

Meeting Date: March 22, 2018

Agenda Item No. 9

Agenda Item: Swan Hunting in Idaho

Bureau Chief Approval:

Prepared by: Jeffrey Knetter

Background:

Swan hunting in the Pacific Flyway is guided by frameworks designated in the 2003 Final Environmental Assessment (EA): Proposal to Establish Operational General Swan Hunting Seasons in the Pacific Flyway (Bartonek et al. 1995) and a Finding of No Significant Impact. This EA included the states of Montana, Nevada, and Utah. Any other states wishing to have a swan season will require a revised EA for general swan hunting seasons in the Pacific Flyway.

Currently, both Nevada and Utah are considering changes to their operational swan seasons, and were advised that changes would require a revised EA. Given interest to revise the EA from Idaho, Nevada, and Utah, Pacific Flyway Representative Dr. Todd Sanders is going to review proposed changes with the USFWS Division of Migratory Bird Management Headquarters staff and Solicitor's Office. Further, proposed hunts in Idaho were discussed at the Greater Yellowstone Trumpeter Swan Working Group meeting in February. Dr. Sanders will provide feedback from these meetings to the Pacific Flyway Study Committee at their meeting in early March.

The Pacific Flyway Western Tundra Swan Management Plan (2017) identifies the following procedures for new hunt proposals:

- Prior to requesting a new swan hunt, a state must submit a hunt plan proposal to the Pacific Flyway Study Committee at least 30 days prior to the Subcommittee meeting at which approval is sought. Hunt proposals must include:
(a) description of hunt area boundaries; (b) a summary of numbers of swans, species composition, and seasonal use patterns in the proposed hunt area;
(c) number of permits requested; (d) anticipated harvest; (e) season length and dates; (f) description of the permit process; and (g) proposed methods for obtaining reliable data on harvest and hunter activity.
- States initiating first-time swan hunting seasons or proposing major changes in permits or hunt areas are encouraged to obtain adequate public participation before proposals are brought before the Pacific Flyway Study Committee and Council.
- Swan hunting seasons should be directed toward tundra swans and designed to minimize take of trumpeter swans. As trumpeter and tundra swans become more abundant, and swan hunting becomes more popular and widespread, the chance taking of a trumpeter swan during general swan seasons could become more prevalent. To minimize this problem, waterfowl biologists, nongame biologists, and representatives from the USFWS and Pacific Flyway Council should work together in early planning stages of all proposed swan hunts and restoration projects. It is very important that all partners in swan management work together to minimize conflicts and find workable solutions that benefit both goals for trumpeter swan restoration and tundra swan hunting.
- New hunts will be considered experimental for a period of three years, after which an evaluation to assess conflicts and address any take of trumpeter swans must be conducted before experimental seasons may become operational.

Furthermore, a harvest potential analysis will be conducted. A potential limitation for Idaho in the justification for a season in a revised EA may be baseline data, which would include:

- Number of swans in the area
- Species composition
- Seasonal use patterns
- Implications on trumpeter swan restoration efforts

Current survey data is lacking from north Idaho. There is more data available for southeast Idaho, but most data is limited to winter months (February-March) and the nesting season. In 2015 the entire Rocky Mountain Population of trumpeter swans was surveyed – 17,178 birds. The previous February, 6,933 trumpeter swans were counted in the Tri-State area (ID, MT, WY) – 5,092 were in Idaho. The Department also has results from surveys conducted in conjunction with light goose seasons during February-March in the American Falls area of southeast Idaho. There is little survey data available on tundra swans in Idaho. The Panhandle and Southeast regions are aware of these data needs and are evaluating methods to collect appropriate data.

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.

Public Involvement Process:

Informational item.

Justification:

Informational item.

Staff Recommendation:

This agenda is for information only. No action required.