

up 33 percent from last year, 44 percent above the long-term average, and the highest wetland count on record.

“When you combine the wet conditions across much of Minnesota last fall, lots of snowpack, and above average spring precipitation, it’s not surprising that we saw record wetland numbers across the survey area this spring,” said Steve Cordts, DNR waterfowl specialist. “With such good wetland conditions, I would expect production, or the number of young ducks hatched, to be good this year.”

The same waterfowl survey has been conducted each May since 1968 to provide an annual index of breeding duck abundance. The survey covers 40 percent of the state that includes much of the best remaining duck breeding habitat in Minnesota. A DNR waterfowl biologist and pilot count all waterfowl and wetlands along established survey routes by flying low-level aerial surveys from a fixed-wing plane. The survey is timed to begin in early May to coincide with peak mallard nesting activity. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service provides ground crews who also count waterfowl along some of the same survey routes. This data is then used to correct for birds not seen by the aerial crew.

The Canada goose population was estimated at 370,000, which was higher than last year’s estimate of 311,000. The number of breeding Canada

geese in the state remains high, but has been relatively stable over the past 10 years. Since 2001, the DNR has conducted a helicopter survey of nesting Canada geese in April. The survey, which includes most of the state except the Twin Cities metro area, counts Canada geese on randomly selected plots in prairie, transition and forested areas.

Although breeding duck numbers increased relative to last year, the goal in the DNR’s Duck Recovery Plan is to attract and hold a breeding population of 1 million ducks while maintaining Minnesota’s rich waterfowling tradition.

“We remain committed to improving breeding and migration habitat for waterfowl in the state as one of our highest priorities,” said Dennis Simon, DNR Wildlife Section chief, “but we also realize it will require the DNR and all our partners to continue to focus our efforts to accomplish that long-term goal.”

The status of breeding duck populations and wetland conditions in other areas of North America is good to excellent. Total breeding duck numbers increased 11 percent from last year and were 35 percent above the long-term average. Mallard breeding populations increased 9 percent from last year and were 22 percent above the long-term average. Wetland habitat conditions in the Dakotas and southern Canada are near record high levels this spring.

The Minnesota waterfowl report can be viewed online at [www.mndnr.gov/hunting/waterfowl](http://www.mndnr.gov/hunting/waterfowl).

The DNR will announce this fall’s waterfowl hunting regulations in early August.

## **NORTH DAKOTA Large Duck Flight Expected**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department’s May and July waterfowl surveys indicate hunters can expect a large fall flight similar to recent years. Opening day for North Dakota residents is Sept. 24 for ducks, coots, mergansers and geese. Nonresidents may begin hunting waterfowl in North Dakota Oct. 1.

Mike Johnson, game management section leader, said North Dakota’s fall flight – breeding ducks and the young they produce in the state – is based on data from the May breeding duck survey and the July brood survey. “This year’s production was down from last year, however, there are strong indications of an exceptional late hatch of ducks this year,” Johnson said. “Since our surveys have been completed, observers have been seeing large numbers of newly hatched ducks throughout the state.”

The brood index from the Game and Fish Department’s annual mid-July survey was down 26 percent from 2010, but was 19 percent above the long-term average. Average brood size was 7.7 ducklings, up 1.0 from last year. The longterm