

Meeting Date: April 11, 2019

Agenda Item No.

Agenda Item: 2019-2020 Migratory Game Bird
Season-setting

Bureau Chief Approval: _____

Prepared by: Jeffrey Knetter

Background:

Idaho's waterfowl seasons are set within a framework established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), after they consult with all state fish and wildlife agencies. Regulatory decisions are made using biological data observed the previous year. This process and schedule mean season frameworks (e.g., outside dates, season lengths, bag limits) are finalized early enough for state agencies to select and publish season dates well in advance of fall seasons. Furthermore, this process allows the Commission to set seasons for all migratory game birds at the same time. Consequently, all migratory game bird regulations are now published in the same brochure.

The Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) process determines the general duck season framework. This process was adopted by the USFWS in 1996 and is used to evaluate duck habitat and populations annually. The AHM process informs the optimal season framework for U.S. duck seasons. Special harvest strategies are used for some of the less common ducks. Goose seasons are determined by flyway management plans for each goose population.

Staff recommendations for changes for the 2019-2020 Migratory Game Bird seasons include the following proposals:

Ducks

- Reduce the daily bag limit from 2 to 1 pintail.

Light Geese

- Shift Butte County and those portions of Bonneville, Jefferson, and Clark counties west of Interstate 15 from Zone 5 to Zone 2, to allow late winter/spring hunting opportunities.

Sandhill Cranes

- Reduce the number of crane tags available to accommodate for the reduction in the annual harvest allocation for Idaho, as per the Flyway Management Plan.

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 meeting with all state fish and wildlife agencies.

Public Involvement Process:

In 2016, the Department conducted mail and web-based surveys to obtain input from hunters on how to structure the waterfowl (i.e., duck and Canada goose) seasons and zones, within the confines of the federal framework, which includes flexibility in the start and end dates between the Saturday nearest September 24 and the last Sunday in January. This information will be used to guide Idaho waterfowl seasons for the 2016-2020 seasons, rather than re-defining the seasons each year.

The 2019-2020 Migratory Game Bird season proposals were available for public comment on the Department's website from March 15-27.

Justification:

The Adaptive Harvest Management process determines the general duck season framework. This process was adopted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1996 and is used to evaluate duck habitat and populations annually and select the optimal season framework for U.S. duck seasons. Special harvest strategies are used for some of the less common ducks (i.e., scaup and pintail). Goose seasons are determined by flyway management plans for each goose population. Data collected in 2018 indicate breeding habitat conditions and populations are at levels that can support a 107-day season for all waterfowl, except scaup (86 days). The maximum number of hunting days and bag limits allowed by the federal framework can be taken with no long-term impacts on Idaho's waterfowl resource.

The federal framework for light geese (snow and Ross's) was expanded in 2008-09 to March 10 for interior states within the Pacific Flyway. Idaho has implemented late-winter seasons since 2010.

In 2013, the federal framework for white-fronted geese was separated from Canada geese, and expanded to March 10 within the Pacific Flyway. Idaho has implemented a late-winter season for white-fronted geese since 2014.

American crow seasons are set by states as per the hunting regulations defined in the Federal Register (i.e., 50 CFR 20.133).

Dove seasons are determined by the mourning dove harvest strategy, which is based on leg band returns, for doves in the Western Management Unit.

Sandhill crane seasons are directed by the Pacific Flyway Council Rocky Mountain Population Crane Plan.

Staff Recommendation:

The Department's recommendation is to take the maximum allowed hunting days and bag limits allowed by federal framework. The proposed daily duck bag limit would be seven ducks, but not more than 2 female mallards, 3 scaup, 2 redheads, 1 pintail, and 2 canvasbacks. The proposed daily bag limit for Wilson's snipe would be 8 and the proposed daily bag limit for coots would be 25. The proposed daily bag limit for Canada geese would be 4 (except in Zone 4 during September 1-15, when the daily bag limit would be 5), the proposed daily bag limit for white-fronted geese would be 10, and the proposed daily bag limit for snow and Ross's geese would be 20. The proposed possession limit would be three times the daily bag limit.

There is no daily bag limit for American crows.

The proposed daily bag limit for doves would be 15 mourning and white-winged doves in the aggregate.

The proposed daily and season limit for sandhill cranes is 2 cranes.

Final recommendations (attached) will be presented at the Commission meeting.

Action Requested:

Approve 2019-2020 migratory game bird seasons.

Suggested Motion:

The Commission adopt staff recommendations for the 2019-2020 migratory game bird seasons.

WATERFOWL

Youth Waterfowl Season:

Proposed season structure:
Statewide: September 28-29

Ducks:

The proposed season structure for ducks is:

- Zone 1: October 5, 2019 – January 17, 2020; Scaup: October 5, 2019 – December 29, 2019
- Zone 2: October 5, 2019 – January 17, 2020; Scaup: October 5, 2019 – December 29, 2019
- Zone 3: October 12, 2019 – January 24, 2020; Scaup: October 31, 2019 – January 24, 2020
- Zone 4: October 5, 2019 – January 17, 2020; Scaup: October 5, 2019 – December 29, 2019

Proposed daily bag limit would be 7 ducks; but not more than 2 female mallards, 2 redhead, 3 scaup, ~~2~~ 1 pintail or 2 canvasback.

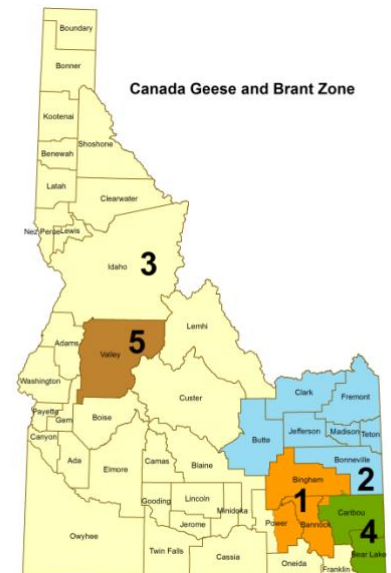


Canada geese:

The proposed season structure for Canada geese is:

- Zone 1: October 5, 2019 – January 17, 2020
- Zone 2: October 5, 2019 – January 17, 2020
- Zone 3: October 12, 2019 – January 24, 2020
- Zone 4: September 1, 2019 – September 15, 2019 & October 5, 2019 – January 2, 2020

Proposed daily bag limit would be 4 Canada geese, except in Zone 4 during September 1-15, when the daily bag limit would be 5 Canada geese.



Light Geese (Snow and Ross's Geese):

The proposed season structure for white geese is:

- Zone 1: October 5, 2019 – January 17, 2020
- Zone 2: November 6, 2019 – January 17, 2020 & February 8, 2020 – March 10, 2020*
- Zone 3: November 27, 2019 – March 10, 2020
- Zone 4: October 12, 2019 – January 24, 2020
- Zone 5: October 5, 2019 – January 17, 2020*
- Zone 6: October 5, 2019 – January 17, 2020

Proposed daily bag limit would be 20 white geese.

*The Department proposes to shift Butte County and those portions of Bonneville, Jefferson, and Clark counties west of Interstate 15 from Zone 5 to Zone 2. Reflected in map

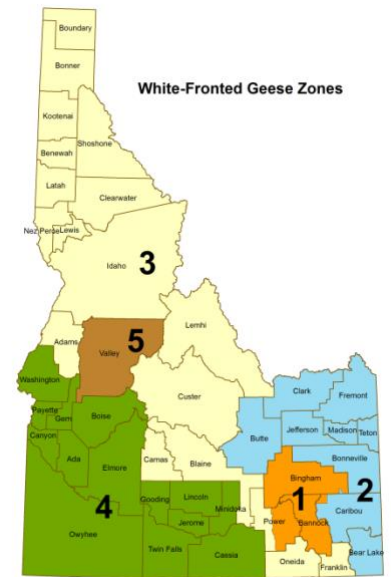


White-fronted Geese:

The proposed season structure for white-fronted geese is:

- Zone 1: October 5, 2019 – January 17, 2020
- Zone 2: October 5, 2019 – January 17, 2020
- Zone 3: October 12, 2019 – January 24, 2020
- Zone 4: November 4, 2019 – February 16, 2020
- Zone 5: October 5, 2019 – January 17, 2020

Proposed daily bag limit would be 10 white-fronted geese.



Sandhill Cranes:

The Pacific and Central Flyway Management Plan for the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) of sandhill cranes allows for the regulated harvest of cranes when the population exceeds 15,000, as estimated by the average of the three most recent reliable surveys. Based on the allowable harvest for this population, 1,628 sandhill cranes may be harvested from the RMP during the 2019 hunting season.

Idaho’s 2019 crane harvest allocation, as provided by the Flyway Management Plan, is 220 cranes, down from 306 in 2018.

The Department proposes the following actions:

All tags (441) will be offered on a first-come first-served basis at any vendor as per the allocation below.

Hunt Area	Season	Tags
1 - Bear Lake	9/1-9/15	238 130
1 - Bear Lake	9/16-9/30	149 130
2 - Teton	9/1-9/15	35 25
3 - Fremont	9/1-9/15	44 33
3 - Fremont	9/16-9/30	44 33
4 - Jefferson	9/1-9/15	23 20
4 - Jefferson	9/16-9/30	24 20
5 - Swan Lake	9/1-9/15	29 25
6 - Malad	9/1-9/15	25

The daily limit is 2 cranes for all hunts. The season limit is 2 cranes.

Doves:

Dove seasons are guided by the mourning dove harvest strategy for doves in the Western Management Unit, which is based on band returns. The USFWS approved the STANDARD (60 days; 15-bird bag) regulatory alternative for the 2019 season, which allows for a maximum season of 60 days, occurring between September 1 and January 15.

The proposed season structure for doves is:

Statewide: September 1 – October 30

Proposed daily bag limit: 15 mourning and white-winged doves in the aggregate.

American Crow:

American crow seasons are set by states following guidance provided for in the Federal Register (i.e., 50 CFR 20.133). The season shall not exceed 124 days during a calendar year, and shall not be permitted during the peak crow nesting period within a State.

The proposed season structure for American crows is:

Statewide: October 1 – January 31

Proposed daily bag limit: no limit.