

Federal agency's survey indicates increase in geese

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has completed its annual fall survey of emperor geese, and survey observers said there were more juvenile emperors in flocks than in the last few years.

The 1986 fall count of 68,051 emperor geese is 12 percent above the 1985 fall count. However, it is 17 percent below the fall count of 1984. Emperor geese numbers are around 50 percent less than population estimates made in the mid-1960s.

The survey was the eighth annual survey of emperors made by the agency and covers all coastal areas from Bethel to Cold Bay on the north side of the Alaska Peninsula and Cold Bay to Anchorage on the south side of the peninsula.

The goose nests along the west coast of Alaska and east coast of the Soviet Union. About 90 percent of the world population nests on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, according to Dick Pospahala, chief of migratory birds for the service in Alaska.

"The birds winter primarily in the Aleutians, and during migration they use several key staging areas which include lagoons and estuaries between Izembek Lagoon, Alaska Peninsula and Chagvan-Nanvak Bays in Bristol Bay."

The population decline of the geese has been a major concern for waterfowl managers, Native groups, conservation organizations and hunters who have participated in negotiating a plan to reduce harvest of certain geese that nest on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.

The Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Goose Management Plan has called for no hunting of cackling Canada geese since 1984, as well as reduced hunting of emperors, white-fronts and black brants throughout their ranges, Pospahala said.

In response to a reduced number of birds last spring, Native leaders called for a cessation of hunting on emperors after nesting began this year, and the fall hunting season was closed by state and federal action.

"Nesting conditions were better this spring than the past four years, and production of young emperor geese was good," Pospahala said.