



Oregon Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework

Effective dates: September 1, 2010
through August 31, 2015

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Proposed 2010 -2015 Upland Game Bird Framework

Executive Summary

Oregon's diverse habitats support 12 species of upland game birds, eight of which are native, and 10 of which have hunting seasons. This document contains the proposed framework for upland game bird hunting seasons for the next five years. The seasons are designed to provide recreational hunting opportunities compatible with the overall status of upland game bird populations. The multi-year framework approach for setting upland game bird regulations was first adopted by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission in 1996 for a 3-year period and again in 1999 and 2004 for 5-year periods.

The role of regulations in game bird management has many functions including protection of a species, providing recreational opportunities, and in consultation with hunters to provide bag limits and seasons. Regulations should be as simple as possible to make them easy to understand.

These frameworks are also based on the concept that annual fluctuations in upland bird numbers, which can vary greatly and are normal, should not be the basis for setting hunting seasons year by year. Standardized frameworks are biologically sound management tools that help the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) provide consistent, stable regulations that reduce confusion, assist hunters with planning trips, and lower administrative costs.

MANAGEMENT APPROACH

In an effort to stabilize hunting regulations, the following concepts are the foundation for the frameworks offered in this document:

- Many upland game bird populations exhibit a high annual death rate and cannot be stockpiled from year to year
- Similar annual death rates occur in most upland game bird populations whether they are hunted or not.
- Dramatic short-term fluctuations occur because of weather conditions.
- Long-term increases and decreases in population numbers are related to changes in the quality and quantity of habitat.
- Hunted upland game bird populations are generally subjected to density dependent hunting pressure

Based on these concepts, ODFW maintains a policy to maximize upland game bird hunting opportunities consistent with the adequate protection of the bird populations. In most cases the quality and quantity of habitat has a much greater impact on long-term population numbers than does hunting. It is crucial for the long-term health of any upland game bird population that high quality habitat be maintained.

2010-2015 Upland Game Bird Framework: Season Proposals

Pheasant

Statewide: Saturday nearest Oct. 8 - Dec. 31

Previous framework was Saturday nearest Oct. 15 through Sunday nearest Dec. 11

California (Valley) Quail

Western Oregon: Sept. 1 – Jan. 31

No change from previous framework

Umatilla and Morrow Cos: Saturday nearest Oct. 8 - Dec. 31

No change from previous framework

Remaining E. Oregon Cos: Saturday nearest Oct. 8 - Jan. 31

No change from previous framework

Mountain Quail

Western Oregon including Hood Rvr and Wasco Cos: Sept. 1 – Jan. 31

No change from previous framework

Eastern Oregon:

Wallowa, Grant, Wheeler, Gilliam, Crook, and Klamath Cos: From the Saturday on or nearest Oct. 8 – Jan. 31.

Ending date was changed from previous framework which was Dec. 31. Also, Crook Co was added to the open area.

Umatilla and Morrow Cos: From the Saturday on or nearest Oct. 8 – Dec. 31.

No change from previous framework.

Remainder of Eastern Oregon: Closed

Only change from previous framework was that Crook Co. was added to open area.

Ruffed and Blue Grouse

Western Oregon including Hood Rvr and Wasco Cos.: Sept. 1- Jan. 31.

No change from previous framework.

Eastern Oregon: Sept. 1- Dec. 31.

Ending date was changed, previously was the Sunday nearest Nov. 27.

Chukar and Hungarian (Gray) Partridge

Umatilla and Morrow Cos: From the Saturday on or nearest Oct. 8 - Dec 31.

No change from previous framework.

Remainder of eastern Oregon: From the Saturday on or nearest Oct. 8 - Jan 31.

No change from previous framework.

Turkey

Statewide Spring Season: Apr. 15 – May 31

No change from previous framework.

General Fall Season: Oct. 15 – Dec. 31

No change in season length from previous framework. Number of tags available proposed to increase from 3,000 to 4,000. Propose the season bag limit be increased to 2 turkeys of either sex, but daily bag limit will remain at one. Propose to change open areas from Counties to Wildlife Management Units which will increase the open area in NW Oregon.



OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

OREGON UPLAND GAME BIRD HUNTING SEASON FRAMEWORK

September 1, 2010 – August 31, 2015

INTRODUCTION

This document contains the framework for upland game bird hunting seasons that will be in place for the next five years. The seasons are designed to provide recreational hunting opportunities compatible with the overall status of upland game bird populations. This document is not designed to provide a history of upland game bird populations, nor outline and prioritize habitat programs in Oregon. The intent is to focus on harvest regulation. The multi-year framework approach for setting upland game bird regulations was first adopted by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission in 1996 for a 3-year period and again in 1999 and 2004 for 5-year periods.

The role of regulations in game bird management has many functions including protection of a species, providing recreational opportunities, and in consultation with hunters to provide bag limits and seasons. Regulations should be as simple as possible to make them easy to understand.

These frameworks are also based on the concept that annual fluctuations in upland bird numbers, which can vary greatly and are normal, should not be the basis for setting hunting seasons year by year. Standardized frameworks are biologically sound management tools that help the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) provide consistent, stable regulations that reduce confusion, assist hunters with planning trips, and lower administrative costs.

UPLAND GAME BIRD RESOURCES

Oregon's non-migratory upland game bird species are gallinaceous birds. Eight of the 12 gallinaceous species are native to Oregon. These include the mountain quail (*Oreortyx pictus*), California quail (*Callipepla californica*), sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), sharp-tailed grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*), *sooty grouse (*Dendragapus fuliginosus*), *dusky grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*), spruce grouse (*Falci pennis canadensis*) and ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*). Some native species are, or were, limited to small geographical regions within the state such as California quail and spruce grouse. Others had wide distribution, but were extirpated, such as the Columbian sharp-tailed grouse. Sharp-tailed grouse were re-introduced into Wallowa County, Oregon in 1991. Four species are not native to Oregon and have been introduced. One introduced species is from North America; the wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*). The other species, which are from Eurasia include the ring-necked and Sichuan pheasant

(*Phasianus colchicus ssp.*), chukar partridge (*Alectoris chukar*), and gray (Hungarian) partridge (*Perdix perdix*).

*Note: Sooty and Dusky grouse were collectively considered one species, the blue grouse, until the American Ornithologists Union split them in 2006. In Oregon, sooty grouse are found in the Coast Range, Cascades and Warner mountains. The dusky grouse is found primarily in NE Oregon in the Blue, Ochoco, and Wallowa Mountains. For regulation purposes, the dusky and sooty grouse will be collectively called “blue” grouse.

MANAGEMENT APPROACH

Historically, hunting seasons in Oregon have varied from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Harvest regulations have many times conflicted with accepted principles of upland game bird biology, which have been proven over the years by management and research activities across North America. In an effort to stabilize hunting regulations, the following concepts are the foundation for the frameworks offered in this document:

- Many upland game bird populations exhibit a high annual death rate and cannot be stockpiled from year to year. Some upland game bird species, such as quail, are short-lived and from 60 to 80 percent will die annually, although not all species have such high mortality rates. Nearly all upland birds produce large broods and exhibit high turnover rates from year to year. Additionally, forest grouse may exhibit cyclic population fluctuations, in which their population numbers may rise or fall over an extended period of time. Some species, such as sage grouse, tend to be longer-lived and have lower reproductive capacities.
- Similar annual death rates occur in most upland game bird populations whether they are hunted or not. Some populations have been shown to exhibit compensatory mortality. The outcome of compensatory mortality is that the overall number of animals dying annually does not change much even though causes of death may differ from year to year or from one area to another. Because of this tendency, the often-held belief that populations can be “built-up” by not hunting is often incorrect.
- Dramatic short-term fluctuations occur because of weather conditions. Weather directly affects the physical condition of birds, availability of food and the survival of young, but also causes annual changes in habitat that may affect game birds in several ways. These are factors that cannot always be predicted, changed or controlled.
- Long-term increases and decreases in population numbers are related to changes in the quality and quantity of habitat. Factors such as conversion of older age timber, changes in predominant crop types or farming methods, invasive plant species, and urban expansion are examples that can have lasting detrimental impacts on bird populations.
- Hunted upland game bird populations are generally subjected to density dependent hunting pressure. This means that when populations are low, hunter pressure is also

low and does not reduce populations to such low levels that they are unable to recover to population levels supported by the habitat when weather conditions are favorable.

Based on these concepts, ODFW maintains a policy to maximize upland game bird hunting opportunities consistent with the adequate protection of the bird populations. In most cases the quality and quantity of habitat has a much greater impact on long-term population numbers than does hunting. An exception may be when heavy hunting pressure is applied to small populations in marginal or isolated habitat or during severe winter weather that concentrates birds. Because of the high reproductive potential of many upland bird species, relatively liberal hunting seasons have minimal impacts on population numbers for most species. It is not normally necessary to curtail seasons and bag limits for the recovery of most upland populations from low levels. Given adequate habitat and favorable weather conditions during nesting and brood rearing, most game bird populations will recover rapidly with no change in hunting regulations.

Again, it is crucial for the long-term health of any upland game bird population that high quality habitat be maintained. In general, good habitat conditions will support huntable populations. Annual weather conditions will determine the success of production and birds available during fall seasons. However, large landscape changes have influenced some population levels. For example, farming practices (methods and crops) have reduced ring-necked pheasant populations in many areas, especially western Oregon. This is no fault of the agricultural community, just a response of a bird population to a changing landscape. ODFW, other management agencies, and conservation organizations do not always have the resources or capabilities to alter large landscapes and populations will fluctuate. Programs such as the federal Conservation Reserve Program and the Wetlands Reserve Program have assisted wildlife populations in many areas. Oregon Upland Game Bird Stamp revenues also provide funding for upland game bird habitat work in areas that will benefit the hunting public.

One last important consideration in setting game bird regulations is public access for hunting. Many parts of the state, especially southeast Oregon, provide ample opportunities for access to a variety of public lands. Access in many parts of the state is controlled by private landowners who supply a large habitat base for many upland species. While many private lands are accessible with permission or through cooperative programs, landowners have varying tolerance levels for access and do not always support long seasons.



Ring-necked and Sichuan Pheasant

- Statewide Season
- Season Dates: From the Saturday on or nearest October 08 through December 31.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 2 rooster pheasants/8 rooster pheasants.

Discussion: Ring-necked pheasant populations vary considerably throughout Oregon, with moderate numbers occurring in portions of eastern Oregon. Sichuan pheasant populations are also scattered in low numbers in many areas of western Oregon. Success in the introduction of Sichuan pheasants has been limited and many birds occur in areas with no public access.

Even areas with limited pheasant numbers can continue to provide hunting since only roosters are legal game. Pheasants are polygamous and relatively few roosters are required to achieve breeding. Ratios as wide as one rooster to 10 hens have been demonstrated to provide adequate egg fertility. Recorded ratios for roosters in many portions of the state are higher than 1:10.

Pheasant hunting is very popular with Oregon hunters, but in many areas little can be done to reverse the landscape changes that have occurred over several decades. However, in others there are opportunities to improve habitat for pheasants and other upland game birds. The Morrow Soil and Water Conservation district, Pheasants Forever, the Oregon Wildlife Heritage Foundation, ODFW, and numerous private landowners have initiated the Columbia Plateau Upland Habitat Restoration project in Morrow, Gilliam, and Umatilla Counties. Now its second full year, the project is starting to really take off. The goal of the project is simple; improve upland game bird habitat and improve hunting access to private land. ODFW's Access and Habitat program and the Upland Game Bird Stamp program have both contributed significant funds to the project.

Because of the limited pheasant numbers and public access, and a rooster only take, no significant decrease in populations caused by hunting are predicted in western Oregon with the expanded statewide concurrent season. With the limited habitat available for wild pheasants on the westside of the state, the Fee Pheasant hunts have become more popular in western Oregon and ODFW will consider expansion of such hunts.

Changes from previous framework: Relative to other states with similar overall harvests, Oregon's season has been conservative in length. This framework adds 27 days to the pheasant season as compared to the 2005-2010 framework; one week on the front end to open concurrently with chukar and quail seasons in eastern Oregon, and the remainder of December on the back end of the season.

CHUKAR AND GRAY (HUNGARIAN) PARTRIDGE

- Season Dates in Umatilla and Morrow Counties: From the Saturday on or nearest October 8 through December 31. Season Dates in remainder of eastern Oregon: From the Saturday on or nearest October 8 through January 31.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 8/24.

Discussion: Chukar habitat in Oregon is both widespread and relatively secure. By its nature the habitat is also difficult to hunt under most circumstances. Factors most affecting chukar populations are severe winters, spring drought, and/or wet conditions during the hatching period. With no other species is the self-limiting nature of upland bird hunting better demonstrated than with chukars. In years and in areas when populations are low, hunting pressure and harvest diminishes dramatically. The reverse is also true. Populations have on numerous occasions demonstrated the ability to quickly rebound without implementation of restrictive harvest regulations. While chukar populations throughout most of their range in Oregon are not limited by hunter harvest, the vulnerability of the birds is sometimes greatly increased when severe weather forces birds to areas that have good hunter access.

Hungarian partridge are usually hunted incidentally with chukars, and sometimes pheasants. Habitat is more limited for this species, but population characteristics are similar to chukars. Harvest is relatively low except in years when populations are particularly abundant.

Changes from previous framework: None.

CALIFORNIA (VALLEY) QUAIL

Western Oregon (concurrent with mountain quail season):

- Season Dates: September 1 through January 31. Concurrent with adopted mountain quail season.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 10/20, singly or in aggregate with mountain quail.

Eastern Oregon (concurrent with chukar season):

- Season Dates in, Umatilla and Morrow Counties: From the Saturday on or nearest October 8 through December 31.
- Season Dates in remainder of eastern Oregon: From the Saturday on or nearest October 8 through January 31.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 10/20.

Discussion: The California (valley) quail is a native bird originally confined to the counties bordering California and Nevada. Valley quail are among Oregon's most widely distributed game birds, found in urban, agricultural, and wildland habitats. They may be found associated with pheasants on agricultural land or with chukars along stream courses in desert environments. They are most often hunted in conjunction with other species. Except when hunted concurrently with other upland species, hunting activity for valley quail is usually quite light because their distribution is often confined to riparian areas and areas close to human development. The framework offers extended hunting opportunities for valley quail in western Oregon, but is not expected to result in a large effort/harvest, because once again, these birds are often pursued in conjunction with other species. Currently, only 1% to 5% of the statewide harvest of valley quail occurs in western Oregon. The season will be concurrent with mountain quail season, reducing the consequences of misidentification by hunters. For most of eastern Oregon, seasons are concurrent with partridge seasons. Quail are commonly hunted in conjunction with chukars in many areas of eastern Oregon. Considering the distribution of these birds and their relative abundance, valley quail are underutilized as a game bird in most areas of Oregon.

Changes from previous framework: None.

MOUNTAIN QUAIL

Western Oregon (including Hood River and Wasco counties):

- Season Dates: September 1 through January 31.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 10/20 singly or in aggregate with California Quail.

Eastern Oregon:

- Season Dates in Wallowa, Grant, Wheeler, Gilliam, Crook, and Klamath Counties: From the Saturday on or nearest October 8 through January 31.
- Season Dates in Umatilla and Morrow Counties: From the Saturday on or nearest October 8 through December 31 (concurrent with California quail).
- Closed season continues in remainder of eastern Oregon.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 2/2.

Discussion: In western Oregon, mountain quail provide some of the most difficult game bird hunting available because of the brushy and often steep nature of occupied habitat and the tendency of birds to run in heavy cover. This species is one of Oregon's least hunted upland species. In recent years, about 87% of the harvest occurs Sept – Nov. The previous framework extended the season through the end of January. A dramatic

increase in harvest for western Oregon mountain quail was not observed with the longer season. The entire January harvest is estimated at less than 400 birds.

In eastern Oregon, populations declined from historic levels as they have throughout the intermountain regions of the west for reasons that are not completely understood. However, since the mid-1990's some populations are rebounding, especially in the John Day Watershed. In the John Day Watershed populations have increased and their distribution expanded. Mountain quail have also been translocated from S.W. Oregon to several sites in eastern Oregon, most recently the Trout Creek Mountains. The translocation program is expected to continue for the next few years. Because of relatively low numbers in most areas, and uncertain status of populations, open seasons have been very limited in most of eastern Oregon.

Changes from previous framework: The framework adds Crook Co. to the list of eastern Oregon counties where a mountain quail season is authorized, but continues the conservative season of the past several years. In addition, the length of season was adjusted to run concurrent with California quail and chukar seasons which extended the season through Jan. 31 in some counties. Hunters pursuing California quail and chukars are the most likely to encounter and incidentally harvest mountain quail. The small daily bag limit offered in select areas of eastern Oregon allows for the incidental harvest of these birds, but should not hamper future range expansion of the species.

FOREST GROUSE – “BLUE” GROUSE, RUFFED GROUSE AND SPRUCE GROUSE.

Western Oregon (Includes Hood River and Wasco Cos.):

- Season Dates: From September 1 through January 31.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 3 blue grouse and 3 ruffed grouse/6 blue grouse and 6 ruffed grouse.

Eastern Oregon:

- Season Dates: From September 1 through Dec. 31.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 3 blue grouse and 3 ruffed grouse /6 blue grouse and 6 ruffed grouse.

- No open season for Spruce grouse.

Discussion: Forest grouse, with the exception of spruce grouse, are widely distributed in the state and are some of the most hunted game birds in Oregon. In western Oregon, hunting for grouse is difficult due to heavy cover conditions and frequent rainfall. The previous framework extended the season in western Oregon. As expected, the longer season did not result in a dramatic increase in harvest, because about 94% of ruffed grouse and 97% of blue grouse are harvested in Sept – Nov. After mid-October, blue

grouse spend most of their time in trees feeding on conifer needles; largely out of reach of hunters.

The department has increased wing collection efforts in western Oregon and will continue to do so to learn more about the population dynamics of these birds. Blue grouse studies in northeast Oregon suggest that hunting has little impact on the population, even in areas of high hunter use. As with many other species, annual rainfall dictates relative abundance of grouse in the fall, but these populations may be cyclic in nature. Wing collections from hunters since 1985 have documented a very small incidental take of spruce grouse. Most spruce grouse wings are returned at drop-off sites known as wing barrels; consequently it is not possible to identify individual hunters. Spruce grouse populations are very restricted in their distribution in northeast Oregon. An effort is underway to map the distribution of spruce grouse in Oregon.

Changes from previous framework: This framework extends the forest grouse season in eastern Oregon by one month, (as compared to the previous framework). A dramatic increase in harvest is not expected, because like in western Oregon, nearly the entire forest grouse harvest occurs before mid-November. In addition, snow, road conditions, and even road closures will likely limit access. The change however, could provide some additional hunting opportunity, especially for ruffed grouse.

SAGE GROUSE

- Season Dates: No more than a 9-day season between September 1 and 20.
- Daily Bag/Season Limits: 2/2 by permit only.
- Permit allocations to be determined for individual unit areas annually.

Discussion: Sage grouse are widely distributed across the ~ 30,000 square miles of sagebrush-steppe habitat in Oregon. Sage grouse have relatively low reproductive rates and high adult survival rates compared to other upland game bird species and their response to improved habitat conditions may be slower than that of most species. Because of the status of this species and sagebrush habitats across its range, hunting will remain conservative through the issuance of hunting permits assigned to specific wildlife management units so that there will be no significant impact on populations.

Since 1989, Oregon has held a sage-grouse season each fall. Every season had a daily and season bag limit of two birds. However, the length of the season has varied. There were 6 years with a 2-day season, 10 years with 5-day season, and for the last 4 years a 9-day season. Average individual hunter success was comparable despite the differences in length of the season, with the 2-day season at 1.09 birds/hunter, 5-day season at 1.07 birds/hunter, and 9-day season at 1.15 birds/hunter. The 9-day season does not significantly increase harvest since the daily bag and season limit remains at two birds and the average Oregon sage-grouse hunter spends 1.8 days hunting, successful or not.

The 9-day season does make scheduling a hunt easier for successful applicants by giving the option of two different weekends of opportunity.

Information from lek (strutting ground) surveys are used in a mathematical formula adopted by the Western States Sage Grouse Technical Committee to determine hunt areas. Hunt areas will be those designated areas that contain a breeding population of ≥ 100 males (breeding population of ≥ 300 total birds). Use of this minimum breeding population criteria may result in the combination of several current management units into single hunt areas. Units without adequate breeding population information or breeding populations below the minimum breeding population level will be closed to hunting. Sage grouse management guidelines recommend harvest rates should be at 10% or less of fall population. Bag limit and permit allocations for hunt units will be reviewed annually based on biological information gathered from breeding and production surveys and will be designed to take no more than 5% of the estimated fall population. Based on harvest surveys, Oregon's sage-grouse harvest in recent years has been 3% or less of the estimated fall population.

The hunting season time frame also allows opportunities to gather further biological information from wings solicited from hunters. Information gathered from wings has been important in recent years in gathering information for this species, including peak hatching dates and age and sex ratios. In the recent range-wide conservation assessment for greater sage-grouse it was noted that states lacking a hunting season do not routinely monitor sage grouse production.

In addition, during the last 3 years, hunters have been provided the necessary materials to collect and submit blood samples from harvested sage-grouse. The purpose of this effort is to monitor the population for West Nile virus. The department has received exceptional cooperation from the hunters with more than 1000 blood samples returned. To date, none of the samples have tested positive for WNV antibodies.

Changes from previous framework: None.

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE

➤ No season is proposed for Columbian sharp-tailed grouse.

Discussion: Sharp-tailed grouse, once common throughout large areas of eastern Oregon, were extirpated in the state by the 1960s. A reintroduction of this native species has been undertaken in Wallowa County in northeast Oregon. Current population status does not warrant a hunting season. Additional areas for further expansion of sharptails are currently under review. If sufficient populations become established and secure, limited hunting may be offered in future years. From 2006 through 2008 the population in Wallowa County was augmented with 138 birds from Idaho and Utah. Radio-telemetry is being used to monitor movements, reproductive effort, and mortality. Initial results indicate very good productivity with many of the hens nesting successfully. However, low adult survival to the following spring (and emigration?) suggest the winter

habitat, particularly the availability of shrub and deciduous tree component, may not be adequate for the population.

Changes from previous framework: None.

WILD TURKEY

General Spring Season:

- Season Dates: April 15 through May 31.
- Daily Bag Limit: One male turkey or a turkey with a visible beard.
- Season Limit: Two legal turkeys, except that an additional (third) legal turkey may be taken by hunters with a bonus turkey tag in the designated bonus tag area.
- Bonus Tag: A bonus tag may be used to take one legal turkey in the following Wildlife Management Units only: Trask, Willamette, Santiam, Stott Mt., Alsea, McKenzie, Siuslaw, Indigo, Dixon, Melrose, Tioga, Sixes, Powers, Chetco, Applegate, Evans Creek, and Rogue.

Youth Spring Turkey Hunt:

- Season Dates: The first weekend prior to and excluding April 15.
- Daily Bag/Season Limits: One male turkey or a turkey with a visible beard.
- Only youths 17 years of age and younger accompanied by a non-hunting adult may participate. Unfilled tags are valid for the general spring season.

Fall Season:

Western Oregon

- Open area includes only the following Wildlife Management Units: Trask, Willamette, Santiam, Stott Mt., Alsea, McKenzie, Siuslaw, Indigo, Dixon, Melrose, Tioga, Sixes, Powers, Chetco, Applegate, Evans Creek, and Rogue.
- Season Dates: October 15 through December 31.
- Daily Bag/Season Limits: One turkey of either sex daily, and two per season.
- Permits for fall would be limited to 4,000 and distributed on a first come, first serve basis.

Eastern Oregon

- Add fall turkey hunts as populations warrant, including conversion to general season hunts. Currently 5 controlled fall turkey hunts have been established in eastern Oregon.

Discussion: Oregon's spring turkey season is among the most liberal in the United States, but turkey populations and range are continuing to expand. The long season provides abundant opportunities with extra hunting offered in high-density areas and in areas where turkeys are less desired. Breeding begins as early as late February, and much of it has already occurred by mid-April, so a gobbler-only spring season has proven to have minimal impacts on populations. As turkey populations have increased, the department has expanded fall hunting opportunities. Fall seasons can be used to control turkey populations and assist landowners with addressing damage. Emergency hunts for turkeys can also be used to address turkey nuisance and damage. In 2004 an Oregon wild turkey plan was adopted by the Commission and will guide turkey management for the next 10 years.

Changes from previous framework: For the western Oregon general fall turkey season, the open area was changed to an area that is based on Wildlife Management Units (WMUs). Previously, the open area was based on County boundaries. The change provides two advantages; 1) WMUs have good boundary descriptions and 2) it will align the open area with current harvest survey methodology. In addition, the available number of tags for the western Oregon fall season was increased from 3,000 to 4,000. The general fall season daily bag limit remains one turkey, but the season bag limit was increased to two turkeys.

OTHER FRAMEWORKS

Shooting hours for upland game bird seasons are proposed to remain at ½ hour before sunrise to sunset. The shooting hours table for game birds presented in the annual Game Bird Regulations has been expanded to standardize shooting hours in different regions of the state.

Through Commission action, (Aug. 2005), the use of rimfire rifles and rimfire handguns was added to the legal methods for the take of "blue" and ruffed grouse. This is in addition to shotgun, archery, and falconry. Currently, there is no biological concern associated with the use of rifles and handguns for the taking of forest grouse.

MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

The frameworks offer hunting opportunities based on a combination of biological and social factors. However, they are just one component of overall upland game bird management in Oregon. Managed hunting has minimal impacts on overall upland bird

populations, with habitat and weather factors playing a larger, driving force. It is still important to monitor populations to determine the status, and to provide accurate hunting forecasts. For some species, population census methods have not been precise enough to accurately reflect either numbers or availability of birds for harvest. Minimizing annual changes in regulations offers opportunities to focus on improving survey methods. Improved surveys could meet the following objectives:

- Provide better information about the status of bird populations.
- Provide more precise data for making changes in long-term hunting frameworks.
- Provide better information to support hunting seasons if they are challenged.

Another important component of upland management is research to assist in gathering basic life history information to assist in management decisions. ODFW has a long history of cooperative research with Oregon State University and it is planned to continue these efforts, with a priority on native upland species. In addition, public access programs and habitat enhancement programs will be reviewed and developed to meet the needs of Oregon's upland game bird hunters.

When Seasons Need Changing

WINTER EMERGENCIES

When seasons extend into late December or January harsh winter conditions may be encountered. In some years deep and/or crusted snow have placed birds under stress, concentrated them in smaller areas, limited access to food, and made them more vulnerable to harvest and harassment.

These conditions can impact segments of populations. There is little that can be done to alleviate the effects when these conditions occur, including stopping hunting. In fact, a hunting closure may have the opposite affect by allowing more birds to compete for what little food may be accessible. Populations, which are stressed in winter, may have many weeks to survive before spring. When these conditions occur, the stage is set for several undesirable social situations. Birds that are concentrated along roads in valley floors allow unethical hunters to harvest birds illegally by shooting from vehicles or from the road. Another issue is the ethical concern on the part of many hunters, landowners, and non-hunters that the birds should not be hunted when they are so stressed and concentrated. But again, many of these birds may not survive the winter. In addition, in some parts of eastern Oregon, chukar range coincides with important, high-density winter ranges for deer, bighorn sheep, and elk. Under harsh winter weather conditions, disturbance to big game by bird hunters late in the winter can be a concern.

ODFW recognizes the need to consider localized, early closure of certain game bird seasons during unusually severe winter conditions. Since conditions requiring an emergency closure vary on a case by case basis, a closure may be implemented at the

recommendation of the involved Wildlife District and Region followed by consultation with the Wildlife Division. When a decision is made to recommend a closure, the Wildlife Division Administrator will request the Director close the season under the temporary rule process. In an effort to provide some consistency and more certainty for hunters and businesses that depend on upland game bird seasons, the department is proposing that any emergency closures take effect on the 15th or last day of the month. For example, if winter conditions do not warrant the closure of Chukar season on December 31st, hunters will know that the season will extend through at least January 14th. Similarly, if the season is not closed on January 15th, hunters will know the season will extend through January 31st. Closures will be by County and publicized (newspapers and radio) as widely as possible.

POPULATION STATUS AND FRAMEWORK REVIEW

Annual surveys conducted for upland bird species will be evaluated to track any long-term trends and identify any concerns with populations. It is the foundation of this document that upland game bird seasons do not require annual adjustment. Occasional season adjustments may be needed, however, based on long-term evaluation of populations and/or habitats. All frameworks will be re-evaluated at 5-year intervals.