

# Waterfowl Management Strategic Plan



**Approved**  
**February 6, 2008**



Florida Fish and Wildlife  
Conservation Commission

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# **Waterfowl Management Strategic Plan**

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Final – February 6, 2008

**Mission: To conserve, enhance, and promote sustained use of waterfowl populations and habitat.**

## **Introduction**

This strategic plan maps out the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) waterfowl management efforts for the years 2008-2013 by identifying specific actions that will conserve and enhance populations of native, wild waterfowl and their habitat and promote their sustainable use. Waterfowl are among the most recognized and economically important wild animals in North America. In Florida, naturalists, bird watchers, and hunters spend countless hours enjoying these birds. As human impact on the environment has increased, negative effects on waterfowl populations also have increased. FWC is charged with ensuring the continued well-being of these popular birds.

This plan encompasses three goals: (1) conservation and enhancement of resident waterfowl populations and habitats, (2) leadership in the conservation and enhancement of continental waterfowl populations and habitats, and (3) recreational use and public support resulting in the enhancement and conservation of waterfowl populations and habitat. This plan does not address nonnative waterfowl in Florida (e.g., feral mallards, Muscovy ducks, and resident Canada geese), other than as they may cause nuisance problems or directly affect wild, native waterfowl populations and species.

Florida wetlands support breeding (resident) and migrant (wintering) waterfowl, and FWC's management targets populations and habitats of these birds. To prioritize management efforts set forth by this plan, we placed Florida's waterfowl species and populations into 3

categories: (1) residents, (2) recently established residents, and (3) migrants. Populations in the ~~–residents~~” category (mottled ducks and wood ducks) will receive the highest priority because they are part of Florida’s historical avifauna and reside in Florida year-round. Conservation efforts for these birds must occur solely within Florida’s borders. Species and populations in the ~~–migrants~~” category spend much of their annual cycle in locales other than Florida, and therefore will receive second priority. The ~~–recently established residents~~” category currently includes fulvous whistling ducks and black-bellied whistling ducks, which occur in Florida year-round. However, they are relatively new additions to Florida’s avifauna. Therefore, this group will receive third priority because the best available evidence suggests that these species are expanding into Florida as a result of relatively recent human-induced changes to the landscape. These species are not part of the state’s pre-Columbian assemblage of wildlife.

This plan was developed by the WMST and is intended as a tool for FWC and other organizations, agencies, and individuals who have an interest in conservation of Florida’s waterfowl. The WMST believes the strategies and tactics outlined in the plan will result in work that conserves waterfowl populations so they may be enjoyed by Florida’s citizens for generations.

**Goal 1: Conservation and enhancement of resident waterfowl populations and their habitats.**

*Objective 1: Implement and periodically update the mottled duck conservation plan (see separate plan).*

*Objective 2: Develop, implement, and periodically update the wood duck conservation plan (see separate plan).*

*Objective 3: Provide for sustained use of recently established resident waterfowl (fulvous whistling-ducks and black-bellied whistling-ducks) and assess their potential impacts on other native wildlife.*

Strategy 1: Assess the status of recently established resident waterfowl species.

Tactic 1: Annually monitor trends in population indexes using Christmas Bird Count and North American Breeding Bird Survey data.

Strategy 2: Ensure hunting regulations are consistent with current population status and knowledge of recently established resident waterfowl species population dynamics.

Strategy 3: Support management by other entities that benefits recently established resident waterfowl species.

Strategy 4: When opportunities arise, integrate this objective into other FWC efforts.

Strategy 5: When appropriate, develop or provide technical assistance in the development of informational materials related to recently established resident waterfowl species.

Strategy 6: Attain understanding of biology and ecology necessary to meet management needs.

Tactic 1: Identify information gaps.

Tactic 2: Seek out opportunities to attain the information through training, literature review, or original research.

Tactic 3: Be aware of new scientific findings and share relevant items with coworkers.

Tactic 4: Attend meetings, symposia, and conferences, being conscious of value relative to costs.

**Goal 2: Leadership in the conservation and enhancement of continental waterfowl populations and habitats.**

*Objective 1: Positively influence regional, Atlantic Flyway, national, and international research, conservation, and management initiatives that affect Florida's waterfowl and their habitats.*

Strategy 1: Contribute to achieving objectives of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP).

Tactic 1: Continue participation and leadership in the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture of NAWMP.

Tactic 2: Advocate for Florida's waterfowl habitat conservation needs.

Tactic 3: Implement contributing efforts in Florida.

Strategy 2: Continue participation and leadership in the Atlantic Flyway Council (AFC).

Tactic 1: Advocate for Florida's waterfowl conservation and management needs in AFC decisions.

Tactic 2: Advocate for sustainable harvest and viewing opportunities for Florida's citizens in AFC decisions.

Tactic 3: Support cooperative AFC research and management projects and participate in contributing efforts in Florida, as appropriate.

Tactic 4: Advocate for continued banding of scaup and ring-necked ducks on the breeding grounds.

Tactic 5: Provide funding for Eastern Canada Cooperative Banding project.

Tactic 6: Cooperate and assist in collection of samples for waterfowl health/disease monitoring.

Strategy 3: Contribute to achieving objectives of Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM).

Tactic 1: Participate in the AHM Working Group, as appropriate.

Tactic 2: Maintain appropriate level of technical understanding of AHM.

Tactic 3: Advocate for the objective decision framework provided by AHM.

Tactic 4: Communicate timely AHM messages to Florida waterfowl hunters.

Strategy 4: Develop technical and leadership skills relevant to goal.

Tactic 1: Participate in continuing education and training opportunities.

Tactic 2: Mentor and be mentored.

Strategy 5: Attain understanding of biology and ecology necessary to meet management and conservation needs.

Tactic 1: Identify information gaps.

Tactic 2: Seek out opportunities to attain information through training, literature review, or original research.

Tactic 3: Be aware of new scientific findings and share relevant items with coworkers.

Tactic 4: Attend meetings, symposia, and conferences, being conscious of value relative to costs.

Strategy 6: Assist with Atlantic Flyway Wingbee.

Tactic 1: Send one FWC biologist or technician annually.

*Objective 2: Positively influence the conservation, restoration, enhancement, and management of Florida's migratory and wintering waterfowl habitat.*

Strategy 1: Coordinate with waterfowl habitat and population initiatives such as the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture (ACJV) Waterfowl Implementation Plan, Florida's Wetlands Conservation Initiative, and Florida's Wildlife Legacy Initiative to assess habitat needs in Florida.

Strategy 2: Develop monitoring system to determine acreage of Florida's migrating and wintering waterfowl habitat and track conservation and management efforts.

Tactic 1: Compile GIS land cover data from Florida Natural Areas Inventory, FWC, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wetlands Inventory, etc.

Tactic 2: Identify wetlands with excellent and good waterfowl habitat potential and determine whether they occur within or outside of the five ACJV Waterfowl Focus Areas.

Tactic 3: Identify and delineate habitat overlap (common needs and threats) with other species and guilds, particularly Species of Greatest Conservation Needs as identified in Florida's Wildlife Legacy Initiative, using GIS.

Tactic 4: Develop measurable objectives for priority wetlands to be conserved, restored, enhanced, or managed.

Tactic 5: Classify wetlands identified in Tactics 2 and 3 as priority wetlands and determine acreage and ownership.

Tactic 6: Develop and maintain tracking system for FWC and conservation partner efforts toward the objective.

Strategy 3: Advocate for conserving, restoring, enhancing, and managing priority wetlands as identified above and other potential waterfowl habitats with public and private landowner groups.

Tactic 1: Develop methodologies for informing landowner groups concerning the benefits of conserving, restoring, enhancing, and managing waterfowl habitat.

Tactic 2: Provide technical assistance to landowners and land and water managers.

Tactic 3: Compile and distribute information on various funding initiatives and landowner assistance programs.

Strategy 4: Develop and maintain partnerships to conserve, restore, enhance, and manage wetland habitats.

Tactic 1: Participate in FWC wetland conservation, restoration, and management efforts.

Tactic 2: Participate in non-FWC wetland conservation initiatives and aquatic habitat management decisions to incorporate waterfowl habitat considerations.

Tactic 3: Continue to foster relationships with existing partners such as Ducks Unlimited, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Water Management Districts, Atlantic Coast Joint Venture, etc.

Strategy 5: Develop and maintain technical understanding of habitat requirements and the relationships among habitat management, habitat responses, and bird responses.

Tactic 1: Identify specific research needs and seek opportunities to conduct research.

Tactic 2: Stay up-to-date on current management and research information and issues.

**Goal 3: Recreational use and public support resulting in the enhancement and conservation of waterfowl populations and habitat.**

*Objective 1: Minimize net loss of acreage open to public waterfowl hunting.*

Strategy 1: Establish and update annually a database of acreage open to public waterfowl hunting.

Tactic 1: Implement process used by the Division of Hunting and Game Management (HGM) staff for tracking statewide public hunting lands, as a starting point.

Tactic 2: Determine acreage open to public waterfowl hunting.

Tactic 3: Develop process for annually updating acreage totals for public waterfowl hunting lands.

Strategy 2: Seek opportunities to establish or increase public waterfowl hunting opportunities on suitable wetlands.

Tactic 1: Establish and maintain working relationships with Florida's land management agencies to provide public waterfowl hunting on their properties.

Tactic 2: Acquire lands suitable for waterfowl hunting.

Tactic 3: Continue review of WMA regulations, coordinating with stakeholders to assess potential for increasing waterfowl hunting opportunities.

Strategy 3: Work with cooperators (including managers of FWC lands) to ensure that current public hunting arrangements are working and take an active role in problem solving, as necessary.

Tactic 1: After waterfowl season, annually contact cooperators to discuss any desired changes.

Tactic 2: Maintain communications with stakeholder groups to obtain their input on cooperator's current hunt management.

*Objective 2: Maintain the numbers of active duck hunters at or above 10,740, which is the 2001-2005 average as measured by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service Harvest Information Program.*

Strategy 1: Encourage people to take up waterfowl hunting.

Tactic 1: Incorporate waterfowl hunting skills course into various educational programs of the Hunter Safety Section.

Tactic 2: Develop mentoring program where established hunters would share hunting tips and encouragement to newcomers of the sport.

Tactic 3: Support stakeholder organization's efforts to encourage youth participation in waterfowl hunting.

Tactic 4: Evaluate the potential for creating additional youth waterfowl hunting opportunities above and beyond the current federal youth waterfowl hunting days.

Tactic 5: Post internet links to popular duck hunting forums on FWC's waterfowl home page.

Strategy 2: If practical, use waterfowl hunting workshops to maintain or increase the number of waterfowl hunters.

Tactic 1: Assess the effectiveness of waterfowl hunting workshops to achieving objective.

Tactic 2: Partner with stakeholder organizations to conduct waterfowl hunting workshops.

Tactic 3: Seek opportunities for workshops in conjunction with other events.

Strategy 3: Consider hunter preferences when recommending regulations changes.

Tactic 1: Promote human-dimensions research at the Atlantic Flyway and state levels to assess hunter preferences before recommending changes to hunting regulations.

Tactic 2: Use human-dimensions research to (1) evaluate and improve hunting regulations and (2) assess hunter response following regulation changes.

Strategy 4: Evaluate and improve nonregulatory management.

Tactic 1: Use human-dimensions research to (1) evaluate and improve current management and (2) assess management changes.

*Objective 3: Promote public awareness and support of waterfowl conservation and management.*

Strategy 1: Disseminate information to media and the public on waterfowl-related conservation issues, viewing and hunting opportunities, and rules and regulations.

Tactic 1: Produce and disseminate statewide waterfowl hunting regulation brochures.

Tactic 2: Post waterfowl hunting regulations and related-information on appropriate FWC Web sites.

Tactic 3: Produce news releases announcing waterfowl seasons and regulations.

Tactic 4: Increase visibility of the FWC's Waterfowl Web site.

Tactic 5: Participate in outdoors/conservation/environmental events and meetings with displays and oral presentations.

Tactic 6: Promote appreciation and understanding of waterfowl and wetlands through articles in "Florida Wildlife" magazine and outdoor-related publications.

Tactic 7: Update and distribute "Duck Hunting in Florida" brochure, as needed.

Tactic 8: Continue implementation of mottled duck communications plan.

Strategy 2: Seek partnerships to enhance and extend public awareness and support.

Tactic 1: Find opportunities to disseminate the FWC's information through partners Web sites, magazines, and other publications and media.

Tactic 2: Involve stakeholder groups, as appropriate.

Tactic 3: Create volunteer opportunities.

Strategy 3: Manage nuisance waterfowl issues.