
OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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**GAME BIRD PROGRAM
RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR 2010-2011 GAME BIRD
SEASONS – UPLAND GAME
BIRDS AND MIGRATORY
GAME BIRDS**

FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE OREGON FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION
AUGUST 6, 2010

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The recommendations in this packet are based on public correspondence (including telephone and e-mail communications), Pacific Flyway Study Committee and Council discussions, discussions with field personnel, federal regulatory requirements and past Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission direction concerning hunting seasons.

UPLAND GAME BIRDS

POPULATION STATUS AND HARVEST

Production: Upland game bird season recommendations are not based on annual production surveys. It is natural for upland game bird populations to fluctuate from year to year. Much of this short-term fluctuation in populations can be attributed to weather. Upland bird populations in 2010 are expected to continue their recovery from the low numbers experienced in 2007. The low production in 2007 was likely the result of drought conditions, with SE Oregon spring precipitation at less than 20% of normal during spring of 2007. In 2008 and 2009, upland bird production increased for most species. The 2009-10 winter was near average, with below average snow pack, but recovering late. A cool wet 2010 spring extended well into June, which may have caused some chick mortality, but the increased precipitation should have resulted in improved cover and food availability. At the time of this writing, 2010 brood surveys have not been initiated. A more complete briefing will be provided to the Commission on August 6.

Stamp Sales: In 2009, Resident Oregon upland game bird validation (stamp) sales were 72,098 which is a 5.5% increase from 2008, however these sales include 14,368 of the 29,200 Sports Pac license purchasers that did not claim their validations. Total 2009 nonresident game bird stamp (valid for both waterfowl and upland game bird hunting) sales in 2009 was 6,818, a 6.5% increase over the previous year.

2009-10 Harvest Surveys: Results from the 2009-10 harvest survey for pheasants, quail, partridge, and grouse are found in Table 1 (pg 5). Harvest surveys for sage-grouse and turkeys are conducted separately and were as follows:

Sage-grouse - Statewide, 1,150 permits were authorized during 2009, 1021 were drawn, and 803 permits were purchased. Hunters harvested an estimated 783 sage-grouse and returned at least one wing from 493 birds (and more than 400 blood samples for West Nile Virus (WNV) testing). These wings were examined at the annual sage-grouse wing bee. Examination of wings indicated that production in 2009 was good with 2.3 chicks/hen, well above the 17-year average of 1.6 chicks/hen. Blood samples were sent to the National Wildlife Health Center testing but the results have not been received at time of writing.

Fall turkey – For 17 wildlife management units in W. Oregon, 4,000 permits were authorized (first-come, first-served) during the 2009 season. A total of 3,090 permits were issued, and 2,099 hunters spent 8,344 days afield harvesting 863 turkeys. Tag sales were up 22%, hunter numbers were up 27%, and harvest was up 40% as compared to 2008. Hunter success was 41% for the general fall season. The five eastern Oregon

controlled fall turkey hunts were fully subscribed with 725 successful applicants. Tags were issued to 628 hunters, of which 496 went hunting and bagged an estimated 275 turkeys for a success rate of 55%.

Spring Turkey – Surveys for the 2010 season are not complete at this time, but preliminary results suggest that harvest will increase over the previous year and that harvest will exceed 5,000 birds. Final results will be available by August 6th. The youth spring turkey hunt continues to be very popular and well received.

Table 1. 2009-10 Season Oregon Upland Game Bird Expanded Harvest by Harvest Unit¹										% Change From 2008
Species	Indices	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5	Area 6	Area 7	Total	
Blue Grouse	Hunters	1064 4	5526	2047	3275	3377	1842	614	12179	-8.6%
	Days	6481 8	3783 7	1280 9	2334 5	1385 3	5871	3658	162191	34.4%
	Harvest	1099 4	7295	2221	4613	3965	1656	1166	31910	64.4%
Ruffed Grouse	Hunters	1350 9	8904	2354	3275	3582	1535	512	13611	-12.1%
	Days	7589 9	4614 2	1154 3	2360 6	1425 9	4934	2889	179272	33.1%
	Harvest	2876 5	1860 4	3183	6417	5592	942	229	63732	95.6%
Mt. Quail	Hunters	4196 2466	4094 1760	1126	819	409	819	0	7573	-5.8%
	Days	0	6	3023	4873	2974	3838	0	56947	30.9%
	Harvest	4774	5805	731	310	759	1879	0	14258	-18.7%
CA Quail	Hunters	2661 1654	1944 1185	2047	716	614	819	2559 1226	8290	-17.9%
	Days	1	6	6427	2769	4705	3706	2 1616	58266	-8.6%
	Harvest	5123	1967	5949	1618	5440	2422	5	38684	-18.6%
Chukar	Hunters	0	0	1535	1535	1535	409	4708 2803	6755	-12.8%
	Days	0	0	7833	5381	9326 1345	2983	9 3374	53562	8.2%
	Harvest	0	0	6465	1879	1	2089	4	57628	28.6%
Gray Partridge	Hunters	0	0	921	716	716	102	1330	2661	171.5%
	Days	0	0	6673	3566	2929	960	4089	18217	99.7%
	Harvest	0	0	6005	266	2148	0	502	8921	317.6%
Ring-necked Pheasant	Hunters	2763	716	5424 1747	716	1637	716	4196 1557	6857	-29.3%
	Days	7478	1421	5 1085	4661	6782	4265	5 1298	57657	10.2%
	Harvest	2040	487	5	1162	4635	1552	9	33720	0.0%

Note: These data are derived from a random phone survey of 4200 upland game bird validation holders.

- ¹ Harvest Units
- Area 1 - Includes Lane Co. and all Cos N. and W. of crest of Cascades
 - Area 2 - All of SW OR counties west of crest of Cascades
 - Area 3 - North Central OR Cos. (Hood, Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam, Morrow, & Umatilla).
 - Area 4 - Central OR Cos. (Deschutes, Crook, Jefferson, Wheeler & Grant).
 - Area 5 - NE OR Cos. (Wallowa, Union, & Baker).
 - Area 6 - Klamath and Lake Cos.
 - Area 7 - Harney and Malheur Cos.

UPLAND GAME BIRDS

➤ SEASON FRAMEWORKS

In 2009 the Commission adopted the 2010-2015 Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework which provide standardized upland game bird seasons for September 1, 2010 through August 31, 2015. The framework includes seasons for ring-necked and Sichuan pheasants, chukar and Hungarian (Gray) partridge, California quail, mountain quail, “blue” and ruffed grouse, sage grouse, and fall and spring turkey. The seasons listed in the draft 2010-11 Game Bird Regulations reflect season criteria adopted by the Commission.

➤ 2010 CONTROLLED SAGE-GROUSE HUNT

On March 5, 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced its determination that listing the greater sage-grouse range-wide was warranted, but precluded by higher-priority listing actions. Therefore, sage-grouse are a "candidate" species under the Endangered Species Act, but remain a state-managed species. In light of this decision, concerns have been expressed about the potential impacts of hunting greater sage-grouse. In their listing decision, the USFWS concluded that the key threats to the continued survival of sage-grouse are 1) habitat loss, fragmentation, and modification and 2) inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms, particularly in relation to energy and other development. The USFWS also evaluated the "utilization" (e.g., hunting) of sage-grouse and concluded that "the greater sage-grouse is not threatened by overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes now or in the foreseeable future".

A recent (2010) paper in the Journal of Wildlife Management examined several years of band recovery data from Nevada and Colorado and concluded that harvest rates of 11% or less of the fall population is unlikely to have an important influence on local population dynamics of sage-grouse. This conclusion is similar to the range-wide sage-grouse management guidelines that recommend a harvest rate of 10% or less. Oregon's policy has been for harvest not to exceed 5% of the fall population and in practice harvest

has been estimated at 3% of the fall population in the hunted areas. Sage-grouse are not hunted range-wide in Oregon; regulated hunting is permitted in 12 of 21 wildlife management units where sage-grouse occur.

Eliminating responsible and regulated hunting would likely mislead the public; implying hunting is responsible for the current status of sage-grouse, and thus distract attention from the real threat to sage-grouse which is habitat loss and fragmentation. As part of one of two remaining strongholds for sage-grouse, the department takes its management responsibility for sage-grouse seriously and will continue to evaluate on an annual basis the limited harvest of sage-grouse in the state; making any necessary adjustments and/or closures as warranted.

At the time of this writing, the 2010 lek survey data has not been completely analyzed and production surveys have not been initiated. Greatly improved production in 2009 is expected to result in increased lek attendance in 2010, and in fact preliminary data does suggest that Oregon sage-grouse lek numbers increased by 20 to 30% over 2009. More information will be presented at the August 6, 2010 commission meeting. At this time, permit number recommendations are being evaluated for any changes. **Proposed sage-grouse season dates for 2010 are September 11-19.** Permit numbers are determined annually based on mathematical formula combining spring lek count information, brood survey information, and results from the analysis of wings taken during the previous hunting season. Spring lek surveys are used to estimate the adult male breeding population. Based on a sage grouse sex ratio of females per male, the adult breeding population is then estimated. A chick/hen ratio is estimated from summer brood surveys and then applied to the adult breeding population to estimate the total sage grouse fall population. The formula is designed to authorize the take of no more than 5% of the estimated fall population.

Wings collected from last year (2009) indicated 57% young in the harvest which is above the 17-yr average of 48%. The chick/hen ratio was 2.3 and equaled the year 2002 for highest chick/hen ratio for the past 20 years. For all management units combined, preliminary summary of lek counts this spring indicated increasing populations as compared to 2009. At the time of this writing, 2010 brood surveys have not been initiated, so it is unknown how the extended cool and wet spring affected production. The increased moisture may have impacted chick survival but at the same time it improved range conditions.

Mortality of sage-grouse due to WNv was detected for the first time in Oregon during 2006. The extent of mortality is unknown, but in at least one location near Burns Junction in southern Malheur County more than 60 mortalities were likely due to the disease. This area was searched and sampled in 2007 and 2008. During 2006, sage-grouse hunters were given instructions and sample materials for collecting blood from one bird. The response rate was very good with more than 310 samples received – all useable. The National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC) analyzed the samples and found them all to be negative for WNv. The effort was expanded in 2007, 2008, and 2009 by sending all successful applicants materials to collect 2 blood samples. Over the last 4 years, more than 1500 blood samples have been submitted by hunters. One sample, (from the Beulah WMU in 2008) has tested positive for WNv. Staff is proposing to obtain

hunter-collected blood samples again in 2010 and work with the NWHC on the analysis. The NWHC has also been testing live sage-grouse and other birds in Oregon since 2003 as part of a WNV surveillance effort.

SAGE GROUSE PERMIT RECOMMENDATIONS

<u>Management Unit</u>	<u>2010 Recommendations</u>	<u>2009 Permits</u>	<u>2008 Permits</u>
Sumpter	Not available at this time	10	10
Lookout Mountain	“	10	10
Beulah	“	150	150
Malheur River	“	100	100
Owyhee	“	75	75
Whitehorse	“	225	225
Steens	“	80	100
Beatys Butte	“	175	175
Juniper	“	100	100
Silvies	“	20	20
N. Wagonfire	“	35	40
S. Wagonfire	“	20	20
Warner	“	150	150
TOTAL		1,150	1,175

An important benefit to hunting sage grouse is collection of essential biological information (See above about hunter-collected blood samples in 2009). Each hunter is provided two wing envelopes and asked to send in one wing from each bird harvested. Analysis of these wings provides an estimate of overall production, hatching chronology, and pre-winter sex and age composition of the population. The sex and age composition allows the prediction of breeding population trends for the following year. Without this information it would be very difficult to determine how sage grouse populations are performing through time. It will become even more critical to have this information as land managers implement habitat improvement treatments designed to benefit sage grouse.

Of the western states where sage grouse are hunted, Oregon has the most conservative sage grouse season. Under current harvest strategies, population data indicate a stable to increasing population trend for the last 20 years, despite declines observed 2005-08. The controlled hunt process allows the department to manage harvest and hunters and collect important information. Collecting this information by other means would be difficult and costly.

➤ 2010 FALL TURKEY SEASONS

Background

Responding to the general trend of increasing numbers of turkeys and damage complaints, in recent years the department has proposed expanded fall turkey hunting opportunities. For 2010, staff proposes an increase in the number of controlled fall turkey tags for three hunts in NE Oregon.

Controlled Fall Turkey Seasons

Recommendation: Increase tag numbers to 150 for each Baker, Grand Ronde, and Wallowa Controlled Fall turkey hunts. All three hunts have the same season dates and bag limits which are as follows:

Season Dates: October 9, 2010 through November 30, 2010

Daily Bag/Season Limits: One turkey of either sex daily.

Tag Sale Deadline: Hunters may purchase tags beginning on Sep 21 through the end of the season.

Tag Numbers: Baker, Hunt No. K62, 150 tags (increased from 100)
Grand Ronde, Hunt No. K84, 150 tags (increased from 75)
Wallowa, Hunt No. K85, 150 tags (increased from 75)

Controlled and General Fall Turkey Seasons

It is unlawful to obtain and possess more than two 2010 fall turkey tags of which only one can be a controlled fall turkey tag. Thus, hunters can purchase two general fall turkey tags, or obtain one controlled fall turkey tag and one general season fall turkey tag per season. At time of harvest, a hunter must validate their tag immediately by removing the triangle in its entirety for the appropriate month and day of harvest and attach the tag securely to the carcass. See the 2010-11 Game Bird Regulations for legal hunting methods and shooting hours. Dogs may be used during the fall turkey season.

➤ 2010 SEPTEMBER YOUTH PHEASANT HUNTS

Special youth hunts for pheasants began at E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area in the early 1950s, and have since been expanded to 12 other areas throughout the state.

The hunts provide a controlled opportunity for young hunters to experience bird hunting without competition from adult hunters. Youth ages 17 and younger are eligible to participate. The program has been popular and well received. In recent years, approximately 1,200 youth hunters participate annually in the program. In addition, sporting clay trailers were used to conduct youth shotgun skill clinics in association with many of the hunts. These provide instruction and a challenging opportunity to learn how

to hit flying targets and to use a shotgun more effectively. In addition to the blaze orange hat and vest required of all participants, including adults, beginning this year shooting glasses (eye protection) will also be required.

These hunts draw considerable community interest and generally good publicity from the news media. Volunteers from sportsmen's clubs, the Hunter Education Program and interested individuals assist with the hunts, some providing and handling dogs for youths and their parents.

Proposed hunt dates and maximum allowable hunters at any one time are listed in the table below.

PROPOSED YOUTH PHEASANT HUNTS

<u>Hunt Area</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Hunter Limitation</u>
Baker City Area (private land)	Sept. 18 & 19	50
Denman Wildlife Area	Sept. 18 & 19	85
E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area	Sept. 18, 19, 25 & 26	70
Fern Ridge Wildlife Area	Sept. 11 & 12	75
Heppner	Sept. 19	30
Irrigon Wildlife Area	Sept. 25 & 26	60
John Day Area (private land)	Sept. 18 & 19	30
Klamath Wildlife Area	Sept. 11 & 12	80
Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area	Sept. 11 & 12	35
Mid-Columbia (The Dalles area)	Sept. 11 & 12	20
Ontario (Paul Parker Memorial Hunt)	Sept. 11 & 12	75
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area	Sept. 11 & 12	50
Willow Creek (Prineville Area)	Sept. 18 & 19	80

➤ **2010 WESTERN OREGON FEE PHEASANT HUNTS**

Background

For the last 20 years the department has offered special western Oregon fee pheasant hunts on public hunting areas. Initially the Oregon Legislature directed the department to offer these hunts, which have been very popular with a segment of hunters living in western Oregon metropolitan areas. In 2009, 4,119 fee pheasant tags were sold. The hunts are offered on the following 4 wildlife areas in western Oregon: E. E. Wilson, Sauvie Island, Fern Ridge and Denman.

In these hunts pheasants are purchased from private breeders and released (typically daily) on hunt areas throughout the season. Each participant in the hunt must possess a \$17.00 pheasant tag, good for two birds, in addition to a hunting license and upland game bird validation. Tags are purchased from license outlets, and the revenues applied toward the cost of the program. Additional tags can be purchased throughout the season.

While the intent of the program is to cover costs with tag revenue, the balance between annual program costs and hunter participation is difficult to predict with precision. Therefore, pheasant tags pay the bulk of the program costs, and any short fall is paid with upland game bird stamp revenue. Due to increased fuel and feed prices the price of the birds increased by about 35% over the past 3 years. After remaining unchanged since 1991 at \$11.50, Fee Pheasant Hunt tag prices were increased to \$17.00 in 2010.

Hunters are generally supportive of this program with the main complaint being they would like to see more birds stocked. However, due to the increasing cost of birds, increasing the total number of birds released will increase program costs.

Recommendation: Based on performance of past seasons, staff is proposing a 2010 season similar to that held in 2009. A \$17.00 pheasant tag, obtainable through license agents, allowing hunters two birds would again be required. Proposed season dates are: **Fern Ridge Wildlife Area Sept 13 – Oct 10; Sauvie Island WA, Sept 13 – 26; Denman Wildlife Area, September 20 – October 8; and E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area, October 1-31.**

➤ **YOUTH AND HUNTERS WITH DISABILITIES RABBIT HUNTS**

A youth rabbit hunt on the E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area, to be sponsored by the Marys Peak Hound Club, is proposed for continuation. The hunt would take place on **February 19 & 20, 2011** and be open to youth aged 17 and younger, with each accompanied by a non-hunting adult 21 years or older. The hunt will be limited to 20 youths per day and the wildlife area will begin taking reservations **February 1, 2011.**

A rabbit hunt for people with disabilities is proposed for **February 5, 2011**, and is also sponsored by the Marys Peak Hound Club. Pre-registration is requested and the maximum number of hunters is limited to 50.

➤ **2010 PHEASANT HUNTING CLINICS**

Proposed are two **Becoming an Outdoors Woman pheasant hunting clinics that will be offered September 11 & 12, 2010** at the **Denman Wildlife Area and October 2 and 3, 2010 at the Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area.** These pheasant hunts are designed for new hunters who want help developing the skills necessary to learn to hunt on their own. Day one will consist of gun handling instructions, safety talks, skeet shooting, and an afternoon pheasant hunt using dogs. Day two will consist of a morning pheasant hunt and lunch. The number of participants in each workshop will be limited. General season regulations will apply.

Proposed is a **one-day adult pheasant hunting clinic at E. E. Wilson Wildlife Area on September 24, 2010.** This is an introductory pheasant hunting clinic designed for adults

who would like to learn about pheasant hunting. Topics will include safe gun handling, improving shooting skills, and an afternoon pheasant hunt. The number of participants in each workshop will be limited. General season regulations will apply.

➤ **2010 LOWER KLAMATH HILLS YOUTH CHUKAR HUNT (NEW)**

The Klamath Chapter of the Oregon Hunters Association, in cooperation with the department, will offer a new youth hunting opportunity for chukar in the Lower Klamath Hills regulated hunt area. The primary intent of this hunt will be to provide youth 17 years of age and younger an upland hunting opportunity, immediately following the release of chukar into the hunt area. Each youth shall be accompanied by one adult chaperone. The adult chaperone will be asked to refrain from hunting. The youth mentor program will apply to this hunt since it is within the general season dates for chukar. Youth hunters will be required to wear hunter orange and safety glasses. Adult chaperones will be required to wear hunter orange. **Safety glasses and orange apparel will not be provided.** Hunting is available by reservation. Please reserve a hunt day by calling, Rick Viera, Klamath Chapter OHA at (541) 591-2452 prior to the hunt. The number of participants for this youth hunt will be limited.

For the 2010 hunt season, the proposed hunt dates and special regulations are as follows:

Hunt Dates: October 09 – 10, 2010

Bag Limit: 2 chukar (per the existing special regulations for the Lower Klamath Hills hunt area)

2010-11 Upland Game Bird Falconry Seasons

Background

The use of falcons for the take of upland game birds is very limited in Oregon. All falconers are licensed and staff coordinates with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the monitoring of falconry activities in the state.

Recommendation

No changes in seasons from last year are proposed.

PROPOSED UPLAND GAME BIRD FALCONRY SEASON

Open Season: September 1, 2010 – March 31, 2011

Daily Bag Limit: One pheasant (either sex), two California quail, two Hungarian (Gray) partridge, two chukar partridge, two ruffed grouse, and two blue grouse.

Possession Limit: Double the daily bag limit.

Sage Grouse Season: September 1, 2010 – January 31, 2011

Daily Bag Limit: One sage grouse

Season Limit: Two sage grouse

Open Areas for Sage Grouse: Sumpter, Lookout Mt., Beulah, Malheur River, Owyhee, Whitehorse, Steens Mt., Beatys Butte, Juniper, Silvies, Wagontire, and Warner wildlife management units

There are about 75 licensed falconers within the state. While the season is long, harvest surveys indicate minimal harvest of upland species. A conservative sage-grouse season and limit is proposed. The falconry season for sage-grouse closes at the end of January, just prior to the time birds begin gathering on leks where they are more vulnerable.

MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

POPULATION STATUS

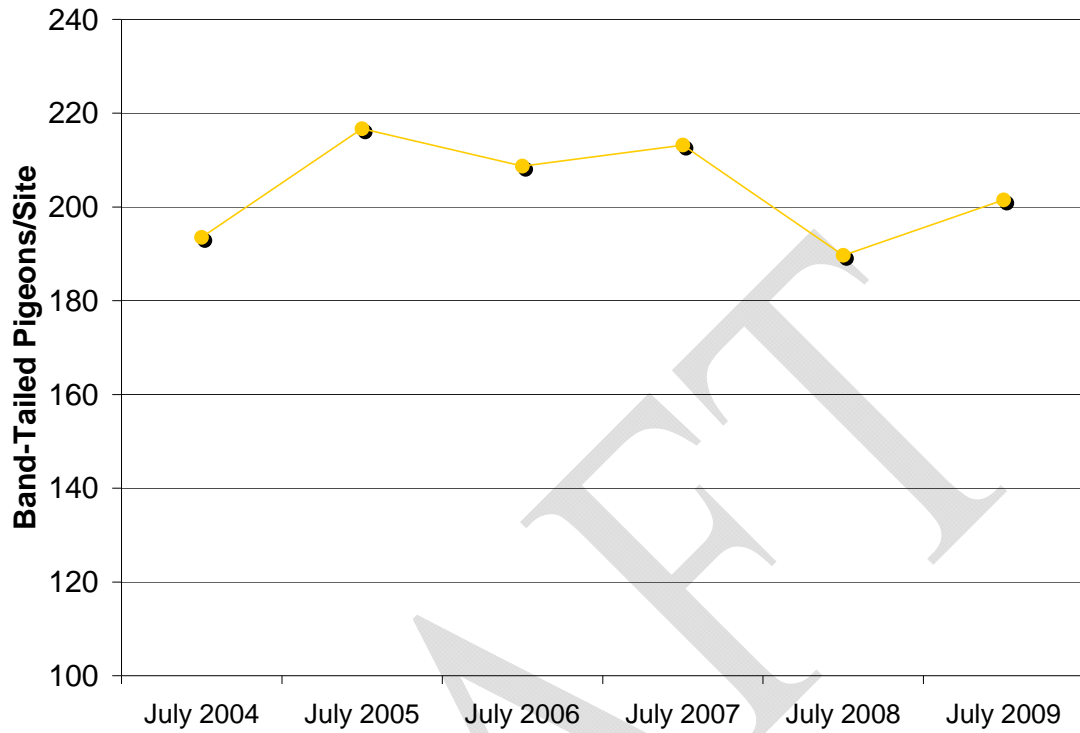
Ducks: Oregon breeding waterfowl surveys were conducted from late April through mid-May. Statewide, the breeding mallard population was down 6% compared to last year and down 28% compared to the 1994-2009 long-term average. Total duck numbers were up 11% from last year and down 23% from the long term average. USFWS population estimates for ducks breeding in other areas of the continent will be provided at a later date.

Geese and Swans: No status has been presented to date by the USFWS. In Oregon, statewide the breeding Canada goose population was down 12% from last year and the long-term average.

Mourning Doves: In recent years the average number of doves heard in annual call counts has been relatively unchanged in the Western Management Unit. However, long-term declines in dove populations remain a concern nationwide. In 2010, the trend estimate for mourning doves heard during call counts in Oregon was down 12% from 2009; however the change is not statistically significant. From 2001 – 2010 this trend has decreased an average of 1.3% per year but again the trend is not statistically significant. Efforts are currently underway between the flyways and USFWS to reassess and develop new harvest strategies for mourning doves. The primary goal of a harvest strategy would be to develop a predictable regulatory harvest system based on the current biological understanding of mourning doves in the Western Management Unit and improve the biological understanding of factors regulating populations in the unit. Significant restrictions on mourning dove harvest in the Western Management Unit last occurred in 1987.

Band-tailed Pigeons: During the last several years, new survey methodologies have been implemented in British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and California. These surveys were implemented as a standardized method to survey the pigeon population and make trend estimates comparable between states and provinces. Oregon counts were conducted for the first time using the new protocol during 2004. Since that time, the July surveys have shown a 5.6% per year decrease in the number of pigeons counted at mineral springs. Although the trend is negative, the estimate is not statistically significant. USFWS analysis of the 2010 population survey information will not be completed before the August Commission meeting.

AVERAGE NUMBER OF BAND-TAILED PIGEONS COUNTED PER SITE IN OREGON DURING THE COORDINATED JULY SURVEYS



MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS 2009-10 HARVEST SURVEYS

Introduction

The Harvest Information Program (HIP), a cooperative harvest survey between the USFWS and states, was implemented in Oregon during 1995. Harvest is calculated by the USFWS from sampling hunters from databases provided by the department's licensing system. This cooperative survey will continue to be refined yearly. Discussions between the USFWS and the Wildlife Division may lead to significant changes to the HIP survey system and permits for band-tailed pigeons, brant and sea ducks next year.

Stamp Sales: State of Oregon waterfowl validation (stamp) sales to resident hunters in 2009 totaled 51,636, a 3.4% increase from 2008, however these sales include 15,016 of the 29,200 Sports Pac license purchasers that did not claim their validations. Total 2009 nonresident game bird stamps (valid for both waterfowl and upland game bird hunting) sales were 6818, up 6.5% from 2008.

Ducks and Geese: No information provided to date.

American Coots: No information provided to date

Mourning Doves: Preliminary results from the HIP suggest during the 2008 hunting season, 4,300 Oregon hunters spent 16,400 days hunting mourning doves and they harvested 38,600 doves.

Band-tailed Pigeons: Preliminary results from the HIP suggest during the 2009 hunting season, 600 Oregon hunters spent 1,800 days hunting band-tailed pigeons and they harvested 1,900 pigeons.

Wilson's Snipe: No information provided to date

MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

2010-11 SEASON PROPOSALS

Please note: All seasons for migratory game birds are established under U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) frameworks. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife works through the Pacific Flyway Council process and the USFWS regulatory process to make recommendations on these federal frameworks. All recommendations must meet established framework guidelines and all season selections by the Fish and Wildlife Commission are subject to approval by the USFWS. The Commission should note that most duck and goose season recommendations are not presented at this time. Final determinations for many seasons won't occur until July 30th; after federal regulatory meetings.

➤ MOURNING DOVES

Framework

Oregon is allowed a 30-consecutive-day season between September 1, 2010 and January 15, 2011, with a daily bag and possession limit of 10 and 20, respectively.

Recommendation

In most years the effective length of Oregon's dove season is governed by the first cool temperatures or early storms that precipitate southern migration, which usually occurs in early September. The following season provisions are recommended in accordance with the proposed federal framework and represent no change from traditional seasons.

PROPOSED MOURNING DOVE SEASON

Open Season:	September 1 - 30, 2010
Open Area:	Entire State
Daily Bag Limit:	10 doves
Possession Limit:	20 doves

Public Comment

No public comment has been received.

➤ BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

Framework

Oregon is allowed a season up to 9 days in length, which may not begin earlier than September 15, with a two bird daily bag and four bird possession limit.

Recommendation

Although there has been concern over the status of the pigeon population in recent years, hunting restrictions have reduced hunter numbers and harvest to minimal levels, which are believed to have no significant impact on the population. Both British Columbia and Washington re-opened band-tailed pigeon seasons in recent years in response to increased populations. The Flyway is in the process of updating its band-tailed pigeon management plan, which will contain a new harvest strategy for pigeons based on population status. Similar to the brant permit, the department implemented a band-tailed pigeon permit in 2005. The intent of the permit is to allow the USFWS to more accurately identify pigeon hunters for harvest survey purposes. This permit also improves the ability to obtain pigeon wings from successful hunters so that the age composition of the harvest may be monitored. The department and the USFWS are currently discussing way to further increase the accuracy of the survey which may include proposed changes to the permit system next year.

PROPOSED BAND-TAILED PIGEON SEASON

Season Dates:	September 15 - 23, 2010
Open Area:	Entire State
Daily Bag Limit:	2 pigeons
Possession Limit:	4 pigeons

Public Comment

None received

➤ SEPTEMBER CANADA GOOSE SEASONS

Background

Resident western Canada goose populations are established in nearly all areas of suitable habitat in Oregon, including northwest Oregon. Goose harvest regulations have been severely restrictive in that portion of the state since 1984 because of the status of several subspecies of wintering Canada geese, especially the dusky. Since identification of goose subspecies is difficult for the average hunter, harvest restrictions essentially have limited the take of the more abundant subspecies wintering in Oregon. These restrictions, combined with high productivity for resident western Canada geese, have contributed to a widely distributed goose population, which includes populations established in many urban areas.

A September Canada goose season, designed to focus harvest on resident western Canada geese, was initiated in 1990 to assist in the alleviation of agricultural crop depredation and provide a recreational opportunity on a growing resident goose population occurring

in the lower Columbia River area. By 1993, the September season was expanded into all northwest Oregon counties. The season occurs before the fall migration of other Canada geese into the state, thus minimizing concern about the taking of other subspecies of Canada geese. In later years the September season was expanded statewide.

Population monitoring of resident goose populations continue to be used to evaluate September and general fall goose season impacts. Most resident goose populations throughout the Pacific Flyway are at levels that warrant continuation of current seasons. However, the 2007 population estimate for eastern Oregon was slightly below the level which calls for harvest restrictions in the flyway management plan. In response, the bag limit was lowered to 3 geese during the September season in all of eastern Oregon beginning in 2007. Population estimates for eastern Oregon during the last three years were at levels which have increased the 3-year average slightly above the Flyway's restriction level. However, because of year to year variability in population estimates, this population still warrants concern.

The Pacific Flyway Council in March 1998 adopted a goose depredation plan for northwest Oregon and southwest Washington. This plan recognizes the need to focus on increasing harvest rates on populations in northwest Oregon. Since western Canada goose populations still remain at viable levels, staff proposes to retain last season's bag limits and season length. This is an ongoing process to assist landowners with depredation control.

In addition, goose populations are established throughout all suitable habitats in southwestern Oregon. Complaints have been received from landowners in many areas. Even with liberal fall seasons, breeding populations of Canada geese continue to maintain themselves at viable population levels.

Framework

The current federal framework for Oregon allows outside dates of September 1 – 20 in N.W. Oregon and September 1 – 15 in the remainder of the state. Daily bag and possession limits are 5 and 10 Canada geese, respectively. Shooting hours for the September Canada goose hunt are sunrise to sunset.

Recommendation

No recommendation is presented at this time. The Oregon Goose Control Task Force which was created by the 2009 Legislature has not yet completed its final recommendations. Proposals for the September season will be affected by recommendations made by this group and staff proposals for both the September Canada Goose Season, as well as the regular fall goose seasons will be forthcoming in a supplemental packet which will be distributed prior to the Commission meeting.

➤ DUCK AND MERGANSER

Framework

Based on duck numbers and habitat conditions, it is anticipated that duck seasons will once again be 107 days. Outside dates are the Saturday closest to September 24 to the last Sunday in January. Shooting hours are from one half hour before sunrise to sunset. Zoning options approved by the USFWS may be retained. Two federal youth waterfowl

days are allowed for ducks, mergansers, coots and geese. The two youth days must be consecutive. Youth 15 years of age and under may participate.

Because of incomplete information, no recommendation is presented at this time but will be provided shortly before the August Commission meeting. The final recommendation will be based on the Western Mallard model which was implemented in 2008.

➤ **FALL GEESE**

No recommendations are presented at this time. Season selections are dependent on duck season selections.

➤ **BLACK BRANT**

No recommendation is presented at this time. However, because of the extremely low harvest of brant in Oregon, little change in allowed frameworks is anticipated.

➤ **WILSON'S SNIPE**

No recommendations are presented at this time. Normally snipe seasons are concurrent with duck seasons. A few members of the public have requested a split snipe season in western Oregon.

➤ **AMERICAN COOT**

No recommendation is presented at this time. Normally coot seasons are concurrent with duck seasons.

➤ **CROW**

Framework

Liberal seasons are offered outside of months when nesting may occur. A 124 day season is allowed during a calendar year. Depredation and nuisance birds can still be taken outside of established hunting seasons.

Recommendation

Adoption of maximum days allowed.

PROPOSED CROW SEASON

Statewide: October 1, 2010 – January 31, 2011

General crow seasons are required because of a treaty negotiation with Mexico. Crow hunting in Oregon is likely minimal with more crows being taken on depredation complaints.

Public Comment

No public comment has been received.

➤ **FALCONRY**

No recommendations are presented at this time. Proposed falconry dates are dependent on approved gun seasons.

GAME BIRD REGULATIONS 2010-11 REGULATION CHANGE PROPOSALS

Division staff, high desert region and northeast region staff are currently discussing proposed changes to the boundary of the open hunt area of the John Day River Wildlife Refuge. More information will be provided to the Commission in August.

DRAFT

PUBLIC HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES

Columbia Basin Regulated Hunt Area Program: Little change is anticipated for this program. A final briefing will be given to the Commission on August 6.

Waterfowl Youth Hunts: In addition to the federal waterfowl youth hunt weekend, there are other areas and dates set aside for youth only hunting. Youth waterfowl hunts provide an opportunity for hunters 17 years of age and younger to have a hunting area set aside for their use. Each young person is accompanied by an adult 21 years or older, who is not allowed to hunt. Hunts occur on the Sauvie Island, Fern Ridge and Klamath wildlife areas.

Upland Cooperative Access Program: Private landowners in the Columbia Basin have provided hunter access to their lands for many years. However, landowner/hunter relationships are sometimes difficult to manage based on the needs of the landowner and the public. There has been some concern expressed by hunters that not enough information is given to hunters to assist in finding access points. However, the majority of landowners want to participate but will not authorize the widespread public release of their names and phone numbers. This is understandable but so is the frustration of some hunters. In January of 2005, a task force was convened to evaluate the UCAP program. Members of the task force included hunters, landowners, and ODFW Staff. While no structural changes to the program were advocated, the task force made several recommendations for improving public outreach about the program. The suggested changes were implemented during the 2005-06 season, including the creation of a new brochure. About 110,000 acres were enrolled in the UCAP program for the 2009-10 season.

APPENDIX A
2010-2015 OREGON UPLAND GAME BIRD
FRAMEWORKS

DRAFT



Oregon Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework

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

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2010 -2015 Upland Game Bird Framework

Executive

Summary

Oregon's diverse habitats support 12 species of upland game birds, 8 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:

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 1 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 little can be done to reverse the landscape changes that have occurred over several decades. Fee pheasant hunts have become more popular in western Oregon and ODFW will consider expansion of such hunts. With 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 statewide concurrent season.

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.