

IMPROVED WATERFOWL POPULATIONS LEAD U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE TO CONTINUE LIBERAL WATERFOWL REGULATIONS FOR UPCOMING HUNTING SEASON

Record Numbers Allow Two Bird Canvasback Bag Limit in Three Flyways

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today proposed continuation of liberal hunting regulations for the upcoming 2007-2008 late waterfowl seasons due to improved habitat conditions and waterfowl population estimates. Duck hunting season lengths will be 60 days in both the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways, 74 days in the Central Flyway, and 107 days in the Pacific Flyway.

"Based on Spring duck numbers, improved breeding habitat conditions and an improved outlook for production in many breeding areas, we propose to give hunters a wide range of hunting opportunities," said Service Director H. Dale Hall. "We have five species that are at record or near record highs, including canvasbacks, and there are good breeding conditions on the prairies. However, we remain concerned that pintails and scaup have not yet responded to the improved habitat conditions and remain well below long-term averages."

"The scaup population has experienced a significant long-term decline and this year's estimate is the third lowest on record," said Hall. "The Service is proposing to continue the reduction on the daily bag limit that has been in place the last two years in all flyways. We may need to consider additional restrictions in the future if the trend continues."

States select their season from within the frameworks or the outer limits of season length, bag limits and season beginning and ending date.

Brief highlights of the proposed frameworks include:

- Record populations allow for an extra canvasback in the bag in the Atlantic, Mississippi and Pacific Flyways. Due to the ongoing "Hunters' Choice" experiment in the Central Flyway, that flyway will continue with a one bird daily bag limit.
- The Central Flyway will continue into a second year of its three year evaluation of the Hunter's Choice duck bag limit on hen mallards, canvasbacks, pintails and mottled ducks.
- A full season on pintails with a one bird daily bag limit will be similar to last year.
- The Atlantic Flyway will be afforded an increase in the Atlantic brant season from 30 to 50 days.

Under earlier published regulations, the special September teal season is available to certain states between September 1 and September 30, and may not exceed nine consecutive days in the Atlantic Flyway and 16 days in the Mississippi and Central Flyways. The daily bag limit is four teal. The seasons for September Canada goose, youth hunting days, sea ducks, snipe, woodcock, rails, common moorhens and purple

gallinules, sandhill cranes, band-tailed pigeons, mourning doves, white-winged and white-tipped doves and falconry will continue with little change from last year.

The proposed late season waterfowl frameworks will appear in a mid-August edition of the *Federal Register* for public comment and on <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/fedreg/MGBHR.HTML>. The proposed early season regulations posted on July 23.

Audio recording of season highlights will be available at <http://www.doi.gov/audio.html>.

Highlights of the proposed late-season frameworks are as follows.

Atlantic 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

Ducks: A hunting season is proposed of not more than 60 days between September 22, 2007, and January 27, 2008. The proposed daily bag limit is six and may include no more than four mallards (two hens), two wood ducks, two scaup, two redheads, two hooded mergansers, one black duck, one pintail, one mottled duck, one fulvous whistling duck, two canvasbacks, and four scoters. The season on harlequin ducks is closed.

Geese: For light geese, states would be able to select a 107-day season between October 1, 2007, and March 10, 2008, with a daily bag limit of 15 geese and no possession limit. For Atlantic Population (AP) Canada geese, the proposed season this year will allow portions of Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Vermont and New York to hold a 45-day season with a three-bird daily bag limit. Delaware, Maryland and Virginia (except Back Bay, Virginia) will be allowed to hold a 45-day season with a two-bird bag limit in AP areas. Back Bay, Virginia, and the Northeast Hunt Unit of North Carolina would be able to select a 30-day season with a two-bird daily bag and a one-bird per season respectively. In Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Long Island, New York, a 60-day season on North Atlantic Population Canada geese is proposed with a three-bird daily bag limit. Special or experimental seasons and regular seasons to harvest resident and other populations of migratory Canada geese would be authorized in Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia. For Atlantic brant, the season length may be 50 days with a daily bag limit of two.

Mississippi Flyway: Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin

Ducks: A hunting season is proposed of not more than 60 days between September 22, 2007, and January 27, 2008. The proposed daily bag limit is six and may include no more than four mallards (two hens), three mottled ducks, two scaup, two wood ducks, two redheads, one black duck, one pintail, and two canvasbacks. The proposed daily bag limit of mergansers is five, only two of which may be hooded mergansers.

Geese: Generally, seasons for Canada geese would be held between September 22, 2007, and January 31, 2008, and vary in length among States and areas, with daily bag limits varying from one to three. States would be able to select seasons for light geese not to exceed 107 days with 20 geese daily between September 22, 2007, and March 10, 2008; for white-fronted geese this proposed season would not to exceed 72 days with a two-bird daily bag limit or 86 days with a one-bird daily bag limit between September 22, 2007, and February 17, 2008; and for brant it would not exceed 70 days with a two-bird daily bag limit or 107 days with a one-bird daily bag limit between September 22, 2007, and January 31, 2007. There would be no possession limit for light geese.

Central Flyway: Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and portions of Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, and Wyoming

Ducks: Duck seasons are proposed to be held between September 22, 2007, and January 27, 2008. In the High Plains Mallard Management Unit (roughly west of the 100th Meridian), a 97-day season is proposed. The last 23 days would be able to start no earlier than December 8, 2007. A 74-day season is proposed for the remainder of the Central Flyway. This is the second year of a proposed 3-year evaluation of the Hunter's Choice duck bag limit in the Central Flyway.

The Hunter's Choice bag limit is an aggregate bag of which only one duck from the following may be taken: hen mallard, canvasback, pintail, or mottled duck. Hunter's Choice regulations are intended to reduce the harvest of all the species included in the one-bird bag, while maintaining full hunting opportunity on abundant species such as drake mallards. Five States (North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Kansas, and Texas) have been randomly assigned to have Hunter's Choice regulations and the remaining 5 States (Montana, Nebraska, Colorado, Oklahoma, and New Mexico) will serve as controls (season within a season regulations for canvasbacks and pintails) as the evaluation proceeds.

In Montana, Nebraska, Colorado, Oklahoma, and New Mexico, the daily bag limit would be 6 ducks, with species and sex restrictions as follows: mallard – five, no more than two of which may be females; redhead, scaup, wood duck – two; pintail, mottled duck, canvasback – one. For pintails and canvasbacks, the season length would be 39 days, which may be split according to applicable zones/split duck hunting configurations approved for each state. The possession limit would be twice the daily bag limit. In North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Kansas, and Texas, the daily bag limit would be five ducks, with species and sex restrictions as follows: scaup, redhead and wood duck – two; only one duck from the following group – hen mallard, mottled duck, pintail, canvasback. The possession limit would be twice the daily bag.

Geese: Under the proposal, States may select seasons between September 22, 2007 and February 17, 2008 for dark geese and between September 22, 2007 and March 10, 2008 for light geese. East tier states would be able to select a 107-day season for Canada geese season with a daily bag limit of three. For white-fronted geese, states would be able to select either a 72-day season with a daily bag limit of two birds or an 86-day season with a daily bag limit of one bird. In the West Tier, states may select a 107-day dark- goose season with a daily bag limit of five birds. In the Western Goose Zone of Texas, the State would be able to select a 95-day season with a daily bag limit of four dark geese

(including no more than one white-fronted goose). Colorado would be able to select a 107-day season with an aggregate bag limit of four. For light geese, all states would be able to select a 107-day season with a daily bag limit of 20 and no possession limit.

Pacific Flyway: Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and portions of Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, and Wyoming

Ducks: Under the proposal, states are allowed a 107-day season between September 22, 2007, and January 27, 2008. The proposed daily bag limit is seven ducks, including no more than two mallard hens, two redheads, three scaup, one pintail and two canvasbacks.

Geese: 100-day seasons are proposed for California, Oregon, and Washington, with outside dates between September 22, 2007, and March 10, 2008. Proposed basic daily bag limits are four light geese and four dark geese. For dark geese, there are exceptions to the basic bag limits in many states, see State regulations. In California, Oregon, and Washington, where the dark goose bag limit does not include brant. 107-day seasons, with outside dates between September 22, and January 27 would be able to be selected in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. Proposed basic daily bag limits are four light geese and four dark geese. Other restrictions vary by State and zone. For brant, the proposed season lengths are 16 days in Oregon and Washington and 30 days in California, with a two-bird daily limit. Washington and California would be able to choose seasons in each of two zones.