

Meeting Date: April 14, 2022

Agenda Item No. 1

Agenda Item: 2022-2023 Migratory Game Bird
Season-setting (ACTION)

Bureau Chief Approval: JR

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

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.

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 annually evaluate duck habitat and populations. 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.

The Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey was not conducted in 2020 or 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic; consequently, adjustments to optimization methods and AHM decision frameworks were developed to inform duck hunting regulations based on the *predicted* 2020 and 2021 breeding population size and the regulatory alternatives selected for the 2020 and 2021 hunting seasons.

Based on the liberal regulatory alternative selected for the 2021-2022 hunting season, and a predicted 2021 breeding population size of 1.17 million mallards - 640,000 mallards observed in Alaska, and 530,000 predicted in the southern Pacific Flyway - the optimal choice for the 2022-2023 hunting season in the Pacific Flyway is the liberal regulatory alternative; 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 ducks and dark geese was expanded in 2019-2020 to January 31.

The federal framework for light geese (snow and Ross's) was expanded in 2008-2009 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.

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

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

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

In 2019 and 2020 the Department conducted mail and web-based surveys to obtain input from hunters on how to structure migratory game bird (i.e., ducks, geese, and doves) seasons and zones within the confines of the federal framework. This information will be used to guide Idaho waterfowl seasons and zone configurations for the 2020-2025 seasons, and was used to develop proposals for 2022-2023 migratory game bird seasons and 2022-2025 duck zone configurations.

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 USFWS after meeting with all state fish and wildlife agencies.

Public Involvement Process:

In 2019 and 2020 the Department conducted mail and web-based surveys to obtain input from hunters on how to structure the migratory game bird (i.e., ducks, geese, and doves) seasons and zones, within the confines of the federal framework, which includes flexibility in the start and end dates. This information is intended to guide setting of Idaho waterfowl seasons for the 2020-2025 seasons, rather than re-defining the seasons each year. 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 2022-2023 migratory game bird season proposals were available for public comment on the Department's website from March 11–23. Staff will provide a summary of public response to the Commission at the meeting. No regional open houses were held. However, the Department did hold a virtual open house event on March 16 to provide an overview of proposals and answer questions.

In addition, the Department conducted a survey on season preferences among migratory bird permit holders in Benewah, Bonner, Boundary, Kootenai, and Shoshone counties from March 4 - 24. Of the individuals who had purchased a migratory bird permit during 2021 and 2022, 29.9% had not provided an email address, therefore staff conducted the survey via both email and mail methods, stratifying the survey by both county of residence and whether an individual had provided an email or a mailing address.

Justification:

Commission action is required to set the migratory game bird seasons for 2022-2023.

Staff Recommendation:

The Department recommends taking the maximum allowed number of hunting days and bag limits allowed by federal framework. The proposed daily duck bag limit is 7 ducks, but not more than 2 female mallards, 2 scaup, 2 redheads, 1 pintail, and 2 canvasbacks. The proposed daily bag limit for Wilson's snipe is 8 and the proposed daily bag limit for coots is 25. The proposed daily bag limit for Canada geese is 5, the proposed daily bag limit for white-fronted geese is 10, and the proposed daily bag limit for snow and Ross's geese is 20. The proposed possession limit is three times the daily bag limit.

There is no daily bag limit for American crows.

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

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

Final recommendations on seasons and duck zone configuration will be presented at the Commission meeting.

Action Requested:

Approve 2022-2023 migratory game bird seasons.

Suggested Motions:

The Commission adopt staff recommendations for the 2022-2023 migratory game bird seasons.

Migratory Game Bird Recommendations

2022-2023 Migratory Game Bird Season-setting

Recommendations for the 2022-2023 seasons are found on the following pages. Changes from the 2021-2022 seasons are highlighted. Comments are summarized by proposal.

Youth/Veteran/Military Waterfowl Season:

Proposed season structure:

Statewide: September 24-25

There were 33 specific comments on this proposal. The most common theme in opposition was that overlapping seasons diminishes the experience for youth hunters. Other common themes were that veteran/military hunters should have their own weekend, the hunt occurs too early, and general opposition to youth and/or military/veteran hunts.

Ducks, Wilson's snipe, and coots:

Current season structures were scoped for all zones, except Zone 2, where two options were presented: an October 1 – January 13 season, or an October 19 – January 31 season. There were 28 respondents to the season proposal for Zone 2; 19 (68%) supported the later season option. The Department also conducted an email survey on waterfowl hunting season preferences of Panhandle residents who had purchased a migratory bird permit during 2021 and 2022. For Panhandle residents who did not have an email in the license system, a hard copy survey was mailed to them. There were 605 responses; 320 (52.5%) supported an early season and 285 (47.5%) supported the later season option.

There were 74 specific comments on duck season proposals. The most common comments were in favor of later seasons in most zones.

The proposed season structure for ducks, snipe, and coots:

Zone 1: October 1, 2022 – January 13, 2023; Scaup:
October 1, 2022 –December 25, 2022

Zone 2: October 1, 2022 – January 13, 2023; Scaup:
October 20, 2022 – January 13, 2023

Zone 3: October 19, 2022 – January 31, 2023; Scaup:
November 7, 2022 – January 31, 2023

Zone 4: October 1, 2022 – January 13, 2023; Scaup:
October 1, 2022 –December 25, 2022

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

Proposed daily bag limit for Wilson's snipe would be 8 and the proposed daily bag limit for coots would be 25.



Canada geese:

There were 90 specific comments on Canada goose season proposals. A common theme among respondents was to provide hunting opportunity through January. Some comments suggested the season be concurrent with duck seasons in zones 1 and 2.

The proposed season structure for Canada geese is:

Zone 1: October 1, 2022 – January 13, 2023

Zone 2: October 19, 2022 – January 31, 2023

Zone 3: October 19, 2022 – January 31, 2023

Zone 4: September 1, 2022 – September 15, 2022 &
October 1, 2022 – December 29, 2022

Zone 5: October 1, 2022 – January 13, 2023

Zone 6: October 1, 2022 – January 13, 2023

Proposed daily bag limit would be **5** Canada geese.



Light Geese (Snow and Ross's Geese):

There were 55 specific comments on the light goose season proposals. Many respondents (55%) desired light goose seasons that extend beyond March 10.

The proposed season structure for white geese is:

Zone 1: October 1, 2022 – January 13, 2023

Zone 2: October 1, 2022 – December 9, 2022 &
February 4, 2023 – March 10, 2023

Zone 3: November 26, 2022 – March 10, 2023

Zone 4: October 19, 2022 – January 31, 2023

Zone 5: October 1, 2022 – January 13, 2023

Zone 6: October 1, 2022 – January 13, 2023

Zone 7: October 1, 2022 – January 13, 2023

Proposed daily bag limit would be 20 white geese.



White-fronted Geese:

In general, respondents expressed white-fronted goose seasons close too early. There were 51 specific comments on the white-fronted goose season proposals.

It is important to note that Federal frameworks do not allow for light or white-fronted goose seasons to extend beyond March 10. Furthermore, when goose hunters were asked about season preferences for light and white-fronted goose seasons in the 2019 goose hunter opinion survey, there was not a strong preference among either group to modify the current season structure. Of the 982 survey respondents to the light goose questions, 526 (53.6%) preferred hunting light geese with e-calls and unplugged shotguns. Of the 647 survey respondents to the white-fronted goose questions, 345 (53.3%) preferred extending the white-fronted goose season to March 10, allowing hunters to pursue both species, but without e-calls and unplugged shotguns.

The proposed season structure for white-fronted geese is:

Zone 1: October 1, 2022 – January 13, 2023

Zone 2: October 1, 2022 – January 13, 2023

Zone 3: October 19, 2022 – January 31, 2023

Zone 4: November 7, 2022 – February 19, 2023

Zone 5: October 1, 2022 – January 13, 2023

Zone 6: October 1, 2022 – January 13, 2023

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



Swans:

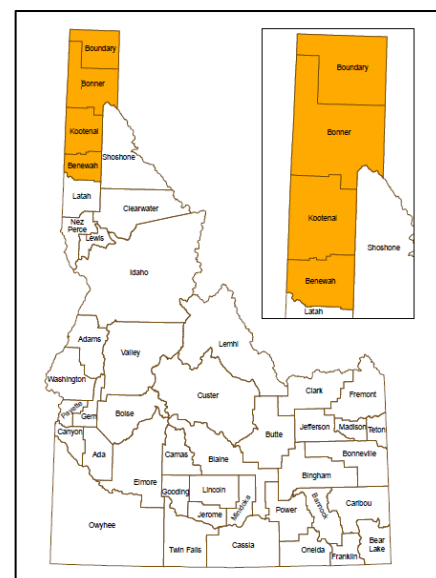
The proposed season structure for swans is:

Benewah, Bonner, Boundary, and Kootenai counties:
October 1, 2022 – December 1, 2022

All tags (50) will be offered through a Controlled Hunt application process.

Proposed daily/season bag limit would be 1 swan.

There were 23 specific comments on the swan season proposal. Comments included expanding the hunt statewide and general opposition to swan hunting.



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 2022 season, which allows for a maximum season of 60 days, occurring between September 1 and January 15. Furthermore, extended falconry seasons are those dates outside of regular, special, or experimental gun seasons when migratory game birds may be taken by falconry. When making selections for extended falconry seasons, it is important to keep in mind that for all hunting methods combined, the combined length of the extended falconry season, regular season, and any special or experimental seasons must not exceed 107 days

The proposed statewide firearm season structure for doves is:

September 1 – October 30

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

The proposed statewide extended falconry season for doves is:

January 23, 2023 – March 10, 2023

Proposed daily bag limit: 3 mourning and white-winged doves in the aggregate.

There were 12 specific comments on the dove season proposals. There were some comments about the desire for seasons to start earlier, and split seasons.

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 27, 2022 – February 28, 2023

Proposed daily bag limit: no limit.

There were 8 specific comments on the crow season proposal. There were some comments requesting year round seasons and raven hunting.

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, 2,778 sandhill cranes may be harvested from the RMP during the 2022 hunting season.

Idaho's 2022 crane harvest allocation, as provided by the Flyway Management Plan, is 290 cranes, up from 278 in 2021.

The Department proposes the following actions:

All tags (636) 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	9/1-9/30	330
2 - Teton	9/1-9/15	45 50
3 - Fremont	9/1-9/15	45 48
3 - Fremont	9/16-9/30	45 48
4 - Jefferson	9/1-9/15	27 30
4 - Jefferson	9/16-9/30	28 30
5 - Swan Lake	9/1-9/30	45 50
6 - Malad	9/1-9/30	45 50

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

The Department proposed slight tag increases in all sandhill crane hunts, except the Bear Lake hunt.

There were 16 specific comments on crane season proposals. Several requested increased numbers of tags and expansion of hunting to other areas of the state.