



Early Summer Habitat Conditions in Canada

June 21, 2007

Much of the southern Prairie Provinces have received significant precipitation in the past month, maintaining and improving good conditions for breeding waterfowl. Elsewhere, habitat conditions have essentially remained unchanged from last month's assessment and are generally good at this time. Results from the CWS/USFW May Waterfowl Breeding Population Survey will be available in July, but early reports indicate that waterfowl production should be good this year.

In the past month the freshet has started on the Fraser Delta and Valley of **British Columbia**, and the record high snow pack this year has forced many communities along the river to be on a continuous flood watch. On the Fraser Delta, farmers have most or all of their crops in the ground for the summer season, with large tracts of land in potatoes and perennial forage - staple foods for migrating and wintering waterfowl. Natural and DUC project wetlands are full and marsh vegetation is thriving. The first broods of Canada geese and mallards are enjoying the marshes. Adult geese are molting their primaries and adult mallards are going into eclipse plumage.

Spring precipitation was minimal in the central Interior until a week or two ago, but recent rains have greened upland cover, and conditions are now average. Pair numbers appeared average, but cool spring weather appeared to slow the progress of the pairing season with broods appearing later than normal. Canada goose, mallard, goldeneye and bufflehead broods are now common.

In the southern Interior spring precipitation was minimal until a week or two ago, but recent rains have improved upland conditions. However, wetland conditions are still below average and pair numbers were slightly below average. As in the central Interior, broods are showing up later than normal. Conditions are average in the southeastern Interior, and there is no population data available for the region yet.

Spring precipitation has been above average, and temperatures have warmed in the Peace region. Upland conditions have now mostly recovered from last year's drought. Wetlands are maintaining their levels quite well, but are still feeling the effects of the drought and poor spring runoff. It's too early to make statistical comparisons to previous years, but bird numbers appear good so far. Several mallard broods have been observed to date, as well as Canada goose broods.

Wetland and upland conditions are good to excellent throughout the agricultural zone of **Alberta** this year. A late spring snowstorm on May 24th in the Calgary-Red Deer corridor delivered 20-25 cm of wet snow. This was followed by a locally heavy storm event from June 4-7 with 50-80mm of rain in the Calgary, Rocky Mountain House, Camrose and Hanna areas. Periodic shower and thunderstorm activity has occurred in all

areas. Cool temperatures have reduced evaporative losses and seasonal and semi-permanent wetlands remain full.

Habitat conditions are rated as good to excellent in the prairies. In the Hanna area DUC projects continue to spill. Some drying has occurred in eastern sections, but west and northwest areas remain in very good to excellent condition for this time of year. In the aspen parkland a similar situation prevails; conditions are rated as good in the east and northeast grading to very good and excellent in central and western sectors. Ephemeral ponds remain in many areas of the central parkland. In the boreal transition zone conditions are rated as good to very good. The Peace parkland has been somewhat drier, but wetland habitat remains in very good to excellent condition.

Spring seeding was protracted by wet conditions in many areas of the province with some seeding extending into mid-June. A number of low areas which in previous years were cropped are too wet to seed this year. There is excellent grass growth on hay and pasture lands and no forage shortages are anticipated.

The CWS/USFW May Waterfowl Breeding Population Survey report will be available in early July. Anecdotal reports suggest that breeding waterfowl are dispersed and taking advantage of the good to excellent habitat conditions. Duck broods are becoming a common sight. DUC staff report seeing mallard, northern pintail, common goldeneye, bufflehead, northern shoveler, canvasback and blue-winged teal broods. Canada goose goslings are growing rapidly.

Abundant wetlands will provide improved breeding and brood habitat in Alberta compared to the previous few years. Excellent cover conditions are also expected to provide improved nest success. At present above average waterfowl production is anticipated from the agricultural zone of Alberta in 2007.

In **Saskatchewan**, Saskatoon and the surrounding area recently received four inches of rain and more flooding is expected. Wetlands are well over full supply level on most projects in the parklands. Conditions generally remain good to excellent in the parklands and are a little drier, but improving in the prairies.

Wetland conditions are still good in the Allan Hills with temporary and seasonal wetlands maintaining their levels due to timely rains. Seeding is mostly complete in the area and crops are in good condition as are hay and pastures. Early sightings of pintail, mallard and canvasback broods indicate that production is good in the region. Few groups of drakes have been sighted, which also indicates a good breeding effort.

Conditions have started to improve through much of the southeast as much of the area has received 3-6 inches of rain in recent weeks. In the extreme southeast wetlands are improving and are currently fair to good. Areas around Estevan are still poor-fair, but are slowly improving. There are some Canada goose broods, but duck broods have yet to be observed despite the large number of ducks in the area.

Since spring, wetland conditions have improved over much of southwestern **Manitoba** due to frequent rain. Conditions are favourable for brood rearing waterfowl and reneating birds. Percent of average precipitation is 115-150% for the entire Manitoba parklands. Excellent conditions remain throughout the parkland areas of Minnedosa and Shoal Lake due to numerous spring wetlands, frequent rainfall, strong initial settling and nesting efforts and optimum nesting and reneating conditions. Conditions in the area

south of Brandon have improved and are now rated as very good. This area began spring under fairly dry conditions but recent significant rainfall will improve brood survival and hen renesting efforts compensating for the potential lower pair settling numbers in these extreme southern areas. Upland cover has spiked over the past week as have spring seeded crops in areas south of Brandon, providing excellent upland cover for late and renesting waterfowl. Fall rye fields are heading out while winter wheat is not far behind in the Killarney area. Temperatures have remained average and are favourable for nesting birds.

Canada goose broods are abundant with the first brood observed on May 9th. Observations of mallard broods indicate good initial nesting success, and the first mallard brood was observed on June 1st. General observations indicate good numbers of blue-winged teal as well as a strong initial nesting attempt by them and mallards. The first blue-winged teal nest was observed on June 16th. Northern pintail numbers don't appear to be as strong as they were in the last two years; however increased observations have been reported in Shoal Lake region. Redhead numbers also appear to be strong as are ring-necked duck numbers. American wigeon again appear to be low in numbers.

Habitat conditions are average to above average for the majority of the **Western Boreal Forest (WBF)**. In the Yukon, water levels on rivers and basins are very high, due primarily to mountain snow runoff and glacial melt contributing to already high water levels. Spring generally arrived late in the Yukon, although all lakes are now ice-free. These high water conditions may not be always beneficial for waterfowl, particularly for nesting waterfowl and broods. Broods have yet to be observed on aerial surveys, although the survey crew expects to see their first goslings and ducklings on a trip to the MacMillan River during the week of June 25th. Bachelor groups of mallards have been observed, as have flocks of Canada geese. Wigeon were also abundant on previous surveys. Over the next three months, the Yukon is expected to have above average temperatures through the territory, with below average precipitation in the north and south, and above average precipitation in central regions of the territory.

Spring habitat conditions in northeastern British Columbia have improved compared to the past couple of seasons, although conditions are below average to average, at best. There are no waterfowl surveys scheduled to take place in the boreal portions of British Columbia. This area typically has good numbers of mallards, bufflehead, ring-necked ducks, green-winged teal, and scaup. Above average temperatures and below average precipitation are forecast over the next three months in the region.

In the boreal portions of the Prairie Provinces habitat conditions are average to above average. Water conditions in basins, streams, and rivers were all very high this spring. The ground appears to be saturated as rainfall quickly pools and recharges wetland basins and river levels. Above average temperatures are forecast for the next three months in northern Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Northern Alberta and northern Saskatchewan are predicted to have below average precipitation, while average precipitation is expected in Manitoba.

A report from The Pas and the Saskatchewan River Delta indicates that brood production is late and below average for the time of year. Broods from early nesting species have not been observed in any numbers. It is not know if the excess water

conditions are negatively contributing to production (flooding) or if the ducks are more dispersed and not as easily observed. In Melfort, conditions are similar, with an abundance of water, but few broods. Despite the low brood numbers there are still good numbers of duck pairs observed in both of these locations.

Broods of Canada geese, mallards, common goldeneye, and bufflehead were observed on a breeding survey in northeastern Alberta in early June. The survey crew expects to see many more broods, particularly mallards, bufflehead, ring-necked duck, and wigeon, during their next survey scheduled the week of June 17th.

Conditions are near average throughout much of Northwest Territories (NWT). It is still very early for brood production estimates for the NWT. Pairs of scaup and mallards were the most abundant on a trip around Trout Lake in the southern portion of the territory, as were groups of male bufflehead and surf scoter. Over the next three months the NWT expects above average temperatures, with below average to average precipitation.

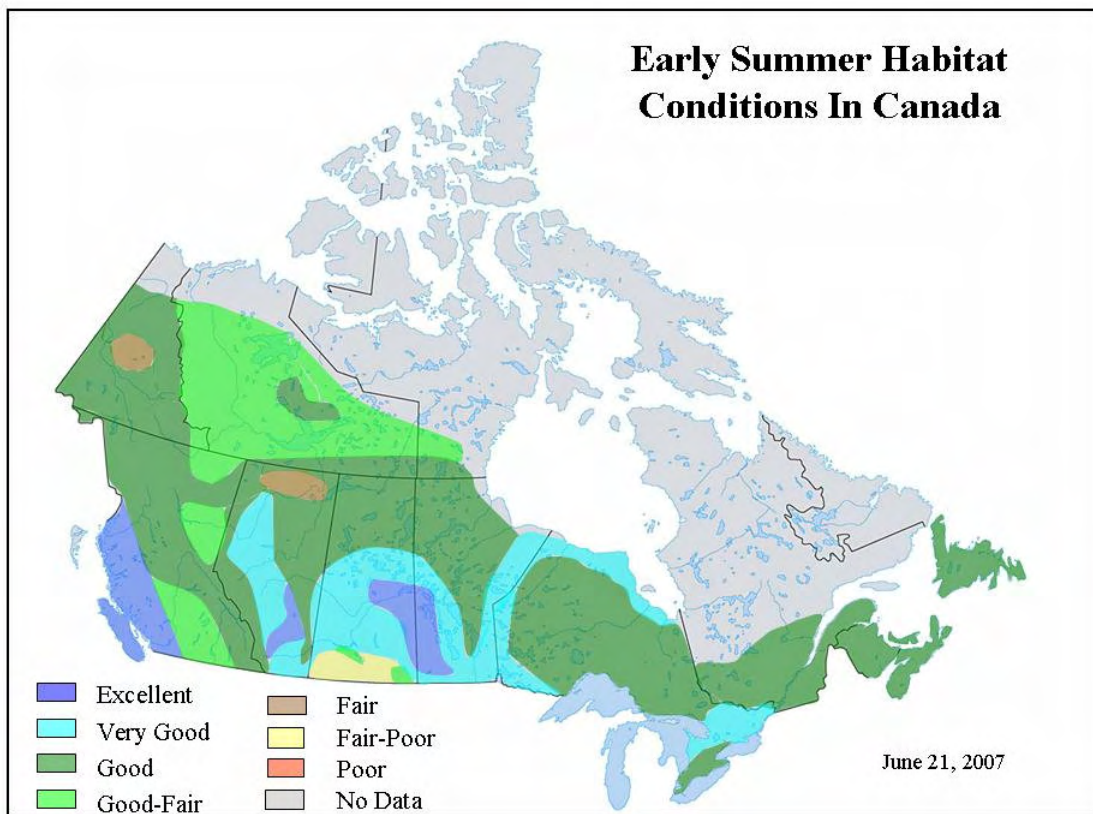
Wetland habitats across southern **Ontario** remain in good shape despite May precipitation amounts totalling less than half of the normal monthly values. Conditions tend to be slightly drier in southwestern Ontario than in the central and southeastern areas of the province, however, permanent wetlands are still at or near capacity for emerging broods. Hay cutting has been underway since the end of May and is currently in full swing, unfortunately ahead of schedule in some areas by as much as ten days. This could have huge impacts on waterfowl production, as farmers are now frequently encountering incubating hens during haying operations, which suggests the occurrence of a strong re-nesting effort. Conditions throughout northern Ontario remain pretty good, with many areas of the northwest having been recharged after receiving significant amounts of precipitation near the end of May. An early ice-out and exceptionally warm early spring temperatures may have given birds a jump on the breeding season; however, these initial nesting attempts appear to have been largely unsuccessful, as evidenced by recent province-wide sightings of only young broods. Preliminary results from the Black Duck Survey are very promising with large numbers of birds observed throughout central and northeastern Ontario, including a welcomed increase in black duck numbers. Despite an early spring and good habitat conditions on the breeding grounds, the spring population estimate for Southern James Bay Population Canada geese was down substantially from last year's record total. On a brighter note, Mississippi Valley Population Canada geese pair numbers were up slightly and the population estimate is above average.

Temperatures recorded in May were generally above average across **Quebec**, especially in northern regions where the average temperature was 1.5°C above average. May was fairly dry this year and the province received less precipitation than average, especially in northern regions where precipitation was 30-60% below normal. Despite the lack of precipitation, the mean level of the St. Lawrence remained close to average this month. Habitat conditions remain generally good across Quebec and we hope that more rain in the coming weeks will ensure a good rearing period.

Below average precipitation kept the nest flooding risks low throughout the province. Resident geese and early nesting ducks began nesting in early May. The numbers of resident goose nests increased on Varennes Island. Preliminary results of the

breeding waterfowl survey in the Montreal archipelago revealed good production with a mean clutch size that was higher than normal. Pintails, mallards and gadwalls were the most abundant species observed in this survey. At St. Peter Lake, large numbers of mallards have been observed since the beginning of June and groups of dabbler drakes are still present. Production is expected to be average or better this year. Snow geese initiated nests last week on schedule on Bylot Island and the laying peak was around June 14-15 (130 nests). We are anticipating a moderate level of nest predation. At this point, the breeding conditions for snow geese should be fair to good.

Unseasonably cool temperatures have not affected the early breeding success of waterfowl in **Atlantic Canada**. Broods of Canada geese and black duck were spotted early, indicating successful early nesting attempts, even with the unseasonable temperatures. Long-range forecasts are predicting more seasonable weather over an extended period. Overall, production in Atlantic Canada appears to be on par with other years. Consistent warm weather and seasonable temperatures should assist in maintaining these production levels. Initial brood surveys within the region are favourable. Water levels in most wetlands have remained consistently good across the region.



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