

Duck Zones and Season Splits, 2021-2025 – May 14, 2020

Zones and splits are Federal regulatory options that allow States some flexibility to manage duck hunting opportunity when ducks are most available to hunters or align with hunter preferences. A state may establish up to four zones (geographic areas with a contiguous boundary) where independent seasons may be established within the Federal duck season framework. State established duck zones and season splits follow guidelines established by The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. States have the option to review and modify zones and splits every 5 years. These considerations are for the period 2021-2025.

Since 2012, the Department has conducted annual mail and web-based waterfowl hunter surveys to obtain input from hunters on season preferences and when appropriate, how to structure zones and splits, within the confines of the federal framework.

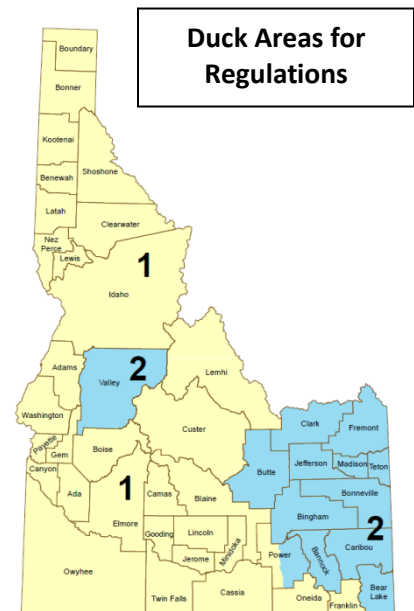
Important results from the 2020 duck hunter preference survey include:

- ✓ Most (>70%) Idaho duck hunters said they prefer continuous seasons, rather than split seasons.
- ✓ Hunters in most of north and southwest Idaho preferred waterfowl seasons that start and end later, to allow for hunting opportunities as close as possible to the end of the Federal Framework (January 31).
- ✓ Hunters in much of east Idaho preferred duck seasons that start as early as possible in October to allow for hunting opportunities prior to wetlands freezing; goose hunters preferred later seasons.
- ✓ Hunters in Zone 1 and Bonneville County preferred duck seasons that start and end as late as possible.



Survey response summaries were reviewed with regional staff via webinar on May 4. Although hunters in Zone 1 prefer duck seasons that end as late as possible, the Department recognizes that, to a large degree, access to waterfowl hunting in zone 1 is controlled by the Shoshone-Bannock tribes who manage their access consistent with earlier season framework dates. Setting a later season in Zone 1 at this time would not result in later hunting, as access would likely be denied. Hunters in Bonneville County also desire to have seasons that end as late as possible but under Idaho's current four-zone framework and USFWS guidelines and limits on the number of zones available to states, there is not enough flexibility for another dis-contiguous zone without adversely affecting other hunters in Idaho.

Season timing desired by hunters in all counties surrounding Bonneville County either prefer seasons that start and end early, or are part of Zone 1. Potential options were discussed with the regions to address this issue, and there is an interest to pursue zone and season changes in the future; however, both the Southeast and Upper Snake regions believe it is in the duck hunters' best interest for the Department to improve our working relationship with the tribes and address concerns related to establishing a later season framework before proposing changes.



The final result was that all regions recommended no changes to current duck zone boundaries for 2021-2025. The Commission set duck seasons in April for the 2020-2021 season. Because seasons and bag limits in zones 1, 2, and 4 are identical, we can represent seasons more simply in the regulations by displaying just 2 duck areas for 2020.