

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

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TIME FOR DECISION NEAR FOR WATERFOWL REGULATIONS

The Department of the Interior is approaching the time of decision for this year's waterfowl hunting regulations.

The regulations decided in August will culminate a year-long fact-finding process by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, State wildlife agencies, and citizen organizations.

The Federal Government has been setting the Nation's waterfowl hunting regulations ever since the United States entered into an agreement with Great Britain (acting in behalf of Canada) concerning migratory bird conservation in 1918.

Waterfowl nesting conditions in the United States and Canada, because of abundant water, are among the best since aerial surveys began about 20 years ago.

The prairie pothole breeding habitat, surveyed intensively in the spring, consists of many natural ponds and lakes which, with the right combination of snow and rainfall, are ideal duck nesting sites.

The pothole region includes the Dakotas, western Minnesota, northeastern Montana, and southern Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Conditions in this region are crucial to the size of the fall flight.

For habitat and population surveys, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife divides this vast area into nine regions, with an airplane assigned to each. Regions are divided into "strata" for aerial surveys from 100-ft. altitude. About 70,000 lineal miles are flown on two surveys, one in May and one in July. Waterfowl and habitat observations are recorded. Additional assessments are made by ground-observers in random locations. Other key information is gathered by State and Canadian agencies and Ducks Unlimited, Canada.

In August, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife will have a good idea of the numbers of waterfowl that will move down the flyways.

Hunting results from past seasons help determine the regulations for a given waterfowl population. Information on species, age and sex of waterfowl killed is obtained from hunters who cooperate in returning wing samples and answering questionnaires.

The final reports on production from northern breeding grounds arrive in Washington late in July to be analyzed. Fall flight prospects are ready a week later.

The predictions on fall flight are presented to the four flyway councils, composed of State wildlife heads. The councils then make their recommendations to the Bureau. A Waterfowl Advisory Committee studies the fall flight forecast and staff recommendations for hunting regulations, then makes comments and recommendations to Bureau Director John S. Gottschalk.

The advisory committee consists of representatives from the National Waterfowl Council, National Audubon Society, Wildlife Management Institute, Outdoor Writers Association, Izaak Walton League, National Wildlife Federation, Wildlife Society and International Association of Game, Fish and Conservation Commissioners.

The regulations offer the States options on seasons and limits within certain guidelines. The States may adopt more stringent rules, but cannot be more liberal than the Federal regulations.

And when hunters have left the blinds next winter, the process for planning the next waterfowl season will be underway.

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