

General Decision Frameworks for Determination of Federal Limits for Annual Migratory Game Bird Hunting Seasons: Atlantic Flyway

August 27, 2026

The below general decision frameworks are used to determine appropriate Federal limits for annual migratory game bird hunting seasons in the Atlantic Flyway. Other general decision frameworks applicable to the Atlantic Flyway are contained in a second document titled “General Decision Frameworks for Determination of Federal Limits for Annual Migratory Game Bird Hunting: Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific Flyways” where the results apply to two or more flyways. Where noted, these general decision frameworks are supplemented by other species-specific decision frameworks similarly adopted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) in a Federal Register final rule. The most currently available data is applied to these decision frameworks to determine the appropriate Federal limits. All prescribed Federal limits resulting from these decision frameworks are maximums. If the Atlantic Flyway Council and the Service Migratory Birds Regulations Committee (SRC) recommend more restrictive season limits than prescribed by these decision frameworks, then this would be discussed during Flyway Council and SRC meetings open to the public. If supported by the Service, this would be noted in the Federal policy memorandum with the annual hunting season limits including the restrictions and unforeseen substantiating circumstances for public review and comment.

Migratory Game Bird Seasons in the Atlantic Flyway

In the Atlantic Flyway States of Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania, if Sunday hunting of migratory birds is prohibited statewide by State law or regulation, all Sundays are closed to the take of all migratory game birds. For these States where Sunday hunting is prohibited statewide by State law or regulation, the State is allowed compensatory hunting days to maintain the effective season length like those States where Sunday hunting is not similarly prohibited. Compensatory days are offered by allowing the State to extend their hunting season length beyond the allowable season length, as described in the decision frameworks, for any migratory game bird by one day for each Sunday included in the State’s regular hunting season. Total season days must be within the season bracket dates, season days must be consecutive except as provided in split-season provisions, and total season length (including extended falconry and other special seasons) must not exceed 107 days.

Decision Frameworks

- 1) Special Youth and Veterans—Active Military Personnel Waterfowl Hunting Days
See “General Decision Frameworks for Determination of Federal Limits for Annual Migratory Game Bird Hunting: Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific Flyways”.
- 2) Special Early Teal Seasons
See “General Decision Frameworks for Determination of Federal Limits for Annual Migratory Game Bird Hunting: Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific Flyways”.

3) Special Early Teal-Wood Duck Seasons

See “General Decision Frameworks for Determination of Federal Limits for Annual Migratory Game Bird Hunting: Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific Flyways”.

4) Duck, Merganser, and Coot Seasons

Bracket Dates and Season Lengths: Bracket dates and season lengths are determined by the eastern multiple duck species Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) decision framework (16 USC 704 (c); and 83 FR 47868, September 21, 2018). The season lengths for scaup are determined by scaup AHM decision framework (73 FR 51124, August 29, 2008; and 73 FR 43290, July 24, 2008).

Duck Daily Bag Limits: The daily bag limit for ducks is determined by the eastern multiple duck species AHM decision framework (83 FR 47868, September 21, 2018). The duck and merganser daily bag limit may include no more than 1 mottled duck, 1 fulvous whistling duck, 2 redheads, 3 wood ducks and 4 sea ducks (including no more than 3 scoters, 3 long-tailed ducks, or 3 eiders and no more than 1 female eider). The daily bag limits for pintail, scaup, black ducks, mallards, and canvasbacks are determined by the respective AHM decision framework for pintail (90 FR 17300, April 24, 2025), scaup (73 FR 51124, August 29, 2008; and 73 FR 43290, July 24, 2008), black ducks (77 FR 49868, August 17, 2012) and mallards (88 FR 6054, January 30, 2023) and the canvasback decision support tool (81 FR 17302, March 28, 2016). The daily bag limit of mergansers is 5. In States that include mergansers in the duck bag limit (i.e., in the aggregate), the daily bag limit is the same as the duck bag limit. The daily bag limit of coots is 15.

Closed Seasons: There is no open season on the harlequin duck.

Zones and Split Seasons: Seasons must comply with Federal zone and split-season configurations for ducks (90 FR 17300, April 24, 2025). Changes among configurations may occur the first year of the fixed multi-year (generally 5-year) period that it would apply.

Other Provisions: The seasons, limits, and shooting hours should be the same between New York’s Lake Champlain Zone and Vermont’s Lake Champlain Zone, and between Vermont’s Connecticut River Zone and New Hampshire’s Inland Zone.

A craft under power may be used to shoot and retrieve dead or crippled birds in the Sea Duck Area in the Atlantic Flyway. The Sea Duck Area includes all coastal waters and all waters of rivers and streams seaward from the first upstream bridge in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York; in New Jersey, all coastal waters seaward from the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGS) Demarcation Lines shown on National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Nautical Charts and further described in 33 CFR 80.165, 80.501, 80.502, and 80.503; in any waters of the Atlantic Ocean and in any tidal waters of any bay that are separated by at least 1 mile of open water from any shore, island, and emergent vegetation in South Carolina and Georgia; and in any waters of the Atlantic Ocean and in any tidal waters of any bay that are separated by at least 800 yards of open water from any shore, island, and emergent vegetation in Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina. In Virginia, the Sea Duck Area includes all ocean waters of Virginia, the tidal waters of Northampton and Accomack Counties up to the first highway bridge, and the Chesapeake Bay and each of its tributaries up to the first highway bridge; Back Bay and its tributaries are not included in the Sea Duck Area. The Sea Duck Area in each State

must be described, delineated, and designated as special sea duck hunting areas under the hunting regulations adopted by the respective States.

5) Special Early Canada and Cackling Goose Seasons

Bracket Dates and Season Lengths: 15 days during September 1–15 in the Eastern Unit of Maryland; 30 days during September 1–30 in Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, Long Island Zone of New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and South Carolina; and 25 days during September 1–25 in the remainder of the Atlantic Flyway.

Daily Bag Limits: 15 geese in the aggregate.

Shooting Hours: One-half hour before sunrise to sunset, except that during any special early Canada and cackling goose season, shooting hours may extend to one-half hour after sunset if all other waterfowl seasons are closed in the specific applicable area.

6) Dark Goose Seasons

Bracket Dates, Season Lengths, Daily Bag Limits, and Season Segments: Regulations are State and area specific and are determined based on the status of three Canada goose populations (Atlantic, North Atlantic, and Atlantic Flyway Resident) estimated from monitoring data. White-fronted geese and cackling geese are included in the daily bag limit for Canada geese in the aggregate.

Atlantic Population (AP) Canada Geese:

Region ¹ Parameter	Alternatives		
	Liberal	Moderate	Restrictive
New England			
Season Lengths	45	30	30
Daily Bag Limits	3	3	1
Mid-Atlantic			
Season Lengths	45	30	30
Daily Bag Limits	3	3	1
Chesapeake			
Season Lengths	45	30	30
Daily Bag Limits	2	2	1
North Carolina			
Season Lengths	30	30	30
Daily Bag Limits	2	1	1

¹Chesapeake includes Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia; New England includes Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Vermont; and Mid-Atlantic includes New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.

Season lengths and daily bag limits are determined based on the predicted spring population size (pairs) from monitoring data. When the predicted population size is >160,000 pairs, liberal regulations will be prescribed to achieve a mean harvest rate of 7% breeding adults and is expected to result in a stable breeding population ($\lambda=1.0$). When the predicted population size is >125,000 and $\leq 160,000$ pairs, moderate regulations will be prescribed to achieve a mean harvest rate of 5% breeding adults and is expected to result in a growing

breeding population size ($\lambda = 1.025$). When the predicted population size is $>60,000$ and $\leq 125,000$ pairs, restrictive regulations will be prescribed to achieve a mean harvest rate of 3% breeding adults and is expected to result in a growing breeding population size ($\lambda = 1.04$). When the predicted population size is $\leq 60,000$ pairs and has been trending downward for 3 years, the season will be closed. Both total population trends and productivity (observed during banding and or predicted from productivity models) should be examined annually for major deviations from long-term averages which may warrant recommendations of more restrictive regulations.

North Atlantic Population (NAP) Canada Geese:

Areas ¹ Parameter	Alternatives		
	Liberal	Moderate	Restrictive
High Harvest			
Bracket Dates	Oct 1–Feb 15	Oct 1–Jan 31	Oct 1–Dec 31
Season Lengths	70	60	30
Daily Bag Limits	3	2	2
Low Harvest			
Bracket Dates	Oct 1–Feb 15	Oct 1–Feb 15	Oct 1–Feb 15
Season Lengths	70	70	50
Daily Bag Limits	3	3	3

¹High Harvest includes parts of Maine (2 of 3 areas) and New York (1 of 2 areas). Low Harvest includes parts of Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine (1 of 3 areas), New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York (1 of 2 areas), Rhode Island, and Vermont.

Bracket dates, season lengths, and daily bag limits are determined based on the recent 3-year running mean of the breeding population pairs estimate. The season is closed when the estimate is below the lower 95% credible interval of the average 2001–2005 population size. A restrictive regulation is prescribed when the estimate is below the lower 75% credible interval of the average 2001–2005 population size. A moderate regulation is prescribed when the estimate is within the upper and lower 75% credible interval of the average 2001–2005 population size. A liberal regulation is prescribed when the estimate is at or above the 75% credible interval of the average 2001–2005 population size. In addition, all available data, including annual breeding pair estimates, total population size, and recent weather conditions, will be examined annually for major deviations from long-term averages which may warrant recommendations for more restrictive regulations.

Resident Population (RP) Canada geese: Bracket dates, season lengths, daily bag limits, and season segments are fixed and specific to each area.

The table below provides the bracket dates, season lengths, daily bag limits, and season segments by area for dark goose seasons in the Atlantic Flyway, which are either fixed or determined based on the harvest strategies above for AP or NAP geese.

Area	Bracket dates	Season length	Daily bag limit	Season segments
------	---------------	---------------	-----------------	-----------------

Area	Bracket dates	Season length	Daily bag limit	Season segments
<i>Connecticut:</i>				
Atlantic Population (AP) Zone	Oct 10–Feb 5		AP	2
AP Zone Late Season Area*	Dec 15–Feb 15		AP	1
North Atlantic Population (NAP) Zone		NAP		2
NAP Late Season Area*		NAP		1
Resident Population (RP) Zone	Oct 1–Feb 15	80	5	3
<i>Delaware</i>				
	Nov 15–Feb 5		AP	2
<i>Florida</i>				
	Oct 1–Mar 10	80	5	3
<i>Georgia</i>				
	Oct 1–Mar 10	80	5	3
<i>Maine:</i>				
North NAP High Harvest Zone		NAP		2
South NAP High Harvest Zone		NAP		2
Coastal NAP Low Harvest Zone		NAP		2
<i>Maryland:</i>				
AP Zone	Nov 15–Feb 5		AP	2
RP Zone	Nov 15–Mar 10	80	5	3
<i>Massachusetts:</i>				
AP Zone	Oct 10–Feb 5		AP	2
AP Zone Late Season Area*	Dec 15–Feb 15	54	5	1
NAP Zone		NAP		2
NAP Late Season Area*	Jan 15–Feb 15	27	5	1
<i>New Hampshire</i>				
		NAP		2
<i>New Jersey:</i>				
AP Zone	Fourth Saturday in Oct–Feb 5		AP	2
NAP Zone	NAP			2
Special Late Season Area*	Jan 15–Feb 15	28	5	1
<i>New York:</i>				
AP Zone	Fourth Saturday in Oct–Feb 5		AP	2

Area	Bracket dates	Season length	Daily bag limit	Season segments
AP (Lake Champlain) Zone	Oct 10–Feb 5	AP		2
NAP High Harvest Zone		NAP		2
NAP Low Harvest Zone		NAP		2
Western Long Island RP Zone	Saturday nearest Sep 24–last day of Feb	107	8	3
Remainder of RP Zone	Fourth Saturday in Oct–last day of Feb	80	5	3
AP (Lake Champlain) Zone Late Season*	Dec 1–Feb 15	78	5	1
<i>North Carolina:</i>				
Northeast Zone	Saturday prior to Dec 25–Jan 31	AP		1
RP Zone	Oct 1–Mar 10	80	5	3
<i>Pennsylvania:</i>				
AP Zone	Fourth Saturday in Oct–Feb 5	AP		2
RP Zone	Fourth Saturday in Oct–Mar 10	80	5	3
<i>Rhode Island:</i>				
Statewide		NAP		2
Late Season Area*	Jan 15–Feb 15	32	5	2
<i>South Carolina</i>	Oct 1–Mar 10	80	5	3
<i>Vermont:</i>				
Connecticut River Zone		NAP		2
Interior Zone	Oct 10–Feb 5	AP		2
Lake Champlain Zone	Oct 10–Feb 5	AP		2
Interior, and Lake Champlain Zones Late Season*	Dec 1–Feb 15	78	5	1
<i>Virginia:</i>				
AP Zone	Nov 15–Feb 5	AP		2
RP Zone	Nov 15–Mar 10	80	5	3
<i>West Virginia:</i>	Oct 1–Mar 10	80	5	3

*Denotes a late season in all or part of an already specified area; the selected total season length for any area may not exceed 107 days and season dates may not overlap.

7) Light Goose Seasons

Bracket Dates: October 1–March 10.

Season Lengths: 107 days. Seasons may be split into 3 segments.

Daily Bag limits: 25 light geese. There is no possession limit.

8) Brant Seasons

Bracket Dates: Saturday nearest September 24–January 31.

Season Lengths and Daily Bag Limits:

Parameter	Alternatives		
	Liberal	Standard	Restrictive
Season Lengths	60	50	30
Daily Bag Limits	2	2	1

Seasons may be split into 2 segments.

The season lengths and daily bag limits are determined based on the predicted winter Atlantic brant population size from monitoring data. A closed season is prescribed when the predicted population is <100,000 brant. The restrictive regulatory alternative is prescribed when the predicted population is ≥100,000 and <115,000 brant. The standard regulatory alternative is prescribed when the predicted population is ≥115,000 and <150,000 brant. The liberal regulatory alternative is prescribed when the predicted population is ≥150,000 brant. The previously identified harvest packages should be followed unless known breeding conditions will result in poor or no production or factors that could result in high non-hunting adult mortality (e.g., reduced biomass of submerged aquatic vegetation, oil spills) are known to be present at the time of the annual regulation development. Under these circumstances more conservative regulations may be implemented. Additionally, State hunting seasons must be consistent with the Atlantic Flyway Councils' management plan for this population.

9) Swan Seasons

See "General Decision Frameworks for Determination of Federal Limits for Annual Migratory Game Bird Hunting: Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific Flyways".

10) Gallinule Seasons

See "General Decision Frameworks for Determination of Federal Limits for Annual Migratory Game Bird Hunting: Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific Flyways".

11) Rail Seasons

See "General Decision Frameworks for Determination of Federal Limits for Annual Migratory Game Bird Hunting: Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific Flyways".

12) Snipe Seasons

See “General Decision Frameworks for Determination of Federal Limits for Annual Migratory Game Bird Hunting: Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific Flyways”.

13) American Woodcock Seasons

See “General Decision Frameworks for Determination of Federal Limits for Annual Migratory Game Bird Hunting: Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific Flyways”.

14) Eastern Management Unit Dove Seasons

Bracket Dates: September 1–January 15.

Season Lengths: Season lengths are determined in the national dove harvest strategy (78 FR 52658, August 23, 2013).

15) Puerto Rico

a. Dove and Pigeon Seasons

Bracket Dates: September 1–January 15.

Season Lengths: 60 days.

Daily Bag Limits: 30 Zenaida, mourning, and white-winged doves in the aggregate, of which 10 may be Zenaida doves and 3 may be mourning doves, and 5 scaly-naped pigeons.

Closed Seasons: There is no open season on the white-crowned pigeon and the plain pigeon, which are protected by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

Closed Areas: There is no open season on doves or pigeons in the following areas: Municipality of Culebra, Desecheo Island, Mona Island, El Verde Closure Area, and Cidra Municipality and adjacent areas.

b. Duck, Coot, Gallinule, and Snipe Seasons

Bracket Dates: October 1–January 31.

Season Lengths: 55 days. The season may be split into 2 segments.

Daily Bag Limits: 6 ducks, 6 common gallinules, and 8 snipe.

Closed Seasons: There is no open season on the ruddy duck, white-cheeked pintail, West Indian whistling duck, fulvous whistling duck, and masked duck, which are protected by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. There is no open season on the purple gallinule, American coot, and Caribbean coot.

Closed Areas: There is no open season on ducks, gallinules, and snipe in the Municipality of Culebra and on Desecheo Island.

16) Virgin Islands

a. Dove and Pigeon Seasons

Bracket Dates: September 1–January 15.

Season Lengths: 60 days.

Daily Bag and Possession Limits: 10 Zenaida doves.

Closed Seasons: There is no open season for ground-doves, quail-doves, and pigeons.

Closed Areas: There is no open season for migratory game birds on Ruth Cay (just south of St. Croix).

Local Names for Certain Birds: Zenaida dove, also known as mountain dove; bridled quail-dove, also known as Barbary dove or partridge; common ground-dove, also known as stone

dove, tobacco dove, rola, or tortolita; scaly-naped pigeon, also known as red-necked or scaled pigeon.

b. Duck Seasons

Bracket Dates: December 1–January 31.

Season Lengths: 55 days.

Daily Bag Limits: 6 ducks.

Closed Seasons: There is no open season on the ruddy duck, white-cheeked pintail, West Indian whistling duck, fulvous whistling-duck, and masked duck.

17) Special Falconry Regulations

See “General Decision Frameworks for Determination of Federal Limits for Annual Migratory Game Bird Hunting: Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific Flyways”.

End of Document