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DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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INTERIOR DEPARTMENT EXPECTS MODERATE INCREASE IN FALL DUCK FLIGHTS

An increase in duck population in each of the four flyways this year has been forecast by the Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service. The increase is due to better nesting conditions throughout most of the duck breeding areas in North America, particularly in the prairie pothole regions of the United States and Canada, the Service said.

The forecast was made in Washington, D. C., at a joint meeting of Fish and Wildlife Service personnel and the Waterfowl Advisory Committee composed of representatives of the Flyway Councils and the chief conservation agencies in the United States. This group meets each year to develop recommendations on the fall waterfowl hunting season for submittal to Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall.

The forecast was based on two intensive aerial and ground surveys of waterfowl breeding areas; upon information derived from banding hundreds of thousands of ducks and geese on their breeding and wintering areas; upon a measure of birds killed, as obtained from a mail survey of waterfowl hunters; and on data collected during an annual survey in January to measure distribution of birds on the wintering areas following the shooting season.

The first 1963 survey of the breeding grounds, which began in early May and extended into June, indicated a small increase over the 1962 breeding population which was 38 percent below the 1950-62 average. The second survey, made primarily in July, showed slight to better-than-moderate increases in the 1963 hatch as compared with the hatch for 1962.

While the forecast emphasized the low breeding population compared with the 12-year average and good years in the past, it contained a ring of optimism in the statement that, "there seems to be no question but the backbone of the drought period has been broken." The May pond count in the pothole area of the

Nation was 17 percent higher in 1963 than in 1962, but still was 36 percent below the 1951-1962 average and 60 percent below the peak year of 1955.

Increases were noted in the population of both canvasback and redhead ducks. However, the redhead population is still 14 percent below the 12-year average and the canvasback is 11 percent below. The season on these birds has been closed for three years.

There was no significant change in the populations of the Atlantic flyway's popular black duck.

The forecast showed that in Alaska the breeding population was down 15 percent, compared with 1962, but that favorable weather conditions resulted in a good increase in the production of young birds. In northern Alberta there was an increase of 25 percent in the breeding population which combined with favorable weather to produce a good increase in young birds.

In the Northwest Territories breeding population was down and the weather unfavorable for good production; northern Saskatchewan and northern Manitoba show increases in broods. Ontario registered a 49 percent decrease in breeding stock, but the small breeding stock will reproduce at a good rate. In southern Alberta an increase in breeding population was recorded, habitat conditions improved considerably, and the July surveys revealed excellent production. In southern Saskatchewan there was a small increase in breeding populations, habitat conditions improved somewhat, and production increased moderately. In southern Manitoba an increase of 34 percent in breeding population was reported in May, but nesting was interrupted by adverse weather and only moderate production is expected.

In the Dakotas and Minnesota, the heart of the United States prairie pothole country, a 32 percent increase in nesting population was noted in May. The July survey indicated that there will be an increase in young birds and an accompanying increase in the fall flight. Nebraska showed a definite increase in birds. Colorado will probably have about the same production as last year. Michigan shows an increase in breeding population and production. Montana production should be good in the eastern portion but rather poor in the west. In Washington increases were noted in some areas and decreases in others; Oregon showed that both breeding population and production are higher than in 1962 and the same general picture holds for California, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming.

A summary by flyways follows:

Pacific--A moderate increase in the fall flight of ducks compared with 1962; little change in the flight of geese; a sharp reduction in brant and a small increase in coots.

Central--At least a moderate increase in the fall flight of ducks; little change in the goose flight; small increase in the flight of coots.

Mississippi--At least a moderate increase in the flight of ducks; little change in the flight of geese; small increase in coots.

Atlantic--Lack of adequate methods of surveying the Quebec-Labrador breeding areas makes it necessary to depend heavily upon the winter survey for forecasting the waterfowl that come from this important area. Combinations of data from this source with an expected increase from western areas supplying birds to the flyway result in a forecast that there will be a small increase in the flight of ducks; the goose and brant will be about as in 1962; there will be a small increase in coots.

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