



Ducks Unlimited Canada
CANADA'S CONSERVATION COMPANY

Summer Habitat Conditions in Canada

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Habitat conditions in eastern Canada are generally very good. Conditions are more varied in western Canada where many areas are experiencing warm, dry weather.

Waterfowl production appears to be very good in many parts of the country - the Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey conducted by USFWS and CWS showed that breeding waterfowl numbers in the traditional survey area are up 9% from the long-term average and up 14% from spring 2005.

Spring precipitation has been highly variable in coastal **British Columbia**, and many natural wetlands are entering a low water regime. However, habitat conditions are generally still very good in the region. Resident waterfowl have broods in the class III stage, and brood-rearing habitat is also in good condition. On the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island, farmers are irrigating crops and anticipating the harvest, which will start as early as next month for some crops. Salt issues are expected due to the warm, dry weather.

In the central Interior, summer precipitation has generally been normal or near-normal. However, the Fraser system is experiencing 20-year low levels due to the lack of winter snow. Some recent rains have caused the uplands to green up, but wetlands are still a bit lower than normal. Brood conditions are near normal for most areas, particularly as you go north, but below average west of Williams Lake.

Summer precipitation has been below average in the Thompson system of the southern Interior (where warm temperatures have led to a high forest fire risk), but above average in the Okanagan system. Middle and high elevation wetlands are still in good shape, but many low elevation wetlands are relatively dry. Correspondingly, brood potential and production estimates appear good for mid and high elevation wetlands, but only fair at lower elevations. Some mallard and goldeneye broods have entered the class III stage.

Summer precipitation has been average in most areas of the southeast Interior and above average in the West Kootenays (boundary area). Uplands have greened up nicely and there has been a slight upgrade to last month's assessment due to high rainfall in the West Kootenays.

Precipitation is well below average in the Peace this summer and streamflows are very low in some parts of the system. Uplands have stopped greening up, and wetlands are lower than normal. Brood conditions have been downgraded accordingly from last month.

Hot, dry weather has prevailed over much of **Alberta** for the past month. A marked precipitation pattern from north to south exists, with the aspen parkland, boreal transition zone and Peace parkland receiving below average precipitation while the Prairies have received near normal precipitation or better. Heavy thunderstorm activity in late June brought significant precipitation to much of the Prairies, with several locations recording well over 100 mm. Localized flooding was reported and there were fears of a repeat of 2005's devastating floods. Precipitation totals for June were near average for the aspen parkland – prairie transition zone. However, central and western portions of the aspen parkland received below average precipitation, continuing a trend started in the fall of 2005. This trend continued into the boreal transition zone and Peace parkland.

Soil moisture levels are low or worse throughout much of the west half of the northwestern aspen parkland, boreal transition zone and the Peace region. In contrast, soil moisture levels are adequate to excellent throughout the rest of the aspen parkland and prairie. Dry conditions through June and into mid-July allowed haying operations to be largely completed without significant delay. This undoubtedly led to some nest and hen loss amongst waterfowl nesting in hayfields. This may have been somewhat offset by good to excellent pasture conditions in the aspen parkland and prairie. Pastures are in fair to poor condition in the Peace parkland.

The recently completed Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey shows spring pond numbers in the prairie and aspen parkland increased 32.7% from 2005 while they declined by 15.9% in the boreal transition zone and Peace parkland. Waterfowl reacted strongly to the improved spring habitat conditions in the aspen parkland and prairie; dabblers increased 40.6 % from 2005, 56.6 % from the 10 year average and 8.7% from the long-term average (mallards +34 % from 2005, and 13.6% from the 10 yr mean and -18% from long-term mean; northern pintail +116.5%, +189.4% and -15.3%). Divers increased 68.2% from 2005, 12.7% from 10 year average and declined 1.9% from the long-term average (canvasback +78.7, +40.7% and +19.9%; scaup +69.1%, -5.3%; and -39.4%; goldeneye +375.8%, +164.7% and +242.9%). In the central portion of the survey (boreal transition and Peace parkland) overall dabbler and diver numbers were similar to 2005 and the long-term average. It is noteworthy that northern pintail increased 75.8% from 2005 and 54.8% from the long-term average in this region.

While the weather has resulted in some deterioration in wetland conditions, overall brood habitat is in fair to good condition throughout the agricultural area of Alberta. The Alberta duck production outlook is good in the eastern parkland and prairie and fair in the western aspen parkland, boreal transition zone and Peace parkland.

Wetlands in the parklands of **Saskatchewan** remain in good to excellent condition while wetlands in the prairies are rated fair to good. Specifically, the Thickwood Hills, Allan Hills, Dana Hills, Touchwood, and Churchbridge areas all have good to excellent wetland conditions while wetland conditions in the Missouri Coteau and Estevan area are fair. Some temporary wetlands are still present in the parklands due to rains received at the end of June and early July, but recent warm temperatures (25° C +) have increased evaporation rates and are starting to dry these wetlands out.

The Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey showed a 27% increase in breeding waterfowl in southern Saskatchewan compared to 2005 numbers and a 37% increase over the long-term population average. Reports from staff around the province indicate good production as a number of broods have been observed. Brood ages range from I to III with a majority in the late class II stage, suggesting that nests hatched early in the summer. Species observed with broods include blue winged teal, canvasback, gadwall, northern shoveler, mallard, and northern pintail. Canvasback broods seem to be particularly abundant. Large groups of moulting birds are now present on large wetlands.

Crops are in good to excellent condition given the abundant moisture and haying is now 62% complete. Haying operations began a little early in the parklands this year given the abundant moisture, and hay production has been tremendous.

A warm dry trend has settled over much of southwestern **Manitoba**. Precipitation has been frequent in areas north of Brandon but sporadic south of Brandon. Shoal Lake and Minnedosa have received average precipitation (50 to 70mm) over the past month, while Deloraine and Killarney have missed a number of the weather systems moving through Manitoba this summer and have only received 30 to 50mm. However, excellent wetland conditions remain throughout much of the region. Preliminary reports from the Breeding Waterfowl Population and Habitat Survey indicate that the May pond counts were similar to those of 2005 and are still up from the long-term average. There is also no shortage of water or brood habitat on the landscape and class III and IV basins remain inundated throughout much of the region. Despite the excellent wetland conditions there are some concerns about soil moisture in more southern areas due to the lack of recent rains.

Hay crops and cover are good throughout the region. Haying was largely finished by the first of July, which was 2-3 weeks earlier than usual. Anecdotal evidence from landowners has suggested an increased disturbance of nesting waterfowl in haylands with the early cut.

The Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey showed a 10% increase in breeding waterfowl in the region compared to 2005 and a 16% increase from the long-term average. Brood production appears to be following suit as well despite the setback from early haying operations. Broods are plentiful and ducklings of all ages are reported by field staff on a regular basis including reports of two fledged northern pintail broods. Waterfowl seem successful in every aspect of production this year including settling, nesting, brood rearing and renesting efforts.

Waterfowl production appears to be good throughout the **Western Boreal Forest** despite a variety of habitat conditions. Habitat conditions throughout the majority of the Northwest Territories (NWT) are above average, with the exceptions of areas immediately north of Great Slave Lake, and to the west of Great Bear Lake (near Norman Wells), where drought codes and fire dangers are very high. Abnormally high water levels on rivers have been reported throughout the NWT and many birds have been observed using eddies along the rivers. Lakes and wetlands in the NWT have flooded the vegetation along their shorelines, which should provide good brood cover. In the Yukon,

water conditions are generally at or near average. However, the area between Carmacks and Dawson City is below average and rated as having a high drought code. The spring and summer weather has been cool and wet in the Yukon, which has improved water conditions, but the cool temperatures may be having a negative impact on broods. Habitat conditions in northern British Columbia and northern Alberta remain, for the most part, below average. However, waterfowl production does appear to be good in northern Alberta where there is an abundance of late nesting waterfowl. Predominant species in northern Alberta at this time are common goldeneye and ring-necked ducks. Further south, conditions are average to above average in the boreal transition zone of the Prairie-provinces – especially in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, which are reporting excellent water conditions, and good brood numbers.

The entire western boreal forest is predicted to experience continued above average temperatures over the next 3 months. The 3 month precipitation forecast for the Western Boreal Forest is for below average amounts south of 60, while the Yukon and western NWT is to experience average precipitation, and eastern NWT is to receive above average precipitation.

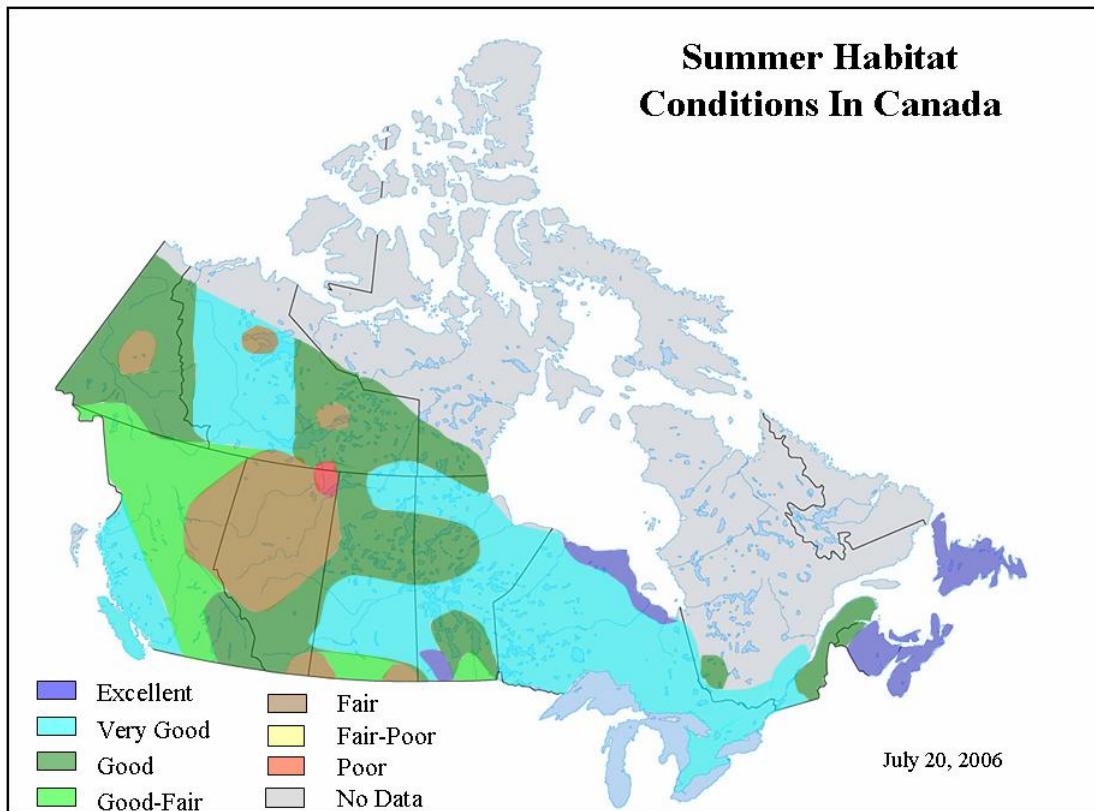
Wetland conditions continue to be rated as very good across **Ontario** despite June rainfall values being well below normal. Brood habitats are plentiful and remain fully charged throughout the southern, central and northern regions of the province. Haying operations are now well underway after being delayed because of a wet May. This delay in cutting will have benefited re-nesting birds by allowing more nests to hatch, while the warm June temperatures will have boded well for developing broods. Numerous large later class broods are being reported from the field, confirming a strong and successful early breeding effort. Spring population estimates for Southern James Bay Population and Mississippi Valley Canada geese are up considerably from previous years and production is predicted to be very good. Overall, 2006 waterfowl production is expected to be above average for Ontario.

June temperatures were above average throughout **Quebec**. Precipitation has been abundant in southern regions (Montreal, Ottawa River valley and Eastern Township regions) and has maintained high water levels in wetlands, which offer very good rearing conditions that are similar to those of 2005. In the other regions, the brood habitat conditions are good. The levels of the St. Lawrence River have been below average for the last two months.

Waterfowl production has been good throughout the province. Broods have been abundant and clutches have typically been large, especially in southern regions. This year, there were two different nesting periods which may be explained by the early spring, high water levels or predation. In the boreal forest, the total number of waterfowl breeding pairs was similar to 2005. However, American black ducks, the most abundant species, increased by 24%. Resident Canada geese broods were also abundant and had a high mean clutch-size. Snow geese initiated nests on schedule this year and the number of nests found in Bylot Island study sites was normal (139 nests) with a mean clutch size

that was slightly higher the average (3.9 / 3.7 eggs). The breeding effort appears to be normal this year.

Habitat conditions in **Atlantic Canada** are excellent. Spring rain provided sufficient water levels in most DUC wetlands and regular rain events through the last month have maintained these water levels. The warm weather and sufficient water levels have resulted in brood production being on par with the last several years. Brood surveys are currently being conducted on a regional basis. Overall, habitat and brood habitat conditions are excellent over the entire region.



Prepared by Stacey Hay

Field Contacts:

British Columbia – Bruce Harrison
Alberta – Ian McFarlane
Saskatchewan – Michael Hill
Manitoba – Mark Francis
Western Boreal Forest – Darcy Falk
Ontario – Scott Muir
Quebec – Patrick Harbour
Atlantic Canada – Wade Lewis