

respect to seasons on the Rocky Mountain Population of greater sandhill cranes. Pending final results of the March 1995 survey which should be available in June 1995, harvest guidelines would allow an open season in the States of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming if the population is above 16,000 cranes; otherwise, there would be no open season. With an open season, there would be no change in frameworks.

14. Woodcock

Council Recommendations: The Atlantic Flyway Council recommended that woodcock season frameworks remain unchanged in the Eastern Region for 1995-96 unless adverse weather substantially depresses the breeding populations as measured by the 1995 Singing Ground Survey. The Council believes that population declines are attributed to habitat loss and degradation rather than due to current harvest levels.

Written Comments: The Pennsylvania Game Commission recommended that the Service and Flyway Councils develop a harvest management strategy for woodcock in which specific population objectives are identified that would require further harvest restrictions. They also are anticipating a more comprehensive analysis of the woodcock harvest when the Service's Harvest Information Program becomes fully operational.

18. Alaska

Council Recommendations: The Pacific Flyway Council recommended changes in bag and possession limits for ducks in Alaska. Specifically, the Council requested the following bag and possession limits for the two Alaska framework sets of restrictive and moderate/liberal, respectively: North Zone 8/24 or 10/30, Gulf Coast Zone 6/18 or 8/24, and Southeast, Pribilof/Aleutian, and Kodiak zones 5/15 or 7/21; and canvasback limits 2/4. Sea duck limits of 15/30 would be separate, with seasons to remain closed on spectacled and Steller's eiders.

Service Response: With the exceptions of canvasback, the Service agrees with the Council's recommendation and proposes to increase daily bag limits to 7 ducks in the Southeast, Pribilof/Aleutian, and Kodiak Zones, 8 ducks in the Gulf Coast Zone, and 10 ducks in the North Zone. Increases would be consistent with the moderate and liberal packages proposed under adaptive harvest management this year, and would return Alaska to the basic limits prevailing prior to

restrictions initiated in 1988. Duck breeding populations in Alaska-Yukon during 1995 were above the 1955-94 average by 99 percent for mallards, 90 percent for wigeon, 247 percent for green-winged teal, 164 percent for shovelers, and 896 percent for pintails.

Regarding the canvasback bag limit, the Service believes that harvest management of this species in Alaska and in all Flyways should adhere to the harvest strategy that was employed in 1994, which calls for annually assessing several population parameters, including estimated breeding population, habitat conditions, and harvest. Based on current population levels, expected production, and both last year's and this year's projected harvest estimates, the Service believes that a season in all Flyways and Alaska, with a 1-bird daily bag limit, is warranted.

20. Puerto Rico

Written Comments: Puerto Rico recommended that the daily bag limit for ducks be increased from 3 to 4 birds and that the daily bag limit for snipe be increased from 6 to 8 birds. This recommendation was further modified during the Service Regulations Committee meeting when the Puerto Rico representative requested a desire to have Puerto Rico's regulations be consistent with the Atlantic Flyway.

Service Response: The Service agrees with Puerto Rico's request to make duck and snipe daily bag limits consistent with those proposed for the Atlantic Flyway.

Public Comment Invited

Based on the results of migratory game bird studies now in progress and having due consideration for any data or views submitted by interested parties, the possible amendments resulting from this supplemental rulemaking will specify open seasons, shooting hours, and bag and possession limits for designated migratory game birds in the United States.

The Service intends that adopted final rules be as responsive as possible to all concerned interests, and therefore solicits the comments and suggestions of the public, other concerned governmental agencies, and private interests on these proposals. Such comments, and any additional information received, may lead to final regulations that differ from these proposals.

Special circumstances are involved in the establishment of these regulations which limit the amount of time that the Service 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, the Service believes that to allow comment periods past the dates specified is contrary to the public interest.

Comment Procedure

It is the policy of the Department of the Interior, whenever practical, to afford the public an opportunity to participate in the rulemaking process. Accordingly, interested persons may participate by submitting written comments to the Chief, Office of Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, room 634, Arlington Square, Washington, DC 20240. Comments received will be available for public inspection during normal business hours at the Service's office in room 634, Arlington Square Building, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Arlington, Virginia. All relevant comments received during the comment period will be considered. The Service will attempt to acknowledge comments received, but substantive responses to individual comments may not be provided.

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" (FSES 88-14), filed with EPA on June 9, 1988. Notice of Availability was published in the **Federal Register** on June 16, 1988 (53 FR 22582). The Service's Record of Decision was published on August 18, 1988 (53 FR 31341). Copies of these documents are available from the Service at the address indicated under the caption **ADDRESSES**.

Endangered Species Act Consideration

The Division of Endangered Species is completing a biological opinion on the proposed action. As in the past, hunting regulations this year will be designed, among other things, to remove or alleviate chances of conflict between seasons for migratory game birds and the protection and conservation of endangered and threatened species. The Service's biological opinions resulting