DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR
news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release JUL 30 1985

Megan Durham (202) 343-5634

RECORD LOWS PROJECTED FOR 1985 FALL FLIGHT OF DUCKS; OUTLOOK FOR GEESE SIMILAR TO LAST YEAR

An estimated 62 million ducks -- 22 percent fewer than last year -- will wing their way south this fall, according to the "1985 Status of Waterfowl and Fall Flight Forecast" released today by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Canadian Wildlife Service.

The report projects a decrease in the fall flight of ducks for all four waterfowl flyways. Overall, the total flight of ducks is the lowest ever projected since the two agencies began making such predictions 16 years ago.

While habitat for breeding ducks increased significantly this spring, it deteriorated in midsummer because of dry conditions. Although nesting success for ducks improved somewhat in southern Canada over last year, an increased fall flight from that area has been offset by reduced production in the Dakotas, record low numbers of ducks in Montana, and significant declines in duck populations in Alaska and parts of northern Canada. In the report, the two agencies express "continued concern for the numbers of ducks returning each spring to principal breeding areas as well as for the continued loss and degradation of breeding habitat in the U.S. and Canada."

Earlier this month, the agencies reported that spring breeding populations of ducks this year were the lowest ever documented by survey teams. For key duck species such as the mallard and northern pintail, record low numbers were observed -- below 5.5 million for mallards and fewer than 3 million for pintails.

"The Status of Waterfowl and Fall Flight Forecast" is used in establishing annual hunting regulations. With its completion, all of the information collected before establishing the hunting regulations is now available. Based on the low spring breeding populations and the dramatic decrease in the projected fall flight, Flyway Councils are now discussing possible restrictions to reduce duck harvests. (Flyway Councils are composed of waterfowl managers representing State, federal, and Canadian wildlife agencies). A public hearing to discuss proposals for waterfowl hunting regulations will be held at 9 a.m. August 1 in the Interior Department auditorium in Washington, D.C.

(over)

The outlook for geese, brant, and swans this year is generally better than for ducks, with fall flights of most species expected to be similar to last year.

Nesting conditions for geese were generally favorable in the Canadian Arctic, portions of the Dakotas, and most of the midwest. In Alaska, heavy snowfall, late spring thaw, and flooding resulted in poor conditions for nesting. Conditions in prairie nesting areas of Canada were improved over last year, but some areas continue to be under the influence of drought. Extremely dry conditions prevailed over Montana and parts of the Dakotas.

Because geese experienced good habitat conditions and nesting success last year, the 1985 breeding populations of some flocks contain an increased proportion of birds that are not old enough to breed. As a result, fall flights similar to or slightly lower than last year are expected for most populations of Canada geese, lesser and greater snow geese, Atlantic brant, and mid-continent white-fronted geese. Ross' geese, and the Western Prairie, Rocky Mountain, Pacific, and Giant Canada goose populations may have larger fall flights than last year. Tundra swans experienced generally favorable nesting conditions and the fall flight is expected to be about the same in the east and slightly greater than last year in the west.

In the Pacific Flyway, decreased fall flights are expected for four species of special concern -- Pacific white-fronted geese, Pacific brant, Cackling Canada geese, and Dusky Canada geese.

The size of the duck migration is estimated annually by the Canadian and U.S. biologists on the basis of May and July air and ground surveys of habitat conditions, breeding populations, and brood production, as well as harvest surveys and band recovery data. Numbers of geese, brant, and swans are projected on the basis of fall production surveys, winter surveys, spring staging area counts, local breeding surveys, and satellite imagery.

--DOI--

1985 FALL FLIGHT FORECAST

UNITED STATES 1969-1985