



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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1994-95 WATERFOWL HUNTING REGULATIONS PROPOSED

In response to improved duck production this year, the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is offering states the option of either an increase in the daily bag limit for ducks or an increase in the number of days in the duck hunting season for 1994-95.

In addition, the Service is proposing to allow hunting of canvasback ducks nationwide for the first time since the 1985-1986 season. Season lengths would be extended for certain goose and brant populations, while swan hunting regulations would remain essentially the same as last year.

Under the first option, daily bag limits would increase from three to four ducks in the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central flyways, and from four to five ducks in the Pacific Flyway. The length of the duck hunting season will remain the same as last year in all four flyways.

Under the second option, states would be permitted to add 10 extra days to the duck hunting season, but bag limits would remain the same as last year--three ducks in the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central Flyways, and four ducks in the Pacific Flyway.

This would be the first time since 1987 that hunters have been allowed four ducks in the bag or season lengths of 40 days in the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways.

"This year's improvement in duck production allows us to offer more opportunities this fall for hunters who have supported years of restrictive regulations in times of low populations," said Fish and Wildlife Service director Mollie Beattie. "However, if duck populations next year do not show signs that the improvement is continuing, the Fish and Wildlife Service will look closely at whether additional harvest restrictions are needed."

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Abundant precipitation during the winter and spring improved water levels throughout the important duck breeding areas of the northcentral United States and Canadian Prairie Provinces. As a result, duck breeding populations were up to 32.5 million, according to annual aerial surveys covering 1.3 million square miles. In addition, the fall flight index, an estimate of the size of the autumn migration, jumped to 71 million ducks. Although these forecasts represent a projection rather than an actual count of birds, relative changes from year to year are reflective of changes in duck abundance.

The forecast for mallards, the most abundant duck in North America, is 12 million compared with 8.8 million last year. Canvasback breeding population indices increased to 525,000 birds, up from a low of 373,000 in 1985, allowing the season to be opened again.

Five of the 10 major duck species remain below their long-term population average from 1955-93, however, and mallards, pintails, and scaup have not yet reached the population goals established for these species under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Bag limits proposed by the Service impose restrictions on the daily take of ducks by species and gender in order to restrict the harvest of these species.

This is the first good news after years of poor habitat conditions and generally low populations. Duck populations fell to record lows in the 1980s due to an extended drought in the prairie nesting areas and continued loss of wetland and upland habitat across the continent.

The fall flight index has been compiled since the late 1960s. This year's duck fall flight forecast is the highest since 72 million in 1983. The index hit a record low of 55 million ducks in 1985.

Biologists attribute the population increases this year to favorable weather combined with the results of many efforts to restore and conserve wetland and upland habitats through the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the Conservation Reserve Program, and projects undertaken by organizations such as Ducks Unlimited.

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan, an international partnership effort, has protected, restored, or enhanced more than 2 million acres of wetland and upland habitat since 1986.

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Additionally, private lands enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program have provided millions of acres of upland habitat for waterfowl and many other bird species. This program has played a major role in restoring nesting cover, which was substantially reduced over the years due to agriculture.

Geese have generally fared better than ducks. Most goose and swan populations in North America remained numerically sound even as duck numbers declined. There is concern, however, about declining Atlantic and southern James Bay Canada goose populations. In addition, numbers of dusky Canada geese, though stable, are at half the levels seen in the 1970s.

Goose production was enhanced last year by one of the earliest arctic springs on record. This year, spring was delayed, but the number of geese flying south in the fall is expected to be only slightly smaller than last year.

The proposed regulations prescribe season lengths, bag limits, shooting hours, and outside dates for the hunting of ducks, geese, swans, and coots. States select their seasons from within the frameworks set by the Service. State regulations may be more restrictive, but not more liberal, than the Federal frameworks. Hunters should consult final state regulations before going afield.

Highlights of the proposed regulations 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 -- Either (A) A hunting season of not more than 30 days and daily bag limit of four ducks, including no more than three mallards (only one of which can be a female), two wood ducks, two redheads, one canvasback, one black duck, one mottled duck, one pintail, and one fulvous whistling duck, or (b) 40 days and daily bag limit of three ducks, including the restrictions shown above. The season on harlequin ducks would be closed. The daily bag limit of mergansers would be five, only one of which could be a hooded merganser. Outside dates for opening and closing seasons are October 1, 1994, and January 20, 1995.

Geese -- For light geese, states could select a 107-day season between October 1, 1994, and February 10, 1995, with a daily bag limit of five birds. For Canada geese, 70-day seasons would be

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permitted in most areas, except for closed seasons in Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia's Back Bay; an 8-day season in Georgia; a 35-day season in Crawford County, Pennsylvania; and 60-day seasons in Delaware, Maryland and Virginia, except for Back Bay. In addition to the regular seasons, a 17-day season would be allowed in the Susquehanna and Juniata River area of Pennsylvania; a 16-day season in coastal and central Massachusetts; a 30-day season in southern Connecticut; and a special 4-day season in South Carolina. Season dates and bag limits for Canada geese would vary in specific areas.

In addition, an experimental special season could be held in a designated area of northeastern New Jersey from January 28, 1995, to February 11, 1995, with a five-geese limit.

Atlantic Brant -- States could select a 50-day season between October 1, 1994, and January 20, 1995, with a daily bag limit of two.

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

Ducks -- Either (A) 30 days and a daily bag limit of four ducks, including no more than three mallards (only one of which can be a female), three mottled ducks, one black duck, one pintail, two wood ducks, one canvasback, one redhead, or (B) 40 days and daily bag limit of three, including no more than two mallards (no more than one of which can be female) and including the restrictions shown above. The daily bag limit of mergansers would be five, only one of which could be a hooded merganser. Outside dates October 1 and January 20.

Geese -- Generally, states could select 70-day seasons for dark geese between October 1, 1994, and January 31, 1995, and 107-day seasons for light geese between October 1, 1994, and February 14, 1995, with a seven-bird daily limit including no more than two Canada geese, two white-fronted geese, and two brant. There would be, however, numerous 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), either (A) a 51-day season and daily bag

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limit of one ducks, including no more than one female mallard, one mottled duck, one pintail, one redhead, one canvasback, and two wood ducks, or (B) 61 days and daily bag limit of three, including the restrictions shown above. Under both options, the last 12 days may start no earlier than the Saturday nearest December 10.

In the remainder of the Central Flyway, either (A) 39 days and daily bag limit of four ducks, including no more than one female mallard, one mottled duck, one pintail, one redhead, one canvasback, and two wood ducks, or (B) 49 days and a daily bag limit of three ducks, including the restrictions shown above.

Outside dates are October 1 - January 20. The daily bag limit of mergansers would be five, only one of which could be a hooded merganser.

Geese -- Goose seasons would be permitted between October 1, 1994, and January 31, 1995, for dark geese, and between October 1, 1994, and the Sunday nearest February 15, 1995, for light geese, except in Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas where the closing date for light geese would be February 28. Season lengths and bag limits would vary by state.

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

Ducks -- Either (A) concurrent 59 days and daily bag limit of five ducks, including no more than four mallards (no more than one female), one pintail, two redheads, and one canvasback or (B) concurrent 69 days and daily bag limit of four ducks, including no more than three mallards, and including the restrictions shown above. In the Columbia Basin Mallard Management Unit, the seasons may be an additional 7 days. Outside dates are October 1 and January 20.

Geese -- A 100-day season would be permitted in most parts of the flyway between October 1, 1994, and January 22, 1995 with a bag limit of no more than three light geese and three dark geese, including no more than two white-fronts. In California, a 30-day season would be permitted for brant, and in Washington and Oregon a 16-day season would be permitted for brant. The daily bag limit would be two brant in these special seasons. There would be many area-specific regulations and exceptions to these frameworks. After 10 years of closure, cackling Canada geese can now be hunted, with one cackler allowed in some areas. The seasons would be closed for Aleutian Canada geese.

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-6-

Additional details on the proposed hunting regulations are scheduled for publication in the August 19, 1994, Federal Register. Public comments will be accepted through September 2 and should be addressed to the Director (MBMO), 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Mail Stop 634 ARLSQ, Arlington, Virginia 22203.

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