

**Meeting Date:** May 14, 2020

**Agenda Item No. 14**

**Agenda Item:** Waterfowl (Duck) Zones

**Bureau Chief Approval:** TB

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

**Background:**

Waterfowl hunting is federally regulated under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Idaho and other states regulate waterfowl hunting within federally established parameters.

Zones and split seasons are special regulations designed to distribute hunting opportunities and harvest according to temporal, geographic, and demographic variability in waterfowl populations.

States may change zones and season splits for geese before the season each year. However, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) requires states to configure zones and season splits for ducks for 5-year periods. The current five-year period ends after the 2020 season, and the deadline for Idaho to submit its duck zone/split configurations to USFWS for the 2021-2025 seasons is July 1, 2020.

USFWS regulations limit the number of choices states have for zone/split configurations. This year (2020) USFWS has proposed changes to these choices.

For the current 2016-2020 period, Idaho uses a configuration of no more than 4 zones with no split seasons. During this period the Commission has set continuous seasons and combined zones into one category of earlier season dates and a second category of later season dates.

USFWS' rationale for requiring the duck zone/split configuration to be set for 5-year periods includes:

- The ability to assess consequences of zones/splits on duck harvest and effect of season length and bag limit on duck harvest;
- Administrative burden associated with making more-frequent changes;
- Concern over the proliferation of zones and splits; and
- Little perceived need to change zones and splits annually for hunter satisfaction, recruitment, and retention.

**Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:**

Idaho's migratory game bird seasons are set within a framework established by USFWS under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which considers input from all state fish and wildlife agencies.

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.

**Public Involvement Process:**

In 2019 and 2020, the Department conducted mail and web-based surveys to obtain input from hunters on their preferences on how to structure migratory game bird seasons and zones, within the confines of the federal framework. There were over 4,100 respondents to the 2019 goose hunter opinion survey, and over 6,300 respondents to the 2020 duck and dove survey. The Department considers this hunter input in making its recommendations for the zone and split configuration for the 2021-2025 seasons.

**Staff Recommendation:**

The staff recommendation for the duck zone/split configuration for 2021-2025 is undergoing Bureau and regional review. It will be sent to the Commission before the meeting.

**Action Requested:**

The Department requests Commission review and input before the Department submits the zone/split configuration to USFWS for approval.