

Waterfowl Season Setting: Preferences of Idaho Waterfowl Hunters

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game sets the waterfowl hunting season each year, under the authority of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

To help guide the waterfowl season-setting process for the next five-year period, (2012-2016) the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) conducted a survey to determine the preferences of Idaho waterfowl hunters. Hunters were asked to comment on how they prefer waterfowl seasons to be structured in Idaho, within the confines of the Federal Framework. Setting waterfowl seasons is a cooperative effort among state and federal agencies. The United States and Canada are divided into four flyways: the Atlantic, Mississippi, Central and Pacific. Idaho is in the Pacific Flyway. For each flyway, a framework is set for each hunting season and is the same for each state in the flyway. The framework establishes the maximum length of the waterfowl hunting season between the Saturday nearest September 24 and the last Sunday in January.

The IDFG surveyed hunters in July 2012. We particularly wanted to know, “Do waterfowl hunters prefer a continuous or a split season?” and, “Do they prefer an earlier or a later season?” A continuous season is defined as 105 straight days of waterfowl hunting for ducks and dark geese (Canada and white-fronted). A split season has a break of some closed days within the season, but still has 105 total days of hunting.

The survey questionnaire was mailed to 2,000 randomly sampled hunters who live in each of the three waterfowl zones (see map below) in Idaho and who purchased Migratory Bird permits for the 2011-2012 season. If hunters did not send back the mail-in questionnaire, IDFG survey staff attempted to contact them up to three times by telephone. We received complete surveys from 1,094 hunters. The following is a summary of the results from this survey.

HUNTING PARTICIPATION

- 73% of hunters surveyed said they hunted waterfowl in Idaho in the previous five years. The survey targeted hunters who purchased a Migratory Bird Permit in 2011 or 2012 (some of these only hunted doves).

Q1. Have you hunted waterfowl in Idaho in the last five years? (Yes, No)

Zone	Total	Yes	No	% Yes
1	288	205	83	71%
2	269	186	83	69%
3	537	404	133	75%
TOTAL	1,094	795	299	73%



Q2. How many days did you hunt waterfowl in Idaho during the 2011-2012 season?

- 86% of waterfowl hunters said they hunted waterfowl in Idaho during the 2011-2012 season.

Days Hunted During 2011-2012 Season					
Zone	Total	0 (%)	1-5 (%)	6-10 (%)	10+ (%)
1	205	20 (10)	68 (33)	39 (19)	77 (38)
2	186	25 (13)	60 (32)	29 (16)	72 (39)
3	404	67 (17)	138 (34)	53 (13)	145 (36)
TOTAL	795	112 (14)	266 (34)	121 (15)	294 (37)

Q3. In which waterfowl zone do you primarily hunt?

- Responses were received from hunters throughout the state. Most hunt in the same zone where they live (80%).

Zone	Total
1	209
2	208
3	363
TOTAL	780



SEASON PREFERENCE FOR WATERFOWL HUNTING

- Most Idaho waterfowl hunters (74%) said they prefer continuous seasons over split seasons.

Q4. Do you prefer a 'continuous' or a 'split' season structure for the Idaho waterfowl season in the zone you primarily hunt?

Zone	Continuous	Split	Total	% Continuous
1	158	56	214	73%
2	160	37	197	81%
3	292	119	411	71%
TOTAL	610	212	822	74%

TIMING OF THE WATERFOWL SEASON

- Most Idaho waterfowl hunters (74%) said they prefer to start and end the waterfowl season later to allow for hunting opportunities as close as possible to the end of the Federal Framework (as late in January as possible.)

Q5. For a ‘continuous’ season: Is it more important to you to have an early opening date or a later closing date?

Open the season on the first Saturday in October and close in mid-January.

OR

Open the season on a Saturday in October that allows the season to close as late as possible in January.

Zone	Total	First Saturday	Later Saturday	% Later
1	220	54	166	76%
2	200	80	120	60%
3	414	83	331	80%
TOTAL	834	217	617	74%

We asked other questions about the structure for a split season, but have not presented these results because split seasons were not favored in the survey.