

moderate, and "LIB" for the liberal alternative. We will announce final regulatory alternatives in early June. Public comments will be accepted until May 1, 2003, and should be sent to the address under the caption **ADDRESSES**.

D. Special Seasons/Species Management

iv. Canvasbacks

Since 1994, we have followed a canvasback harvest strategy such that, if canvasback population status and expected production are sufficient to permit a harvest of one canvasback per day nationwide for the entire length of the regular duck season, while attaining a spring population objective of 500,000 birds in the subsequent year, the season on canvasbacks should be opened. If not, the strategy prescribes that the season on canvasbacks be closed nationwide. Last spring, the estimate of canvasback abundance was 487,000 birds, and the number of May ponds in Prairie Canada (1.4 million) was the lowest recorded since surveys began in 1961 (58 percent below the long-term average). The size of the spring population, together with expected natural mortality and below-average production due to the dry conditions, was insufficient to offset expected mortality associated with a canvasback season lasting the entire season length of the "liberal" regulatory alternative and still attain a population objective of 500,000 canvasbacks in the spring of 2003. Therefore, we closed the season on canvasbacks for the 2002–03 hunting season.

In 2002, the Flyway Councils proposed modifications to the harvest strategy (67 FR 59110). We choose not to implement proposed modifications because a thorough technical assessment and subsequent review by all stakeholders has not been conducted. Service technical staff will complete an assessment of the performance of the canvasback population model, as well as a comparison of the expected long-term performance of the current strategy and that proposed by the Flyway Councils in 2002. The results of this review will be available to the Flyway Council technical committees for discussion at their winter meetings.

In 2003, we will again consider the size of the spring canvasback population and model-based predictions of production and harvest in the development of canvasback regulations proposals. We continue to support the harvest strategy adopted in 1994 and believe that it should be used to guide seasons in the upcoming year. However, we will continue to cooperatively work with the Flyway Councils to complete

technical assessment of any proposed changes in the canvasback harvest strategy.

v. Pintails

We will continue to utilize an interim strategy to guide the harvest of pintails. Last year we updated the equations that predict harvest by Flyway, and we will continue to use these in the strategy this year. As we did last year, we will consider population status and expected recruitment using this strategy to predict the subsequent years, Fall Flight. Should circumstances warrant, we will again consider a season length of less than that employed for the general duck season, if warranted by these calculations, to maintain a breeding population of pintails above the closure threshold level established in the strategy.

4. Canada Geese

B. Regular Seasons

We are concerned about the recent status and trend of the Short Grass Prairie (SGP) Canada goose population. Midwinter survey population estimates of SGP Canada geese have declined sharply since 1995–96. Although recent winter indices are still somewhat above the population goal of 150,000 that was established in 1982, these recent indices likely contain a higher proportion of geese of larger races than in 1982. Indices of adult survival of SGP Canada geese have been declining during 1992–2000, and indices of small Canada geese harvested in the Central Flyway appear to reflect the sharp decreases indicated by the midwinter surveys since the mid-1990s.

We encourage the Central Flyway States and Canadian Provinces to exercise caution in the harvest of small races of Canada geese until the status of SGP Canada geese can be more reliably monitored, and to review existing monitoring methods and management plan criteria.

5. White-Fronted Geese

Fall indices of Mid-continent Population (or midcontinent) white-fronted geese have declined from 1,058,000 in 1998 to about 640,000 geese in 2002. Although the 3-year average is currently above the established goal of 600,000, estimates of survival rates for this population have also declined in recent years. We encourage the States and Provinces in the Central and Mississippi Flyways to cooperatively review spatial and temporal harvest characteristics for this population and consider appropriate harvest strategies.

8. Swans

In 1995, we instituted a legal swan season in the Pacific Flyway that permitted the take of a limited number of trumpeter swans. Prior to that time, and beginning in 1962, a tundra swan season had been in effect in the Pacific Flyway. During the tundra swan seasons, it was known that some number of trumpeter swans were taken by swan hunters who mistook them for tundra swans. We authorized this limited take of trumpeter swans in an attempt to reconcile potentially conflicting strategies for managing two swan species in the Pacific Flyway. The potentially conflicting strategies are: (1) To enhance the winter range distribution of the less abundant Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) of trumpeter swans by severely restricting or eliminating swan hunting in portions of the Pacific Flyway currently open to hunting these species, and (2) to optimize hunting of the more numerous and widely distributed Western Population (WP) of tundra swans in the Pacific Flyway. The regulations establishing this limited take have been based on three Environmental Assessments (Bartonek *et al.* 1995; Trost *et al.* 2000; and Trost *et al.* 2001) and three Findings of No Significant Impact regarding these Environmental Assessments (EA) issued by the Service.

The scope of the most recent EA (Trost *et al.* 2001) was the 2001–03 hunting seasons only. Upon completion of these seasons, we have stated our plans to review the results with respect to both tundra swan and trumpeter swan harvests. As we stated in 2001, we view the seasons in Montana and Nevada as operational seasons that are subject to the normal annual review of status and harvest of the affected populations. Adjustments to these seasons are made, if needed, as part of the normal annual regulatory process for hunting migratory birds. The season in Utah was experimental and now that the experimental period has been completed, a forthcoming review, assessment, and determination as to the appropriate course of action for either continuation or suspension of this experimental season will be necessary. As such, the first step in this process is the preparation of a new EA. We expect the new EA to be completed and available to the public for comment in April. Copies will be available upon request from the Division of Migratory Bird Management at the address indicated under the caption **ADDRESSES** or from the Division's Web site at <http://migratorybirds.fws.gov/>.

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