also excluded from the case studies because of its lower materiality and risk. The six case study projects and their relevant timing are listed in [Table 19](#).

Table 19: list of case studies conducted for the evaluation

Program component	Case studies
North American Waterfowl Management Plan/North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust (2013-14) Canadian/Prairie/Parkland and Western Boreal Habitat (2011-2012)
Wildlife Habitat Canada Conservation Stamp Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Murre Conservation Fund (2011-13) Southern Ontario Priority Wetland Habitat (2014)
Ecological Gifts Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agricultural Land Donation in British Columbia trusted to the NCC for Protection (2013-14) Easement Agreement in Manitoba trusted to the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation for Protection (2011-12)

Appendix D: summary of findings

Criteria	Expectations met	Further work required	Priority attention required	Unable to assess
Relevance criteria				
Continued need for the program	•			
Alignment with federal government priorities	•			
Consistency with federal roles and responsibilities	•			
Expected results				
Land securement: The extent to which land has been secured (acquired or has come under protection)	•			
Habitat management and stewardship: The extent to which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - wildlife habitats are conserved through stewardship actions and managed sustainably through the creation, improvement, maintenance and management of wetland habitat - the program components, industry and organizations build and implement standards, guidelines and best practices to maintain and improve habitat 	•			
Participation and engagement: The extent to which target audiences participate and engage in conservation-related activities and are aware of conservation issues		•		
Program efficiency				
The extent to which the program's cluster design is appropriate	•			
The extent to which the governance structure is clear, appropriate and efficient		•		
The extent to which program delivery is efficient and economical	•			
The extent to which performance data is collected		•		

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