

Goose Depredation Task Force – SB 622

Final Recommendations

Migratory waterfowl management is a joint responsibility of the federal and state governments. Management actions are governed by International Treaty through the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Oregon is an integral part of the Pacific Flyway and serves as either a stopping ground or primary wintering ground for several species of geese that breed in and migrate south from Russia, Alaska and Canada. During the last three decades, thousands of migratory Canada geese have moved into Oregon that had not been present historically. This is in addition to an increased resident goose population that is present year round. These increased populations of resident and migratory geese have lead to conflicts in many parts of the state. Of primary concern are the white-fronted, snow and Ross' geese in the Klamath Basin, Aleutian Canada geese on the south and north coast and dusky and cackling Canada geese in the Willamette Valley.

Many of these goose populations have recovered from record lows, which have lead to increased conflicts and economic impacts on private agricultural lands. Historically cackling Canada geese wintered exclusively in the central valley of California, but since the late 1980's, for unknown reasons, shifted north to winter in the Willamette Valley. Farmers throughout Oregon began experiencing depredation in the early 1980's from various species and from cacklers by the late 1980's. Depredation has been increasing throughout the state since then. The cackling Canada goose population has continued to increase over that last decade with management objectives set prior to the population wintering in Oregon. Historically, the only migratory goose population that wintered in northwest Oregon (primarily in the Willamette Valley) in any numbers was the dusky Canada goose. Dusky Canada geese have been negatively impacted due to the 1964 earthquake in Alaska which raised the Copper River Delta altering habitat. Survival of juvenile geese has declined substantially since that time raising concerns over long-term viability of the population.

Traditionally the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) working through the Pacific Flyway Council (PFC) and USFWS regulatory processes has used hunting seasons to control goose populations. Season structure and bag limits have been maximized where possible to provide recreational opportunities and where appropriate to try to stem population growth. However, these traditional methods of controlling goose populations face several challenges, including: (1) mandates within the MBTA on season length and timing, (2) concerns over impacts to subsistence harvest by Native Alaskans and (3) the concern of over harvesting the declining dusky population.

As a result of concerns over the increasing numbers of geese and the impacts these increasing populations are having on agricultural crops and possibly human health as well, the 2009 Legislature passed Senate Bill 622 which established a Goose Control Task Force. The intent of the task force was to identify problems caused by the

increasing number of various species of geese in Oregon and to make recommendations regarding opportunities to control goose populations and their impacts to Oregon farmers pursuant to applicable state and federal laws. Two members of the legislature were assigned to the task force and the ODFW Director appointed 9 members representing state and federal, aviation, agricultural, conservationist and academic interests. The Task Force met four times and concluded discussions on July 13, 2010.

Based on discussions, which included input from the public, the Oregon Goose Control Task Force recommends the following actions, which are not listed by priority, to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission and other state and federal management authorities:

1. It is specifically recommended that a working group comprised of affected state and federal wildlife agencies, landowners and hunters be formed to begin discussions with Native Alaskans on reducing the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Goose Management Plan's population objective for cackling Canada geese. Discussions with Native Alaskans should begin by the end of 2010.
2. ODFW and USFWS should immediately engage flyway entities on a review of population objectives with the aim of reducing priority problem goose populations in Oregon. Problem goose populations include but are not limited to cackling Canada geese, white-fronted geese and snow/Ross' geese.
3. ODFW and USFWS work with Pacific Flyway entities on increasing goose harvest opportunities that can provide assistance to agricultural operators throughout Oregon. Priority areas include the Willamette Valley, coastal areas, Snake River area of Malheur County and the Klamath Basin. Harvest regulations should focus on maximizing hunting days and bag limits and regulations should be simplified to promote hunter participation and harvest. Specifically, in the Northwest Oregon Permit Goose Zone hunting should be allowed to occur 7 days per week during the authorized season. Additionally, state wildlife areas and federal refuges should be open for September Canada goose hunting to target the resident population.
4. ODFW and USFWS review hunting regulations pertaining to the Northwest Oregon Permit Goose Season and look at ways to streamline process, eliminate unnecessary regulations, and promote more hunter participation to assist landowners with goose depredation. This includes a review of high concentration use areas by dusky Canada geese and the scientific determination used to classify types of Canada geese. This review should be completed so that any potential changes could be incorporated in the 2011 hunting season or as soon thereafter as possible.

5. ODFW and stakeholders discuss options to improve hunter access on private lands that are experiencing agricultural depredation. A review of the past Access and Habitat Program for goose hunter access should be undertaken. Any recommendations for increasing hunter access should be finalized by the end of 2010.
6. ODFW and the USFWS should use agricultural practices on lands under their control which are similar to those used on private agricultural land in the area where geese are causing agricultural depredations. This includes the planting of goose forage crops which are available to geese during multiple seasons. Agencies should consult with the OSU agricultural extension service to determine effective farming practices. Supplemental feeding of geese on state and federal areas should be utilized when needed to reduce goose depredation on private farmlands.
7. The USFWS should issue Migratory Bird Depredation Permits (a.k.a. goose kill permits) to private landowners, or their designees, for the purpose of relieving agricultural depredation caused by geese. These kill permits are targeted to alleviate depredation when hunting seasons are closed and reduce both resident and migratory populations. The reason that these permits would not be issued during hunting season should be explained to the public. The application procedure for the permits should be user friendly, any permit costs should be waived and permit issuance should be completed in a timely manner. The issuance of permits for cackling Canada and other geese is a priority, statewide. A permitting system should be in place by 2011.
8. State legislation should be drafted which directly compensates Oregon landowners for goose depredation losses on agricultural lands.
9. The PFC's NW Oregon/SW Washington Canada Goose Agricultural Depredation Control Plan (1998) should be updated by a subcommittee of the PFC's Technical Committee comprised of representatives from at least ODFW, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, The Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the USFWS (Regions 1, 7 and 9). The update should be completed by early 2011. The subcommittee should solicit public comments regarding the update through meetings and also make provisions to accept written comments. Through its membership in the subcommittee, ODFW should, to the best of its ability, craft the update of the plan to provide maximum agricultural depredation relief to Oregon landowners.
10. ODFW, in coordination with the OFB, should continue to seek federal Congressional funding for the current NW Oregon/SW Washington Canada Goose Agricultural Depredation Control Plan (approximately \$2

million/year) and any subsequent updates. In the event of partial funds being secured priority should be first for plan actions which can be implemented by the Wildlife Services branch of the United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. Additionally, the Oregon Legislature should explore all options for state funding of Wildlife Services.

11. The Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) should work aggressively with the Environmental Protection Agency and other federal agencies on authorization and use of chemical agents that could assist with goose depredations on agricultural crops. ODA should also streamline and simplify the permit process for applying pesticides. In addition, ODA should work closely with Oregon State University researchers on new research on products that could assist with depredation issues.
12. USFWS and ODFW should begin discussions with the Natural Resource Conservation Service to incorporate food plots that would benefit geese in any federal wetland projects on private lands. These food plots would be designed to attract geese away from agricultural croplands. No future publicly funded wetland projects should be implemented without provisions to provide food resources to help reduce agricultural depredations by geese.
13. Numerous educational and informational needs were identified including –
 - a. ODFW and USFWS develop web links and other public communication on public health risks related to goose populations
 - b. ODFW and USFWS develop web links and other public communication on available aversion control methods for geese on agricultural lands
 - c. Develop public information on control methods related to resident Canada geese on agricultural lands and in urban areas
 - d. In conjunction with the Oregon Department of Aviation develop web links and public communication on the aviation risks related to goose populations.
14. State legislative, ODFW, USFWS, OFB and ODA representatives continue to work for proactive solutions with the Congressional delegation on the severity of goose depredation, including the monetary damages incurred by farmers and the resulting loss in tax revenue to the state and federal governments.

Task Force Members - Concurrence

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