



Ducks Unlimited Canada
CANADA'S CONSERVATION COMPANY

Spring Habitat Conditions in Canada

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Spring migration should peak in many parts of the country in the coming week and habitat conditions are generally good for returning waterfowl. Conditions are particularly good in coastal British Columbia, the Saskatchewan parklands and parts of eastern Canada at this time. Additional precipitation is needed in much of the prairies to ensure good conditions this breeding season.

The south coastal mountains in **British Columbia** experienced a record high snowpack this year and a large runoff is currently underway. The spring has been cool and wet in the coastal region, and most water bodies are at capacity. On the Fraser Delta, farmers have begun tilling their fields for summer crops. Resident Canada geese and wood ducks have begun nesting, while most migrants including snow geese have left.

Runoff has been disappointing in the central Interior despite the above average snowpack, which was record-high in some northern drainages. As a result, water levels are only slightly above average. Spring has been relatively cool; only the low elevation wetlands are ice-free. Even with the cool weather, migration is well underway; even early scaup have shown up.

Despite the above average snowpack, runoff has also been disappointing in the southern Interior. Due to a combination of a slow melt (cool temperatures), dry soils and a lack of frost, moisture is infiltrating into the soil rather than running into wetlands. In addition, there has been almost no spring precipitation so far. Despite the cool weather, migration is well underway. A large pulse of pintails that were likely headed for Alaska recently moved through the area.

Previous runoff projections were a bit optimistic in the southwest Interior; runoff is about normal and there has been little spring precipitation so far.

Even though there was a near-record snowfall in the Peace region last winter, conditions are no longer entirely positive. The combination of a slow melt (cool temperatures), dry soils and a lack of frost have decreased the chances for a significant runoff – the snow is receding, and many fields are showing large amounts of bare ground. Trumpeter swans, mallards, pintails, American wigeon and Canada geese are back and waiting for water to appear as most wetlands are still iced-over.

Runoff was complete by early April throughout much of prairie and parkland **Alberta**. The runoff was protracted and considered normal in both regions. Habitat conditions in most areas of the province are now rated fair-good or better. Conditions are especially good near Hanna and DUC projects are full in that area. Conditions are also good in the Milk River Ridge south of Lethbridge. Snow still remains in the area around Grande Prairie, which received record snowfall this winter. Western Alberta including Calgary received some heavy snowfall earlier this week in a late storm. The southwest

also received some recent intermittent snow as did Edmonton and Red Deer. Migration is on schedule and is expected to peak within the next week. Canada geese have begun to nest in the province.

Conditions in the parklands of **Saskatchewan** continue to be very good. Runoff is currently peaking in the parklands and high water levels are threatening to flood some communities. Drier conditions persist in the prairies. Runoff was limited in the southeast near Estevan, and while recent precipitation has improved conditions somewhat, habitat conditions remain fair-poor. Wetlands in the Missouri Coteau are in fair condition overall, with more northern parts of the Coteau fairing better than southern areas. Wetlands in the southwest remain in fair-poor condition and there are a large number of pintails and other waterfowl in the area. The migration of arctic geese has already peaked in the province while numbers of other waterfowl should peak in the next week.

In southwestern **Manitoba** the spring-like conditions of late March brought mallards, northern pintails, snow geese and other dabblers to the region. Runoff peaked in areas south of Brandon by March 30th and was just beginning in areas north of the City when a cold arctic air mass moved into the province and lasted for over a week. The cold air halted migration and caused birds to retreat. A small number of geese had begun to nest before the cold air moved in and the extreme cold probably had some impact on these early nesters. More seasonal temperatures returned to the province on April 8th and brought a resurgence of early migrants. Three-bird flights of mallards were common by the 15th and large numbers of migrating snow geese also common.

The region has received little moisture since the March report, and the slow thaw did little to improve wetland conditions. Areas south of Brandon already show signs of dry soil conditions and Class I (ephemeral) wetlands have already dried up. Class IV (semi-permanent) wetlands have just melted and most are flooded into their vegetated perimeters, but not beyond. Conditions in areas north of Brandon are favourable at this time, but there are concerns over soil moisture levels and spring rains are needed to maintain wetland levels.

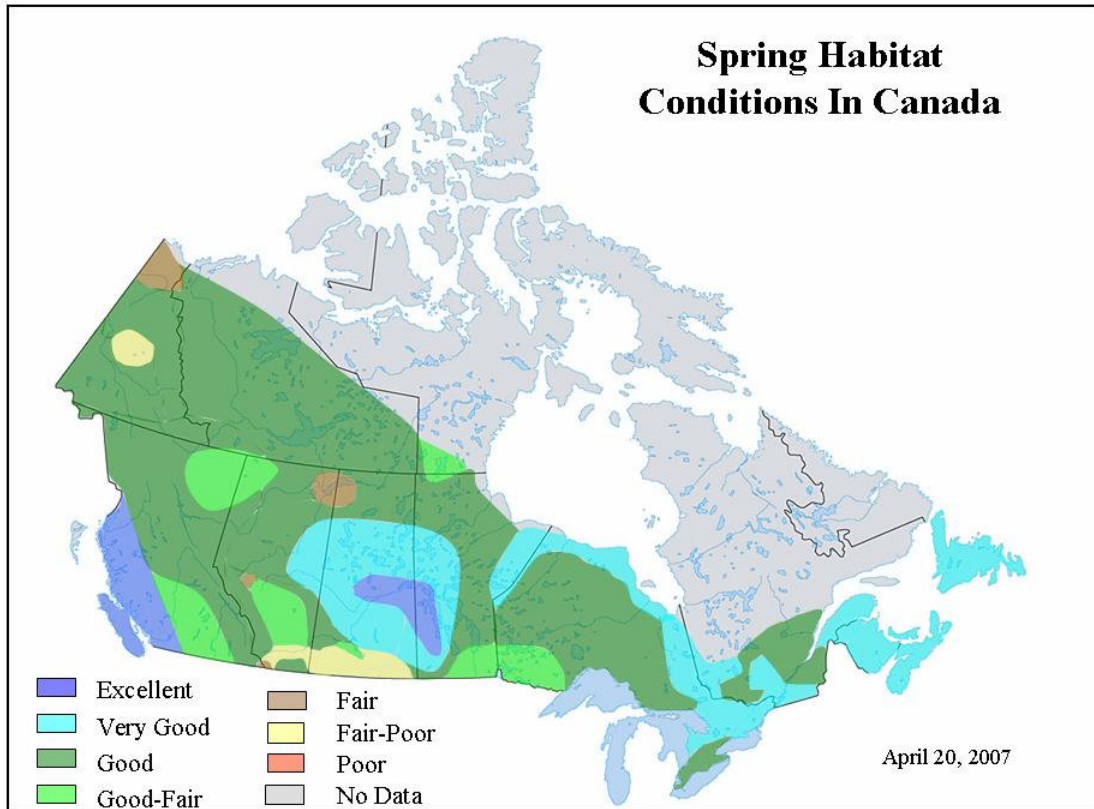
Spring has yet to arrive in the more northern reaches of the **Western Boreal Forest**. Snow remains only in sheltered areas, but ice still covers most of the large water bodies. Canada geese have been in the Edmonton area for a while now, but ducks including mallards and goldeneye are just beginning to return to the area. Ducks should begin to arrive in the more northern portions of the region by the beginning of May and migration should peak in these northern areas in the next few weeks. Habitat conditions are expected to be good overall in the Western Boreal Forest this spring and have changed little since the March report. The Northwest Territories, Yukon Territory and northern Alberta have recently received some snow and the boreal fringe of Alberta is forecast to receive some significant precipitation later this week.

Cool, wet weather quickly replaced the warm temperatures and relatively dry conditions that welcomed the arrival of spring to southern **Ontario**. Habitat conditions have improved for breeding pairs due to recent rain events recharging the seasonal wetland base, which was beginning to wane. Conditions presently range from good in

the southwest to very good in the southeast while habitats throughout central Ontario continue to be rated as very good with permanent wetlands at full supply. Conditions across northern Ontario vary from fair to good in the northwest due to below normal water levels in many of the lakes, rivers and wetlands, to very good in the Claybelt. The very mild weather in late March caused wetlands to open-up quickly and as such, many dabbling ducks shortened their stay on traditional staging areas along the lower Great Lakes and headed inland to establish breeding territories. Nesting is already well underway for Canada geese while mallards are at various stages of breeding as evidenced by groups of drakes, lone pairs and mixed groups.

March temperatures were slightly below average in all **Quebec** regions with the exception of Gaspesie in eastern Quebec. Temperatures have been well below normal since the beginning of April and snow has been abundant, which has improved the snowpack and wetland conditions. However, the snowpack remained below average throughout the province this winter and spring runoff should be complete within the next week with the forecast calling for warmer temperatures. The level of the St. Lawrence River is close to normal is not expected to rise significantly. Northern pintails, ring-necked ducks, lesser scaup and common and hooded mergansers have been observed in the province. Canada geese and greater snow geese arrived on March 27th.

A late snowstorm in **Atlantic Canada** covered the entire region in snow over the Easter weekend, with some areas receiving more snow from this event than at any other time over the winter. Spring migration is evident in every wetland as the numbers of returning waterfowl increase with warmer weather. Spring habitat conditions in Atlantic Canada are very good. All estuaries, rivers and wetlands are ice-free and providing excellent habitat for returning waterfowl. Warmer weather is predicted in the long-range forecast, which should also contribute to favourable breeding conditions for waterfowl.



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