



Ducks Unlimited Canada
CANADA'S CONSERVATION COMPANY

Late Spring Habitat Conditions in Canada

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Habitat conditions in Canada are now generally good or better for breeding waterfowl. Conditions are particularly good in the British Columbia coastal region and in much of Alberta, the Saskatchewan parklands and southern Ontario, where early reports from waterfowl survey crews indicate a strong breeding effort. The Saskatchewan prairies remain dry. Canada goose broods have been reported in a number of areas and other waterfowl are now nesting across the country.

The south coastal mountains of **British Columbia** experienced a record high snow pack this year, and the runoff was relatively high. As temperatures continue to increase, water bodies are at full capacity, leaving most of the Fraser River Delta and Fraser Valley on a flood watch. On the Delta, farmers are busy preparing their fields for the summer season. The majority of waterfowl species including wigeon, mallard, snow geese, swans, and shovelers have migrated northward. Resident Canada geese, pintail, gadwall, wood duck and mallard are nesting and brooding young.

Runoff varied with latitude in the central Interior - northern drainages received very high snowfall, and runoff was above average; more southerly drainages also received relatively high snowfall, but runoff was only average due to suspected poor frost conditions and a slow melt. Wetland conditions generally follow the same gradient. Spring was relatively cool, and migration was slightly delayed; however, the main pulse of migrants is now through, and all species are present. Only Canada goose broods have been observed so far.

Despite a high snow pack, runoff was disappointing due to poor frost conditions and a slow melt in the southern Interior. There has been almost no spring precipitation so far in the region. As in the central Interior, migration was slightly delayed, but the breeding effort is now about normal. Runoff was about normal in the southeast Interior and there has been little spring precipitation so far.

Despite a high snowpack, runoff was disappointing due to poor frost conditions and a slow melt in the British Columbia Peace region. Many systems had unusually low flows this spring. All waterfowl species have arrived and early-nesting species are initiating nests.

Snowmelt and runoff were largely complete by the last week of March - first week of April in the prairie and aspen parkland of **Alberta**. Snowmelt and runoff occurred approximately 1-3 weeks later in the peace parkland and boreal transition zone.

The near record snowfall in the Peace parkland melted slowly, which recharged soil moisture and filled wetlands and lakes without causing damaging floods. Most areas of the province have been subject to a couple of major precipitation events in the past month. In late April southern Alberta received 15-20+ cm of wet snow and a storm in

early May delivered 50-100 mm of rain in a line from south of Calgary to Peace River. Red Deer (Pine Lake and Buffalo Lake), Edmonton-Camrose and the Drayton Valley areas received the greatest amounts of precipitation; elsewhere 20-40 mm of rain fell. This precipitation came on top of reasonably saturated ground, resulting in the formation of sheet water ponds and flooding of semi-permanent basins into the wet meadow zone. Some DUC water control projects that had receded to their full supply level or below following the spring melt are flowing again.

Spring conditions in much of the prairie and south and east parkland are the best that they have been in many years. Southern Alberta (prairie and prairie-parkland transition) is rated as good. The Cypress Hills and Milk River Ridge are rated as very good. Central Alberta (aspen parkland) is rated as very good to excellent. Conditions in the priority areas of Pine Lake, Buffalo Lake, Sullivan Lake and Viking are the best since the 1990s. The western parkland and boreal transition zone is rated as good to very good. The Peace parkland is also rated as excellent. Spring seeding is well underway and producers report good soil moisture conditions. A number of low areas that were cropped in previous years will be too wet to seed this year. Cattle are being moved onto pasture.

The Canadian Wildlife Service/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service air-ground breeding waterfowl surveys are currently underway. Anecdotal reports from the ground survey crews indicate improved pond and waterfowl numbers from 2006 on many survey transects in southern and eastern Alberta. Crews have needed to add survey ponds on some transects. cursory observations indicate breeding birds are well dispersed on the abundant ponds. The good-excellent spring habitat conditions have stimulated a strong breeding effort from early nesters such as mallard and northern pintail. Lone drake and paired mallards are currently a common sight indicating that a good breeding effort is underway. The first reports of Canada goose broods have been received.

Overall, wetland conditions are good to excellent across the **Saskatchewan** parklands and poor to fair in the prairies. In the parklands, wetlands are overflowing and the water often extends beyond the margins of wetland basins. Wetlands in the prairies are quite a bit drier, especially along the U.S./Canada border. The southwest and southeast need some rainfall to recharge the wetlands. In the Allan Hills, wetland conditions are good to excellent and recent pair counts (May 7) suggest that there are over 100 pairs of ducks per square mile this year. The survey also showed that there were a number of lone mallards and pintails suggesting a good nesting effort in this priority area. In the Missouri Coteau, wetland conditions are dry next to the U.S. border and gradually improve as you move north. DUC staff have reported lone mallards and pintails in this area too. Overall the breeding effort should be good, especially in the parklands. The snow geese and sandhill cranes are still moving through the province, but most have continued north towards the boreal forest and Arctic. Canada goose broods have been sighted across the province.

Seeding is well underway in the southern part of the province and is just beginning in the parklands. It has been difficult for producers to get on their fields due to the wet conditions in the parklands and those eager to start have had their equipment stuck in the mud. The flooding in the north central and northeastern parts of the province has renewed the interest in draining wetlands and there are quite a few producers out on

the land with their V ditchers. Temperatures in May have been above normal and quite windy, so the land is beginning to dry.

Two recent weather systems blanketed much of southwestern **Manitoba** with 25-40mm of much-needed rain. This provided a bit of respite from the warm and dry spring, but more precipitation is needed, especially in areas south of Brandon, which are typically much dryer than the Minnedosa/Shoal Lake region. Semipermanent (Class IV) wetlands still remain flooded into the vegetation, but many shallower wetlands are stressed or dry in the southern regions. Ephemeral and temporary (Class I and II) wetlands were short-lived in the southern regions this season.

Farming is well advanced in areas south of Brandon where several landowners are done sowing and many more are expecting to finish this week. Areas in Boissevain and Deloraine have increased sowed acreages by tilling through shallow wetland areas that have been wet in recent years. Areas north of Brandon are being sown at a more normal pace. The recent rainfall coupled with warm sunny days has been favourable for upland cover and forage production, which has shown a tremendous growth spurt in the past week. Winter wheat acres are also doing very well.

Waterfowl wasted no time after a slightly delayed arrival in April. Three-bird flights were common among mallards by the 15th of April and lone drakes were common a week later. Canada geese are just starting to hatch, however one brood hatched on the 9th as the goose kept her nest right through temperatures as low as -18°C in the first week of April.

The **Western Boreal Forest** (WBF) received average to above average amounts of snow in most locations this winter. All reports indicate that spring habitat conditions are above average in a large portion of the WBF. Bird reports are also strong; however spring has been late arriving in some northern areas.

There is an abundance of water in the Yukon with mountain snow runoff still to come. Spring habitat conditions are good, although spring is as much as two weeks late. A number of wetlands and lakes are still ice covered, although many waterbirds are present and using any areas with open water. Snow is abundant in the higher elevations and conditions in southern parts of the territory will continue to improve. Conditions are good in the northern Yukon, but are below average in central portions of the territory. Spring habitat conditions should be particularly good in the southeastern corner of the territory. In the next three months, the Yukon is expected to have above average temperatures in the south, below average temperatures in the north, and below average precipitation throughout the territory.

Spring habitat conditions in northeastern British Columbia should be better than they have been in the past four years due to above average snow fall this past winter. This should help improve conditions around Fort Nelson, which has experienced a dry spell in recent years. Above average temperatures and average to above average precipitation are forecast over the next three months in the boreal portions of British Columbia.

In the boreal portions of the Prairie Provinces the habitat conditions are above average. The trend of very good to excellent conditions in northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba continues this year. Northern Alberta has had good runoff – basins, streams, and rivers are very high and conditions area also above average. The drought code for

these areas is low, as is the fire danger rating. The boreal transition zone is strong in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. 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 amounts of precipitation are expected in Manitoba.

A report from The Pas and the Saskatchewan River Delta (SRD) indicates that the arrival of spring and waterbird breeding are behind schedule. It is very wet in this area – with wetlands, lakes, and the SRD at record-high levels. Migrating snow geese went through the area in the second week of May. Large numbers of duck have yet to be seen, although one explanation could be that waterfowl are widely dispersed on the abundant wetlands.

In northern Alberta, waterbird surveys indicate that all duck species have arrived with bufflehead, mallards, scaup, ring-necked duck, wigeon, goldeneye, shovelers, and green-winged teal present in very good numbers. Migrating snow geese and cranes were also observed on surveys.

Spring has also been later than normal in arriving in the Northwest Territories. Conditions in Fort Liard and Fort Simpson are advanced compared to Yellowknife, which is typical. There are no reports from locations further north in the NWT, although information on the internet suggests that the weather is still very cool and spring has not arrived in these locations – it is assumed that most lakes are still frozen. Conditions are expected to be average throughout much of the NWT. While most duck species are back in the southern portion of the NWT, the diving duck species have yet to arrive in any great numbers. Snow geese were observed the first week of May, and the Mackenzie River, a major migratory bird route, has started to break-up. Shorebirds have yet to arrive in the NWT. Over the next three months the NWT expects above average temperatures in the south and below average temperatures in the north, with below average precipitation throughout.

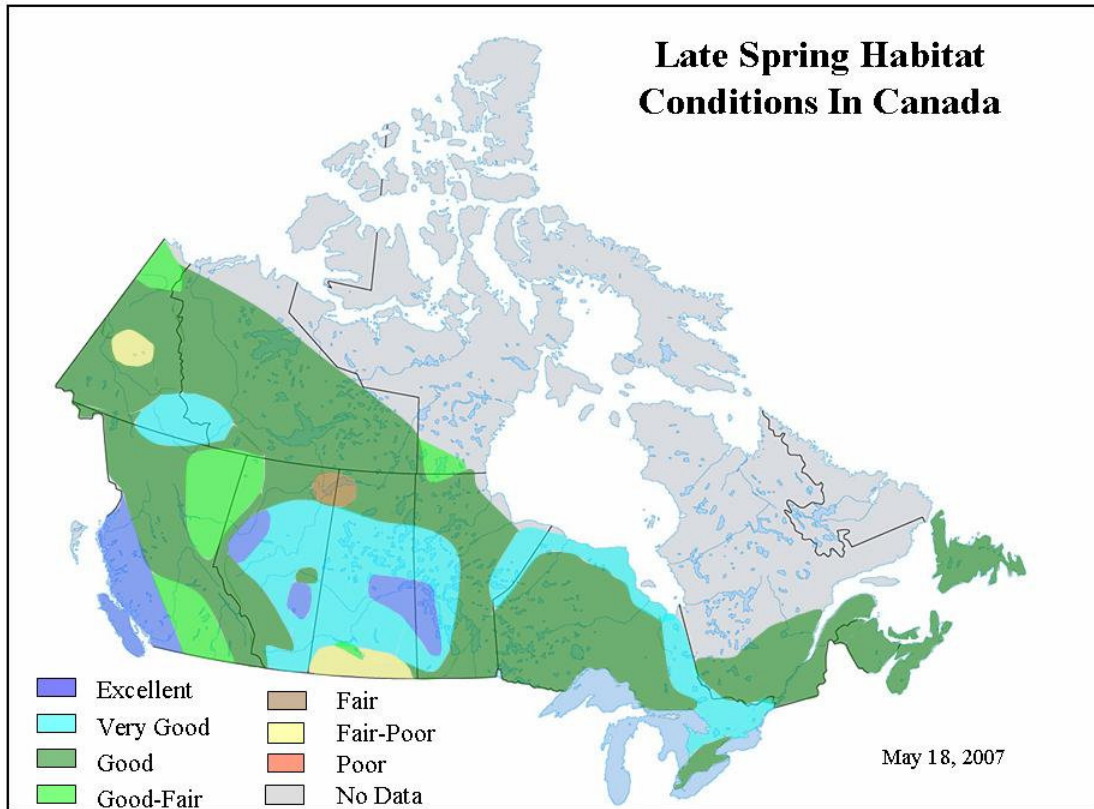
Despite a lack of precipitation that has enabled many of the fields throughout southern **Ontario** to be worked ahead of schedule, habitat conditions remain favourable. The drier than normal conditions have taken their toll on the seasonally flooded wetland base, however, permanent wetlands are still at full capacity well in advance of peak hatch. Conditions continue to grade from good in the southwest to very good across both the southeastern and central parts of Ontario. Habitats in northwestern Ontario have improved as a result of above normal precipitation, while the northeast continues to be rated as very good. Preliminary pair surveys suggest a strong breeding effort is underway across southern Ontario. The extremely warm weather and favourable wetland conditions of late March likely triggered earlier than normal nesting attempts by mallards, however, only broods of Canada geese are being regularly reported from the field. Numerous localized sightings of blue-winged teal and wood duck pairs have been particularly encouraging.

Temperatures were close to average in April across **Quebec**. Total precipitation and snowfall in April were above average for almost all areas except for eastern Quebec. The Lower St. Lawrence and Côte-Nord regions recorded 30% and 60% less precipitation than average, respectively. Total snow precipitation was generally close or

below average for winter 2006 in Quebec; northern regions recorded 30% less snowfall than average. Due to a combination of rapid snow melt and poor snow pack, runoff throughout the province was complete by mid-April. We did not observe a high rise in water levels of the St. Lawrence, which prevented flooding of the nests of early-nesting waterfowl. The abundant precipitation in April provided a good water supply in water courses and wetlands and the mean water level of the St. Lawrence in April was close to average.

The return of cold temperatures towards the end of March and early April contributed to a slightly late nesting season. Consequently, we are observing a number of ducks in pairs and some female mallards, black ducks and pintails are on the nest. There were still a large number of greater snow geese along the St. Lawrence River at the beginning of May. We are also observing a late breeding effort by the resident Canada goose on Varennes Island. Breeding waterfowl surveys are underway in the Montreal archipelago and preliminary nesting counts are good. In the area of St. Peter Lake, the DUC staging habitats were at maximum efficiency last week. Large numbers of greater snow geese, pintails, mallards and black ducks have been observed and spring habitat conditions are generally good.

Waterfowl migration in Atlantic Canada is evident in almost every wetland. Numbers of returning black duck, ring necked duck, blue & green-winged teal and Canada geese are strong over the region. Weather conditions have consisted of below average temperatures and below average precipitation. Waterfowl breeding pair surveys have begun and reports indicate good numbers of breeding pairs over the entire region. Much colder and wet conditions are predicted in the long range forecast and this may have a negative impact on the success of these nesters.



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