

**GAME BIRD PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR 2019-20  
UPLAND and MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SEASONS**



**FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE OREGON FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION  
April 19, 2019**



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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 (Commission) direction concerning hunting seasons.*

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## UPLAND GAME BIRDS

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### SEASON FRAMEWORKS

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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 wild turkey seasons.

Based on external and internal comments received over the previous five years, the Department solicited comments on proposed framework changes at 23 public meetings held across the state in May 2014. Biologically sound changes receiving public support were incorporated into the current framework adopted by the Commission. Upland game bird seasons proposed in the draft 2019-20 Game Bird Regulations reflect framework criteria.

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### POPULATION STATUS AND HARVEST

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The following information about the status and harvest of Oregon’s upland game birds is presented to provide additional background and context for the 2019-20 regulation proposals.

**General Trends:** Annual fluctuations in upland bird numbers are normal and these short-term changes can often be attributed to weather conditions, and the resulting effect on habitat. These changes should not be the basis for setting annual hunting seasons because many upland game bird populations exhibit high annual mortality rates whether hunted or not. Generally, it is unnecessary to modify seasons and bag limits for the recovery of upland game bird 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, hunting pressure on upland game bird populations is generally density dependent, i.e. when populations go down, hunting pressure decreases. Long-term population trends are most often related 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 decline sharply. From 2007-2015 (2011 was an exception) precipitation was below average and consequently suppressed upland game bird populations, especially chukar 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).

Weather in the winter of 2016-17 included deep persistent snow cover that caused high mortality in some areas, reducing breeding populations. Despite a very dry summer in 2018, production

inventories indicated a strong year for most upland game bird populations. Chukar, gray partridge, ring-necked pheasant and California quail all showed a notable increase over the previous year. Forest grouse were very abundant in western Oregon, but showed poor production in eastern Oregon. The winter of 2018-19 was relatively mild until late February when in a short period of time snowpack exceeded the long term average nearly statewide. Upcoming conditions in the spring and through the summer will shape the localized conditions for population changes.

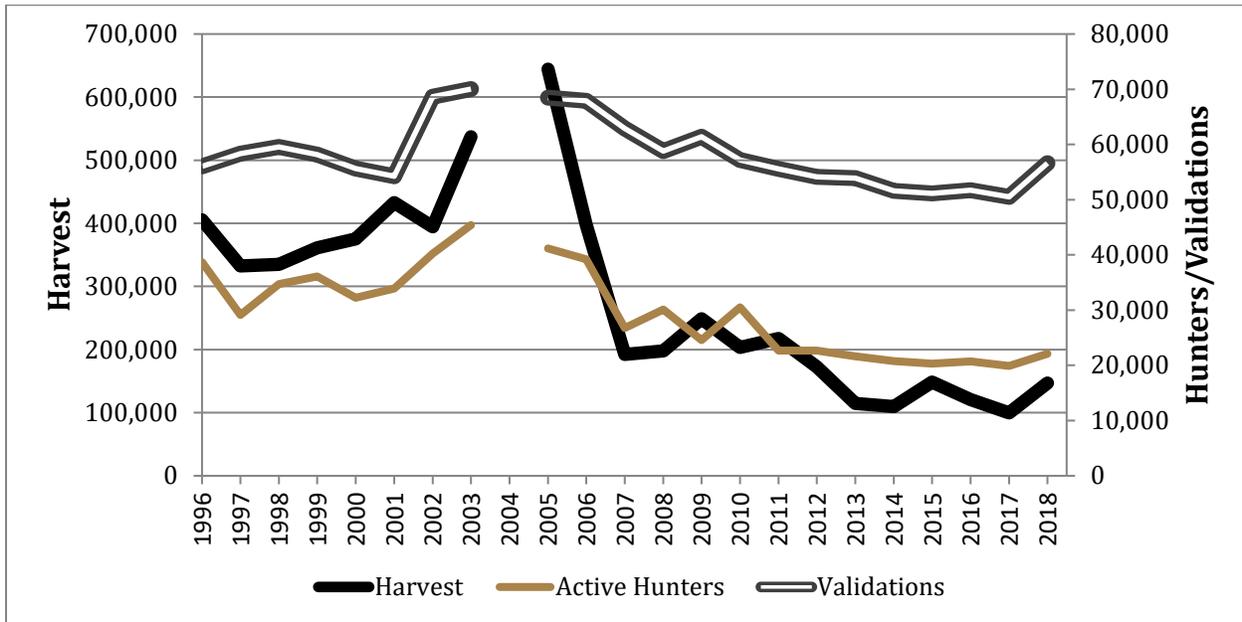


Figure 1. Long-term trend of upland game bird harvest and hunters (no survey in 2004).

**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 season forecasts. Most birds in the fall harvest are hatched in the same year, so reproductive success is an important predictor of hunter success. There are no reliable indicators for turkey population trends.

Peak hatch for most upland game birds in Oregon is mid-May through mid-June. Consequently, it is too early to predict upland game bird reproductive success for 2019. Improved snowpack in late winter should have a positive outcome for water availability on the landscape, habitat, cover, and forage, including insects. Chicks that are successfully hatched should find the structural and forage elements necessary for good survival in 2019.

**Harvest Surveys:** A random phone survey of ~3,600 upland game bird validation holders was used to estimate 2018-19 upland game bird harvest (Table 1). Upland game bird harvest was up for every huntable species compared to 2017-18. Few people specifically hunt Hungarian partridge so the estimated harvest is highly variable from year to year due to the sample size of hunters called. Separate harvest surveys are conducted for sage-grouse (Table 2) and wild turkeys (Table 3). Wild turkey surveys are included under the mandatory reporting system; sage-grouse harvest estimates are based on direct mailing of survey questionnaires to successful controlled hunt applicants. A supplemental email survey was sent to sage-grouse hunters in 2018.

Table 1. Results of 2018-19 upland game bird harvest surveys in Oregon in comparison to last season and the previous 5-year average.

		Total Harvest for 2018-19	% Change from 2017-18	5-Year Average
Blue Grouse	Hunters	10,258	7%	9,972
	Days	76,973	-3%	87,328
	Harvest	15,945	86%	11,751
Ruffed Grouse	Hunters	13,006	7%	12,008
	Days	123,648	-5%	123,992
	Harvest	36,879	14%	32,027
Mountain Quail	Hunters	3,481	6%	3,869
	Days	18,094	33%	23,674
	Harvest	4,848	10%	5,598
California Quail	Hunters	5,129	12%	4,894
	Days	35,535	-7%	35,517
	Harvest	32,098	63%	22,398
Chukar	Hunters	5,129	12%	4,768
	Days	29,139	34%	23,142
	Harvest	32,077	37%	26,784
Hungarian (Gray) Partridge	Hunters	916	12%	1,082
	Days	9,496	296%	5,509
	Harvest	7,132	653%	2,744
Ring-necked Pheasant	Hunters	4,946	-10%	5,630
	Days	22,139	-2%	31,713
	Harvest	16,454	59%	17,285

*Sage-grouse* – A total of 740 permits were offered for the 2018 season, down from 800 in 2017. The Lookout Mountain and Sumpter Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) remained closed due to long-term population declines. The Juniper WMU was closed in 2018 in response to poor population returns following a large-scale wildfire on the unit. The Trout Creek Mountains portion of the Whitehorse WMU remained closed, largely to prevent conflict with research following the large fires of 2012. Permits were reduced from 30 to 20 in North Wagontire. The south Wagontire unit remained closed due to the declining population in the Picture Rock Pass area.

Of the 740 permits authorized for 9 WMUs, some WMUs were undersubscribed during the controlled hunt draw resulting in 583 permits drawn. Hunters harvested an estimated 406 sage-grouse (down 1.1% from 2017), averaging 1.01 birds/hunter (Table 2). Hunter-returned wings ( $n = 251$ ) were examined at the annual sage-grouse wing bee to estimate age ratios, sex ratios, proportion of successful hens and timing of hatch. In 2018, wings showed 1.4 juveniles/hen in the harvest, slightly lower than Oregon's long-term average of 1.5 juveniles/hen, but an improvement over the 2017 ratio of 1.0 juveniles/hen. In 2018, biologists conducted the most comprehensive sage-grouse lek survey to date in Oregon, surveying 70% of known leks. The minimum spring

population estimate from lek counts was down -10.2% from 2017, the second consecutive year of decrease (Fig. 2).

Table 2. 2018 sage-grouse hunting effort and harvest by wildlife management unit.

Hunt	Tags Authorized	Tags Drawn	Tags Issued	Did Hunt	Hunter Days	Birds Harvested	Birds/Hunter	% Response
J51	0	0	0	--	--	--	--	--
J64	0	0	0	--	--	--	--	--
J65	150	52	40	33	53	30	0.91	67
J66	100	79	65	67	128	53	0.78	61
J67	75	37	28	24	52	15	0.63	78
J68	70	70	49	40	69	52	1.31	73
J69	75	75	57	55	105	63	1.15	76
J70	150	150	112	105	201	121	1.15	78
J71	0	0	0	--	--	--	--	--
J72	20	20	16	14	33	9	0.60	70
J73A	20	20	14	13	21	14	1.11	70
J73B	0	0	0	--	--	--	--	--
J74	80	80	61	53	106	50	0.94	63
<b>Totals</b>	<b>740</b>	<b>583</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>761</b>	<b>406</b>	<b>1.01</b>	<b>71</b>

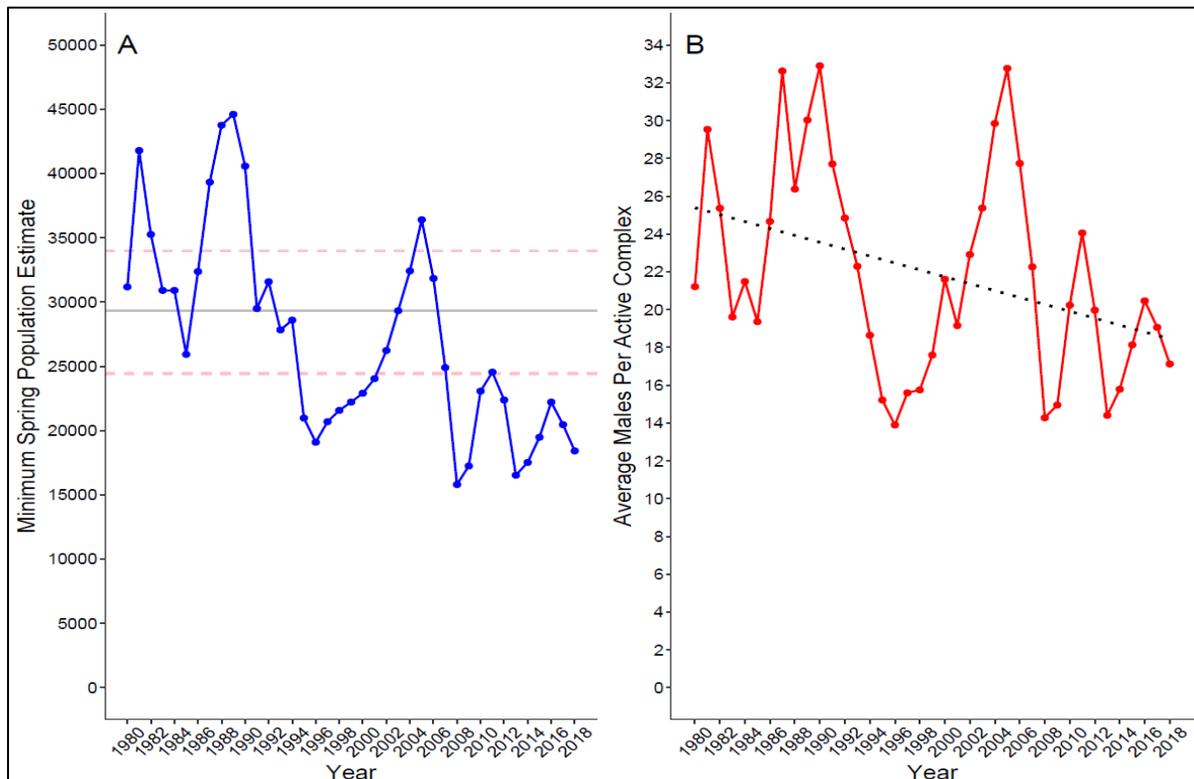


Figure 2. Greater sage-grouse population trends in Oregon, 1980 – 2018. (A) Estimated spring breeding population of greater sage-grouse, gray line indicates 2003 baseline population level of 29,327 individuals, pink dotted lines indicate the 95% confidence interval around the 2003 baseline estimate. (B) Change in average lek complex size (males per active lek complex).

Turkey – Harvest estimates for turkeys are obtained from the mandatory reporting system. Final survey results for the 2018 spring and fall seasons are not available at the time of this report due to the postponement of the mandatory reporting deadline to April 15. Preliminary results will be presented at the commission meeting.

Spring Turkey - Although 2018 harvest data is not yet available, tags issued for general spring turkey were up 3.2% from the previous year. The youth spring turkey hunt continues to be very popular and well received. On average, youth account for about 15% of total spring harvest of turkeys.

Fall Turkey – The western Oregon General Fall Turkey Season includes 17 WMUs where 4,000 permits were authorized (first-come, first-served). Tags issued for the western Oregon general season increased 6.1% from the previous year. A total of 1,100 tags were available for the three eastern Oregon fall turkey hunts, all of which were issued. Fall harvest is expected to be similar to the estimated harvest in 2017; however, final harvest estimates will not be available until after the mandatory reporting deadline.

Table 3. Number of tags authorized and issued for the 2018 spring and fall turkey seasons. Harvest information is not yet available.

HUNT	Tags Authorized	Tags Issued	Hunters	Hunter Days	Birds Harvested	Birds/Hunter	% Response
General Spring	Unlimited	50,076					
Western Oregon Fall	4,000	2,410					
Blue Mountain Fall	600	602					
Northeast Fall	450	450					
White River Fall Controlled	50	40					
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>53,578</b>					



## 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 2015-2020 upland game bird framework and presented in Table 4. 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 tag numbers may be adjusted annually based on population trends or damage/nuisance issues.

Table 4. The 2019-20 season proposals for forest grouse, partridge, pheasant, quail, and general turkey.

<b>2019-20 Upland Game Bird Season Proposals</b>			
<b>UPLAND GAME BIRDS</b>	<b>OPEN AREA</b>	<b>OPEN SEASON</b>	<b>Daily Bag limit</b>
"Blue" and Ruffed Grouse	Statewide	Sept. 1 – Jan. 31	3 each species
Chukar and Hungarian (Gray) Partridge	Eastern Oregon counties	Oct. 5 – Jan. 31	8 (except Lower Klamath Hills = 2)
Rooster Pheasant	Statewide	Oct. 5 – Dec. 31	2
California Quail	Western Oregon	Sept. 1 – Jan. 31	10 in aggregate
	Eastern Oregon counties	Oct. 5 – Jan. 31	10
Mountain Quail	Western Oregon, Hood River and Wasco counties	Sept. 1 – Jan. 31	10 in aggregate
	Crook, Gilliam, Grant, Klamath, Morrow, Umatilla, Wallowa, and Wheeler cos	Oct. 5 – Jan. 31	2
	Remaining Eastern Oregon Counties	NO OPEN SEASON	
Spring Turkey – General	Statewide	Apr. 15 – May 31	1 (season limit 3)
Youth Spring Turkey – General	Statewide	Apr. 11 – Apr. 12	
Fall Turkey – General Western Oregon	17 Western Oregon WMUs	Oct. 15 – Dec. 31	1 (season limit 2 Fall Turkey tags)
Fall Turkey – General Central	16 Eastern Oregon WMUs	Oct. 5 – Dec. 31	1 (Season limit 1)
Fall Turkey – General Northeast	13 Eastern Oregon WMUs	Oct. 5 – Dec. 31	

**NOTE:** possession limit of forest grouse, partridge, pheasant and quail is three times the daily bag limit.

**2019 Controlled Sage-grouse Hunt.** The season framework for sage-grouse establishes a controlled hunt with a 9-day season between September 1-20. The 2019 proposed season dates are September 7 -15 with a two bird daily and season bag limit. The Department's policy is for sage-grouse harvest not to 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; a limited number of sage-grouse permits are proposed in 9 of the 21 WMUs where sage-grouse occur.

The breeding population of sage-grouse increased in 2014-2016, then downcycled in 2017 and 2018, typical of upland game bird populations. At this time, volunteers and state and federal personnel are conducting the 2019 lek surveys. Over the next couple of months, lek data will be analyzed and biologists will conduct production surveys in July. 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. Permit numbers for controlled sage-grouse hunting will be set in early August 2019 by temporary rule. This year staff is proposing to reopen hunting in the Trout Creek Mountains of the Whitehorse WMU for the first time since 2012 when significant research efforts were undertaken to document post-fire recovery and habitat after the large Holloway Fire. There has been a strong recovery of the breeding population in the Trout Creek Mountains. This area will be managed as a subunit of the Whitehorse WMU and will have its own tag allocation, primarily to keep hunters well distributed throughout the area. Other existing closures will be maintained, including Juniper, South Wagontire, Lookout Mountain, and Sumpter WMUs due to declining populations.

As stated above, permit numbers are calculated from a 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 5. 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. Research has concluded that harvest rates of 10% or less are unlikely to have any meaningful effect on the population dynamics of sage-grouse.

An important benefit of hunting sage-grouse is collection of essential biological information. Each hunter is provided 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 closely manage harvest and hunters and collect important information. Collecting this information by other means would be difficult and costly. The Department will continue to evaluate the limited harvest of sage-grouse in the state on an annual basis; 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. On September 22, 2015, the USFWS determined greater sage-grouse did not warrant protection under the ESA because unprecedented, landscape-scale conservation efforts across the western United States had significantly reduced the threats to greater sage-grouse. This collaborative, science-based greater sage-grouse strategy is likely the largest land conservation effort in U.S. history. The main threats to sage-grouse were, and are, 1) habitat loss, fragmentation, and modification and 2) inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms, particularly in relation to energy and other development. In Oregon, two of the largest threats are invasive species (non-native annual grasses and conifer encroachment) and wildfire. The USFWS also evaluated the "utilization" (e.g., hunting) of sage-grouse and concluded, "the greater sage-grouse is not threatened by over-utilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes now or in the foreseeable future."

Table 5. Oregon sage-grouse hunting permit numbers in 2017 and 2018. Permit numbers for 2019 will be adopted by temporary rule in early August after population and production surveys are completed.

<b>Sage-grouse Permit Recommendations</b>			
<b>MANAGEMENT UNIT</b>	<b>2017 PERMITS</b>	<b>2018 PERMITS</b>	<b>2019 RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
Beulah	150	150	Permit numbers will be adopted in early August after completion of population surveys.
Malheur River	100	100	
Owyhee	75	75	
Trout Creek Mountains <sup>1</sup>	0	0	
E. Whitehorse <sup>2</sup>	70	70	
Steens Mountain	75	75	
Beatys Butte	150	150	0
Juniper	50	0	
Silvies	20	20	
North Wagontire	30	20	
South Wagontire	0	0	
Warner	80	80	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>740</b>	

<sup>1</sup> The part of unit 68 south of Whitehorse Ranch Rd; west of Hwy 95; and east of Fields-Denio Rd.

<sup>2</sup> Unit 68 excluding that area described for Trout Creek Mountains hunt.

2019 Controlled Fall Turkey Season. Specific hunts and tag numbers for eastern Oregon fall turkey seasons are not covered in the 2015-2020 Upland Game Bird Framework. Responding to the general trend of increasing turkey populations and associated nuisance/damage complaints, the Department recently expanded fall turkey hunting opportunities in eastern Oregon; there are now two general season hunts with a limited number of tags (available over-the-counter, on a first-come first-served basis) and one controlled hunt. Because fall turkey seasons allow either-sex harvest, they can serve as a population management tool, while offering some additional recreational opportunity. In response to field staff requests for tools to deal with nuisance/damage issues, four additional WMUs are proposed for inclusion in the eastern Oregon limited fall turkey hunt: Biggs, Maupin, Columbia Basin, and Owyhee. The new units will be included in the Blue Mountains hunt,

but will be renamed to “Central”. General season fall tags for eastern Oregon have proven popular with hunters, selling out within 2 weeks of availability. However, only about 60% of tag holders actually utilize the opportunity, and about half of those hunters are successful. Staff is proposing to offer an additional 400 fall tags in eastern Oregon for 2019, including 300 tags for the Central fall turkey hunt, and 100 for the Northeast. Assuming similar participation levels, the increase in tags will result in the additional harvest of <100 wild turkeys in eastern Oregon. We project this will result in hen harvest of 2-3%, well below the threshold (10%) for population decrease.

The two eastern Oregon general season hunts, Northeast and Central (formerly Blue Mountains), are proposed to open October 5 and end December 31, 2019, however only private land would be open during the last month of the season (December 1-31).

Due to the popularity of the White River Controlled Fall Turkey hunt, which usually averages about three applicants for each of the 50 available tags, staff is proposing this hunt remain a controlled hunt. Maintaining the controlled hunt status for the White River Hunt (K41) will ensure interested hunters will have an equitable chance of obtaining a tag.

Hunters can purchase two western Oregon general fall turkey tags, or obtain one fall turkey tag for eastern Oregon and one western Oregon general season fall turkey tag per season. The 2019-20 Game Bird Regulations will describe the legal hunting methods for fall turkey and shooting hours (dogs may be used during the fall turkey season).

2019 Western Oregon Fee Pheasant Hunts. The Department has offered special western Oregon fee pheasant hunts on specific public hunting areas for over 25 years. 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 pheasant tag, good for two birds, in addition to a hunting license and upland game bird validation. Revenues from tag sales are 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 supportive of this program with the main complaint being they would like to see more birds stocked and consideration for longer seasons. However, increasing the total number of birds released would increase program costs without any assurance of a corresponding revenue increase and extending seasons on the wildlife areas would likely conflict with other uses such as waterfowl seasons.

Based on performance of past seasons, staff is proposing a 2019 season similar to that held in 2018 (Table 6). A pheasant tag allowing hunters two birds would again be required.

Table 6. Proposed locations and dates for the 2019 western Oregon fee pheasant hunts.

<b>2019 Proposed Western Oregon Fee Pheasant Hunts</b>	
<b>HUNT AREA</b>	<b>DATES</b>
Fern Ridge Wildlife Area	September 9 – October 6, 2019
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area	September 16 – September 29, 2019
Denman Wildlife Area	September 16 – October 4, 2019
E. E. Wilson Wildlife Area	October 1 – October 31, 2019

*2019 Youth Upland Game Bird Hunts.* Special youth hunts for pheasants began at E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area in the early 1950s, and are currently held at 12 other areas throughout the state (Table 7). All of the youth 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 long-term declining trend in participation for most locations. In 2018, 611 youth hunter-visits were recorded for the program, similar to 610 visits in 2017. Two additional hunts are proposed this year, a new hunt on the Coquille Valley Wildlife Area, and the return of a previous event in Ontario.

Instructors provide youth shotgun skill clinics in association with the youth hunts at many locations. Sporting clay trailers provide a convenient method to for participants to learn how to hit flying targets and 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 the participants.

Table 7. Proposed 2019 youth upland hunt dates, locations, and maximum number of hunters allowed on area at any one time (hunter limitation).

<b>2019 Proposed Youth Upland Game Bird Hunts</b>		
<b>HUNT AREA</b>	<b>DATES</b>	<b>HUNTER LIMITATION</b>
Central Oregon (Near Madras)	September 14 & 15	80
City of Ontario property	October 12 & 13	20
Coquille Valley Wildlife Area	September 7 & 8	40
Denman Wildlife Area	September 14 & 15	85
E. E. Wilson Wildlife Area	September 21 & 22	70
Fern Ridge Wildlife Area	September 7 & 8	75
Irrigon Wildlife Area	September 21 & 22	15
John Day (private land)	September 14 & 15	30
Klamath Wildlife Area	September 14 & 15	80
Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area	September 14 & 15	35
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area	September 14 & 15	50
White River Wildlife Area (Mid-Columbia)	September 14 & 15	20

2019 Pheasant Hunting Workshops. Pheasant hunting workshops have also proven to be very popular. To try to meet demand, the Department’s Outdoor Skills Education Program is proposing two weekends of workshops this year at two ODFW Wildlife Areas (Table 8). Additional workshops may also be scheduled during the general pheasant season. Each workshop will be directed at families, which would also allow mentored youth participation. Topics covered at the workshops include safe gun handling, shooting skills, and pheasant hunting. The number of participants in each workshop will be limited. General season regulations will apply; for example bag limits and shot restrictions.

Table 8. Oregon outdoor skills education program pheasant hunting workshops.

<b>2019 Proposed Pheasant Hunting Workshops</b>	
<b>HUNT AREA</b>	<b>DATES</b>
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area	September 7 & 8 (Family Workshops)
E. E. Wilson Wildlife Area	September 14 & 15 (Family Workshops)

2019 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 19 and 20. The primary intent of this hunt is 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. Mentored Youth Hunter 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. Daily bag limit is two chukar.

2019-20 Upland Game Bird Falconry Seasons. A small group of hunters in Oregon use raptors to take upland game birds. All falconers are licensed, and staff coordinates with the USFWS on the monitoring of falconry activities in the state.

**Open Season<sup>1</sup>:** September 1, 2019 – March 31, 2020

**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.

**Open Areas:** Statewide

**Sage-grouse Season<sup>1</sup>:** September 1, 2019 – January 31, 2020

**Daily Bag Limit:** One sage-grouse

**Season Limit:** Two sage-grouse

**Open Areas:** Those areas open to controlled sage-grouse hunting in 2019.

<sup>1</sup>Although the seasons are long, falconry harvest is believed to be low with only about 140 licensed falconers in Oregon. A conservative sage-grouse season and bag limit is proposed. The falconry season for sage-grouse closes at the end of January, prior to the time birds begin gathering on leks where they are more vulnerable.

PUBLIC COMMENTS RELATED TO UPLAND GAME BIRD REGULATIONS

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See Attachment 5

## MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

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### POPULATION STATUS

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**Population Status:** Because of the Federal rulemaking schedule, migratory game bird population status information used to inform hunting season proposals is information collected during the calendar year prior to the proposed seasons. For example, the proposals identified in this document for 2019-20 seasons are based in part on population status information collected in 2018-19 or earlier.

**Mourning Doves:** Mourning dove abundance is assessed by a model using a combination of banding data (harvest probability) and hunter harvest information to estimate population size. Because doves must be harvested to generate this information, the derived population estimates produced are for preceding years. Oregon has been banding mourning doves to generate information for this population model since 2008. Last summer (2018) staff banded 911 doves across the state.

For August 2017, the USFWS estimated 44,474,339 mourning doves resided in the Western Management Unit (WMU), which includes Oregon, California, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, Arizona, and Utah. This estimate is similar to 2016 (45,083,724). Information on the 2018 WMU population size is dependent on an estimate of the 2018-19 season harvest, which the USFWS has not yet finalized at this time. 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 approximately 50 mineral sites in mid-July in California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. In Oregon, ODFW staff has been conducting these surveys at 20-22 mineral sites since 2004. Unlike mourning doves, methods to assess total abundance of pigeons have not been developed.

For 2018, the USFWS estimated no change in the trend of pigeon abundance over the last 10 years and the 3-year relative abundance index is slightly lower than the objective. BBS data can also be used to assess population trends for pigeons. Over the long (1968-2017), mid (2008-2017), and short-term (2013-2017) trends are inconclusive for pigeons in Oregon, though range-wide the trend is negative over the long-term, though inconclusive over the mid and short-term. When considering all factors, the Pacific Coast Population of band-tailed pigeons is currently considered stable.

**Ducks and Mergansers:** In general for 2018, total ducks from major breeding areas in Alaska, Canada, Montana and the Dakotas were down 13% from 2017 and up 17% from the 1955-2017 long-term average (LTA). All common species except pintails and scaup remain above their LTA. In 2018, scaup and pintails were down 20% and 40% from their LTA, respectively. Breeding duck numbers from northern (Alaska and NW Canada) areas which contribute the majority of their breeding waterfowl to the Pacific Flyway were down compared to 2017, but up compared to the LTA for most species, except for scaup and pintails. However, populations in southern Alberta and

important areas of the western U.S. were generally up from previous years. Habitat conditions in these breeding areas were rated as good in Alaska, good northwest Canada, mixed in southern Alberta, and good to excellent in the western U.S.

Oregon breeding waterfowl surveys were conducted from late April through late May in 2018. Statewide, total duck numbers were up 22% from 2017 and 18% from the 1994-2017 LTA. The breeding mallard population was up 36% from 2017 and 14% from the LTA. Breeding waterfowl habitat conditions were fair to good in many areas of Oregon, though not as good as 2017 due to runoff from the heavy snow pack from the winter of 2016-17. We anticipate good to excellent breeding conditions in 2019 as the snowpack in many areas of Oregon is >100% of average as of this writing (March 15).

**Geese:** Most goose populations in the Pacific Flyway remain healthy. However, dusky Canada geese remain a population of concern and their 2018 population estimate was 10,823, down 20% from 2017. The 3-year average of 12,511 geese remains below the goal of 20,000 outlined in the Pacific Flyway’s Dusky Canada Goose Management Plan. For cackling Canada geese, the estimated fall 2018 population was 203,687, which is down 30% from last year and represents a significant decline from previous estimates, suggesting the population may be declining from record high numbers estimated in 2015. However, the 3-year average of 273,669 geese is still 9% above the population goal of 250,000. Table 9 summarizes the population status and objectives for geese in Oregon. Habitat conditions for nesting geese were good in most of Alaska in 2018. Habitat conditions on Wrangel Island, Russia, were also fair and production was about average.

Table 9. Current population status and objectives for Pacific Flyway goose populations.

	Most Recent Population Indices	Most Recent 3-Year Average	Population Objective	Status Relative to Objective
<b>Cackling Canada Geese</b>	203,687 (2018)	273,669 (2016 - 2018)	250,000	Above
<b>Dusky Canada Geese</b>	10,823 (2018)	12,511 (2016 - 2018)	20,000	Below
<b>Aleutian Canada Geese</b>	171,334 (2018)	164,847 (2016 - 2018)	60,000	Above
<b>Taverner’s Canada Geese</b>	45,914 (2018)	48,840 (2016 - 2018)	None	NA
<b>Lesser Canada Geese</b>	2,010 (2018)	3,784 (2016 - 2018)	None	NA
<b>Pacific Western Canada Geese</b>	350,700 (2018)	298,500 (2016 - 2018.)	None	NA
<b>Brant</b>	125,298 (2018)	140,348 (2016 - 2018)	162,000	Below
<b>Pacific Greater White-fronted Geese</b>	590,017 (2018)	670,375 (2016 - 2018)	300,000	Above
<b>Tule White-fronted Geese</b>	15,483 (2017)	12,718 (2015 - 2017)	10,000	Above
<b>Wrangel Island Snow Geese</b>	306,000 (2018)	317,333 (2016 - 2018)	120,000	Above
<b>Western Canadian Arctic Snow Geese</b>	451,000 (2013)	NA	200,000	Above
<b>Pacific Flyway Winter White Geese</b>	1,217,295 (2017)	1,495,394 (2015 - 2017)	NA	NA

**Coots:** The estimated continental breeding population was 1.60 million in 2018, which is 25% lower than the 2017 estimate and 17% below the LTA (1955-2017).

**Wilson’s Snipe:** According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey the estimated annual change in the snipe population in the Western Region was -1.0% over the long-term (1966–2015) and -1.0% over the short-term (2005–2015).

## 2017-18 HARVEST ESTIMATES

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The Harvest Information Program (HIP), a cooperative harvest survey between the USFWS and states, was implemented in Oregon during 1995. The USFWS estimates hunter effort and harvest by sampling hunters from records provided by the Oregon Point of Sale (POS) licensing system. This cooperative survey continues to be refined yearly. Hunter and Harvest estimates for 2017-18 can be found in Table 10. Harvest estimates from the 2018-19 seasons will not be available until summer 2019.

**Total Waterfowl Hunters:** HIP estimates that during the 2017-18 season, 27,800 people hunted ducks and/or geese at least one day in Oregon. This estimate is up 47% from the previous 5-year average.

## 2018-19 MIGRATORY WATERFOWL VALIDATION SALES

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**Waterfowl Validation/Stamp Sales:** State of Oregon waterfowl validation (stamp) sales to resident hunters for the 2018-19 season totaled 60,407, an increase of 8% from 2017-18. However, 64% of adults and youths who purchased a Sports Pac (Sports Pacs accounted for 75% of validation sales) did not return to a license agent to obtain their waterfowl validation after July 1<sup>st</sup>, leaving the total number of resident waterfowl validations actually held by hunters during the 2018-19 season at 31,616, up 2% from 2017-18. Total 2018-19 nonresident game bird validation (valid for both waterfowl and upland game bird hunting) sales were 4,065, also up 2% from 2017-18.

Table 10. Harvest Information Program estimates of Oregon migratory game bird hunters and harvest during the 2017-18, season compared to the previous 5 seasons.

	Hunters			Harvest		
	2017/18	Previous 5- Season Avg	% Change from 5- Season Avg	2017/18	Previous 5- Season Avg	% Change from 5- Season Avg
<b>Total Ducks</b>	<b>26,755</b>	<b>16,981</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>477,900</b>	<b>311,980</b>	<b>53%</b>
Mallard				183,971	119,668	54%
Gadwall				14,928	10,198	46%
American Wigeon				95,886	48,325	98%
Eurasian Wigeon				269	421	-36%
Green-winged Teal				70,334	41,028	71%
Cinnamon & Blue-winged Teal				1,210	294	312%
Northern Shoveler				16,272	15,401	6%
Northern Pintail				41,286	41,612	-1%
Wood Duck				11,565	8,073	43%
Redhead				807	286	182%
Canvasback				1,479	1,621	-9%
Greater Scaup				10,086	4,204	140%
Lesser Scaup				7,262	4,948	47%
Ring-necked Duck				11,431	7,430	54%
Barrows Goldeneye				269	362	-26%
Common Goldeneye				672	522	29%
Bufflehead				6,186	5,796	7%
Ruddy Duck				807	435	86%
Black Scoter				0	0	0%
White-winged Scoter				0	4	-100%
Surf Scoter				62	107	-42%
Harlequin Duck				0	0	0%
Long-tailed Duck				0	0	0%
Hooded Merganser				1,614	1,118	44%
Red-breasted Merganser				0	18	-100%
Common Merganser				1,210	895	35%
<b>Total Geese</b>	<b>13,273</b>	<b>8,901</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>55,805</b>	<b>55,313</b>	<b>1%</b>
Canada Geese				46,220	45,134	2%
Greater White-fronted Geese				4,727	4,135	14%
Snow Geese				4,464	3,976	12%
Ross' Geese				394	268	47%
<b>Brant</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>&lt;50</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Mourning Doves</b>	<b>2,800</b>	<b>3,140</b>	<b>-11%</b>	<b>19,680</b>	<b>32,340</b>	<b>-39%</b>
<b>Band-tailed Pigeons</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>-72%</b>	<b>471</b>	<b>1,240</b>	<b>-62%</b>
<b>American Coots</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>780</b>	<b>-87%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,480</b>	<b>-100%</b>
<b>Wilson's Snipe</b>	<b>1,000</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>571</b>	<b>1,140</b>	<b>-50%</b>

## 2019-20 MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SEASON PROPOSALS

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*Please note: All seasons for migratory game birds are established under 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. Additionally, all recommendations must fall within established frameworks (can be more conservative but not more liberal) and all season selections by the Fish and Wildlife Commission are subject to approval by the USFWS.*

- **MOURNING DOVE**

Framework: Under the national harvest strategy, when mourning dove abundance dictates a standard mourning dove season, Oregon is allowed a 60-day season between September 1 and January 15, with daily bag and possession limits of 15 and 45, respectively. The season may be split into two segments.

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. The Department's Game Birds Committee did consider a split season last year, however, it was not supported at that time as mourning dove seasons cannot currently be set by zone in Oregon under Federal frameworks. Due to constraints of the Federal regulations setting process, the earliest that Oregon could consider a split season by hunting zone is the 2021 season.

Proposed Season:

<b>Open Season:</b>	September 1 – October 30, 2019
<b>Open Area:</b>	Entire State
<b>Daily Bag Limit:</b>	15 mourning doves
<b>Possession Limit:</b>	45 mourning doves

Public Comment: None

- **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 and January 1, with 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 27 seasons.

Proposed Season:

**Open Season:** September 15 – September 23, 2019  
**Open Area:** Entire State  
**Daily Bag Limit:** 2 band-tailed pigeons  
**Possession Limit:** 6 band-tailed pigeons

Public Comment: None

• **DUCK AND MERGANSER**

Framework: A maximum season length of 107 days is allowed between the Saturday closest to September 24 (September 21, 2019) and January 31; daily bag limit of seven birds to include no more than three scaup, two hen mallards, two redheads, two canvasback, and one pintail. The season for scaup may only be open for 86 days during the general duck season. For all species the possession limit is three-times the daily bag limit. Shooting hours are from one half hour before sunrise to sunset. Zoning options approved by the USFWS may be retained. One split in season dates may occur in each zone. Two federal youth waterfowl days are allowed for ducks, mergansers, coots and geese. Youths 17 years of age and under may participate. Two federal veteran/active duty military days are allowed for ducks, mergansers, coots, and geese. Active duty members of the military (as defined in section 101 of title 38, United States Code) and members of the Armed Forces on active duty, including members of the National Guard and Reserves on active duty may participate.

Recommendation: Adoption of maximum days and bag limits as allowed by framework. Maintain traditional shooting hours and adoption of a federal youth waterfowl weekend. The adoption of a youth waterfowl hunt weekend requires a reduction in regular waterfowl seasons by two days, which accounts for the two day split in each zone. This recommendation is identical to last season's except the bag limit for pintails is decreased back to one per day, the maximum allowed under Federal frameworks as outlined in the Northern Pintail Harvest Strategy.

Proposed Seasons:

<b>Statewide Youth Weekend:</b>	September 21 & 22
<b>Zone 1:</b> (Zone 1 is western Oregon and Columbia Basin counties)	October 12 – October 27 & October 30 – January 26, 2020 Scaup open from November 2 – January 26, 2020
<b>Zone 2:</b> (Zone 2 is remaining eastern Oregon counties)	October 5 – December 1 & December 4 – January 19, 2020 Scaup open from October 5 – December 1 & December 4 – December 31

**Daily Bag Limit (all seasons):** 7 total; with no more than 2 hen mallards, 1 pintail, 2 redheads, 2 canvasbacks and 3 scaup. Note: scaup may only be taken during the open season specific to them.

**Possession Limit:** Three times the bag limit

*Discussion:* Allowed frameworks were developed cooperatively with the USFWS, states and all Flyway Councils under the Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) program. AHM is a process that increases objectivity and efficiency in the annual process of setting duck hunting regulations. AHM improves upon past approaches by using clearly defined harvest-management objectives, a limited set of regulatory options, and robust data assessment procedures. It is important to note the AHM process is dynamic, and as new information is obtained decision criteria is modified. This year represents the 12<sup>th</sup> year of implementation of the Western Mallard Model under AHM. This model takes information from breeding duck surveys in Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California to guide the season for the entire Pacific Flyway.

The proposed season framework is nearly identical to last year and flyway biologists believe continued liberal harvest regulations are justified based on population information. Many duck populations have remained relatively abundant in recent years, especially the mallard, which is the most commonly harvested species. National harvest strategies are in place for pintail, scaup and canvasback. The only change is a decrease in the bag limit for pintail to 1 per day. The decrease was called for by the Northern Pintail Harvest Strategy which was adopted by all Flyway Councils and the USFWS in 2010. The bag limit has been either 1 or 2 per day since 1998 and was last at 1 per day in 2016-.

Recently, the President signed into law S. 47 (John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, previously title Natural Resources Management Act). This Act includes a provision which allows states to select two waterfowl hunting days for veterans and activity duty members of the military. Since this Act was only recently enacted (March 13, 2019) the Department has not yet had time to consider the effects of utilizing this opportunity for 2019-20 but will do so over the next year. If a veteran/activity duty hunt were selected that did not coincide with the current youth hunt, it would require a reduction in the regular waterfowl season of 2 days.

Adoption of a 105-day duck season will accommodate the federal youth waterfowl hunting weekend (105 + 2 = 107 day maximum) and should provide ample opportunity to hunt at preferred times.

*Public Comment:* Comments received do not support the bag limit reduction for northern pintails. Additionally, two comments were received requesting that electronic decoys be allowed for waterfowl hunting.

- **GOOSE SEASONS**

*Please Note: There are four separate frameworks regarding goose seasons; September Canada goose, general fall/winter, Northwest Permit Goose, and black brant season.*

- **SEPTEMBER CANADA GEESE**

*Background:* A September Canada goose season, designed to focus harvest on resident western Canada geese, was initiated in 1990 to alleviate agricultural crop depredation and provide a recreational opportunity on a growing resident goose population occurring in the lower Columbia River area. In later years the September season was expanded statewide, however, this season has been closed in the South Coast Zone since 2006 due to a desire to hold late-winter Canada goose seasons in that Zone to address damage caused by Aleutian Canada geese.

*Framework:* The current federal framework for Oregon allows up to a 15 consecutive day season from September 1 – 20. Daily bag and possession limits are 5 and 15 Canada geese, respectively. Shooting hours for the September Canada goose hunt are one half hour before sunrise to sunset.

*Recommendation:* Staff recommends adoption of a September Canada goose season in all areas of the state except the South Coast Goose Zone. Staff recommends adoption of a bag limit of 5 Canada geese in all open areas with possession limits triple the daily bag limit. The traditional opener of the Saturday after the Labor Day weekend is recommended.

*Proposed Seasons:* (for zone descriptions see general goose and Northwest Permit Goose sections)

<b>Northwest Permit Zone:</b>	September 7 – 15
<b>Southwest Zone:</b>	September 7 – 11
<b>South Coast Zone:</b>	Closed
<b>Eastern Oregon Zone:</b>	September 7 – 11
<b>Klamath, Lake, Harney, &amp; Malheur Zone:</b>	September 7 – 11
<b>Daily Bag Limit (all zones):</b>	5 Canada geese
<b>Possession Limit:</b>	15 Canada Geese

*Discussion:* Seasons are relatively short but cannot be longer because of the desire to hold long general goose seasons as well as avoid season overlap with the Labor Day holiday. Currently, all frameworks for regular goose seasons are 107 days, the maximum allowed under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Season days used for September Canada goose seasons require a subsequent reduction in other Canada goose seasons. In 2017, staff considered a nine day season in all areas of the state (federal frameworks allow this), however, hunter comments indicated a preference to maintain as many days as possible during the regular season.

*Public Comment:* None

• **GENERAL FALL/WINTER GEESE**

*Framework:* A maximum season length of 107 days is allowed between the Saturday closest to September 24 (September 21) and January 31 for Canada geese, except that the season for Canada geese in the South Coast Zone may extend through March 10. For white-fronted and white geese 107 days is allowed between the Saturday closest to September 24 (September 21) and March 10. Maximum daily bag limits are 4 Canada geese, 10 white-fronted geese, and 6 white geese, except that the white-front bag limit in Lake County may not exceed 1 per day, the Canada goose limit in the South Coast Zone may not exceed 6 per day, and the white goose limit after the last Sunday in January (January 26) may not exceed 20 per day. For all species the possession limit is three-times the daily bag limit. Shooting hours are from one half hour before sunrise to sunset. Two federal youth waterfowl days are allowed for ducks, mergansers, coots and geese. Youths 17 years of age and under may participate. Two federal veteran/active duty military days are allowed for ducks, mergansers, coots, and geese. Active duty members of the military (as defined in section 101 of title 38, United States Code) and members of the Armed Forces on active duty, including members of the National Guard and Reserves on active duty may participate.

*Recommendation:* Adoption of maximum days and bag limits as allowed by framework. Maintain traditional shooting hours and adoption of a federal youth waterfowl hunt. The adoption of a youth waterfowl hunt weekend requires a reduction in regular waterfowl seasons by two days. This season recommendation is identical to last season’s except for date adjustments to align with the 2019-20 calendar. Additionally, remove the regulation closing all public lands and waters to goose hunting during the third segment of the South Coast Zone season.

Proposed Seasons:

<b>Statewide Youth Weekend:</b>	September 21 & 22
<b>Southwest Zone:</b> (all of Douglas, Coos, and Curry counties east of Hwy 101, and Jackson and Josephine counties.	October 12 – October 27 & November 4 – January 26, 2020
<b>South Coast Zone:</b> (all of Douglas, Coos, and Curry counties west of Hwy 101)	September 28 – December 1 & December 21 – January 11, 2020 & February 22 – March 10, 2020
<b>Klamath, Lake, Harney &amp; Malheur Zone:</b> (Canada Goose Seasons only)	October 5 – December 1 & December 16 – January 26, 2020
<b>Klamath, Lake, Harney &amp; Malheur Zone:</b> (White-front and White Goose Seasons only)	October 5 – December 1 & January 24 – March 10, 2020
<b>Remainder of Eastern Oregon Zone:</b>	October 12 – October 27 & November 4 – January 26, 2020
<b>Daily Bag Limit (all zones unless noted):</b>	4 Canada geese 10 white-fronted geese 6 white geese

*Daily Bag Limit Exceptions*

<b>South Coast Zone:</b>	6 Canada geese
<b>Lake County:</b>	1 white-fronted goose
<b>Klamath, Lake, Harney &amp; Malheur Zone:</b>	20 white geese (January 27 – March 10)
<b>Possession Limit:</b>	Three times the daily bag limit

*Discussion:* Most goose populations have remained robust in recent years, increasing recreational opportunity throughout the state. Snow, Ross's, Aleutian Canada, cackling Canada, Pacific western Canada, and Pacific white-fronted goose populations in the flyway are at or significantly above management goals. Numerous population and harvest surveys are in place to monitor population trends and harvest levels. Hunting days for duck and goose hunting will not always coincide in some counties due to boundary differences between duck and goose zones and the desire to offer September Canada goose seasons. However, in order to optimize opportunity, it is critical to utilize the full frameworks allowed. Extended frameworks allow later hunting opportunity, which is a common request by hunters and agricultural producers. In order to utilize this opportunity, split seasons will be fully utilized similar to previous years.

Since the implementation of a three segment goose season in the South Coast Zone in 2006, public lands and waters have been closed to hunting during the third period, only. This hunting closure was designed to concentrate hunting effort for geese on private pastures which were being damaged by migrating Aleutian geese which usually being arriving from wintering areas in California in late February. However, in most years these geese do not begin arriving in large numbers until after March 10, when the hunting season is closed. Removing this restriction is not expected to have a large effect but will increase hunting opportunity.

*Public Comment:* None

• **NORTHWEST PERMIT ZONE GEESE**

*Background:* Goose hunting seasons in Northwest Oregon have been restrictive since the 1950s to protect the dusky Canada goose which winters in this area. Dusky Canada geese have a small population size (range 7,000 – 18,000 over the last 30+ years) and are more vulnerable to harvest than other geese. Beginning in 1985, after steep declines in the dusky Canada goose population, a quota based season was implemented which assigned a quota of dusky Canada geese to Oregon, which if reached would mandate a closure of the goose season. This system allowed goose seasons to be long, so long as the dusky Canada goose quota was not attained, but also required all successful goose hunters to bring their geese to check stations so dusky Canada geese could be tallied toward the season quota.

When the first quota season was implemented only a small portion of the area was initially open for goose hunting (Sauvie Island Wildlife Area and adjacent private lands), however, over time this hunt program grew to encompass nearly the entire winter range of the dusky Canada goose in Oregon. The season achieved its objectives of keeping dusky Canada goose harvest minimal, while allowing long, liberal seasons for other types of geese to provide agricultural depredation relief and hunting opportunities. Dusky Canada goose subunit quotas were rarely exceeded though overall goose harvest during the last 10 seasons with check stations sometimes exceeded 10,000 geese a season; on average only 28 of those were dusky Canada geese (last 10 seasons with check stations).

However, the quota system had some significant drawbacks. It was generally disliked by the hunting community as it forced all hunters harvesting geese to drive to hunter check stations (sometimes over 20 miles from their hunting area), which were only open limited hours. Additionally, the agricultural community was frustrated that goose hunting could not be allowed every day of the week. Hunting was limited to fewer than seven days a week since an entire new check station staff would be required to keep the stations open every day. Hunting geese everyday may help alleviate some of the depredation issues in this area. Lastly, due to increased personnel costs the program became more costly for the Department to administer. Staffing the nine check stations annually cost the agency approximately \$200,000, which traditionally was funded by the sale of waterfowl validations. Additionally, in past years a special \$50,000 overtime contract was in place with Oregon State Police to devote additional hours to enforcement, bringing the total cost for administration of this season to \$250,000. Validation sales are approximately \$500,000 annually, so 50% of the waterfowl stamp budget was being used to administer the season.

Beginning in 2013, the Department began working with the USFWS and our Pacific Flyway partners to revise the Flyway's Dusky Canada Goose Management Plan. A major discussion item was to review the quota based harvest strategy and determine if a different approach could obtain similar results without the negative aspects which accompany the quota system. The Flyway's revised 2015 harvest strategy calls for a closed dusky Canada goose season in NW Oregon and SW Washington, the core wintering area for dusky Canada geese. Since the Federal framework for the dusky Canada goose seasons is a closed season, there is no need to use check stations to monitor harvest toward a quota. Additionally, the strategy recommends seasons for other geese should follow the general goose season frameworks for the rest of the state. This strategy applies to all of northwest Oregon, not just that portion delineated as the Northwest Permit Zone prior to 2015.

In recommending this strategy, the Flyway did recognize there are some risks of moving to a closed season for dusky Canada geese. One concern the Flyway has is that without check stations there is no way to monitor the harvest of dusky Canada geese, except in those cases where law enforcement detects a hunter with a dusky Canada goose. The Department will continue to work with Oregon State Police and USFWS law enforcement officers to promote the importance of hunter compliance checks during this season. Another concern is what to do if the dusky Canada goose population begins to decline in the future. If that happens, the overall goose season may need to become more restrictive. If the dusky Canada goose population falls below 7,500 geese, the plan calls for goose hunting to only be allowed over crops or pastures which could be damaged by geese.

Frameworks guided by this new strategy were first adopted by the USFWS for use during the 2015 season and remain in effect for the 2019-20 season. Additionally, the states of Washington and Oregon entered into an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the USFWS in 2015 which outlines all of the voluntarily actions the states will take to ensure hunters are equipped to identify the different types of geese in the hunt area and avoid taking dusky Canada geese. The MOU requires the Department to continue to conduct surveys for neck collared dusky Canada geese. The data is used to estimate annual adult survival rates, which are used as an index to determine if dusky Canada goose harvest has changed over past levels. Currently, average annual adult survival for neck collared dusky Canada geese is about 81% (2001 – 2017) and no evidence of a change in adult survival of the collared population has been detected since closure of the check stations.

Cackling Canada geese make up the vast majority of the wintering goose flock in northwest Oregon and they are responsible for the majority of the agricultural depredation in the region. The cackling Canada goose management plan was recently revised by the Flyway (2016) and now gives clearer guidance to harvest management actions when the cackling Canada goose population exceeds the population objective. Specifically, the plan says, “if the 3-year average population index is greater than 10% above (275,000) or 10% below (225,000) the objective (250,000), implement regulatory actions to regain the objective.” Since 2014, the Canada goose bag limit in the Permit Zone has been 4 per day and from 2015 - 2017 the 3-year average population exceeded 275,000 (currently 273,699). Last year’s , annual estimate represented a 30% decline from the previous estimate (Figure 3), however a 30% decline from one year to the next is unlikely for a goose population, suggesting the 2018 estimate may have been biased low for unknown reasons. .

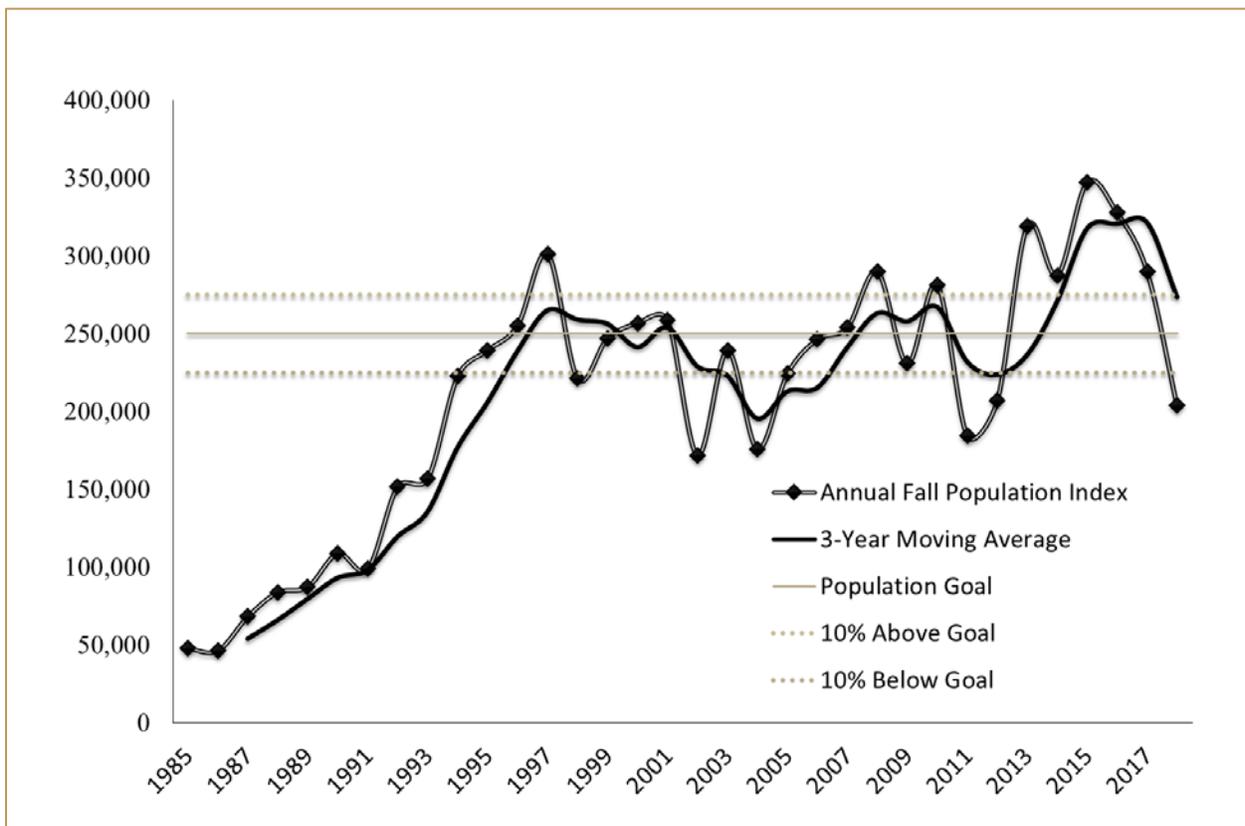


Figure 3. Cackling Canada goose population index, derived from the total indicated birds estimated from the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Coastal Zone survey, expanded by a constant factor to estimate total fall population size.

**Framework:** A maximum season length of 107 days is allowed between the Saturday closest to September 24 (September 21) and March 10. Maximum daily bag limits are 6 Canada geese, 10 white-fronted geese, and 6 white geese, except that the season for dusky Canada geese is closed. For all species the possession limit is three-times the daily bag limit. Shooting hour frameworks are from sunrise to sunset.

**Recommendation:** Adoption of maximum days allowed by framework and the maximum bag limits as allowed by framework except adopt a Canada goose bag limit of not more than 4 per day. However, if the 2019 cackling Canada goose population estimate derived from the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Coastal Zone Survey exceeds that from 2017 (289,867), consider adopting temporary rules before October 2019 to change the bag limit from 4 Canada geese per day to 6 Canada geese per day. Adopt a federal youth waterfowl weekend. The adoption of a youth waterfowl hunt weekend requires a reduction in regular waterfowl seasons by two days.

**Proposed Seasons:**

<b>Northwest Permit Zone:</b> (all of Benton, Clatsop, Columbia, Clackamas, Lane, Linn, Marion, Multnomah, Tillamook, Washington, and Yamhill counties)	October 19 – October 27 & November 23 – January 16, 2020 & February 8 – March 10, 2020
<b>Daily Bag Limit:</b>	4 Canada Geese (except dusky Canada geese are closed to harvest) 10 white-fronted geese 6 white geese
<b>Sauvie Island Wildlife Area:</b> Eastside, Westside and Oak Island Only	Wildlife Area hunt days occurring from October 19 – October 27 & November 23 – January 16, 2020
<b>Daily Bag Limit:</b>	6 white geese
<b>Possession Limit (all areas):</b>	Three times the daily bag limit

**Additional Regulations:**

- Maintain goose hunting during all days of the week. Hunting all days of the week allows hunters to hunt on their preferred days and provides landowners suffering depredation the opportunity to utilize hunting to address the damage whenever it occurs.
- Maintain goose hunting during the federal youth waterfowl weekend. Dusky Canada geese usually do not arrive in Oregon until mid to late October, so unintentional harvest of dusky Canada geese during the youth hunt is unlikely.
- Maintain the goose hunting closure area near Pacific City in Tillamook County, where a small closure is in place to protect Aleutian Canada geese which nest on the Semidi Islands, Alaska. Maintain all other private lands being open for goose hunting. Maintain the goose

hunting closures on state wildlife areas (Sauvie Island, Fern Ridge, and E. E. Wilson) except maintain the white goose hunting opportunity at Sauvie Island Wildlife Area. Wildlife Area closures are meant to encourage Canada geese to forage on public lands in an effort to reduce agricultural damage to neighboring private lands.

- Maintain the requirement that all hunters must possess a valid Northwest Oregon Goose Permit while hunting.
- Maintain shooting hours for geese in this zone as the maximum allowed by federal frameworks, sunrise to sunset.
- In addition to potentially receiving a citation; maintain the penalty that any hunter taking a dusky Canada goose have their Northwest Oregon Goose Permit invalidated for the remainder of the season and must retake the goose identification exam prior to hunting geese in the permit zone during subsequent seasons.
- Maintain the goose hunter education program for permit zone hunters. This will continue to improve knowledge of goose management issues and the role hunters play in this process.

*Discussion:* Goose hunters in northwest Oregon have proven over the last 30+ years that they can shift their harvest towards other Canada geese and avoid taking dusky Canada geese. Significant changes occurred to this season in 2015 which were generally very well received by hunters and the agricultural community. No major issues related to closed season dusky Canada goose take have been noted during the previous seasons. Managers believe the Flyway's Dusky Canada Goose Management Plan has the necessary checks in place to respond appropriately should the dusky Canada goose population decline in the future.

As mentioned above, Federal Frameworks do allow selection of a Canada goose bag limit of up to 6 per day in this zone this season. However, survey data suggest the cackling Canada goose population may already be declining towards the objective of 250,000 under the current Canada goose bag limit of 4 per day. The Department is concerned that a bag limit increase to 6 per day could drive the population below the objective if it is already declining. If the population drops 10% below the objective more restrictive seasons could be called for.

Because the aerial surveys to estimate the cackling Canada goose population include a degree of variability, it is possible the population may not have experienced a significant decline in 2018 and may still be at levels observed from 2013 - 2017. The Department believes it is prudent to wait for the 2019 survey results before making a decision to increase the bag limit. Unfortunately, these results will not be available until sometime in July of 2019, after the Game Bird Hunting Regulations have been published. As mentioned previously, the Department is recommending the Commission adopt a bag limit of 4 Canada geese per day for the 2019-20 season at this time and request the Department consider implementing temporary rules prior to the beginning of the season to increase the bag limit to 6 Canada geese per day if the 2019 Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Coastal Zone Survey indicates the cackling Canada goose population exceeds the 2017 estimate of 289,867 geese. The Department recommends basing this decision off of the 2017 population estimate because the 2018 estimate may have been a biased low count. In the past, the population has shown large

annual decreases, only to rebound to previous levels the subsequent year. If this were to occur in 2019, that would provide some evidence the 2018 count was indeed biased low. If the bag limit is increased by temporary rule, the Department intends to notify hunters of the change from the published regulations via news release, email, and social media.

Public Comment: None

- **BRANT**

Framework: A maximum season length of 37 days is allowed between the Saturday closest to September 24 (September 21 in 2019) and December 15. Maximum daily bag limit is 2 brant. Shooting hours are from one half hour before sunrise to sunset. Additionally, in the past the Commission has supported brant seasons in Oregon which purposefully overlap with seasons in California.

Recommendation: Adoption of 16 day season with a daily bag limit of 2. This recommendation is identical to last season's.

Proposed Season:

<b>Statewide:</b>	November 23 – December 8
<b>Daily Bag Limit:</b>	2 brant
<b>Possession Limit:</b>	Three times the daily bag limit

Discussion: Oregon coastal bays are a minor wintering site for brant in the Pacific Flyway, with only three bays (Tillamook, Netarts, and Yaquina) regularly hosting any significant numbers of wintering brant. There are also very few concentrations of migrating brant in Oregon Bays during the framework period. Surveys conducted each January typically tally fewer than 500 wintering brant among the three bays. Due to the low numbers of wintering birds, relative to the overall Pacific Flyway wide population, the brant season in Oregon has been short in duration with restrictive bag limits. Reasons for the low wintering numbers in Oregon are unknown, though human disturbance has been documented to have detrimental effects on brant populations in other areas of the Flyway. Development and aquaculture (oyster plats) in estuaries, which can destroy eelgrass beds, and other non-hunting recreational activities in Oregon, are of concern. Brant hunter numbers in Oregon are low and minimal harvest occurs in Oregon. Even though Federal frameworks allow more hunting opportunity for Oregon than proposed here, the Department continues to support a conservative approach to brant hunting adopted by the Commission over two decades ago. Two objectives of the approach were to overlap Oregon and California seasons whenever possible and maintain harvest in Oregon at a moderate level.

Public Comment: None.

- **AMERICAN COOT**

Framework: Concurrent with duck season with a daily bag limit of 25.

Recommendation: Adoption of maximum days and bag limits as allowed by framework.

Proposed Season:

<b>Statewide:</b>	Concurrent with duck season
<b>Daily Bag Limit:</b>	25 coot
<b>Possession Limit:</b>	Three times the daily bag limit

Public Comment: None

- **WILSON'S SNIPE**

Framework: A maximum season length of 107 days between September 1 and February 28, with a daily bag limit of 8. A two-way season split can be selected. Hunting zones may be selected by established duck hunting zones.

Recommendation: Adoption of maximum days and bag limits as allowed by framework.

Proposed Season:

<b>Duck Zone 1:</b>	November 2 – February 16, 2020
<b>Duck Zone 2:</b>	October 5 – December 1 & December 4 – January 19, 2020
<b>Daily Bag Limit:</b>	8 snipe
<b>Possession Limit:</b>	Three times the daily bag limit

Discussion: Snipe are a lightly hunted game bird species in Oregon. Federal surveys estimate an average of about 500 hunters pursue snipe in Oregon and they generally harvest about 1,000 snipe per season. Snipe season dates have varied over the years to a season concurrent with duck season to a season which opens later than duck season or has a split in December which allows some hunting into February, when duck season is closed. From 2005 – 2010 the season was concurrent with duck season, but after several public requests in 2011 the Department recommended a season that opened later than duck season in Zone 1 only and closed in mid-February. Hunter effort and harvest estimates are difficult to generate accurately for lightly hunted species, so federal survey data cannot be used to gauge the impact of the season change. Some hunters do take advantage of the opportunity to hunt snipe during February.

Public Comment: None

- **FALCONRY**

*Framework:* Maximum season length of 107 days, including those days when the gun season is open. Falconry daily bag and possession limits for all permitted migratory game birds shall not exceed 3 and 6, respectively, singly or in the aggregate. During that time when the season for dove, pigeons, crow and/or snipe, overlaps that for waterfowl, the falconer's bag may contain no more than 3 of all the federally regulated species.

*Recommendation:* Adoption of maximum days and bag limits as allowed by framework.

*Proposed Season:*

<b>Duck, Coot, Merganser, Crow and Snipe:</b>	Concurrent with gun seasons
<b>Geese:</b>	Concurrent with gun seasons except no hunting is allowed in the Northwest Permit Goose Zone or during any September Canada goose season.
<b>Mourning Dove and Band-tailed Pigeon:</b>	September 1 – December 16
<b>Daily Bag Limits:</b>	3 in the aggregate, though not more than 1 band-tailed pigeon or goose
<b>Possession Limits:</b>	Three times the daily bag limit

*Discussion:* There are approximately 140 licensed falconers in the state, not all of who fly their raptors after game. Their collective harvest of birds is small. Most migratory game bird season proposals are concurrent with gun seasons. Liberal 107-day general duck and goose seasons deny opportunities for falconers to hunt outside of normal gun seasons.

*Public Comment:* None

## **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:

<b>Open Season:</b>	October 1 – January 31, 2020
<b>Open Area:</b>	Entire State
<b>Daily Bag Limit:</b>	No limit
<b>Possession Limit:</b>	No limit

Public Comment: None

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