U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

PUBLIC HEARINGS TO DISCUSS EIS
ON RESIDENT CANADA GOOSE MANAGEMENT

May 7, 2002

Franklin Cool Springs Marriott
Conference Center
700 Cool Springs Blvd.
Franklin, Tennessee 37076

APPEARANCES:

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MR. CASE: We'll go ahead and get started. Although there's not a normal sequence, we'll go through the motions to make sure everything is on the up and up.

My name is Dave Case. I'm the consultant here for tonight's meeting. As you know, the purpose is to take comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has prepared in relation to resident Canada geese.

Ron Kokel is going to do a presentation on the Environmental Impact Statement and on some of the background on it. Then you got cards when you came in. We'll just have you come up to the microphone, and you can make comments.

Vicki is our court reporter. She'll be capturing everything, so there will be a formal record. And if you could, when you come up, spell your last name. Give us your name and spell your last name so we get it correct; and if you represent an organization officially, then let us know that as well.

On the Environmental Impact Statement, if you want a copy of the final Environmental Impact Statement, go ahead and
sign up on that. If you do not want to be a recipient, check that off there so we don't duplicate your name. If you haven't received a copy before, just check the other one.

So with that done, I think we'll go ahead and get started. I'd like to introduce Ron Kokel of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife. Ron?

MR. KOKEL:

Thank you, Dave, and good evening, everybody. Again, I'm Ron Kokel. I'm with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Division of Migratory Bird Management; and I'm stationed in Arlington, Virginia. And on behalf of our esteemed director, Steve Williams, I'd like to welcome everybody here.

This is the fourth of eleven public meetings being held across the country for the purpose of inviting public participation into our process of developing an Environmental Impact Statement for resident Canada goose management. The DEIS was developed in full cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services.

Why are we here? Well, we're here to explain the DEIS's proposed action and to
listen to your comments. This draft EIS considered a range of management alternatives for addressing expanding populations of locally breeding Canada geese. And as such, we're here to listen to you and invite your comments on recommended actions.

First, a brief explanation of the National Environmental Policy Act, which governs the whole process. The National Environmental Policy Act or NEPA requires the completion of an EIS to analyze environmental and socioeconomic impacts that are associated with federal significant actions.

NEPA also requires public involvement, which includes a scoping period before the draft can be completed, and a comment period after the draft.

We began this process in August of 1999 when we published a Federal Registry notice and announced our intent to prepare this draft. Then in February of 2000, we held nine public scoping meetings, one of which was held in Nashville. It was designed to seek public input into this process. Scoping ended in March of 2000. In response to scoping, we received over
3000 comments, and we had about 1250 people attend the nine public scoping meetings.

While in scoping, we found that the top issues of concern were the property damage and conflicts caused by resident Canada geese; methods of conflict abatement; sport hunting opportunities on resident Canada Geese; economic impacts; human health and safety concerns associated with geese; and the impact to the geese themselves.

NEPA also outlines the specific format of an EIS. There's a purpose and need section, an alternative section, a safe environment section, and environmental consequences section.

In the EIS, we define resident Canada geese as those geese which nest within the lower 48 states in the months of March, April, May, or June, or reside within the lower 48 states in the months of April, May, June, July, or August.

The purpose of the EIS was, one, to evaluate alternative strategies to reduce, manage, and control resident Canada goose populations in the U.S; two, to provide a
regulatory mechanism that would allow state and
local agencies or other federal agencies and
groups of individuals to respond to Canada geese
damage complaints; and third, to guide and direct
resident Canada goose population management
activities in the U.S.

The need for the EIS was twofold:
One, increasing resident goose populations
coupled with growing conflicts, damages, and the
socioeconomic impacts; and for a re-examination
of the Service's resident goose management.

We looked at seven management
alternatives. Alternative A, no action, which
is the baseline; Alternative B, nonlethal
control or management, which would only be those
federally nonpermitted activities; Alternative
C, a nonlethal control and management, which
would include federally permitted activities;
Alternative D, expanded hunting methods and
opportunities; Alternative E, integrative
depredation order management; Alternative F,
state empowerment, which is the proposed
action; and Alternative G, which is the general
depredation order.

Under the no action alternative,
there would be no additional regulatory methods
or strategies authorized. We would continue to
use the special hunting season, the issuance of
depredation permits, and the issuance of special
resident Canada geese permits.

Under the second alternative, the
nonlethal management, which would include
nonfederally permitted activity, we would seek
all legal control of resident Canada geese and
their eggs. Only nonlethal harassment
techniques would be allowed; no permits would be
issued; and all special hunting seasons would be
discontinued.

Under the third alternative,
nonlethal control or management, which would
include federally permitted activities, we would
cease all permitted lethal control of adult
resident Canada geese. We would promote
nonlethal harassment techniques. No depredation
of special Canada goose permits would be issued;
and
special hunting seasons would be discontinued.

The fourth alternative is
expanded hunting methods and opportunities.
Under this alternative, we would authorize
additional hunting methods to increase the
harvest of resident Canada geese. Such method
could include electronic calls, unplugged guns, and
expanded shooting hours. These seasons could be
operational during September 1 and 15 seasons.
They could be experimental during September 16
to 30 seasons; and they can't be conducted
outside of any other open seasons.

The fifth alternative, we termed
integrative depredation order management. This
alternative consists of an airport depredation
order, a egg and nest depredation order, an
agricultural depredation order, and a public
health depredation order. Implemention would be
up to the individual state's wildlife agencies.
Special hunting seasons would be continued; and
the issuance of depredation permitting for
special Canada goose permits would also be
continued.

The airport depredation order
would authorize airports to establish and
implement a program which could include indirect
or direct population control activities. The
intent of this program would be to significantly
reduce goose populations at airports.
Management actions would have to occur on the premises.

The nest and egg depredation order would allow the destruction of resident Canada goose nest and eggs without a federal permit. The intent of the program would be to stabilize the breeding populations.

The agricultural depredation order would authorize landowners, operators, or tenants to actively engage in commercial agriculture to conduct direct or indirect control activities on the geese depredation on agriculture crops. Management actions would also have to occur on the premises.

And lastly, the public health depredation order would authorize states, counties, and municipal or local public health officials to conduct direct or indirect control strategies on geese when recommended by health officials, if there was a public health threat. Management actions would also have to occur on the premises.

Our proposed action was the sixth alternative, which we term "state empowerment."

Under this alternative, we would establish the
new regulations, which would authorize the
states' wildlife agencies or their authorized
agents to conduct or allow management activities
on resident goose populations. The intent of
this alternative would be to allow state
wildlife management agencies sufficient
flexibility to deal with the problems caused by
resident geese within their state. It would
authorize indirect or direct population control
strategies such as aggressive harassment, nest
and egg destruction, gosling and adult trapping
programs; and would allow
implementation of any of the specific
depredation orders that were identified in
Alternative E.

During existing special hunting
seasons, we would expand methods of taking to
include hunter harvests like I talked about
under Alternative D. Such additional hunting
methods could include electronic calls,
unplugged guns, and expanded shooting hours. Again,
these seasons would be operational during
September 1 to 15. They could be experimental
from September 16 to 30; and they would have to
be conducted outside of any other open seasons.
In addition, we would establish a conservation order, which would provide special expanded hunting opportunities during a portion of the treated closed period, August 1 to 31; and the open period, September 1 to 15. Additional hunting methods could be used such as electronic calls, unplugged guns, expanded shooting hours, and liberalized bag limits. Again, these would have to be conducted outside of other open seasons.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would annually inspect the impact and effectiveness of the overall program; and there would be a provision for possible suspension of the hunting regulations under the conservation order for the regular season changes as far as methods when the need was no longer present.

We would also continue all special and regular hunting seasons. We would continue the issuance of depredation of special Canada goose permits. The only state requirement would be to annually monitor the spring breeding population, and to annually report takes under authorized activities.

The last alternative is the
a general depredation order. This alternative would allow any authorized person to conduct management activities on resident geese, which were posing a threat to health and human safety or causing property damage. It would be available between April 1 and August 31. It would also provide expanded hunting opportunities such as that under Alternative D. We would continue to use the special and regular hunting seasons, and the issuance of depredation of special Canada goose permits. And the authorization for all management activities would come directly from the Service.

Under the impacts to the environment, we looked at two subparts. One is the biological environment. Under the biological environment, we looked at the resident Canada goose populations, water quality in wetlands, vegetation and soils, wildlife habitat, and federally listed threatened and endangered species.

Under the socioeconomic environment, we looked at the Migratory Bird Program, which would include the sport hunting program, and the permit program; social values
and considerations; economic considerations such as property damage and agricultural crop damage caused by resident geese; human health and safety issues; and the program costs.

The environmental consequences section forms the scientific and analytic basis for a comparison of the different alternatives. It analyzes the environmental impacts of each alternative in relation to the resource categories. And as I said earlier, the no action alternative provides the baseline for this analysis.

Under the no action alternative, we expect several things: One, populations for resident Canada geese would continue to grow. In the Atlantic Flyway, we estimate there'd be about 1.6 million in ten years; in the Mississippi Flyway, two million in ten years; the Central Flyway, 1.3 million in ten years; and the Pacific Flyway, about 450,000 in ten years. We also would expect continued and expanded goose distribution problems and conflicts; increased workload both on state, federal, and local levels; and continued impacts of the resident Canada geese to property,
safety, and health.

Under our proposed action, we would expect a reduction in goose populations, especially in specific problem areas. There would be increased hunting opportunities. There would be a significant reduction in conflict; decreased impacts to property, safety, and health. While there would be an initial workload increase, we believe that long term, there would be a workload decrease. And above all, it would maintain viable resident Canada goose populations.

Some of the recent modeling that's been done suggests that to reduce four flyway populations from the current level from about three and a half million down to the flyway established goal of 2.1 million would require annually for ten years, the harvest of an additional 480,000 geese; or take an additional 852,000 goslings annually, or the nest removal of 528,000 nests annually, or the combination of an additional harvest of 240,000 geese, and the take of 320,000 goslings annually. All these would have to be on top of what is already occurring.
Thus we believe this is the only way to possibly attain these kind of numbers, and to give states the flexibility to address the problems within their respective state. We also believe that the population reduction should be addressed on a wide number of available fronts. And since states are the most informed and knowledgeable local authorities on wildlife conflicts, the primary responsibilities and decisions of the program should be placed with them.

Well, what comes next? First is the development of a new regulation to carry out this proposed action. This should be forthcoming this month. Second, the public comment period on the draft ends May the 30th. And third, the publication of a final EIS, a record of decision, and a final rule which we anticipate for this fall.

As I just stated, the public comment period is open until May the 30th; and Dave has outlined the various methods that you can use to submit your comments. These include any oral or written comments that you submit tonight, and any that you may subsequently send.
in to us. The address is printed on the back of
the card that you received when you came in.
Also we've set up an electronic site where you
can e-mail comments, and all the other
information that's pertinent to the EIS process
is there including the EIS. And on behalf of
the Service, I'd like to everybody here for
attending.

MR. CASE: Thanks, Ron. As I
mentioned, we're going to take
comments from people in the order that you came
in. Again, if you could give us your name.
Spell your last name for us, and if you could,
speak into the microphone so everybody in the
back can hear you and so Martha can hear you. So
No. 1.

MR. BANKSTON: My name is Ray
Bankston, B-a-n-k-s-t-o-n, and I'm a goose
hunter. I have been for about 60 years.

My one comment is that I believe
the state empowerment part of this is the way to
go. There's no doubt about that. But the one
word that's missing in there, I think you're
going to have to address. To get geese out of
protected areas to where the hunters can shoot
them is to bait them. We've got -- I'm speaking of the local areas -- we've got many, many, many areas that we can identify that geese are on and are never shot. They never leave these residential areas, the park areas, or whatever. And to get them to leave, you're going to have to bait them. How this could be done, I don't know. I would say it would have to be site specific and person specific, a permit for a person at a site during a time frame. Other than that, I think the other part of it will work. But the unplugged gun and the calls aren't going to help you if the geese -- they're just not going to come to that general area at all. That's my only comment I'll make.

MR. CASE: Thank you. Number 2?
NUMBER 2: I pass.
MR. CASE: Number 3?
NUMBER 3: I pass.
MR. CASE: Number 4?
NUMBER 4: I pass.
MR. CASE: Number 5?
NUMBER 5: I pass.
MR. CASE: I'd like to congratulate you on the shortest resident Canada
goose meeting, and the most pleasant Canada
goose meeting that we've had in the past two
years. If there are no other comments, then
we'll adjourn the meeting. Thank you.

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I hereby certify the foregoing to be a
true and accurate transcript of the proceedings.

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VICKI S. GANNO, RPR
Court Reporter