



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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SERVICE ISSUES FINAL 1995-96 WATERFOWL HUNTING REGULATIONS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has issued final regulatory frameworks for the 1995-96 waterfowl hunting season, increasing both the season length and bag limits for ducks in response to a sharp rebound in populations.

Under the regulations, states will be allowed to choose a daily bag limit of up to five ducks except in the Pacific Flyway, where the limit is six ducks. As always, there are specific limits for individual species, such as black ducks, canvasbacks, and northern pintails, within the daily bag limit.

Season lengths for ducks can be up to 50 days in the Atlantic and Mississippi flyways, 60 days in the Central Flyway (83 days in the High Plains), and 93 days in the Pacific Flyway (100 days in the Columbia Basin).

This year, the Service's annual breeding duck survey recorded an estimated 35.9 million ducks, up more than 10 percent 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 for this species contained in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. The overall fall flight index is expected to be 80 million ducks, up from 71 million in 1994 and the largest since 1979.

At the same time, however, the Service cautions that the habitat conservation goals of the North American Plan have been only half met. To ensure the long-term health of waterfowl populations in both dry and wet years, it is vital that these goals are achieved.

Meanwhile, goose and swan populations are doing well and seasons nationwide will generally be unchanged from previous years with the exception of later closing dates for light geese in many areas. The Service continues to be concerned, however, about several populations of Canada geese. In particular, a sharp decline on the breeding grounds of the Atlantic population since the late 1980s has resulted in the suspension of the regular Canada goose season in Atlantic Flyway states.

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This year, an annual survey conducted in conjunction with the Canadian Wildlife Service and the Atlantic Flyway Council revealed just 29,000 breeding pairs despite excellent habitat conditions in the northern Quebec survey area. This is down 27 percent from 1994 and 75 percent below levels recorded in 1988.

The drop in numbers of migratory Canada geese in the Atlantic Flyway has continued even though substantial harvest restrictions have been imposed on Atlantic Flyway states since 1992. Because of the survey results, Canada has joined the United States in imposing season closures in 1995. Special seasons on resident Canada geese will continue in both countries.

Final frameworks for this year's waterfowl hunting seasons were published in the September 27, 1995, Federal Register.