

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

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The below general decision frameworks are used to determine appropriate Federal limits for annual migratory game bird hunting seasons in the Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific flyways. Other general decision frameworks applicable to each flyway are contained in a second document specific to each flyway. 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 Flyway Councils 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, Delaware, 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 guidance in 16 USC 704 (c); 84 FR 42996, August 19, 2019.

2) Special Early Teal Seasons and Bonus Blue-winged Teal

Areas:

Atlantic Flyway: Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia.

Mississippi Flyway: Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin.

Central Flyway: Colorado (part), Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico (part), Oklahoma, and Texas.

Bracket Dates: September 1–30.

Season Lengths: Season lengths are determined in the special early teal season guidelines (90 FR 40178, August 18, 2025).

Daily Bag Limits: 6 teal.

Shooting Hours: One-half hour before sunrise to sunset, except in the States of Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, South Carolina, and Wisconsin, where the hours are from sunrise to sunset.

Other Provisions: In lieu of a special early teal season, 2 bonus blue-winged teal are allowed for the first 9 or 16 days of the regular duck season in the Central and Mississippi Flyways, depending on the length of the special early teal season (90 FR 40178, August 18, 2025). In the Central Flyway, this option is available only to the States of Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. In the Mississippi Flyway, this option is available only to the States of Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

3) Special Early Teal–Wood Duck Seasons

Areas: Florida, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

Seasons and Daily Bag Limits: Season and daily bag limits are determined in the special early teal season guidelines (90 FR 40178, August 18, 2025) (see page 40187).

4) White-fronted Goose Seasons (Midcontinent Population)

Areas: Mississippi, Central, and Pacific Flyways within the range of the Midcontinent Population of white-fronted geese.

Bracket Dates: September 1–February 15 in the Mississippi Flyway and Saturday nearest September 24–the Sunday nearest February 15 in the Central Flyway, and September 1–January 26 in the Pacific Flyway.

Season Length and Daily Bag Limits:

Area	Alternatives	
	Standard	Restrictive
Pacific Flyway		
Alaska	107 days, 4 geese	107 days, 4 geese
Central Flyway		
West tier States ¹ except Texas	107 days, 5 geese in the aggregate with other dark geese	107 days, 5 geese in the aggregate with other dark geese
Texas West Goose Zone	95 days, 5 geese in the aggregate with other dark geese	95 days, 5 geese in the aggregate with other dark geese
Balance of States	107 days, 1 goose; 88 days, 2 geese; OR 74 days, 3 geese	88 days, 1 goose; OR 74 days, 2 geese
Mississippi Flyway		

Low-harvest States ²	107 days, 5 geese in the aggregate with other dark geese	107 days, 5 geese in the aggregate with other dark geese
Balance of States	107 days, 1 goose; 88 days, 2 geese; OR 74 days, 3 geese	88 days, 1 goose; OR 74 days, 2 geese

¹ West tier States includes Texas and the Central Flyway portions of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico.

² Low-harvest State status applies if the most recent 5-year average harvest for the state is <1,000 white-fronted geese annually. The aggregate bag limit of dark geese for low harvest states is only an option when the Canada and cackling goose season regulatory alternative in the Mississippi Flyway is liberal, otherwise all states in the Mississippi Flyway are subject to the alternative regulations for the Balance of States.

Seasons may be split into 3 segments in the Central Flyway and 4 segments in the Mississippi Flyway. Three-segment seasons in the Central Flyway require Central Flyway Council and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approval, and a 3-year evaluation by each participating State.

The regulatory alternative for season length and daily bag limits are prescribed based on the estimated fall population size and harvest rate from monitoring data. Population size is derived from a Lincoln estimator using band and harvest data. The analytical framework derives a recent three-year average for each demographic parameter, population size and harvest rate. The probability distribution of the most recent 3-year averages relative to threshold values is used in a decision-analysis framework for setting harvest regulations. The harvest strategy requires that 85% of the distribution (confidence in the parameter estimate) be below or above critical thresholds to prescribe a specific regulatory alternative. The 85% distribution corresponds to a confidence interval (CI) of 70% for the parameter estimate. Thus, if the upper or lower 70% CI for the parameter falls below or above the critical threshold value, then >85% of the distribution is below or above the threshold. The season is closed when >85% of the distribution for the most recent 3-year average population size is below 250,000 geese. A restrictive regulatory alternative is prescribed when >85% of the distribution for the most recent 3-year average population size is below 1,200,000 geese and >85% of the distribution for the most recent 3-year average harvest rate is above 7.5%. A standard regulatory alternative is prescribed when conditions are not meet for either the restrictive or closed season regulatory alternatives.

5) Swan Seasons (Eastern Population)

Areas: Delaware, North Carolina, and Virginia in the Atlantic Flyway and North Dakota, South Dakota east of the Missouri River, and part of Montana in the Central Flyway.

Bracket Dates: October 1–January 31 in the Atlantic Flyway and the Saturday nearest October 1–January 31 in the Central Flyway.

Season Lengths: 90 days in the Atlantic Flyway and 107 days in the Central Flyway.

Permits: Hunting is by State-issued permit only. Permits will authorize the take of no more than 1 swan per permit. A second permit may be issued to hunters from unissued permits remaining after the first drawing. Unissued permits may be reallocated to States within a Flyway.

Permit Allocation:

Alternatives		
Liberal	Moderate	Restrictive
12,000	9,600	7,200

The regulatory alternative for total permits for the Atlantic and Central Flyways combined is prescribed based on the estimated winter population size from monitoring data. The analytical framework derives a recent 3-year average population size estimate and is compared to threshold values in a decision-analysis framework for prescribing the appropriate regulatory alternative. The recent 3-year average population size estimate must exceed the threshold value to change regulations, either more restrictive or liberal. The season is closed when the recent 3-year average winter population estimate is $\leq 50,000$ swans and will remain closed until the estimate is $\geq 70,000$ swans. A restrictive alternative is prescribed when the estimate is $> 50,000$ and $\leq 70,000$ swans and will remain restrictive until the estimate is $\geq 80,000$ swans. A moderate alternative is prescribed when the estimate is $> 70,000$ and $\leq 110,000$ swans. A liberal alternative is prescribed when the estimate is $> 110,000$ swans. Allocation of permits among States must be approved by the Atlantic and Central Flyway Councils and consistent with the Councils' management plan for this population.

Monitoring: Each State must evaluate hunter participation, species-specific swan harvest, and hunter compliance in providing measurements of harvested swans for species identification. Each State should use appropriate measures to maximize hunter compliance with the State's program for swan harvest reporting. Each State must achieve a hunter compliance of at least 80 percent in providing species-determinant measurements of harvested swans for species identification. Each State must provide to the Service by June 30 following the swan season a report detailing hunter participation, species-specific swan harvest, and hunter compliance in reporting harvest.

Other Provisions: In lieu of a general swan hunting season, States may select a season only for tundra swans. States selecting a season only for tundra swans must obtain harvest and hunter participation data.

6) Sandhill Crane Seasons (Eastern Population)

Areas: Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina in the Atlantic Flyway; Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Minnesota, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin in the Mississippi Flyway; including all areas within the range of the Eastern Population of sandhill cranes.

Bracket Dates: September 1–January 31.

Season Lengths: 60 days.

Daily Bag and Possession Limits: The daily bag limit is 3 cranes except in Kentucky where the daily bag limit is 2 cranes. The season bag limit is 3 cranes.

Permits: Hunting is by State-issued permit only.

Other Provisions: The number of permits, open areas, season dates, protection plans for other species, and other provisions of seasons must be consistent with the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyway Councils' management plan for this population and approved by the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyway Councils and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Permit Allocation:

Alternatives	
Standard	Restrictive
12% ¹	10%

¹ Total permit allocation the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways combined is based on the percentage of the recent 3-year average population size.

The regulatory alternative for total permits for the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways combined is prescribed based on the estimated fall population size. The analytical framework derives a recent 3-year average population size estimate and is compared to threshold values in a decision-analysis framework for prescribing the appropriate regulatory alternative. The recent 3-year average population size estimate must exceed the threshold value to change regulations, either more restrictive or liberal. The season is closed when the most recent 3-year average fall population index is <30,000 cranes. A restrictive alternative is prescribed when the estimate is ≥30,000 and <60,000 cranes. A standard alternative is prescribed when the estimate is ≥60,000 cranes. Total permits is derived based on the percentage of the 3-year average fall population index associated with each regulatory alternative. Allocation of permits among States must be approved by both the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyway Councils and consistent with the Councils' management plan for this population.

7) Sandhill Crane Seasons (Midcontinent Population)

Areas: Minnesota in the Mississippi Flyway; Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming in the Central Flyway; and Alaska in the Pacific Flyway; including all areas within the range of the Midcontinent Population of sandhill cranes.

Bracket Dates: September 1–February 28.

Season Lengths: 37 days in Texas (Zone C) and Minnesota (Northwest Goose Zone), 58 days in Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming, and 93 days in New Mexico, Oklahoma, and the balance of Texas.

Daily Bag Limits:

Area	Alternatives		
	Standard	Moderate	Restrictive
Minnesota	2	1	1
North Dakota Area 2	2	1	Closed
Texas Zone C	2	1	Closed
Balance of States	3	2	1

The regulatory alternative for daily bag limit is prescribed based on the estimated spring population size from monitoring data. The analytical framework derives a recent 3-year average population size estimate and is compared to threshold values in a decision-analysis framework for prescribing the appropriate regulatory alternative. The goal is to maintain a 3-year average population index within a range of 350,000–475,000 cranes. The recent 3-year average population size estimate must exceed the threshold value for at least 3 consecutive years to change regulations, either more restrictive or liberal. The season is closed when the recent 3-year average spring population estimate is ≤200,000 cranes. A restrictive alternative is

prescribed when the estimate is above 200,000 but $\leq 275,000$ cranes. A moderate alternative is prescribed when the estimate is above 275,000 but $\leq 350,000$ cranes. A standard alternative is prescribed when the estimate is above 350,000 cranes.

Permits: Hunting is by State-issued permit only.

Other Provisions: The number of permits, open areas, season dates, protection plans for other species, and other provisions of seasons must be consistent with the Mississippi, Central, and Pacific Flyway Councils' management plan for this population and approved by the Mississippi, Central, and Pacific Flyway Councils and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

8) Sandhill Crane Seasons (Rocky Mountain Population)

Areas: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming within the range of the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) of sandhill cranes.

Bracket Dates: September 1–January 31.

Season Lengths: 60 days. The season may be split into 3 segments.

Daily Bag and Possession limits: The daily bag limit is 3 cranes, and the possession limit is 9 cranes per season.

Permits: Hunting is by State-issued permit only.

Other Provisions: Numbers of permits, open areas, season dates, protection plans for other species, and other provisions of seasons must be consistent with the Central and Pacific Flyway Councils' management plan and approved by the Central and Pacific Flyway Councils and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with the following exceptions:

1. In Utah, 100 percent of the harvest will be assigned to the RMP crane quota;
2. In Arizona, monitoring the species composition of the harvest must be conducted at 3-year intervals unless 100 percent of the harvest will be assigned to the RMP crane quota;
3. In Idaho, 100 percent of the harvest will be assigned to the RMP crane quota; and
4. In the Estancia Valley hunt area of New Mexico, the level and species composition of the harvest must be monitored; greater sandhill cranes in the harvest will be assigned to the RMP crane quota.

Note: See Rocky Mountain population sandhill crane harvest strategy (80 FR 51090, August 21, 2015) for annual determination of allowable harvest for each state.

9) Gallinule Seasons

Areas: Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central Flyways

Bracket Dates: September 1–January 31.

Season Lengths: 70 days.

Daily Bag Limits: 15 gallinules.

Zones and Split Seasons: Seasons may be selected by zones established for duck hunting. The season in each zone may be split into 2 segments.

10) Rail Seasons

Areas: Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central Flyways and the Pacific Flyway Portions of Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, and Wyoming.

Bracket Dates: September 1–January 31.

Season Lengths: 70 days. Seasons may be split into 2 segments.

Daily Bag Limits:

Clapper and King Rails: In Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Rhode Island, 10 rails in the aggregate. In Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia, 15 rails in the aggregate.

Sora and Virginia Rails: 25 rails in the aggregate.

11) Snipe Seasons

Bracket Dates: September 1–February 28, except in Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Virginia, where the season must end no later than January 31.

Season Lengths: 107 days.

Daily Bag limits: 8 snipe.

Zones and Split Seasons: Seasons may be selected by zones established for duck seasons. The season in each zone may be split into 2 segments.

12) American Woodcock Seasons

Areas: Eastern and Central Management Regions.

Bracket Dates: September 13–January 31.

Season Lengths: Except as subsequently provided, the season lengths are determined in the American woodcock harvest strategy (80 FR 51090, August 21, 2015; 76 FR 19876, April 8, 2011).

Daily Bag Limits: 3 woodcock.

Zones and Split Seasons: Seasons may be split into 2 segments. New Jersey may select seasons in each of 2 zones. The season in each zone may not exceed 36 days.

13) Interior Band-tailed Pigeon Seasons

Areas: Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah

Bracket Dates: September 1–November 30.

Season Lengths: 14 days.

Daily Bag Limits: 2 pigeons.

Zones: New Mexico may select seasons in each of 2 zones. The season in each zone may not exceed 14 days. The season in the South Zone may not open until October 1.

14) Eastern Management Unit Dove Seasons

Bracket Dates: September 1–January 31.

Season Lengths and Daily Bag Limits: The daily bag limits are mourning and white-winged doves in the aggregate. Season lengths and daily bag limits are determined in the national dove harvest strategy (78 FR 52658, August 23, 2013).

Zones and Split Seasons: Seasons must comply with Federal zone and split-season configurations for doves (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.

15) Central 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).

Daily Bag Limits: Daily bag limits are determined in the national dove harvest strategy (78 FR 52658, August 23, 2013). The daily bag limits are mourning and white-winged doves in the aggregate.

Zones and Split Seasons: Seasons must comply with Federal zone and split-season configurations for doves (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:

Texas: Bracket dates are September 1–January 25. The daily bag limits are mourning, white-winged, and white-tipped doves in the aggregate, of which no more than 2 may be white-tipped doves. This provision is experimental in the South Zone pending annual and final evaluation of the first 3 years of a 4-year experimental season. If the Flyway Councils and Service Regulations Committee do not continue this or a similar provision experimentally or operationally, then the provisions in the South Zone shall return to pre-experimental conditions including the following. South Zone bracket dates are September 14–January 25. Additionally, a special white-winged dove season is allowed in the South Zone. Bracket dates are September 1–19, season length is 6 days and may be split into 3 segments. The daily bag limits are mourning, white-winged, and white-tipped doves in the aggregate, of which no more than 2 may be mourning doves and no more than 2 may be white-tipped doves. Shooting hours are from noon to sunset.

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