

California Duck Hunters Sweat It Out As Warning Of Bag, Season Cut Sent

By DEVAN L. SHUMWAY
SACRAMENTO (UPI) — California's 180,000 duck hunters are going to get cut somewhere this year.

Facts are beginning to pile up. The first hint came from the Interior Department, which reported there will be a "moderate reduction" in the number of ducks flying southward along the Pacific Flyway this year.

"The reduction in pintails will be greater than that for mallards," said the agency. "The flight of canvasbacks, redheads and ruddy ducks, which are not so important in the Pacific Flyway as elsewhere, will be drastically reduced."

Then came director William E. Warne of the California Fish and Game Department. He admitted that the picture, although not grim, is far from ideal.

Some fish and game sources believe that part of the reason for

the cut may be political.

Limits of hunts within the nation's flyways are set by the Interior Department. State agencies act to set their own seasons within those limits.

Last year, for instance, the federal government allotted California 105 days and the Fish and Game Commission set a 35-day season within those limits, from October 11 to January 13.

The limit was set at 10 birds. This year, something is going to have to give. Either the length of the season, or, more probably, the total bag.

Frank Kozik, Fish and Game Department waterfowl expert, said that breeding ground surveys in Northern Canada, where the waterfowl go to nest, are still under way—about a month late.

Generally, a few flights of birds already have made their way over California by the middle of August. So far this year, however, there have been no reports of the migrations.

California sent northward more breeding ducks than normal, but when they arrived in the northland, they ran into problems, according to Kozik.

The major problem was a cold spring—a situation where the ice packs on some northern breeding areas were frozen until as late as June 10.

As a result, the ducks nested late. And the surveys — which give the wildlife people some idea of how the flight is going to look—are late.

But the Pacific Coast area actually will be in much better shape than elsewhere. The Pacific area will get only a slight reduction.

At the same time, the Atlantic Flyway will have a "moderate decrease" from the low population level of last year; the Mississippi Flyway will suffer a "marked decrease" and in the Central Flyway there also will be a "marked reduction."

That's where the politics comes in. If the other three flyways have their seasons' trimmed, it seems to be politically expedient to have the same done in the Pacific Flyway, according to one F&G source.

"The Eastern interests have a sort of a dog in the manger attitude about this," said the source. "They figure that some of the ducks might come their way, I guess."

This, of course, is not possible. The flyway concept, first described in 1935 by F. C. Lincoln of the Fish and Wildlife Service, disproves this idea entirely. The ducks fly south along generally the same route every year. This has been proved by banding.

California bands about 30,000 ducks and 5,000 geese each year to gain a better working knowledge of the flyway which along the Pacific states includes California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, Utah and Arizona.

The state Fish and Game Commission met in San Francisco August 19 to set migratory waterfowl regulations for the 1959 season.

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