



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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### DUCK FALL FLIGHT MAY BE ONE OF THE HIGHEST ON RECORD

Results from the summer waterfowl and habitat survey paint an even brighter picture for the fall flight of migratory ducks than earlier projections--the total fall flight may reach nearly 90 million ducks.

"The fall flight index is 16 percent higher than last year's index, and certainly one of the highest we've seen since breeding duck surveys were started in the 1950s," Acting Fish and Wildlife Service Director John Rogers said. "The index for the number of young ducks produced was the second highest recorded and was 25 percent higher than that of last year. The number of ponds in July increased 15 percent above the count for last year to a record high level."

Rogers explained that the fall flight index is only a rough estimate of the number of ducks that will fly south along the Nation's four major flyways this fall. "The estimate comes from a survey of the primary duck nesting areas, which stretch from South Dakota to Alaska. It provides a general comparison to prior years," he said. This year's fall flight of nearly 90 million compares to an average of 82 million during the 1970s, a period with abundant waterfowl and good habitat conditions.

Although populations of most duck species are above average, northern pintails, scaup, and American wigeon are still below the goals identified in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

In response to a continued upswing in breeding duck populations, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed frameworks for the 1996-97 waterfowl hunting season that generally maintain, and in some areas slightly increase, hunting opportunities from last year's expanded season and bag limits.

This is the second year the Service has used adaptive harvest management to set season lengths and bag limits for ducks. This new process provides a more predictable, objective, and consistent way of setting annual duck hunting regulations. "Adaptive harvest management will enhance our capabilities for understanding how duck populations respond to environmental

(over)

conditions and hunting pressure, which ultimately will improve our management of this important resource. The aim of adaptive harvest management is to provide maximum hunting opportunities while ensuring that we meet our goal of managing waterfowl as a sustainable resource over the long term," Rogers said.

"We've come a long way since the drought of the late 1980s when the fall flight fell to 56 million ducks," he said, "but we need to remember that the good duck production we've seen during the last few years is not solely the result of abundant wetlands. Many government and private agencies have worked hard to greatly improve upland habitats. The excellent nesting conditions we have will not last indefinitely. We must strive to ensure a healthy habitat base every year, regardless of how much snow and rain fall."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages 511 national wildlife refuges encompassing 92 million acres, as well as 72 national fish hatcheries.

The agency also enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, stocks recreational fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It oversees the Federal Aid program that funnels Federal excise taxes on angling and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies. This program is a cornerstone of the Nation's wildlife management efforts, funding fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, shooting ranges, and related projects across America.