



NEWS RELEASE

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

August 2, 1996

Mitch Snow 202-208-5634

SERVICE PROPOSES WATERFOWL HUNTING SEASON, LIMITS

In response to a continued upswing in breeding duck populations, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing frameworks for the 1996-97 waterfowl hunting season that generally maintain, and in some areas slightly increase, hunting opportunities from last year's expanded season and bag limits.

Although duck populations generally are nearing the highest levels they have reached in the past 20 years, Atlantic population Canada geese are still substantially below objective levels. Because of this, the Service is proposing to continue the suspension of hunting seasons for these birds across the eastern U.S. However, a limited number of special seasons to harvest resident Canada geese is authorized in 11 states. Also, due to reductions in population, the Atlantic brant season will be shortened from 50 to 30 days.

"Boosted by 3 successive years of plentiful rain and snowfall in key nesting areas, nearly 83 million ducks should fly south this fall," Acting Service Director John Rogers said. "This contrasts with the late 1980s when the fall flight was only 57 million ducks. Keeping in mind that these are the good times with abundant water on the prairies, we also need to recognize there will be drier years sometime in the future. Therefore, we must continue our efforts to conserve and restore wetland habitat through such programs as the North American Waterfowl Management Plan."

The resurgence in duck populations has made it possible for the Service to extend hunting seasons and expand bag limits in the past 2 years. Last year's harvest increased from 8.5 to 12.5 million ducks. In Louisiana, for example, the harvest more than doubled from one million to more than two million.

The frameworks for this year's hunting season are the result of extensive discussions with the flyway councils representing the four major migratory routes used by waterfowl, the states, and the public. The proposals were developed using a new approach to regulating duck harvests introduced in 1995 by the Service, states, and flyway councils. Known as Adaptive Harvest Management, this process is designed to improve our understanding of the relationships between duck hunting regulations and duck populations. This improved process is also aimed at reducing the uncertainty and conflict that have marred rulemaking in the past.

Office of Public Affairs
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240
Room 3447

(202) 208-5634
FAX (202) 219-2428

In addition to setting the season frameworks, the Service is proposing a "Youth Waterfowl Hunting Day" on a trial basis. This day would provide young people an extra hunting day before or after the regular waterfowl season. The day would have to be held outside of any regular duck season on either a weekend or holiday when youths would have the maximum opportunity to participate. The day could be held up to 10 days before or after any regular duck season framework or within any split of a regular duck season. Participants would have to be 15 or younger and accompanied by an adult at least 18 years old. The adult would not be allowed to hunt ducks but could participate in other open seasons. Under the proposal, the daily bag limit and species restrictions would be consistent with the regular duck season in the flyway.

The good news on the estimated fall flight follows the results of the annual spring breeding duck survey, which recorded an estimated 37.5 million breeding ducks in the key nesting areas, up 5 percent from 35.9 million in 1995. The survey samples 1.3 million square miles across the north-central United States, western and northern Canada, and Alaska and estimates the number of ducks in important breeding areas.

Populations of four species--gadwall, blue-winged teal, northern shoveler, and canvasback--reached record highs. In particular, blue-winged teal, up 25 percent to 6.4 million, and northern shoveler, up 21 percent to 3.4 million, showed substantial gains.

Highlights of the proposed frameworks are as follows:

Atlantic Flyway--(Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia)

Ducks--A hunting season of not more than 50 days between October 1, 1996, and January 20, 1997. The proposed daily bag limit is five and may include no more than one mallard hen, one black duck, one pintail, one mottled duck, one fulvous whistling duck, two wood ducks, two redheads, and one canvasback. The season on harlequins is closed. The proposed daily bag limit of mergansers is five, only one of which may be a hooded merganser.

Geese--For light geese, states may select a 107-day season between October 1 and March 10, with a daily bag limit of 8 geese and 24 in possession. For Atlantic population Canada geese, the season is suspended. However, special or experimental seasons to harvest resident geese are authorized in Connecticut, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Mississippi Flyway--(Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin)

Ducks--Hunting seasons of not more than 50 days between September 28, 1996, and January 19, 1997. The proposed daily bag limit is five and may include no more than four mallards (one hen), three mottled ducks, one black duck, one pintail, two wood ducks, one canvasback, and two readheads. The proposed daily bag limit of mergansers is five, only one of which may be a hooded merganser.

Geese--Generally, states may select 70-day seasons for dark geese between September 28, 1996, and January 31, 1997, and 107-day seasons for light geese between September 28, 1996, and March 10, 1997. The daily bag limit is 10 light geese, 3 Canada geese, 2 white-fronted geese, and 2 brant. There are, however, area-specific restrictions and exceptions to these frameworks.

Central Flyway--(Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and portions of Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, and Wyoming.)

Ducks--In the High Plains Mallard Management Unit (roughly west of the 100th Meridian), an 83-day season is proposed between September 28, 1996, and January 19, 1997. The last 23 days may start no earlier than December 7, 1996. A 60-day season is proposed for the remainder of the Central Flyway. The proposed daily bag limit is five and may include no more than one mallard hen, one mottled duck, one pintail, one canvasback, two redheads, and two wood ducks.

Geese--Seasons for dark geese are proposed from September 28, 1996, to January 31, 1997, except in the western goose zone in Texas where the season may extend to February 16, 1997. For light geese, the proposed seasons may extend from September 28, 1996 to March 10, 1997, except for selected counties in Nebraska where the closing date is February 16, 1997. Goose bag limits vary by state and management unit.

Pacific Flyway--(Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and portions of Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, and Wyoming)

Ducks--A 93-day season between September 28, 1996, and January 19, 1997, except in the Columbia Basin Mallard Management Unit, where the season may be extended an additional 7 days. The proposed daily bag limit is seven ducks, including no more than one mallard hen, two pintails, two redheads, and one canvasback.

Geese--A 100-day season is proposed in most parts of the flyway between September 28, 1996, and January 19, 1997, with a bag limit of no more than three light geese and four dark geese, except in California, Oregon, and Washington, where the dark goose bag limit does not include brant. Other restrictions vary by state and zone.

Additional details on the proposed hunting regulations will be published in the Federal Register. Public comments will be accepted through September 3, 1996, and should be addressed to the Chief, Office of Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1849 C Street, NW., Mail Stop 634 ARLSQ, Washington, DC 20240.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages 508 national wildlife refuges encompassing 92 million acres, as well as 72 national fish hatcheries.

The agency also enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, stocks recreational fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and assists foreign governments in their conservation efforts. It oversees the Federal Aid program that funnels Federal excise taxes on angling and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies. This program is a cornerstone of the Nation's wildlife management efforts, funding fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, shooting ranges, and related projects across America.