



AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

This agenda item requests the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission's approval of the 2025-2030 Oregon Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework and adoption of the 2025-26 hunting regulations and seasons for game birds and crows.

Game Bird Hunting Regulations

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) annually adopts the Oregon Game Bird Hunting Regulations which establish season dates, bag limits, areas and other regulations for hunting upland and migratory game birds.

Regulation of upland and migratory game birds are set through two different structures. For upland birds, the Commission has authority and responsibility for upland game bird management within the state. Upland game bird seasons are based on a framework that is renewed every five years based on internal recommendations and public comments. A new Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework for September 1, 2025 – August 31, 2030 is proposed in conjunction with the 2025-26 Game Bird Hunting Regulations

For migratory game bird management, preeminent authority and responsibility in the United States lies with the Secretary of the Interior and is derived from international treaties to which the U.S. Constitution specifies that only the Federal government can be signatory. Federal authority is legislated by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and its amendments. Countries involved in bilateral migratory bird treaties with the U.S. include Canada, Mexico, Japan, and the Russian Federation. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is the lead federal agency for migratory game bird management.

The USFWS actively cooperates with other countries and states in the management of migratory game birds. Management in the U.S. and Canada is coordinated through Flyways which are administrative units that describe migration routes and distribution of migratory birds. Oregon is one of twelve states in the Pacific Flyway.

Through various Flyway committees and Councils, states provide season recommendations to the USFWS annually. Federal frameworks (allowed days, bag limits, shooting time, etc.) are proposed by a USFWS Regulations Committee and then approved by the Secretary of the Interior. These frameworks provide guidance to states in selection of seasons; states cannot legally adopt seasons that are more liberal than established federal frameworks.

For both upland and migratory game birds, each year staff consults with field biologists, stakeholders, and experts when considering game bird hunting regulations proposals. They consider the status of game bird populations, habitat conditions, new research, and

environmental events (such as weather, climate patterns, and fire) that may require adaptation of hunting regulations. Staff also consider opportunities to simplify and clarify rules to improve the hunter experience.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The department used several approaches to gather input on annual proposals for changes to the game bird hunting regulations:

- Responded to members of the public and news media on questions and comments on game bird programs throughout last year’s seasons.
- Migratory game bird season concepts were sent in February 2025 via email to a list of persons who have requested to receive regulation updates from the Migratory Game Bird Program Coordinator.
- Proposed changes for the 2025-26 Upland Game Bird Regulations and the 2025-2030 Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework were provided in March 2025 to interested sporting groups and presented at the Portland and Central Oregon Sportsman’s shows. Members of the public who expressed interest in the upland game bird proposals were also provided copies via email in March 2025. Additionally, the proposed 5-year framework was posted on the ODFW website accompanied by a news release.

In anticipation of the Commission consideration of the proposed rules, the department published notice of the proposed rulemaking (Attachment 2). Additionally, the public has an opportunity to provide comment prior to (in writing) or (orally) during the hearing that occurs at the April Commission meeting.

ISSUE 1

Approve 2025-2030 Oregon Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework

ANALYSIS

The current 2020-2025 Oregon Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework expires August 30, 2025. Staff is proposing several modifications for the 2025-2030 Oregon Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework as shown in Attachment 3 and summarized below.

Staff is proposing modification of the framework to:

- Combine Western and Eastern OR Fall Turkey Tags into a General Fall Turkey Tag, which could be used in any unit open to fall turkey hunting.

Rationale: Season dates, and daily and season bag limits may still vary by location. This change is recommended due to hunters frequently filling western Oregon fall turkey tags in eastern Oregon and vice versa. This indicates confusion about the product. Because there are no longer caps on the number of tags sold, and there are no longer any fall controlled hunts, there is not a biological rationale for separating the products. This could result in fewer sales of fall turkey tags but should improve compliance and mandatory reporting data. We will maintain the 2-bird bag limit for western Oregon and the 1-bird bag limit for eastern Oregon.

- Expand Eastern Oregon Fall Turkey Season to include Malheur River , Steens Mountain, Juniper, and Silvies Wildlife Management Units (WMUs).

Rationale: Nuisance wild turkey complaints have been increasing around Harney County as wintering flocks have located agricultural subsidies. Managers would like to be able to use hunting as a tool to address these wintering wild turkey complaints, but currently this area is excluded from the fall wild turkey hunt boundary. These WMUs are large and will only offer opportunity in available habitat. For example, the Steens Mtn. unit will only have opportunity in the far northwest portion of the unit, and the Juniper WMU only in the far northeast portion. As a general practice, we have not divided WMUs into subunits for fall turkey.

- Expand the area allowing Fall Wild Turkey Season to open on September 1 in the vicinity of the John Day Valley to include the Fossil WMU south of the Wheeler County line and the Heppner WMU south of the Grant County line.

Rationale: These areas are contiguous with the other John Day Valley units that open on September 1. These dates increase the chances of archery hunters encountering wild turkeys in September on public land, and failure to make this change would create confusion for hunters related to the pilot Beardless Wild Turkey Permit Hunt boundary.

Staff is proposing no changes to the framework for:

- Season structures for ring-necked pheasant, chukar and gray partridge, California quail, mountain quail, forest grouse, and sage-grouse. There will continue to be no season for spruce grouse or Columbian sharp-tailed grouse.
- Shooting hours.
- Requirements for carcass identification while in transit
implementation of winter emergency closures when necessary.

ISSUE 2

Adopt 2025-26 hunting regulations and seasons for game birds and crows.

ANALYSIS

A summary of population status, past hunter effort and harvest, proposed season dates, bag and possession limits, and other regulations related to the 2025-26 game bird hunting seasons is included in Attachment 4. Public comments received as of March 11, 2025 are provided in the summary and Attachment 6.

An overview of the proposed recommendations include:

Upland Game Bird Seasons

Proposals for forest grouse, partridge, pheasant, and quail seasons follow the recommended 2025-2030 Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework. The Beardless Wild Turkey Permit hunt is still considered a pilot program and is not included in the framework with the intention to consider the hunt on an annual basis.

Fall Turkey Seasons

- Combine the Western Oregon and Eastern Oregon Fall Wild Turkey Tags.

Rationale: Harvest data shows that some hunters are filling western Oregon fall turkey tags in eastern Oregon and vice versa. This indicates confusion about these tag products. Because there are no longer caps on the number of tags sold, and fall hunting is no longer limited through controlled hunts, there is not a biological rationale for separate fall tags for western Oregon and eastern Oregon. Combining these two tags into a single fall tag could result in a slight decrease in sales of fall turkey tags but should improve compliance and mandatory reporting data. Staff propose to maintain the 2-bird bag limit for western Oregon and the 1-bird bag limit for eastern Oregon.

- Expand the Fall Wild Turkey hunt boundary to include the Silvies, Malheur River, Juniper, and Steens Mountain WMUs.

Rationale: Nuisance wild turkey complaints have been increasing around Harney County as wintering flocks have located agricultural subsidies. Managers would like to be able to use hunting as a tool to address these wintering wild turkey complaints, but currently this area is excluded from the fall wild turkey hunt boundary. These WMUs are large but turkey populations are limited by available habitat. For example, the Steens Mt. unit only has turkey habitat in the far northwest portion of the unit, and the Juniper unit only in the far northeast portion. As a general practice, WMUs are not divided into subunits for fall turkey.

- Expand the Beardless Wild Turkey Permit hunt boundaries in three areas.
 1. Fossil WMU south of the Wheeler County boundary and the Heppner WMU south of the Grant County boundary.
 2. Melrose WMU
 3. Applegate, Evans Creek south of the Josephine and Jackson County boundaries, and Rogue WMUs.

Rationale: The Fossil and Heppner units are experiencing chronic wild turkey damage in the vicinity of Fossil, Spray, and Monument. Expanding the boundaries will allow landowners to utilize turkey hunting at a lower price point and focusing on female turkeys to provide some measure of population control and hazing. The Heppner WMU was already part of the Beardless Turkey Permit hunt area, but this proposal will move the boundary north to the county line.

The Umpqua and Rogue districts have continued to experience chronic turkey damage in outlying foothills and suburban/rural transitional land use areas. Following the success and social acceptance of the Willamette Valley beardless turkey hunt, these districts would like to apply this hunt to address problem areas, while restricting the hunt to private lands, excluding industrial timber lands. We will provide a summary of the 2024-25 Beardless Turkey Permit Hunt harvest report when it becomes available.

- Allow Fall Turkey season to begin on September 1 in Fossil WMU south of the Wheeler County boundary and the Heppner WMU south of the Grant County boundary.

Rationale: These areas are contiguous with the other John Day Valley units that open on September 1. These dates increase the chances of archery hunters encountering wild turkeys in September on public land. This change keeps the boundaries for the Beardless Wild Turkey Permit hunt and those units that open September 1 for fall turkey hunting the same. This change results decreases confusion for hunters.

- Begin the Beardless Wild Turkey Permit hunt on October 1, rather than November 1 to address earlier wintering grounds arrival times in this area.

Rationale: Wintering turkeys are beginning to arrive on ranch lands in the John Day Valley in early October. In western Oregon, flocks may be year-round residents. Allowing the beardless turkey permit hunt to start earlier will provide additional management tools for landowners who wish to participate through the use of hunters to increase harvest and provide some measure of hazing.

Sage-grouse Seasons

Season length, open areas, bag limit, and permit numbers for each sage-grouse hunt unit are tentatively proposed at the same conservative levels set by temporary rule in 2024. Permit numbers in these proposed rules may be modified by subsequent rulemaking if sage-grouse population estimates change after surveys are completed and analyzed by mid-July.

Special and Youth Upland Game Hunting Opportunities

Staff proposals include specific dates and locations for two pheasant hunting workshops and 11 youth hunting opportunities.

Mourning Dove Seasons

Proposals for mourning dove seasons are unchanged from last year.

Band-tailed Pigeon Season

Proposals for band-tailed pigeon seasons are unchanged from last year.

Youth Waterfowl Season

Proposals for this season are unchanged from last year.

Veteran & Active Military Personnel Waterfowl Season

Proposals for this season are unchanged from last year.

Duck Seasons

Proposals for duck seasons are unchanged from last year, except staff is proposing that the bag limit for northern pintail be increased from one to three daily, in accordance with the USFWS's recently revised adaptive harvest management strategy to inform pintail harvest regulations.

Goose Seasons (including Brant Season)

Proposals for goose seasons are unchanged from last year, except, in accordance with the federal frameworks, to:

- Lengthen the season of the September Canada goose season in the Northwest Permit Zone from nine to 15 days,
- Reduce the bag limit for Canada geese during the regular goose season in the Northwest Permit Zone from three per day to two per day,
- Reduce the season length of the regular Canada goose season in the Northwest Permit Zone from 95 days to 74 days,
- Establish the closing date of the regular Canada goose season in the Northwest Permit Zone at February 15, instead of March 10 as in previous seasons,
- Implement a three-segment season for white and white-fronted geese in the Mid-Columbia Zone.

Snipe and Coot Seasons

Proposals for snipe and coot seasons are unchanged from last year.

Crow Seasons

Proposals for the crow season are unchanged from last year.

Game Bird Seasons for Falconers

Proposals for seasons to hunt game birds by falconry are unchanged from last year.

State Refuges

Staff proposes expanding the area of the John Day River Refuge (JDRR) where all game bird hunting is allowed. The JDRR is one of several refuges identified in the Oregon Revised Statutes

(ORS), Chapter 501. Per ORS, these refuges are closed to hunting and trapping of any wildlife unless provided otherwise in rule.

The JDRR includes all lands and waters (public and privately owned) within ¼ mile from the high-water flow line along the John Day River from its mouth at the Columbia River, upstream to its junction with Thirty Mile Creek. Within this area, current rules allow hunting of game birds during authorized seasons in that portion of the refuge from Thirty Mile Creek downstream to Rock Creek. Below Rock Creek, only upland game bird hunting is allowed and only during September and October.

The staff proposes expanding the area where hunting of all game birds is permitted be the entire reach from Thirty Mile Creek downstream to Tumwater Falls. Rules for hunting game birds below Tumwater Falls would remain unchanged with only upland game bird hunting allowed and only during September and October.

ISSUE 3

Modify rules for department owned lands.

ANALYSIS

In order to protect wildlife area resources and prevent the spread of wildfires onto adjacent lands, the department is proposing rule changes at Klamath Wildlife Area that would prohibit open fires. Recently, staff and law enforcement have responded when open fires at wildlife area parking areas have lead to issues, including increase wildfire threat to the wildlife area as well as adjacent private lands.

OPTIONS

1. Adopt staff recommendations
2. Modify staff recommendations

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

1. Adopt staff recommendations

DRAFT MOTION:

1. I move to adopt as department policy the 2025-2030 Oregon Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework as proposed by staff and shown in Attachment 3.
2. I move to adopt regulations for 2025-26 game bird hunting seasons, amend rules for department owned lands, and OAR Chapter 635, Divisions 008, 051, 052, 053, 054, 060 and 065 as proposed by staff and shown in Attachments 4 and 5.

Effective Date: *Upon Filing*