



Goose Backgrounder

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, August 2010

Issue: Goose Management Issues in NW Oregon and SW Washington

NW Oregon and SW Washington have a complex history of goose management. Currently seven subspecies of Canada geese winter in this region, some populations with depressed numbers and others that are very abundant. This mix of numerous subspecies and associated management issues occur nowhere else in North America. In addition, small populations of white-fronted geese and snow geese are now wintering in NW Oregon. The management of mixed goose populations can make decision processes very problematic. For over two decades, goose-hunting opportunities in this region have been very restrictive with complicated regulations primarily formulated to protect the dusky Canada goose. Hunter education requirements, mandatory check in and other regulations not mandated in other areas of the state makes hunter participation in this hunt prohibitive. Many of the subspecies of Canada geese generally look similar causing hunter identification in the field difficult. Restrictive hunting is directly related for the need to conserve dusky Canada geese, which have been on a long-term population decline, now numbering between 6-8,000 birds. Restrictions in place for dusksies in effect also limit harvest of more abundant geese.

The Willamette Valley of Oregon has historically been the primary wintering location of dusky Canada geese breeding on the Copper River Delta of Alaska. In the 1970s, other Alaska nesting geese such as Taverner's and lesser Canada geese began shortstopping in the Willamette Valley and wintering numbers of geese escalated. Resident Canada goose populations also grew rapidly. In the early 1990s, most populations were somewhat stabilized but then a dramatic shift in overall wintering numbers occurred when 95 percent plus of the cackling Canada goose population began wintering in NW Oregon and SW Washington rather than traditional areas of California.

Since the distribution of wintering cacklers in Oregon, several management issues have surfaced. Cackler numbers are now approximately 165,000 and have been on a slight increase for over a decade. This rise in total goose numbers has escalated farmer complaints about depredation on agricultural crops and pastures. Also, cacklers have distributed into areas which have never had wintering geese in the past making depredation complaints more widespread. In addition, cacklers are beginning to winter within urban boundaries of major population centers in the Willamette Valley, including parks and schoolyards. This has caused some complaints about nuisance issues and public health. Finally, large numbers of cacklers are using areas in close proximity to commercial airports and in particular the FAA has major concerns about 30-50,000 wintering cacklers that are within close proximity to the Eugene, Oregon airport. The chance of an airstrike has increased with birds roosting on a reservoir, which is in the final flight path for air traffic. Large concentrations of cacklers can also be observed near Portland International Airport.

The current flyway objective, in concert with agreements with Alaskan natives, for cacklers is 250,000. This objective was set decades ago when cacklers wintered exclusively in central California and agricultural damage was not a concern. Managers in Oregon are concerned that if numbers of cacklers are allowed to increase at this time it will only boost farmer complaints, nuisance complaints within cities and potential safety issues at airports. This could also hamper public support for goose management. The flyway has developed a goose depredation plan for this region that if funded totally would assist to diminish some of these issues. However, the plan has not been funded for several years after an initial two-year partial funding by Congress about 10 years ago. Current estimated costs to fully implement the plan are \$2 million per year.

While Oregon has been a long-term partner in conservation agreements for cacklers, again the 250,000-population objective was agreed upon primarily by the two user groups at the time— Alaskan natives and California. The switch of wintering grounds from California to Oregon was not predicted at the time nor is it desired by flyway managers. While Oregon can still support a long-term goal of 250,000, under current conditions the population objective is unacceptable

as programs are not in place to allow goose population growth and reduce impacts on Oregon landowners. Decision-making is complicated by the fact that Alaska natives take cacklers for subsistence in the spring.

Oregon will be pursuing flyway partnerships and ask for cooperation in increasing harvest rates on cacklers to at minimum stabilize the population at current levels until programs are funded to deal with the many issues described. A task force created by the Oregon Legislature is currently reviewing all facts related to goose management issues and will generate several management recommendations on how to deal with this problem. Flyway managers met in early May to discuss potential harvest management strategies for cacklers for the next three years with hopes to meet with Alaskan native representatives in the near future to discuss cooperative methods to address this ongoing and growing issue, including negotiation of a lower cackler population objective.