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**GAME BIRD PROGRAM
RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR 2015 -16
UPLAND and MIGRATORY
GAME BIRD SEASONS**



**FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE OREGON FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION
AUGUST 7, 2015**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Page</i>
Upland Game Birds	
Season Frameworks	3
Population Status and Harvest.....	3
Upland Game Bird Season Proposals.....	7
2015 Controlled Sage-grouse Hunt.....	7
2015 Controlled Fall Turkey Seasons	9
2015 Western Oregon Fee Pheasant Hunts.....	10
2015 September Youth Pheasant Hunts	11
2015 Pheasant Hunting Workshops.....	12
2015 Lower Klamath Hills Youth Chukar Hunt.....	12
2015-16 Upland Game Bird Falconry Seasons.....	13
Migratory Game Birds	
Pacific Flyway Population Status and Harvest.....	14
Oregon Waterfowl and Nonresident Game Bird Validation Sales.....	15
Migratory Game Birds 2015-16 Season Proposals.....	16
Mourning Dove	16
Band-Tailed Pigeon.....	17
Crow	17
Regulation Schedule	
Notice of 2016 Regulatory Schedule Changes	18
Game Bird Regulation Changes	
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area Hunt Program	20

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 (Commission) direction concerning hunting seasons.

UPLAND GAME BIRDS

SEASON FRAMEWORKS

In 2014 the Commission adopted the 2015-2020 Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework; a policy document that guides the development of standardized upland game bird seasons for a period of 5 years (September 1, 2015 through August 31, 2020). Standardized regulation frameworks are biologically sound management tools that help the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) provide consistent, stable regulations that reduce confusion, assist hunters with planning trips, and lower administrative costs. The framework includes seasons for ring-necked pheasant, chukar and Hungarian (Gray) partridge, California quail, mountain quail, "blue" and ruffed grouse, sage-grouse, and spring and fall turkey seasons.

Based on external and internal comments received over the previous five years, the Department solicited comments on five proposed framework changes at 23 public meetings held across the state in May 2014. Based on the public support received, three of those changes were incorporated into the current framework adopted by the Commission. The upland game bird seasons proposed in the draft 2015-16 Game Bird Regulation proposals reflect the framework criteria.

POPULATION STATUS AND HARVEST

The following information about the status and past harvest of upland game birds is presented to provide additional background and context for the 2015-16 regulation proposals.

General Trends: Annual fluctuations in upland bird numbers are normal and these short-term changes can often be attributed to weather conditions. These changes should not be the basis for setting annual hunting seasons because many upland game bird populations exhibit high annual death rates whether they are hunted or not. Generally, it is unnecessary 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. In addition the hunting of upland game bird populations are generally subjected to density dependent hunting pressure; when populations go down hunting pressure decreases. Long-term population trends are often attributed to changes in the quality and quantity of habitat.

After moderate levels of upland game bird populations in the early 2000's, populations and harvest peaked in 2005 (Fig 1). A severe drought in 2007 caused upland game bird populations to tumble. Since 2007 precipitation has generally been below average and consequently has continued to suppress upland game bird populations, especially chukars in eastern Oregon. The lack of grass and forb growth during dry conditions reduces hiding cover, food, and insect abundance (a key component in a chick's diet).

This year is shaping up to be another dry year and populations are expected to remain below the long term average. Reports of early nesting and a timely dose of rain in mid-May for much of eastern Oregon may help mitigate the effects of the ongoing drought conditions being experienced in that part of the state.

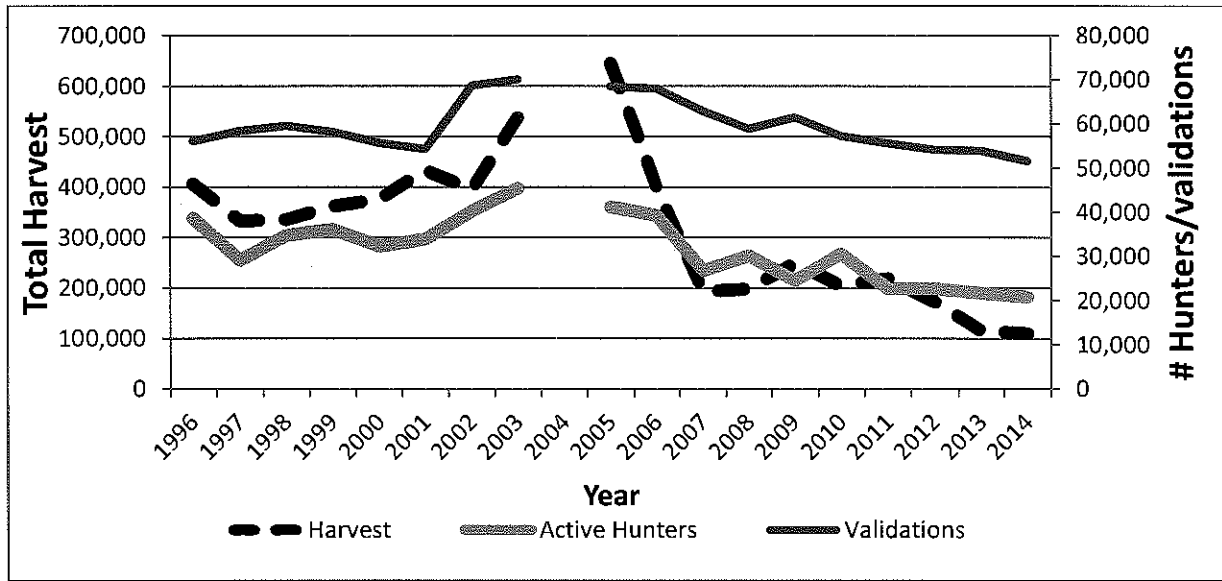


Figure 1. Long term trend of upland game bird harvest and hunters (No survey in 2004).

Production: Upland game bird season recommendations are not based on annual production surveys, but it is still important to collect this information to determine the status, trends, and to provide accurate hunting forecasts. Most of the birds in the fall harvest were hatched in the same year, so reproductive success is an important predictor of hunter success.

Upland bird populations in 2015 are expected to remain below the long term average but improve over the previous year. Mild winter conditions and lack of snow improved overwinter survival, but much of central and SE Oregon once again received below average precipitation from January-May. However, timely precipitation in mid-May provided a needed boost to grass and forb growth in many areas of eastern Oregon. Temperature and precipitation were favorable during the peak hatch for most upland game birds (typically late May and early June but may have been earlier this year). At the time of this writing, 2015 upland game bird brood surveys have not been initiated so additional information about upland game bird production will be provided to the Commission on August 7.

Harvest Surveys: Harvest surveys are conducted annually. Most upland game bird harvest is estimated from the random phone survey of 4,200 upland game bird validation holders. The results of last year’s survey are in Table 1. Separate harvest surveys are conducted for sage-grouse and turkeys and not included in Table 1. Turkey surveys are included in mandatory reporting and

sage-grouse harvest is based on direct mailing of survey questionnaires to successful controlled hunt applicants.

Table 1. Results of 2014-15 harvest survey by harvest unit in Oregon. Harvest of most species increased over the previous year, except for ruffed grouse and pheasant. Birds/hunter increased for all species except pheasant.

2014-15 Upland Game Bird Season Harvest and Hunting Effort.										
Species	Indices	Harvest Unit ¹							Total	% Change from 2013
		Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5	Area 6	Area 7		
Blue Grouse	Hunters	2,603	1,537	1,110	1,366	1,622	427	256	8,709	-21.2%
	Days	29,961	23,430	8,934	8,894	17,328	1,537	2,831	92,915	3.3%
	Harvest	4,263	2,891	1,144	1,377	3,599	332	125	13,731	2.4%
Ruffed Grouse	Hunters	4,525	2,049	1,366	1,281	1,708	342	256	10,673	-24.8%
	Days	38,980	27,511	10,481	9,143	17,109	1,435	2,831	107,490	-9.3%
	Harvest	7,938	9,538	2,252	2,195	3,972	291	354	26,540	-18.3%
Mountain Quail	Hunters	1,366	768	598	342	256	171		3,159	-42.4%
	Days	13,390	13,707	2,215	1,507	2,107	184		33,110	7.1%
	Harvest	3,069	2,442	162	324	473			6,470	35.9%
California Quail	Hunters	1,025	598	1,025	427	342	256	939	4,098	-28.7%
	Days	8,789	9,181	2,629	1,081	4,683	384	7,179	33,926	-22.0%
	Harvest	804	795	1,070	1,152	2,593	398	12,260	19,072	1.3%
Chukar	Hunters			598	342	1,025	342	2,220	4,184	-16.8%
	Days			4,387	2,703	4,110	440	9,562	21,202	-26.4%
	Harvest			3,664	2,295	3,807	82	13,382	23,230	1.8%
Gray Partridge	Hunters			256	85	342		342	683	-66.9%
	Days			1,724	923	3,843	21	1,315	7,826	-26.9%
	Harvest			392	1,257	6,247		42	7,938	256.0%
Pheasant	Hunters	1,110	256	1,622	427	854	512	1,452	5,977	35.8%
	Days	1,652	2,322	10,936	970	3,554	1,070	8,603	29,107	-27.0%
	Harvest	444	201	3,808	245	2,160	1,043	4,794	12,695	-36.3%

¹Harvest Units

Area 1 – All of Lane Co. and Cos. north and west of the crest of the Cascades.

Area 2 – All of southwest Oregon Cos. west of the crest of Cascades.

Area 3 – Columbia Basin Cos.

Area 4 – Central Oregon Cos.

Area 5 – Northeastern Oregon Cos.

Area 6 – Klamath and Lake Cos.

Area 7 – Harney and Malheur Cos.

Sage-grouse – A total of 845 permits were offered during the 2014 season, 25 fewer permits than in 2013. No permits were offered for the Lookout Mountain and Sumpter Wildlife Management Units (WMU) which accounted for much of the decrease. These Baker County units continue to experience population declines. A portion of the Whitehorse WMU remained closed, largely to

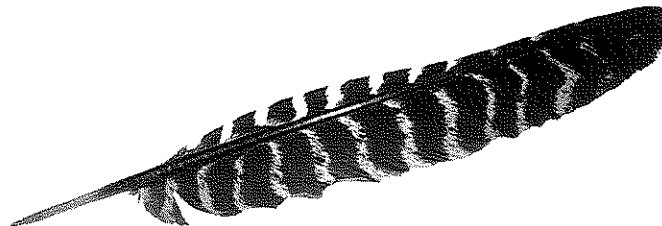
prevent conflict with research following the large fires of 2012. Of the 845 permits authorized, 569 were drawn, and 470 permits were purchased. Hunters harvested an estimated 455 sage-grouse, averaging 1.02 birds/hunter. Hunters returned one wing from 264 birds. These wings were examined at the annual sage-grouse wing bee to estimate age ratios, sex ratios, proportion of successful hens and timing of hatch.

Fall turkey – There are no reliable indicators for turkey population trends, but anecdotal observations indicated turkey production improved for the third year in a row and this was corroborated by increased hunter effort and harvest in both general and controlled fall hunts.

The fall turkey general season includes 17 WMUs in Western Oregon, where 4,000 permits were authorized (first-come, first-served) for the 2014 fall season. A total of 2,461 permits were issued. Due to the relative high mandatory reporting rates for fall turkey seasons, no phone surveys were conducted. For the general fall season the reporting rate was 72%. Hunter success averaged 45% for the 1,435 hunters who harvested 652 turkeys which was a 37% increase in harvest over last year. Mandatory reporting rate for the controlled fall turkey hunts was 90%. A total of 1,025 tags were available for the five eastern Oregon controlled fall turkey hunts. There were 801 successful applicants and 693 tags issued; of which 522 tag holders went hunting and bagged an estimated 269 turkeys which was a 24% increase in harvest over last year.

Spring Turkey – Harvest rates for turkey were obtained from the mandatory reporting system for the second year; however, since the deadline for reporting on spring tags is not until January 31st of the following year, spring 2014 harvest data is the most recent available (spring 2015 data will be available in February 2016). Surveys for the 2014 spring season indicate 12,896 hunters harvested 4,229 turkeys; representing a 9% increase in harvest from the previous year.

The youth spring turkey hunt continues to be very popular and well received. New questions in the mandatory reporting system allowed the department to determine that youth harvested 290 turkeys during the 2-day youth weekend. Youth harvested an additional 491 turkeys during the 47-day general spring season.



UPLAND GAME BIRD SEASON PROPOSALS

Regulation Proposals: For most upland game birds all aspects of the seasons (e.g. season dates, daily bag limits, possession limits) are covered by the 2015-20 upland game bird framework and presented in Table 2. However for some species, like sage-grouse, there is a controlled hunt where the permit numbers are determined annually based on fall population projections. Eastern Oregon fall turkey is another season where the number of hunts and permit numbers may be adjusted annually based on population trends or any damage/nuisance issues.

Table 2. 2015-16 season proposals for forest grouse, partridge, pheasant, quail, and general turkey.

2015-16 Upland Game Bird Season Proposals			
UPLAND GAME BIRDS	OPEN AREA	OPEN SEASON	Daily Bag limit
"Blue" and Ruffed Grouse	Statewide	Sep. 1 – Jan. 31	3 each species
Chukar and Hungarian (Gray) Partridge	Eastern Oregon cos	Oct. 10 – Jan. 31	8 (except Lower Klamath Hills)
Rooster Pheasant	Statewide	Oct. 10 – Dec. 31	2
California Quail	Western Oregon	Sep.1 – Jan. 31	10 in aggregate
	Eastern Oregon cos	Oct. 10 – Jan. 31	10
Mountain Quail	Western Oregon, Hood Rvr and Wasco cos	Sep. 1 – Jan. 31	10 in aggregate
	Crook, Gilliam, Grant, Klamath, Morrow, Umatilla, and Wallowa, Wheeler cos	Oct. 10 – Jan. 31	2
	Remaining Eastern Oregon cos	NO OPEN SEASON	
Spring Turkey	Statewide	Apr. 15 – May 31	1 (season limit 3)
Fall Turkey – General Western Oregon	17 W. Oregon Wildl. Mgmt Units.	Oct. 15 – Dec. 31	1 (season limit 2)

2015 Controlled Sage-grouse Hunt. The season framework for sage-grouse establishes a controlled hunt with a 9-day season that shall occur between Sept. 1-20, with a two bird daily and season bag limit. The 2015 proposed season dates are Sept. 12 -20. The number of controlled hunt permits is determined annually. The Department's policy is for sage-grouse harvest to not exceed 5% of the fall population and in practice, harvest is estimated at 3% or less 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 WMUs where sage-grouse occur, but permits were only offered for 10 WMUs in 2014.

At the time of this writing, staff is predicting a similar number of sage-grouse permits (~845) will be offered in 2015 as in 2014. For the second year, staff will propose that no permits will be

available for the Lookout Mountain and Sumpter WMUS as well as the Trout Creek Mountain portion of the Whitehorse WMU .

Permit numbers are determined annually based on a mathematical formula combining spring lek count information, brood survey information, hunter participation rates, 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 number of permits offered by WMU during the past two years is shown in Table 3. The formula is designed to authorize the take of 5% or less of the estimated fall population. The 5% is the maximum allowed harvest and not a harvest goal. A 2010 paper in the Journal of Wildlife Management examined several years of sage-grouse band recovery data from Nevada and Colorado and concluded that harvest rates of 11% or less of the fall population are unlikely to have any meaningful effect on the 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.

At this time, the 2015 lek survey data have not been completely analyzed and production surveys have not been initiated, however preliminary data suggests the breeding population of sage-grouse increased from the previous year in most areas. More information about population trends will be presented on August 7, after production surveys are completed.

An important benefit of hunting sage-grouse is collection of essential biological information. 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. Age-at-harvest models are also being refined for upland game birds that allow for population reconstruction based simply on age at harvest data and known hunting effort. 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 is among the most conservative. Under current harvest strategies, population data indicate population trends are within the range of historical variation since 1980. 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. Eliminating responsible and regulated hunting would likely mislead the public by implying hunting is responsible for the current status of sage-grouse, and thus distracting attention from the real threats to sage-grouse which are habitat loss and fragmentation. The Department 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.

On March 5, 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced its determination that listing the greater sage-grouse range-wide under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was warranted, but precluded by higher-priority listing actions. Therefore, sage-grouse are a "candidate" species under the federal ESA, 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 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 over-utilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes now or in the foreseeable future". The USFWS will, by court order, decide in late 2015 if sage-grouse should be listed as threatened or endangered under the federal ESA.

Table 3. Oregon sage-grouse hunting permit numbers for 2013 and 2014. The calculation of proposed permit numbers for 2015 will take into consideration production data not available at the time of this writing.

Sage-grouse Permit Recommendations			
MANAGEMENT UNIT	2015 RECOMMENDATIONS	2014 PERMITS	2013 PERMITS
Sumpter		0	10
Lookout Mountain	Available at August 7	0	10
Beulah	Commission Meeting	150	150
Malheur River		100	100
Owyhee		75	75
Whitehorse		70	70
Steens Mountain		75	75
Beatys Butte		150	150
Juniper		70	75
Silvies		20	20
N. Wagontire		35	35
S. Wagontire		20	20
Warner		80	80
TOTAL		845	870

2015 Controlled Fall Turkey Season. Specific hunts and tag numbers for the controlled fall turkey season are not covered under 2015-2020 Upland Game Bird Framework. Responding to the general trend of increasing turkey populations and associated damage complaints the Department has expanded fall turkey hunting opportunities in recent years; however no further expansion is being proposed for the 2015 season. With only calendar adjustments, staff is proposing the same five eastern Oregon controlled fall turkey hunts and the same number of tags (1,025) as authorized last year.

It is unlawful to obtain and possess more than two 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. The 2014-15 Game Bird Regulations describe the legal hunting methods for fall turkey and shooting hours (dogs may be used during the fall turkey season).

2015 Western Oregon Fee Pheasant Hunts. For over 20 years the Department has offered special western Oregon fee pheasant hunts on public hunting areas. Since the hunts occur entirely or partially outside of the general statewide pheasant season, a special season must be adopted for these site-specific hunts. 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. The hunts are currently offered on the following four wildlife areas in western Oregon: E. E. Wilson, Sauvie Island, Fern Ridge and Denman. The department annually allocates ~3,300 rooster pheasants among the four areas.

In these hunts rooster 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 shortfall is paid with upland game bird stamp revenue.

Hunters are generally very supportive of this program with the main complaint being they would like to see more birds stocked. However, increasing the total number of birds released would increase program costs without any assurance of a corresponding revenue increase.

Based on performance of past seasons, staff is proposing a 2015 season similar to that held in 2014. A \$17.00 pheasant tag, obtainable through license agents, allowing hunters two birds would again be required. Proposed season dates are in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Proposed locations and dates for the 2015 Western Oregon Fee Pheasant Hunts.

2015 Proposed Western Oregon Fee Pheasant Hunts	
HUNT AREA	DATES
Fern Ridge Wildlife Area	September 14 – October 11, 2015
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area	September 21 – October 4, 2015
Denman Wildlife Area	September 21 – October 9, 2015
E. E. Wilson Wildlife Area	October 1 – October 31, 2015

2015 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 11 other areas throughout the state (Table 5). The hunts provide a controlled opportunity for young hunters to experience bird hunting without competition from adult hunters. Youths ages 17 and younger are eligible to participate. The program has been popular and well received but has been experiencing a declining trend in participation for most locations in recent years. However in 2014, 865 youth hunters participated in the program, an 11% increase over the previous year. Much of this increase is attributed to I&E (Myrna Britton) who distributed posters to license agents and electronically contacted youths who recently passed the hunter education course.

In addition to the youth hunts, at some locations sporting clay trailers are 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. All participants, including adults are required to wear a blaze orange hat and vest, in addition to shooting glasses (eye protection).

Youth 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.

Table 5. Proposed 2015 youth upland hunt dates, locations, and maximum number of hunters allowed on an area at any one time (hunter limitation). A mentored hunt for youths will be held on Sept. 20 at E. E. Wilson Wildlife Area.

2015 Proposed Youth Hunts for Pheasants		
HUNT AREA	DATES	HUNTER LIMITATION
Baker City (private land)	Sept. 26 & 27	50
Denman Wildlife Area	Sept. 19 & 20	85
E. E. Wilson Wildlife Area	Sept. 26 & 27	70
Fern Ridge Wildlife Area	Sept. 12 & 13	75
Irrigon Wildlife Area	Sept. 26 & 27	15
John Day (private land)	Sept. 19 & 20	30
Klamath Wildlife Area	Sept. 12 & 13	80
Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area	Sept. 19 & 20	35
Mid-Columbia (near The Dalles)	Sept. 19 & 20	20
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area	Sept. 19 & 20	50
Willow Creek (Prineville area)	Sept. 19 & 20	80
E. E. Wilson W.A. Mentored Youth	Sept. 20	20

2015 Pheasant Hunting Workshops. Pheasant hunting workshops have proven to be very popular. To meet demand, the Department's Outdoor Skills Education Program is proposing several workshops this year at three locations (Table 6). Additional workshops may also be scheduled during the general pheasant season. Each workshop will be targeted at families, adults, or women. Topics will include safe gun handling, shooting skills, and pheasant hunt. The number of participants in each workshop will be limited. General season regulations will apply.

Table 6. Oregon Outdoor Skills pheasant hunting workshops.

2015 Proposed Pheasant Hunting Workshops	
HUNT AREA	DATES
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area	September 12 & 13 (Family Workshops)
E. E. Wilson Wildlife Area	September 12 (Family), 19 (Women's Hunt), 25 (Family)
Denman Wildlife Area	November 7 (Women's Hunt)

2015 Lower Klamath Hills Youth Chukar Hunt. The Klamath Chapter of the Oregon Hunters Association, in cooperation with the Department, will again offer a youth hunting opportunity for chukar in the Lower Klamath Hills regulated hunt area. The hunt is planned for October 10 and 11. 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 chukars 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 rules 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. 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. Daily bag limit is 2 chukars.



2015-16 PROPOSED UPLAND GAME BIRD FALCONRY SEASONS

The use of falcons for taking upland game birds is practiced by few hunters 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.

Open Season¹: September 1, 2015 - March 31, 2016

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: Three times the daily bag limit.

Sage-grouse Season¹: September 1, 2015 - January 31, 2016

Daily Bag Limit: One sage-grouse

Season Limit: Two sage-grouse

Open Areas: Those areas open to controlled sage-grouse hunting.

¹While the seasons are long there are about 140 licensed falconers in Oregon, so the harvest of upland game bird species is believed to be relatively small. A conservative sage-grouse season and bag 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

PACIFIC FLYWAY POPULATION STATUS AND HARVEST

Population Status: At this time, the USFWS has only released 2015 population status reports for mourning doves and band-tailed pigeons. The remaining USFWS population status updates will be provided in a supplement to the Commission prior to August 7th.

Mourning Doves: Mourning dove abundance is assessed by a model using a combination of banding data (harvest rate) and hunter harvest information to estimate population size. Because doves must be harvested to generate this information, the derived population estimates produced are for the preceding year. Oregon has been banding mourning doves to generate information for this population model since 2008. Last summer staff put forth an exceptional effort and banded 1,178 doves across the state.

For 2014, the USFWS estimated 43,697,000 mourning doves resided in the Western Management Unit, which includes Oregon, California, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, Arizona, and Utah. Mourning dove population trends can also be assessed by the US Geological Survey's Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). For Oregon, during the past 10-years the trend is inconclusive.

Band-tailed Pigeons: Band-tailed pigeon population status is assessed by a model calculating the trend in pigeons counted at 51 mineral sites in mid-July in California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. In Oregon, ODFW staff has been conducting these surveys at 21 mineral sites since 2004. Like mourning doves, calculated population trends are for the preceding year. Unlike mourning doves, methods to assess total abundance of pigeons have not been developed.

For 2014, the USFWS estimated positive population trends over the most recent five and 10-year time periods in Oregon. Range wide, trends are inconclusive. BBS data can also be used to assess population trends for pigeons. Over the long (1968-2014), mid (2005-2014), and short-term (2010-2014) trends are inconclusive for pigeons in Oregon, though a range-wide the trend is negative over the long-term, but inconclusive over the mid and short-term. When considering all factors, the Pacific Coast Population of band-tailed pigeons is currently stable.

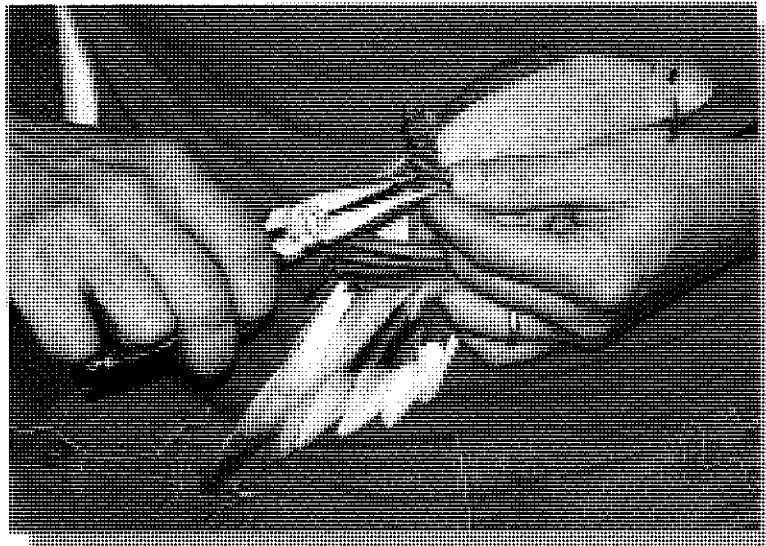
Harvest: The Harvest Information Program (HIP), a cooperative harvest survey between the USFWS and states, was implemented in Oregon during 1995. The USFWS estimates effort and harvest by sampling hunters from records provided by the Oregon licensing system. This cooperative survey continues to be refined yearly.

The USFWS has only released 2014 harvest reports for mourning doves and band-tailed pigeons. Remaining harvest information will be provided in a supplement to the Commission prior to August 7th.

Mourning Doves: Harvest and effort information from HIP suggest that 3,600 hunters spent 8,800 days afield and harvested 19,600 mourning doves in Oregon in 2014. In 2013, 3,800 hunters spent 10,500 days afield and harvested 28,400 mourning doves.

Band-tailed Pigeons: Harvest and effort information from HIP suggest that 400 hunters spent 1,100 days afield and harvested 1,200 band-tailed pigeons in Oregon. These estimates are similar to 2013 when 400 hunters spent 1,200 days afield and harvested 1,600 pigeons.

Waterfowl Validation/Stamp Sales: State of Oregon waterfowl validation (stamp) sales to resident hunters for the 2014/15 season totaled 58,895, an increase of less than 1% from 2013/14. However, 41% of adults and juveniles who purchased a Sports Pac (Sports Pacs account for 70% of validation sales) did not return to a license agent to obtain their waterfowl validation after July 1st, leaving the total number of resident waterfowl validations actually held by hunters at 34,870. Total 2014/15 nonresident game bird stamps (valid for both waterfowl and upland game bird hunting) sales were 4,234, down 17% from 2013/14. The decrease in nonresident sales is likely inadvertently due to allowing nonresidents to hunt for mourning doves, wild turkeys, band-tailed pigeons, and snipe with a 3-day nonresident game bird license in 2014. Prior to this, the purchase of this 3-day license was conditional upon the purchase of a nonresident game bird validation. With the inclusion of game bird species for which a validation is not required, the conditional link in the license system was removed and many hunters likely only purchased the 3-day license instead of both documents.



MIGRATORY GAME BIRD 2015-16 SEASON PROPOSALS

Season frameworks for migratory game birds are established annually in late-July by the USFWS. The Department works through the Pacific Flyway Council process and the USFWS regulatory process to make recommendations on these federal frameworks. All recommendations to the Commission must meet final USFWS framework guidelines and all seasons selected by the Commission are subject to approval by the USFWS.

The Pacific Flyway Council will not meet to propose frameworks to the USFWS for most migratory game bird seasons until July 24, 2015. The USFWS will meet to review those proposals and adopt final frameworks July 29-30, 2015. Therefore, most migratory game bird season recommendations are not presented at this time as recommendations cannot be finalized until the USFWS approves final frameworks. **Season proposals for the following migratory game birds will be provided to the Commission via a supplemental packet in early August.**

- **DUCK AND MERGANSER**
 - **SEPTEMBER CANADA GEESE**
 - **FALL/WINTER GEESE**
 - **BLACK BRANT**
 - **WILSON'S SNIPE**
 - **AMERICAN COOT**
 - **FALCONRY**
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- **MOURNING DOVE**

Framework: Under the national harvest strategy, when mourning dove abundance dictates a standard mourning dove season, Oregon is allowed a 60-consecutive day season between September 1, 2015 and January 15, 2016 with a daily bag and possession limits of 15 and 45, respectively.

Recommendation: In most years the effective length of Oregon's mourning dove season is governed by the first cool temperatures or early storms that initiate southern migration, which usually occurs in early September. The following season proposal is recommended in accordance with the federal framework which calls for a standard season framework as outlined by the harvest strategy for the Western Management Unit for mourning doves and represents no change from last season.

Proposed Season:

Open Season:	September 1 - October 30, 2015
Open Area:	Entire State
Daily Bag Limit:	15 mourning doves
Possession Limit:	45 mourning doves

Public Comment: A comment was received requesting mourning dove season being split into a two period season allowing some of the 60-day season to be utilized in November or later. The Department has had discussions about investigating this possibility, however, it is not currently allowed under Federal Frameworks.

- **BAND-TAILED PIGEON**

Framework: Under the Flyway adopted harvest strategy, when band-tailed pigeon abundance dictates a restrictive season, Oregon is allowed a 9-consecutive day season between September 15, 2015 and January 1, 2016, with a daily bag and possession limits of 2 and 6, respectively.

Recommendation Although there has been concern over the status of the pigeon population in past years, hunting restrictions have reduced hunter numbers and harvest to minimal levels, which are believed to have no significant impact on the population. In July of 2010 the Pacific Flyway Council adopted an updated management plan for Pacific Coast band-tailed pigeons with a harvest strategy based on the population status derived from the coordinated July mineral site survey. The following season provisions are recommended in accordance with the federal framework which calls for a restrictive season framework as outlined by the harvest strategy for the Pacific Coast Population of band-tailed pigeons and represents no change from the previous 24 seasons.

Proposed Season:

Open Season:	September 15 – September 23, 2015
Open Area:	Entire State
Daily Bag Limit:	2 band-tailed pigeons
Possession Limit:	6 band-tailed pigeons

Public Comment: A comment was received requesting the band-tailed pigeon season open on September 1st or earlier. However, the current federal frameworks do not allow seasons to open prior to September 15th. This season timing is based on research which shows a small percentage of the Pacific Coast Population is still nesting in late August and early September, delaying the opening of the season allows adult pigeons to complete the rearing of young prior to initiation of harvest.

- **CROW**

Framework: Liberal seasons are offered outside of months when nesting may occur. Per treaty stipulations between the United States and Mexico, a 124 day season is allowed during a calendar year. Depredation and nuisance crows can still be taken outside of established hunting seasons under a federal depredation order; however, federal action since 2010 has made the take of depredation and nuisance birds more restrictive. Now crows taken under the depredation order must be taken with non-toxic ammunition and all take must be reported to the USFWS.

Recommendation Adoption of maximum days allowed.

Proposed Season:

Open Season:	October 1, 2015 – January 31, 2016
Open Area:	Entire State
Daily Bag Limit:	No limit
Possession Limit:	No limit

Public Comment: None received.

NOTICE OF FUTURE CHANGES TO THE GAME BIRDS REGULATORY SCHEDULE

In 2013 the USFWS issued a Final Supplemental Environmental Statement for the Hunting of Migratory Game Birds (SEIS). This document is a periodic requirement of the Service and is often used to examine current regulatory processes. Over time, the migratory game bird regulation setting schedule had evolved into a two "season" process, where some frameworks were adopted early (June) and some were adopted late (July). This is the reason the Department cannot propose waterfowl seasons until very late July, since they are considered "late-seasons." However, over time the current regulatory schedule became more and more untenable for the USFWS, as the federal rule making process became more burdensome. With the new SEIS, the USFWS has adopted a new regulatory schedule which combines the early and late season regulatory meetings and moves them both approximately ten months earlier.

Beginning with the 2016 migratory game bird seasons, the USFWS will have adopted final frameworks for migratory game bird hunting by the end of February 2016 and will require the states to have selected seasons by the end of April 2016. Thus, the Department and the Commission will need to propose and adopt migratory game bird seasons for 2016 during March April, a full three months prior than is currently done. Hence, the Department will propose 2016 migratory game bird regulations at the Commission's April 2016 meeting. Since the upland game bird seasons are currently adopted as 5-year frameworks by the Commission, those seasons, with the exception of sage-grouse permit numbers, will also be finalized at that time. The Department will propose final sage-grouse permit numbers later in the summer, prior to the season opener. This change should benefit the hunting public as they will know the final season dates earlier and will have more time to plan fall hunting trips.

It should be noted that final frameworks for migratory game birds will be adopted prior to collection of current year biological data (population surveys). Currently, mourning doves and band-tailed pigeon framework proposals are based on models using previous year data to recommend frameworks. Under the new process, duck seasons would be set using predictions of the current year's breeding populations based off of historic population surveys (in some instances 60 years of historic population data). Goose season frameworks would simply be based off of the most current data, similar to band-tailed pigeons and mourning doves.

While there is risk in frameworks being more liberal or conservative than would be allowed if using current year data, simulations by the Service detected very few instances of different framework results when using historic vs. current year biological data. Below is a table outlining the current schedule and the schedule for 2016.

Table 1. Comparison of the game bird regulatory cycle under the current federal schedule and the 2016 regulatory schedule.

Current Regulatory Schedule		2016 Regulatory Schedule	
Time of Action	Action	Time of Action	Action
July 2014	Band-tailed pigeon surveys used for setting 2015 frameworks	August 2014	Upland Game Bird Frameworks for 2015 - 2020 adopted
August 2014	Upland Game Bird Frameworks for 2015 - 2020 adopted	May 2015	Waterfowl surveys used for setting 2016 frameworks
August & September 2014	Mourning dove information for setting 2015 frameworks	July 2015	Band-tailed pigeon surveys used for setting 2016 frameworks
May 2015	Waterfowl surveys used for setting 2015 frameworks	August & September 2015	Mourning dove information for setting 2016 frameworks
June 2015	USFWS adopts 2015 frameworks for mourning dove and band-tailed pigeons	October 2015	USFWS adopts 2016 frameworks for all migratory game birds
June 2015	Department proposes 2015 mourning dove, band-tailed pigeon, and crow seasons	February & March 2016	Department proposes 2015 upland and migratory game bird seasons
June 2015	Department proposes 2015 upland game bird seasons and fall turkey tag numbers	April 2016	Commission adopts 2016 upland and migratory game bird seasons
July 2015	Sage-grouse brood surveys for setting 2015 permit numbers (in-part)	June 2016	Department publishes 2016 game bird regulations
July 2015	USFWS adopts 2015 frameworks for waterfowl	August 2016	Department proposes 2016 sage-grouse permit numbers
August 2015	Department proposes 2015 sage-grouse permit numbers	August 2016	Commission adopts 2016 sage-grouse permit numbers
August 2015	Department proposes 2015 duck, goose, and snipe seasons	September 2016	Seasons open
August 2015	Commission adopts 2015 game bird regulations		
August 2015	Department publishes 2015 game bird regulations		
September 2015	Seasons open		

GAME BIRD REGULATION CHANGES

At the August 2014 Commission Meeting, staff asked the Commission to direct the Department to implement changes to the Sauvie Island Wildlife Area Controlled Game Bird Hunt system where the current first-come, first-served hunt site selection process for successful applicants would change to one where random order determined hunting site selection for successful applicants, beginning with the 2015-16 season. Changes were not proposed to be implemented immediately for the 2014-15 hunt year as significant alterations would need to be made to the infrastructure at Sauvie Island Wildlife Area and to the Department's controlled hunt computer system. Originally the changes were planned to be completed by the 2015-16 season. Unfortunately, due to other licensing system priorities, the necessary changes to the controlled hunt program to implement the new Sauvie Island system could not be completed in time for the 2015-16 seasons. The Department does foresee the changes can be made in time for the 2016-17 seasons.