

framework be extended from September 20 to September 30. They also recommended that Rhode Island's September resident Canada goose season framework dates of September 1 to September 30 be made operational.

The Upper- and Lower-Region Regulations Committees of the Mississippi Flyway Council recommended that the experimental early Canada goose season in Huron, Tuscola, and Saginaw counties in Michigan be extended for 1 year. Further, the Committees recommended that the Service grant operational status to Minnesota's Special September Canada Goose Season extension (16–22 September).

The Central Flyway Council recommended that South Dakota's 3-year experimental September Canada goose season (September 16–30) become operational for all of eastern South Dakota (east of the Missouri River) beginning in 2003.

The Pacific Flyway Council recommended that Wyoming's special season framework for the Rocky Mountain population of western Canada geese would consist of an 8-day season during September 1–15 in Bear River, Salt River, Farson-Eden Area, Bridger Valley, and Teton Counties, and the Little Snake River drainage portion of Carbon County. All participants must have a valid State permit for the special season. The number of permits may not exceed 240 in the Bear River, Salt River, Farson-Eden Area, and Bridger Valley area, and 20 permits in the Little Snake River drainage portion of Carbon County. The daily bag limit would be 3, with season and possession limits of 6. Where applicable, the season must be concurrent with the September portion of the sandhill crane season.

#### B. Regular Seasons

*Council Recommendations:* The Upper- and Lower-Region Regulations Committees of the Mississippi Flyway Council recommended that the framework opening date for all species of geese for the regular goose seasons in Michigan and Wisconsin be September 16, 2003. The Committees also recommended that the harvest index (quota) in Minnesota's Lac qui Parle Goose Zone be eliminated beginning in 2003.

The Central Flyway Council recommended regular season frameworks for dark geese in the west-tier States consist of a framework opening date of the Saturday nearest September 24 (September 27, 2003) and a framework closing date of the Sunday nearest February 15 (February 15, 2004). The season could be divided into 2

segments, except in Wyoming, where the season could be divided into 3 segments and evaluated in accordance with Service criteria. Season length would be 107 days, except in Colorado and Texas, where the season length would be 95 days. Daily bag limit would be 5 dark geese in the aggregate, with the following exceptions: (a) In the Western Goose Zone of Texas, the daily bag limit would be 1 white-fronted goose and 3 other dark geese (in the aggregate), and (b) in Colorado, the daily bag limit would be 3 dark geese in the aggregate. The possession limit would be twice the daily bag limit.

#### C. Special Late Season

*Council Recommendations:* The Atlantic Flyway Council recommended that Massachusetts' late Canada goose southern boundary of the coastal zone be extended from the present boundary in Duxbury, south to the Cape Cod Canal.

#### 8. Swans

*Council Recommendations:* The Central Flyway Council recommended that up to 200 tundra swan permits be temporarily transferred from South Dakota to North Dakota beginning in the 2003 season.

#### 9. Sandhill Cranes

*Council Recommendations:* The Central Flyway Council recommended accepting the 2002 Rocky Mountain population of sandhill cranes harvest allocation of 668 birds as proposed by the Pacific Flyway.

#### Public Comment Invited

The Department of the Interior's policy is, whenever practicable, to afford the public an opportunity to participate in the rulemaking process. We intend that adopted final rules be as responsive as possible to all concerned interests and, therefore, seek the comments and suggestions of the public, other concerned governmental agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and other private interests on these proposals. Accordingly, we invite interested persons to submit written comments, suggestions, or recommendations regarding the proposed regulations to the address indicated under the caption **ADDRESSES**.

Special circumstances involved in the establishment of these regulations limit the amount of time that we can allow for public comment. Specifically, two considerations compress the time in which the rulemaking process must operate: (1) The need to establish final rules at a point early enough in the summer to allow affected State agencies

to appropriately adjust their licensing and regulatory mechanisms; and (2) the unavailability, before mid-June, of specific, reliable data on this year's status of some waterfowl and migratory shore and upland game bird populations. Therefore, we believe that to allow comment periods past the dates specified is contrary to the public interest.

Before promulgation of final migratory game bird hunting regulations, we will take into consideration all comments received. Such comments, and any additional information received, may lead to final regulations that differ from these proposals.

You may inspect comments received on the proposed annual regulations during normal business hours at the Service's office in room 4107, 4501 North Fairfax Drive, Arlington, Virginia. For each series of proposed rulemakings, we will establish specific comment periods. We will consider, but possibly may not respond in detail to, each comment. As in the past, we will summarize all comments received during the comment period and respond to them after the closing date.

#### NEPA Consideration

NEPA considerations are covered by the programmatic document, "Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement: Issuance of Annual Regulations Permitting the Sport Hunting of Migratory Birds (FSER 88–14)," filed with the Environmental Protection Agency on June 9, 1988. We published Notice of Availability in the **Federal Register** on June 16, 1988 (53 FR 22582). We published our Record of Decision on August 18, 1988 (53 FR 31341). In addition, an August 1985 environmental assessment entitled "Guidelines for Migratory Bird Hunting Regulations on Federal Indian Reservations and Ceded Lands" is available from the address indicated under the caption **ADDRESSES**.

In a proposed rule published in the April 30, 2001, **Federal Register** (66 FR 21298), we expressed our intent to begin the process of developing a new EIS for the migratory bird hunting program.

#### Endangered Species Act Consideration

Prior to issuance of the 2003–04 migratory game bird hunting regulations, we will consider provisions of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, (16 U.S.C. 1531–1543; hereinafter the Act) to ensure that hunting is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any species designated as endangered or threatened or modify or destroy its critical habitat