This report will address all the biological concerns pertaining to the release of Captive reared Mallard Ducks with specific historic and current scientific information.

**DISEASE**

In a study by the National Wildlife Research Health Center of non-migratory waterfowl, the relative paucity of duck plague outbreaks reported in Maryland [29 from 1967 to 1995, involved backyard flocks mostly Muscovy ducks indicates little threat to migratory waterfowl (Converse and Kidd 2001). It remains that even with the new methods for determining waterfowl diseases and infections in released mallards, there has never been an outbreak of duck plague involving the large release programs in Maryland, South Carolina, North Carolina, or Alabama. In fact, there has not ever been a suspected case in those states among their participating release farms. It should also be stated that in 1993 a “blue ribbon panel” of avian diseases experts submitted a report to the FWS that duck plague and other diseases were already found in wild waterfowl and not solely isolated to captive reared flocks. Unfortunately, the rhetoric concerning the alleged disease threat to migratory waterfowl posed by the release of captive reared waterfowl has been dominated by agency bias, personal prejudice, invalid assumptions and inaccurate and misleading information.

One could also conclude that there is potential for wild waterfowl to introduce disease to released ducks. Presently in most states where free-flying released ducks programs are present, there exist mandatory criteria pertaining to the management of the released ducks. Items such as good clean potable water, a required volume of water relative to the quantity of ducks being released, methods of feeding the ducks and ample nutritional habitat to sustain the released ducks when they cannot be fed artificially (See Maryland’s RSA Permit and Proposed Free-flying Mallard Release Permit.) In states where released mallard programs are operating, annual inspections are performed to ensure that the management plan practices submitted with the permit are being followed. As a result of these criteria, the released ducks are guaranteed a good healthy, stress free, and monitored atmosphere.

As stated, until such time when migratory waterfowl populations are given the same scrutiny as released waterfowl, scientific evidence is insufficient to suggest or claim that any disease outbreaks in North American are caused by captive reared waterfowl.
HEALTH CERTIFICATIONS
Most states require a health certification of veterinary inspectors (health certification) for birds imported into the state. Presently, periodic inspections of brood flocks and their progeny are conducted for avian influenza along with other potential diseases. Nearly all mallard duck producers also operated under the Department of Agriculture's National Poultry Improvement Plant (NPIP); the same organization that the poultry industry uses as their health certifications.

CONCLUSION
All four Flyway Councils were asked to make recommendations on Captive Reared Mallards. The Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways adopted four recommendations. (The Central Flyway did not submit a report and it is unknown what report the Pacific Flyway presented).

• Restrict the unlimited take of free-flying CR mallards on state-licensed shooting areas to the regular duck season

• Prohibit all releases of CR mallards except for uses prescribed in 50CFR 21.13 (limited to State licensed shooting areas, dog training, and field trials)

• Prohibits banding of all CR mallards; minimizes the effect of CR band recoveries on federal band reporting rates

• Requires all CR mallards to have the alula removed from each wing (done at day old); done to separate CR mallards in waterfowl parts collection survey and eliminates the contamination of age ratios used in the eastern mallard ADM process to set duck hunting regulations in the AF

The FWS admittedly states: “Although quantifying the transmission of disease into the wild is very difficult, there is little evidence to indicate that today’s CRM operations pose an immediate threat to the health of wild ducks”.

It is paramount to understand that Federal Regulations allow the release of CRM Under [50CFR 21:13 Section D: That such birds may be killed in any number, at any time, within the confines of any premises operating as a shooting preserve under State license permit, or authorization, or they may be shot, in any number, at any time or place, by any person for a bono fide dog training or field trial purposes]. Therefore, any alteration of CRM operations would not be consistent with present Federal Regulations, thus requiring a change to 50 CFR 21:13 Section D.

With the release of over four million mallards in Dorchester County, Maryland along with the millions released in South Carolina, North Carolina, Alabama, Delaware and others with no demonstrable adverse effects, points toward retaining the release mallard programs. The state wildlife agencies are doing an excellent job in managing the CRM program in the states where it is currently taking place; let’s let them continue. Further evidence point toward there is no evidence that CRM programs have any impact on migratory patterns of wild ducks. Lastly, this is a very slippery slope for the WHHCC as it relates to other raised for release programs tower shoots, quail, pheasant, chukar partridge and others. ★

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