

population and marks the seventh year of a rapidly expanding population in this portion of the State. West Texas supports a small population of whitewings. The 1995 estimate of 15,700 birds was 7 percent below the 1994 estimate. For white-tipped doves, an average of 0.78 birds were heard per stop in both brush and citrus locations in 1995.

Finally, Mr. Dolton presented population and harvest information on band-tailed pigeons. Band-tailed pigeons are managed as two separate and distinct populations: the Coastal Population (Washington, Oregon, California, and Nevada) and the Four-corners or Interior Population (Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico). For the Coastal Population, the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) indicates that there was a significant decline between 1968 and 1994. However, the population apparently has stabilized in the 10 years from 1985 to 1994. Mineral spring counts conducted in Oregon suggest that bandtails had two precipitous declines (in 1973 and again in 1985). Since 1985, these counts indicate that the population gradually has been increasing, but it remains at a lower level than during the 1970s. Counts at these selected springs in 1994 showed a 73 percent increase in pigeon use over 1993. Washington's call-count has shown a nonsignificant decline in the population from 1975-94. A significant population increase of 71 percent was found between 1993 and 1994. Two indirect population estimates suggest that overall bandtail numbers were between 2.4 and 3.1 million birds in 1992. With bag limits and season length continuing to be restricted, a harvest in 1994 of 5,226 pigeons was estimated for Oregon while a harvest of 11,500 was estimated for California in 1993. Neither Washington nor British Columbia chose to open a bandtail season in 1994. In the Four-corners area, BBS data showed a stable population between 1968 and 1994. The combined harvest for all four States in 1994 was 828 birds.

Dr. Jim Dubovsky, Waterfowl Specialist, presented information on 1995 habitat conditions for waterfowl and preliminary estimates of blue-winged teal abundance and harvests. Across most of the northcentral United States and eastern portions of the prairie provinces in Canada, habitat conditions for nesting ducks generally were good to excellent. Abundant water existed in basins and fields, and land managed in conservation easements in the United States continued to provide good nesting cover. In contrast, western portions of the Canadian provinces were extremely dry, and nesting habitats

worsened relative to recent years. The pond estimate for the northcentral United States and prairie Canada combined was 6.3 million. This was the highest estimate since 1979, and was 38% above the long-term average.

The 1995 May breeding population survey yielded an estimate of 5.1 million blue-winged teal, which is similar to the 1994 estimate of 4.6 million, but 23% above the long-term average. The estimated harvest of blue-winged teal during the 1994 September teal season was approximately 272,000 birds, which was 63% higher than that which occurred during the last two teal seasons. However, the 1994 harvest was comparable to historic estimates. The combined special and regular season harvest of all teal last year was 1.4 million, a figure 30% higher than that of recent years, but substantially lower than levels from the 1970s and early 1980s. Harvest rates of blue-winged teal during 1994-95 remained low and were similar to or lower than those which occurred historically.

Mr. David Sharp, Central Flyway Representative, reported on the status and harvests of sandhill cranes. The Mid-Continent Population appears to have stabilized following dramatic increases in the early 1980s. The preliminary 1995 spring index for the Central Platte River Valley, uncorrected for visibility, was 284,800. This index is significantly lower (-30 percent) than the previous year's index of 395,500. However, the photo-corrected 3-year average for the 1991-93 period was 420,866, which was 12 percent above the previous year's 3-year running average and within the established population-objective range of 343,000-465,000 cranes. All Central Flyway States, except Nebraska, elected to allow crane hunting in portions of their respective States in 1994-95; about 19,400 Federal permits were issued and approximately 7,400 permittees hunted one or more times. The number of permittees and active hunters were similar to the previous year's seasons. About 17,300 cranes were harvested in 1994-95, a 4 percent decrease from the previous year's estimate. Harvest information from Alaska, Canada and Mexico are not yet available, but collectively are believed to be about 7,000 during the 1994-95 sport hunting seasons. The total North American sport harvest was estimated to be about 30,000, which is similar to last year's estimate (-4 percent) and near (-7 percent) the all time high recorded in 1990. Annual surveys of the Rocky Mountain Population, which migrates through the San Luis Valley of Colorado in March, suggest that the population

has been relatively stable since 1984. The 1995 index of 20,200 cranes was within the established objective range of 18,000-22,000. Limited special seasons were held during 1994 in portions of Arizona, Montana, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming, and resulted in an estimated harvest of 671 cranes.

Comments Received at Public Hearing

Ms. Susan Hagood, representing the Humane Society of the U.S., expressed concern about the continuation of seasons on species for which we have little population data. She recommended very restrictive or closed seasons on sea ducks and opposed rapidly increasing bag limits on any species with only one year of data. She further suggested that bag limits on common moorhens, snipe, and gallinules were excessive and encouraged "target shooting." She maintained that the opening of hunting seasons in Alaska should be delayed at least two weeks to allow birds to leave their natal areas. Further, she urged the Service to disallow pre-sunrise shooting.

Mr. Charles D. Kelley, representing the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, commended the Service for its management of migratory bird resources. He also indicated that the conservative thought used by the Service in the development of annual migratory bird hunting regulations was shared by the States. As a result of this conservative thought, he reiterated the Service's findings that declines seen in most game species were tied to habitat practices.

Mr. George Vandel, representing the Central Flyway Council and the South Dakota Game Fish and Parks Department, made some preliminary remarks regarding the status of this year's duck breeding populations and nesting conditions in South Dakota. He indicated that this spring's total breeding population was at a high level, with many species at record high levels. He further indicated that many factors contributed to this recovery, including improved precipitation patterns, availability of Conservation Reserve Program lands with high quality nesting cover, and the success of cooperative management programs such as those under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

Mr. Vandel then reviewed several recommendations that were passed by the Central Flyway Council. With respect to early season issues, he supported the request to expand the open area for the hunting of Rocky Mountain sandhill cranes in Wyoming and recommended that no other changes