WETLANDS AND DUCKS IN THE BALANCE

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For well over a century, ducks and geese have been icons of wetlands conservation. That’s for good reason, because as go wetlands on landscapes such as the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR), so go duck populations. Now the future of wetlands and waterfowl in the United States hangs in the balance as Congress debates the Clean Water Restoration Act—legislation every bit as important to Ducks Unlimited’s conservation mission as the Farm Bill. The voice of sportsmen must be heard in this debate if we are to prevent a dramatic acceleration of wetland loss, a decrease in duck populations, and reduced hunting seasons in the future.

Most duck hunters know that the fortunes of ducks are directly tied to wetland conditions, especially on the prairies. And many waterfowlers remember when hunting seasons and bag limits were cut back during the severe prairie droughts of the 1960s and 1980s. Although periodic dry spells are natural on the prairies, a significant decrease in duck populations, and reduced hunting seasons in the future.

The United States has already lost more than 33 percent of its historic wetlands in many areas. But that number is actually too low when it comes to waterfowl habitats. Unfortunately, regions that tend to be most important to waterfowl have typically experienced wetland loss that exceeds the national average. For example, the PPR of the United States once contained about 20 million acres of wetlands. Today, less than a third of those wetlands remain. In one five-county study area in southwest Minnesota, more than 87 percent of the wetland basins have been lost. What does that mean for ducks? This landscape can now produce less than 20 percent of the ducks it once did. Even more sobering, this study area is representative of much of the remaining unprotected Rainwater Basin wetlands. The consequences of such losses for waterfowl and hunters would be devastating. Fortunately, there is something we can do to prevent this from happening.

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SEEK THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CLEAN WATER RESTORATION ACT

While everyone claims to be for clean water, there are some individuals and organizations who oppose the Clean Water Restoration Act (CWRA). False, misleading claims about what this legislation would do to farmers, ranchers, and landowners are unfortunately being spread far and wide. While honest debate is always valuable, stripping federal protections from tens of millions of acres is not.

FEEDBACK "BEYOND THE TRUTH"

We are confident that the CWRA is law. We invite you to take our survey at www.ducks.org/cleanwater. The CWRA is supported by the vast majority of Americans, and it is supported by the majority of sportsmen as well.

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PASSING THE CLEAN WATER RESTORATION ACT

A sustained, dedicated effort by all sportmen will be required to ensure passage of the Clean Water Restoration Act (CWRA) in Congress. As with any bill, the CWRA will be thoroughly debated in hearings, committees, and on the floor of both houses of Congress before it’s sent to the president’s desk. The elected representatives who make decisions at every step of this legislative process are influenced by many people, including their constituents, lobbyists, expert witnesses, and their congressional peers and staff. So it is essential that you contact your elected representatives. For the latest news and step-by-step instructions on how you can contact your elected representatives about the CWRA, visit the DU website at www.ducks.org/cleanwater. You can also receive regular e-mails on the CWRA and other legislative issues by signing up to be a member of DU’s Government Affairs Team at www.ducks.org/volunteer/publicpolicy.

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