

**Wisconsin Conservation Congress  
Migratory Committee Meeting Minutes  
Plaza Hotel & Suites  
201 N. 17<sup>th</sup> Ave  
Wausau, WI  
August 2, 2008**

Meeting called to order at 9:00 am by Chairman Richard Koerner.

The roll call was taken and the following committee members were present: Richard Koerner, John Edelblute, Mitchell Fisher, Richard Becker, Craig Conroy, Todd Cook, James Daily, Ronald Earnest, Paul Gettelman, Martin Haas, Roger Hanson, Ray Heidel, Rick Koenig, Jo Ann Kuharske, Al Marotz, Tim Morgan, Sandy Naas, David Nowak, Jerry Rowland, Allen Shook, Kurt Staab, Alan Suchla, Herbert Theisen, Brad Wagner.

Committee member Jeff Scott was excused from attending the meeting; absent and not excused members Chuck Boley and Guy McFarren.

Guests in attendance included former WCC Chairman Steve Oestriche, Keith Olsen, Rich Kirchmeyer - WCC, Sandra Bryson, Jane Wily - Natural resources board, Dean Bortz - Wisconsin outdoor news, Noel Dolde – WWC.

DNR staff present included Migratory biologist Kent Van Horn and his new assistant James Christopoulos.

**ORDER OF BUSINESS:**

**Department Informational Items and Updates**

The meeting began with a report by Kent Van Horn. Kent walked us through all the complicated info and items from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Wisconsin has the second highest number of waterfowl hunters next to Texas. We are lot smaller than Texas and have high numbers of hunters. Therefore given our size we have a high density of waterfowlers.

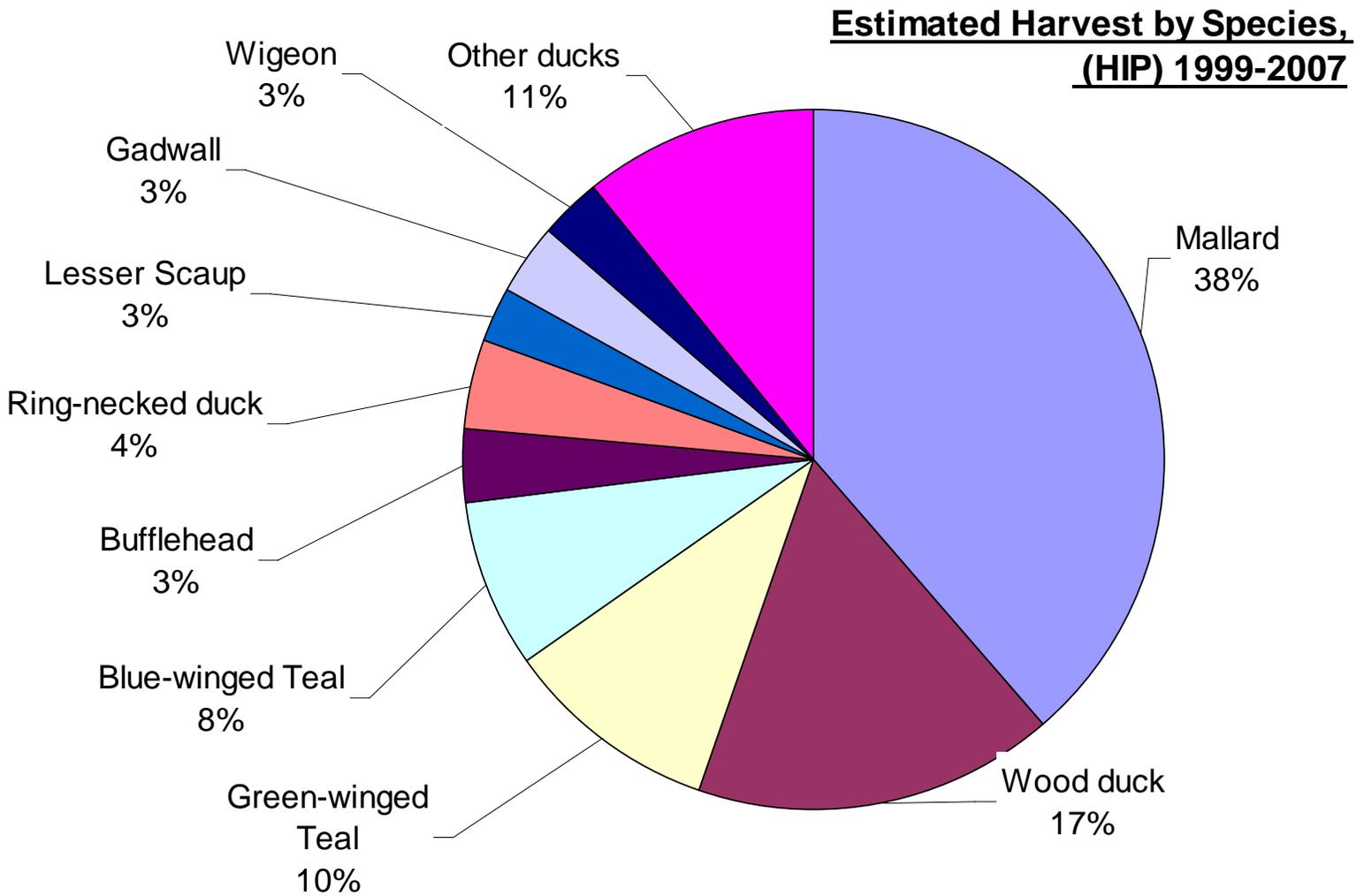
**Estimated Active Waterfowl Hunter Numbers (HIP) -2007 season**

Top 6 states:

Texas	94,100
Wisconsin	83,300
Minnesota	77,200
Louisiana	62,700
Arkansas	60,400
California	55,100

**Status of ducks at the State and Federal level:**

Blued wing, woodies, mallards green wing teal make up the majority of birds in the bag. Seventy percent of the mallards bagged in Wisconsin are birds banded here.



Most of the Midwest and Great Lakes had great water this spring but the prairie regions, both in the U.S. and Canada, were dry. When the surveys were conducted in May the Dakotas were very dry.

Mid continental decision on hunting seasons involve Canada, Michigan, and Wisconsin on down. The numbers of birds in traditional areas were up and overall mallard numbers were still good. Although down this year from last, they are still well up over the long term average. Field surveys showed a substantial increase of blue-wing teal but they were surpassed by an even larger increase in green-wing teal numbers.

Dave Nowak questioned Kent as to why this seems to be most reversed in regards to blue-wing teal vs. green-wing teal. He sees nearly 3 to 1 blue-wing vs. green-wing. Nowak hunts southeastern Wisconsin and Kent suggested that may be the case where he hunts but it's not true around the northern half of WI or Mississippi River.

## Continental Breeding #'s - Select Species

- Green-winged teal – 3.0 mil(+57% LTA)
- Blue-winged teal – 6.6 mil (+45% LTA)
- Pintail – 2.6 mil (-36% LTA)
- Canvasback – 500,000 (-14% LTA)
- Scaup – 3.7 million (-27% LTA)

**Pintails** are below the long term but they are stable. The Canvasback count is down significantly; reflecting the dry prairie regions of North America. Scaup are up a little from last year and have been stable over the last several years. We had at least average breeding for the year.

Kent went into detail of the complicated federal details. USFWS removed mallards from the mid continental breeding area. We lowered the over all adjustment for mallards. Some birds in the pacific flyway were moved out of the pacific flyway and attributed to the mid continent and with the dry spring in Alberta this could potentially restrict our season. The pacific flyway, if given a liberal season, would have 107 days and 7 mallard per day. Kent objected to the realignment and will keep us informed of any changes or decisions by the feds.

**Canvasback** numbers are closely tied with the spring breeding conditions. Redhead and canvasback population estimates change with the wetness of the ponds. It seems that harvest has little to do with the population decline or perception of it (regarding the poor count in the prairie region). It looks like the canvasback numbers are tied to the amount of water or lack of it.

But then this year cans were down 40 percent. What happened? Did we kill 400,000 birds? No, surveys showed about 140,000 cans in the bag from 2007. They questioned the survey. Kent's opinion is that the birds moved off to big -

water to rest without breeding because there ponds and shallow water lakes were dry. The birds just go to areas outside the breeding survey. We had two good years of breeding in 2006 and 2007, they did not disappear. But given the framework set aside by the feds we are forced to have a closed season on cans. A lot of hunters that sit on our the Mississippi River in late October will be seeing a ton of cans and wondering why we can't hunt them.

### **Scaup:**

The long term trend for bluebills pushed the USFWS to a new direction for bills. No one believes that this decline of scup is the result of hunting. Birds may be laying fewer eggs or producing less broods. They don't know if it's habitat or change in birds. We still have a lot of scaup but the harvest is less than 300,000. We have birds in the 6 bird bag limit the have lower populations than scaup. We know that hunting is not the decline in scaup. Not matter what the feds said we had to go into a restrictive season on scaup. They gave us a season choice of one bird for 60 days or a 45 day season with 2 birds per day. After some negotiation Kent agreed to a 40 days of one bird and 20 days with two bills. We do not believe that the harvest restrictions will turn the season around. But feds determined that we must adjust the bags according to the population regardless of whether the restrictive season or liberal season had anything to do with the number of ducks.

### **Wood ducks:**

Bag limits for woodies have been at 2 birds per day for a long time because it is difficult to count ducks; they breed in difficult areas to fly over and survey. The feds took a hard look at upping the bag to 3 birds per day. Dave Nowak has been a driving force from the congress committee to push the issue of 3 birds per day. Most of the woodies that we breed are being bagged in Wisconsin and Illinois, etc. The final determination will be that we will have 3 birds per day for the next three years. The decision was based on banding surveys rather than breeding count. It is interesting that birds banded in the southern states are bagged in Wisconsin.

### **2007 Water Fowl Survey**

Kent sent out a Wisconsin based water fowl hunter survey last year, 2007. Over all the general public of duck hunters was that they were happy or approved of the season framework. Hunters were chosen by random; Van Horn received a very high percent of returns. Approximately 71% of the sampled water fowlers responded to the survey. Seems about 2/3 of the hunters accept the opening days whereas, 30% do not like the opening dates. Some want later or earlier openers and we are still seeing hunter conflicts with boarder jumpers. Below are the highlights from the survey:

- 80% thought duck bag limit was about right
- 51% favored 1 hen mallard, 33% 2 hens, 7% 0 hens, 9% no opinion
- 65% duck season length about right (28% too short)

- 59% thought timing of duck season was about right (29% too early, 6% too late)
- 2007 WI Waterfowl Hunter Survey
- Opening day in the north 44% for Saturday nearest September 24 (29% for Oct 1)
- Opening day in the south 40% for Saturday nearest October 1<sup>st</sup> (18% for Sept 24, 20% for Oct 8)
- One statewide opener – No - 44%,
- 33% - Yes, 23% unsure

The discussion on scaup numbers and season framework continued. John Edelblute asked Kent if he knew when the peak of the migration occurred for scaup. October 20 was about the beginning of the scaup migration and historically peak late October early November Van Horn said. Lately more birds are sticking around until late into the season.

**Geese:** No big issues here. Last years harvest was very similar to 2006. The early goose season produced a record bag. The number of hunter applications declined which coincided with an increase in the price of the conservation patron license. Research by Kent showed that the unintended consequence of raising license fees for more revenue results in a drop of sales of the conservation patron license, but more importantly, a drop in federal and state duck stamps. As many as 4200 less stamps duck stamps were sold meaning less money for duck habitat. A prime example of raising taxes (license fee) to increase revenue has the opposite effect.

**Status of Doves, Woodcock:**

13,000 hunters bagged 202,000 doves in Wisconsin last year. Non-toxic shot is required this year for dove hunting on all state lands.

- Doves
  - 781 banded in 2007
  - 10 year (1999-2008) population trend shows 1-2%% increase for WI
  - 202,000 harvested by 13,600 hunters in 2007
- Woodcock
  - Population trend generally flat for the last 10 years after 30 year decline. However, 2008 10 year trend was down slightly.
  - 48,027 harvested by 17,258 hunters in 2007

Kent wrapped up his presentation and we took a break at 10:21

The meeting resumed at 10:35.

**Action items:**

**Early goose season** set and the youth duck hunt is set. No vote was taken.

**Duck season bag:**

Motion by Al shook to accept the duck bag limit as proposed by the DNR  
Second Tim Morgan

Motion by Brad Wagner to amend the motion to accept the proposed duck bag limit with the WCC Migratory Committee to go on record to in support of a 2 two per day season for scaup  
Second by Ray Heidel  
Motion to amend passes unanimously without a whisper

Another motion to amend the motion to accept the season was to propose cans for 1 per day to by Roger Hanson  
Second by Ray Heidel  
After discussion Roger Hansen rescinded his motion.

Kent Van Horn reminded the committee that our amendments can not alter the season framework that the USFWS offered the Mississippi flyway. A new motion was made to send a letter instead of amended the motion

The vote was called for original motion of the proposed duck bag limit with the amendment for two Scaup; motion failed.

A new motion by Ron Earnest was made to accept department framework bag limits as proposed  
Second by Todd Cook  
Question called with no further debate, motion carried no objections

Motion by Brad Wagner to send a letter of protest the USFWS and the WDNR regarding the decision to restrict scaup to one per day, the closure of the Canvasback season, and the mallard reassignment. Brad will write the letter.  
Second by Paul Gettelman Green Lake  
Motion passed unanimously

**Duck Season Opening Dates:**

Sandy Naas motion to accept opening dates proposed by the DNR  
Second Ron Earnest

Discussion: Rick Koenig wants to have one sate wide opener because southern hunters come up for north opener and bag the heck out of the ducks and there are no ducks left by the second weekend. Also, nobody knows when to ask for days off of work.

Al Shook is in favor of the early opener for north and week later for the south. He referred back to the survey of hunter by Kent and the fact that 2/3s of the hunters were pretty much in favor of the season staggered opening dates and the split.

The committee is reminded that the season dates must be voted in separate motions Northern zone and Southern zone.

Amended motion to accept northern dates by Sandy Naas  
Second by Ron Earnest

Kent Van Horn interjected; the USFWS studied the two different openers and two zones and concluded that they had no effect on hammering the population. Van Horn said is sympathetic to the unknown of when the season will open but his hands are tied.

The question called and passed with one grunt of disapproval

Al shook motion to accept Southern zone dates as proposed  
Dave Nowak second

Discussion: Ray Heidel states that Lacrosse wants a longer split of 9 days. Al Shook reminded the committee that a few years ago when we ran a 7 day split hunters lost a weekend of hunting, and that Kent received a lot of complaints. Some of which questioned his heritage and birth mother.

Motion carried unanimously with the exception of Ray Heidel representing the river rats from La Crosse

**Shooting hours:**

Motion to open day at 9 am and 1/2 hour before for rest of season by unknown  
Second by Al Marotz

Motion passes unanimously

**Scaup Season Bag/Dates:**

Chairman Koerner relayed the options for northern scaup zone. Discussion of this lively topic ensued. Tim Morgan said mostly this will be a nightmare to enforce; says it should be earlier rather than later.

Motion by Jim Daily to start October 18th to November 6th 2 birds per day and 1 bird before and after

Second by Craig Conroy

Hand count 15 yes 6 no motion passed

Motion Ray Heidel open October 25 thru November 13 and 1 before and one after  
Tim Morgan second

Roger Hansen has this is a nightmare for wardens trying to enforce bags, difficult for hunters to know or understand the bag changes. He wants to see last possible days for 2 per day Nov. 18 to Dec. 7.

Kent reminded the committee that we could go more restrictive and go to 1 per day for the 60 days season.

Motion 11 yes, 11 no - tied motion fails do to a tie

New motion by Todd Cook to start Nov 1 go back to 2 after 20 days  
Ron Earnest second  
Motion 22 yes, 2 no motion passes

Motion by Brad Wagner for WDNR to create campaign for duck id between ring bill and scaup  
Second by Paul Gettelman  
Motion passed

### **Canada Goose:**

Motion to Dave Nowak to accept goose seasons as proposed  
Rick Koenig second

Discussion: La Crosse - Ray Heidel wants to open goose season concurrent with duck season. Mitch Fisher responded, "So what." Heidel added, "And no goose hunting for Sheboygan County.

Ron Earnest thinks that the far south wants the season to run out to the latest part of the season.

Motion passes with some objection from the La Crosse County delegate

Al Shook motion to adopt white geese and falconry seasons as proposed  
Second Paul Gettelman  
Motion passes unanimously

### **Other Business**

The duck school for wardens is Friday September 26 at Horicon office and the WDNR is looking for volunteers to act as duck hunting actors.

The WCC Ad hoc committee on open water hunting committee set; will set date for meeting in near future. WCC delegates that are on the committee will be reimbursed for expenses. We will be limited to 3 meetings.

Chairman Koerner brought up the mission statement that is required by our bylaws. He read the draft statement that he created and asked the committee to review it and we should vote on it at our regular December meeting. A copy of Koerner's creative work will be included in the minutes.

Ray Heidel talked about the number of restrictions that were put into place on the upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge, despite much public objection, and were supported by the WDNR.

The regular December of the migratory committee meeting will be moved to the second weekend as to not lose and more days of hunting. The meeting will be at the Ramada inn Steve's Point.

Jerry Roland wants the migratory committee to prepare for future restricted seasons. The committee as well as the WDNR should begin making suggestions as to season framework and bags. This is in lieu of the prairies pothole region drying up.

#### **Correction to December 2007 Committee Minutes**

Ray Heidel had an issue with the December 2007 minutes, there was a mistake made in recording the minutes. The question was asked by Ray to Kent Van Horn if the WDNR was considering designing and implementing managed hunts on the Mississippi. The minutes incorrectly stated that the WDNR was considering it. Let the minutes reflect that the answer given to Ray Heidel was that the WDNR was not considering implementing managed hunts on the Mississippi River.

Motion to adjourn by Todd Cook  
Second by Mitch Fisher  
Motion passed  
Meeting adjourned at 12:01 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Mitchell J Fisher

Attachments:  
Migratory Committee Mission Statement

**Wisconsin Conservation Congress  
Migratory Committee Mission Statement  
By Richard Koerner**

The mission of the Migratory Committee is to represent the waterfowl hunters of Wisconsin by working with the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources to effectively manage Wisconsin's local ducks, geese and well as migrating ducks, geese, swans, and other migratory waterfowl and migratory birds for present and future generations to enjoy.



Edgar Harvey, Jr., Chair  
N3635 Timberview Road  
Waldo, WI 53093  
920-528-7071

Robert Bohmann, Vice-Chair  
1105 Melvin Avenue  
Racine, WI 53402  
262-681-2055

Richard Kirchmeyer, Secretary  
N4824 Lound Road  
Prentice, WI 54556  
715-428-2321

August 20, 2008

Robert Blohm, Chief  
Division of Migratory Bird Management  
U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Arlington Square MS MBSP 4107  
4401 N. Fairfax Drive  
Arlington VA 22203 USA

Dear Mr. Blohm:

I am writing on behalf of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress. Formed by State Statute, we are an advisory body to the Natural Resources Board, which is the policy board of the Department of Natural Resources. Wisconsin state statute 15.348 indicates that the Conservation Congress shall be an independent organization of citizens of the state and shall serve in an advisory capacity to the Natural Resources Board on all matters under the jurisdiction of the Board. The purpose is to represent the citizens of Wisconsin by working with the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources to effectively manage Wisconsin's abundant natural resources for present and future generations to enjoy.

The Wisconsin Conservation Congress consists of 5 delegates from each of the 72 counties in Wisconsin elected by the public to represent the citizens of Wisconsin in hunting, fishing and trapping matters as well as environmental issues. That's 360 delegates who, by law, serve as the voice of the public to the Wisconsin DNR and the Natural Resources Board.

The Wisconsin Conservation Congress Migratory Committee, comprised of 27 members from throughout the state that represent Wisconsin's 80,000 waterfowl hunters and waterfowl resources, accepted the 2008 federal duck season framework for the Mississippi Flyway. However, we have significant concern with three specific season framework decisions that have been mandated by the USFWS and would like to express these concerns to you as detailed in this letter.

The three areas of concern are: 1) the complete closure of the 2008 Canvasback season, 2) the reduction in harvest limits on Scaup; and 3) the change to allow the Pacific Flyway to use Alaskan bird counts in the calculation of their season framework and the removal of these bird counts from the mid-continent calculation.

Canvasbacks: We do not see any evidence that supports the closure of the harvest of Canvasbacks for the 2008 season. The reported decrease in the Canvasback breeding population for 2008 does not seem biologically possible unless there was a massive winter kill off that has not been reported. We believe the lower number of Canvasbacks counted this spring is most likely due to an over-flight of the traditional breeding areas due to dry conditions in the prairies. The Mississippi Flyway Council put forth a proposal to the USFWS that would allow for a 60 day season and a 1 bird per day limit if the Canvasback population fell between 400,000 and 800,000 birds. Below 400,000 birds would be a closed season and above 800,000 birds would allow for a 2 bird daily limit. This proposed framework can be supported based on the Redhead harvest data and population data which when overlaid with data on Canvasbacks appears to track each other very closely. We have had 60 day seasons and 2 birds per day limits on Redheads with no impact to the long-term population trends of this species. This proposal by the Mississippi Flyway Council would provide a more consistent and sound approach to the season framework for Canvasbacks. We ask that the USFWS reconsider their position of Canvasback season closure for 2008 and instead institute a 60 day season with a daily bag limit of 1 bird.

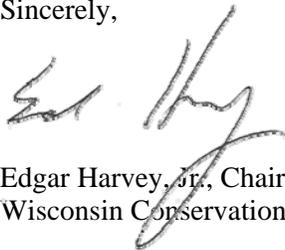
Scaups: We do not see any evidence that supports another reduction in the harvest of Scaup during the 2008 season. We understand that the USFWS agreed to a compromise with the Flyway councils that allows for 40 days with one bird in the bag and 20 days with 2 birds in the bag. However, given that Scaup are the 3<sup>rd</sup> most abundant bird in North America and the population decline has flattened we believe that a 60 day season with a 2 bird daily bag limit would be effective in protecting the resource. This switch in bag limits will likely cause confusion with some hunters. There is a 6-duck bag limit on Ring Necks (Ring Bills) which look similar to Scaup as does the female Red Head. Wisconsin also has a fair amount of big water hunters. A one duck bag on Scaup isn't worth the time and money spent to set up for the hunt. This most likely will affect duck stamp sales and the revenue that the USFWS and state wildlife agencies receive to run waterfowl and habitat programs next year. The 20 days of two Scaup will be different in Wisconsin because we have two different duck openers and a split of five days in the south zone and running eleven days later than the north zone which opens one week earlier than the south zone. We feel this will be a law enforcement problem. Again, we support and believe a 60 day season and a 2 bird daily bag limit would be effective in protecting the resource and offer the hunting community reasonable harvest expectations.

Pacific Flyway Counts: We are very concerned with the changes to the mid-continent Mallard count where the Alaskan breeding surveys have been removed and will be used by the Pacific Flyway to set their season framework. This has the potential to reduce or close Mallard harvests in the Central and Mississippi Flyways while at the same time we would still have liberal seasons in the Pacific Flyway. It is our understanding based on harvest data from bandings that a large portion of the Pacific Flyways Mallard harvest comes from the prairie pothole region. So, it does not appear that this is fair to hunters in the Central and Mississippi Flyways nor does it appear to be a sound solution to protecting the Mallard resource when it may need protection. We ask that the USFWS return to the historical method of mid-continent Mallard count to insure a fair harvest across all of the flyways and to provide adequate protection to the Mallard resource when it is needed.

The Wisconsin Conservation Congress and the Migratory Committee of the Congress are not opposed to season closures or limited bag limits when there is solid biological evidence and solid quantitative data that indicates the resource is in need of additional protection.

We know you will most likely be unable to change the 2008 season frameworks that have been set forth, but please consider our comments and changes when setting the 2009 season framework. We thank you for taking time to read and understand our concerns with the closure of the Canvasback season, reduce bag limits on Scaup and the Pacific Flyway/Mid-Continent Mallard count that has the potential to impact season frameworks in the future.

Sincerely,



Edgar Harvey, Jr., Chairman  
Wisconsin Conservation Congress



Richard Koerner, Chairman  
Migratory Waterfowl Committee  
Wisconsin Conservation Congress

CC: Kent Van Horn, DNR  
George Meyer, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation  
Dale Arenz, Wisconsin Waterfowl Association  
Tom Zwicker, Ducks Unlimited  
Natural Resources Board members  
WCC Migratory Committee