

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Megan Durham 202/343-5634

1980-81 WATERFOWL HUNTING SEASON FRAMEWORKS PROPOSED

The waterfowl hunting season frameworks proposed for 1980-81 by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are generally the same as last year, with the following exceptions:

Nationwide

--Stabilizing duck season frameworks and limits at 1979-80 levels.

These regulations have been generally unchanged in several flyways in recent years and the Service proposes to expand this practice nationally this fall. Plans call for most season lengths and bag limits for ducks to remain at 1979-80 levels for 5 years, during which time the United States will join Canada in research studies of the relationships among hunting regulations, duck harvests, and duck populations. By stabilizing the major duck hunting regulations, waterfowl researchers and managers will be better able to evaluate the effects of factors such as habitat conditions, production, disease, and natural mortality upon harvests and the population dynamics of ducks.

Recent research by the Fish and Wildlife Service indicates that stabilizing the regulations will not have a significant effect on duck populations. The experiment could be terminated early, however, if population levels indicate a need for more restrictive regulations. An environmental assessment that will describe the proposal in more detail is being prepared and will be available before the regulations frameworks are made final.

Atlantic Flyway

--Zoning in Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. These States are offered the option to select waterfowl seasons by geographical areas, in compliance with Service zoning criteria.

--Redheads. The daily bag limit is being increased from 1 daily and 1 in possession to 2 daily and 4 in possession with no area closure restrictions on redheads in the flyway. In those areas of the flyway open to canvasback harvest the daily bag limit on redheads is 2, or 1 redhead and 1 canvasback.

Mississippi Flyway

--Changes in duck and goose limits. Bag and possession limits for Canada and white-fronted geese will be separated, and with a few exceptions, possession limits for all waterfowl will be double the daily bag limit. Redheads will be excluded from area closures this year, and limits will be separate from those for canvasbacks in the conventional bag limit option.

--Zoning. New 3-year zoning experiments, with changes in zoning arrangements, will begin this year in Missouri, Illinois, and Michigan. A minor boundary change will be made in Indiana.

--Canada geese. A number of regulatory changes are proposed in conjunction with ongoing management programs and plans. These include reductions in harvest

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quotas in Minnesota, Missouri, Wisconsin and Illinois; removal of the quota in Kentucky; special regulatory provisions for a portion of Michigan to help solve nuisance problems caused by local giant Canada geese; reopening the Canada goose hunting season in a portion of Mississippi to provide opportunity to harvest giant Canadas, and minor adjustments in season lengths in Missouri and Illinois.

Central Flyway

--Redheads and canvasback bag limits. Daily bag limits under conventional regulations will permit taking 1 redhead and 1 canvasback (except in canvasback closed areas).

--Separate limits for dark and light geese. Daily bag and possession limits for dark (Canada and white-fronted) geese will be separated from those for light (snow, blue and Ross') geese in the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and eastern Texas.

--Increased possession limits of geese. Hunters will be allowed to have in their possession the number of geese which they could have taken legally during two days. Possession limits double daily bag limits are traditional for most ducks and many other game birds.

--Removal of terminal dates for hunting certain geese. Seasons for hunting Canada and white-fronted geese will no longer be terminated on specific dates in the Dakotas, Nebraska and Kansas. This will permit greater flexibility in managing several populations which frequent these States.

Pacific Flyway

--Merganser limits. Separate limits for mergansers are no longer proposed. Mergansers will be included within the basic limit of 7 ducks a day and 14 in possession. The restrictive limit on hooded mergansers will be lifted. Both changes are being proposed in an effort to simplify regulations.

--Restrictive goose regulations in portions of California, Oregon and Washington. Various restrictive regulations on goose hunting continue in the Balance-of-the-State and Northeastern Zone of California, in Lake and Klamath Counties of Oregon, and in Island, Skagit, Snohomish and Whatcom Counties of Washington. These restrictions are designed to rebuild populations of white-fronted, cackling Canada and Wrangel Island snow geese. California is offered two additional options for season selection, and limits on snow geese in Washington may be increased to 3 birds.

The Service's proposed frameworks for migratory waterfowl hunting were published in the August 13 Federal Register. Public comments are invited on these proposals and should be addressed to the Director (MBMO), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. The comment period closes August 23 because of the tight schedule for publishing the final rulemaking.

Final hunting season framework regulations will be published in the Federal Register after the public comment period ends and after the individual State governments review and comment on the current proposals. State conservation agency authorities select their regulations from those offered in the final Federal frameworks.

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