



Ducks Unlimited Canada  
CANADA'S CONSERVATION COMPANY

## Early Fall Habitat Conditions in Canada

September 20, 2006

*With the exception of central and northern areas of British Columbia and Alberta, habitat conditions are good or better across the country. This years' fall flight is shaping up to be quite good and numbers of birds are beginning to build in southern areas. Harvest was early throughout the Prairies this year and is largely completed.*

Summer precipitation was below average in the **British Columbia** coastal region, and well below average in some parts of the north coast. The past month was also dry, and water levels in the Fraser are at a 20-year low but fall rains should set in by the end of the month. Potato crops are being harvested on the Fraser Delta and cover crops have been planted in harvested pea and bean fields allowing ample growing time before waterfowl appear on the Delta and feed on these crops. Early migrants in the Valley include approximately 2,000 American wigeon and 2,500 northern pintail. Canada geese are a little skittish with the opening of hunting season.

There was very little precipitation in the central Interior during late summer and habitat conditions have been slightly downgraded from last month's assessment. Conditions remain quite dry, and many shallow wetlands are dry or drying fast. Noticeable shifts in the fall flight are not expected, as most of the Interior has been relatively dry this year, and staging wetlands have been less affected than temporary wetlands. In the southern Interior, summer precipitation was below average in the Thompson system, but there has been some rainfall in the last few days and fall weather has arrived. Precipitation was about average in the Okanagan, but the valley has been relatively dry over the last two months. Summer precipitation has been average in most areas of the southeast Interior and there has been no change in habitat conditions since the last assessment.

Precipitation was well below average this summer in the Peace region. Streamflows are very low in most of the Peace system, and are at record low levels in some rivers. Pastures have been overgrazed, crops were less than half of average yields, and wetlands are well below full supply level, or dry. On the bright side, some hayfields were left uncut due to lack of forage, and crop depredation complaints are non-existent due to early harvests. Conditions in the British Columbia Peace are demonstrably worse than on the Alberta side and there has been a slight downgrade of conditions from last assessment.

Hot, dry weather prevailed over **Alberta** for most of August and the first part of September. This led to a deterioration of wetland conditions with seasonal wetlands dry and mudflats common on semi-permanent wetlands. The weather changed abruptly in the second week of September with highs in the mid to high 20s at the start of the week and highs of 4-6°C by the end of the week accompanied by 25-50 mm of rain and possibly

snow. The moisture will maintain wetland water levels for the fall and begin to recharge soil moisture levels in preparation for freeze-up.

Harvest conditions have been almost ideal. Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development reported that approximately 35 per cent of the provincial harvest was completed by late August. Most areas are now over 75 per cent complete. In many areas, harvest is 10–14 days ahead of normal. Province-wide forage crop conditions declined in the hot dry weather with over 70 per cent of the pastures and tame hay in the province rated as poor or fair. Subsoil moisture is rated 31 per cent poor (Peace parkland and northwest boreal transition); 34 per cent fair (north aspen parkland, foothills and northeast boreal transition); 33 per cent good (southern aspen parkland and Prairie); and 2 per cent excellent (isolated areas of the aspen parkland).

Alberta duck production was good in 2006 - particularly in the prairie and eastern parkland and an improved fall flight over the past few years is anticipated. Local ducks and Canada geese are just beginning to flock together and flocks of northern birds are beginning to move through eastern parts of the province. Snow, Ross', and white-fronted geese have been reported in the St. Paul, Wainwright and Hanna areas. The hunting season is just underway, but early season reports indicate that excellent hunting opportunities are available. With the current cooler, unsettled weather the fall migration and hunting season will move into full-swing.

Wetlands in the parklands of **Saskatchewan** continue to be in very good shape going into early fall, whereas prairie wetlands range from fair to fair-good condition. The parkland region recently received a substantial amount of rain ranging from nearly 8 inches near Tisdale to 4-5 inches in the Saskatoon area and 2-3 inches near Yorkton. This will improve wetland conditions in the parklands where it had been dry for about 6 weeks prior to this rain event. The wetlands in the Missouri Coteau are in fair condition and it is quite dry in the southeastern part of the province. The Allan Hills should be in good to excellent shape heading into fall. The outlook for production is good to excellent in the parklands and fair to good in the Prairies.

Arctic geese arrived in the province in the beginning of September and are starting to build in numbers. Mallards and pintails have been observed field-feeding and are beginning to build in numbers. Harvest was early this year with about 86 per cent of the crop already combined. The moisture received this past week should help to get winter wheat started.

With the exception of some recent rain, weather in southwestern **Manitoba** continues to be warm and dry and the lack of precipitation is now taking a toll on wetlands. Wetland levels have dropped considerably over the past three weeks after being maintained throughout most of the season. Many Class III (seasonal) wetlands are now dry and water levels of some Class IV (semi-permanent) wetlands are starting to drop below the vegetative ring with mud flats beginning to show on some of these basins. Recent rains delivered 1 inch of precipitation in the Killarney/Baldur area; 2 inches in Brandon; 2.5 - 3 inches in Minnedosa/Shoal Lake; and up to 5 inches in areas east of Riding Mountain.

This precipitation was not enough to recharge wetlands, but it will help to improve soil moisture. Additional fall precipitation is required to increase soil moisture levels and wetland levels for next spring. Areas north of Brandon are fairing better than areas south of Brandon as periodic rains through the summer have helped to maintain pothole levels. Soil moisture conditions also appear better in areas north of Brandon.

Crop harvest was extremely early this year and is largely completed throughout the region. Very little tilling has occurred as landowners are waiting for improved soil moisture before cultivating. Lack of soil moisture may have a negative effect on the amount of winter wheat acres landowners are willing to sow in areas south of Brandon this year. Some reports suggest that a large number of winter wheat acres are already sown north of Brandon.

Waterfowl production remains excellent in southwestern Manitoba and an excellent fall flight is expected. Hunters have been capitalizing on the abundant populations of resident Canada geese early this season and on a few of the early migrant large geese. Local ducks are plentiful as well, but field hunting has been slow until now as field-feeding seems later than usual this year. Observations of snow geese were first reported last week but there has been little sign of fall migration to date. Overall, waterfowl food is abundant and water conditions remain favourable creating good opportunities for hunters in southwestern Manitoba.

There does not appear to be any shortage of water throughout the **Western Boreal Forest**, and recent rains should improve and recharge wetlands for the fall migration and for next spring. DUC staff report that a good number of migrating waterfowl have been observed – including a high number of Canada geese, some flocks of white geese, and dabbling ducks.

Conditions have been cool lately north of 60, with reports of snow in the higher elevations. Bird numbers are quite variable throughout the Yukon. Reports from Watson Lake showed a good number of grouped dabblers (mallards and wigeon), with diving duck species observed in smaller numbers. An earlier report (mid-August) from Old Crow indicated that few ducks were still in the area. Swans are still observed in pairs and are not grouped. Information from the Northwest Territories (NWT) is also mixed, although it appears that migration has yet to peak. Banding results were apparently low this fall in-and-around Yellowknife, and better around Norman Wells. Small flocks of Canada geese have been observed, as well as sandhill cranes, resident diving ducks, and mallards. The outlook for hunting in the Yukon and NWT is below average this fall.

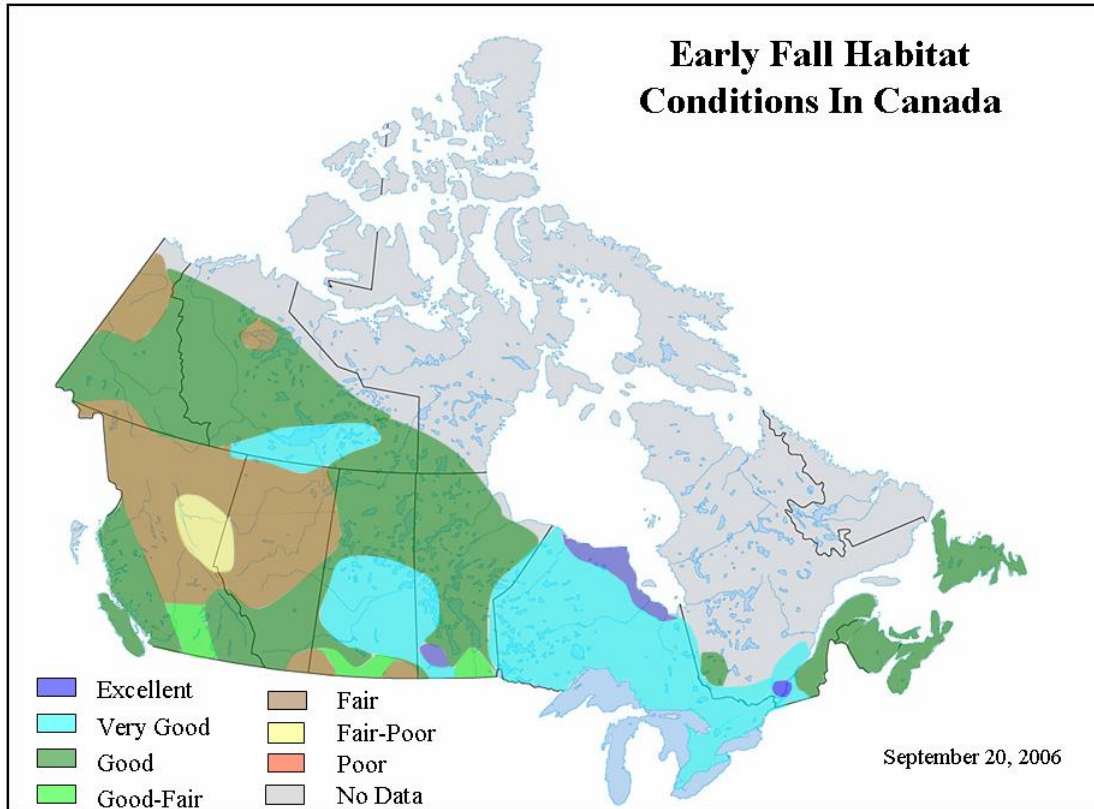
The boreal transition zone of Saskatchewan and Manitoba (information from Meadow Lake, Melfort, and The Pas) is reporting an abundance of water, which is teeming with birds. Many geese (more dark geese than light) have been observed, as well as dabbling species, like mallards, American wigeon, gadwall, and teal. The big push in northern Alberta and British Columbia seems to have just started, and it is expected that the next two weeks should see an average to above average number of waterfowl coming through. Blue-winged teal are still being observed, although they will most likely move on shortly.

with the recent drop in temperatures. Mallard groups are beginning to increase in number. The outlook for hunting is average to above average. Surveys will be conducted in northern Saskatchewan this week and additional information will be available for the area around La Ronge in next month's report.

Heading into fall, wetland conditions across **Ontario** are still rated as very good. Despite a dry August, the recent return of wetter weather has fully recharged habitats in advance of the fall flight. While Great Lakes water levels are below their long-term averages for all of the lakes except Lake Ontario, this is not expected to affect waterfowl use of near-shore emergent marshes. Good numbers of mallards, wood ducks and blue-winged teal have begun showing up at many southern marshes, as have some Southern James Bay Population Canada geese, while sizeable flocks of mallards, black ducks and goldeneyes can be found on northern Ontario habitats. Prospects for the Ontario fall flight and hunting season are very good.

For the first time this year, August temperatures were below the seasonal average in all regions of **Quebec** except the Mauricie and Ottawa River Valley regions, where temperatures were close to normal. Temperatures in September were above average throughout the province. Total precipitation was also below average in August for all regions except for Montreal, which received 60% more rain than average. Overall, wetlands are in good to excellent condition due to the regular precipitation throughout the summer season. The Saguenay and Lower St. Lawrence regions had good results for the first hunting weekend and we are expecting a very good hunting season and fall flight throughout the province. It was an excellent banding season for American black duck, mallard and resident Canada geese at Lake St. Pierre with a high ratio of ducklings. In northern regions, the first flocks of greater snow geese have been observed.

Habitat conditions are currently good throughout **Atlantic Canada**. Very good summer habitat conditions resulted in successful brood production for all waterfowl species. Large numbers of Canada geese have been reported throughout the region and numbers of other waterfowl species are on par with previous years. Overall, this year's fast approaching hunting season should provide good numbers of waterfowl. The warm temperatures over the region will provide ideal conditions for both the hunter and for the fall flight.



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