



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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**WHAT DO YOU GET WHEN YOU MIX WINGTIPS, HIGH HEELS,
GUM BOOTS, SANDALS, COWBOY BOOTS, AND SNEAKERS?
A GOVERNMENT PROGRAM THAT WORKS!**

How do you spell success? For one government program, it's spelled D-U-C-K-S! That's also one way the North American Waterfowl Management Plan measures its success, and this year it gets good marks as duck numbers show improvement. Good increases have also been observed in other wetland bird species such as sandpipers, bobolinks, and meadowlarks.

"Although we still have a long way to go to restore stable waterfowl populations, the premise of the North American Plan has been validated. Duck populations have responded as predicted to abundant water on the prairies and the availability of habitat," said Robert G. Streeter, U.S. co-chair of the North American's International Plan Committee for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "I salute the thousands of individuals and groups from various walks of life who made sure wildlife habitat was available across the continent. Thanks to their efforts, this is a program that works in concert with the states, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, and other private groups."

Streeter said a large share of the credit for increased duck numbers goes to "the weather and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which have put millions of acres of duck nesting cover on the prairies."

Based on aerial surveys, the Service estimates this year's duck breeding populations at 32.5 million in the survey area, with the fall migration predicted to number 71 million. This compares to 26.3 million and 59 million ducks respectively in 1993 and is up substantially from the population lows recorded in the 1980s. However, this is still below goals set by the North American Plan of at least 62 million breeding ducks in the survey area and a fall flight of 100 million ducks under average environmental conditions (see table, page 2). Waterfowl experts point out that this year's environmental conditions are not average, but extraordinary.

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10 most common species	1985 status (in thousands of ducks)	1994 status	NAWMP goals-year 2001
mallard	4,754	6,980	8,100
pintail	2,511	2,972	5,600
gadwall	1,304	2,318	1,500
wigeon	2,040	2,382	3,000
green-winged teal	1,435	2,108	1,800
blue-winged teal	3,459	4,616	4,700
shoveler	2,697	2,912	2,000
redhead	579	653	640
canvasback	373	526	540
scaup	5,038	4,529	6,300

"This is wonderful news and the first big step toward rebuilding waterfowl numbers and meeting the goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan," said Maitland Sharpe, executive director of the Izaak Walton League of America, Inc. "But we may not see steps two or three unless we all keep working to give this resource a chance to make a full recovery. The ducks can't do their part unless we keep doing ours."

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan, a voluntary nonregulatory agreement signed in 1986 by the United States and Canada and in 1994 by Mexico, was forged to reverse the serious decline in duck populations. The Plan is implemented through public- and private-sector partnerships, which have invested \$500 million in conserving more than two million acres of the continent's wetland ecosystems. The unusual meld of partners ranges from Wall Street brokers and garden club members to ranchers, farmers, Scouts, students, and teachers.

"The shared responsibility called for in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan is paying dividends, confirming that when people and nations work together for a common goal, the benefits are real," said Lynn A. Greenwalt, vice president for International Affairs of the National Wildlife Federation. "This year's encouraging increase in waterfowl numbers shows what will happen when people marshal their skills, commitment, and money to make sure wildlife habitat protection has a place in our plans for the future."

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For many, it's been an act of faith as well as a commitment. "Since the North American Plan was initiated, we've endured a decade of unrelenting drought. Still, partners continued building new wetlands and restoring drained ones while the Conservation Reserve Program was putting nesting cover on the ground," said Tom Hinz, North American Plan committee member from the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. "Most of this time, there has been no water to fill those wetlands, but we did it with the idea that when the water returned, so would the ducks. They did, and are having greater nesting success than we've seen in many years."

Excellent conditions of water and nesting cover are reported across the prairies, where most ducks are produced. "We have consistently focused on habitat programs with confidence that improved wetland conditions would signal a turnaround in previously declining waterfowl populations," said Alan Wentz, group manager for Ducks Unlimited's Conservation Program. "This year is proving that a holistic approach to habitat programs far outweighs short-term quick-fix approaches."

Unusual numbers of sandpipers, bitterns, black terns, bobolinks, western meadowlarks, and other prairie birds are also being seen this year. "The landscape where CRP and wetlands come together is teeming with life," according to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Ron Reynolds.

But even as those working to restore waterfowl celebrate this long-awaited event, they are not quite ready to declare success in reversing the long decline.

"Both water and CRP are ephemeral and could disappear as fast as they came. All gains realized this year could be lost," said Steve Miller of Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources, who serves as chair of the Plan's Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Joint Venture Management Board. "We can't control the weather, but we, as a society, can mandate Federal farm programs to benefit both wildlife and agriculture, such as CRP, which is so critical for the future of waterfowl."

"Prairie waterfowl numbers may be improving, thanks to a combination of good weather, hunting restrictions, and habitat improvements under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan," said James McCuaig, director of Water and Habitat Conservation of the Canadian Wildlife Service and co-chair of the Plan.

"However, ducks have not reached target levels established under the Plan and there is no reason for complacency about key species such as mallards and pintails," he said. Both species, along with wigeon, scaup, and canvasback, remain below Plan goals.

Rollin Sparrowe, president of the Wildlife Management Institute, praised the cooperation of landowners, hunters, and others who provided the habitat that helped improve waterfowl numbers. "The fine investment to date in habitat conservation and management under the North American Plan deserves careful treatment of duck populations as they respond to the improved conditions," he said.

"While one good season doesn't constitute recovery, this year's results are still tremendous and worth celebrating," said Streeter. "We've worked hard and waited a long time. As this fall's migration gets under way, I invite wildlife enthusiasts everywhere to join me in celebrating and witnessing one of nature's greatest spectacles. And then let's get back to work to make sure the ducks, the sandpipers, and other migratory birds have what they need to keep the recovery going."

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