

# **The Waterfowl Councils**

**A Conservation Partnership**



**Circular 78**

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# **THE WATERFOWL COUNCILS**

## **A Conservation Partnership**

What is a Waterfowl Council?

It's doubtful if many duck hunters know the answer to that question. Yet these Councils are responsible for the planning of many programs that will influence the kind of duck hunting these same sportsmen will have in the future.

Because the activities of the Waterfowl Councils do mean so much to so many people - not only to duck hunters but to the millions of people who get their fun just watching the birds - this circular has been prepared to tell the Council story. Its purpose is to explain the basic waterfowl problem and the current approach to a solution, why the Councils came into existence, how they are organized, what they seek to do to improve management of the waterfowl resource, and ways in which interested people can help to achieve the goals that the Waterfowl Councils establish.

Right at the outset it should be explained that the Federal Government under international treaties with Canada and Mexico is responsible for the conservation - that also includes management - of migratory waterfowl. The discharge of that responsibility rests with the U. S. Department of the Interior and, more specifically, with the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife of the Fish and Wildlife Service. However, the Service recognizes that Uncle Sam by himself can never do the job that's called for in waterfowl management. He must have the active assistance of every other agency interested in wildlife resources - both governmental and private - if the job is to be done. It was to develop such a partnership approach to the terrific task of solving today's waterfowl problem that Waterfowl Councils were created.

### **Our Waterfowl Problem**

Our present waterfowl conservation difficulties are the result of three things. The number of people on this Continent is rocketing upward and more and more of us are turning to the outdoors and wildlife resources for recreation. As the demand for more opportunity to enjoy wildlife increases, the habitat needed to produce and maintain wildlife shrinks steadily in the face of urban, industrial, and agricultural encroachment. At the same time, man's advances toward an easier way of life for himself through technology - modern highways, high-speed cars, electronic bird calls, better guns, drainage, and pesticides - are giving the wild creatures new troubles in their reduced living space. How to approach this big problem of keeping our waterfowl in a complex world is the concern of wildlife managers generally.

### **Ducks Supply the Pattern**

The ducks themselves have had something to say about how we should organize our conservation efforts. Basically, waterfowl of this Continent are divided into groups that have discernible patterns of migration between their nesting and wintering grounds. Hunters, by returning the bands they find on the legs of ducks and geese they shoot,

have produced this information. Although there is considerable overlapping of these flight lanes and a certain amount of trading back and forth between them by waterfowl, studies of band recoveries have shown that the various migration patterns for ducks and geese break down into four major flyways. They are referred to as the Pacific, Central, Mississippi, and Atlantic Flyways.

Because of this distinct pattern of waterfowl movement and the relationship of nesting, migration, and wintering areas for various groups of birds in these lanes, it became obvious that plans for the resource had to be designed on a flyway basis if they were to be successful and meet future needs.

To develop adequate flyway planning, it is necessary to understand how the birds in each flyway behave and how various conditions affect their numbers. Also, ways had to be found to correct the limiting factors and to manipulate the waterfowl population and its environment so that an increase in numbers would result. All this is the role of research. Waterfowl management then employs the various tools and programs developed by this research.

Waterfowl management involves many things. It includes the maintenance of present wildlife habitat, development of additional good waterfowl areas, manipulation of water levels, planting of crops for food and cover to maintain increased numbers of wild fowl, and regulated harvest of the annual surplus of waterfowl by hunting. It means establishing refuges, both State and Federal, to give the birds places to feed and rest and to provide people greater opportunities to enjoy the resource. The locations of these managed areas also are designed to provide better distribution of the birds during their annual migrations.

Plans for all these studies and developments must be geared to the waterfowl situation, flyway by flyway. Sportsmen-in-the-know recognize the value of this approach and support it vigorously.

So, too, well-informed sportsmen support the regulation of hunting flyway by flyway. Before the flyway concept was developed, waterfowl managers established hunting regulations on a nationwide basis. This had the great disadvantage of forcing hunting restrictions on all areas when they were actually needed only in certain sections. Conversely, nationwide relaxations in regulations permitted excessive harvest in some areas and of some species that conditions did not warrant. Regulation of hunting by flyways not only benefits the ducks and geese, but it also permits maximum hunting opportunity consistent with the local waterfowl situation.

Within a flyway, there is good reason to be concerned about what happens in other parts of the flyway. On the other hand, except for the common effort to make certain no abuse of the waterfowl resource occurs, there is little reason for people in one flyway to enter into management decisions elsewhere unless their own waterfowl populations are also affected.

## **How Waterfowl Councils Originated**

Once the flyway concept as a basis for hunting regulations had been advanced by the Fish and Wildlife Service, it was not long before the need for cooperative efforts in other fields of waterfowl management and research began to receive greater attention. Federal-State partnership in wildlife management received its first real stimulus from

the Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937, which created the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration program. This Act established a close working arrangement between Federal and State wildlife agencies. From such a fertile field of common interest, cooperative efforts branched out rapidly, including some work with waterfowl.

The partnership effort in waterfowl management on a flyway basis, however, did not make its appearance until after World War II, and research needs originally prompted this development. In each flyway, the pressing demand for quick answers to special problems launched cooperative projects as the most effective way to do the job. In the Atlantic Flyway, a group of Northeastern States and several conservation organizations in 1946 formed a Joint Black Duck Committee. Later this committee became the Joint Waterfowl Committee and a South Atlantic Waterfowl Committee was formed in the Southeastern States. In 1947, waterfowl technicians of the Northern States in the Mississippi Flyway started a team approach to their problems. The following year the Pacific Flyway Study Committee was formed and State and Federal workers in the Central Flyway began to explore ways to help each other in duck programs.

Spurred by the success of these first cooperative efforts, the International Association of Game, Fish, and Conservation Commissioners adopted a resolution at its 1951 convention in Rochester, N. Y., calling for the setting up of a National Waterfowl Council and also a Waterfowl Council in each of the flyways. The National Council would be composed of two representatives from each Flyway Council to deal with nationwide problems. The next year the four Flyway Councils and the National Council were organized.

## **What is the Flyway Council?**

The Flyway Council is a formal organization representing all State fish and game agencies in a flyway. Each State has one vote - cast either by the Director or his designated representative. In the Eastern Flyway, the Council is called the Atlantic Waterfowl Council. The other Councils are known as the Mississippi, Central, and Pacific Flyway Councils. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, through its Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, and the Canadian Wildlife Service work closely with these Councils in all phases of waterfowl management, including setting up the hunting regulations. Canadian provincial wildlife agencies now participate in Council activities, too. In addition, representatives of private, national conservation organizations often attend the Council sessions to coordinate their work with the Council programs.

The sole purpose of the four Flyway Councils is to preserve the valuable waterfowl resource for all the people. The Councils seek to achieve this goal by assisting in cooperative planning and action by Federal, State, and Provincial Governments, private conservation agencies, and the general public - on both sides of the border. Their chief tools are research and proved wildlife management techniques.

## **How the National Waterfowl Council Functions**

Two representatives elected by each of the four Flyway Councils make up the National Waterfowl Council. Each year, members of this National Council along with representatives of other national conservation organizations discuss waterfowl

regulations with the Fish and Wildlife Service. This entire group is known as the Waterfowl Advisory Committee.

The Waterfowl Advisory Committee makes recommendations to the Director of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife regarding the proposed hunting regulations. With his staff, the Director then drafts the regulations. Following review of the proposed regulations by the Commissioner of Fish and Wildlife and the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife, these proposals go to the Secretary of the Interior for his action. The States then establish their waterfowl hunting season dates within the framework that is finally adopted.

## **A Planned Attack**

Although Flyway Council members give serious attention to the matter of annual regulations to guide the hunting harvest, they recognize that the task of highest priority is to provide comprehensive solutions for the basic problems that threaten the future of American waterfowling.

Under the impetus of the Council approach, wildlife technicians - Federal, State, and private - in all four flyways have dug into the task of improving waterfowl management with renewed vigor. As they progressed, the need for a blueprint to guide waterfowl research and management efforts in each flyway became increasingly clear to them. No one agency had the resources or personnel to do the big job called for: it had to be a well-coordinated, full-partnership team effort. A waterfowl management plan for each flyway that would spell out in detail what has to be done, by whom, and in what order, thus became a necessity.

With Federal waterfowl biologists assigned to the task of coordinating these efforts, each flyway now is implementing such a plan.

## **Flyway Plan Objective**

These flyway management plans generally are designed to:

1. Accelerate collection and analysis of banding information and other biological data which will indicate important nesting, migration, and wintering areas and the segments of the North American waterfowl population associated with them.
2. Establish the pattern, priority, and responsibility for acquiring areas needed for managing waterfowl populations and for continuing our enjoyment of the resource.
3. Give greater emphasis to the research needed to improve waterfowl management practices, including those related to producing more ducks and geese and permitting a safe harvest of the resource each year.
4. Promote the increased use on all areas under public jurisdiction of the findings of wildlife research workers and the experience of management.
5. Create incentives to preserve existing habitat and develop new habitat, and encourage beneficial practices for waterfowl on private lands.

6. Obtain public understanding and support for the waterfowl program and its objectives.

## **How We Can All Help**

Here is the key to a successful flyway program! Whether we are hunters, bird-lovers, or plain American citizens, young or old, men or women, we can all help by-

1. Supporting the steps our Government and cooperating private agencies take to carry out the waterfowl program in our flyways.

2. Promoting, - wherever we have the opportunity and in every possible way, measures that benefit waterfowl, such as those that-

(a) Oppose projects that are unnecessarily destructive to waterfowl or the wetland habitat they must have.

(b) Encourage others to conduct local projects to restore wetlands designated as important to waterfowl.

(c) Endorse efforts to incorporate in Government construction projects necessary developments to enhance waterfowl values.

(d) Develop or help others develop small marshes to serve as nesting, resting, or feeding areas for ducks and other wildlife.

(e) Assist others to carry out land and water management practices which your local wildlife officials indicate are beneficial to waterfowl.

(f) Seek and follow the advice of wildlife technicians on your local waterfowl problems.

(g) Join in local efforts to resolve conservation issues.

3. Observe the hunting regulations, which are necessary to ensure a fair opportunity for everyone to enjoy the resource, and practice good sportsmanship.

That's the story of the Flyway Councils and their role in meeting the needs of migratory waterfowl in America's Space Age future.

**PRESERVATION OF OUR NATURAL  
RESOURCES IS THE RESPONSIBILITY  
OF EVERY CITIZEN**