

Conservation Corner

by James Cummins
Executive Director
of Wildlife Mississippi

Recently, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) released its report on 2017 Trends in Duck Breeding Populations, based on surveys conducted in May and early June by the FWS and the Canadian Wildlife Service. Overall, duck numbers in the survey area remain high. Total populations were estimated at 47.3 million breeding ducks in the traditional survey area, which is 34 percent above the 1955-2016 long-term average. Last year's estimate was 48.4 million birds. The projected mallard fall flight index is 12.9 million birds, similar to the 2016 estimate of 13.5 million.

The main determining factor for duck breeding success is wetland and upland habitat conditions in the key breeding landscapes of the prairies and the boreal forest. Conditions observed across the U.S. and Canadian survey areas during the 2017 breeding population survey were generally similar to last year with a few exceptions. The total pond estimate for the U.S. and Canada combined was 6.1 million, which is 22 percent above the 2016 estimate of 5.0 million and

17 percent above to the long-term average of 5.2 million.

"The surveys indicate that wetland conditions and populations of most frequently harvested ducks remain above the long-term average, and for most species, populations were at or above those from last year," said DU Chief Scientist Tom Moorman. "This is great news for waterfowlers who can now turn their attention to preparing habitat, tuning up dogs and relentlessly watching the weather forecasts for the onset of fall and winter weather that will push the birds on their annual southward migration.

"Hunters may notice in the report that mallards declined 11 percent, or about 1.3 million birds, from 2016. The bulk of that appears to be related to drier conditions in the Canadian parklands region, where the surveys detected about 0.6 million fewer mallards. Overall, mallard populations remain in great shape, and FWS estimates the mallard fall flight will be similar to last year.

"Hunters should always remember that habitat and populations are going to vary over time, so we must keep

focused on habitat conservation efforts over the long term.

Ultimately, we need to maintain landscapes so that when precipitation and other conditions are right, the ducks will respond, produce more ducks and provide us all with a nice return on our conservation investments."

The spring surveys provide the scientific basis for many management programs across the continent, including hunting regulations. Individual states set their hunting seasons within a federal framework of season length, bag limits and dates. Hunters should check the rules in their states for final dates and bag limits.

James L. Cummins is executive director of Wildlife Mississippi, a non-profit, conservation organization founded to conserve, restore and enhance fish, wildlife and plant resources throughout Mississippi. Their web site is www.wildlifemiss.org.

THE WICKER REPORT

By: United States Senator Roger Wicker



Wicker Looks Ahead to Senate Agenda as Critical Deadlines Approach *Lawmakers Must Act on FAA, 2018 Funding Before End of September*

During the first week of August, the Senate confirmed 76 executive nominees. To put that number into perspective, only 56 of President Trump's 283 nominees had been confirmed over the course of the year before that week. At that slow pace, Senate confirmations for this Administration would have taken 11 years to complete.

This brief return to regular order reveals just how much Senate Democrats have obstructed the confirmation process this year, leaving critical government positions unfilled. I hope these partisan tactics do not continue into the fall, when a number of pressing legisla-

tive items need the full attention of the Senate.

Mississippi Priorities Represented in FAA Bill

One of these items is the reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which would expire at the end of September without congressional action. The FAA provides important services affecting our airports, air traffic, and air travel experiences. Senate passage of a four-year reauthorization would offer stability and certainty to the future of these operations.

As a member of the Senate Commerce Committee, I sponsored several amendments to the FAA bill, which

passed in committee earlier this summer. Those provisions would provide federal support for airports in our rural communities, require a review of airline fees, and create an unmanned systems safety research facility at Mississippi State University, which leads the FAA's Center for Excellence for Unmanned Aircraft Systems.

President Puts Focus on Border Security

In addition to the FAA reauthorization bill, Congress will need to consider Fiscal Year 2018 funding for the federal government and prevent the government from defaulting on its debt.

Unless a new budget deal is reached, spending measures will have to adhere to unrealistically low levels for national defense. We need to ensure our troops and veterans have the support they need. The annual defense bill authorizing these budget priorities is ready to be enacted by the full Senate.

"NOTICE OF A TAX INCREASE AND A PUBLIC HEARING ON THE PROPOSED BUDGET AND PROPOSED TAX LEVIES FOR THE CITY OF LEXINGTON"

The City of Lexington will hold a public hearing on a proposed ad valorem tax revenue increase for fiscal year 2018 and on its proposed budget and proposed tax levies for fiscal year 2018 on September 13, 2017 at 5:30 p.m., at the City of Lexington City Hall Board Room.

The City of Lexington is now operating with projected total budget revenue of \$2,339,520. \$350,961 of such revenue is obtained through ad valorem taxes. For next fiscal year, the proposed budget has a total projected revenue of \$2,253,252. Of that amount \$374,061 is proposed to be financed through a total ad valorem tax levy.

For next fiscal year, the City of Lexington plans to increase your ad valorem tax millage rate by 3 mills from 49.75 mills to 52.75 mills. This increase means that you will pay more in ad valorem taxes on your home, automobile tag, utilities, business fixtures, and equipment and rental real property.

Any citizen of the City of Lexington is invited to attend this public hearing on the proposed ad valorem tax increase, and will be allowed to speak for a reasonable amount of time and offer tangible evidence before any vote is taken.

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