

Meeting Date: April 11, 2017

Agenda Item No.

Agenda Item: 2017-2018 Migratory Game Bird
Season-setting

Bureau Chief Approval: _____

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Background:

Beginning with the 2016-17 hunting seasons, a new process and schedule are now used for setting annual migratory bird hunting regulations. Legal, administrative, and analytical burdens associated with establishing migratory game bird hunting regulations intensified during the last decade and the process became untenable. As a result, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service adopted an alternative process that combines early and late season meeting schedules with modifications to Adaptive Harvest Management frameworks. Regulatory decisions will be made using biological data observed the previous year.

This single process and new schedule mean the federal season frameworks (e.g., outside dates, season lengths, bag limits) will be finalized earlier, and will enable state agencies to select and publish their migratory game bird season dates well in advance of fall seasons. Furthermore, this process will allow the Commission to set seasons for all migratory game birds at the same time; consequently, all migratory game bird regulations will be published in the same brochure.

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 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.

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. Goose seasons are determined by flyway management plans for each goose population. Data collected in 2016 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, and they have been well received.

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 7 ducks, but not more than 2 female mallards, 3 scaup, 2 redheads, 1 pintail, and 2 canvasbacks. The proposed daily bag limit for Canada geese would be 4, 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 3 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 will be presented at the Commission meeting.

Action Requested:

Approve 2017-2018 migratory game bird seasons.

Suggested Motion:

The Commission adopt staff recommendations for the 2017-2018 migratory game bird seasons.