

POSITION STATEMENT OF THE NORTH DAKOTA CHAPTER OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY REGARDING MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL OF MIGRATORY GAME BIRD DEPREDATION, HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY AND NUISANCE ISSUES

Introduction

Migratory game birds are an international resource that is important to hunters, wildlife enthusiasts and the public throughout North America. Because migratory game birds move across state, provincial and national borders, political jurisdictions must cooperate to effectively conserve and manage this resource. Population objectives for most species of migratory game birds have been established in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) and other plans and agreements. Migratory game birds can cause agricultural crop depredations, threats to human health and safety and cause nuisance problems. This statement expresses the position of the North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society (NDCTWS) on migratory game bird damage issues.

For purposes of this position statement, migratory game birds include waterfowl and sandhill cranes (SHC). In this document the term “damage” refers to depredation of agricultural resources, nuisance problems and human health and safety issues.

The management of damage caused by migratory game birds follows the concepts of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. As land use becomes more complex and intense competition for available agricultural resources increases, crop depredation by migratory game birds becomes a greater concern. Although on a national basis migratory game bird depredation of agricultural crops is small, damage can be severe in local areas or to individual producers. The severity of depredation is often weather-dependent, and in years of delayed harvest, depredation can become extreme locally. Additionally, migratory game birds can cause human health and safety concerns, especially near airport facilities and highways, and nuisance problems, especially in urban situations. Migratory game bird damage issues must be considered when implementing wildlife management programs and projects.

North Dakota lies in the heart of the Prairie Pothole Region and is an internationally important producer of ducks and Giant Canada geese. North Dakota also provides important habitats for migrating waterfowl and SHC in the spring and fall. At least 17 species of ducks are found in North Dakota at some time during the year. Of the ducks, only three species, mallard, northern pintail and possibly wood ducks regularly feed in agricultural fields. These three species make up less than one-third of all ducks that breed or are produced in North Dakota. Feeding on small grains by these species occurs principally in the fall and winter. The remainder of the year, these birds feed in wetland habitats. All other duck species feed almost exclusively in wetland habitats. All geese are grazers, but they will also feed on waste grains, especially in the fall. Four species of geese (Canada geese, snow geese, Ross’s geese and white-fronted geese) are found in North Dakota at some time of the year. All geese and SHC may depredate agricultural crops when conditions are favorable. Giant Canada geese, the only geese that nest in the state, can depredate agricultural crops during the growing season. In addition, large numbers of molt migrant Canada geese from other states are known to summer in North Dakota and depredate agricultural crops. Aircraft safety problems can be caused by any species of bird, including migratory game birds. Nuisance problems usually involve resident Giant Canada geese and occasionally mallards.

Authorities

Protection of migratory game birds in North America is provided by Conventions between the U.S. and Great Britain (for Canada) (1916, amended 1998), Mexico (1936, amended 1972), Japan (1972) and the U.S.S.R. (1976). Additionally, migratory game birds are protected under federal, state, provincial and territorial laws throughout their range.

It is unlawful to hunt, kill, sell, purchase or possess migratory game birds except as permitted by regulations adopted by the Secretary of the Interior and other appropriate agencies. Neither a state nor federal permit is required to scare or harass depredating migratory birds, except that use of an aircraft requires a state permit. The state of North Dakota, through the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGFD), retains the authority to regulate the taking of all wildlife, including migratory game birds, within the state. Thus, state permits are required for any taking of wildlife for damage purposes, including that done by federal agencies.

Through a 2012 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the United State Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services (WS) both agencies agree that it is important to: 1) conserve migratory bird populations and their habitats; 2) recognize that actions taken to benefit some migratory bird populations may adversely affect other migratory bird populations; 3) recognize that actions that may provide long-term benefits to migratory bird populations may have short-term impacts on individual birds; 4) recognize that under specific circumstances, migratory bird species can cause damage to agriculture, property, endangered and threatened species, and other natural resources; and 5) survey and monitor for diseases to protect migratory birds.

Funding for migratory game bird damage management within North Dakota is currently derived from a combination of federal and state sources including WS, NDGFD, and the ND Department of Agriculture.

Recommendation/Policy

The policy of the North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society in regard to migratory game bird damage management and control and associated problems is to:

- 1) Support sustained, regulated harvest of migratory game birds as a necessary first step in minimizing damage problems from migratory game birds.
- 2) Encourage and support educational and technical support programs in migratory game bird damage prevention and control.
- 3) Support continued scientifically based research and development of improved population management techniques needed to minimize damage by migratory game birds. We encourage research to improve methods and equipment used for a) preventing and controlling migratory game bird damage, human health and safety problems and nuisance problems; b) monitoring the effectiveness and practicality of the effort such as cost/benefit ratios and alterations to the surrounding environments; c) assessment of the wildlife damage; and d) assessment of potential alternatives for damage prevention and control.

- 4) Encourage development of migratory game bird damage control programs that use an integrated approach of one or more appropriate control tools that are efficient, safe, practical and economical in preventing, reducing, or alleviating the damage problem.
- 5) Encourage research and development of agricultural crops and techniques designed to minimize migratory game bird damage and improve agricultural production.
- 6) Encourage landowners to take initiatives to solve depredation problems or seek professional assistance at an early stage of problem development. Suggested practices include: not planting crops in areas susceptible to chronic goose damage; avoiding tillage techniques which reduce the availability of foods to migratory birds that may increase damage to surrounding un-harvested crops; and establishing tall dense grass buffer strips between wetlands and croplands.
- 7) Encourage landowners to employ available federal and state habitat conservation practices to reduce crop depredations.
- 8) Encourage landowners to allow hunting to reduce depredation of unharvested crops. We recognize that landowners retain the right to regulate access to their lands for hunting and other recreation.
- 9) Encourage developers to consider the potential for wildlife damage problems and take steps necessary to reduce wildlife/human conflicts resulting from urban sprawl and other developments.
- 10) Encourage local governments and agencies to take responsibility for managing and funding management of nuisance and damage problems within their jurisdictions. We recommend that airport authorities work with appropriate federal, state and local agencies to develop and implement appropriate wildlife hazard management plans to alleviate migratory bird problems.
- 11) Support a cooperative state/federal/local approach to managing migratory game bird damage.
- 12) Discourage releasing or maintaining domestic and semi-domestic waterfowl that can attract wild waterfowl in urban situations. We recommend that local jurisdictions regulate or discourage recreational feeding of waterfowl in situations that can attract wild waterfowl.
- 13) Not support compensation or replacement for losses due to migratory game bird depredation or damage in any form.
- 14) Not support expenditure of public funds for crop depredation control on lands that are not available for migratory game bird hunting or on lands where access fees for hunting are charged.

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