



NEWS

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

For release July 18, 1997

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SERVICE PROPOSES TO DEVELOP SEPARATE HARVEST STRATEGY FOR NORTHERN PINTAILS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing an interim strategy to set bag limits for northern pintails based on breeding populations and projected nesting success. The strategies would be in effect while the Service develops a permanent strategy for the species.

The interim strategy would be designed to produce a minimum 6 percent increase in the pintail population each year. It would allow a daily bag limit of no more than three pintails and would seek to maintain the traditional allocation of pintail harvest among the four Flyways.

"Under our current adaptive harvest management strategy, hunting regulations are set based on mallard breeding populations and pond counts in our mid-continent traditional survey area," said Acting Service Director John Rogers. "It has become apparent we need a different harvest strategy for pintails."

In 1995, the Service implemented adaptive harvest management, a new approach designed to help waterfowl managers better understand the impacts of hunting regulations on duck harvest and population levels. The approach provides for more objective and scientific harvest management and insures long-term conservation of the resource.

Under adaptive harvest management, the Service establishes a set of alternatives each spring for the coming hunting season. In late summer, the Service chooses one of the alternatives based on the results of its annual surveys of waterfowl populations and habitat conditions.

In the initial years of implementing adaptive harvest management, the decision-making system has focused on the status of mid-continent mallards.

Pintails also have been an extremely important component of the waterfowl harvest, particularly in the Pacific Flyway. As a result, biologists have long debated the best way to determine appropriate harvest regulations for pintails.

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While work has begun to develop an adaptive harvest management approach for pintails, the technical development could take up to 3 years. Therefore, there is a need for the interim strategy.

This year, buoyed by favorable weather conditions in recent years, overall duck breeding populations have climbed to the highest level since the Service began its annual spring survey in 1955. While the population of northern pintails rose 30-percent this spring, that is still 19 percent below the long-term average for the species.

Biologists suspect that loss of habitat, especially upland habitat, in key pintail breeding areas may be the reason the species has not rebounded as strongly as other duck species.

Based on this year's encouraging news, the Service expects to consider some easing of the bag limit restrictions that have been in place for years. In fact, under the proposed interim strategy, the daily bag limit for pintails for the coming season could be three birds, up from one bird last year.

By developing a harvest strategy for pintails, the Service hopes to more specifically determine the impact of hunting on the species and establish hunting regulations that will provide for its long-term conservation.