



## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### INFORMATION SERVICE

#### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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#### WATERFOWL POPULATIONS DECLINE, FWS DIRECTOR SAYS

While millions of ducks and geese remained in the U. S. last fall because of mild weather -- instead of flying on to Mexico -- and many sportsmen therefore were under the impression that waterfowl populations had increased, the sad news is that continent-wide studies indicate waterfowl numbers have declined, Albert M. Day, Director of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service said today in San Francisco at the 15th North American Wildlife Conference.

"It looks now as though instead of gaining ground last year, waterfowl populations lost some of the previous years' gains. We not only took the harvestable crop, but also cut into the 'capital stock' of this year's breeders," stated Day. "I fear that the final totals of the recent inventory will show a population decline."

Service Director Day also expressed concern over the accelerated pace which agricultural drainage has assumed in recent years. As a result of government subsidies and technical advice, private landowners are destroying essential breeding and wintering habitats much faster than conservation agencies can rebuild and preserve them.

Since 1942, almost 6,000,000 acres of marshland have been drained, while only about 4,500,000 acres of waterfowl habitat have been developed by state and Federal conservation agencies during the last 20 years.

"To me," said Mr. Day, "it seems more than mere coincidence that the waterfowl populations have been so slow in recovering during the same period that so much of their essential habitat has disappeared as a result of this drainage program.

"The ultimate purpose of this agricultural drainage program is to put more lands under cultivation. Why wouldn't it be sounder public policy for the Government to pay the farmers for not draining their marshes? Payments to landowners to encourage the production of ducks and geese and muskrats -- which are always in short supply -- might well lead to greater national benefits than to continue to deplete our soils to raise potatoes and cereals and eggs, which are hauled and stored in already bulging storage space."

Mr. Day also suggested that it might be better to leave the spring and summer run-off on the land instead of hurrying it through drain tiles to networks of ditches, then into straightened streams that rush with ever-increasing speed into swollen rivers that are dammed for flood control and leveed higher and higher each year to protect adjacent farms and homes.

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