

**Final Script – July 18 2008**

**Status of Waterfowl 2008**

	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Dale Hall – On camera</u></p> <p>Hi, I'm Dale Hall, Director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service.</p> <p>For more than 50 years, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Canadian Wildlife Service, along with State and Provincial wildlife agencies, and private conservation organizations, have surveyed North America's waterfowl breeding habitat with airplanes and ground crews.</p>
	<p>It's the longest running wildlife survey in the world and data gleaned from this effort allow Federal, State, and Provincial agencies to establish hunting seasons each year that provide ample recreational opportunities, while taking into consideration the health and sustainability of our shared waterfowl resources.</p>
	<p>A few weeks ago, we began the 2008 chapter of the waterfowl breeding population and habitat survey in North America, which, when completed, will have covered nearly 2.1 million square miles of habitat in the U.S. and Canada.</p>
	<p>This year, I am standing next to a wetland in the heart of Canada's prairie pothole region, in southern Saskatchewan, visiting Canadian and</p>

	American field crews who together conduct this portion of the waterfowl breeding ground survey
	I'll now turn it over to Bob Blohm, Chief of the Division of Migratory Bird Management who will report on the results of survey.
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Bob Blohm- on camera</u></p> <p>Aerial and ground crews have now finished the survey and we can report the results for 2008.</p>
	In general, the quality of habitat for breeding waterfowl in portions of Canada and the U.S. has deteriorated from conditions in 2007.
	Here are some observations from our pilot/ biologists recorded in May. Let's begin with John Bidwell.
On camera	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>John Bidwell</u></p> <p>The winter of 2007 and 2008 had significant levels of snowfall, record levels of snowfall in most areas in Maine, in Atlantic Canada - all the way up to Labrador.</p>
Snow scenes	Most areas had in excess of 20 inches of snow above the norm and so consequently we had a significant snow pack that has melted fairly gradually in April, but with some rains that we received last week, we've had extensive flooding in the Saint John and the Penobscot river valleys.

On camera	The flooding is going to slow things down a little bit because of the high water levels are going to be taking up some of the nesting territory for early breeders, however I think the birds can adapt pretty well.
	One thing for sure there is plenty of water and as you get up into the northern areas the lakes are opening up with the mild temperatures here in April and early May but we're expecting a normal breeding season for most species here in Maine and Atlanta, Canada.
On camera	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Jim Bredy</u></b></p> <p>We're here in Burlington, Vermont about ready to start the waterfowl breeding population surveys in northern New York, southern Ontario, and southern Quebec.</p>
Courting waterfowl	Although later than last year the timing of nesting appears normal, near the long term average. There were record snowfall amounts in this survey area.
On camera	A rapid snow melt has helped to fill many wetland basins; therefore conditions are looking promising for nesting waterfowl and we're hopeful for a good hatch.
On camera	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Mark Koneff</u></b></p> <p>In 2008, our survey area includes the inner lakes region of southwest Ontario, the Boreal forest of eastern Ontario and the James and Hudson Bay lowlands of northern Ontario.</p>

wetlands	<p>Winter temperatures across this region have been average to below average and spring temperatures have been about average. However, spring did come a little bit later to the north country this year.</p> <p>Snowfall across the area has been average to well above average in some areas.</p>
On Camera	<p>In the north, a good frost seal and a good snow pack has resulted in good to very good habitat conditions and despite a poor frost seal, heavy snows and heavy spring rains have resulted in good to fair habitat conditions across southwest Ontario.</p>
Jim on camera	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Jim Wortham</u></b></p> <p>Today we're here on the Kapukassing River having just finished up our Western Ontario stratum and that's the area that is just to the north of the Great Lakes – just to the east of the Manitoba border to the west.</p>
Habitat scenes	<p>It's an area characterized by boreal forest -having lots of granite outcroppings in the southern portions gradually giving way to muskeg bogs in the northern portions.</p>
Jim on camera	<p>The name of the game this year has been is the timing of the ice thawing out on the lakes.</p>
Waterfowl on ice	<p>Right now we have got birds in the area that are ready to nest but the lakes are now just giving way and so what's happening is that we have a lot of</p>

	<p>frozen lakes - that are frozen shore to shore - but we're also starting to see some open waters on the edges of the lake.</p>
Habitat scenes	<p>The rivers give way first, the beaver sloughs and bogs next. The birds have plenty of places to distribute themselves now but sometimes it is not always the traditional areas they are looking for.</p>
Jim on camera	<p>So we expect the timing of the survey to be 'bang on'. We think the birds are here and ready and we may have some of these alternative nesting sites for individual species but overall we expect a good year</p>
Karen on camera	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Karen Bollinger</u></b></p> <p>Today, we're in Dauphin, Manitoba near the northern end of our survey area of southern Manitoba and southeastern Saskatchewan</p>
Good habitat	<p>Most of the area has been very dry and the only good habitat that we have found has been - starting in Brandon the middle of the survey area - going northwest through western Manitoba and into northeastern Saskatchewan.</p>
Dry habitat -	<p>Otherwise, it's been very dry, very poor habitat conditions. In those areas where there are birds, they're concentrated on the few wetlands that do have water.</p>

Karen on camera	We believe that production will be poor for the most part in this survey area.
On camera	<b><u>John Solberg</u></b> We're just south of Aberdeen, South Dakota for the 2008 breeding population survey. This wetland that I am standing by probably looks a little better then - then is representative for the area.
Habitat scenes	This is about the third year running that conditions have been dry. We did have a cold winter but once again, the precipitation received in both North and South Dakota was generally below average.
waterfowl	The dry conditions in much of the area have resulted in probably a lower breeding population then we've seen the last couple of years
John on camera	I'd say that nesting conditions and wetland habitats over all in North and South Dakota are average to below average this breeding season 2008.
Ray on camera	<b><u>Ray Bentley</u></b> We've been surveying the western North and South Dakota and eastern Montana.
Dry wetland	Overall, the entire region is under moderate to severe drought, Moving down into southwest South Dakota. Only about 40% of our basins on our survey lines contained water.
Day habitat	Moving north into North Dakota the conditions are quite, quite worse in that the region is under a influence of a significant drought

aerial	Our survey lines up there are indicating less than 10% basins containing any water at all, residual cover is adequate but upland vegetation is delayed and almost nonexistent.
aerial	Moving west into Montana, we get the usual, quite diverse array – mosaic rather - of habitat conditions, that can vary between quite dry to actually quite good and it's simply a function of individual storm tracks that track through the region.
Ray on camera	The prospects for eastern Montana remain just about average overall with the variability ranging from poor to good..
Tractor plowing  Ray on camera	And in all locations, we are seeing a continued conversion of CRP land back into agriculture and those will serve as negative impact on waterfowl production particularly when the CRP land is adjacent to the limited wetlands available in eastern Montana.
On camera	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Elizabeth Huggins</u></b></p> <p>It's May 2008, we're here doing the breeding pairs survey in southern Alberta. We're standing in front of some of the few wetlands that remain this year.</p>
	The majority of the prairies are in very poor condition. They had a very dry winter, very dry spring. It's also been a very late spring, There is almost no run off from the mountains in spite of the fact they had above normal snow pack.

	<p>We're seeing very crowded wetlands because there is not much habitat for the birds this year. We anticipate very poor nesting success due to over crowding and dry habitat conditions.</p>
	<p>As we travel north to the Aspen parklands, we're seeing fair to good conditions and as we get further north to the Peace parklands we're seeing again improved conditions from last year. We anticipate better production in the North Country then down here in the prairies.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Phil Thorpe</u></b></p> <p>Wetland conditions once again are variable in southern Saskatchewan. In the south, the grassland are extremely dry this year.</p>
	<p>The southern grasslands, compared to last year, have lost a substantial number of wetland basins and we estimate from preliminary numbers that only 10% or less of the basins have water this year.</p>
	<p>As you move up into the northern grasslands conditions improve where basins have lost about 20 to 30% over what we saw last year.</p>
	<p>In the parklands, reports are that good to excellent wetland conditions exist primarily because of the excess water we had last year in the province remains.</p>

	<p>This year we expect that production out of the grasslands especially the southern grasslands will be poor. As you move up into the northern grasslands we should see fair to isolated good areas of production and once we get into the parklands I would expect good to excellent production,</p>
<p>Dan on camera</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Dan Nieman</u></b></p> <p>We're in southern Saskatchewan assessing waterfowl production potential for the current breeding season. I think the production potential this year can best be characterized as a good news, bad news story</p>
<p>Dry habitat</p>	<p>Southern Saskatchewan, the grasslands in particular are extremely dry, similar to the situation last year when we had limited production out of that area. Very few wetlands are available.</p>
<p>Crowded wetland</p>	<p>The wetlands that are there are harboring large numbers of waterfowl that are concentrated on the few areas available; a situation not conducive to good production, many of those birds won't breed.</p>
<p>Aerial of parklands</p>	<p>Many of the areas in the grasslands are totally devoid of water. The birds that would normally frequent that area have moved further north into the Aspen parklands and that's where the good news story lies.</p>

Wetland with birds	Habitat in that region is generally good, last year it was excellent. We didn't get a lot of precipitation but good carryover of the water from the previous year into this year will provide conditions that should be conducive to good production for the fourth consecutive year in that region.
Dan on camera	.Looking at the area as a whole, it appears that the dry spots in Montana, the two Dakotas, the southern Prairie Provinces indicate that the Aspen parklands of west central Saskatchewan and east central Alberta might, might be one of the few bright spots available for waterfowl this year. Expect reduced waterfowl fall flight out of southern Saskatchewan this year, good out of the parklands, negligible out of the grasslands.
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Carl Ferguson</u></b></p> <p>My survey area is the northern Alberta, a small portion of northeastern British Columbia and the Northwest Territories.</p>
	The key up that way is the late spring. Today in Inuvick - at the top of my survey area - it's snowing. All the major lakes starting from the lesser Slave lake in northern Alberta all the way to the Arctic Ocean, the large lakes are frozen
	So, we have a number of ducks and a number of geese that are stacked up south of that area waiting to go north. Timing is a critical, critical thing for my

	<p>area as there is permanent water. Coming through the Dakotas and into Saskatchewan it looks like we may have a flyover this year in the territories of some magnitude.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Fred Roetker</u></b></p> <p>We're standing on the shore of Clearwater Lake at The Pas, Manitoba and believe it or not, even with all this ice, we're at the very southern edge of this crew area in the boreal forest.</p>
	<p>Here in the western boreal forest or the bush country as we like to call it - our area -that we fly - extends from here up to almost Churchill on the Hudson Bay coast here in Manitoba and over in Saskatchewan just north of Prince Albert up to Stony Rapids or the northwest territory's border.</p>
	<p>In all this bush country the primary species we see are Mallards, Widgeon, Green winged Teal. As far as the divers go its lots of Scaup - they're coming through strongly now, - lots of ring necks, Golden Eye, Buffleheads, all three species of Mergansers.</p>
	<p>It's very diverse country. People look at a lake like this and say this isn't duck country, this is fish country but the real fabric of the country for waterfowl are the small streams, beaver ponds and the miles and miles of shore line. As you look down the shore line there are endless possibilities for nesting ducks. 2008 will go in the history books as a late spring for duck nesting here in northern Manitoba. “</p>

<p>Good, bad, ugly map</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Bob on camera</u></b></p> <p>The observations of our pilot biologists as well as those from state, provincial, and other Federal biologists are the basis for our annual assessment of habitat conditions and waterfowl population trends. In late July we provide more information in our annual Waterfowl Status report.</p> <p>As you've heard from Fish and Wildlife Service and Canadian Wildlife Service biologists, habitat conditions in the prairies declined from last year, while in the eastern survey area habitat conditions remained similar or improved.</p> <p>Spring was 1-2 weeks later than the early spring of preceding years, but overall was similar to the long-term average.</p> <p>With the exception of far western and eastern South Dakota, conditions were fair to poor in most of the US prairies, due to sustained drought and general lack of nesting cover.</p> <p>The parklands of southern Saskatchewan and Manitoba were drier than last year, but remained in good condition.</p> <p>The bush of northern Canada and Alaska were classified as mostly in good condition. Although spring ice break-up was slightly later than normal,</p>
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	<p>there were good water conditions in the beaver ponds, river deltas, and small lakes and ponds that are characteristic of this region.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Bob– on camera</u></b></p> <p>Now let’s look at this year’s pond numbers.</p>
	<p>Pond numbers in the Canadian prairies and parklands were 39% lower than last year and 11% below the long-term average. In the north-central U.S., pond abundance was 30% below last year and 11% below the long-term average.</p>
	<p>In the prairie pothole region of Canada and the north-central United States combined, we estimate there were 4.4 million ponds in May; 37% lower than last year's estimate of 7 million and 10% below the long-term average of 4.9 million.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Bob– On camera</u></b></p> <p>Here’s a look at breeding duck population estimates from the spring survey.</p>
Graph	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Bob– VO</u></b></p> <p>Between 1955 and 2007, breeding duck populations in the traditional survey area fluctuated between 25 and 43 million birds.</p> <p>The 2008 total duck breeding population estimate is just over 37 million birds. This estimate is 9% lower than last year, and 11% above the long-term average.</p>

Graph	This year we estimated 7.7 million mallards in our traditional western survey area, which is 7% below last year and 3% above the long-term average.
Graph	We estimated 2.6 million pintails, which is 22% lower than the 2007 estimate, and 36% below the 1955-2007 average.
Graph	At 6.6 million birds, blue-winged teal have remained about the same as 2007, and were 45% above their long-term average.
Graph	The estimate for green winged teal was 3% higher than 2007 and 57% above the 1955-2007 average.
Graph	At 2.5 million birds, the wigeon population was 11% below last year and 5% below the long-term average.
Graph	Gadwall were 19 % lower than last year but still 56% above the long term average.
Graph	The estimate for scaup, 3.7 million birds was 8% higher than last year but remains well below the long-term average.,
Graph	We estimated 3.5 million shovelers this year which is 23% below last year's record high numbers but still 56% greater than the 1955 to 2007 average.

Graph	Again this year there were over 1 million redheads, 66% over the long-term average and again the highest on record.
Graph	Canvasbacks were 44% lower than last year's record high numbers, and were 14% below the long-term average.
Mallards	Information from the spring survey is used to predict the size of the fall population of mallards. Based on information received to date, the fall flight of mallards from the mid-continent survey area is expected to be around 9.2 million birds, a bit lower than last year's fall flight estimate of 10.9 million birds.
Large flock of ducks on water	In the Eastern survey area, the numbers of most species were lower than last year, but the differences were not statistically significant.
Ring neck ducks	Ring-necked ducks were the most common duck species encountered, This year we estimate that there were 551,000 ring-necks in the eastern survey area.
Black duck	This year's breeding ground estimate for black ducks, the second most common species, was 496,000 birds, which is slightly lower than the 2007 estimate.
Mallard pair	The number of mallards was similar to last year at 450,000 birds.

<p>Bob on camera</p> <p>Plane</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Bob on camera</u></p> <p>Pilot biologists returned in July to survey a portion of the prairies. In general, the quality of habitat conditions in May and July were similar. Areas classified as good or excellent in May continued to have good water levels and adequate vegetation for brood-rearing. Areas in western North Dakota classified as fair or poor showed slight improvement due to late spring rainfall and were classified as fair; however, eastern North Dakota remains in poor condition.</p>
<p>Brood</p> <p>Pretty wetland</p>	<p>The Canadian parklands benefited from late spring rainfall and remain in fair or good condition. July rains in the prairies of southern Saskatchewan and southern Manitoba may improve conditions for late nesters and broods.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Bob— on camera</u></p> <p>Now let's briefly look at the status of geese and swans in North America this year.</p>
<p>Geese in Canada</p>	<p>Most populations of geese and swans nest across remote areas of Alaska and northern Canada, although a few populations nest in temperate regions as far south as Texas</p>
<p>Biologists with eggs</p>	<p>Each year, biologists monitor goose and swan population status and the production of their young through a variety of surveys conducted on breeding, wintering, and migration areas.</p>

<p>Snow goose lands</p>	<p>Most goose and swan populations in North America remain abundant and healthy, although the production forecast for this fall varies from poor to excellent.</p>
<p>Geese insnow</p> <p>Maps</p> <p>Geese in snow</p> <p>Map</p>	<p>In 2008, the timing of nesting was near average in most important goose breeding areas across Alaska and Canada.</p> <p>However, spring weather patterns were especially favorable for Canada geese and greater snow geese of the Atlantic Flyway.</p> <p>Although near average, 2008 nesting conditions for Mississippi Flyway Canada geese near Hudson Bay were less favorable than during the last few years of excellent conditions.</p> <p>In contrast, the snow and Ross's geese that nest throughout Arctic Canada, and migrate to the Mississippi and Central Flyways likely experienced better production in 2008 than during last year's harsh nesting season.</p>

<p>Map</p> <p>Geese in sky</p>	<p>The outlook for production is also near average for the Cackling and white-fronted geese that nest on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta in Alaska and migrate to the Pacific Flyway.</p> <p>However, brant production from this area will likely be poor in 2008 due to high predation rates at several colonies.</p> <p>The population level of dusky Canada geese declined again in 2008. However, Dusky Canada goose production this year is expected to be near average, and better than in 2007.</p>
<p>Several Canada Geese Pars with chicks</p> <p>Hunters with dog</p>	<p>Most other North American goose populations, including those that nest in southern Canada and the United States, experienced near-average nesting conditions in 2008.</p>
<p>swans</p>	<p>As for North American tundra swans: Cygnet production for the Eastern Population in 2008 will be substantially improved from that of last year, while cygnet production for the Pacific Flyway's tundra swans is expected to be above average once again. Goose and Swan enthusiasts can find more information about regional populations in the Status of Waterfowl Report 2008</p>

	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Dale Hall on camera</u></b></p> <p>The importance of the Prairie Pothole Region to North America’s waterfowl resource can’t be overemphasized. This region truly has earned its name as the continent’s “duck factory” and yet the wetlands and grasslands in this glacially-created landscape are among the most threatened habitats anywhere.</p>
	<p>On the U.S. side of the border, this August marks the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Small Wetlands Program that was created to stem the rapid loss of small, isolated wetlands and areas of grassland habitat in the Prairie Pothole Region of the United States.</p>
	<p>Over the years, we have used Duck Stamp funds to acquire Waterfowl Production Areas, which are small wetland and pothole areas managed for the benefit of migratory waterfowl. Since then, the Service has permanently protected nearly 3 million acres of waterfowl breeding habitat.</p>
	<p>Canada is an important partner in our collective effort to conserve and manage waterfowl and wetland habitats they depend upon.</p>
	<p>The Canadian Wildlife Service and its partner agencies play a critical role in this survey and have also worked diligently to protect wetland habitat in Canada.</p>

	<p>Since 1986, through the Prairie Habitat Joint venture of the North American Management Plan, Canada has restored, protected and managed wetlands and uplands in that important part of the 'Duck Factory' known as Prairie Canada.</p>
	<p>Wildlife Habitat Canada's stamp funds have also made an important contribution to the protection of waterfowl habitat within this region.</p>
	<p>Although programs differ in the two countries our objectives are the same: preserve our waterfowl heritage and the habitat it is so dependent upon so that future generations are able to continue to enjoy this precious resource.</p>
	<p>What can you do? Buy a Federal Duck Stamp and in Canada a Canadian Wildlife Habitat Conservation Stamp. And more importantly, tell people how important their support is to ensuring healthy populations of all migratory birds.</p> <p>I hope you all continue to enjoy your waterfowl heritage.</p>

