



## Late Winter Habitat Conditions in Canada

February 17, 2006

*Winter continues to be unseasonably mild and dry in many regions of the country. Temperatures in Quebec, Manitoba and Saskatchewan have recently returned to normal which should help to improve the prospects for spring runoff in these areas. Additional precipitation will be needed to ensure good habitat conditions in much of British Columbia, Alberta and southern Ontario this coming spring.*

Since Christmas, the weather in southern and central **British Columbia** has been dominated by a series of wet Pacific frontal systems, producing snowfall throughout the interior, along with a mix of rain and snow along coastal areas. Coastal areas experienced almost record snowpack increases during January and snow accumulation is now well above normal in many areas. Monthly average temperatures were also well above normal during January. This produced some valley bottom snowmelt in many areas, and resulted in rainfall rather than snowfall in valley bottom and low elevation areas. As a result of these high temperatures, low elevation snow throughout much of the Province is well below normal (often less than 50% of normal). Both the southern and southeastern Interior received above average snowfall in January and snowpack is now near normal in these areas. The frost seal is beginning to thaw in the south and southeastern Interior, but the snowpack at high elevations should improve prospects for runoff. In the central interior, snowpack remains below average and the frost seal is thawing in areas, which bodes poorly for spring runoff. Northern British Columbia missed much of the precipitation that the rest of the Province received due to lingering high-pressure systems. Snowfall in the Peace region has been less than half the seasonal average and the frost seal is not as deep as normal, which will probably translate into poor runoff this spring.

Winter continues to be dry and warmer than normal in **Alberta**. Precipitation totals for the period of November to early February are below average (60-85% of average) to extremely dry (< 40% of average) in the Province. The exceptions are the southwest foothills/mountains and an isolated area around Medicine Hat, which have received average to above average precipitation. Above freezing daytime temperatures and near continuous Chinook winds have led to rapid loss of any snow accumulations in the agricultural zone of the Province. Most areas including Edmonton, Red Deer, Brooks, Grand Prairie, Lloydminster, Cold Lake and Fort McMurray report minimal to no snow accumulations. There is currently an average mountain snowpack in southern Alberta. The usual over-wintering waterfowl are present at open water sites on rivers and power plant cooling ponds.

Overall, temperatures throughout the past two months have been above normal and many areas of **Saskatchewan** are experiencing the warmest January on record. Snowfall has

generally been below average throughout the Province and there is very little snow on the ground in the south. The Missouri Coteau has little to no snow except in ditches and a few areas where the snow has drifted. Similarly, in the southeastern part of the Province, temperatures have been warm and there is little snow on the ground. The westcentral part of the Province is in better shape, but still has a below average snowpack. However, this area had good to excellent moisture conditions in the fall and run-off is still expected to be good. There are over 12 inches of snowpack in the Allan Hills and in the central part of the Province, and the spring outlook is also good in these areas. Over the past few days, temperatures have returned to normal, which has been a rare occurrence this year. A pair of mallards was sighted along the river in Saskatoon last week, and meadowlarks have been seen as far north as Regina. Horned larks were observed near Wadena in late January.

Winter weather continues to be unseasonably mild in southwestern **Manitoba**. South of Brandon, conditions have improved with recent snowfalls. The snow pack was previously low in much of the region but a layer of snow now covers the fields. Conditions continue to be favourable north of Brandon with the snowpack gradually increasing in areas north and east of Brandon. The frost seal is poor throughout the region due to the insulating snowpack and unseasonably mild weather. Some reports indicate that the frost is only 1 foot thick. The poor frost seal may be mitigated by the wet soil moisture conditions of the past fall. Forecasts call for a return to normal temperatures in mid-February, which may also help improve the frost seal.

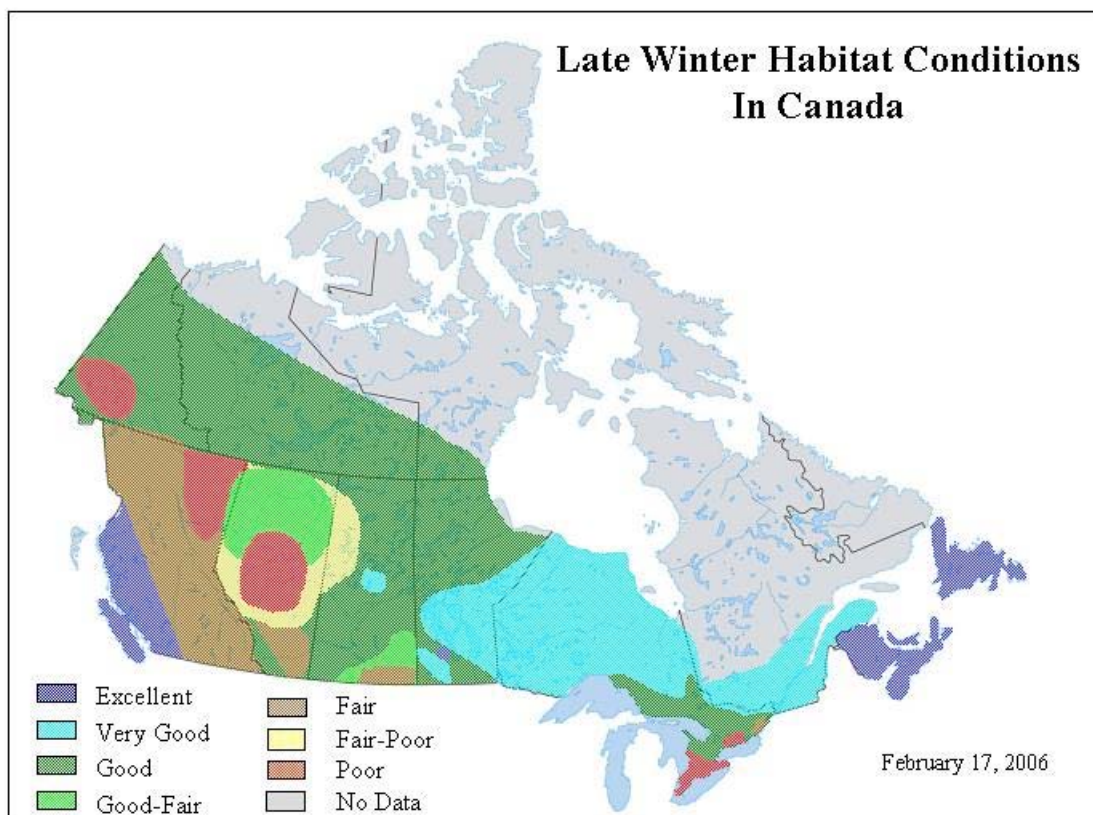
Total snow accumulation for most of the **Western Boreal Forest** is near average, ranging from above average in parts of Manitoba and Saskatchewan to poor in northcentral Alberta. A high percentage of the Western Boreal Forest also experienced temperatures that were well above the seasonal average. Seasonal temperatures have started to come around, although much of the Western Boreal Forest is still experiencing temperatures that are well above normal. The forecast for the Western Boreal Forest over the next few months is for above average temperatures in the northern Prairie Provinces; average temperatures in northern British Columbia and the southern Territories; and for lower than average temperatures in the northern parts of the Territories. Precipitation forecasts for the next 3-months are varied throughout the Western Boreal Forest. The west half of the Yukon and northeast British Columbia are to experience above average precipitation; the east half of northern Alberta east through to central Manitoba to receive lower than average precipitation; northern Territories to experience lower than average precipitation; and all other areas within the Western Boreal Forest are to have to average precipitation.

The mildest January in recorded history has done little to improve habitat conditions across most of southern **Ontario**. Although total precipitation is near normal, most precipitation has come in the form of rain, which has only served to further reduce an already scarce snowpack. As such, conditions are typically poor throughout the southwestern and southcentral portions of the Province that border the Great Lakes, improving only slightly along the St. Lawrence River to the Quebec border. Habitat conditions in the “snow belt” area stretching from the Bruce Peninsula to the upper Ottawa Valley have improved due to some significant snow accumulations, however the

frost seal remains poor. Despite the unseasonably warm temperatures extending as far north as James Bay, near normal snow accumulations throughout northern Ontario have maintained very good habitat conditions.

January was exceptionally mild in **Quebec** with temperatures 5-7.5°C above normal across the Province. Temperatures returned to normal in early February. Total precipitation was higher than the seasonal norm in all regions especially along the St. Lawrence channel. Due to the unusually mild January temperatures, the majority of the precipitation fell in the form rain. The thaw and rainfall contributed to decrease the snowpack, which remained below normal, but it is higher than last January's levels. At mid-month, there was an abundance of water in major tributaries and lakes, but the recent return of cold temperatures should help ensure a thick frost seal.

Migratory waterfowl will be returning to their northern breeding grounds in **Atlantic Canada** in a few weeks. These birds will be joining an unusually large number of Canada geese and black ducks that over-wintered across the Maritimes due to mild temperatures and limited snow cover this winter. Returning birds will be met with excellent habitat conditions with coastal areas, estuaries and many inland rivers and wetlands ice-free. Significant winter rains will help ensure that wetlands will be in prime condition for the spring breeding season.



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