



Fall Habitat Conditions in Canada

October 20, 2006

Habitat conditions remain largely the same as they have been since the summer with conditions in the east generally good or better and conditions in the west and north more variable with dry conditions persisting in parts of Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. Waterfowl have left the more northern regions and are building in numbers in the south. Early season hunting results range from mixed in the Western Boreal Forest and Ontario to very good in southern Alberta and Quebec.

There has been little rain in most coastal areas of **British Columbia** this fall, and summer precipitation was also below average. As a result, water levels in the Lower Fraser are still at a 20-year low. However, conditions typically re-charge quickly at this time of year. The dry weather has favoured harvest and perennial forage and cover crops will likely be a more important source of winter food for waterfowl than remnant potato crops. Consequently, we expect more waterfowl depredation issues this winter. Ducks may also use intertidal areas more. Early migration is in full swing: mallard, northern pintail and American wigeon are present in good numbers, and other species are starting to pick up; there is no sign of snow geese yet.

In the central Interior fall precipitation has been very low (50-80 per cent of average), and summer precipitation was also below normal (60-85 per cent of average), resulting in poor moisture conditions. The Middle Fraser system is still at a 20-year low. Even large lakes such as Williams Lake have low water, and there is exposed ground in several areas in the outlet marsh. Some users on DUC-shared systems have complained about a lack of water. In the southern Interior some recent rains in the Thompson system bode well for freeze-up, but were not enough to bring us up to average levels overall; the river is still very low. There has been no recent rain in the Okanagan but conditions are still about normal. In the southeast Interior moisture conditions are normal in the East Kootenays, thanks to some recent rains. Overall, summer precipitation was average in most areas.

Habitat conditions are generally poor in the Peace. Growing season precipitation was 40-80 per cent of average, with a wet snowfall in mid-September contributing much of the precipitation. Water levels are at all-time lows according to some producers. Class III (temporary) wetlands are dry, and Class IV (semi-permanent) wetlands have mud flats extending well inside the emergent zone (even on projects with water control structures). Crop yields may be as low as 20 per cent of normal. Cover conditions are not good, but these are generally not limiting here. There were good numbers of waterfowl in September – the local office had several hundred sandhill cranes, good numbers of white-fronted geese, Canada geese and snow geese. Many mallard, American wigeon and northern pintail were available to hunters on field shoots. Birds have yet to be driven

south by inclement weather and there have been no problems with depredation due to the early harvest.

Many parts of Alberta received snow earlier in the week. Weather conditions have remained unsettled with periods of rain and showers in most areas. With the exception of the area around Grand Prairie, where conditions are fair-poor, soil moisture levels are generally good and wetland conditions range from fair to good in the region. Early season hunting results have been very good and waterfowl are still moving through the area with American wigeon and northern pintails noted in the area around Camrose. Arctic geese are now moving through the eastern portion of the region and tundra swans are also starting to move through.

Wetland conditions continue to be very good in the Saskatchewan parklands as this area has received substantial precipitation over the past few weeks. Temperatures in the parkland area have been below normal and some areas received 4-5 inches of snow this past week. The prairies are drier than the parklands with poor to fair wetland conditions in the southeast and the portion of the Coteau that borders the United States. The northern part of the Coteau is in slightly better shape with wetland conditions ranging from fair to good. Overall, wetlands in the parklands should be in good condition next spring if we get any kind of snowfall over the winter. The prairies could use some rain or snow to improve wetland conditions before freeze up.

Many of the Arctic geese and ducks have moved south out of the parklands due to the recent cooler temperatures and ponds freezing over. Waterfowl appear to be building in numbers in the prairies but cooler temperatures may also begin to move those birds south. Hunting pressure is beginning to slow down.

Wetlands in southwestern Manitoba continue to be stressed by the lack of precipitation. Since early spring, precipitation has been 60-85 per cent of average in areas north of Brandon and 40-60 per cent of average in areas south of Brandon. Wetlands that were inundated in the spring and throughout much of summer are now going dry including most Class III (seasonal) wetlands and smaller Class IV (semi-permanent) basins. The normal temperatures of September have given way to unseasonably cold October temperatures.

Preliminary reports indicate that sown winter wheat acres exceed last year's record numbers. This has largely been attributed to a rainfall in late September that encouraged seeding. Soil moisture conditions are poor in the region, especially in the more southern areas. Many wetlands that were "reclaimed" in the past wet years are now under cultivation again. Additional fall precipitation is needed along with a good snow pack and frost seal to ensure good wetland conditions next spring.

Waterfowl production was excellent in southwestern Manitoba this past season. Migration slowed in early October and many Canada geese had already moved through the area. A recent cold front coupled with snowfall interrupted this lull last week resulting in new birds moving into southwestern Manitoba. Peak migrations occurred

September 26 and 27th and again on October 13th and 14th following a drastic drop in temperature across the Prairies.

Habitat conditions remain largely unchanged this month in the **Western Boreal Forest**. Some areas have received fall precipitation which will help to recharge soil moisture levels before freeze-up. A number of individuals have reported that this year's migration and hunting season have been one of the more unusual in recent memory.

Water bodies in the Yukon are mostly frozen with only large staging lakes remaining open. Southern portions of the territory recently received 3 inches of snow. The majority of waterfowl have now left the Yukon with the exception of some birds present on staging lakes. Hunting pressure is low in the area, but early reports indicate that hunting opportunities were limited this year. In the Northwest Territories, most water bodies are now ice-covered with the exception of rivers. Water levels are average to below average. Few birds remain in the region and hunters reported poor hunting opportunities this fall. Large numbers of male bufflehead and other divers were reported in the area but these birds were difficult to hunt.

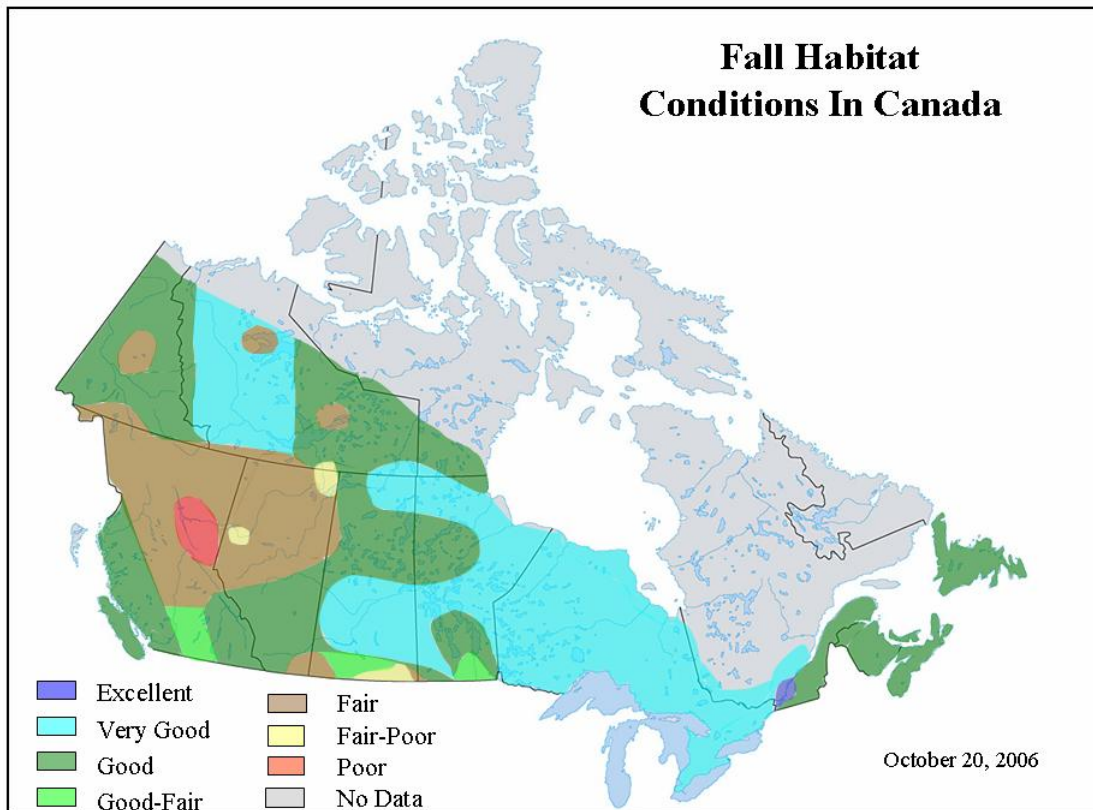
Parts of central Alberta recently received some precipitation. Migration and hunting opportunities have been spotty and difficult to predict despite the good numbers of waterfowl present in the area this year. No peak in migration has been observed in the area. Water bodies have yet to freeze and some waterfowl remain on larger water bodies. In northern Saskatchewan many small groups of bufflehead were observed near Buffalo Narrows and redhead, canvasback and mallard were the most prevalent species in the area. Reports from Melfort suggest that Canada geese have already moved through the region as this species has been difficult to find while snow geese are plentiful. Hunters have reported good success with ducks in the area near Melfort.

Wetlands across **Ontario** continue to be rated as very good due to frequent and intense rain events. Habitats are at full supply and soil moisture is well above normal. The wet weather has delayed the harvest of many crops, which should translate into good late season field shooting opportunities. Early season hunting success has been mixed across the region, however, the hunting has started to really pick-up with the onset of colder temperatures up north. Wood ducks and blue-winged teal have moved on while significant numbers of other dabblers including mallards, green-winged teal, wigeon, gadwall and northern pintail have started to build-up on some of the traditional staging marshes along the lower Great Lakes coast. Diving ducks are beginning to trickle into the region including some redheads and canvasbacks in Lake St. Clair area, which is providing added incentive for hunters.

In **Quebec**, mean temperatures in September were above average in all regions except the Ottawa Valley region. Total precipitation in September was lower than the seasonal average for the regions along the St. Lawrence River, but precipitation has been abundant since the beginning of October, assuring good moisture conditions and wetland water levels. Water levels in the St. Lawrence are currently average. A variety of waterfowl species have been observed and duck and Canada goose hunting season results range from good to excellent in all Quebec regions, and are particularly good along the St.

Lawrence River. Greater snow geese arrived at Cap Tourmente around September 22nd and migration peaked on October 16th at 53 000 geese.

Habitat conditions are good throughout **Atlantic Canada**. Large numbers of Canada geese have been reported throughout the region and numbers of other waterfowl species are on par with previous years. Several rain events in late September and early October have maintained water levels on DUC wetlands in the region, which are supporting Canada geese, black ducks, ring-necked ducks and blue- and green-winged teal. Numbers of waterfowl should increase in the coming week or two, as more migratory waterfowl move into the region; hunters will then enjoy good numbers for the harvest. Weather predictions for the next few weeks are favourable for waterfowl with cooler conditions and more precipitation.



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