developed by the Council, Native groups in Alaska, and the Service.

7. Snow and Ross's Geese

Council Recommendations: The Atlantic Flyway Council recommended extending the framework closing date for snow geese to March 10.

The Upper-Region and Lower-Region Regulations Committees of the Mississippi Flyway Council recommended that the framework closing date for light geese be extended to March 10 and the daily bag limit be increased to 10 birds.

The Central Flyway Council recommended that the framework closing date for east- and west-tier light geese be extended to March 10.

Public-Hearing Comment: Mr. Lloyd Alexander commended the Service for extending the framework closing date on greater snow geese to March 10, but asked the Service to consider the option of allowing states to split their seasons into 3 segments. He believed that the requested option is needed to allow more flexibility in helping farmers deal with crop-depredation problems.

Written Comments: The Pennsylvania Game Commission recommended that the State of Pennsylvania be included in those wintering States offered an extended framework closing date of March 10. They stated that increasing the framework would allow farmers to deal with depredation problems and provide additional hunting opportunity to Pennsylvania hunters.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission requested that the 17 Rainwater-Basin counties proposed by the Service to be excluded from the area where the framework closing date for snow goose hunting would be extended to March 10 be included in the March 10 framework-closing-date area. Further, they request that Burt, Washington, and Douglas Counties north of Interstate 80 be added to the March 10 frameworkclosing-date area. They also request that in lieu of Interstate 80, the Platte and North Platte Rivers be the boundary separating the two areas with different framework closing dates. They state that the reasons for these recommendations are to increase the harvest of snow geese and the primary concentration of latewinter snow geese in Nebraska is in the Rainwater-Basin counties and along the Missouri River.

Service Response: The Service concurs with the requests to extend the framework closing date for light geese to March 10 in the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central Flyways, but believes that this extension should be limited to the primary wintering range of light geese in each Flyway. For the 1995-96 hunting

season, Interstate Highway 80 will be the northern boundary of this extension in the Central and Mississippi Flyways, with the exception of Nebraska. In Nebraska, the Platte River will serve as the boundary. In the Atlantic Flyway, the extension will be limited to the States of Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia.

Regarding Nebraska's recommendation to include the Rainwater-Basin Counties and three counties north of the Platte River in the late-hunt area, the Service does not agree with the recommendation. The Counties north of the Platte River were not considered primary wintering areas for light geese. The Rainwater Basin is an important spring staging area for many species of migratory birds, and biologists believe that hunting activities in March could be disruptive, increase potential for disease outbreaks, and be incompatible with other uses.

The Service concurs with the recommendation to use the Platte River as the boundary for the March 10 extension of the framework closing date in Nebraska. If there is a need to refine this boundary, the Service requests input from the two Flyway Councils to establish biological criteria for such a refinement. These criteria should include at a minimum the number of geese using an area and the frequency among years an area is used for wintering. In the absence of defined criteria, the Service will continue to use Interstate 80 and the Platte River in Nebraska as the boundary in the Central and Mississippi Flyways. The Service also reminds States that additional areas proposed for inclusion in the late-hunt region should be submitted to their respective Flyway Council for consideration. The Service will work with the Flyway Councils to develop specific criteria for use in the 1996-97 hunting season.

8. Swans

Council Recommendations: The Pacific Flyway Council reiterated its recommendations for a swan season in portions of Montana, Utah, and Nevada (see the June 16, 1995, Federal Register), except that the period should be 3 years instead of 5 years and the trumpeter swan quota allocation was made. Features of the Council's recommendation include: (1) changing ending framework dates in all three States from the Sunday closest to January 20 to December 1 for Montana, Sunday closest to December 15 for Utah, and the Sunday following January 1 for Nevada; (2) changing the hunt area in

Montana by deleting those portions of Pondera and Teton Counties west of U.S. Highways 287-89 but including all of Chouteau County; (3) reduce Utah's statewide season to just the Great Salt Lake Basin, defined as those portions of Box Elder, Weber, Davis, Salt Lake, and Tooele counties lying south of State Highway 30 and Interstate 80/84, west of Interstate 15, and north of Interstate 80. Number of swan permits would remain unchanged for Montana (500) and Nevada (650) but would be increased from 2,500 to 2,750 for Utah. A trumpeter swan quota of 20 birds would be allocated, with 15 to Utah and 5 to Nevada, with the season being closed either by the framework date or attainment of the quota, whichever occurs first. All hunters in Utah and Nevada would be required to participate in a mandatory parts check at designated sites within 72 hours of harvest for species determination; and hunters in Montana would continue to participate in a voluntary billmeasurement card program. The States would continue to monitor harvest composition, swan population during the hunt, and collect related harvest data. This information would be reported to the Service in a preliminary report by March 31 and a final report by June 30, 1996.

The Council offered the proposed frameworks in an attempt to forward trumpeter swan range expansion efforts throughout the western states and to cooperate with the Trumpeter Swan Society in their efforts with this species. The quota on trumpeter swans is believed to be biologically insignificant and estimated to be less than 1 percent of the population. The combined sport and subsistence harvest of Western Population tundra swans has averaged about 10 percent of the midwinter index during the past 10 years without negative impact to population status. In Utah, 26 percent of the swan harvest has occurred after December 1 and 15 percent after December 15, with December harvests as high as 57 percent in 1993. The Council believed that until December hunts can be demonstrated to threaten trumpeter swans they should be allowed to continue. Between 1962-94, upwards of 98 percent of the Utah harvest occurred in the Great Salt Lake area; therefore, closing of other areas will mainly remove local opportunity but not have a great effect on the overall harvest. The 250 (10 percent) increase in permits for Utah is requested to replace opportunity and harvest lost through area and season closures. Nevada biologists have no data suggesting that State's season is having any impact on