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PROPOSED WATERFOWL HUNTING REGULATIONS ANNOUNCED

With fall flights of wild ducks expected to be "as good as last year," hunters of migratory waterfowl can look forward to about the same shooting seasons and bag and possession limits for the 1956-57 season as they had in 1955-56, Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton said today in announcing new regulations proposals.

The new Federal proposals specify by flyways the length of the shooting seasons, bag and possession limits, and shooting hours, but do not include the specific season dates for the various States. They will be announced at a later date after the States have made their selections.

Based on the number of days allotted to each flyway, the specific dates will be selected by State game administrators within a general framework of October 1 to January 15, 1957. The "outside dates" of this year's framework are the same as last year, with a few exceptions in the Pacific Flyway.

Season lengths and bag and possession limits in all flyways will remain substantially the same as last year, with a few exceptions.

Secretary Seaton emphasized that the basic data used to guide Director John L. Farley, of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and his technical staff, in making their decisions resulted from the cooperative surveys of the wintering grounds and the breeding grounds of the birds conducted by Service biologists and game management agents, State game department technicians, wildlife experts of the Canadian Wildlife Service, the Provincial Game Branches, and field personnel in Canada of Ducks Unlimited and the Wildlife Management Institute.

In the course of formulating the basic regulations, Director Farley accorded full consideration to the opinions and recommendations of his Waterfowl Advisory Committee.

This Committee is composed of delegates of the National Waterfowl Council (whose membership is constituted of directors of State game departments), and representatives of the International Association of Game, Fish, and Conservation Commissioners, the Wildlife Management Institute, the National Wildlife Federation, the Outdoor Writers Association of America, the National Audubon Society, the Izaak Walton League of America, and the Wildlife Society.

Highlights of the 1956-57 regulations are as follows:

### SEASONS

With minor exceptions, the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways will again have a 70-day season on waterfowl and coots, the Central Flyway a 75-day season on ducks and coots and a 60-day season on geese, and the Pacific Flyway will continue to have an 80-day season on ducks and geese.

Split seasons have again been offered as options to the States, with the same 10 percent penalty in effect as last year. As last year, the States may elect to divide split seasons into unequal lengths.

### SHOOTING HOURS

In 1955 the hours for hunting waterfowl and coots were modified to permit full-day shooting on the opening day as well as during other days of the season. This privilege has been continued in effect and the shooting hours approved for this year remain at one-half hour before sunrise to sunset in all flyways except the Mississippi. In response to a resolution adopted unanimously by the members of the Mississippi Flyway Council comprising representatives of the game departments of all States in that flyway, last year's more restrictive shooting hours of one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour before sunset will be observed this year.

The framework within which the States recommend open season dates on ducks and geese are stated below by flyways.

### ATLANTIC FLYWAY STATES

The States in this flyway--Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia--can select concurrent open seasons on waterfowl and coots of 70 consecutive full days, or two seasons aggregating 63 full days, beginning on or after October 1, 1956, and ending not later than January 15, 1957. The daily bag and possession limits on ducks remain fixed at 4 and 8, respectively, and on geese (except snow geese) at 2 and 4.

### MISSISSIPPI FLYWAY STATES

With the exception of Minnesota, all the States in this flyway--Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin--can have concurrent open seasons on waterfowl and coots of 70 consecutive full days, or two seasons aggregating 63 full days, within the framework of October 1, 1956, to January 15, 1957. Daily bag and possession limits on ducks will remain at 4 and 8, respectively, in all States except Minnesota, with a daily bag and possession limit of five on geese for all States. (These limits on geese may not include more than two Canada geese, two white-fronted geese, or one Canada goose or its subspecies and one white-fronted goose.)

In Minnesota an experimental formula will be tried this year for the first time which will give that State a season on ducks beginning October 6 and continuing for a period of 55 full days ending November 29. Because of the shorter season than that available to other States in that flyway, and the delayed opening date, Minnesota will have a daily bag and possession limit on ducks of 5 and 10, respectively. This request for a shortening of the season by 15 days to obtain an extra duck in the bag was made by the Minnesota Game Department and endorsed by the unanimous vote of the members of the Mississippi Flyway Council. From this experiment both Minnesota and the Service hope to develop data which will be useful in determining whether it is possible to establish a measurable relationship between shooting days and birds in the bag.

#### CENTRAL FLYWAY STATES

The States in this flyway--Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming--may select concurrent open seasons on ducks and coots of 75 consecutive full days, or two seasons aggregating 68 full days, within the established framework of October 1 to January 15. The daily bag and possession limits on ducks remain at 5 and 10, respectively.

States in this flyway may select concurrent open seasons on geese (except Ross's geese) of 60 consecutive full days, or two seasons aggregating 60 full days, subject to the condition that the goose season may not be split into two equal or unequal hunting periods unless a comparable split season for ducks is selected. Also, in Moffat County, Colorado, and in Wyoming (except Teton County, Goshen County and the drainage of the Salt River in Lincoln County) the season for Canada geese and its subspecies may not extend beyond December 15, 1956. The seasons on geese recommended by each State game department must be within the opening and closing dates of any consecutive-day or split seasons recommended by that State for ducks and coots. The daily bag and possession limits on geese will again be five. (These limits may not include more than two Canada geese, two white-fronted geese, or one Canada goose or its subspecies and one white-fronted goose.)

If North Dakota so desires, it may select a season for ducks comparable to that granted Minnesota. In this case, the North Dakota duck season would begin on October 6 and continue for 55 full days, ending on November 29, with an increase in the bag and possession limits from 5 and 10 to 6 and 12. If North Dakota decides not to accept this option, it may recommend a season on ducks on the same basis as the other Central Flyway States, with the bag and possession limits remaining at 5 and 10 for North Dakota.

#### PACIFIC FLYWAY STATES

The States in this flyway--Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington--may again select concurrent open seasons on ducks and geese (except Ross's geese) of 80 consecutive full days, or two seasons aggregating 72 full days. In recognition of the crop depredation problem caused annually by pintails and widgeons, all States in this flyway will again have an option to choose a bag limit of ducks consisting of seven a day or in possession, or six daily with 12 in possession. In addition, three "depredation" birds, consisting of pintails or widgeons, singly or in the aggregate of both kinds, will be permitted daily and in possession.

The daily bag and possession limit on geese (except Ross's geese) will again be six with the usual limitation that not more than three of the dark species of geese may be included in such limit.

Following a practice observed last year, additional restrictions on the daily bag and possession limit for Canada geese in certain designated areas in Arizona, California, Idaho, Oregon, and Utah will be provided to afford protection to certain subspecies of Canada geese which may be seriously endangered unless hunting is restricted in the areas designated. As an additional protective feature, the regulations this year will provide that the hunting seasons in the areas of the States mentioned, so far as Canada geese are concerned, shall terminate on December 15, 1956.

In recognition of the recommendations from the Pacific Flyway Council, approval has been given to treating a limited area in Northern California (conforming generally to the boundaries of that portion of the Klamath and Tule Lake Refuge which lies in California) as though it were in Oregon. This relatively small California area will be given the same hunting season on waterfowl as may be recommended this year by the adjoining State of Oregon.

The action is taken to permit a uniform season on both sides of a public waterfowl hunting area bisected by State boundaries. For administrative reasons it is desirable that all hunting in the area take place during the same period of time. The situation here is not unlike that found at the Pymatuning Reservoir, lying astride the Ohio-Pennsylvania boundary, which takes the Pennsylvania season, and the Lake Meade area in Nevada which receives the same season as that which prevails in Arizona, thereby avoiding the complications which are created by uncertainties concerning the true location of the Colorado River.

#### SEASONS ON SPECIAL SPECIES

Wood Ducks--The season on wood ducks in the Mississippi Flyway will be closed this year. Last year one wood duck could be included in the daily bag and possession limits for other ducks in that flyway. The decision to close the season this year resulted from recent studies made by biologists of a number of State game departments in the Mississippi Flyway and by Fish and Wildlife Service biologists which indicated such an over-all decline in the wood duck populations in substantial portions of the flyway as to lead to the conclusion that this species is in a precarious condition. Since there is no indication of a decline in other flyways, last season's rules will be continued. In the Central and Pacific Flyways the daily bag and possession limits on ducks may include one wood duck; in the Atlantic Flyway the daily bag limit on ducks may include one wood duck and the possession limit may include two ducks of this species.

Mergansers--Following last year's pattern, the daily bag and possession limit on other ducks may include one hooded merganser. Also, as last year, American and red-breasted mergansers will be counted in the daily bag and possession limits on other species of ducks in all Flyways. Where merganser depredations occur, control will be effected by special depredation permits.

Brant--In the Atlantic Flyway the season for taking brant will again conform to the season for ducks and geese with a daily bag and possession limit of six birds. In the Pacific Flyway the States may have a season for brant to fall within the dates of December 1 to February 10, with a bag and possession limit of three birds.

Coots--In all flyways except the Pacific, the season for coots will conform to the waterfowl seasons and the daily bag and possession limits in each of the four flyways remain the same as in the 1955 season, 25 in the Pacific Flyway and 10 in the other three flyways. In the Pacific Flyway, where an under-harvested population of coots is responsible annually for heavy crop depredations, the States may select a coot season of 105 consecutive days between the dates of October 1 and March 10.

Gallinules in the Pacific Flyway--Gallinules, for which no open season now is provided in this flyway, are sometimes taken inadvertently while coots are being hunted. Although the problem does not appear to be serious since few gallinules are encountered in that flyway, the regulations for 1956-57 will provide that this species may be taken with coots. A single bag and possession limit of 25 coots and gallinules, singly or in the aggregate of both kinds of such birds, will be permitted. These provisions will avoid the technical violations which sometimes arise through the inability of hunters to distinguish gallinules from coots where both occur in the same habitat.

Wilson's Snipe--The season length for Wilson's snipe has been increased from 15 to 30 consecutive days in all four flyways, with the proviso that the season shall come within the open season dates for waterfowl as recommended by each State. The Service believes that the increased season length will provide the State game departments greater flexibility in recommending season dates which will be more likely to coincide with the fall flights of these birds. Bag and possession limit of eight birds remains the same. Since hunters show little interest in this species, hunting has not contributed appreciably to mortality during the past three years of an experimental 15-day season.

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