

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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EARLY START FOR 1976 MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING REGULATIONS

Restrictions might be eased on the hunting of canvasback and redhead ducks this fall, and the season for snow goose hunting along the Atlantic coast might be extended from 30 to 50 days, according to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed rulemaking published March 3 in the Federal Register.

The Interior Department agency said these proposals are designed to provide advance notice to the public and interested agencies about possible changes in regulations and to allow greater public participation in the setting of the regulations.

A 60-day public comment period extending through May 1, 1976, is provided. Comments should be addressed to the Director (FWS/MBM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240.

This is the first in a series of proposed and final rule-making documents for migratory bird hunting regulations. It will be followed by more detailed proposals as additional information on the status of various species and populations becomes available.

In addition to these publications, two advisory committee meetings concerning migratory bird hunting regulations are scheduled during 1976 and the public is invited to attend and participate.

On June 22 at 9 a.m. in Conference Room 2008 of the New Executive Office Building, 726 Jackson Place, N.W., Washington, D.C., the Annual Regulations Conference for Migratory Shore and Upland Game Birds will be held. This meeting will be primarily for the purpose of reviewing the status of mourning doves, woodcock, band-tailed pigeons, white-winged doves, rails, gallinules, and common snipe as well as for discussing the proposed hunting regulations.

On August 5 at 9 a.m. in Conference Room 2010 of the New Executive Office Building, the Director's Waterfowl Advisory Committee will meet to discuss Service recommendations for the 1976-77 waterfowl regulations.

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Persons wishing to attend these meetings should write the Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240, or call 202/343-8827. Opportunity is provided at each meeting for comments or brief statements from the public about the topics under discussion. To facilitate inclusion in the record, it is requested that such statements be submitted in writing before or immediately after each meeting.

No major changes are proposed at this time for the 1976-77 hunting season. Minor changes may take place for goose hunting as well as for redhead and canvasback duck hunting. A redefinition of "Commercial Preservation Facilities," and minor changes in the record keeping and wanton waste regulations are proposed. The proposals include:

SHOOTING HOURS: Basic shooting hours beginning one half hour before sunrise and ending at sunset are proposed with the option that more restrictive shooting hours within this framework may be selected by the States or may be established for special seasons.

EARLIEST AND LATEST GOOSE HUNTING DATES: Same as last year. From October 1, 1976, to January 20, 1977, for the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways and from October 2, 1976, to January 23, 1977, for the Central and Pacific Flyways with exceptions for sea ducks, teal, scaup, and brant.

CANVASBACK AND REDHEAD DUCKS: Consideration will be given to some relaxation in the restrictions on harvest of these species in effect during the past 3 years. No specific proposals are made at this time, however, pending the receipt of additional information on population status in 1976. An environmental assessment is being prepared for the two species to review their status and will include current population trends. It will be available to the public no later than August 5, 1976.

GOOSE HUNTING: Consideration will be given also to increasing the length of the hunting season for Atlantic Flyway snow geese from 30 days to 50 days. This will depend on evaluation of 1975 season harvest data, and summer population and production information, and probability of a fall flight similar to that in 1975. Area closures to Canada goose hunting in California due to the presence of the endangered Aleutian Canada goose will be continued this year in cooperation with the State.

BASIC REGULATIONS: The Service proposes to clarify regulations pertaining to the handling and processing of migratory game birds after they have been bagged by hunters, including the tagging requirement for migratory birds in custody at preservation (processing) facilities. At the present time Federal regulations recognize only commercial preservation facilities. Many migratory game birds, however, are routinely processed at hunting clubs as part of the services provided to members or customers. Consequently, it is proposed to extend the Federal regulations to these establishments to clarify the legality of their services. Further, it is proposed that the records requirements be more fully described so that birds received or held at these facilities can be more readily identified by ownership. Also, a change in the "wanton waste" regulation is proposed for more clearly specifying that it shall be illegal for hunters to discard shot birds in the field. Finally, a minor change is proposed in the regulations relating to emergency closure of hunting seasons.