

Adaptive Harvest Management Task Force

Conference Calls Summary

March 20, 2003

The AHM Task Force met via conference call on February 24, March 6, and March 12, 2003. A summary of the calls follows.

Communications Protocol

The Task Force reviewed and approved the protocol for communicating their work:

- Meeting summaries and other on-going work related “documents” will be approved by the Task Force before distribution. Once approved, Task Force members will distribute them to the various groups they represent. The IAFWA will distribute the documents through their established channels.
- Conclusions/recommendations from the Task Force will be approved by the Task Force and then submitted to the IAFWA Executive Committee for approval/distribution.
- “Process” questions and inquiries from outdoor media will be handled as needed by the facilitator. Communications related to recommendations will be handled through IAFWA channels.

Changes to AHM in 2002

In 2002 a number of changes were made to the midcontinent-mallard AHM protocol, which is used to prescribe hunting regulations for the three western Flyways. The most significant changes were revision of the population models to correct for an apparent bias in estimates of survival and reproductive rates, and extension of framework dates in the moderate and liberal regulatory alternatives. According to the AHM Working Group, these revisions are expected to result in fewer liberal seasons, more closed-season prescriptions, and an increase in annual variability in hunting regulations. Based on the best biological information available, however, there appears to be considerable opportunity within the AHM process to alleviate some of these adverse consequences, while still insuring long-term protection of the waterfowl resource.

Potential changes to the AHM protocol include constraints on the use of the current regulatory alternatives or revision of harvest management objectives. As long as the overarching goal of AHM remains sustainable harvesting, decisions concerning these changes can be based primarily on how regulations best serve the interests of the hunting public.

One-Step Constraint

Given the charge to review policy issues in AHM, the Task Force investigated a number of possible, strategic changes to the current AHM protocol that might help minimize closed-season prescriptions and annual variability in regulations. ***Based on this review, the Task Force urges the Flyway Councils to give serious consideration to a constraint on regulatory changes greater than one step each year.***

According to the AHM Working Group, this “one-step constraint” is expected to greatly reduce the frequency of closed-season prescriptions, as well as virtually eliminate annual regulatory changes greater than one step. This constraint also is expected to produce a

more even distribution of the frequencies with which the various regulatory alternatives are applied. Notably, this constraint is *not* expected to significantly affect average mallard population size or harvest, nor average population size of the nine other principal duck species breeding in the midcontinent region (gadwall, wigeon, green-winged teal, blue-winged teal, shoveler, pintail, redhead, canvasback, and scaup).

Potential Constraints and Policy Changes

The Task Force is continuing to evaluate other potential regulatory constraints, as well as other policy changes with potentially more profound implications:

(1) In AHM, the central objective is to regulate hunting in a way that provides for the long-term viability of duck populations and associated hunting opportunities. In one case (midcontinent mallards), however, an ancillary objective is to maintain population size at or above the goal of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP). Because the primary purpose of the NAWMP population goal is to guide habitat-management efforts, questions have been raised regarding whether those goals should be considered in setting hunting regulations and, if so, the extent to which they should be emphasized (particularly during periods when environmental conditions are below average).

(2) Because AHM helps ensure long-term resource conservation through an optimal use of specified regulatory alternatives (whatever they may be), proposals to modify the set of regulatory alternatives primarily involve social trade-offs. In this light, how many regulatory alternatives should there be? Among the alternatives, what are desirable or acceptable ranges of season lengths, bag limits, and framework dates? How often should the set of regulatory alternatives be reviewed and what are appropriate criteria for modifying them?

The Task Force looks forward to working with all stakeholders to review and discuss these issues and to develop recommendations where appropriate

Next Meeting

The Task Force will meet by conference call on April 2 at 2:00 p.m. eastern time.

Facilitator Contact

Dave Case is serving as facilitator for the Task Force and can be contacted at (574) 258-0100 or dave@djcase.com.