

## **STATUS OF POPULATIONS AND HARVEST OF CANADA GEESE IN NEW YORK**

Canada geese are among the most well-known and widely recognized species of waterfowl in North America. Their V-shaped flocks and unmistakable honks once reminded people of wilder places and changing seasons. As their name implies, they once nested exclusively in Canada and migrated to parts south for the winter. Today, however, there are both migratory and local-nesting (resident) populations of geese that must be managed separately but concurrently. Resident goose numbers have grown to levels that have caused significant nuisance problems in some locations. This has led to confusion among waterfowl hunters over the complex hunting regulations necessary to reduce local goose populations while meeting the diverse goals established for multiple flocks of migrant geese.

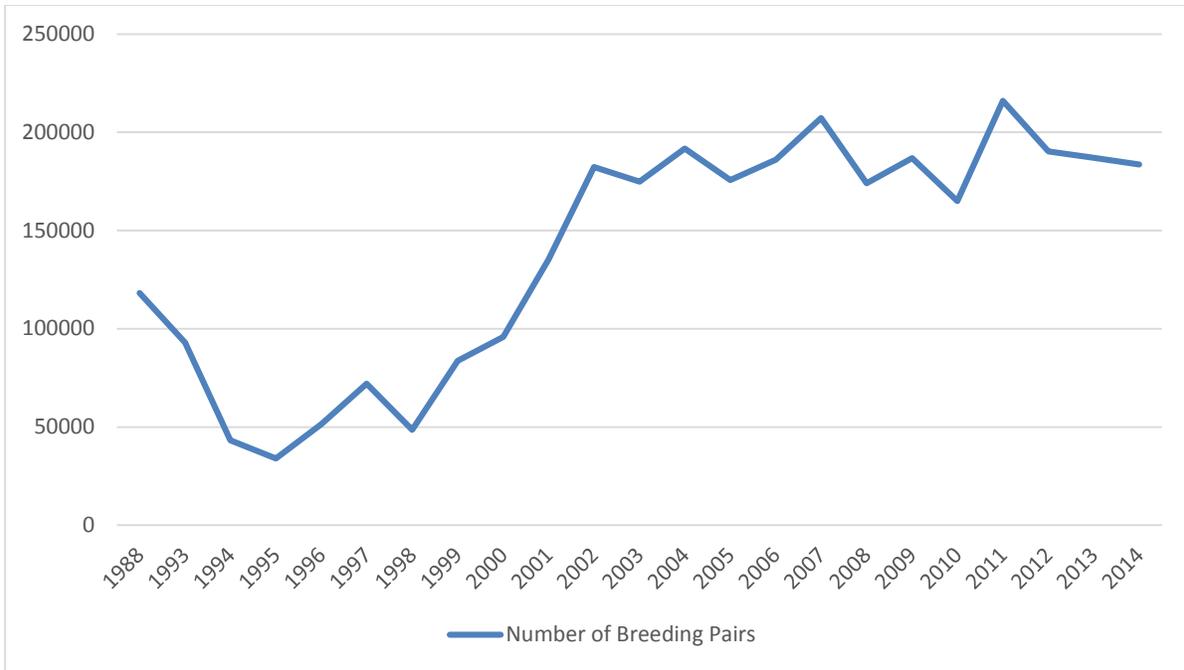
Hunters enjoyed 70 to 90 day seasons and ample bag limits (3 per day) in the 1970s and into the 1980s. Canada geese were assumed to be abundant. However, there was a lack of information on populations, productivity on the breeding grounds, and the effect of harvest on the overall number of birds.

Almost without knowing it, the Canada goose situation in New York and the Atlantic Flyway began to change in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Two major events occurred essentially simultaneously.

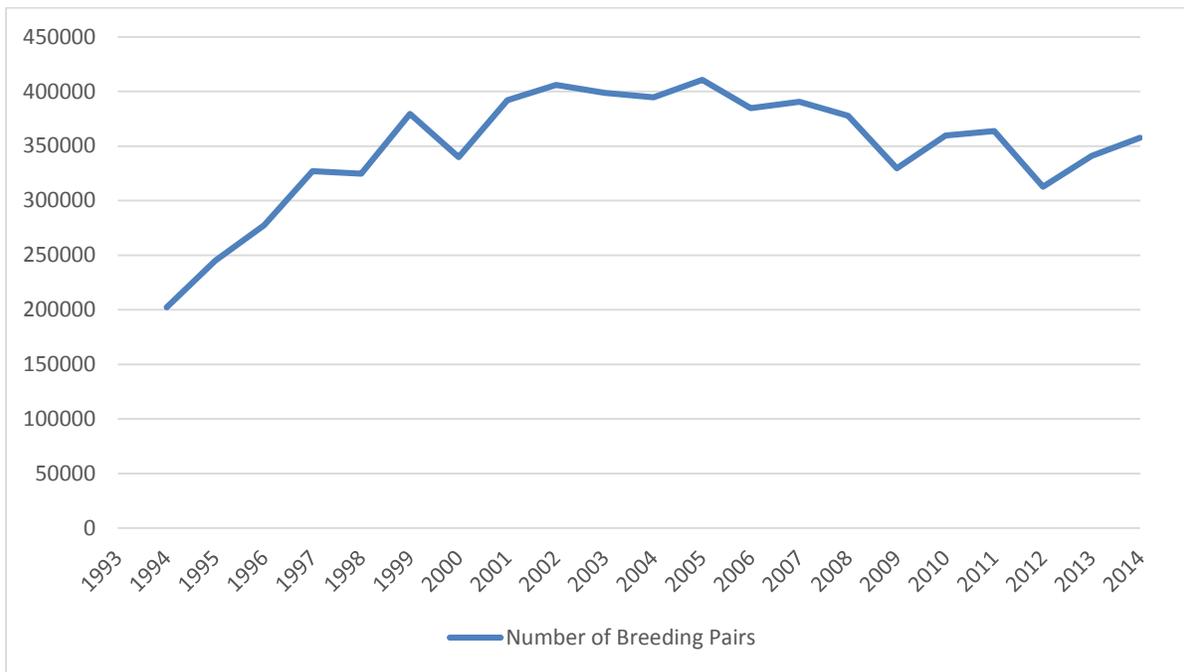
1. The Atlantic Population (AP) of Canada geese (birds which nest in northern Quebec and migrate south in the fall) began a precipitous decline (Figure 1).
2. The Resident Population (RP) of Canada geese (birds that nest in the states and southern Canada) began an enormous growth phase (Figure 2).

Traditionally, Canada goose populations had been monitored in the Atlantic Flyway by mid-winter surveys. However, the mixing of resident and migrant birds on the winter grounds masked the changes that were occurring. Since there were no good mechanisms in place to determine the rise and fall of these two separate groups of birds and because they all look alike, it was difficult to tell what was happening until it was almost too late. Luckily, biologists were able to determine the dangerous status of the AP migrant birds and sport hunting suspended in 1995. Aggressive management actions were taken, along with annual monitoring of breeding ground conditions, counts of birds and breeding pairs, and banding of geese on the breeding grounds. By fall 1999, the migrant population recovered sufficiently enough to restore a limited hunting season in much of the Atlantic Flyway.

During this same period, the rapidly expanding population of resident geese was beginning to create significant nuisance problems. The September goose season, beginning in 1993, was the first major management action taken to reduce the number of resident birds.



**Figure 1. Estimated number of breeding pairs of Canada geese on the Ungava Peninsula, Quebec, Canada, 1988 and 1993-2014. Note- no survey flown in 2013.**

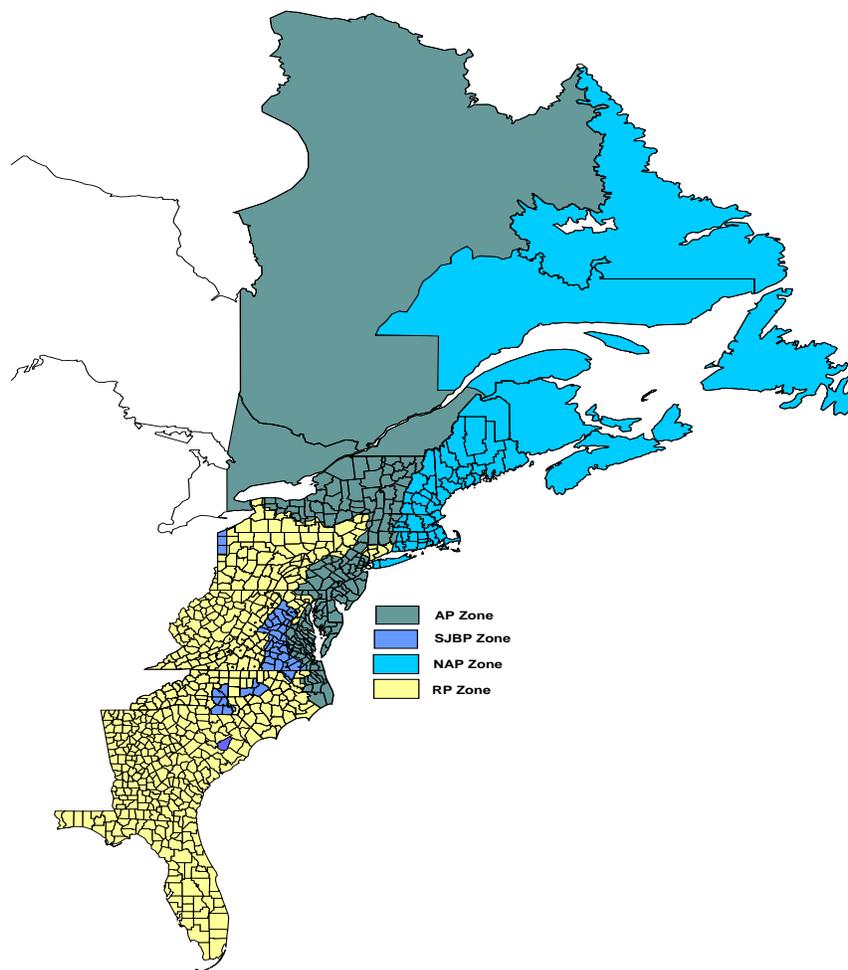


**Figure 2. Estimated number of breeding pairs of Atlantic Flyway Resident Population Canada geese, 1994-2014.**

Despite continuous efforts to inform the public about the Canada goose situation in New York, confusion, and even frustration, is rampant. With a limited hunting season for migrant birds and liberal seasons for resident birds occurring for more than a decade now, hunters are asking about the current and future status of Canada geese. They want to know why harvest is still limited despite a perceived overabundance of Canada geese in New York, and are asking for expanded opportunities to hunt geese earlier in the fall and later in the winter.

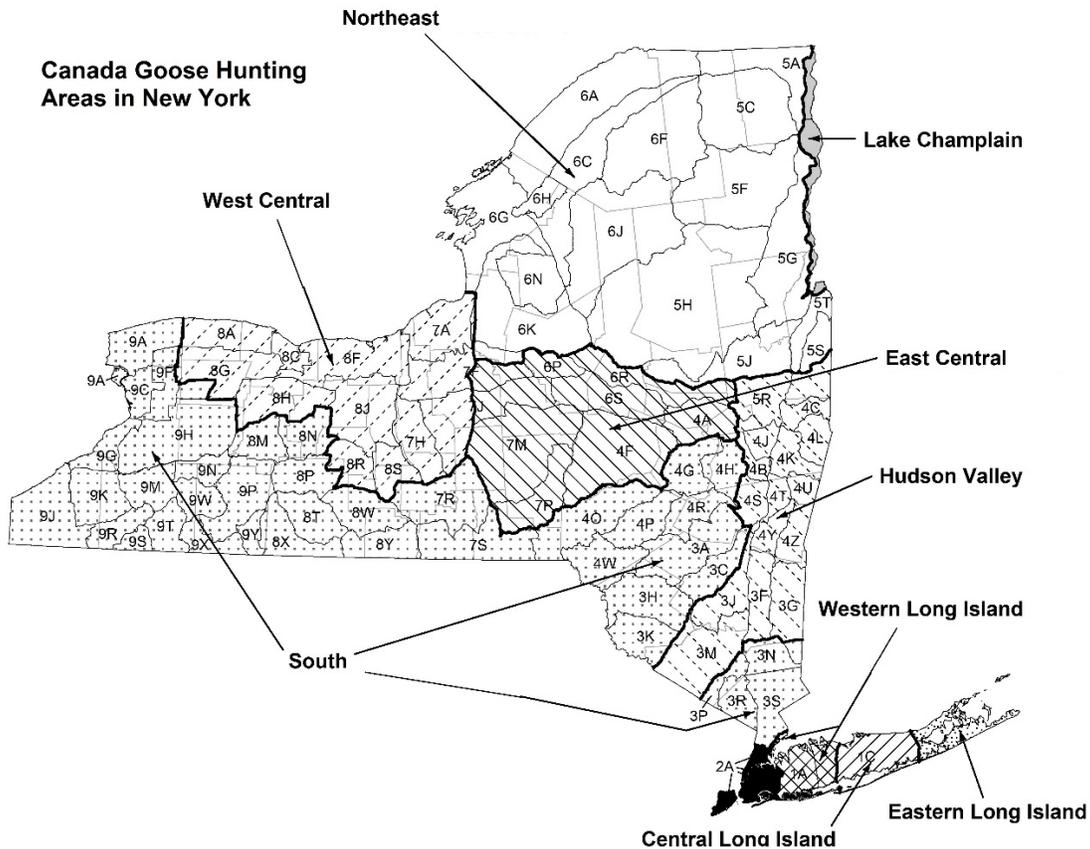
### **WHY ARE THERE AREAS OF THE STATE WITH LONGER SEASONS?**

Across North America, Canada geese have been divided into 12 *populations*, composed of up to 4 subspecies, for management purposes. These population designations are based on the composition of birds among breeding, migrating, and wintering ranges. In addition to AP and RP Canada geese, geese harvested in the Atlantic Flyway also come from the North Atlantic Population (NAP) and Southern James Bay Population (SJB), and both are found in New York. Canada Goose Management Regions have been established for the Atlantic Flyway (Figure 3) based upon direct recoveries of banded geese from these four populations during fall and winter hunting seasons.



**Figure 3. Canada Goose Management Regions in the Atlantic Flyway.**

New York attempts to use its Wildlife Management Unit (WMUs) boundaries for Canada goose season-setting purposes by grouping WMUs into nine Canada Goose Hunting Areas (Figure 4). This provides more flexibility than our five regular Waterfowl Hunting Zones (used for ducks, brant and snow geese), allowing for greater refinement of season dates to match the composition of geese in each area, as well as local hunting conditions and desires. In other words, the use of WMUs allows us to delineate hunting areas based upon the different populations of Canada geese that occur in New York and take full advantage of the harvest strategies prescribed for each population.



**Figure 4. Canada Goose Hunting Areas and Wildlife Management Units**

Most of upstate New York is considered an AP Canada goose harvest area and is subjected to a shorter season needed to limit the harvest of those birds (see Status of Atlantic Population below). The Northeast, Hudson Valley, East Central, and West Central Canada Goose Hunting Areas are all AP goose harvest areas where seasons are currently limited to a ‘moderate’ season length of 50 days. These 50 days are set by DEC to match when geese are most available to hunters in those areas, but the overall harvest is moderated to avoid overharvest of AP geese. The South Canada Goose Hunting Area is considered a RP Canada goose harvest area, because most AP geese pass over during migration and are harvested in low numbers during the dates allowed for the longer season. This allows extra harvest opportunity of the resident geese that are abundant during those extra days.

On Long Island we have a similar situation with a migrant population that requires a different harvest rate than the resident population. In this area, the migrant birds are part of the North Atlantic Population (NAP) that breed in Labrador, Newfoundland, western Greenland, and eastern Quebec. Canada goose harvest areas here have different season lengths and bag limits as prescribed for NAP birds and resident birds.

Another migrant Canada Goose population that breeds in the Southern James Bay area of Ontario migrates through the far western tip of New York (WMU 9J). Harvest of SJBP geese occurs in low numbers along the Great Lakes and in the Finger Lakes area of the state. SJBP geese are managed jointly with the Mississippi Flyway using a plan that allows for increased harvest of RP geese while maintaining a low but stable breeding population of SJBP geese. At one time, a small part of western New York was managed based on the presence of SJBP geese. However, the flyways have since agreed that management of that area based on RP or AP geese was acceptable and would help to simplify our season-setting process.

### **WHY DOES CANADA GOOSE SEASON START SO LATE IN OCTOBER?**

Even before the Atlantic Population declined and began to rebound it became apparent there were fewer birds returning to the southern states – Virginia, North and South Carolina – to winter. It is known that AP geese begin to migrate south in late September and many reach their wintering grounds by late October. The late start of the hunting season is the strategy used to protect migrating AP geese from excessive harvest (which could occur if birds were subjected to “opening day” hunting pressure throughout their migration) and allow the birds to reach their southernmost wintering grounds. The season framework established by the USFWS for NY is no earlier than the 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday in October and is described in the Atlantic Population (AP) Canada Goose Management Plan in this way:

*“Opening framework dates are considered to be an important tool to help maintain the current wintering distribution of the AP, especially in the southern range. Season opening date frameworks will continue to be used, where practical, to allow for passage of early migrating AP geese that have the fidelity to winter in the southern portion of the AP range.”*

Historically, migrant Canada geese wintered in all southern Atlantic Flyway states. In Georgia and Florida, major declines occurred between 1953 and 1960. Today, no AP Canada geese are known to exist in these states. Midwinter survey estimates of Canada geese in South Carolina declined from 44,000 to 1,500 between 1964 and 2002. Today only a few remnant flocks winter in the state. Large numbers of Canada geese also wintered in eastern North Carolina and Back Bay, Virginia, but migrant Canada geese wintering in these areas have declined greatly since the early 1960s. Hunting seasons for migrant Canada geese were closed in the area in 1989 (Back Bay, VA) and 1992 (eastern NC). Previous Atlantic Flyway goose management plans recognized this decline and objectives and strategies sought to increase numbers of Canada geese wintering in this area. However, numbers continued to decline and presently remain low. Approximately 5,000 migrant Canada geese currently winter in eastern North Carolina. Several factors are thought to influence the migration timing and wintering distribution/destination including differential survival of southern geese, climate change, and long-term changes in farming practices throughout the flyway.

Today, aerial surveys are made to monitor the numbers and distribution of AP geese in the southern states. Harvest is obviously monitored, too, through hunter surveys and band returns, and it is important that the proportions of harvested AP and AFRP geese be monitored in all seasons. Hunters play a critical role in reporting all banded birds that they shoot, so the composition of harvests can be accurately determined and appropriate hunting regulations put in place to influence population trends effectively. Flyway biologists are also supporting research efforts that help understand the other factors (survival rates, distribution due to agriculture and climate change) that may contribute to the decline of AP geese in the southern AF.

NY provides significant stopover habitat for this important population of Canada geese during migration (Figure 5) and we benefit from excellent hunting opportunities as a result. We must also accept responsibility for flyway-wide management of this population.

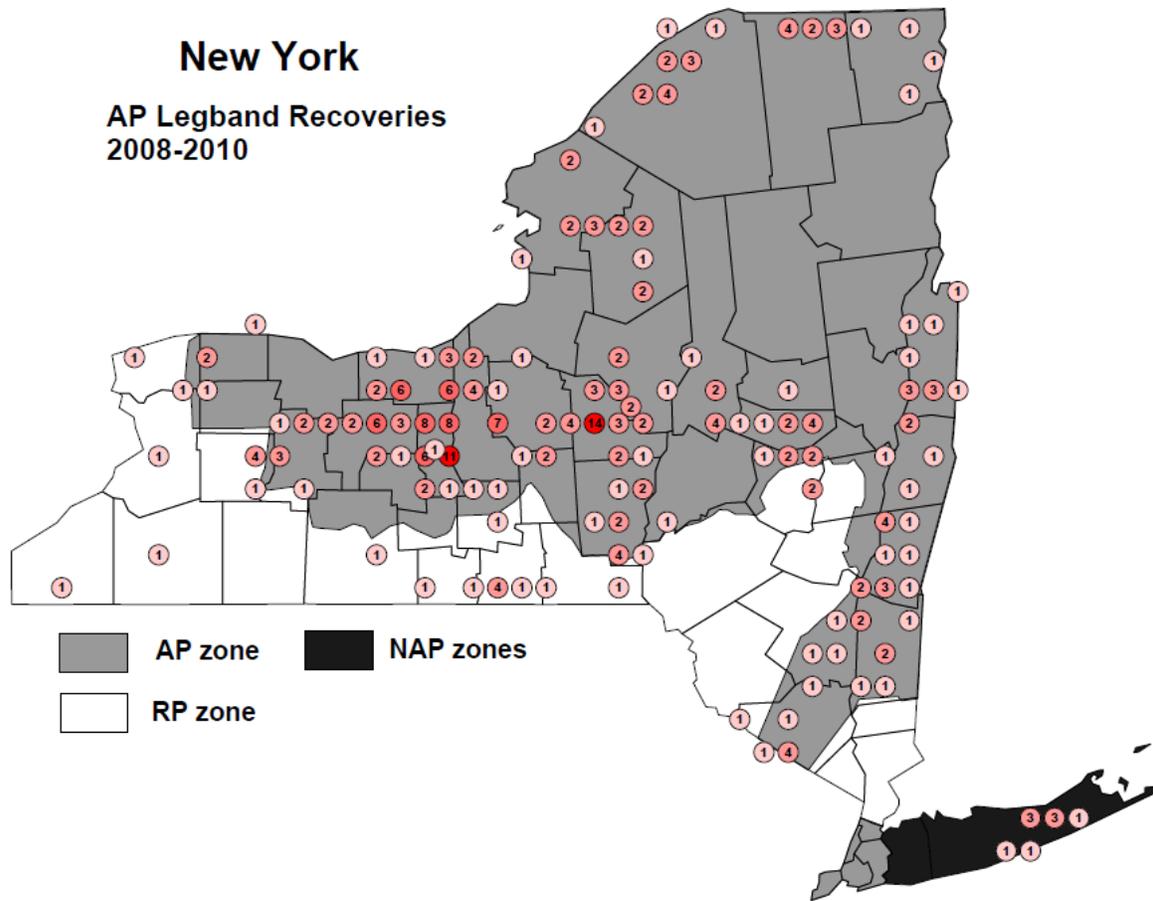


Figure 5. Locations and numbers of AP Canada Goose leg band recoveries, October - March, 2008-2010.

## WHAT IS THE STATUS OF ATLANTIC POPULATION CANADA GEESE?

AP geese breed throughout northern Quebec, especially along Ungava Bay, the eastern shore of Hudson Bay, and in the interior of the Ungava Peninsula. AP geese winter from southern Ontario and southern Quebec southward to North Carolina with major wintering concentrations occurring on the Delmarva Peninsula and in portions of NY, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Virginia.

This population has certainly rebounded from the lows of the mid-1990s. In 1995 the breeding pair count in the Ungava Peninsula of Quebec was estimated to be 33,995 pairs. In 2014 the estimated count was 183,642. Over the past five years the population has stabilized with an average of approximately 188,000 breeding pairs. The highest number of breeding pairs estimated to date was 216,032 in 2011. The total number of geese on the breeding grounds in 2014 was 785,576. This number includes breeding adults, sub adults and non-breeders, and some Resident Population geese that migrate north to molt prior to when surveys are conducted. Because the number of RP geese that molt migrate to northern Quebec is unknown, the breeding pair estimate is a more reliable indicator of the changes in breeding status.

## IS THERE A GOAL FOR THE ATLANTIC POPULATION?

YES. It is based on the number of breeding pairs in the major goose producing areas of northern Quebec – the Ungava Peninsula (Figure 6) between the east coast of Ungava Bay and the west coast of Hudson Bay. That goal is 250,000 pairs; 225,000 pairs on the Ungava peninsula and 50,000 pairs in the boreal forest of northern Quebec. While the goal of 50,000 pairs in the boreal forest has been realized and even exceeded, the number of pairs on the Ungava peninsula remains below the goal. In 2014 the estimated number of breeding pairs was 183,642; see Figure 1 for estimates going back to 1993.

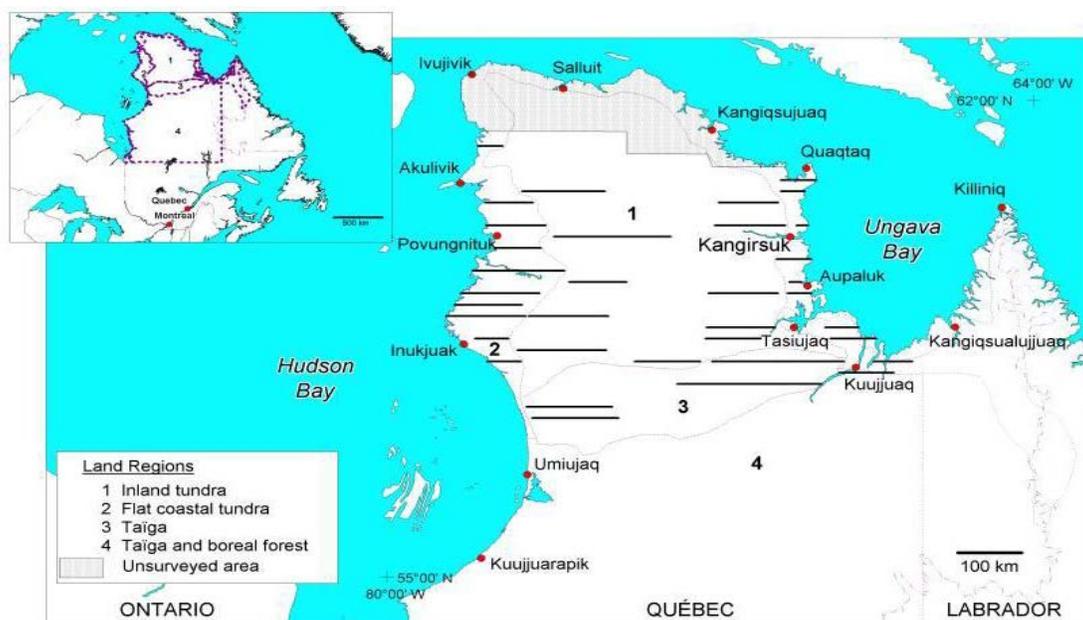


Figure 6. Map of Ungava Peninsula, Quebec, Canada, depicting land regions and breeding pair survey transects.

## **HOW WAS THE GOAL OF 250,000 BREEDING PAIRS DETERMINED?**

This goal represents an estimate of what size breeding population it would take to produce a fall flight that can support a liberal hunting season roughly similar to the seasons that existed in the late 1970s. During that time the annual sport harvest was about 300,000 AP geese. Once the goal is reached, a fall flight of almost 1,500,000 geese could be expected, as the population in the fall includes breeding adults, non-breeding adult geese, and young-of-the-year birds.

## **HOW ARE SEASON LENGTHS AND BAG LIMITS DETERMINED IN ATLANTIC POPULATION GOOSE HUNTING AREAS?**

The population objective for AP Canada geese is to maintain a spring breeding pair index of 225,000 in the Ungava Region of northern Quebec. When the 3-year average breeding pair index is at or above 225,000, liberal harvest regulations will be considered that would target a projected average harvest rate of breeding adults not to exceed 15%. In this case, the harvest regulations in NY would include a 60-day season with a maximum daily bag limit of 3 geese.

When the 3-year average breeding pair index is between 150,000 and 225,000, moderate harvest regulations will be considered that would target a projected average harvest rate of breeding adults not to exceed 10%. Regulations for this population level include a 50-day season with a daily bag limit of 3 geese in NY. This harvest rate is expected to allow for further growth of the AP.

If the 3-year average breeding pair index drops below 150,000, restrictive harvest regulations will be considered that would target a projected mean harvest rate of breeding adults not to exceed 5%. Regulations would provide a 30-day season with a maximum daily bag limit of 2 geese in NY. If the breeding pair index drops below 60,000 and has been trending downward for 3 years, consideration will be given to suspending sport hunting in AP goose harvest areas.

In all cases, the timing of hunting seasons will facilitate the southern migration of the AP Populations - enabling them to reach wintering areas in the southern portion of the Atlantic Flyway. As discussed earlier, this involved opening the season no earlier than the 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of October in all AP and RP harvest areas in NY. RP areas are included because AP geese migrate south on a broad front rather than following clear corridors. Consequently, harvest of AP geese may occur almost anywhere in upstate NY during October, whereas after that AP geese tend to settle into well-established concentration areas (such as the Finger Lakes and Hudson Valley).

Consideration is given to varying season opening dates and bag limits among flyway regions to manage AP harvests. The regular season is allowed to open as early as October 10<sup>th</sup> in the AP areas of Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut since AP goose band recoveries have been extremely low along this edge of the migratory route. NY's Lake Champlain Zone is managed jointly by New York and Vermont and by federal rules the season dates and bag limits must be the same in both states, so the earlier opening date applies in this small portion of New

York. Much higher numbers of AP geese are found in other parts of northern New York and for that reason, the earlier opening date cannot be offered in the Northeast Canada Goose Hunting Area.

### **THE ATLANTIC POPULATION SEEMS TO BE STALLED AND STILL A LONG WAY FROM THE POPULATION GOAL. WHY IS THAT?**

No one knows for sure at this time why the number of breeding pairs hasn't changed much in the last ten years, but it may be that the harvest rate (percent of the total population removed by hunting) of breeding birds is just high enough that there is little potential for growth. If this trend continues, flyway managers may consider reducing harvest for a period of time to encourage population growth or accepting the "moderate" harvest regulations all that can be sustained for the foreseeable future.

### **WHAT IS THE STATUS OF RESIDENT POPULATION CANADA GEESE?**

Local-nesting or "resident" Canada geese were introduced into the Atlantic Flyway during the early 1900s and now comprise the largest population of waterfowl in the flyway. RP geese are defined as geese that hatch or nest in any state, or in Canada at or below 48° N latitude. Although considered non-migratory, some RP geese do undertake molt migrations in the summer and fall, and many flocks in northern latitudes will migrate south for the winter. Banding studies have confirmed that RP geese are not AP birds that simply stopped migrating north to breed.

The first RP geese were birds released by private individuals, including many geese released by hunting clubs and market gunners when the use of live decoys for hunting was prohibited in 1935. From the 1950s through the 1980s, many state wildlife agencies, including New York DEC, raised and stocked flocks of geese to help establish and expand resident goose populations in rural areas. These birds were not released in urban or suburban areas where geese are now so abundant; those flocks resulted from RP geese that were attracted to the habitat in those areas and benefitted from supplemental feeding and the lack of hunting pressure.

The dramatic growth of the RP goose population was not fully recognized until recently. The northern Atlantic Flyway population exploded from a low of just over 200,000 birds in 1990 to more than 1 million birds in 1997 (Figure 7). The population has leveled off since then and there continues to be about a million RP Canada geese in the flyway today. The number of breeding pairs of RP geese doubled in less than 10 years but has since leveled off at approximately 400,000 pairs.

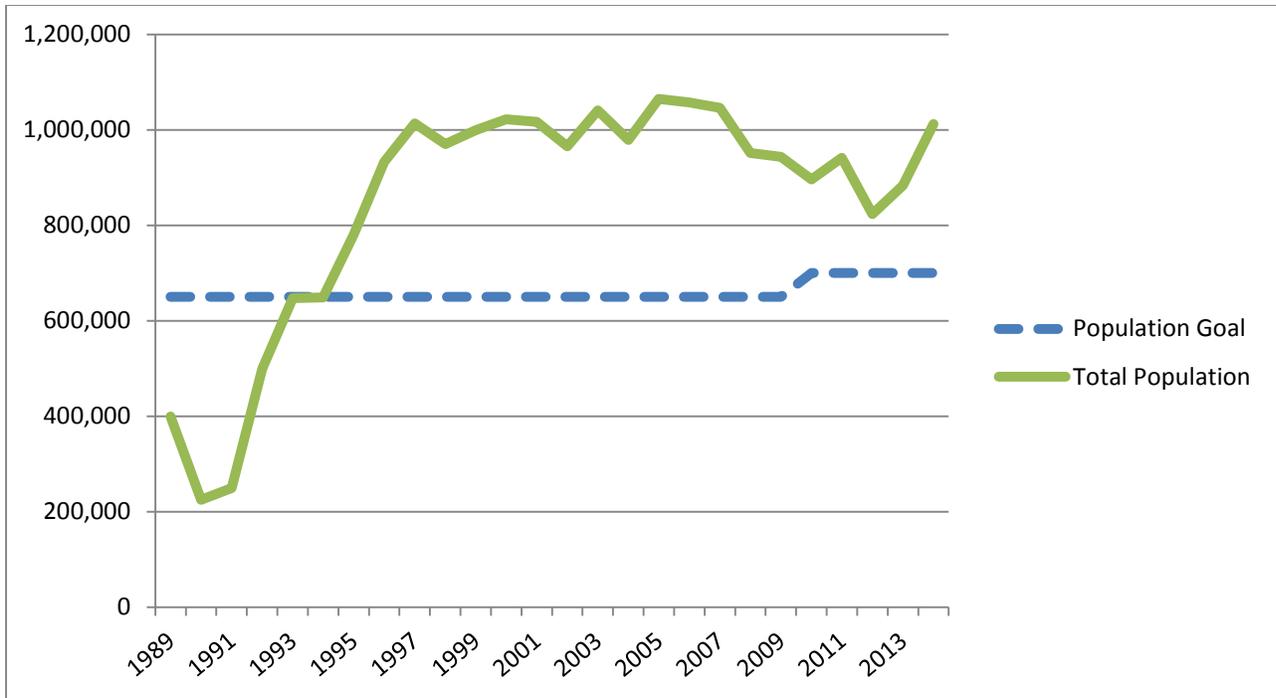


Figure 7. Resident Canada Goose population measures and goal for the Atlantic Flyway.

In New York State, the RP goose population climbed from a low of about 80,000 birds in 1995 to nearly 275,000 in 2007, and continues to fluctuate between about 200,000 and 250,000 geese (Figure8). The number of breeding pairs in NY has quadrupled in 15 years; from approximately 25,000 pairs in 1995 to about 100,000 pairs today.

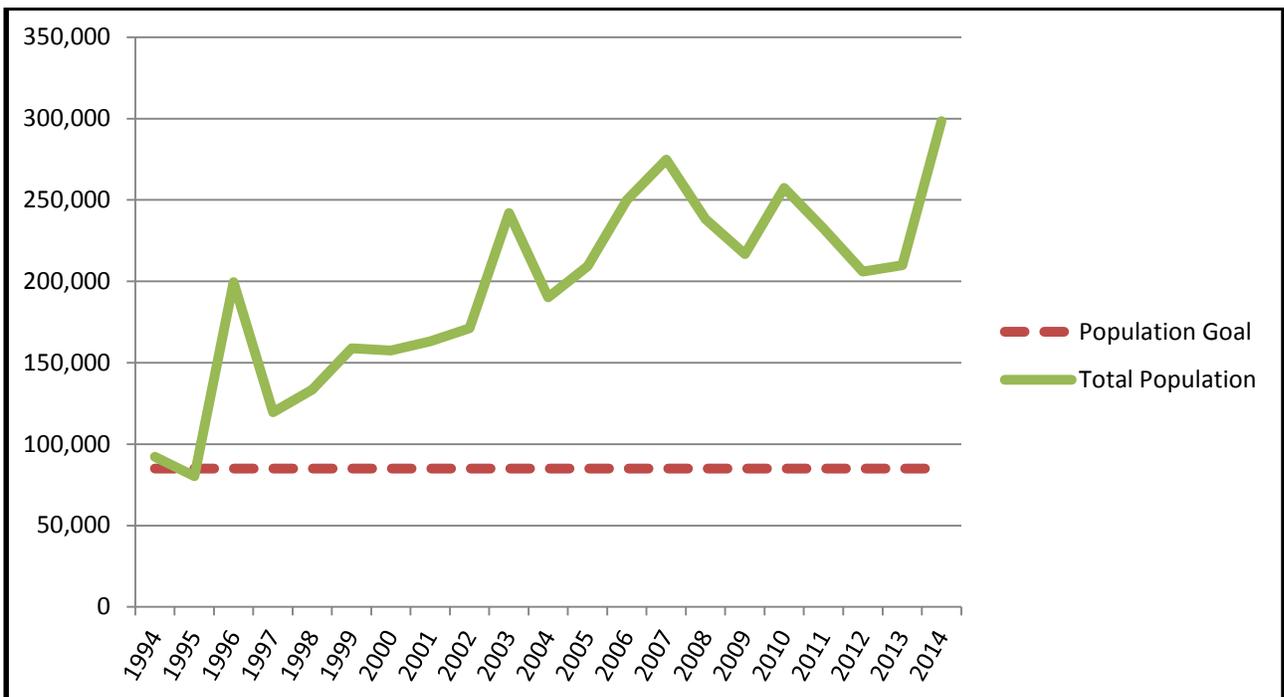


Figure 8. Resident Canada Goose population goals and measures for New York.

## **IS THERE A GOAL FOR THE RESIDENT POPULATION?**

YES. The Atlantic Flyway Resident Population Canada Goose Management Plan calls for the total population of RP geese in the Flyway to be reduced to 700,000 birds, as estimated in the spring, by the year 2020. The population should be distributed across the Flyway in accordance with levels prescribed by individual states and provinces. In New York, the current population goal for RP geese is 85,000 birds.

## **HOW WAS THE RP CANADA GOOSE POPULATION GOAL DETERMINED?**

The overall management goal of the Atlantic Flyway Resident Population Canada Goose Management Plan is to manage Atlantic Flyway RP Canada geese to achieve a socially acceptable balance between the positive values and negative conflicts associated with these birds. Each state and province in the Flyway established a RP goose breeding population objective based on a number of different factors. All of the state and provincial objectives added together totaled about 700,000 geese. It is important to note that this population goal is for total geese, not the number of breeding pairs as the AP goose population goal is based on.

In New York, the aesthetic benefits and recreational opportunities that RP Canada geese provide were evaluated against the conflicts and damage the geese cause. Biologists determined that a resident goose population at or below 85,000 birds, more evenly distributed across the state, would reduce the frequency and severity of goose problems and prevent new problems from occurring, while allowing for an appropriate level of enjoyment and use to continue.

## **HOW ARE SEASON LENGTHS AND BAG LIMITS DETERMINED IN RESIDENT POPULATION GOOSE HUNTING AREAS?**

Sport hunting has played an important role in recreation and population control for RP Canada geese since the 1980s. In an effort to reduce harvest of migrant (AP) geese in the early 1990s, regular fall-winter hunting seasons were reduced, but this was offset somewhat by the establishment of “early” hunting seasons in September to put additional harvest pressure on RP geese. This strategy received greater emphasis later in the 1990s due to the sharp decline of the AP goose population, which resulted in complete closure of the regular season in 1995. Soon after, special “early”, “regular”, and “late” seasons designed to increase harvest pressure on RP Geese were created or expanded during times and locations where significant harvests of migrant geese were unlikely to occur. RP harvest zones have been established in the Atlantic Flyway wherever no more than a 1% direct recovery rate of migrant goose population leg bands have been reported during an open regular season.

In New York, maximum allowable season lengths (107 days) and framework dates (September 1 – March 10) allowed by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act are in effect for our RP goose zones. These are the South Canada Goose Hunting Area and the Western Long Island Goose Hunting Area.

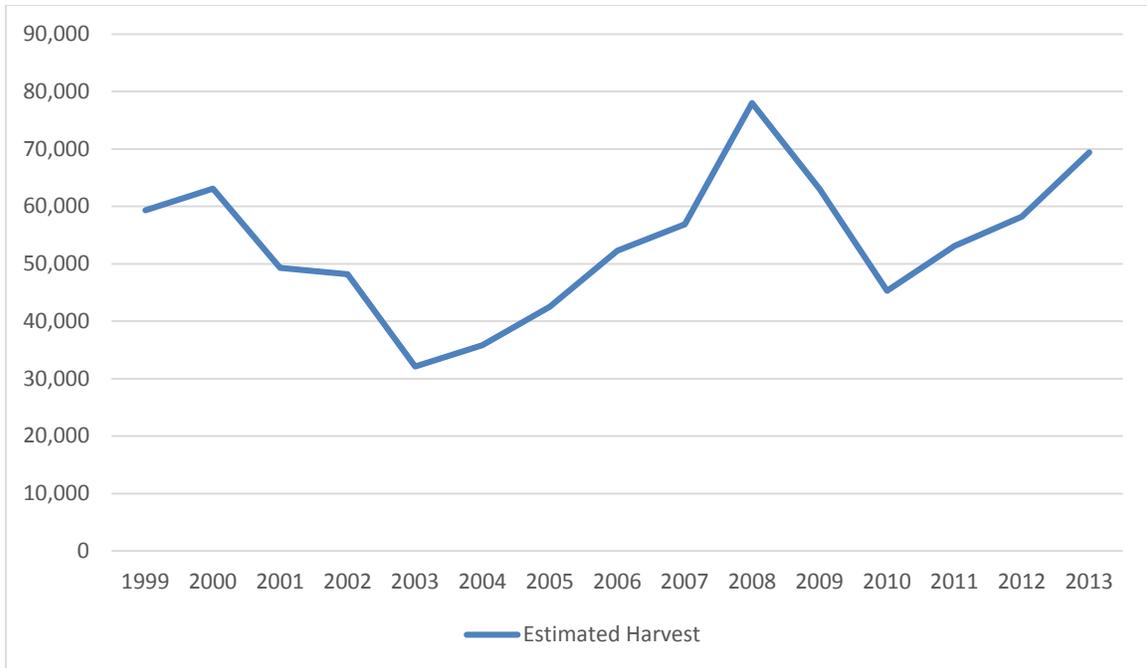
The South Canada Goose Hunting Area currently has a 25-day early season in September, two Youth Hunt days, and an 80-day regular hunting season that can be split up to 3 ways. The season must still remain closed in the South Area from late September until the 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday in October because of the potential for significant harvest of AP geese that pass over and through all of upstate New York during fall migration. The daily bag limit for this area has been set at 5 geese per day since it was established as an RP area. This higher limit (than the regular season in other areas) has been used for most regular and late seasons in the Atlantic Flyway where RP geese make up a majority of the harvest but some harvest of AP geese is still unavoidable.

The Western Long Island Goose Hunting Area currently has no September season, but has two Youth Hunt days and a 105-day regular season that can be split up to 3 ways. A September season is allowed, but DEC got federal and flyway approval to use all of its Canada goose hunting days in this area during later fall and winter when hunting opportunities are best and there is less potential for conflicts with other outdoor activities on coastal waters. The daily bag limit for this area is 8 geese per day, reflecting the fact that almost no AP geese occur in this area, but some harvest of migrant geese (primarily NAP) may occur.

### **SPECIAL SEPTEMBER SEASONS**

Throughout most of the State, early September seasons have been established since 1993 to maximize harvest of RP geese before the arrival of migratory geese. Based on data obtained from neck collar and telemetry studies, and leg band recoveries, AP Canada geese begin arriving in New York during the last week of September and have largely reached their wintering grounds (including some areas of NY) by the end of October. Therefore, the season is closed from September 26<sup>th</sup> until the 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday in October to protect these flocks. As the population of RP geese continues to grow in NY, so has the bag limit, now at 15 geese per day for most of the state: the most allowed by the current harvest strategy. This very liberal bag limit reflects the urgent need to maximize hunter harvest of RP geese at a time when very few migrant geese are likely to be taken. Additionally, the USFWS relaxed certain hunting regulations for the take of Canada geese during September seasons, including the use of unplugged shotguns and electronic calls and extended hunting hours, to further increase the harvest of RP Canada geese. NY adopted these special regulations in 2013 hoping to see an increase in the number of RP Canada geese harvested in September. The estimated harvest in September has averaged approximately 50,000 geese since 1999 (Figure 9) which has not been enough to reduce the population but may have helped stabilize it.

The September season bag limit remains lower in the Lake Champlain Zone because the State of Vermont is still allowing their population of resident geese to grow to enhance goose hunting opportunities in the State. More than 70% of the geese annually harvested in Vermont are RP geese, so more resident birds are desired to augment the number of huntable geese. As mentioned previously, the season dates and bag limits must be the same throughout the Zone.



**Figure 9. Estimated number of Canada geese harvested during September in New York**

### **WHAT IS THE STATUS OF NORTH ATLANTIC POPULATION CANADA GEESE?**

NAP geese breed in Labrador, Newfoundland, western Greenland, and portions of eastern Quebec. They historically wintered from Nova Scotia south to South Carolina but are now mainly found wintering in Nova Scotia, New England, and Long Island, NY.

Reliable long-term data on the status of NAP geese are lacking. Fall and winter counts may have some utility, but are confounded by apparent northward shifts in the wintering ranges of waterfowl in general and the co-mingling of other goose populations. Recently established breeding population surveys are used as a measure of the population, however the two surveys (a USFWS fixed-wing survey and the CWS Eastern Waterfowl Helicopter plot survey) correlate poorly. Both surveys indicate the population is relatively stable. The USFWS fixed-wing survey (Figure 10) estimated an average of approximately 62,000 pairs and 167,000 total birds from 1996 to 2012.

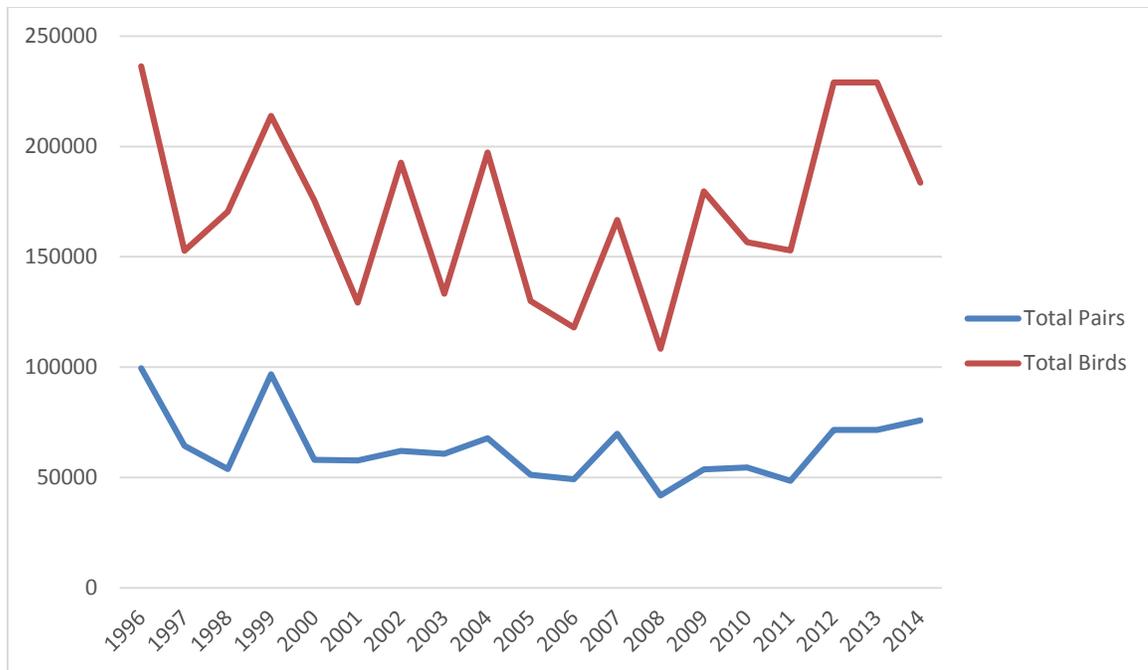


Figure 10. Breeding survey estimates for NAP Canada geese. Note- no survey flown in 2013.

### IS THERE A GOAL FOR THE NORTH ATLANTIC POPULATION?

Yes. The primary management goal for the NAP is to maintain the population at or above levels observed during 2001 – 2005. This population level, as measured by the USFWS fixed-wing survey, was approximately 60,000 breeding pairs and approximately 156,000 total geese. A population of this size will allow for a sustainable sport harvest of about 40,000 NAP geese annually while maximizing opportunity for harvest of RP geese.

### HOW ARE SEASON LENGTHS AND BAG LIMITS DETERMINED IN NORTH ATLANTIC POPULATION GOOSE HUNTING AREAS?

A harvest strategy consisting of “tiered” harvest regulations has been prescribed for NAP harvest areas of the US. This tiered approach allows a state to define “high”, “low”, and RP harvest areas within the NAP zone. “High” harvest areas are defined as the portion of the state where at least 70% of all known NAP leg bands are recovered (Eastern Long Island). “Low” harvest areas may include no more than 30% of all NAP leg band recoveries in a state (Central Long Island), and RP areas are defined as where no more than 10% of all NAP leg band recoveries in the state have occurred (Western Long Island). Low harvest areas are allowed longer seasons and larger bag limits than high harvest areas, and RP areas are designed to maximize harvest of RP geese (see earlier discussion of Western Long Island).

When the 3-year running average of breeding pair estimates and total population size is at or above the 2001-2005 observed level, a liberal season consisting of a 70-day season, between October 1 and March 10, with a 3-bird daily bag will be recommended for both High and Low Harvest areas.

When the 3-year running average breeding pair estimates and total population size is within the 2001-2005 observed level, a moderate season will be recommended. A moderate season will consist of 60 days between October 1 and January 31 with a 2-bird daily bag limit in High Harvest areas and a 70-day season between October 1 and February 15 with a 3-bird daily bag for Low Harvest areas.

Restrictive seasons will be recommended when the 3-year running average breeding pair estimates and total population size falls below 75% of the 2001-2005 observed level. For High Harvest areas, this will include a 30-day season between October 1 and December 31 with a 2-bird daily bag limit. A 50-day season between October 1 and February 15 with a 3-bird daily bag will be allowed in Low Harvest areas.

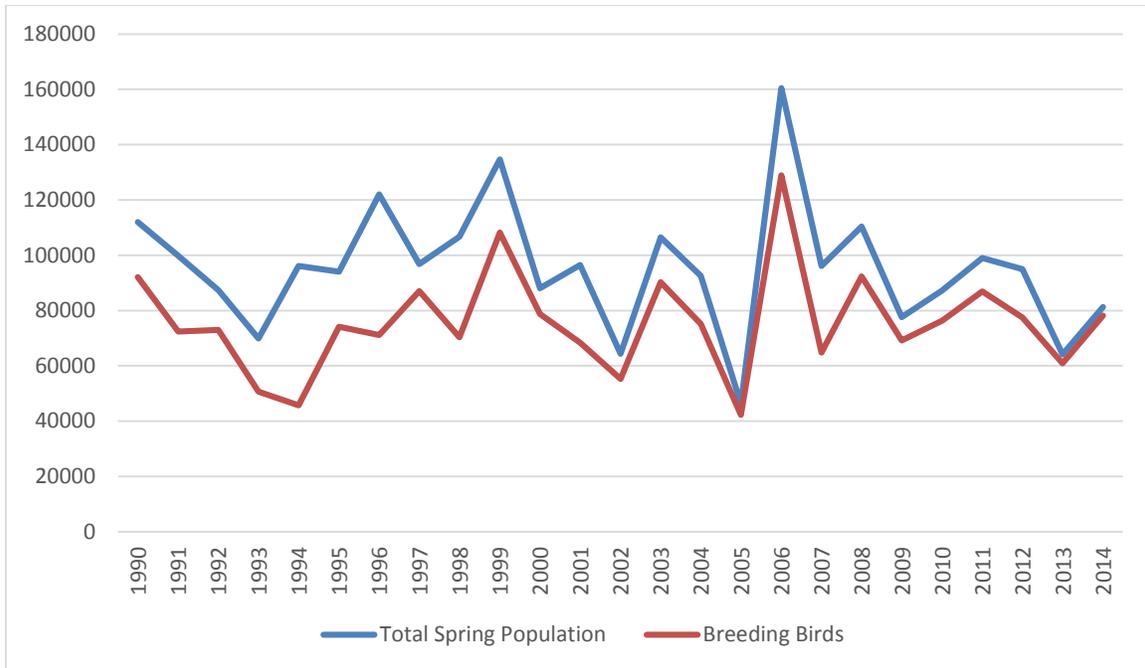
If the 3-year running average breeding pair estimates and total population size falls below 50% of the 2001-2005 observed level, a very restrictive season will be recommended. This will include a 15-day season between October 1 and November 30 with a 1-bird daily bag limit for High Harvest areas and a 30-day season between October 1 and February 15 with a 2-bird daily bag for Low Harvest areas.

The season will be closed if the 3-year running average breeding pair estimates and total population size falls below 25% of the 2001-2005 observed level.

Within most RP areas of the NAP harvest zone, 80-day seasons between October 1 and March 10 with a 5-geese daily bag limit are allowed regardless of NAP status. However, as noted earlier, DEC got approval from the USFWS to forego the September season in the Western Long Island Canada Goose Hunting Area (which has been defined as an RP area in the NAP harvest zone) and instead offer additional late season hunting. The result is a 107-day regular season that can be split into three segments, in addition to the two Youth Hunt days.

## **WHAT IS THE STATUS OF SOUTHERN JAMES BAY POPULATION CANADA GEESE?**

SJBP geese nest on the southwestern James Bay coast and interior lowland muskeg of Ontario and on Akimiski Island, Nunavut. They migrate through and winter in portions of the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways, and are managed jointly by both. The population as a whole has fluctuated at a low level over the last two decades but has averaged around 100,000 total geese and approximately 77,000 breeding birds estimated by spring breeding ground surveys (Figure 11).



**Figure 11. Breeding-ground survey estimates of SJBP Canada geese**

**IS THERE A GOAL FOR THE SOUTHERN JAMES BAY POPULATION?**

Yes. The current management objective is to maintain a sustainable SJBP population exceeding 45,000 spring breeding birds, while simultaneously attaining management objectives for RP goose populations in the Mississippi and Atlantic Flyways through increased harvest.

**HOW ARE SEASON LENGTHS AND BAG LIMITS DETERMINED IN SOUTHERN JAMES BAY POPULATION GOOSE HUNTING AREAS?**

The SJBP management plan allows for greater latitude in management of large populations of RP geese where they overlap with SJBP geese, as the abundance of the RP geese is expected to buffer the harvest of SJBP geese. The plan eliminated some SJBP harvest zones allowing SJBP low harvest states, like NY, to set season lengths and bag limits the same as the surrounding area, as long as direct recovery rates of leg banded SJBP geese remain below 1%. The SJBP zone in NY, WMU 9J, is therefore managed as part of our RP harvest zone. Current harvest regulations will remain in place as long as the spring breeding bird estimate consistently remains above 45,000. Appropriate regulation changes will be considered and implemented if the estimate falls below 50,000 in combination with either a downward trend in the estimate over 3 years and/or evidence of high harvest rates.

The spring breeding bird estimate has remained above 60,000 geese since 2006 and direct recoveries of SJBP geese in NY’s South Canada Goose Hunting Area have consistently been well below 1%. Provided this trend continues, the SJBP zone in WMU 9J will remain part of our RP harvest zone with longer seasons and higher bag limits prescribed. Biologists will continue to monitor SJBP harvest in the regular and early seasons throughout NY State and the Atlantic Flyway.