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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Releases Final Environmental Impact Statement On Resident Canada Goose Management

Not all new management options are available in states along the Pacific Flyway

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service this week announced the release of a final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) that outlines various alternatives to reduce, manage and control resident Canada goose populations and reduce related damages. The Service's preferred alternative will allow state wildlife agencies, landowners and airports more flexibility in controlling resident Canada goose populations.

The Service took this action in response to widespread concern about overabundant populations of resident Canada geese, which can damage property, agriculture, and natural resources in parks and other open areas near water.

"Resident Canada geese populations have increased dramatically over the past 15 years," said Service Director H. Dale Hall. "These high population levels have been shown to cause problems for natural and economic resources, and we believe increased local management with national oversight is the best approach to reduce conflicts and bring the population under control. Through this approach, the Service will continue working to expand and protect hunting opportunity while providing airports, private landowners, and State and local officials the tools they need to address resident Canada goose issues."

"Resident Canada goose management is particularly challenging because of the diversity of society's perspectives regarding the year-round presence of these birds, but the growth of these resident populations causes problems that compel population management," said John Cooper, president of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. "The Service worked closely with the State fish and wildlife agencies in the development of the strategies reflected in the rule to provide a full suite of options to the states to manage resident populations. We sincerely appreciate that close engagement by both the Service and the State fish and wildlife agencies and look forward to continued close cooperation with the Service."

The new management options will not be available in Alaska, and several will not be offered in the other States of the Pacific Flyway, where there are fewer conflicts with the birds due to smaller numbers of resident Canada geese, fewer urban-suburban centers and more abundant undeveloped rural habitat. The Pacific Flyway includes the states of Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, Washington, Oregon and Utah and parts of Wyoming, Montana, Colorado and New Mexico.

In the Pacific Flyway, the presence of migratory Canada geese (i.e. cackling geese, dusky geese, Aleutian geese) that mingle with the resident Canada geese in many areas makes implementation of control actions specific to resident Canada geese more problematic. Some of these migratory Canada goose populations are below desired population levels and one has just been recently recovered and removed from the list of threatened and endangered species. This factor, coupled with the lower numbers and more limited areas of urban-suburban conflict, contributed to the recommendation to exclude the Pacific Flyway from some of the more intensive control options.

The preferred alternative in this FEIS consists of three main program components – with only the first component applying, in part, to the Pacific Flyway.

The first part of the FEIS establishes three new depredation orders that will apply to the Pacific Flyway and allow for: (1) All control of Canada geese at airports (including lethal control, when warranted), (2) unlimited nest and egg destruction for population control and (3) Any necessary activities to protect human health and safety, including lethal control.

Under the new orders, airport managers at commercial, public and private airports and military air operation facilities in all flyways are authorized to establish and implement a resident Canada goose control and management program. They will be able to conduct management and control activities, including lethal take of resident Canada geese, between April 1 and September 15, and can destroy nests and eggs between March 1 and June 30. Resident Canada geese may be taken only within a 3-mile radius of the airport or military airfield.

Private landowners and managers of public lands will be allowed to destroy resident Canada goose nests and eggs on property under their jurisdiction between March 1 and June 30. This order does not permit the take of live birds.

States are authorized to conduct control and management activities, including lethal take, when resident Canada geese are posing a direct threat to human health. A direct threat to human health is one where a federal, state or local public health agency recommends removal of resident Canada geese that the agency has determined pose a specific, immediate human health threat by creating conditions conducive to the transmission of human or zoonotic pathogens. These control and management activities may be conducted between April 1 and August 31, with nest and egg destruction allowed between March 1 and June 30. Geese may be taken only within the specified area of the direct threat to human health.

The remaining management provisions of the FEIS deal with expanded hunting and direct lethal control activities and these actions will not apply in Pacific Flyway States.

The Service received more than 2,900 submitted written comments on the 2002 draft EIS and more than 400 people attended 11 public meetings across the country. Written comments were received from 2,657 private individuals, 33 State wildlife resource agencies, 37 non-governmental organizations, 29 local governments, 5 Federal/State legislators, 4 Flyway Councils, 4 Federal agencies, 3 tribes, 3 businesses, and 2 State agricultural agencies.

Based on comments on the draft EIS, the Service modified the preferred alternative by removing some areas from some components of the program (Pacific Flyway States), adding some affected publics (airports), and changing some of the program administration (State administration to Federal administration).

The final Environmental Impact Statement will be available Friday, November 18, at <http://migratorybirds.fws.gov>. The Service intends to issue a Record of Decision and final rule on the issue after the 30-day public inspection period on the FEIS. The new management provisions will take effect when the final rule is issued.

For the most part, resident Canada geese generally stay in the same area or migrate only short distances. There is no evidence that resident Canada geese breed with migratory Canada geese that nest in northern Canada and Alaska. The rapid rise of resident Canada geese populations has been attributed to a number of factors. Key among these is that most resident Canada geese live in temperate climates with relatively stable breeding habitat conditions. They tolerate human and other disturbances, have a relative abundance of habitat such as mowed grass and waterways, and fly relatively short distances for winter compared with migratory Canada goose populations. The virtual absence of waterfowl hunting and natural predators in urban areas provides additional protection to those portions of the resident population.

Expansion of existing annual hunting season and the issuance of control permits have all been used to reduce resident goose numbers with varying degrees of success. While these approaches have provided relief in some areas, they have not completely addressed the issues.

B-Roll is available by calling the number above.

RESIDENT CANADA GEESE FACT SHEET
RESIDENT CANADA GEESE Q&As

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates national fish hatcheries, fishery resource offices, and ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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