DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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MIGRATORY WATERFOWL SUSTAINED BY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

More than 100 million waterfowl depend in part on the intricate system of 276 national wildlife refuges managed specifically for ducks, geese, and swans in the United States, according to a recent survey conducted by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The survey was published as part of the draft environmental statement on the National Wildlife Refuge System which now comprises a total of 385 refuges.

In addition to the 385 refuges, nearly 400,000 acres in the seven States of Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Maine are being managed as Waterfowl Production Areas, known as WPA's. Another 1 million acres of wetlands are under perpetual easement for the protection of the wetland base.

Refuges and WPA's annually produce at least 1.2 million waterfowl (not counting Alaska) or 10 to 15 percent of the total annual production in the United States and 3 to 4 percent of the total annual production in North America. This figure does not reflect the additional 3 to 4 million ducks produced in association with wetlands under easement. The current level of waterfowl production on Federal refuges, by flyway, is as follows: Pacific, 130,000; Central, 965,000; Mississippi, 101,000; and Atlantic, 26,000.

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Refuges within the four administrative flyways contribute to national and international efforts to manage 46 species of ducks, geese, and swans. In each flyway, some populations of waterfowl use Federal refuges almost exclusively during a part of their life cycles. In the Atlantic Flyway, for example, nearly the entire greater snow goose population winters chiefly on four national wildlife refuges--Pea Island, N.C.; Back Bay, Va.; Mackay Island, N.C.; and Chincoteague, Va. The Mississippi Valley population of Canada geese utilizes principally the Horicon Refuge in Wisconsin, Crab Orchard Refuge in Illinois, and stateowned waterfowl management areas in southern Illinois, western Kentucky, and Wisconsin.

In the Pacific Flyway, up to 90 percent of all waterfowl concentrate during the fall and winter on such refuges as Bear River in Utah, and the Klamath Basin, Sacramento, and San Luis Refuge complexes in California.

Farming, designed to provide a supplemental food source for waterfowl during migration periods and on the wintering grounds, is carried out on some refuges. On others, crops are grown primarily to lure waterfowl onto the refuges to minimize damage to nearby private crops. Due to disease problems and delayed or altered migrations that sometimes result from attempts to concentrate waterfowl, the Service is currently reducing or changing its farming programs to encourage more natural conditions and a wider dispersion of waterfowl.

Approximately 1.2 million acres of refuge and WPA grasslands, or about 44 percent of all refuge grasslands, are managed specifically for waterfowl nesting. Most of the grasslands being actively managed for waterfowl production purposes occur in the northern region of the Central and Mississippi Flyways--Nebraska, the Dakotas, eastern Montana, western Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Combined, refuges and WPA's in these States produced nearly 900,000 waterfowl in 1975, or about 12 percent of all waterfowl production in the United States excluding Alaska and ducks produced on wetlands under easement.

Annual grassland management practices involve grazing on 1.2 million acres, haying on 41,200 acres, seeding on 1,100 acres, fertilization of 1,500 acres, and prescribed burning on 15,000 acres. The major objective of grassland management is to produce quality habitat for ground nesting species of waterfowl and to provide green browse for geese.

Timber management on refuges for waterfowl is used to improve nesting and breeding habitat for wood ducks. This is particularly true on refuges such as Tamarac, Minnesota; Santee, South Carolina; and Noxubee, Mississippi. Selective cutting is done to save the more mature trees that contain natural cavities used for nesting.

Intensive water management for waterfowl is conducted on 276 Federal refuges totaling nearly 850,000 acres. While the purpose of water management programs varies among geographical locations, it is generally used to improve waterfowl nesting, feeding, and resting habitat. Habitat needs for waterfowl vary on a seasonal basis. A small temporary wetland in the Dakotas restored by the installation of a plug or simple control structure to impound run-off from the spring snow melt, for example, may provide essential breeding habitat for a pair of mallards shortly after their

arrival from southern wintering grounds. With the onset of nesting, the value of the temporary wetland which attracted the pair diminishes. After the ducklings are hatched, the hen will seek more permanent natural or artificial marshes, where emergent vegetation will provide cover from predators and aquatic insects provide essential protein until the brood reaches flight stage.

Some refuges in the South prepare for the migrant populations of waterfowl by flooding lowland hardwood forests. Called green tree reservoirs, this aquatic habitat provides a ready source of food, principally acorns (mast), and is highly attractive to wintering mallards and wood ducks. Other areas with refuges such as the famous Bear River marshes in Utah, and Tule Lake in California are flooded in late summer or early fall to ensure an available source of both natural and artificial foods and sanctuary.

Restocking of Canada geese and trumpeter swans into former breeding ranges has resulted in successful restoration of wild populations into natural habitats. The trumpeter swan, for example, was near extinction in 1934. Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Montana, was established in 1935 and contributed significantly to the comeback of trumpeters in Montana and adjacent States. By 1964 the population of trumpeters in the lower 48 States had reached nearly 700; today, a successful transplant program has been extended to the Lacreek Refuge in South Dakota and elsewhere.

The reintroduction of the giant Canada goose is another success story. Once thought to be extinct, breeding populations of the giant Canada goose have been successfully established on 11 refuges in the Dakotas, two in Nebraska, four in Minnesota, and three in Michigan. The present population on Federal refuges is estimated at 3,000 birds, or about 5 percent of the continental population.

Waterfowl hunting is permitted on about 1,240,000 acres on 128 Federal refuges in 38 States. In 1974, an estimated 296,000 waterfowl were harvested on these refuges.

Nationwide, then, Federal refuges are an integral part of national and international cooperative efforts to manage the migratory waterfowl resources of the continent. Key units of habitat in each administrative flyway provide food, nesting, and resting areas on nearly 10 million acres. Some populations of waterfowl use refuges almost exclusively as wintering areas. By the mid-1980's it is expected that production from refuges and WPA's will increase from the present 1.2 million waterfowl to nearly 2 million. The overall effect exerted by refuges is to preserve and enhance the diversity and quality of habitat necessary to perpetuate the migratory waterfowl populations of North America.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This is one of a series of three news releases based on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's recently released draft environmental statement, Operation of the National Wildlife Refuge System--an in-depth examination of the system as it exists today.