

## TRUMPETER SWAN ROCKY MOUNTAIN POPULATION RANGE EXPANSION AND TUNDRA SWAN HUNTING: IS THERE A MIDDLE GROUND?

Robert E. Trost, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Migratory Bird Management, 911 N.E. 11th Avenue, Portland, OR 97232-4181

---

Trumpeter Swans (*Cygnus buccinator*) are divided into three populations for management purposes in North America. Two of these populations occur within the Pacific Flyway, the Pacific Coast Population (PCP) and the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP). Both populations have exhibited continued population growth during the last 30 years (Caithamer 1996). Presently, there are no conflicts between the PCP and Tundra Swan (*C. columbianus*) hunting, primarily because outside of Alaska there is no hunting of Tundra Swans within the migration and winter range of the PCP and within Alaska the seasons are conducted north of the Trumpeter Swan breeding range. Management concerns have developed regarding the impacts of Tundra Swan hunts on Trumpeter Swans within the range of the RMP. The purpose of this presentation is to provide the views of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) regarding this situation.

Federally authorized hunting of Tundra Swans began in Utah in 1962. The Utah season was the first sport hunting of any swans authorized subsequent to the signing of the Migratory Bird Treaty in the United States. This Tundra Swan season has been extended to include portions of Montana, Nevada, and Alaska in the Pacific Flyway. Tundra Swan hunting has proven popular with hunters, and the opportunity to harvest a Tundra Swan is regarded as a trophy opportunity by most hunters. The management and hunt plans for Tundra Swans are the subject of a separate paper in this proceedings and, thus, not addressed in detail here.

The USFWS formalized general policies for Trumpeter/Tundra Swan management in 1989 (Hartwig 1989). The evolution of the general policies that serve as the basis of this statement were presented at a previous conference of The Trumpeter Swan Society (Bartonek 1984). In general, I would describe the policy as containing three separate parts.

1. A strong commitment to flyway management for all waterfowl species. This commitment includes recognition that the USFWS would continue to give strong consideration to recommendations forwarded by flyway councils based on endorsed programs.

2. Continued support for Tundra Swan hunting opportunities when consistent with approved flyway management and hunt plans.
3. General support of cooperative, multi-state programs for the restoration of migratory Trumpeter Swan populations.

Additionally, this policy guidance recognized that there would be times and places where the various interests and objectives of different constituencies would not conform to a single course of action. In these instances, the USFWS announced its intent to develop solutions on a case-by-case basis. RMP Trumpeter Swans proved to be one of those cases.

Presently, the chief focus of RMP Trumpeter Swan management is to constructively address the problem of increasing numbers of Trumpeter Swans wintering in the Tristate Region of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. A secondary, but related, concern is for the status of the breeding segment of the RMP that nests within the Tristate Region. Dispersal of the undesirable winter concentration of Trumpeter Swans, without causing adverse population impacts, has been the focus of these efforts. One of the many problems faced by this effort has been the potential for harvest of Trumpeter Swans in Tundra Swan seasons in states that might logically be expected to encounter Trumpeter Swans dispersed from the Tristate Region. The USFWS has focused on the development of Cooperative Flyway Management Plans as a mechanism for achieving consensus about goals, objectives, and strategies for the management of many migratory goose and swan populations. Efforts are currently underway to revise the RMP Trumpeter Swan Management Plan. In the current draft, the management plan acknowledges the difficulties posed by dispersing Trumpeter Swans into states or areas with an existing Tundra Swan season. The draft plan endorses Bartonek et al.'s 1995 environmental assessment (Swan EA) and its preferred alternative as the best approach to addressing this situation.

The 1995 Swan EA considered four alternatives to address the situation that had developed in the Tristate Region in concert with the ongoing Tundra Swan seasons. These four alternatives were:

1. allow for the limited take of Trumpeter Swans in a restructured Tundra Swan season (preferred alternative),
2. no change from the existing hunting season regulations,
3. severely restrict or close Tundra Swan hunting, and
4. cease active Trumpeter Swan range expansion efforts.

Consideration was given to all four alternatives, and the USFWS subsequently endorsed the preferred alternative with a finding of no significant impact. The USFWS believes this alternative represents the middle ground between the competing interests of Trumpeter Swan restoration and Tundra Swan hunting. There is no doubt that this alternative was a compromise between several opposing viewpoints regarding this situation.

The compromise reached under the preferred alternative contained several changes to existing Tundra Swan seasons, allowed for the first limited legal harvest of Trumpeter Swans since the signing of the Migratory Bird Treaty, and was conditional on the development and implementation of an acceptable harvest monitoring procedure that would detect the presence of Trumpeter Swans in the Tundra Swan harvest. The USFWS is committed to this 5-year course of action and will likely base future management strategies for similar situations on the results of this 5-year experiment. The results obtained to date are encouraging and are described in other papers in this proceedings.

The one factor related to this situation not addressed in the 1995 Swan EA is the potential impact and role

of the active translocation effort to Utah. The USFWS has been an active participant in this effort and believes that this action and attendant study were undertaken consistent with the policy guidelines previously discussed. At present, the number of transplanted swans killed as a result of translocations during the hunting season is a matter of concern. The USFWS and the Pacific Flyway states will review this program during the coming months and attempt to reconcile the various issues raised during the first year of this study.

#### LITERATURE CITED

- Bartonek, J. C. 1984. Policies of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding Trumpeter and Tundra Swans. Pages 1-3 in D. Compton, ed. Proc. and Papers of the Ninth Trumpeter Swan Society Conference. The Trumpeter Swan Society, Maple Plain, MN.
- \_\_\_\_\_, R. Kokel, R. J. Blohm, and P. R. Schmidt. 1995. Environmental assessment: proposal to establish general swan hunting seasons in parts of the Pacific Flyway for the 1995-99 seasons. U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 35 pp.
- Caithamer, D. F. 1996. 1995 Survey of Trumpeter Swans in North America. U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Migratory Bird Management. Unpublished. 14 pp.
- Hartwig, W. L. 1989. Memorandum from Assistant Director - Refuges and Wildlife to Regional Directors, Regions 1-8, subject "Trumpeter Swan policy." U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, DC.