DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR
news release

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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1987 WATERFOWL FALL FLIGHT FORECAST SIMILAR TO LAST YEAR

This year's fall flight of ducks and geese will be much the same as last year's, according to the "1987 Status of Waterfowl and Fall Flight Forecast," recently released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Canadian Wildlife Service.

Duck populations are essentially unchanged from 1986 and the fall flight in all four waterfowl flyways is expected to be similar to last year. The projected fall flight index for 1987 is 75 million, compared with 73 million for 1986. The index is a relative figure reflecting the trend in fall duck populations rather than the exact number of ducks.

This year's fall flight index reflects the continued depressed status of important duck species. In 1985, after several years of drought in key nesting areas, duck breeding populations fell to the lowest levels in 30 years. The fall flight index was 62 million, down from 80 million in 1984, and the lowest since such projections first were made in 1969. Last year's fall flight was the second lowest since 1969. In July, the two wildlife agencies reported that 1987 breeding populations for most key duck species remained much the same as last year, with six of the ten major duck species--mallard, American wigeon, blue-winged teal, northern pintail, canvasback, and scaup--remaining significantly below their average population sizes from 1955-86.

The fall flight outlook for most goose populations this year is similar to last year's. Nesting conditions for geese were generally good in most of the United States except on Alaska's Copper River Delta, the only nesting area of the Dusky Canada goose. Conditions in much of the Canadian Arctic were

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poorer than normal, and poor production is expected from north central and northeastern Canada and the western Hudson Bay. Conditions were good in the western Canadian arctic, south Hudson Bay region and the Canadian prairies.

In the Atlantic Flyway, the fall flight of Canada and greater snow geese is expected to be improved over last year. The fall flight of Atlantic brant will be slightly greater than last year, but remains substantially lower than normal. The fall flight of tundra swans will be similar to last year.

In the Mississippi Flyway, fall flights of Canada geese will be much the same as last year. Giant Canada geese will have an increased fall flight. The fall flight of greater white-fronted geese wintering in Louisiana will be lower than last year and much lower than normal. The fall flight of lesser snow geese will be slightly lower than last year.

In the Central Flyway, most Canada goose populations will experience fall flights similar to or slightly better than last year, except for the Tall Grass Prairie population, which winters mainly in Oklahoma, along the Texas coast, and in Mexico. This population will have a smaller fall flight than last year. The fall flight of greater white-fronted geese will be slightly better than last year. The fall flight of lesser snow geese in most areas will be slightly lower than last year.

In the Pacific Flyway, the fall flight of lesser Canada geese will be similar to last year. Greater white-fronted geese will be increased over last year. Populations of lesser snow geese wintering in southern California will be lower than normal but better than last year, while in northern California and Washington, lesser snow goose populations will be larger than last year. Ross' geese will have a fall flight similar to or somewhat reduced from last year. The fall flight of tundra swans will be similar to last year.

The Pacific white-fronted goose, one of four Pacific Flyway species of concern, will have a slightly larger fall flight than last year. Of the other three species of concern, Pacific brant and cackling Canada geese will have a larger fall flight than last year, while Dusky Canada geese will experience another poor fall flight.

The size of the duck migration is estimated annually by 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.