



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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SUPPLEMENTAL PROPOSALS PUBLISHED FOR 1985-86 MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING SEASONS

After consultation with the Canadian Wildlife Service and a review of public comments on various options for regulating this year's duck harvest, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has developed a proposal the agency thinks should be adopted if mallard and pintail duck population numbers remain low. The Service's proposal is included in a supplemental proposed rulemaking for the 1985-86 migratory bird hunting season, published in the June 4, 1985 Federal Register.

Generally, the Fish and Wildlife Service believes that stabilized waterfowl hunting regulations should be continued for most species until the results of a 5-year joint study become available. A program of stabilized regulations has been in effect in the United States since 1980 as part of a joint study with Canada to better determine the effects of hunting regulations on duck populations. Before 1980, regulations were established by annual assessment.

However, biologists, sportsmen and other waterfowl conservation experts have expressed concern that breeding populations of mallards and pintails were close to a 30-year low last year following several successive years of drought in the prime duck nesting areas of Canada. As a result, on February 15, 1985, the Fish and Wildlife Service asked the public to comment on several possible strategies for reducing the mallard and pintail harvest if waterfowl surveys indicate their populations remain low. One of the strategies proposes to establish regulations prescribing in advance the actions to be taken in response to annual population size or habitat conditions, which would remain in effect until a predetermined population level is achieved. Other possible strategies (regulatory measures) could include restrictions on harvest through bag and season limits, zoning, special season, and similar measures.

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As an interim safety measure, the Service proposes that more restrictive regulations for mallards and pintails be adopted if breeding populations of these species remain below 6.5 million and 4 million, respectively, in surveyed areas. The regulations would be designed to reduce harvest of mallards and pintails by at least 25 percent from the level that would have been expected had regulations remained unchanged from the previous year. These harvest reduction measures would continue until mallard breeding populations reached or exceeded 7.5 million and pintails, 4.7 million. Last year, the mallard breeding population was estimated at about 6 million and pintails, 3.7 million. Harvest restrictions would be developed through the normal regulatory process with full participation of Flyway Councils and other interested parties.

The Service emphasizes that specific harvest strategies for 1985-86 have not yet been set and remain open for further public comment.

Other items of interest in the supplemental proposed rulemaking include the following:

- o Duck zoning requests. Several States had proposed new zoning experiments to begin with this year's waterfowl hunting season. The Service believes the cumulative effect of zoning and other special management strategies should be assessed and existing criteria for evaluating experimental seasons should be reviewed with each Flyway Council. Therefore, the Service believes present zones should not be modified and no new duck zoning studies should be initiated at this time.
- o Migratory bird hunting on Indian reservations and ceded lands. On March 23, 1984 the Service proposed guidelines to permit more flexibility in migratory bird hunting regulations for Indians on federal Indian reservations and ceded lands. Based on the public comments on its proposal, the Service is now proposing revised guidelines that would apply to tribes with recognized reserved hunting rights. The guidelines would set policy concerning hunting seasons on federal Indian reservations, Indian territory, and ceded lands and cover hunting by both tribal and non-tribal members. The Service has prepared a draft environmental assessment on migratory bird hunting on Indian lands. Copies of the assessment may be obtained by writing to the address listed below.

More information on these and other proposals for this year's migratory bird hunting seasons may be obtained by consulting the June 4, 1985, Federal Register. Public comments on the supplemental proposals are welcome and should be addressed to the Director (FWS/MBMO), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Room 3252, Washington, D.C. 20240. There are several deadlines for receipt of public comments on various portions of these proposals, and interested persons should consult the Federal Register for the appropriate dates.