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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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DECISIONS TO CLOSE HUNTING SEASONS DUE TO ENDRIN CONTAMINATION OF WATERFOWL WILL BE MADE BY STATES

State officials will be responsible for deciding whether to close waterfowl hunting seasons in the Central and Pacific Flyways because of possible contamination of ducks and geese by the pesticide endrin, F. Eugene Hester, acting deputy director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said today.

"Although the Fish and Wildlife Service sets the broad frameworks for waterfowl hunting seasons, it will be up to each State to decide whether there is a threat to human health in its jurisdiction that warrants closing the hunting season," Hester said. "The Fish and Wildlife Service will endorse any closures that the States determine are needed.

"I want to reassure hunters and other conservationists that we are monitoring this situation closely and are assisting the States by analyzing waterfowl samples for endrin residues. It is my understanding that the States are awaiting the results of these tests and similar tests being conducted at other laboratories before making any decisions about hunting seasons," he added.

Hester said that ducks collected from several national wildlife refuges in Montana were being analyzed for endrin at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland, and that additional ducks and mourning doves from Montana were being tested at the independent Raltech Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin.

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"Endrin is accumulated mainly in fat, and our initial tests will be to determine endrin residues in fat tissues. Those results will be made available to the State of Montana by September 25. Pesticide analyses are complex and time-consuming, however, and after the initial tests are completed we will be conducting more comprehensive tests that should give us a more thorough understanding of the effect endrin may be having on waterfowl.

"Previous research that we have conducted on endrin indicates that it is generally not accumulated to very high levels in waterfowl tissues," Hester said. "However, since we don't know what levels of endrin waterfowl are being exposed to, we won't know how serious this situation is until our test results come back."

Hester said that one research study conducted at Patuxent showed that mallard drakes fed endrin-contaminated feed eliminated 50 percent of the endrin from their bodies within 3 days and 90 percent within 33 days after being removed from the endrin feed and returned to an uncontaminated diet. He cautioned, however, that the laboratory study might not be strictly applicable to wild birds if endrin continues to persist in their food in the wild.

"The Fish and Wildlife Service's major responsibility is for the welfare of the wildlife resource," Hester concluded. "We will be looking further into this situation to determine whether endrin contamination has caused any significant harm to waterfowl or other wildlife in this region."

Endrin was applied during March and April of 1981 to kill army cutworms in wheat. Based on the amount of endrin sold and the prescribed rates for applying endrin, 120,000 acres in Montana, 100,000 acres in Wyoming, 30,000 acres in South Dakota, and 12,000 acres in Colorado could have been treated. Possible endrin contamination of wildlife first came to light as a result of a fish kill in Montana.

Birds from the affected region migrate mainly through the Central, Mississippi, and Pacific Flyways.

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