

Meeting Date: April 21, 2016

Agenda Item No.

Agenda Item: 2016-2017 Migratory Game Bird
Season-setting

Bureau Chief Approval: _____

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Background:

Beginning with the 2016-17 hunting seasons, a new process and schedule will be used for setting annual migratory bird hunting regulations. Legal, administrative, and analytical burdens associated with establishing migratory game bird hunting regulations intensified during the last decade and the process became untenable. As a result, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) adopted an alternative process that combines early and late season meeting schedules with modifications to Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) frameworks. Regulatory decisions will be made using biological data observed the previous year.

This single process and new schedule mean the season frameworks (e.g., outside dates, season lengths, bag limits) will be finalized earlier, and will enable state agencies to select and publish their season dates well in advance of fall seasons. Furthermore, this process will allow the Commission to set seasons for all migratory game at the same time; consequently, all migratory game bird regulations will be published in the same brochure.

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 2016, the Department conducted mail (n = 2,000) and web-based surveys to obtain input from hunters on how to structure the waterfowl seasons, within the confines of the federal framework, which includes flexibility in the start and end dates between the Saturday nearest September 24 and the last Sunday in January. This information will be used to guide Idaho waterfowl seasons for the 2016-2020 seasons, rather than re-defining the seasons each year.

Justification:

The AHM process determines the general duck season framework. This process was adopted by the Service in 1996 and is used to evaluate duck habitat and populations annually and select 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 2015 show breeding habitat conditions and populations are at levels that can support a 107-day season for all waterfowl, except scaup (86 days). The maximum hunting days and bags allowed by framework can be taken with no long-term impacts on Idaho's waterfowl resource.

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, and they have been well received.

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.

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

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

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

Staff Recommendation:

The Department's recommendation is to take the maximum allowed hunt days and bags allowed by federal framework. The proposed daily duck bag limit would be seven ducks; but not more than 2 female mallards, 3 scaup, 2 redheads, 2 pintail, and 2 canvasback. The proposed daily bag limit for Canada geese would be 4, 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 dove bag limit 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, after considering public input, will be presented at the Commission meeting.

Suggested Motion:

The Commission adopt staff recommendations on the 2016-2017 migratory game bird regulations.