



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

For release August 18, 1995

Hugh Vickery 202-208-5634

SERVICE PROPOSES TO EXPAND WATERFOWL HUNTING SEASON, LIMITS

In response to the highest breeding duck populations since 1980, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing frameworks including longer seasons and larger daily bag limits for the 1995-96 waterfowl hunting season.

However, the good news on general duck and goose populations was tempered somewhat by the continued sharp decline of the Atlantic Flyway Population of Canada geese, which led to a proposed suspension of the goose season throughout the Atlantic Flyway except for special or experimental hunts in a half-dozen states.

The proposed frameworks also allow for a restructured swan season in designated areas of Nevada, Utah, and the Pacific Flyway portion of Montana that would provide the continuation of hunting opportunity for tundra swans while recognizing the need to expand the winter range of the Rocky Mountain population of trumpeter swans. Special permits will be issued by the states and the limit is one bird per season. The states must also conduct a harvest monitoring program to determine the accidental take of trumpeter swans. Strictly controlled seasons for tundra swans will also be allowed in New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Dakota, Virginia, and the Central Flyway portion of Montana.

"Waterfowl populations have responded to excellent weather conditions and a decade of habitat conservation efforts throughout many of the important breeding areas," said Service Deputy Director John Rogers. "As a result, we are now in a position to allow considerably more hunting opportunities to America's waterfowlers."

"The recovery of duck populations is directly attributable to the efforts of hunters and other conservationists," Rogers said. "Without the millions of acres of wetlands they have restored and conserved over the past decade, much of the plentiful rain and snow we've had this year would have fallen on fallow fields, which would have provided little benefit to ducks."

"Through conservation programs such as the North American Wetlands Conservation Act; the Conservation Reserve Program, Wetlands Reserve, and Swampbuster provisions of the Farm Bill; the National Wildlife Refuge System; and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the table was set by conserving

literally millions of acres of wildlife habitat. When the rain and snow finally came to the prairies, waterfowl had the chance to do what they have done for eons. Make no mistake, habitat was the key to this great recovery in duck numbers and this underlines the importance of maintaining the integrity of the far-sighted conservation programs that have done so much to renew duck populations and the habitats on which they depend."

The Service's annual breeding duck survey recorded an estimated 35.9 million ducks, a 10-percent increase from 32.5 million last year. 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.

Based on survey and production data, the Service estimates 80 million ducks will fly south this fall from the surveyed areas, up 13 percent from last year's estimate of 71 million.

Highlights of the proposed frameworks are as follows:

Atlantic Flyway--(Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia)

Ducks--A hunting season of not more than 50 days between October 1, 1995, and January 20, 1996. The proposed daily bag limit is five and may include no more than one mallard hen, two wood ducks, two redheads, one black duck, one mottled duck, one pintail, one fulvous whistling duck, and one canvasback. The season on harlequins is closed. The proposed daily bag limit of mergansers is five, only one of which may be a hooded merganser.

Geese--For light geese, states may select a 107-day season between October 1, 1995, and February 10, 1996, except in Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Virginia, where the closing date has been extended to March 10, with a daily bag limit of five birds. For Canada geese, the season is suspended during the regular season except for West Virginia and four counties in northwest Pennsylvania. Special or experimental late seasons designed to harvest resident Canada geese will be held in Connecticut, Georgia, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina.

Atlantic brant--States may select a 50-day season between October 1, 1995, and January 20, 1996, with a daily bag limit of two.

Mississippi Flyway--(Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin)

Ducks--Hunting seasons of not more than 50 days between September 30, 1995, and January 21, 1996. The proposed daily bag limit is five and may include no more than four mallards (one hen), two wood ducks, one redhead, one black duck, one pintail, and one canvasback. The proposed daily bag limit of mergansers is five, only one of which may be a hooded merganser.

Geese--Generally, states may select 70-day seasons for dark geese between September 30, 1995, and January 31, 1996, and 107-day seasons for light geese between September 30, 1995, and February 14, 1996 (March 10 in part of the flyway), with a 10-bird daily limit including no more than 3 Canada geese, 2 white-fronted geese, and 2 brant. There are, however, area-specific restrictions and exceptions to these frameworks.

Central Flyway--(Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and portions of Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, and Wyoming)

Ducks--In the High Plains Mallard Management Unit (roughly west of the 100th meridian), an 83-day season is proposed provided that the last 23 days start no earlier than December 10, 1995.

A 60-day season is proposed in the remainder of the Central Flyway. Seasons must be between September 30, 1995, and January 21, 1996. The proposed daily bag limit is five, including no more than one hen mallard, two wood ducks, one redhead, one mottled duck, one pintail and one canvasback. The proposed daily bag limit of mergansers is five, only one of which may be a hooded merganser.

Geese--Seasons for dark geese are proposed from September 30, 1995, to January 31, 1996, except in west Texas where the season may extend to February 18, 1996. For light geese, the proposed seasons may extend from September 30, 1995 to February 18, 1996, except in Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Colorado, Kansas, and portions of Nebraska and Wyoming, where the closing date has been extended until March 10. Goose bag limits vary by state and management unit.

Pacific Flyway--(Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and portions of Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, and Wyoming)

Ducks--A 93-day season between September 30, 1995, and January 21, 1996, except in the Columbia Basin where the season may be an additional 7 days. The proposed daily bag limit is six birds,

including no more than one mallard hen, two pintails, one canvasback, and two redheads.

Geese--A 100-day season is proposed in most parts of the flyway between September 30, 1995, and January 21, 1996, with a bag limit of no more than three light geese and three dark geese. Other restrictions vary by state and zone.

Additional details on the proposed hunting regulations will be published in the Federal Register. Public comments will be accepted through September 4, 1995, and should be addressed to the Chief, Office of Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1849 C Street NW., Mail Stop 634 ARLSQ, Washington, DC 20240.