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BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

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TOO MANY CANADA GEESE IN TOO FEW PLACES, INTERIOR DEPARTMENT REPORTS

The distribution of wintering Canada geese in the Mississippi Flyway is a classic case of feast or famine, John S. Gottschalk, Director of the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, said today.

Commenting on a recent St. Louis meeting where Bureau and State officials reviewed the status of the Mississippi Flyway goose population, Gottschalk said that restoration of the historic flock is an outstanding example of State and Federal cooperation in conservation.

The nesting area for the Mississippi Valley goose flock is in northern Ontario west of Hudson Bay. The normal migration route takes the geese through Ontario, Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois. By the mid-1940's, the population of these birds had dropped to less than 50,000. The flock now numbers more than 200,000.

During recent years, great concentrations of geese have built up at the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge in southeastern Wisconsin and on State and Federal areas in extreme southern Illinois. Very few of these birds move south of southern Illinois and northwestern Kentucky.

One of the purposes of the St. Louis meeting was to work out plans for better distribution of these birds in smaller units and farther south in the Flyway.

About 125,000 Canada geese now funnel into the Horicon marshes in October and many of these birds stay until December. This over-abundance in a limited management area has created problems. These include danger of overshooting, potential agricultural depredations, and behavioral changes in which such large concentrations become almost semi-domesticated. Smaller flocks are much warier and not so susceptible to overshooting.

Gottschalk pointed out that seeing large concentrations of Canada geese at Horicon and in southern Illinois is a thrilling experience for visitors to these

areas, but he added that a wider distribution would be better for the birds and also provide smaller flocks in other areas within the Flyway.

Bureau and State waterfowl specialists have initiated a survey of all available research data on Canada geese in the Mississippi Flyway. Any gaps in working knowledge on these birds will be filled with additional research projects.

"We hope to spread the recreational potential of this flock to both hunters and nonhunters throughout the length and breadth of the Mississippi Flyway," Gottschalk said.

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