

Meeting Date: April 16, 2020

Agenda Item No. 2

Agenda Item: 2020-2021 Migratory Game Bird
Season-setting (ACTION)

Bureau Chief Approval: TB

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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. Consequently, all migratory game bird regulations are now published in the same brochure.

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 evaluate duck habitat and populations annually. 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.

Data collected in 2019 indicate breeding habitat conditions and populations are at levels that can support 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 2019-20 to January 31.

The federal framework for light geese (snow and Ross's) was expanded in 2008-09 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 leg 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 (i.e., 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, which includes flexibility in the start and end dates. This information will be used to guide Idaho waterfowl seasons for the 2020-2025 seasons, and was used to develop the following proposals for changes to the 2020-2021 Migratory Game Bird seasons:

Youth and Veterans-Active Military Personnel Waterfowl Hunting Days

- 2 days designated as youth AND veterans-active military personnel waterfowl hunting days in addition to the regular duck season.

Ducks

- Reduce the daily bag limit from 3 to 2 scaup.
- Extend the season end date from the last Sunday in January to January 31 for Zone 3.

Geese

- Extend the season end date for Canada geese from the last Sunday in January to January 31 zones 2 and 3.

Sandhill Cranes

- Reduce the number of crane tags available to accommodate for the reduction in the annual harvest allocation for Idaho, as per the Flyway Management Plan.

Swans

- Establish a swan hunt in northern Idaho (Benewah, Bonner, Boundary and Kootenai counties), with a total of 50 tags offered on a first-come, first-served basis

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 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 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 will be used to guide 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 2020-2021 Migratory Game Bird season proposals were available for public comment on the Department's website from March 23 – April 3. Staff will provide a summary of public response to the Commission at the meeting.

Justification:

Commission action is required to set the migratory game bird seasons for 2020 – 2021.

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 would be 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 would be 8 and the proposed daily bag limit for coots would be 25. The proposed daily bag limit for Canada geese would be 4 (except in Zone 4 during September 1-15, when the daily bag limit would be 5), the proposed daily bag limit for white-fronted geese would be 10, and the proposed daily bag limit for snow and Ross's geese would be 20. The proposed possession limit would be three times the daily bag limit.

There is no daily bag limit for American crows.

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

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

Final recommendations will be presented at the Commission meeting.

Action Requested:

Approve 2020-2021 migratory game bird seasons.

Suggested Motion:

The Commission adopt staff recommendations for the 2020-2021 migratory game bird seasons.