



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release FEBRUARY 10, 1961

DROUGHT IN NESTING AREAS AGAIN PORTENDS SERIOUS OUTLOOK FOR AMERICA'S WATERFOWL

Unless there are unusual snows and above normal rains in the prairie regions of the northern United States and southern Canada between now and the middle of May, North America's waterfowl resource will be in its most precarious condition in the past three decades, the Department of the Interior reported today.

Officials of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Fish and Wildlife Service, say that this area has been responsible for up to 75 percent of the annual continental waterfowl crop.

Although all three of the Prairie Provinces--Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba--are regarded as dry, the main moisture deficiency lies in Saskatchewan, the most extensive of the best duck producing areas. Moisture in that Province has not been so low since the 1930's. Soil borings in Saskatchewan by the Canadian Department of Agriculture show that moisture reserves are depleted to the four-foot level.

Due to the absence of late season moisture, there is no frost in the ground and thus no "soil seal." This means that normal precipitation will tend to be absorbed by the ground rather than collected in the potholes necessary for the nesting birds.

Bureau officials believe that only through extremely heavy snowfall in March and April or rains of such quantity as to cause widespread runoff, will there be sufficient water in the spots needed in time for the 1961 nesting season.

These officials further point out that the United States Weather Bureau outlook for the period up to mid-February calls for only moderate precipitation with above normal temperatures throughout the described area. Officials of the Canadian Wildlife Service and Provincial Game Branch personnel agree that the situation is extremely serious and that other conservation agencies should be alerted to the situation.

The condition in the Canadian pothole area is a complete reversal from what it was early last fall when late summer rains portended excellent water conditions on the nesting grounds. Under normal conditions, the millions of potholes provide for the necessary dispersion of the nesting ducks. Permanent potholes provide maturing areas for the young birds after many of the shallow ones are dry. Research has shown that ducks can take their broods as far as two miles to reach permanent water.

X X X