



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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CANVASBACK HUNTING SEASON CLOSED IN THREE FLYWAYS

Wildlife officials are urging hunters to avoid accidentally shooting canvasback ducks during the 1986-87 hunting season. Canvasbacks cannot be taken legally in the three eastern flyways this year.

In early August, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed that the 1986-87 hunting season be closed on canvasbacks in the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central Flyways (basically every state east of the Rocky Mountains). The closure was confirmed in the Federal Register on September 12, 1986.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Frank Dunkle says he is confident waterfowl hunters will make every effort to comply with the canvasback closure and attempt to avoid accidental shootings. "Traditionally, waterfowl hunters try to comply with regulations needed to protect the waterfowl resource, especially canvasbacks, and we have every reason to believe they will do so this time," he says.

For the past three years, the canvasback population in the three affected flyways has been below target levels established by the Service. Habitat losses, drought, and predation in the bird's main nesting grounds are the major causes. Hunting may contribute to population declines of canvasbacks, and it is believed the closure will contribute to a more rapid recovery of the bird.

An environmental assessment issued in 1983 emphasizes the management of canvasbacks by western and eastern populations and established 3-year average minimum breeding population levels of 360,000 birds in the East and 140,000 in the West, below which season closures should be considered. Currently the eastern population is 303,000 and is below the minimum level for the second consecutive year. The Service feels hunting of the eastern population should not continue until alternative conservation strategies can be fully developed.

The breeding population in the Pacific Flyway, the western portion of the bird's range, is at or above the levels established as acceptable so canvasback hunting in that flyway will be allowed during the coming season.

Fish and Wildlife Service officials are urging that hunters in areas closed to canvasback hunting improve their ability to identify canvasbacks in flight this season. The male canvasback is a large-bodied duck with a reddish brown head and a black breast and tail. The female has a brown head and breast and her body is darker than that of the male. Both sexes can be distinguished from their more abundant and similar-appearing relative, the redhead duck, by their long, black, wedge-shaped bills and elongated heads which are especially noticeable in flight.

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