



Audubon



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Waterbirds on Working Lands Recommended Practices for Wheat Production

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Wheat can be an important food source and nesting environment for waterbirds. Waste wheat seed is a good food source for nesting and resting water birds. Winter wheat rotations with delayed after-harvest tillage can provide nesting habitat for waterbirds, including Northern Pintail and Upland Sandpiper. Many of the wheat areas of the northern Great Plains also have seasonal and permanent wetlands that are beneficial to waterbird habitat. Winter wheat seedlings provide a good source of food for migrating/wintering water birds. If a producer can grow winter or spring wheat, winter wheat is preferred for its superior spring nesting cover.

For most farmers, improvements to wildlife habitats within or near their wheat crop will only require minor modifications to current practices. The recommendations fall into five areas of your operation as outlined below. Please also see [Recommended Practices for All Row Crops](http://www.audubon.org/bird/waterbirds/all_crops.html) (http://www.audubon.org/bird/waterbirds/all_crops.html).

- 1. Nutrient management.** Nutrient management should follow a nutrient management plan that takes into consideration water quality and wildlife impacts. Split nitrogen applications may have an economic and agronomic benefit, especially on soil types with high leaching potentials.
- 2. Tillage management.** Use a reduced-tillage or no-till system. These systems protect water quality, leave more waste grains, and provide nesting habitat. Their use can also improve soil health and thus enhance habitat for terrestrial arthropod and earthworm populations.
- 3. Integrated Pest Management.** Agrichemicals should be managed according to IPM systems. Control practices should be based on IPM insect thresholds. When selecting an insecticide, choose those with minimal environmental impact.
- 4. Harvest and Residue Management.** Straw left in wetland basins can improve terrestrial and aquatic invertebrate populations and can be good nesting habitats. Many waterbirds would benefit from a higher straw height. Straw heights of 12-19 inches will provide cover and nesting protection. When harvesting spring wheat, flushing bars on the combine may be helpful to alleviate loss of waterbirds that are nesting in wheat.
- 5. Field Border and Edge Management.** Maintain wetlands, and try to enhance field border effects in and around wheat. Filter and buffer strips should be used when feasible. If a farm has temporary wetlands or nonproductive areas, consider enrolling these lands in [conservation programs](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs) (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs>) such as CRP, WRP, or easements. Your state may also have additional programs that may help with conservation.