



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Megan Durham (202) 343-5634

FINAL 1985-86 WATERFOWL HUNTING SEASON FRAMEWORKS INCLUDE MEASURES TO REDUCE DUCK HARVEST

Final federal regulations for the 1985-86 waterfowl hunting season include more restrictive hunting seasons and bag limits for ducks than last year in an effort to help restore breeding duck populations that have dropped to the lowest level in 30 years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today.

The final duck hunting frameworks contain several changes from the regulations proposed on August 13, Director Robert Jantzen said.

"We have reviewed the public comments received in response to our proposed hunting regulations and listened carefully to the concerns expressed by various States and private organizations. We have decided that some of their suggestions have biological merit, and we have made several adjustments in the final regulations.

"The objective of our regulations is to reduce the total duck harvest by 25 percent in order to help restore duck breeding populations, which are seriously depleted. We have put special emphasis on protecting mallards, pintails, and other duck species that nest in the mid-continent areas of Canada and the north-central United States that were hard-hit by drought in the past several years. The adjustments we have made in the final regulations are basically alternative ways of meeting those objectives," Jantzen said.

The changes included in the final regulations are:

- o Establishment on an experimental basis of a Northeast Waterfowl Management Unit with somewhat less restrictive duck hunting regulations in five Northeastern States -- Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. These States receive most of their ducks from local production and eastern Canada where populations are not substantially depressed rather than from mid-continent nesting areas.

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- o Moving the duck season opening date from October 8 to October 5 in the Mississippi and Central Flyways. These States ordinarily may open their duck season on the Saturday nearest October 1, which this year would have been September 28. An October 5 opening still meets the Fish and Wildlife Service's objective of delaying the beginning of the duck hunting season by one week. In all Flyways, the framework has also been shortened by one week at the end of the season, as proposed August 13.
- o Allowing hunters in the Pacific Flyway to take five mallards or five pintails in their daily bag only one of which may be a hen, rather than the limit of three mallards or three pintails proposed earlier. Many of the ducks in the Pacific Flyway do not come from mid-continent areas.

Final duck season frameworks for 1985-86 are as follows. Limits on mallards, pintails, and black ducks are listed here; hunters should check regulations for limits on other species.

- o Atlantic Flyway -- a 40 day season beginning no earlier than October 8 and ending no later than January 13, with a conventional daily bag limit of four ducks, including no more than three mallards (of which only one may be a hen), two pintails, and one black duck. In the experimental Northeast Waterfowl Management Unit described above, a 40 day season may be selected beginning no earlier than October 5 and ending no later than January 13. In that zone the States will have the option of choosing a conventional daily bag limit of five ducks, including no more than one black duck, or four ducks, including no more than two black ducks.
- o Mississippi Flyway -- a 40 day season beginning no earlier than October 5 and ending no later than January 13, with a conventional daily bag limit of four ducks including no more than two mallards (only one of which may be a hen), one black duck, and two pintails.
- o Central Flyway -- The season framework extends from October 5 through January 13, with 50 hunting days allowed in the Low Plains Unit and 65 days in the High Plains Unit. The conventional daily bag limit is four ducks, including no more than three mallards (of which only one may be a hen), and three pintails (of which only one may be a hen).
- o Pacific Flyway -- The season framework extends from October 8 through January 13, with 79 hunting days allowed except in the Columbia Basin where the season may last 86 days. The conventional daily bag limit is five ducks, including no more than five mallards (of which only one may be a hen), or five pintails (of which only one may be a hen).

In areas of all Flyways where the point system is used instead of conventional bag limits, added points have been assigned for many ducks. 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.

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The reduced season framework dates and season lengths do not apply to goose hunting regulations, which will remain much the same as last year.

The final "framework" regulations established by the Fish and Wildlife Service represent guidelines, within which States may select various regulatory options. States may be more restrictive, but not more liberal, than the federal frameworks. States are now in the process of selecting their seasons. The Fish and Wildlife Service will publish a Federal Register document including State selections in mid-September.

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 and pintail populations continued their decline to fewer than 3 million, both record lows. 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.

Because there are many changes in this year's waterfowl hunting regulations, the Fish and Wildlife Service urges hunters to be especially careful to check final hunting regulations for their local areas before going afield this fall.