



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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INTERIOR, DEFENSE DEPARTMENTS TO IMPROVE WATERFOWL HABITAT ON MILITARY LANDS

The Nation's military soon will play an important role in providing better habitat for declining populations of North America's wild ducks, as well as for other fish and wildlife species.

Under a new agreement signed in August by William H. Parker III, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Environment), and Frank Dunkle, Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, waterfowl habitat will be improved and protected on military installations in key ranges critical to the conservation of migratory waterfowl (wild ducks, geese, and swans). The projects also will benefit many other fish and wildlife species that depend upon wetlands and surrounding habitats.

The projects, carried out under authority of the Sikes Act, will assist in meeting goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, an international agreement between the United States and Canada designed to rebuild declining waterfowl populations and conserve vital wetland and upland habitats.

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"The Department of Defense controls millions of acres that can provide good fish and wildlife habitat," Dunkle said. "With more intensive management, these areas can be improved for waterfowl and other fish and wildlife at little expense. This is an example of grass-roots, shovel-and-pick efforts called for under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan."

The agreement calls for the Fish and Wildlife Service and the military to assess approximately 30 installations and determine those offering the best waterfowl habitat. Subsequently, state fish and wildlife agencies will be asked to help prepare plans for habitat restoration and improvement projects. The Department of Defense will give implementation projects priority for funding over a 3-year period from fiscal year 1990-92.

Fort Drum, New York; Quantico Marine Base, Virginia; and Camp LeJeune, North Carolina, have already been identified as sites for pilot programs. All three feature marshy areas and offer good potential to improve habitat for black ducks, an Atlantic coastal species in serious decline.

Specific projects at these bases have not been identified, but Federal and state biologists are considering the possibility of stocking beavers at Camp LeJeune. "Beavers could provide the engineering and construction needed to create small ponds at little or no cost," notes Dunkle.

The United States and Canada signed the North American Waterfowl Management Plan in 1986 in response to significant population declines in wild ducks and continuing destruction of wetlands and surrounding upland habitats throughout the continent. A number of wild duck species have suffered significant declines during the 1980's. The 1988 fall flight of ducks is projected at 66 million, the second lowest on record, compared with fall flights of 100 million ducks during the 1970's. Restoration efforts have become more urgent this year as drought virtually eliminated nesting in U.S. and Canadian prairie wetlands that ordinarily produce half the continent's ducks.