

The Pintail Initiative

NORTHERN PINTAILS WERE ONCE AMONG THE CONTINENT'S most common waterfowl species. But over the past several decades, populations have declined. Northern pintails are slowly disappearing before our eyes.

The solution to stopping this downward spiral of one of Canada's most graceful and elegant ducks lies in our very own back yard.

The Problem

The following graphs outline pintail population status based on where pintails choose to settle on the breeding grounds. We can see that pintail populations in the prairies of the United States (*figure 1*) and in Alaska and northern Canada (*figure 2*) remain relatively stable. However, in southern Canada – namely southern Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, the decline (*figure 3*) is obvious. This points to the problem and the solution likely being in the Canadian prairies.

pintails (millions)

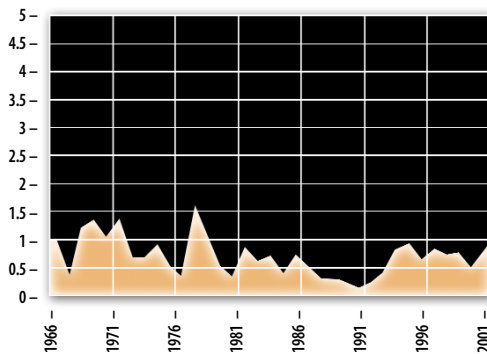


fig. 1 – northern United States

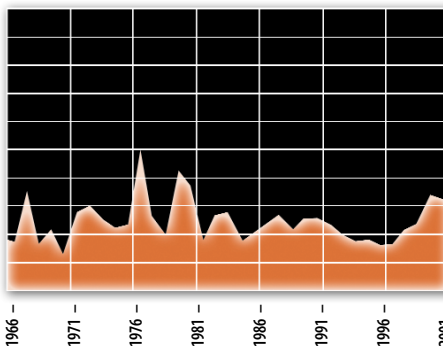


fig. 2 – Alaska and northern Canada

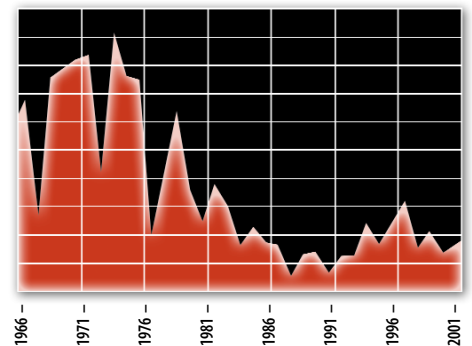


fig. 3 – southern Canada

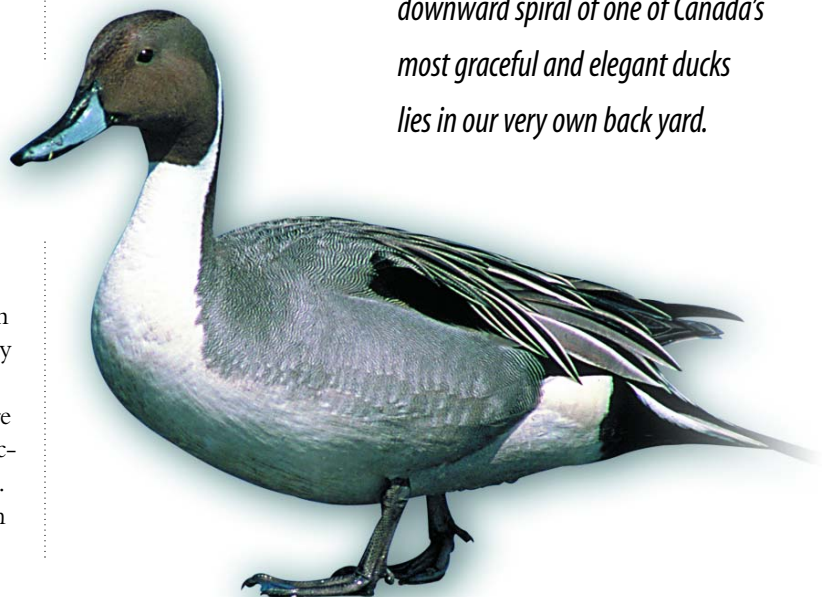
With this information in hand, Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) biologists have identified key factors in Prairie Canada that are likely contributing to pintail declines.

Habitat type	Percentage of use	
	Pintail	Mallard
Cropland	34-74	5-10
Untilled Uplands	26-66	80-95

The practice of summer-fallowing, where farmers purposely give cropland a rest from production every second year, once provided pintails with nesting habitat that was relatively “safe”. But since the 1970s, nearly 13 million acres of summerfallow have been converted to annual cropping in Prairie Canada. This massive land-use change sees more pintails nesting in habitats that will likely be destroyed by farm machinery. Pintails will not re-nest as persistently as some other ducks. Therefore, pintails are less well adapted to deal with nest loss than other species.

Pintails, more than any other duck, will nest in cropland (*left*).

The practice of summer-fallowing, where farmers purposely give cropland a



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The Solution – A Tailor Made Conservation Program for Pintails

Recognizing the serious plight of the pintail, DUC has created its first, species specific conservation program for pintails. The primary components of the program include:

Conversion of marginal cropland to grassland

Research has identified that conversion of cropland to perennial forages (grass) can improve pintail nesting success. For two years, researchers searched over 2,000 acres of hayland for duck nests. They found that pintails, on average, hatched one nest every 142 acres, nearly 10 times the number typically observed in spring-seeded cropland.

Encouraging production of winter wheat

Nearly 4,000 acres of both fall-seeded crops, like winter wheat, and spring-seeded fields were searched over a two-year study. Pintails, on average, hatched one nest in every 72 acres of fall-seeded crops (in contrast to one nest in every 1,332 acres of traditional spring-seeded cropland). Fall-seeded crops generated a greater number of nests – and from these nests, there was greater success in hatching ducks. Fall-seeded cereal crops are a pintail-friendly cropping alternative in areas where cropland intensification has encroached on traditional pintail breeding areas. They also benefit landowners. Winter wheat requires less chemical inputs and offers greater production which can translate into greater revenues for producers.



Conserving habitats used by pintails

Shallow wetlands that typically form in the spring in gently rolling grasslands are preferred pintail habitat. Recognizing the specific needs of these birds, DUC staff are taking efforts to conserve these lands where they exist by working

with landowners on land-use agreements and partnering with other organizations to secure this habitat.



*Do we really want people to
look back and say that we lost this
species while they were under our watch?*



Enacting policy that will ultimately benefit pintails

The landscape change necessary to benefit pintails in the southern Prairies is extensive. DUC is thinking big scale. The types of policy programs the DUC is pursuing, such as watershed management

and recognizing societal benefit of natural lands, are contributing to DUC's pintail initiative. They are also benefiting other wildlife and people.

The Ask

Over the next 25 years, the Canadian prairie portion of the Pintail Initiative is projected to cost \$50 million.

Do we really want people to look back and say that we lost this species while they were under our watch?

The time to act is now.



Ducks Unlimited Canada
CANADA'S CONSERVATION COMPANY