



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE DIRECTS CRACKDOWN ON ILLEGAL BAITING BY WATERFOWL HUNTERS

In light of record-low continental duck populations in recent years, Director Frank Dunkle has announced the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will place special emphasis this fall on the enforcement of regulations prohibiting the baiting of waterfowl. This practice involves the spreading of grain or feed to lure migratory waterfowl near hunting sites and has been illegal since 1934.

Baiting causes unnatural concentrations of waterfowl and makes them more vulnerable to illegal hunting practices. The Fish and Wildlife Service believes baiting could be hurting North American duck populations already hit hard by several years of drought and a continued loss of wetland habitat in the United States and Canada.

"The practice of baiting waterfowl is not only illegal, it is totally unethical," Dunkle said. "In order to protect this Nation's waterfowl resource, I am directing special teams of Service law enforcement personnel, working in cooperation with their State wildlife agency counterparts, to undertake a concentrated effort to enforce Federal regulations prohibiting this practice." He added: "The sportsmen who legally hunt waterfowl will not have to worry. But I want to say to those violators who do hunt over baited areas, we're going to be tough about it."

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Dunkle urged waterfowlers who observe baiting or suspect a site has been baited to contact a State or Federal wildlife law enforcement officer. "By reporting these violations, hunters can help restore our waterfowl populations," Dunkle said.

The Federal migratory bird hunting regulations define baiting as placing, scattering, or exposing corn, wheat, or other grain, salt, or other feed to lure, attract, or entice birds to, on, or over areas where hunters are attempting to take them. However, this does not prohibit taking birds on or over standing crops, flooded standing crops or harvested croplands, or grain crops properly shocked on the field where grown, or grains found scattered solely as a result of normal agricultural practices, such as planting or harvesting.

Baiting waterfowl is legally termed a "strict liability" violation. This means it is illegal to shoot over bait--whether or not you know it is there or how it got there.

Service law enforcement agents recommend that hunters suspecting a site may be baited should check with the landowner, hunting guide, or other responsible person to determine if bait is or has been previously placed in the area. Any food placed in the area must have been consumed or removed completely at least 10 days before hunting is permitted there.

Dunkle says many agents believe baiting is on the rise. He admonished hunters who might consider baiting a blind that, aside from the cost of the grain or other material, it could get more expensive in a hurry. A baiting conviction can cost up to \$500 and/or 6 months in jail, along with a possible loss of hunting privileges for several years and forfeiture of guns, boats, vehicles, and other personal property used in the violation.