



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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REGULATIONS PROPOSED TO REDUCE 1985 DUCK HARVEST

Duck hunting regulations proposed for the 1985-86 waterfowl season are more restrictive than last year in an effort to reduce the duck harvest by approximately 25 percent, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) announced today. Hunting regulations for geese, brant, and swans will be much the same as last year.

"We are persuaded more restrictive hunting regulations for ducks are needed this year because of significant drops in the numbers of most of our key duck species," FWS director Robert Jantzen said.

"These declines are mainly due to recent drought in important duck nesting areas of Canada and the northern United States and to continuing loss of wetland habitats. We need to take the pressure off these birds while their numbers are down, so that they have a better chance to rebuild more quickly when better habitat conditions return."

Total spring breeding populations of most ducks important to waterfowl hunters were 19 percent lower than last year and 24 percent below their average for the past 30 years, according to survey data collected by U.S. and Canadian biologists. Numbers of breeding mallards fell below 5.5 million, a record low, and pintail populations continued their decline to fewer than 3 million. Numbers of gadwalls, wigeons, shovelers, scaup, canvasbacks, and redheads also fell sharply over last year. Both blue-winged and green-winged teal, while not significantly below last year's numbers, are well below their long-term average population. The total fall flight of ducks this year is estimated to be about 62 million, 22 percent fewer than last year.

"Duck populations are down on a continent-wide basis," Jantzen said, "and our view is that all four waterfowl flyways should share in the effort to solve this problem. We have tried to make the proposed restrictions fair among all four flyways."

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To achieve a 25 percent reduction in this year's duck harvest, FWS has proposed later opening and earlier closing dates, reducing the number of hunting days by about 20 percent, reducing bag limits and increasing point values for many ducks, and setting special restrictions on hen mallards and other species of concern.

Bag limit reductions alone do not appear to be an effective way to control harvest because the availability of ducks and hunter success are highly variable. Reducing season length is a proven method to reduce the harvest. Delayed openings tend to protect local breeders and immatures, and reducing late portions of the season may reduce pressure on adult birds, especially mallards, that have already survived various mortality factors and are about to return to breed. A combination of changes in all three basic components of regulations -- bag limits, season dates, and season lengths -- appears to be needed to achieve the desired reductions.

Proposed opening and closing duck season frameworks for all flyways are October 8 through January 13. The conventional daily bag limit in the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central Flyways is four ducks and in the Pacific Flyway five. In all flyways, bag limit restrictions have been proposed for mallards and pintails, with additional restrictions on females. In areas using the point system, hen mallards will be valued at 100 points. Generally, most ducks valued at 10 points last year will be 20 points this year. Male mallards and pintails will be 35 point birds.

Other details of the proposed regulations were published in the August 13, 1985, Federal Register. Because many changes are proposed for this year's duck season, hunters should carefully check final regulations for their local areas before going afield. Final regulations should be published in mid-September.

Early duck seasons, such as September teal seasons, were established earlier this year and are not affected by the proposed restrictions.

Public comments on the proposals are requested and should be addressed to the Director (MBMO), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Matomic Building, Room 536, Washington, D.C. 20240. Because of the need to complete regulations before the beginning of hunting season, public comments must be received by August 22, 1985.

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