Ducks Unlimited Canada
CANADA'S CONSERVATION COMPANY

Spring Habitat Conditions in Canada

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Breeding habitat conditions in eastern Canada are generally good to very good as the first black duck and Canada goose broods begin to appear. Habitat across the prairies and parklands ranges from poor to good. Recent storms in the prairie provinces have improved habitat south of the Trans Canada Highway. Early-nesting Canada geese, mallards and pintails have begun to hatch in southern areas. Breeding habitat remains dry in the interior of British Columbia.

Breeding habitat condition in **Atlantic Canada** is in good to very good condition. Nearly all wetlands are at full supply despite the dryer than average winter. Canada goose and black duck broods are appearing.

Across **Quebec** wetland habitats are in good to very good condition as the peak of the breeding season nears. St. Lawrence River water levels have risen to near normal for this time of year. Overall, a good production year is anticipated. Early-breeding dabbling ducks are well into nesting while many flocks of diving ducks are still found on the rivers and large lakes. As greater snow goose numbers increase, so does the area they use during migration. This year, flocks were seen from eastern Ontario east to the Bay des Chaleurs and from Lake Champlain north to Lake St. Jean.

Wetlands in nearly all of southern **Ontario** remain at or near full supply. Only in the extreme southwest near Windsor are habitat conditions reported as fair. Good to very good conditions are reported elsewhere across the south. Habitat conditions are very good in the Timmins Clay Belt region and good in north-western Ontario near Dryden and Kenora. A strong breeding effort is expected. Cooler temperatures and late season snowstorms have caused minor delays in the northward migration especially in northwest Ontario. In the south, many lone drake mallards and groups of males suggest the nesting season is well underway. There have been many Canada goose broods reported and the first mallard broods have been seen.

Most wetland habitats throughout the Boreal Forest remain frozen with only river courses and deltas free of ice at this time. Over-winter precipitation across the **Boreal Forest** has been below normal in most areas. The bright spots are the Yukon, extreme north-eastern Saskatchewan, and northern Manitoba. Here above normal precipitation will provide better than average habitat conditions once the thaw takes place. Overall the outlook for spring habitat in the Boreal Forest is improved compared to recent years although conditions generally remain below average.

Spring run-off in southern **Manitoba** was disappointing as most melt water was soaked up very quickly by the very dry soils. Many semi-permanent wetlands had exposed mud flats after the spring thaw and precipitation accumulations continued below normal until 11 May. At that point a two-day storm dumped rain and heavy wet snow over much of southern portion of the province. Up to 45 cm of snow and rain fell south of the Trans Canada Highway. Both Brandon and Winnipeg received 30 cm of snow in addition to rain. Most of this accumulation has melted and much of it has again soaked into the dry soils. However many creeks began to run again and temporary ponds and sheet water did re-appear especially in the southern areas. Much of the Red River Valley also received heavy rain on 15 May that added to the temporary ponds and field

sheet water. At the present time good spring habitat exists in eastern Manitoba, the Inter Lake region, the Red River Valley and the west lake region. Moving west conditions degrade to fair to good toward the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border.

Scaup numbers appear to be up in the Minnedosa area and there appears to be good numbers of breeding pairs of all species even though breeding chronology is a bit later than normal. Mallard lone drakes and small groups of males indicate that nesting was initiated before the storm. While it is likely that some nests were abandoned during the storm, it is early enough in the season that these birds will renest. Canada goose broods are appearing across southern regions of the province.

Like Manitoba, southern **Saskatchewan** was hit by a spring storm on 11 and 12 May. Ten to 30 cm of wet heavy snow fell across the prairie zone south of the Trans Canada Highway. Amounts were greatest in the east with Estevan receiving 30 cm plus while portions of the Cypress Hills received 10 to 15 cm. Wetland conditions improved with the resulting melt water even though a good portion of the moisture was soaked up by the dry soil. Habitat conditions presently range from fair to good across the southern prairies with localized areas of very good habitat (e.g., around Assiniboia and Estevan). Habitat in the Missouri Coteau ranges from fair in the northwest to good to in the southeast near the Saskatchewan / U.S. border. North of the Trans Canada Highway the prairies and the parklands conditions are much dryer. A large area of western Saskatchewan around Kindersley is very dry and here habitat conditions are rated as poor. Elsewhere in the prairies and parklands, conditions range from poor to fair. A bright spot showing fair to good conditions is the area in central Saskatchewan stretching from east of Saskatoon south to just north of Regina, including the Touchwood Hills, Foam Lake and Humboldt.

The first Canada goose broods are appearing while most snow goose flocks have moved through to the north. Mallard and pintail hens are either laying or have begun to incubate. It is likely that some of these hens will have abandoned nests during the snow storm. Again it is early enough in the season that they are likely to renest.

Southern **Alberta** also benefited from the 11 and 12 May storm that tracked across the southern part of the province. Twenty-five to 30 cm of wet snow fell from Lethbridge to the Cypress Hills. With this new snow, wetlands in the area are now in good to very good condition. Although the Brooks area did not receive as much snow, the wetlands in the area associated with irrigation districts received adequate fall water to provide good carryover to this breeding season. The northern areas of the prairie biome received little or no benefit from the storm. Here conditions are fair to poor in the west and poor in the east near Hanna. It appears good numbers of pintail settled in southern Alberta this spring. The effect of the storm on these birds remains to be seen.

Poor to fair habitat conditions exist across most of the Alberta Aspen Parkland. Most semi-permanent wetlands have dry emergent zones with exposed mud flats. Seasonal and temporary ponds dried up as the frost left the ground. The exception is the north-eastern portion of the Aspen Parkland near St. Paul, Cold Lake and Lloydminster where habitat conditions are fair to good. It appears few waterfowl settled in the Aspen Parklands this year due to lack of water and poor habitat conditions. Some Canada goose broods were sighted during the first week of May.

Wetland habitats over most of the Peace Parklands are in fair to good condition. Significant late spring snow and rain in the central Peace River and Lesser Slave Lake areas helped replenish wetland water levels and improved habitat conditions to good. Many Canada geese are nesting while mallard and pintail are just beginning to initiate nests.

Very good to excellent spring habitat exists along the **British Columbia** and Vancouver Island coasts and in the Fraser Delta region. Elsewhere in the province, habitat conditions are dry, the result of nearly three years of drought. Breeding habitat in interior B.C. is in generally poor to fair condition. Fair to good habitat exists north in the Peace River Valley and in the Boreal forest. A small area of central B.C. around Williams Lake also has fair to good habitat.

Breeding waterfowl numbers are expected to be down in the southern interior of B.C. this year. Mallard and Canada goose broods have been out for several weeks in the lower Fraser Delta. In the interior only Canada goose broods have been sighted. Nearly all migrant waterfowl have left the Fraser Delta and the southern interior.