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DEC UPDATE ON AVIAN INFLUENZA WILD BIRD SAMPLING

Samples Collected From Mallards in Niagara County Indicate Low Pathogenic Virus;
Finding Poses No Risk to Human Health

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) today announced test results which indicate that a virus found in samples collected earlier this month from wild mallard ducks in Niagara County was low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI). LPAI has been detected several times in wild birds in North America and poses no risk to human health.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) confirmed the presence of LPAI H5N1 from 2 of 27 mallard ducks collected from the Tonawanda Wildlife Management Area in Niagara County on October 21, 2006. This low pathogenic strain of avian influenza occurs naturally in wild birds and typically causes only minor sickness or no noticeable signs of disease in birds. These strains are common in the United States and around the world. Low pathogenic avian influenza viruses are very different from the more severe highly pathogenic H5N1 circulating in parts of Asia, Europe and Africa. Highly pathogenic strains of avian influenza spread rapidly and are often fatal to chickens and turkeys.

To date, USDA and United States Department of Interior (DOI) have announced 12 presumptive positive and/or confirmatory test results for low pathogenic avian influenza in six other states (MI, MD, PA, MT, IL and OH). In all cases, there has been no detection of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in North America. As the expanded surveillance of wild birds for highly pathogenic avian influenza increases in the coming months, USDA and DOI expect additional detections of the "North American strain" of low pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza. USDA and DOI is posting all suspected LPAI H5N1 detections on the Internet at <http://wildlifedisease.nvsl.gov/ai/LPAITable.pdf> . A link is also available on USDA's avian influenza website at <http://www.usda.gov/birdflu> .

New York State continues to work collaboratively with USDA, DOI, and academic institutions to sample wild birds throughout the State for the presence of highly pathogenic avian influenza. Live birds as well as hunter-killed birds will be sampled. Only a simple swab is needed for testing so that live birds are not harmed through the sampling. To date, New York State has collected more than 845 wild bird samples for testing. No other LPAI detections have been found. DEC continues to seek the participation of hunters in this effort and thanks those who have participated thus far.

Samples taken from loons and other birds found dead along Lake Ontario in recent weeks have also been tested for strains of avian influenza, but results to date have been negative. The cause of this mortality is Type E botulism, a disease that has killed thousands of loons, gulls, and other water birds on the Great Lakes over the past five years.

DEC and USDA will continue taking samples throughout New York State in the next few months. Swabs are taken in the field and then sent to the New York State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory at Cornell University where they are tested for the virus. Sampling is expected to continue into February 2007 to reach a 1,600-sample size goal.