



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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HABITAT CONSERVATION, WET CONDITIONS YIELD BANNER YEAR FOR DUCK POPULATIONS

A second consecutive year of plentiful rains and a decade of intensive wetland conservation efforts fueled by a tremendous partnership among government, conservationists, and private landowners have yielded the largest breeding duck population in 15 years, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Mollie Beattie announced today. This includes record populations for three species.

The annual breeding duck survey recorded an estimated 35.9 million ducks, up more than 10 percent from 32.5 million last year. The survey area covers 1.3 million square miles across the north-central United States, western and northern Canada, and Alaska.

Breeding mallard populations rose 18 percent to 8.3 million, the highest level since 1972 and above the 8.1 million goal contained in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

Three species reached all-time highs: canvasbacks were up 47 percent to 771,000, redheads rose 36 percent to 888,000, and gadwalls were up 22 percent to 2.8 million.

"After a decade of low duck populations caused by drought and habitat loss, there is finally water on the prairies and good news for ducks," Beattie said. "This recovery would not have been possible without the support of America's conservation-minded people and the millions of acres of waterfowl habitat restored and conserved in the past decade."

"Many conservationists had a hand in bringing about this great success, but I especially congratulate the Nation's hunters for their vital role," Beattie said. "They were the vanguard who opened the way for this recovery, who continued to buy licenses and Duck Stamps even when seasons were shortened and bag limits lowered, and who contributed their time and money to protect and restore waterfowl habitat. They kept the faith and kept their Federal and state governments working to protect vital habitat.

"Their sacrifice has paid off--the ducks are back!"

(over)

Heavy rain and snow created the wettest conditions in 20 years in many parts of the prairie, the survey revealed.

Seven of the 10 principal species surveyed are now above the goals set in the North American Plan for duck populations in years of average habitat conditions. Only scaup, Northern pintail, and American widgeon are below the goals.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service administers or participates in a number of programs to conserve and restore waterfowl habitat. For example, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, an international partnership effort, has protected, restored, or enhanced more than 2 million acres of wetland habitat since 1986. The Federal Duck Stamp Program has raised more than \$450 million for the purchase of 4.2 million acres of wetlands for waterfowl.

In addition, other government programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program and the Wetland Reserve Program have conserved millions of acres of wildlife habitat in recent years. And sportsmen and conservation organizations such as Ducks Unlimited have conserved and restored millions of acres of prime habitat. In addition, laws such as the Swampbuster provisions of the Farm Bill and the wetland protection provisions of the Clean Water Act also have helped conserve key waterfowl habitat.

"With these great conservation programs in place, we literally laid the foundation; all we needed to do was watch and Mother Nature has finally come through," Beattie said. "If we had not saved the habitat, the rains of the past 2 years would not have helped waterfowl very much. This proves what we have known for a long time: habitat is the key to wildlife and fisheries conservation.

"The temptation may be to rest on our laurels, but the drought taught us we cannot always depend on good weather. If the recovery of duck populations is to continue, we must rededicate ourselves to additional habitat conservation efforts in the years to come. Waterfowl must have a reserve of habitat that is available every year regardless of weather."