



NEWS

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

July 7, 1998

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**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PROPOSES DEVELOPMENT OF
FLYWAY-BASED HARVEST MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR WOOD DUCKS**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed to establish a flyway-based harvest management strategy for wood ducks, ending special experimental September seasons in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Florida after the 2000-2001 waterfowl season.

The experimental wood duck seasons were initiated in 1981 following requests for additional wood duck hunting opportunities. The special September season was designed to target regional populations of wood ducks in the southern U.S., which tend to have higher survival rates and lower harvest rates than northern wood ducks. The goal was to evaluate the biological soundness of such a harvest strategy.

Wood duck harvest management has been hindered by the inability to census wood ducks due to their secretive nature and to the densely vegetated habitats that they occupy. Because adequate regional population monitoring programs are lacking, evaluation of the experimental September wood duck season has been unsuccessful. The Service believes that without such programs, wood duck management should be approached at the flyway level, not the state or regional level, and the September wood duck seasons should be discontinued.

As part of the proposal, the Service would work with the flyway councils to improve the way wood duck harvest strategies are developed at the flyway level. Current monitoring programs provide much of the flyway-level population information that is needed, but Federal and state biologists have additional technical work to do to incorporate this information and other relevant data into a flyway harvest strategy.

During the interim period in which the technical work is being completed, the Service proposes to allow Florida, Kentucky, and

Tennessee to hold September wood duck seasons for a maximum of 3 more years. After September 2000, the seasons in Florida, Kentucky, and Tennessee will be discontinued. A flyway-based approach would address regulatory issues such as wood duck bag limits and season length during the regular duck season.

The Service made the proposal as part of the annual process of setting early season migratory bird hunting regulations. It will be published in the Federal Register in mid-July. The public may comment in writing on the proposal until July 27, 1998.

Comments on the proposal may be sent to Chief, Office of Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Suite 634, Arlington, Virginia 22203.

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's nearly 93 million acres include 514 national wildlife refuges, 78 ecological services field stations, 66 national fish hatcheries, 50 wildlife coordination areas, and 38 wetland management districts with waterfowl production areas. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes Federal excise taxes on fishing 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.