

[From Winter 1994-95]

Water - at Last!

Once again, mother nature was stingy in providing the refuge with rain during the early months of the fall season. This year's rainfall amounts, which fell during September through the early part of November, were comparable to amounts normally experienced in desert regions. The refuge's impoundments clearly showed the effects. Like last year, most of the "moist soil management units" (MSMUs) were almost completely dry during early fall migration when waterfowl began to arrive and search for suitable areas in which to spend the winter.

Since the refuge does not possess the capability to pump fresh water, every fall the MSMUs are replenished solely by means of rainwater. In November, in wistful anticipation of rain as waterfowl flew by overhead, the decision was made to let bay water flood into the three brackish water impoundments on the refuge (Old Fields, North Wash Flats, and Swans Cove). With full-moon tides continuing, a considerable amount of time was invested in the effort during the week of November 13. With the assistance of a wind tide, generated by a northeast storm which hit during the latter part of the week, water conditions within the three impoundments improved substantially.

As mother nature would have it, the storm ushered in the long awaited fall rains which graced the refuge on different occasions during the latter part of November. Consequently, water conditions within all of the impoundments have improved greatly. With the improving conditions, waterfowl numbers have increased as well. Geese, swans and a variety of duck species have arrived in full force. A waterfowl survey on November 23 revealed nearly 25,000 snow geese and 7,000 ducks of various species using the refuge. Barring the chance of future drought, indications are that the winter of 1994/95 will be another excellent year for waterfowl. So come out and enjoy what mother nature has provided - the privilege of viewing a variety of wildlife within its natural setting.

*Larry Ulibarri,
Refuge Operations Specialist*