



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

For release: July 11, 1991

Megan Durham 202-208-4131

**ATTENTION MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTERS: NATIONAL HARVEST SURVEYS  
EXPANDING TO INCLUDE ALL MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state wildlife agencies are launching the first phase of a new program to obtain better information about doves, woodcock, and other migratory game birds harvested each year by the Nation's 5 million migratory bird hunters. The program is scheduled to begin in 1992 in five states and will include all migratory game bird hunters in the country by 1998.

"This program is essential to better manage our migratory game birds and preserve hunting opportunities for the future," said John Turner, director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Information about the birds harvested by hunters is one of the key elements wildlife biologists use to judge the status of bird populations and develop appropriate management programs and hunting regulations.

The new "Migratory Bird Harvest Information Program" is similar to the waterfowl harvest surveys that have been conducted for many years, but will expand the program to obtain more information about non-waterfowl species and to correct problems that have arisen in contacting hunters to participate in the surveys.

(more)

Under the program, all migratory bird hunters will eventually be required to fill out a short name and address form. The Fish and Wildlife Service will use the names and addresses to contact a sample of hunters asking them to voluntarily provide information about their hunting success. The information reported will be anonymous and all names and addresses will be destroyed at the end of each annual survey.

Details of how the program will work in each state are still being worked out. The Fish and Wildlife Service will distribute the harvest information forms free to states, who may charge a small fee to cover their administrative costs and repay vendors for the cost of distributing the forms. The Fish and Wildlife Service will receive no money from the distribution of the survey forms. Some states may combine the survey form with a state licensing or permit requirement.

Hunters will be able to obtain the forms along with their state hunting license. Hunters will receive either a separate "harvest information card" or an indication on their state license to show that they have filled out the form. The harvest information cards will be reciprocal among the states, just as Duck Stamps are, so that hunters will not have to obtain them again if they hunt in more than one state.

So far, five states--California, Minnesota, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota--have volunteered to participate in the first phase of the program, scheduled to begin in 1992. It is anticipated that migratory bird hunters in all states will be participating by 1998.

The Fish and Wildlife Service published a notice of its intent to implement the program in the June 24 Federal Register and is accepting public comments through August 1. This will be followed later in the summer with an official proposal and another public comment period.

The changes in the national harvest survey were recommended in 1990 by the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (an association of state, territorial, provincial, and Federal wildlife agencies of the U.S., Canada, and other western hemisphere countries) to address increasing problems with current harvest surveys.

The national harvest survey is now based on names gathered through the sale of Federal Duck Stamps to waterfowl hunters. A sample of hunters who purchase Duck Stamps also receive survey cards, which they are asked to return to the Fish and Wildlife Service. The Service later contacts these hunters with a questionnaire about their hunting success. These hunters also are asked about hunting of non-waterfowl species such as woodcock, doves, snipe, rails, gallinules, and band-tailed pigeons.

In a study of the current survey program, the Service found that many hunters who were supposed to receive the survey cards with their Duck Stamp never did because the cards were not distributed by the post office or vendor. Many hunters who receive the voluntary questionnaires do not respond. About half of all migratory bird hunters do not hunt waterfowl and are not required to buy a Duck Stamp, so they cannot now be contacted to participate in the survey. The proposed survey program would solve these difficulties in obtaining essential harvest information.

The possibility of using harvest surveys conducted by the individual states to obtain the information has been studied, but it is difficult to reconcile reports from various states because of differences in license requirements, survey procedures, and record-keeping.

"We are going to use the early stages of this effort to refine the survey and make it as streamlined and user-friendly to hunters as we can," Turner said. "Hunters, more than most people, understand the need for sound biological information in wildlife management. They are our eyes and ears in the field, and I know we can count on their support."