

Geese populations rebound

by the Association of Village Council Presidents
for the Tundra Times

BETHEL — The Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Goose Management Plan is showing definite signs of success.

The plan is a major cooperative effort between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the State of California and Native organizations and villages of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta to rebuild the population of four goose species. They include:

- The Cackling Canada Goose.
- The Pacific White-fronted Goose.
- The Pacific Black Brant.
- The Emperor Goose.

During the 1970s, the population of these birds, which had numbered in the hundreds of thousands, began to decline precipitously. These declines were likely caused by a combination of factors, including sport and subsistence harvests throughout their flyways, poor breeding conditions on the bird's nesting grounds, loss of wetland wintering habitat in the Lower 48 and possibly other unknown ecological factors.

The Goose Management Plan was initiated in 1984 to reverse these declines and return the geese to their former abundance. The plan calls to achieve this goal by

significantly reducing harvests throughout the goose range.

These reductions have particular impact on the Yup'ik Eskimos of the Y-K Delta, where much of these populations nest.

Under the plan, Y-K Delta subsistence hunters have voluntarily agreed to major hunting restrictions to help the geese. All egg taking and hunting in the spring and summer — when the geese are nesting and rearing their young — have been eliminated. In turn, sport hunting in Alaska, the Lower 48 and Mexico has been substantially reduced or closed.

The Cackling Canada Goose provides the most visible sign that these efforts are succeeding. In the winter of 1984, the Cackler population was in the most dire condition of the four species, estimated to be only 26,000 birds. All Cackler harvest was stopped.

Last winter, that count had doubled to 52,000. Gene Peltola, AVCP president, praised the plan and said it has helped increase the population.

"This marked increase in the Cackling Canada Goose population clearly shows that by sitting down and working together in a cooperative fashion which respects Native values, government agencies and Native peoples can move these geese," he said.