



## Early Fall Habitat Conditions in Canada

September 19, 2007

*The prospects for the fall flight are generally good across Canada this fall and numbers of waterfowl are building in southern areas. Wetland conditions are deteriorating in many regions with recent dry weather, but are still providing adequate habitat for migrating waterfowl.*

Wetlands in the coastal region of **British Columbia** are reaching seasonal lows after a generally cool and wet summer. Agricultural crops are being harvested in the region and residual vegetables will provide important food for migrating and wintering waterfowl. Winter cover crops should get a boost from some late summer sunny conditions currently hitting the area. Resident waterfowl are at the end of their moult and Canada Geese have become wary with the beginning of the hunting season. Early migrants have started to arrive.

In the central Interior precipitation was average this spring and summer, and wetlands have maintained good conditions. Waterfowl production was average this year, and the prospects for the fall flight are good. Waterfowl are starting to stage in the area.

Precipitation was below average in the southern Interior this spring and summer, but the summer was cooler than normal and wetland conditions have remained relatively stable. Waterfowl production was better than in the previous few years under drought conditions, but production was still below average over the long term.

In the southeastern Interior the Upper Columbia received average precipitation, but other regions such as the west and southeast Kootenays were dry after a normal spring. Waterfowl numbers were down in the region compared to previous years.

Wetlands maintained good conditions in the Peace region with average precipitation this spring and summer. Haying is still ongoing in some areas, and the fall harvest of cereals and oilseeds has just begun. Waterfowl are starting to stage and there are Canada goose flocks of 50-100 in forage fields. Trumpeter swans and a variety of ducks are also now on the larger lakes. Production was average in the region this year, and prospects for the fall flight are good.

Unsettled weather conditions have prevailed across much of **Alberta** since August with below average temperatures and near normal precipitation. In the eastern and southwestern prairies hot and dry weather continued into September. The mountains have received some snow and 5 cm of snow was reported north of Grande Prairie the third week of September.

Wetland habitat conditions are rated as good to very good in north, west and central prairies. In the southern and eastern prairies conditions are rated fair to poor. Conditions in the parklands range from fair to good in the east and northeast to good to very good in central and western sectors. In the boreal transition zone (BTZ) conditions

are rated as fair to good in the east and very good in the west. Wetland habitat is in good to excellent condition in the Peace Parkland. Pastures are generally in good condition throughout the province with good carryover present, which should improve nesting cover conditions in the spring of 2008. Harvest is nearly completed in the in the prairies. In the aspen parkland, BTZ and Peace parkland harvest has been slowed by recent rains and cooler temperatures.

Waterfowl production and brood survival is believed to have been average to above average in the province this year. As a result, a good fall flight is forecast. Fall migration is just beginning in the Peace parkland and BTZ where there have only been a few scattered sightings of white-fronted, snow and Canada geese. The relatively good wetland conditions will disperse birds at least until the migration is fully underway and colder temperatures freeze smaller ponds. Early season hunting for local waterfowl is reported to be good.

Overall, wetland habitat conditions remain good to excellent in the parklands and poor to fair in the prairies of **Saskatchewan**. In particular, the northeastern part of the province is extremely wet and continues to receive regular precipitation. The Allan and Dana Hills have good wetland conditions and staff are still seeing young broods in the area, suggesting an excellent breeding effort. Migration is now in full swing with duck numbers increasing daily and large numbers of snow and white-fronted geese are moving into the province. The fall flight forecast is good to excellent in the parklands and poor to fair in the prairies.

Harvest is well underway with about 50 – 75% of the crops harvested. Some producers are having a hard time getting their combines into fields because of the moisture, particularly in the northeast. Producers are just beginning to plant winter wheat.

Wetland conditions have deteriorated somewhat in southwestern **Manitoba** with recent dry weather, but they continue to provide adequate habitat for fall migrating waterfowl. Seasonal (Class III) wetlands are now mostly dry and semi-permanent (Class IV) wetlands remain in the good shape, but are showing signs of diminishing water levels. This is most evident in southern areas and is magnified around Boissevain and Deloraine, where wetlands tend to be shallower.

The fall flight is expected to be good in the region this year following good waterfowl production. Waterfowl are abundant and there is ample food and water available for feeding and resting. Mallards and pintails are field feeding at this time and are available in good numbers. Canada geese are also abundant, but are dispersed at this time – likely a result of the plentiful food sources. Arctic geese including eastern prairie population Canada geese and cackling geese arrived in the region in the second week of September as well as the first signs of snow geese, although this migration has been limited at this time. Blue-winged teal are still present in good numbers as well. Reports of early season hunting opportunities with mixed bags have been good and hunting pressure appears to be very low so far.

Early seeding and recent dry conditions resulted in an early harvest in areas south of Brandon while harvest was significantly later in areas north of Brandon, but still on schedule. There has been very little tilling of fields at present, but fall seeded crops such

as winter wheat have been seeded in good quantities in southern regions such as Killarney.

Habitat conditions are average to above average for the majority of the **Western Boreal Forest** (WBF). DUC staff report that migration has begun, although the peak may be later than normal.

In the Yukon, annual precipitation ranged from below average in the central region to average or above average elsewhere. The fall flight has begun and dabblers have been grouping for the last 2-3 weeks. Divers have also begun to stage and ring-necked ducks have been particularly abundant. Dark geese are using the river corridors and groups have been building-up in the south, although they are expected to leave in the next week or two.

In the Northwest Territories (NWT), precipitation was below average at sites along the Mackenzie River, but better in Yellowknife and in the southwest. Areas along the Mackenzie River have had good weather over the past few weeks and birds could be built up. Local ducks are still around Yellowknife, while groups of 100 have been seen moving through, and these are thought to be new (including many immature and female) birds. Migration is expected to peak near Yellowknife later in September. Norman Wells recently received four inches of snow and geese, sandhill cranes, and bald eagles were still moving through as of this week. Ducks have mostly moved through the area, and decent-sized groups of pintails, mergansers, scaup, and surf scoters were noted.

Northeastern British Columbia received 115-150% of average precipitation in the past year, although precipitation was low in the summer months. Waterbird surveys were not conducted in the region this year, but this area typically has good numbers of staging mallards, ring-necked ducks, scaup, and trumpeter swans.

The drought code/fire danger is low for the northern portions of the Prairie Provinces. In the past year, the northern prairies received below average precipitation, while the boreal transition zone received above average precipitation.

Good-sized groups of mallards, wigeon, and diving ducks were observed in September near Lesser Slave Lake. North of Edmonton, there are reports of many bufflehead, goldeneye, mallards. Scaup and dark geese are also building in numbers, whereas ring-necked ducks, blue-winged teal and redheads are few in number. The big push has yet to start, and an average to above average number of waterfowl are expected to move through the area in the next two weeks.

Hunting reports from the Saskatchewan River Delta include success with green-winged teal, blue-winged teal, and mallards. Scaup are present, although not in great numbers. Reports around Melfort are highlighted by observations of abundant snow geese, Canada geese and ducks. High numbers of coots have also been observed.

As the fall flight gets underway, habitat conditions across southern **Ontario** remain favourable despite a hot, dry summer that has resulted in many wetlands having much lower than normal water levels or having gone dry altogether. Wetlands in southeastern Ontario appear to have fared slightly better than those in the central and southwestern areas where drier conditions prevailed. Water levels in all the Great Lakes are below their long-term monthly average for this time of year. This should not impact waterfowl usage of these coastal marshes as many of the near-shore dyked marshes along Lake Erie,

the Detroit River and Lake St. Clair have been pumped to full supply in advance of opening day. The lack of summer precipitation has also impacted corn yields and many fields are being harvested ahead of schedule, providing waterfowl ample field feeding opportunities and added time to capitalize on these food resources. Habitats throughout the northern regions of the province continue to be in very good shape for migrating waterfowl due to a much wetter summer than was seen across the south.

Despite banding results being highly variable between stations, the ratio of immature to mature birds remained relatively similar to past years suggesting that 2007 was an average production year. Good numbers of mallards, blue-winged teal, shovelers, wigeon, pintails and black ducks are beginning to appear on select coastal and larger inland wetlands. Early season goose hunting success was mixed due to the warm weather, but was still enjoyable from all accounts. Prospects for the Ontario fall flight and hunting season are considered good; however, with above average temperatures predicted to continue into October, the early season could be slow.

July temperatures were slightly below normal in all regions of **Quebec**, but were more seasonable in August. In the northern and southern regions, precipitation was below average in July and above average in August. In the Quebec City and western regions, total precipitation was above average upgrading habitat conditions to “very good”. Elsewhere, habitat conditions remain good. The levels of the St. Lawrence and Saguenay Rivers have been decreasing since June and are now around 30 cm below normal.

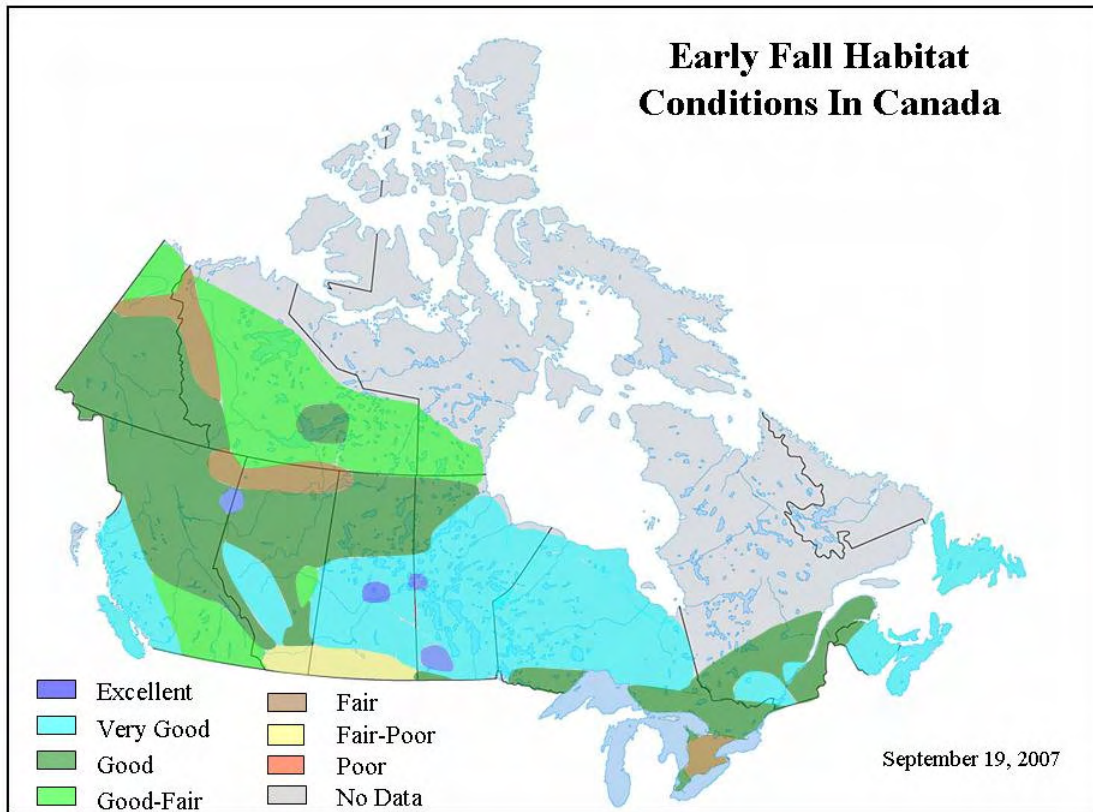
Waterfowl production was good throughout most of the province and a promising fall flight is expected. Large flocks of mallard, wood duck and blue-winged teal have been observed along the Ottawa River and in the Montreal archipelago. Resident Canada geese have been abundant since the beginning of summer. A good hunting season is expected despite the fact that the ponds and small wetlands are harder to reach due to the low water level. Hunting was good in the Saguenay region during opening weekend.

On Bylot Island, greater snow geese laid an average of 3.9 eggs, which was slightly above average. Low predation rates also contributed to an average to above average breeding effort. The banding season revealed a juvenile:adult ratio of 1.11 – greater than last year’s figure of 0.70 and the long-term average of 1.02. The percentage of goslings this fall should be around 26%, which is excellent.

Atlantic population Canada geese were banded from August 6-14<sup>th</sup> near Hudson Bay. Hatching peaked between July 14 and 21, the latest date recorded since banding began in 1997. Of the total number of geese banded, 46% were adults and 54% were goslings, giving a juvenile:adult ratio of 1.17 compared to the average of 1.27. The 2007 banding also had the smallest mean catch size since banding began, indicating very poor productivity.

Habitat conditions throughout **Atlantic Canada** are very good and water levels are normal in the majority of DUC managed wetlands, as a result of abundant precipitation received over the last month. Fall migration is well under way in the region and reports are very good for returning waterfowl numbers. Summer is ending with favourable weather conditions with a mix of sun, warm seasonable temperatures and moderate precipitation. The long range forecast calls for a mix of weather over the region, with

temperatures remaining near seasonal. The hunting season has started in some of provinces and will be in full force by the first week of October.



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