Regarding the Lac Qui Parle Zone in Minnesota, the Service only establishes the frameworks, or outer limits, for dates and times when hunting may occur and the number of birds that may be taken and possessed. The State of Minnesota selects the actual season dates. This year, Federal frameworks allow for a 30-day season, or when 16,000 birds have been harvested (whichever occurs first), between the Saturday nearest October 1 and January 31. In addition, the State may split the seasons into two segments.

Regarding the Central Flyway Council's request to increase the darkgoose aggregate bag limit from 3 to 4 for the west-tier States, the Service concurs with the requested increase for Canada geese. Additionally, the Service is encouraged by the efforts of the Central Flyway Council to begin the process of revising dark-goose management plans with a target completion date in 1997. In the interim, current Cooperative Management Plans would allow for the proposed increase in Canada goose bag limits in the West-Tier States. Comments specific to white-fronted geese are addressed under Item 5. White-fronted Geese.

Regarding the Pacific Flyway Council's request to increase bag limits on Canada geese in portions of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming, and limits on cackling Canada geese in portions of Oregon and Washington, the Service concurs.

C. Special Late Seasons

Council Recommendations: The Atlantic Flyway Council recommended a new experimental late season for resident Canada geese in New York, and additional days and area modifications for existing seasons in New Jersey, South Carolina, and Georgia. In addition, because of the high harvest of migrant Canada geese, the Council recommended suspension of the special late season in the Coastal Zone of Massachusetts.

The Pacific Flyway Council recommended revision of the Canada goose season framework in Cowlitz County south of the Kalama River and Clark County, Washington, to allow a special late season. The season would be subject to the following conditions: (1) season dates would be February 5 through March 10, (2) bag limits and checking requirements would be the same as the regular season, except that the season on cackling Canada geese would be closed, (3) the season would end upon the attainment of a quota of 5 dusky Canada geese (this quota would be taken from the total of 90 allocated under the regular season), and (4) fields

selected for the season would not have more than 10 percent duskys in the flocks using the fields. Additionally, the season would be contingent upon an operational hazing program in place in the hunt area, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal Damage Control (ADC) in Washington. ADC would identify fields receiving depredation and contact hunters from a list supplied by the Washington Department of Fish and Game (WDFG). WDFG would evaluate season effectiveness and estimate harvest, subspecies composition, hunter participation, and report band recoveries.

Service Response: The Service concurs with the above recommendations.

5. White-fronted Geese

Council Recommendations: The Central Flyway Council recommendations regarding dark geese involve white-fronted geese. See item 4. Canada Geese. Specifically pertaining to white-fronted geese, the Council recommended an increase in the season length in the Eastern Goose Zone of Texas from 72 to 86 days.

The Pacific Flyway Čouncil recommended several changes to whitefronted goose frameworks. The Council recommended that special bag-limit restrictions on whitefronts be removed by placing them within the overall dark goose limits except in the primary whitefront harvest areas in Alaska; the Counties of Lake, Klamath, and Harney in Oregon; and in the Northeastern and Balance-of-State Zones in California. In Oregon, the Council recommended that all whitefront seasons be concurrent with dark goose seasons. In California, the Council recommended that the whitefront season be extended by two weeks in the Sacramento Valley special goose closure portion of the Balance-of-State Zone.

Written Comments: The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department recommended that the Service's proposed bag limit of 5 dark geese, which could contain no more than 1 white-fronted and 4 Canada geese, be modified to allow no more than 2 white-fronted geese within a 4dark goose aggregate bag in the Western Goose Zone of Texas. Texas indicated that a 2-bird daily bag limit on whitefronts would maintain harvests at about current levels (3,500) in the Western Goose Zone of Texas.

An individual from Texas recommended maintaining the existing white-fronted goose daily bag limit in the Western Goose Zone of Texas at 3 birds. He further questioned the Service's mid-winter survey data and

argued that if the Service wanted to limit the harvest of whitefronts until better data was available then the Service should increase the dark-goose aggregate daily bag limit to 4 birds, of which no more than 3 could be whitefronts.

Service Response: While the Service concurs with the Central Flyway Council's request to increase the daily bag limit from 3 to 4 Canada geese in the dark-goose aggregate bag limit for the West-Tier States (see Item 4. Canada Geese), the Service believes that it is not appropriate for white-fronted geese. Limits for white-fronted geese in the aggregate bag limit have in the past been more liberal in the western portion of the Central Flyway, which includes the West-Tier States and the Western Goose Zone in Texas, because whitefronts were relatively scarce and occurred almost incidentally in the harvest. However, biologists have recently identified a large group of wintering whitefronts in the Western Goose Zone in Texas, which are believed to be part of the Western Segment of the Mid-Continent Population of greater whitefronted geese. Further, the annual harvest of whitefronts in the Western Goose Zone of Texas has averaged over 3,500 during the past 3 years, which is substantially higher than that occurring in the rest of the western portion of the Flyway. Because of the large number of whitefronts now known to winter in the Western Goose Zone in Texas, the Service believes that the whitefront limits should be more in line with the remainder of those areas in the range of the Western Segment Population of Mid-continent Population of greater white-fronted geese. The Service also believes that the limits should be similar throughout the western portion of the Flyway. Therefore, the frameworks that follow include a daily bag limit of no more than 1 whitefronted goose in the aggregate bag limit for the West-Tier States, including the Western Goose Zone in Texas. The Service is encouraged by progress initiated by the Central Flyway Council to revise dark-goose management plans, including those for the Mid-Continent white-fronted goose population. The target completion date, during 1997, should allow for additional datacollection efforts on this group of whitefronts wintering in the Western Goose Zone in Texas.

Regarding the Pacific Flyway Council's recommended changes in frameworks governing the hunting of white-fronted geese, the Service concurs and notes that the changes are in accordance with the harvest strategy