



Ducks Unlimited Canada
Conserving Canada's Wetlands

Spring Habitat Conditions in Canada

April 18, 2008

In British Columbia habitat conditions have remained stable or improved slightly in most regions in the past month. Overall spring habitat conditions in Alberta are below average with the best conditions in the boreal transition zone (BTZ) and north Peace Parkland. In Saskatchewan habitat conditions are good in the parklands and poor to fair in the prairies with very little runoff. The prolonged dry period that began last summer has taken a toll on wetlands throughout the southwestern Manitoba breeding area, and over flights of birds are expected this year. Habitat conditions in the Western Boreal Forest are varied, but are generally good-fair at present. Conditions generally grade from fair-good in the southwest to very good in southeast Ontario, while habitats in central regions continue to be very good. Record breaking snowfall in most regions of Quebec should ensure excellent spring conditions in much of the province. Conditions remain good in Atlantic Canada. Early migrants are now present throughout most of Canada.

Snow has continued to build on the mountains of coastal **British Columbia** and despite the moderate snowfall the snowpack is well above normal, due to cold winter weather. Low elevation snow on Vancouver Island is particularly well developed. Agricultural fields remain dormant as farmers wait for warmer weather. Many migrating waterfowl are moving through the area and building nutrient reserves as they make their way up the coast. Canada geese and wood ducks have initiated nests around the south coast.

Snowfall was variable this winter in the central Interior, but generally average overall and temperatures have been relatively cold this spring. Spring conditions will be good on average, although the Chilcotin area is notably drier than normal. Migrants started returning about 3 weeks ago, but most lakes remain completely frozen over, and the spring thaw is 1-2 weeks later than normal.

Snowfall was above average in the Thompson drainage of the southern Interior, and cold temperatures in late winter and early spring have helped maintain snowpack levels. In the Okanagan drainage overall snow levels are still below normal despite heavy snowfalls during March, and a diminished spring runoff is forecast. Many low elevation ponds are full of ducks, including mallard, American wigeon, green-winged teal, Barrow's goldeneye, scaup and Canada goose.

In the southeast Interior, snowfall was below average, but snowpacks at high and low elevations are near normal due to cold temperatures. However, runoff is still expected to be below average due to a poor frost seal.

Precipitation was slightly above normal in the Peace region, with some large snowfalls during March. However, the south Peace is notably drier than normal. Runoff

is expected to be average in most areas, except the south Peace. DUC project wetlands have just begun to flow and the only open water is around control structures. The majority of projects should fill this spring. Migrants have started to arrive, including mallard, common goldeneye, northern pintail, American wigeon, Canada goose and trumpeter swan.

Overall spring habitat conditions in **Alberta** are below average with the best conditions in the boreal transition zone (BTZ) and north Peace Parkland. Winter precipitation was below normal for most of Alberta, with the exception of the north Peace Parkland, northeast aspen parkland and east BTZ. Warm, dry conditions have prevailed across Alberta for most of the early spring period. Occasional rain showers and snowfalls have been localized and have not led to any marked improvement in habitat conditions. In the northern prairie and south and central parkland runoff was below average resulting in minimal basin recharge and very limited field water and was complete by late March - early April. DUC projects in the Hanna area went into winter with above average water levels and are in good condition. However, overall conditions are rated as fair to poor in the prairie and central parkland. In the eastern parkland conditions are rated as fair to good along the Saskatchewan border north of Provost through Lloydminster and into the northeast parkland. A good winter snowpack and timely spring snowfalls have resulted in basin recharge and some fieldwater formation in the eastern parkland. There is above average runoff potential in the eastern BTZ and conditions in the area are rated as good. The western BTZ and south Peace Parkland are rated as fair and there was minimal runoff and fieldwater in the Grande Prairie area. Runoff began in the north Peace parkland in mid-April and snow still remains; good spring habitat conditions are predicted for this area. Southern mountain snow accumulations are generally average to above average in the Oldman River basin, below average to average in the Bow and below to much below average in the Red Deer River basin. These areas supply the southern Alberta irrigation districts and associated DUC projects. Snow and below normal temperatures are in the forecast for the aspen parkland and prairie for the next 4-5 days. This may create some improvement if it is followed by a rapid melt.

Local breeding Canada geese have begun nesting in southern Alberta. Northern nesting geese (lesser Canada geese, snow geese and white-fronted geese) and swans are currently moving through the aspen parkland and into the southern Peace parkland. Most duck species have been observed in the aspen parkland and small numbers of mallards are now moving into the north Peace parkland. Flocks of northern pintail have been observed in the past two weeks on available backfloods and fieldwater in the aspen parkland.

In **Saskatchewan** habitat conditions are good in the parklands and poor to fair in the prairies with very little runoff. The southwestern part of the province is very dry and warm temperatures have allowed some producers to begin working their fields. Most of the wet meadow and shallow marsh basins in the southwest have little water and cattle producers are already looking to move their cows further north where water conditions are better. In the Missouri Coteau, wetland conditions are poor to fair as this area is also quite dry and there was little carry over water from last fall. In the southeast wetlands are also in poor to fair shape despite a recent wet snowfall. In the northwest, wetland

conditions are good with good carry over water from last fall. In some areas of the northwest there is still snow on the ground, but warm temperatures (20°C) over the last week have increased melting and run off. There is also some snow remaining on the ground in the north central part of the province and there was some flooding this week with creeks overflowing and roads washing out. Thus, wetland conditions in the north central part of the province should be good due to the recent run off and carry over water from last fall. Similar conditions exist in the northeast with remaining snow rapidly melting. Overall, habitat conditions in the parklands should be good for spring migrants.

Birds have been arriving since the beginning of April with mallards and pintails arriving and settling on sheet water as the cold temperatures have slowed the opening of larger wetlands. Last week northern shoveler, gadwall and blue-winged teal moved into the province along with canvasback and scaup. Most other dabblers and divers returned the week of April 14th. Earlier in the month large flocks of Canada geese were seen in the area and a large number of pairs were observed setting up territories on ponds and along the rivers. Large flocks of snow geese have also been migrating through the province on their way to the Arctic.

Producers have begun working the fields in the southern part of the province but operations are a little slower as you move north toward the parklands. Temperatures are expected to be quite a bit cooler this coming weekend with snow forecast for some areas.

The prolonged dry period that began last summer has taken a toll on wetlands throughout the southwestern **Manitoba** breeding area, and over flights of birds are expected this year particularly in the Killarney area. Wetlands in the Minnedosa/Shoal Lake landscape received some relief from a significant snowfall on March 29th and a couple of other snowfalls earlier that week. Unfortunately the much drier Killarney landscape once again missed this precipitation and there are reports of landowners hauling water for wells and applying fertilizer. Strong winds have been frequent - adding to the quick drying period. Run off was virtually nonexistent in the Deloraine area and peaked in the beginning of April in other areas south of Brandon. Runoff in the Minnedosa/Shoal Lake landscape is currently peaking and some snow remains in the bush and fence lines. It is almost too late for additional precipitation to influence the settling of early arriving waterfowl species, but it will be needed to recharge brood waters for those birds that do breed in the region.

Warm weather in early March saw the first Canada goose pairs return to southwestern Manitoba right on schedule on March 13th. Canada goose numbers built through the remainder of March, but below average temperatures during the latter half of the month slightly delayed the migration of other waterfowl. Migration has been swift since the return of warmer weather on the first of April; the first mallards were observed on April 3rd and most early arrivals had been spotted by April 8th. Mallards are now common and are separating into solitary pairs as most wetlands are now open south of Brandon except for some deeper semi-permanent (Class IV) wetlands. Some of the larger deeper bodies of water are still frozen north of Brandon as well.

In the **Western Boreal Forest (WBF)** precipitation in the Yukon has been well below average in the north, above average around Dawson, and near average in the south. Conditions in the Old Crow Flats will no doubt be below average this year, while the

southeast corner of the territory should have above average water conditions. Water has started to open in the south, and many trumpeter swans and common goldeneye have made their way back to these areas. Smaller numbers of Barrow's goldeneye and northern pintails have also been observed.

In the Northwest Territories, spring has yet to make any significant headway and it could be another late spring and thaw, similar to that of 2007. Winter precipitation was below average in the northern portions of the Mackenzie River Valley, while the south fared better, receiving average amounts of snow. Some raptors have been observed this month, but it's still too early for waterfowl.

Conditions in northeast British Columbia should be average to above average this spring. In northern Alberta conditions should also be near average, with the exception of the Peace Athabasca Delta region which has received below average precipitation over the past couple of seasons, and the Cold Lake area which experienced above average winter precipitation. The fire danger is rated very high to extreme in the area southwest of Fort Chipewyan all the way through to Slave Lake and on to Jasper. Canada geese arrived in the southern reaches of Alberta's boreal forest in mid-March, while numbers of mallards and other ducks have been increasing over the past two weeks.

Spring habitat conditions should be average to above average in northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba, improving along the boreal transition zone. Colder temperatures have delayed spring runoff and break-up in the Saskatchewan River Delta, and an above average snowpack measuring 24cm remains on the ground. Canada geese first arrived in The Pas on March 23rd. There's still abundant snow on the ground in the Melfort area, and the spring thaw seems late, but recent run-off has been high. Geese arrived in early April and numbers have been increasing rapidly.

Average temperatures are expected for the majority of the WBF in the coming months, with the exception of the far north (north of Great Bear Lake) where above average temperatures are forecast, and the Saskatchewan River Delta and Hudson Bay lowlands where below average temperatures are predicted. The 3-month forecast for precipitation is generally average throughout the WBF. The southern Yukon and eastern Northwest Territories are expected to receive below average precipitation, while the Norman Wells area, Fort McMurray south to Cold Lake, and the boreal transition zone of Saskatchewan and Manitoba are forecast to receive above average precipitation.

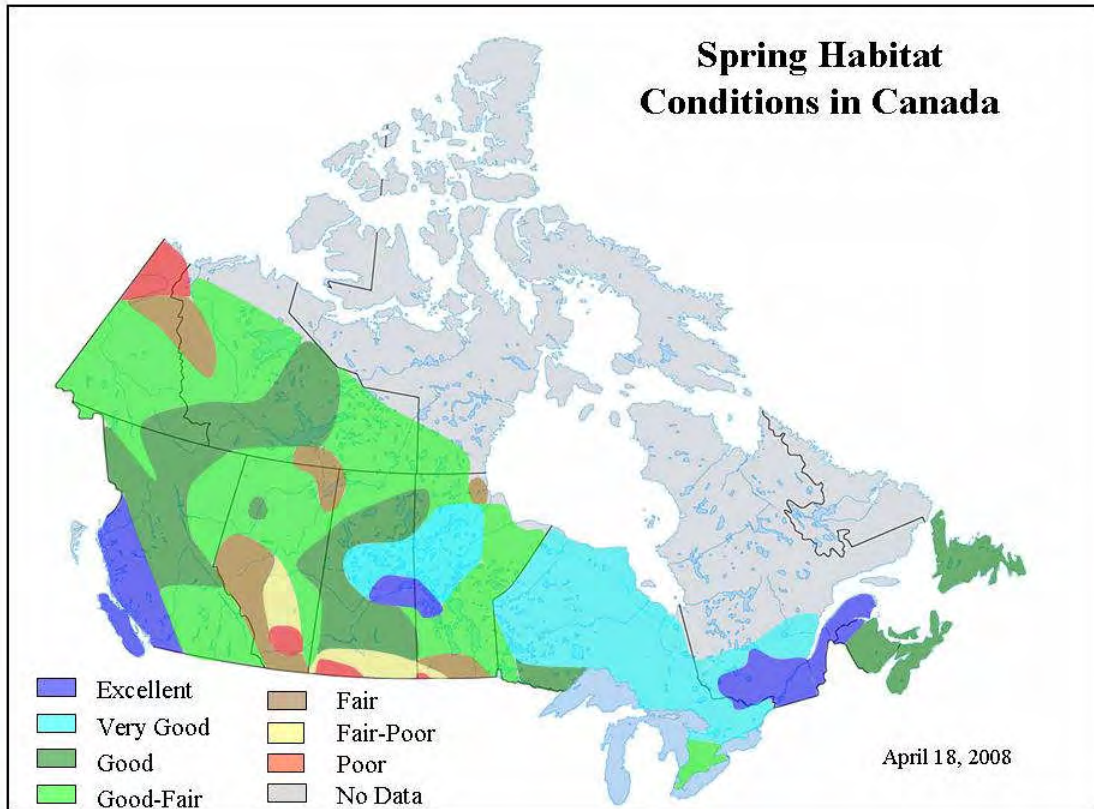
After a long, cold winter, spring-like weather has finally arrived in southern **Ontario**, albeit later than normal in some areas. The melt is largely complete and the above average snowpack and recent rain events have created very good early spring habitat conditions, despite the poor frost seal. Permanent wetlands are at full supply and seasonal wetlands abound across much of the province, although water levels in some are quickly receding. Inland lakes are rapidly becoming ice-free, as are beaver ponds in the forested fringe shield habitat. Conditions generally grade from fair-good in the southwest to very good in the southeast, while habitats in central Ontario continue to be very good. Lakes and wetlands throughout northern Ontario remain iced-over, but a good frost seal and excellent snow accumulations have spring habitat prospects looking very good across much of this region, with slightly drier conditions in the northwest. Most migrants have passed through the region, however, good numbers of scaup are still reported staging

along the lower Great Lakes. Nesting is well underway for Canada geese, while early mallard pair numbers are very encouraging.

Temperatures in March were 2-3.7 °C below average in all regions of **Quebec** and especially in the north. This past March was the coldest on record in 40 years for the Lower St. Lawrence region. Total monthly precipitation was above average for most Quebec regions, except in the Abitibi region where precipitation was 21% below average. Winter snowfall was above average in all but the northern regions of Quebec with Quebec, Montreal, the Lower St. Lawrence and Ottawa receiving more than double the average snowfall for March. Snowpack at the end of March was above average in all but the Saguenay region. It has been the snowiest month of March for Gaspé since 1943 and the second snowiest month for the Quebec region in 65 years. On March 8th and 9th, the “storm of the 21st century” delivered 30-50 cm of snow between Ottawa and Quebec and 20-40 cm over the lower St. Lawrence. The storm lasted for twenty-four hours in some regions and broke existing snowfall records in the Quebec, Trois-Rivieres and Montreal regions. Quebec and Ottawa recorded new snowfall records for winter with roughly 2 more meters of snow than usual. The snowpack in Quebec, Sherbrooke and Gaspé was double the average and exceeded five times the average for Montreal (23 cm) and Ottawa (52 cm).

The average water level of the St. Lawrence River for February and March remained close to average. Warmer April temperatures have begun to melt the snowpack, increasing the water levels above average and a further increase in water levels is expected. Abundant snow precipitation and a good snowpack across all regions has improved the outlook for spring habitat conditions to very good and excellent for regions throughout the province. Flocks of many species have been observed on the St. Lawrence River including goldeneye, common merganser, mallard, American black duck, wood duck and ring-necked duck. Canada geese and greater snow geese started to arrive last week.

Warm spring weather has finally arrived in **Atlantic Canada** along with waterfowl. DUC staff are currently conducting inspections of our large wetlands throughout the region and are reporting lots of waterfowl sightings. Most inland waters are ice-free and water levels are normal or slightly high in some areas for this time of year. Many large flocks of Canada geese have been observed across the region enjoying the warm temperatures and snow-free fields for grazing. There have been early reports of many nesting pairs of geese over the last week, and broods should begin to appear in mid-May. Waterfowl numbers are on the increase and more migrating waterfowl will return to the region over the next few weeks.



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