They further requested that the Service should reimburse them for their losses.

Several individuals from Connecticut supported the season closure on Canada geese breeding in Northern Quebec, but commented that the Maritime Canada goose population was stable. They believed that a limited season in the New England area is justified because the hunting season on the Maritime population in Canada was not closed. In addition, five petitions containing 302 signatures were received from residents of New York and Connecticut opposed to the closing of the Canada goose season in New York and Connecticut. Another individual from Massachusetts was critical of the Service and State wildlife biologists for not making a bigger effort in previous years to reduce the season length and bag limits.

Several individuals from Maine expressed their disappointment with the season closure on Canada goose hunting and asked the Service to reconsider a limited 26-day season with a 1-bird daily bag limit. This would allow Maine hunters to hunt resident geese while having a negligible effect on the migratory goose populations.

In Maryland, the Queen Anne's County Chamber of Commerce requested that a moratorium on all Canada goose hunting be in effect during the 1995-96 season rather than allowing some seasons to occur on resident geese. They added that these seasons have the potential of increasing the harvests of migratory geese as well. Because of the traditional and economic importance of goose hunting in their area, they maintain that a total ban on Canada goose hunting would be the quickest way to rebuild the population and reopen the hunting season.

Two individuals from Massachusetts, complained that migratory geese have been declining for years due to overharvesting, and as a result, many were remaining to breed locally as resident geese. They were glad that the Service finally recognized the problem, but felt that jeopardizing the non-consumptive user because of benefits to hunters was unconscionable.

The National Wildlife Federation expressed support for the Service's proposal to suspend the Canada goose season throughout the Atlantic Flyway for the 1995-96 hunting season. Furthermore, they urged the Service to set goose hunting regulations that would increase the harvest of nonmigratory resident geese in those few Atlantic Flyway areas that would not be closed.

An individual from the Eastern Shore of Maryland expressed support for the closure of the regular Canada goose season for as long as it takes to rebuild the population to the levels of the mid-1980s. Other individuals from Maine and New York supported the suspension of the Canada goose season on the East Coast and one person from Maryland requested a five-year moratorium on the hunting of migratory Canada geese.

The Humane Society expressed support for the proposed closure on Canada geese and further urged that the Service close the season on Canada geese throughout the Atlantic Flyway with no exceptions.

An individual from Minnesota recommended a season opening no earlier than October 7 and closing no earlier than November 20 for the Lac Qui Parle Zone in Minnesota. He further recommended that the quota be set at 7,500 Canada geese.

In the Pacific Flyway, an individual from Washington urged additional protection for the dusky Canada goose population wintering along the Chehalis River.

Service Response: Based on the continuing decline in the number of breeding pairs of Atlantic Population (AP) Canada geese, the Service endorses the Atlantic Flyway Council's recommendation to suspend the 1995-96 regular Canada goose season in the Chesapeake and Mid-Atlantic regions of the Atlantic Flyway, with exceptions for West Virginia and a portion of Pennsylvania. The substantial drop in numbers of AP Canada geese (27 percent from 1994 and 75 percent from 1988) has continued despite harvest restrictions imposed in 1992. However, the Service does not support the recommendation to provide a 30-day season between October 1 and November 30, with a 1-bird daily bag limit, for States in the New England Zone. The AP Canada geese are currently managed under an approved Flyway Management Plan as a single population unit, including both Northern Quebec and Maritimes breeding areas. The Service will continue to manage geese on a population basis, guided by cooperatively developed management plans.

The information available to separate these populations into two units, as the basis for the New England Zone, is currently very limited. Survival rates, based on limited bandings, are actually lower for the Maritimes component of the population than for geese in the area where the Flyway Council recommended a complete season closure. Also, productivity information, which would help assess the differences in survival rates, is very limited. In addition, only 2 years of populationsurvey data are available for Canada geese breeding in the Maritimes, and these are too inconclusive to indicate whether numbers of breeding pairs are stable or declining. The Service does not oppose the delineation of a Maritime unit of AP Canada geese, if warranted, but believes that more information is needed before beginning a harvest strategy different from that for the component breeding in Quebec. Therefore, the Service encourages the Flyway Council to work cooperatively with the Canadian Provinces during the coming year to gather more data, review the key population parameters involving the Maritime component of AP Canada geese, update its AP Canada goose management plan, and make recommendations regarding an appropriate harvest strategy for this group of geese.

The Service recognizes the recreational and economic hardships to hunters and the non-hunting public that will result from suspending the regular hunting season on AP Canada geese this year in the Atlantic Flyway. However, recent breeding pair surveys indicates that this population has undergone a dramatic decline over the past few years and the Service agrees with the Atlantic Flyway Council that very stringent harvest control measures are needed to prevent further declines from occurring. Also, regulatory restrictions taken in 1992 to reduce the harvest were ineffectual and further declines in the population have continued. Canada, in response to these dramatic declines, has joined the Service in imposing season closures during the 1995-96 hunting season. Thus, the Service wishes to minimize further risk to the breeding population that would result from offering a limited hunting season and to focus attention towards rebuilding the population. The Service will continue to work closely with Canada, and the Atlantic Flyway Council to closely monitor and annually reevaluate the population status of AP Canada Geese.

Regarding special early-season framework dates, the Service concurs with the Atlantic Flyway Council that the special circumstances associated with the Flyway-wide closure of the regular Canada goose season warrant a reevaluation of the special early Canada goose season framework dates throughout the Atlantic Flyway. The Service agrees to work with the Atlantic Flyway Council during the coming year to determine if further changes to the special early-season framework dates can be accommodated without adverse impacts to migratory Canada geese in the Atlantic Flyway.