



## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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### EARLY CLOSURE OF DUCK SEASON NOT TO BE ORDERED

There will be no emergency closure of duck hunting this season, it was announced today by Assistant Secretary of the Interior Ross Leffler following a review by the Fish and Wildlife Service of the findings of a four-flyway survey of mallard ducks earlier this month to determine the status of that population.

The conduct of this survey, which was made because of concern about the mallards in the Mississippi Flyway, has prompted speculation that the Service might be planning to close the season early in at least one flyway.

"Cooperative surveys of waterfowl breeding areas last summer indicated that duck populations would decline this fall and conservation measures were incorporated in the Federal Regulations to reduce kill in order to preserve an adequate brood stock for next year. The special survey just completed did not reveal the decrease to be any more than we had expected" commented the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife.

"The current duck season is now practically three-quarters over and at least 75 percent of the kill has probably already occurred. The latest closing date in any State is January 8, 1960. To shut down hunting now would merely penalize wintering ground States. We would prefer to make across-the-board reductions another year if the situation doesn't improve so that the conservation burden would be borne equally by all areas rather than to take discriminatory action now."

"We also feel that the conservation measures written into this year's regulations have been saving birds as we intended they would. In addition, most of the ducks in this fall's flights have been wary old birds which are hard to bag. This factor, too, is thus tending to reduce the kill and save birds to return to the breeding grounds."

Concern about the status of the mallard in the Mississippi Flyway--the most important single duck species there--was aroused when the cooperative studies being conducted by State and Federal waterfowl technicians disclosed that the kill was running heavily to adults, the basic brood stock. In good duck production years, the age ratio for mallards in the bag averages better than two young for each adult. This year, it is considerably less than one young for each adult. This happens when unfavorable conditions on the nesting grounds reduce the number of young birds produced as was the case this year. This unfavorable age ratio also has been noted in areas outside the Mississippi Flyway and for species other than the mallard where such checks have been made. However, the most comprehensive studies have been confined to the Mississippi Flyway.

A Service spokesman commented that the Federal wildlife agency had been receiving better news recently from the important duck nesting grounds in the prairie provinces of Canada. Conditions for good water levels in this area which has been hard hit by drought look better now than for several years at this season.

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