

accommodate the reserved hunting rights and management authority of Indian Tribes while ensuring that the migratory bird resource receives necessary protection. The conservation of this important international resource is paramount. The guidelines should not be viewed as inflexible. In this regard, we note that they have been employed successfully since 1985. We believe they have been tested adequately and, therefore, made them final beginning with the 1988–89 hunting season. We should stress here, however, that use of the guidelines is not mandatory and no action is required if a Tribe wishes to observe the hunting regulations established by the State(s) in which the reservation is located.

Population Status

The following paragraphs provide preliminary information on the status of waterfowl and information on the status and harvest of migratory shore and upland game birds.

May Breeding Waterfowl and Habitat Survey

Habitat conditions for breeding waterfowl have improved over last year in the prairie survey areas, except for eastern South Dakota. Most prairie areas had warm temperatures and plenty of rain this spring. Two areas of dramatic improvement over the past several years were south-central Alberta and southern Saskatchewan, where conditions went from poor to good after much-needed precipitation relieved several years of drought. Other areas in the prairies also improved in condition over 2002, but to a lesser extent. However, years of dry conditions in parts of the United States and Canadian prairies, combined with agricultural practices, have lessened the quality and quantity of residual nesting cover and over-water nest sites in many regions. This could potentially limit production for both dabbling and diving ducks, if the warm spring temperatures and good moisture of 2003 does not result in rapid growth of new cover. Eastern South Dakota was the one area of the prairies where wetland habitat conditions were generally worse than last year, mostly due to low soil moisture, little winter precipitation, and no significant rainfall in April. By the time this region received several inches of rain in May, most birds probably had overflown the area to wetter conditions in other regions to the north and west.

In the northwestern survey areas, habitat was in generally good condition and most areas had normal water levels. The exception was northern Manitoba, where low water levels in small streams and beaver ponds resulted in overall

breeding habitat conditions that were only fair. Warm spring temperatures arrived much earlier this year than the exceptionally late spring last year. However, a cold snap in early May could have hurt early-nesting species such as mallards and pintails, particularly in the northern Northwest Territories.

Habitat conditions in the eastern survey area ranged from excellent to fair. In the southern and western part of this survey area, water and nesting cover were plentiful and temperatures were mild this spring. Habitat quality decreased to the north, especially in northern and western Quebec, where many shallow marshes and bogs were either completely dry or reduced to mudflats. Beaver-pond habitat was also noticeably less common than normal. To the east in Maine and most of the Maritime provinces, conditions were excellent, with adequate water, vegetation, and warm spring temperatures.

Status of Teal

Breeding population estimates for blue-winged teal from surveyed areas total 5.5 million blue-winged teal, which is above the 4.7 million needed to trigger the 16-day teal season in the Central and Mississippi Flyways, and the 3.3 million needed to trigger the 9-day teal season in the Atlantic Flyway.

Sandhill Cranes

The Mid-Continent Population of Sandhill Cranes has generally stabilized at comparatively high levels, following increases in the 1970s. The Central Platte River Valley, Nebraska, spring index for 2003, uncorrected for visibility, was 316,676 cranes. The most recent photo-corrected 3-year average (for 2000–02) was 375,875, which is within the established population-objective range of 343,000–465,000 cranes. All Central Flyway States, except Nebraska, allowed crane hunting in portions of their respective States in 2002–03. About 8,800 hunters participated in these seasons, which was 10 percent higher than the number participating in the previous year. An estimated 16,650 cranes were harvested in the Central Flyway during 2001–02 seasons, which was 11% higher than the previous year's estimate. Retrieved harvests in the Pacific Flyway, Canada, and Mexico were estimated to be about 11,650 cranes for the 2002–03 period. The total North American sport harvest, including crippling losses, was estimated at 31,830, which is similar to the previous year's estimate. The long-term trend analysis for the Mid-Continent Population during 1982–2000

indicates that harvests have been increasing at a higher rate than the trend in population growth over the same period.

The fall 2002 pre-migration survey estimate for the Rocky Mountain Population of sandhill cranes was 18,803, which was 12% higher than the previous year's estimate of 16,559. Limited special seasons were held during 2002 in portions of Arizona, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming, resulting in a harvest of 639 cranes, which is 29% below the previous year's record high harvest of 898 cranes.

Woodcock

Singing-Ground and Wing-Collection Surveys were conducted to assess the population status of the American woodcock (*Scolopax minor*). Singing-Ground Survey data for 2003 indicate that the numbers of displaying woodcock in the Eastern and Central Regions were unchanged from 2002 ($P>0.10$); although the point estimates of the trends were higher. Trends from the Singing-Ground Survey during 1993–2003 were –1.3 and –1.6 percent change per year for the Eastern and Central regions, respectively ($P<0.05$). There were long-term (1968–03) declines ($P<0.01$) of 2.3 percent per year in the Eastern Region and 1.8 percent per year in the Central Region.

The 2002 recruitment index for the Eastern Region (1.4 immatures per adult female) was similar to the 2001 index, but was 18 percent below the long-term average. The recruitment index for the Central Region (1.6 immatures per adult female) was 17 percent higher than the 2001 index of 1.3 immatures per female, and was similar to the long-term average. The index of daily hunting success in the Eastern Region increased slightly from 1.8 woodcock per successful hunt in 2001 to 1.9 in 2002, but seasonal hunting success declined from 6.9 woodcock per successful hunter in 2001 to 6.6 in 2002. In the Central Region, the daily success index was 2.1 woodcock per successful hunt in both 2001 and 2002; but seasonal hunting success increased from 10.0 woodcock per successful hunter in 2001 to 11.0 in 2002.

Band-Tailed Pigeons and Doves

A significant decline in the Coastal population of band-tailed pigeons occurred during 1968–2002, as indicated by the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS); however, no trend was noted over the most recent 10 years. Additionally, mineral-site counts at 10 selected sites in Oregon indicate a general increase over the most recent 10