

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

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WATERFOWL HABITAT SURVEYS UNDERWAY;
FIRST REPORTS INDICATE WATER ABUNDANT

Extensive air and ground surveys of waterfowl nesting areas in the United States and Canada got underway by the Interior Department's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife this month, with first reports indicating that water in some areas is as abundant as it was in the middle 1950's when there were record numbers of pothole nesting sites.

Studies of number of breeders and water conditions, plus July surveys of nesting success, form the basis for autumn hunting regulations to be set by the Federal Government in August.

Also helping the Fish and Wildlife Service in the surveys are the Canadian Wildlife Service, State and Provincial game agencies and Ducks Unlimited, Canada.

Primary nesting habitat is the "prairie pothole" region, which includes the Dakotas, western Minnesota, eastern Montana, and large parts of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Potholes are glacier-formed ponds and lakes which are ideal duck nesting sites with the right combination of water and vegetation.

This vast region will be under close scrutiny in coming months; before the surveys are completed, 70,000 linear miles will have been flown at about 100-ft. altitude.

Uncle Sam's biologists welcome reports of abundant water after drought caused last year's nesting conditions to be among the poorest in 20 years of aerial observation. As a result, fewer breeding birds may be returning to nesting sites.

Rossalius C. Hanson, one of the first biologists aloft in this year's survey, reported: "The water is everywhere from Minneapolis to the Rocky Mountains. The Dakotas and Minnesota have potholes, marshes, surface water, flooded rivers, and the works water conditions every bit as good in southern Alberta and Saskatchewan as in the States

"Water depths appear to be excellent in most areas, and with a normal season, should last well through the nesting season. I have seen years with more water in the Regina plains, but elsewhere water is probably as abundant as in the middle fifties

"The season is probably close to normal. The ice is gone from the marshes and potholes, and the temperatures are spring-like. All species of waterfowl are present except blue-wing teal. We found them as far north as the Dakotas, and ground personnel have reported them in this area. It may be they are being siphoned off in Minnesota and the Dakotas. Mallards and pintail drakes are showing up in two's and three's, so nesting has started."

Hanson summed up his early observations: "It would be nice if we had enough ducks to fill all the potholes. Pintails appear to be in fairly good numbers, but mallards are not plentiful. We are seeing more ducks than I expected but suspect we are drawing birds in that probably flew farther north in past years. We are seeing ducks in areas where nothing but dry land existed the last few years."

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