

Meeting Date: July 26, 2018

Agenda Item No. 5T

Agenda Item: Swan Hunting Proposal (Action)

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.

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 – August 24, 2018. 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.

Upon approval from the Pacific Flyway, the proposal will be forwarded to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Migratory Bird Regulations Committee for consideration. If approved, a DRAFT Environmental Assessment would need to be prepared and published in the Federal Register.

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:

The Department has directly contacted the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, The Trumpeter Swan Society, and the Northern Rockies Trumpeter Swan Stewards. Panhandle Region staff intend to engage local birding and sportsman groups, and members of the Coeur d'Alene Restoration Partnership (including the Coeur d'Alene Tribe) prior to submitting the swan hunt proposal to the Pacific Flyway Western Tundra Swan Subcommittee.

Justification:

Trumpeter swans have increased in abundance and distribution since at least 1995, and the current population status now exceeds initial restoration objectives established by the Pacific Flyway Council (Pacific Flyway Council 2017), and the level at which liberalization of federal swan season frameworks could be considered through the annual hunting regulation setting process (U.S. Department of the Interior 2003). In light of this increased population status, the State of Idaho has expressed interest in establishing a general swan hunting season in northern Idaho.

Staff Recommendation:

The Department's recommendations for a swan hunt in the Panhandle Region of Idaho include:

- (a) Hunt area boundaries: Benewah, Bonner, Boundary, and Kootenai counties
- (b) Numbers of swans, species composition, and seasonal use:
 - a. WMA waterfowl migration surveys
 - b. eBird observations
- (c) Permits: 50; bag limit would be one swan
- (d) Anticipated Harvest: ~23, based on hunter success in Montana
- (e) Season length and dates: first Saturday of October to December 1
- (f) Permit process: Quota
- (g) Harvest Estimation: physical examination, bill cards, and harvest surveys

Action Requested:

Approve sending the Idaho swan hunt proposal to the Pacific Flyway Western Tundra Swan Subcommittee.

Suggested Motion:

The Commission adopt staff recommendations to submit an Idaho swan hunt proposal to the Pacific Flyway Western Tundra Swan Subcommittee.