



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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### FINAL 1986-87 WATERFOWL HUNTING SEASON FRAMEWORKS CONTINUE RESTRICTIONS OF LAST SEASON; NONTOXIC SHOT ZONES EXPANDED

This year's waterfowl hunting season will feature a continuation of restrictive hunting regulations to protect limited increases in waterfowl populations and an expansion of nontoxic shot zones, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Director Frank Dunkle announced today.

While this year's fall flight index of ducks is estimated to number approximately 73 million--up from last year's index of 62 million--restrictive regulations will remain in order to protect the modest gain. This year's index still represents the second lowest forecast on record.

In addition, all but six States will have areas where nontoxic shot will be required for waterfowl hunting this season.

"The increase in this year's fall flight forecast is good news, but we are not out of the woods just yet," Dunkle said. "I am confident that hunters will support this year's regulations as measures that must be taken to protect waterfowl."

"In general, these regulations are aimed at restoring breeding duck populations with special emphasis on species such as mallards and pintails that have been hard hit by several years of drought in their northern nesting grounds," Dunkle noted. "We also decided to close the canvasback season in the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central flyways. The eastern breeding population of this bird is estimated at 303,000, which is below the minimum figure of 360,000 for hunting this species."

#### Seasons and Bag Limits

Highlights of the final duck season frameworks for 1986-87 are as follows. Hunters are urged to check complete State regulations for the area in which they plan to hunt prior to going afield.

- o **Atlantic Flyway** -- a 40-day season beginning no earlier than October 4 and ending no later than January 18, 1987, with a conventional daily bag limit of four ducks, including no more than three mallards (only one may be a hen), two pintails, and one black duck. There are bonus scaup and bonus teal options for States under the conventional regulations selected by all States but one.

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- o **Mississippi Flyway** -- a 40-day season using the same framework dates as the Atlantic Flyway with a daily bag limit of four ducks including no more than two mallards (no more than one may be a hen), one black duck, two pintails, and one redhead. In the Mississippi Flyway, 12 of 14 States selected the point system with a potential maximum bag limit of five ducks per day.
- o **Central Flyway** -- the season framework extends from October 4, 1986, through January 18, 1987, with 51 hunting days allowed in the Low Plains Unit and 65 days in the High Plains Unit. The conventional daily bag limit is four ducks daily, including no more than three mallards (of which no more than one may be a hen), three pintails, one redhead, one hooded merganser, and two wood ducks.
- o **Pacific Flyway** -- the season framework extends from October 4 through January 11, 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 four mallards (of which only one may be a hen), four pintails (of which only one may be a hen), and either two canvasbacks or two redheads or one of each.

In general, the frameworks pertaining to goose hunting regulations are much the same as last year.

These final "framework" regulations established by the Service represent guidelines within which States may select various regulatory options. States may be more restrictive--but not more liberal--than the Federal frameworks. The individual States are currently in the process of selecting their seasons.

#### 1986-87 Nontoxic Shot Zones

Effective September 3, 1986, the Service expanded the number of zones in which nontoxic shot is required for the hunting of waterfowl and coots during the 1986-87 season. These regulations are designated on a "zone" basis similar to nontoxic shot regulations in effect for previous years. The current bald eagle- and waterfowl-based zone approach will be replaced by one that is based solely on waterfowl harvest intensity during the 1987-88 hunting season when implementation of a five-year phase-out of lead shot for waterfowl hunting begins. The Service first required nontoxic shot for waterfowl hunting in certain areas of the Atlantic Flyway in 1976. In following years, the program was expanded to include portions of all four flyways in response to the concern over lead poisoning in waterfowl.

In 1985, the Service first required nontoxic shot in certain areas to prevent lead poisoning in bald eagles, which are listed as an "endangered" or "threatened" species throughout the Lower 48 States. Bald eagles can develop lead poisoning from eating waterfowl carcasses containing lead shot. These "bald eagle protection zones" were established in areas having a high waterfowl harvest and large numbers of wintering bald eagles. During the 1985 waterfowl season, eight States had one or more of these zones.

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The nontoxic shot regulations for this fall's waterfowl season were appended to the final environmental impact statement concerning the use of nontoxic shot for migratory bird hunting and subsequently published in the Federal Register for comments. They represent a composite of areas based on the lead poisoning threat to waterfowl and/or eagles.

The zones were identified on a county-wide basis since information on waterfowl harvest and eagle populations is gathered by county. The Service included counties that had an average annual waterfowl harvest of over 5,000 ducks and geese from 1971 to 1980 coupled with a winter count of 25 or more bald eagles in one or more years between 1978 and 1984.

Since eagles do not recognize political boundaries during their feeding flights, a number of areas considered geographically or ecologically contiguous were added to the list.

The final list of nontoxic shot zones for the 1986-87 season was published in the September 3, 1986, Federal Register and includes a total of approximately 180 zones in 44 States. The only States not having nontoxic shot zones are Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Virginia, and West Virginia. The nontoxic shot zones were identified with concurrence from the respective State wildlife agencies and will be reflected in the hunting regulations issued by the States. Again, hunters are urged to check final State regulations concerning seasons, bag limits, and nontoxic shot requirements in effect for the area they intend to hunt.

#### Lead Shot Phase-out: 1987-91

In late June of this year, a proposal to phase-out use of lead shot for waterfowl hunting in the United States by the 1991-92 season was announced by Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks Bill Horn.

In general terms, the phase-out would begin with the 1987-88 hunting season and offer a gradual phase-in of nontoxic shot in certain additional areas each subsequent year until use of lead shot is eliminated in 1991. The ban on lead shot would begin in counties having the highest number of harvested waterfowl per square mile and expand to include counties having lower harvests during the subsequent years.

The nontoxic shot zones for the 1986-87 season are considered part of the phase-in strategy.

Concern over the impact of lead poisoning has been in evidence for decades. During the summer of 1984, the Interior Department called a meeting of concerned conservation groups and State representatives to discuss the situation. A supplemental environmental impact statement concerning the use of lead shot was prepared later. The final document examined nine alternatives for eliminating lead poisoning caused by the ingestion of spent lead shot as a significant cause of waterfowl losses. The phase-out approach had been suggested in March 1986 by the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and was an alternative in the impact statement.

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The following chart shows the criteria for implementing the phase-out of lead shot according to the number of waterfowl taken per square mile and the estimated percentage of the total waterfowl harvest taken in the zones as a cumulative total.

| <b>Harvest Level<br/>(Waterfowl/Square Mile)</b> | <b>Year Lead Shot Will Be<br/>Prohibited</b> | <b>% of U.S. Waterfowl<br/>Harvest Occuring in<br/>Affected Zones</b> |
|--|--|---|
| 20 or more                                       | 1987-88                                      | 66  |
| 15 or more                                       | 1988-89                                      | 69  |
| 10 or more                                       | 1989-90                                      | 75  |
| 5 or more  | 1990-91                                      | 84  |
| Fewer than 5                                     | 1991-92                                      | 100   |

Conversion to nontoxic shot could be deferred if States carry out monitoring studies that show lead poisoning is not a problem in areas that otherwise would be affected by the conversion schedule. In no case, however, could the requirement for nontoxic shot be deferred beyond 1991.

Under this alternative, boroughs (counties) in Alaska would not be required to employ the gradual implementation schedule, but the State must convert totally to nontoxic shot by 1991 along with the rest of the country.