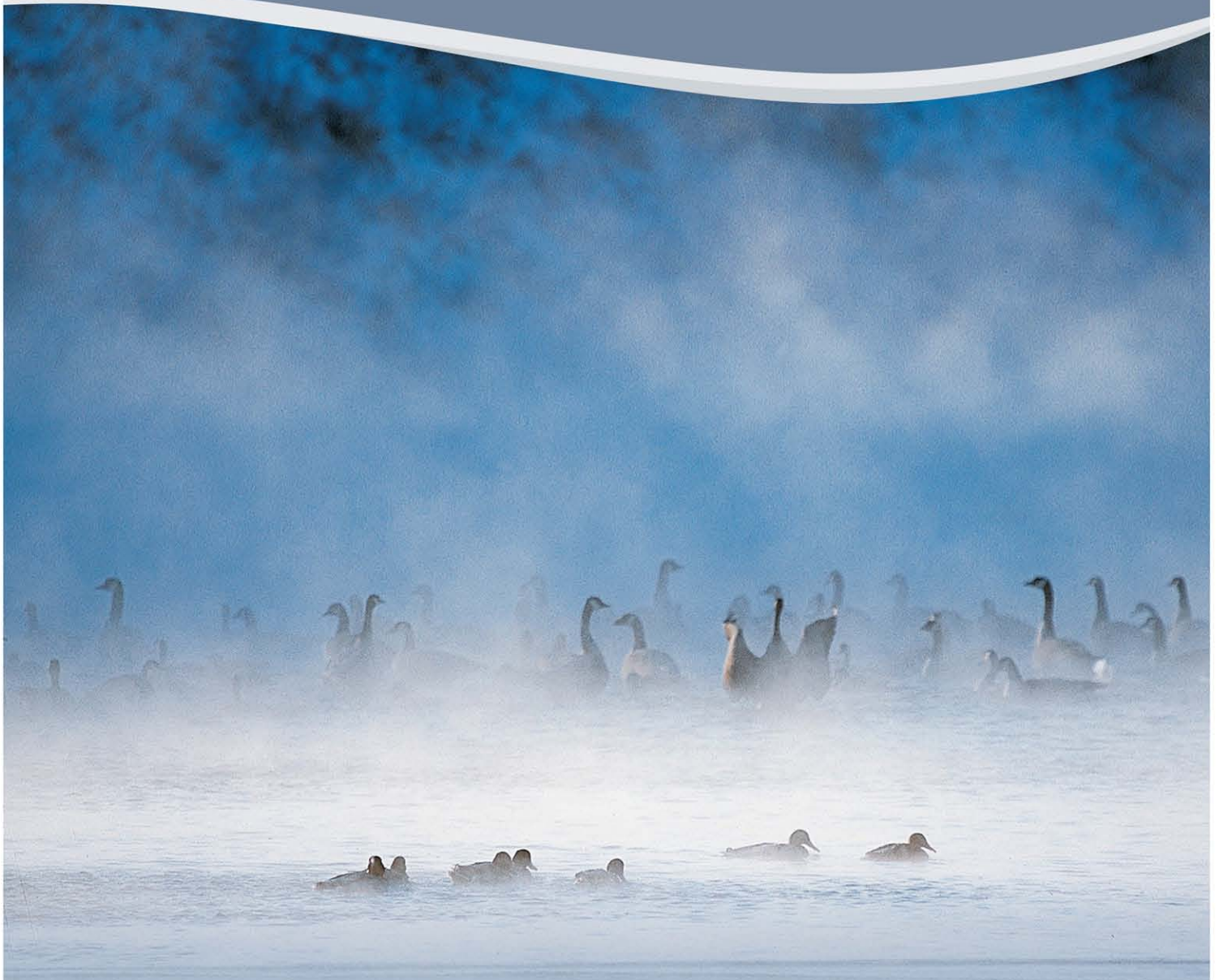


Habitat Report

February, 2011



Ducks Unlimited Canada
Conserving Canada's Wetlands

Active by nature.

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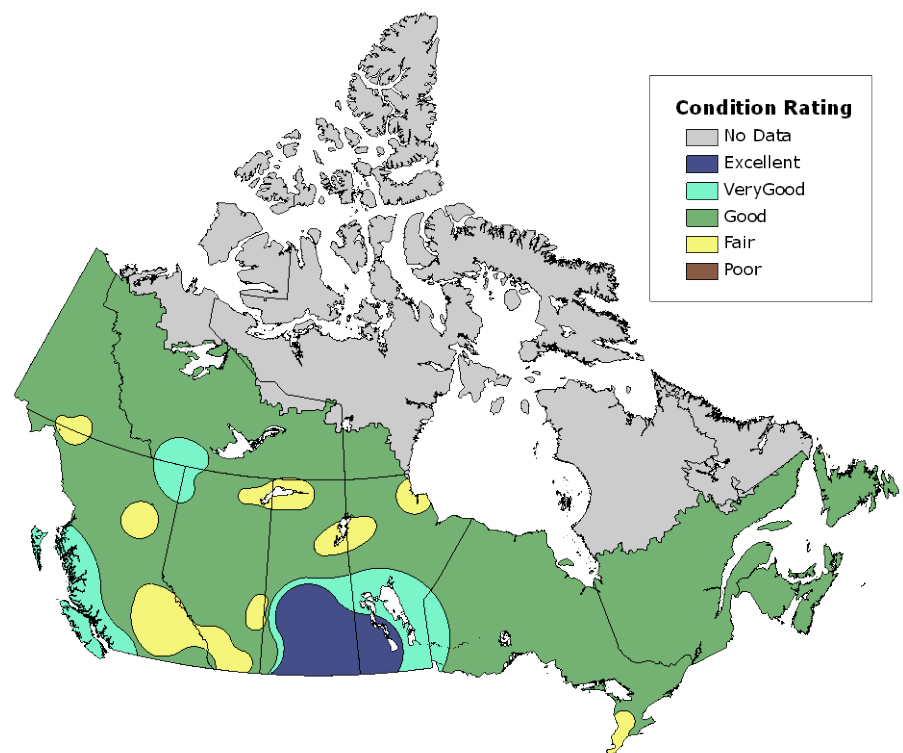
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The following is a compilation of impressions, collected from Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) field staff, of environmental conditions relative to breeding waterfowl. These observations are not based on systematic surveys, and are not intended to describe hunting conditions. This report should only be redistributed as a full PDF document, with DUC permission.

Late Winter Habitat Conditions in Canada

Summary

Conditions have improved in much of the British Columbia/Western Boreal Forest region, where snowfall has been above average in many areas. In the Prairie region, precipitation totals have ranged from 60 to 200 per cent of normal in Alberta, where spring runoff should be fair to good. Excellent spring conditions are expected in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, both of which have had above average snowfall. Although snow accumulations have been variable in the Eastern Region, habitat conditions remain good overall.



British Columbia / Western Boreal Forest

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Along the coast, precipitation has been above normal as a result of the moderate La Niña climate pattern. Snowpacks are currently 115-130 per cent of normal along the south coast, as well as on Vancouver Island. The majority of remnant crops have been consumed, so wintering waterfowl are using local wetland and estuary habitats to acquire nutrients. Large flocks of snow geese, American wigeons, trumpeter swans, and mallards, along with many other species, are building energy as they prepare for their northward migration.



BC Coast – Feb 2011

In the Interior, late-winter snowfall has improved moisture conditions overall. Although snowpack indices are normal in the southeast Interior, they are still below normal for most watersheds in the southern Interior, where mild January temperatures have caused some melting. Melting has also occurred in the central Interior, but cold temperatures have returned and much snow still remains. Although conditions are variable in this region, prospects for spring runoff are good overall.

In the Peace region, snowpack indices are close to normal. However, due to drought conditions last summer and fall, additional snowfall would be required to fully replenish basins. Mild January temperatures caused some melting and sublimation of snow, and the prospects for spring runoff are further tempered by the lack of a good frost seal. Consequently, conditions are still only fair in most of this region.

WESTERN BOREAL FOREST

Temperatures have been fluctuating in the Yukon, swinging from - 50 C (without windchill) to 4 C within a few days. Snowfall has been above average, with some areas reporting up to 130 per cent of normal amounts. In late January, a common merganser was observed feeding in the Yukon River near Whitehorse.

Although Yellowknife has experienced lower than average snowfall amounts, much of the Northwest Territories have had over 120 per cent of normal snowfall. Norman Wells received almost double its normal amounts in January.

Snowfall has been above average in much of northern Alberta, with some areas experiencing two and three times more snow than usual. At this time, Edmonton has already received more snowfall than it has in the last 15 winters, and the season is not over yet.



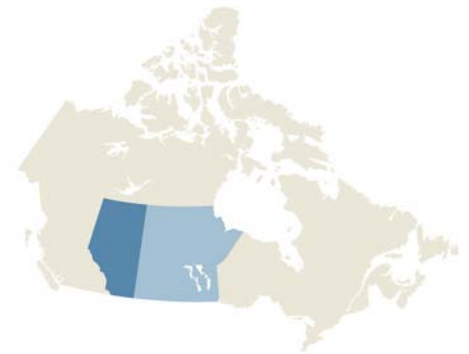
Northern Saskatchewan has also had good winter snowfall, with some areas receiving over 200 per cent of normal amounts. Temperatures have fluctuated, warming to create rainfall for a couple of days, and then swinging back down to -40 C (before windchill) a week later.

Above average snowfall amounts have also fallen throughout northern Manitoba. Flood forecasts suggest that if spring precipitation is above normal, the province could have flooding levels higher than those experienced in 1974.

Prairie Canada

ALBERTA

Winter has been generally snowier and colder than in recent years. Precipitation totals (November 1 to present) have varied from 60-85 per cent of normal in the southern Prairie (including the Milk River Ridge) to 100-200 per cent of normal in the Brooks-Medicine Hat-Cypress Hills area. In other regions, precipitation totals have been: 60-85 per cent of normal in the northern Prairie and eastern Aspen Parkland; 85-150 per cent of normal in the western Aspen Parkland and Boreal Transition Zone (BTZ); and 85-115 per cent of normal in the Peace Parkland.



As a result of widespread snowfall in January and early February, the entire province was blanketed by snow. Recent chinook conditions have consolidated and sublimated the snowpack, particularly in the southern Prairie. Some areas also received freezing rain, which, combined with warm temperatures and wind, has crusted and consolidated the snow.

Alberta Environment reports below average to average snowpack in the southern mountains, which supply the southern irrigation districts. The northern Prairie and eastern Aspen Parkland have approximately 15-40 cm of snow on the ground, while the western Aspen Parkland and BTZ have 30-40 cm. The Peace Parkland appears to be recovering from last year's drought, with near-normal winter precipitation and 30-50 cm of snow on the ground. In all areas, lesser amounts of snow occur on exposed hilltops, while more snow is accumulating in drifts around wetland margins, bush areas and roadside ditches.

Spring runoff conditions in Alberta are a function of the fall frost seal, spring precipitation events and the speed of the spring thaw for winter snow accumulations. At this time, given the generally good frost seal in the fall and the average to above average winter snowpack, spring runoff is predicted to be fair to good through most of the agricultural zone of the province.



Aspen Parkland, AB – Feb 2011

The usual overwintering waterfowl are present on open water areas associated with power plants, rivers and reservoirs. Canada geese will start to migrate and disperse into southern breeding areas in the next couple of weeks.

SASKATCHEWAN



Wadena, SK – Feb 2011

Snow conditions are good to excellent across the province. Most areas have had 60-80 cm of snow, and a late-February snow storm brought an additional 5-10 cm to west-central, central and northeast regions. Temperatures have been quite variable, ranging from lows of -35 C to highs of 4 C.



Last summer and fall were extremely wet, and soil moisture conditions were excellent going into freeze-up. The excessively wet conditions of 2010 produced a good frost seal, which should result in moisture from melting snow running off into wetlands this spring. The Saskatchewan Watershed Authority predicts that spring runoff will be above normal to well above normal throughout the province. This spring, wetland conditions should be excellent across the entire province.

Wet spring conditions will likely make it difficult for producers to access their fields for seeding. Similar to 2010, thousands of acres of land may not get seeded this year.

MANITOBA

Temperatures have been average, while winter snow accumulations have been above average, for most of the major breeding areas of southwest Manitoba. The greatest accumulations have occurred in the western portion of the Minnedosa/Shoal Lake Pothole region. Moisture content in this heavy snowpack is reportedly above average to well above average.



Current conditions, coupled with the high soil moisture content going into freeze-up, will translate into excellent wetland conditions for returning waterfowl this spring. Provincial authorities indicate that spring flooding is imminent and its severity will depend on weather conditions during the spring melt period.

Grasslands and planted forages had a substantial growing season last year, which should translate into favourable nesting cover for early-arriving waterfowl species such as pintail and mallard. Also positive is the significant amount of winter wheat that was sown in Manitoba last year, despite the unfavourable late harvest and sowing conditions faced by producers.



Baldur, MB – Feb 2011

Eastern Region

ONTARIO



Kingston, ON – Feb 2011

It has been a typical winter, with consistently cold temperatures and a good snowpack through most of the province. This is in contrast to last winter, when snow was lacking, and mid-winter warm spells brought rainfall.



Both northern and southern areas have experienced temperatures that were at or slightly below the 1971-2000 long-term average. Snowpack conditions are also similar to the long-term average, with a continued good frost seal. The only thaw occurred between February 17 and 18, throughout southern and much of northern

Ontario, which reduced snowpack in many areas. Although this melt was followed by a return to average winter temperatures, no significant snowfall has occurred since.

Throughout southern Ontario, beaver populations and activity have been relatively high since the fall. As a result, most wetland basins continue to have high water levels. Overall, the province continues to have good (verging on very good) habitat conditions.

QUÉBEC

In January, average monthly temperatures were above normal across the province, with eastern and northern regions experiencing particularly mild temperatures. Since the beginning of February, temperatures have been slightly below normal.



Montreal, QC – Feb 2011

Total precipitation was below normal in January, except in the North Shore region. At this point, February is following the same pattern, with approximately 35 per cent less precipitation than normal. Snowfall amounts were generally close to or below normal in January, especially in Québec City, which experienced its least snowy month of January in the last 65 years. February snowfall amounts have been below normal, except in the Montreal region. This region is also the exception with respect to snowpack, which is below normal in the rest of the province.



The mean St. Lawrence water level is approximately 30-50 cm lower than normal, but there is a good frost seal on the St. Lawrence channel. Habitat conditions remain good throughout the province. If cold temperatures continue and more snowfall arrives, spring habitat conditions should be favourable.

ATLANTIC CANADA

It has been a white winter, with the majority of snow accumulating in southern New Brunswick and western Nova Scotia. The relative water equivalency (determined by snow cover and snow density) is normal in much of northern New Brunswick, but is high in southern parts of the province. Snow accumulation is roughly 35 cm near Fredericton (compared to the long-term average of 45 cm), while other parts of Atlantic Canada are covered by over 80 cm. Relatively late mild temperatures, followed by early snow cover, have limited frost penetration in many areas, which will allow for ground seepage rather than runoff in the spring.



Given the below-normal water equivalency and reduced frost in the upper parts of the St. John River, the spring freshet will likely be reduced this year. This could restrict the number of shallow wetlands that typically support migrant waterfowl and early breeders. In addition, there is concern that some upper flood plain projects may not be flooded, which would result in a lower-than-normal operating level and limited nutrient replenishment. This may decrease food availability for staging waterfowl, and could force activity to non-seasonal wetlands.



Germantown, NB – Feb 2011

The long-range forecast is calling for warm temperatures and rain. However, it isn't spring yet, and March can often deliver a fair bit of snow. This will have an impact on current water equivalency amounts. An average water supply is expected throughout the region, and spring habitat is expected to be suitable for migrants. Shallow wetlands will begin to thaw soon, likely earlier than normal due to thin ice and anticipated warm temperatures. Though the freshet volume will likely be lower than normal this year, most impoundments will continue to operate at normal spring water levels. Overall, habitat conditions are good.