

Meeting Date: July 24, 2024

Agenda Item No. 5H

Agenda Item: Goose Zones and Hunter Survey Results (**Action**)

Bureau Chief Approval: SR

Prepared by: Jeffrey Knetter, Upland Game and Migratory Game Bird Program Coordinator

Background:

Zones and split seasons are special regulations designed to distribute hunting opportunities and harvest according to temporal, geographic, and demographic variability in waterfowl populations. There is an established federal framework that guides the creation of zones and split seasons.

For geese,

- A zone is a geographic area or portion of a state, with a contiguous boundary, for which independent dates may be selected for the goose season.
- Zone and split options selected by a state may be changed annually.

Any state may continue the configuration used in the previous year. If changes are made, the zone and split-season configuration must conform to the following:

- No restriction on the number of zones.
- Seasons may be split into 3 segments.
- Three-segment seasons for Canada geese and white-fronted geese require Pacific Flyway Council and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approval and a 3-year evaluation by each participating state.

The deadline for states to announce changes to goose zones occurs at the annual fall Pacific Flyway Study Committee meeting August 26-30, 2024.

As of this writing, staff are actively collecting public input on potential goose seasons and zones with the 2024 Goose Hunter Opinion Survey. Staff will provide an overview of results from that survey effort, and any associated proposed goose zone changes, at the Commission meeting.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

Idaho Code 36-104(2) grants authority to the Commission to determine when an open season may be declared for the taking of wildlife. IDAPA 13.01.09.301 establishes rules regarding the take of migratory game birds. Idaho's migratory game bird seasons are set within a framework established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service after they meet with all state fish and wildlife agencies.

Public Involvement Process:

In 2024, the Department conducted web-based goose hunter opinion surveys to obtain input from hunters on their preferences on how to structure goose seasons and zones, within the confines of the federal framework. That survey will conclude, and results will be tabulated, prior to the July 2024 Commission meeting. The Department will use input from that hunter survey to inform any recommended changes to goose zones. Results from the 2019 goose hunter opinion survey have been used to guide Department recommendations for goose seasons over the last five years.

Justification:

Commission direction on this agenda item will form staff recommendations on goose zones at the August 2024 Pacific Flyway meeting. Any goose zone configurations would be in effect and apply to the Commission's season-setting action for the 2025-2026 waterfowl seasons (action scheduled April 2025). Although goose zone configurations may be

changed annually by notifying the Pacific Flyway, configurations would remain in place until changed.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff will present an overview of the 2024 Goose Hunter Opinion Survey results and any associated recommendations for zone changes at the Commission meeting.

Suggested Motion: I move the Commission adopt staff recommendations for goose zone configurations to take effect for the 2025-2026 hunting season.