Oregon Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework

Effective Dates:

September 1, 2025 through August 31, 2030

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2025-2030 Oregon Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oregon's diverse habitats support 12 species of upland game birds, 8 of which are native, and 10 of which have hunting seasons. This document contains the proposed framework for upland game bird hunting seasons for the next five years. The seasons are designed to provide recreational hunting opportunities compatible with the overall status of upland game bird populations. The multi-year framework approach for setting upland game bird regulations was first approved by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) in 1996 for a 3-year period and again in 1999 after which the framework review began a 5-year cycle.

The role of regulations in game bird management has many functions including protection of a species, providing recreational opportunities, and, in consultation with hunters, providing bag limits and seasons. Regulations should be meaningful but also strive for simplicity and clarity to reduce any misunderstanding.

These frameworks also incorporate the known biology and population dynamics of these species. A primary framework concept is that annual fluctuations in upland bird numbers, which can vary greatly and are normal, should not be the basis for setting hunting seasons year by year. Standardized frameworks are biologically sound management tools that help the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (department) provide consistent, stable regulations that reduce confusion, assist hunters with preparation and planning, and lower administrative costs.

In an effort to stabilize hunting regulations, the following scientifically-supported concepts are the foundation for the frameworks offered in this document:

- Many upland game bird populations exhibit a naturally high annual mortality rate and cannot be stockpiled from year to year.
- Similar annual mortality rates occur in most upland game bird populations whether they are hunted or not.
- Dramatic short-term fluctuations occur because of weather conditions.
- Long-term increases and decreases in population numbers are related to changes in the quality and quantity of habitat.
- Hunted upland game bird populations are generally subjected to density dependent hunting pressure.

Based on these concepts, the department maintains a policy to protect upland game bird populations while also maximizing bird hunting opportunities. In most cases, the quality and quantity of habitat has a much greater impact on long-term population numbers than does hunting. It is crucial for the long-term health of any upland game bird population that high quality habitat be maintained.

Table 1. Summary of 2025-2030 Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework.

UPLAND GAME BIRDS	OPEN AREA	OPEN SEASON
Dusky and Sooty grouse ("Blue") and Ruffed Grouse (Forest grouse)	Statewide	Sep. 1 - Jan. 31.
Chukar and Gray (Hungarian) Partridge	Statewide	Second Saturday in Oct. - Jan. 31
Rooster Pheasant	Statewide	Second Saturday in Oct. - Dec. 31
California Quail	Western Oregon	Sep.1 - Jan. 31
	Eastern Oregon	Second Saturday in Oct. - Jan. 31
Mountain Quail	Western Oregon	Sep. 1 - Jan. 31
	Eastern Oregon	Second Saturday in Oct. - Jan. 31
Spring Wild Turkey	Statewide	Apr. 15 - May 31
Fall Wild Turkey – General Western Oregon	Wildlife Management Units 14 – 30	Sep. 1 - Jan 31
Fall Wild Turkey – General Eastern Oregon	WMUs 36, 37[1],38, 40, 43-44, 45 (N of Wheeler Co line), 48 (N of Grant Co line), 49, 51, 52, 53-64, 65[2], 66-67, 69, 71-72.	Second Saturday in Oct. - Jan. 31 From Dec. 1 - Jan. 31, hunting is allowed only on private lands[3] by permission.
	WMUs 37[4],45 (S of Wheeler Co line), 46, 47, 48 (S of Grant Co line), 50, and 65[5]	Sep. 1 - Jan. 31 From Dec. 1 - Jan. 31, hunting is allowed only on private lands[3] by permission.

[1]That part of WMU 37 west of FS Rd 12 and S of the Ochoco NF boundary
[2] That part of WMU 65 that falls E of the Malheur NF boundary.
[3] Private lands are any lands not owned or controlled by any state, county, or federal agency.
[4]That part of WMU 37 east of FS road 12 and N of the Ochoco NF boundary.
[5] That part of WMU 65 that falls W of the Malheur NF boundary

OREGON UPLAND GAME BIRD HUNTING SEASON FRAMEWORK

September 1, 2025 – August 31, 2030

INTRODUCTION

This document contains the framework for upland game bird hunting seasons that will be in place for the period of September 1, 2025, through August 31, 2030. The seasons are designed to provide optimum recreational hunting opportunities compatible with the overall status of upland game bird populations. This document is not designed to provide a history of upland game bird populations, nor outline and prioritize habitat programs in Oregon. The intent is to focus on harvest regulation. The multi-year framework approach for setting upland game bird regulations was first approved by the Commission in 1996 for a 3-year period and again in 1999, after which the framework was reviewed on a 5-year basis.

The role of regulations in game bird management has many functions including protection of a species, providing recreational opportunities, and, in consultation with hunters, providing bag limits and seasons. Regulations should be meaningful but also strive for simplicity and clarity to reduce any misunderstanding.

These frameworks also incorporate the known biology and population dynamics of these species. A primary framework concept is that annual fluctuations in upland bird numbers, which can vary greatly and are normal, should not be the basis for setting hunting seasons year by year. Standardized frameworks are biologically sound management tools that help the department provide consistent, stable regulations that reduce confusion, assist hunters with preparation and planning, and lower administrative costs.

UPLAND GAME BIRD RESOURCES

Oregon's non-migratory upland game bird species are gallinaceous birds. Eight of the 12 gallinaceous species are native to Oregon. These include the mountain quail (*Oreortyx pictus*), California quail (*Callipepla californica*), greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*), *sooty grouse (*Dendragapus fuliginosus*), *dusky grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*), spruce grouse (*Falcipennis canadensis*) and ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*). Some native species are limited to small geographical regions within the state such as spruce grouse. Others had wide distribution, but were extirpated, such as the Columbian sharp-tailed grouse. Sharp-tailed grouse were reintroduced into Wallowa County, Oregon in 1991. Four species not native to Oregon have been introduced. One introduced species is from North America; the wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*). The other species, which are from Eurasia include the ring-necked and Sichuan pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus ssp.*), chukar partridge (*Alectoris chukar*), and gray (Hungarian) partridge (*Perdix perdix*).

**Note: Sooty and dusky grouse were collectively considered one species, the blue grouse, until the American Ornithologists Union split them in 2006. In Oregon, sooty grouse are found in the Coast Range, Cascades and Warner mountains. The dusky grouse is found primarily in NE Oregon in the Blue, Ochoco, and Wallowa Mountains. For regulation purposes, the dusky and sooty grouse will be collectively called "blue" grouse.*

MANAGEMENT APPROACH

Historically, hunting seasons in Oregon have varied from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Harvest regulations have many times conflicted with accepted principles of upland game bird biology, which have been proven over the years by management and research activities across North America. In an effort to stabilize hunting regulations, the following scientifically-supported concepts are the foundation for the frameworks offered in this document:

- Many upland game bird populations exhibit a high annual death rate and cannot be stockpiled from year to year. Some upland game bird species, such as quail, are short-lived and from 60 to 80 percent will die annually, although not all upland game species have such high mortality rates. Nearly all upland birds produce large broods and exhibit high turnover rates from year to year. Additionally, forest grouse may exhibit cyclic population fluctuations, in which their population numbers rise and fall regularly over an extended period of time. Some species, such as greater sage-grouse, tend to be longer-lived and have lower reproductive capacities than other upland game birds and require more conservative management.
- Similar annual death rates occur in most upland game bird populations whether they are hunted or not, known as compensatory mortality. The outcome of compensatory mortality is that the overall number of animals dying annually does not change much even though causes of death may differ from year to year or from one area to another. Because of this tendency, the idea that populations can be "built-up" by not hunting is often incorrect.
- Weather conditions cause dramatic short-term fluctuations in upland bird populations. Weather directly affects the energetic requirements of birds, availability of food, and survival of young, but also causes annual changes in habitat. These are factors that cannot always be predicted, changed or controlled.
- Long-term increases and decreases in population numbers are related to changes in the quality and quantity of habitat. Factors such as timber conversion, changes in agricultural practices, invasive plant species, and human development are examples that can change the long-term trajectory of upland bird populations.
- Hunted upland game bird populations are generally subject to density dependent hunting pressure. This means that when populations are low, hunter pressure is also low and does not reduce populations to such low levels that they are unable to recover to population levels supported by the habitat when weather conditions are favorable.

Based on these concepts, the department maintains a policy to protect upland game bird populations while also maximizing bird hunting opportunities. In most cases the quality

and quantity of habitat has a much greater impact on long-term population numbers than does hunting. An exception may be when heavy hunting pressure is applied to small populations in marginal or isolated habitat or during severe winter weather that concentrates birds. Because of the high reproductive potential of many upland bird species, relatively liberal hunting seasons have minimal impacts on population numbers for most species. 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.

Again, it is crucial for the long-term health of any upland game bird population that high quality habitat be maintained. In general, good habitat conditions will support a harvestable surplus of birds. Annual weather conditions will determine the success of production and birds available during fall seasons. However, large landscape changes have influenced some population levels. For example, farming practices (methods and crops) have reduced ring-necked pheasant populations in many areas, especially western Oregon. This is no fault of the agricultural community, just a response of a bird population to a changing landscape. The department, other management agencies, and conservation organizations do not always have the resources or capabilities to alter large landscapes. Farm bill programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program have benefited wildlife populations in many areas. Oregon Upland Game Bird Stamp revenues provide funding for upland game bird habitat work in areas that will benefit the hunting public.

One final important consideration in setting game bird regulations is public access for hunting. Many parts of the state, especially southeast Oregon, provide ample opportunities for access to a variety of public lands. Access in many parts of the state is controlled by private landowners who supply a large habitat base for many upland species. State and federal programs, such as the Access and Habitat Program and Open Fields, incentivize qualified private landowners who allow public access.

HUNTING SEASON FRAMEWORK PROPOSALS

RING-NECKED PHEASANT

STATEWIDE SEASON

- Season Dates: From the second Saturday in October through December 31.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 2 rooster pheasants/8 rooster pheasants.

Discussion: Ring-necked pheasant populations vary considerably throughout Oregon, with moderate numbers occurring in portions of eastern Oregon. Even areas with limited pheasant numbers can continue to provide hunting since only roosters are legal game. Pheasants are polygamous and relatively few roosters are required to achieve breeding. Ratios as wide as 1 rooster to 10 hens have been demonstrated to provide adequate egg fertility.

Pheasant hunting is very popular with Oregon hunters, but little can be done to reverse the landscape changes that have occurred over several decades. Fee pheasant hunts have become more popular in western Oregon and the department will continue to support these hunts. With limited pheasant numbers and public access, and a rooster-only bag limit, no significant decrease in populations caused by hunting are predicted with the statewide concurrent season.

Changes from previous framework: None

CHUKAR AND GRAY (HUNGARIAN) PARTRIDGE

STATEWIDE SEASON

- Season Dates: From the second Saturday in October through January 31.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 8/24.

Discussion: Chukar habitat in Oregon is both widespread and relatively secure. By its nature the habitat is also difficult to hunt under most circumstances. Factors most affecting chukar populations are severe winters, spring drought, and/or wet conditions during the hatching period. Chukar exemplify the self-limiting nature of upland bird hunting. In years and in areas when populations are low, hunting pressure and harvest diminishes dramatically. The reverse is also true. Populations have on numerous occasions demonstrated the ability to quickly rebound without implementation of restrictive harvest regulations. While chukar populations throughout most of their range

in Oregon are not limited by hunter harvest, the vulnerability of the birds is sometimes greatly increased when severe weather concentrates birds in low elevations.

Gray (Hungarian) partridge are seldom the specific target of hunters and usually hunted incidentally with chukar, and sometimes pheasants. Habitat is more limited for this species, but population characteristics are similar to chukar. Harvest is relatively low except in years when populations are particularly abundant. Due to the difficulty in distinguishing partridge species on the wing, and the relatively low abundance of gray partridge, these species have a combined bag limit.

Changes from previous framework: None

CALIFORNIA (VALLEY) QUAIL

WESTERN OREGON (CONCURRENT WITH MOUNTAIN QUAIL SEASON):

- Season Dates: September 1 through January 31. Concurrent with adopted mountain quail season.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 10/30, singly or in aggregate with mountain quail.

EASTERN OREGON (CONCURRENT WITH CHUKAR AND MOUNTAIN QUAIL SEASON):

- Season Dates: From the second Saturday in October through January 31.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 10/30, singly or in aggregate with mountain quail.

Discussion: The California (valley) quail is a native bird originally confined to the counties bordering California and Nevada. California quail are among Oregon's most widely distributed game birds; found in urban, agricultural, and wildland habitats. They may be found associated with pheasants on agricultural land or with chukar along stream courses in desert environments. The framework offers liberal hunting opportunities for California quail, but these birds are often pursued in conjunction with other species. Except when hunted concurrently with other upland species, hunting activity for California quail is usually quite light because their distribution is often confined to riparian areas and areas close to human development. Considering the distribution of these birds, their relative abundance, and naturally high annual mortality, California quail are likely an underutilized game bird in most areas of Oregon. The seasons on both sides of the state are concurrent with mountain quail season, reducing the consequences of misidentification by hunters.

Change from previous framework: None

MOUNTAIN QUAIL

WESTERN OREGON

- Season Dates: September 1 through January 31.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 10/30 singly or in aggregate with California Quail.

EASTERN OREGON:

- Season Dates: From the second Saturday in October through January 31.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 2/6 singly or in aggregate with California Quail.

Discussion: In western Oregon, mountain quail provide some of the most difficult game bird hunting available because of the brushy and often steep nature of occupied habitat and the tendency of birds to run in heavy cover. This species is one of Oregon's least hunted upland species. In recent years, more than 85% of the harvest occurs Sept – Nov.

In eastern Oregon, populations declined from historic levels as they have throughout the intermountain regions of the west for reasons that are not completely understood. However, since the mid-1990's due to habitat improvements and extensive translocation efforts, mountain quail populations exist in every county of eastern Oregon.

With populations expanding and increasing, upland bird hunters, particularly those pursuing California quail and chukar, are becoming more likely to encounter and incidentally harvest mountain quail. The small daily bag limit in eastern Oregon allows for the incidental harvest of these birds but should not hamper future range expansion of the species.

Changes from previous framework: None

FOREST GROUSE – "BLUE" GROUSE, RUFFED GROUSE AND SPRUCE GROUSE.

STATEWIDE SEASON

- Season Dates: From September 1 through January 31.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 3 "blue" grouse and 3 ruffed grouse/9 "blue" grouse and 9 ruffed grouse. "Blue" grouse includes both dusky and sooty grouse.
- No open season for spruce grouse.

Discussion: Forest grouse, with the exception of spruce grouse, are widely distributed in the state and are some of the most hunted game birds in Oregon. The hunting season framework allows for harvest from the first of September through the end of January. About 94% of ruffed grouse and 97% of "blue" grouse are harvested in Sept – Nov. After

mid-October, "blue" grouse spend most of their time in trees feeding on conifer needles; largely out of reach of hunters.

The department has increased wing collection efforts in western Oregon and will continue to do so to learn more about the population dynamics of these birds. In addition, the department has been collaborating with Oregon State University since 2011 to develop an unbiased survey to detect calling male sooty "blue" grouse during spring to provide an index to identify population trends. The project has utilized autonomous recording units (ARUs) to understand hooting patterns throughout the spring. The project is also in the process of developing a population model incorporating detection probabilities, environmental covariates, and harvest information.

Grouse studies in northeast Oregon suggest that hunting has little impact on the population, even in areas of high hunter use. As with many other species, annual rainfall dictates relative abundance of grouse in the fall, but these populations may be cyclic in nature. Spruce grouse populations are very restricted in their distribution in northeast Oregon. Wing collections from hunters since 1985 have documented a small incidental take of spruce grouse. Most spruce grouse wings (typically about four per year) are returned at drop-off sites known as wing barrels; consequently it is not possible to identify individual hunters.

Changes from previous framework - None

SAGE-GROUSE

CONTROLLED HUNT SEASON

- Season Dates: No more than a 9-day season between September 1 and 20.
- Daily Bag/Season Limits: 2/2 by permit only.
- Permit allocations to be determined annually for individual Wildlife Management Units (WMUs).

Discussion: Sage-grouse are widely distributed across the ~ 30,000 square miles of sagebrush-steppe habitat in Oregon. Sage-grouse have relatively low reproductive rates and high adult survival rates compared to other upland game bird species and their response to improved habitat conditions may be slower than that of most species. The department's approach to sage-grouse hunting is guided by the Oregon Sage-Grouse Action Plan, adopted through Governor's Executive Order 15-18, and the Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon. Because of the status of this species and sagebrush habitats across its range, hunting will remain conservative through the issuance of hunting permits assigned to specific WMUs so that there will be no significant impact on populations.

Since 1989, Oregon has held a sage-grouse season each fall. Every season had a daily and season bag limit of two birds. However, the length of the season has varied. There were 6 years with a 2-day season, 10 years with 5-day season, and for the last 14 years, a 9-day season. Average individual hunter success was comparable despite the differences in length of the season, with the 2-day season at 1.09 birds/hunter, 5-day season at 1.07

birds/hunter, and 9-day season at 0.94 birds/hunter. The 9-day season does not increase harvest since the daily bag and season limit remains at two birds and the average Oregon sage-grouse hunter spends 1.8 days hunting, successful or not. The 9-day season does make scheduling a hunt easier for successful applicants by giving the option of two different weekends of opportunity.

Permit numbers are determined annually based on a mathematical formula combining spring lek count information, hunter participation and success 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 conservative 0.5 chicks/hen ratio is applied to the adult breeding population to estimate the total sage-grouse fall population.

The formula calculates the number of permits that would result in harvest by sage-grouse hunt unit of 5% or less. The 5% is the maximum allowed harvest and not a harvest goal. Oregon's harvest is below the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies recommendation to limit sage-grouse harvest to no more than 10% of the fall population. A 2010 paper in the Journal of Wildlife Management examined several years of band recovery data from Nevada and Colorado and concluded that harvest rates of 11% or less of the fall population are unlikely to have an important influence on local population dynamics of sage-grouse. Based on harvest surveys, Oregon's sage-grouse harvest in recent years has been 0-3.7% of the estimated fall population for each unit. Units without adequate breeding population information, isolated populations, or breeding populations below the minimum breeding population level are closed to hunting. Biologists also take into consideration climatic and social factors. For example, when a large wildfire occurs on a unit after the spring lek counts and birds are under additional environmental stress, managers will choose to reduce permits or temporarily close a unit to hunting until the actual impact is understood.

The timing of Oregon's sage-grouse hunting season in early September maximizes the opportunity to gather biological information from wings solicited from hunters because it occurs before most grouse have completed their wing molt. Information gathered from these wings have been important in recent years in gathering information for this species, including peak hatching dates and age and sex ratios.

Changes from previous framework: None.

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE

- No open season for Columbian sharp-tailed grouse.

Discussion: Sharp-tailed grouse, once common throughout large areas of eastern Oregon, were extirpated in the state by the 1960s. A 1991 reintroduction of this native species was undertaken in Wallowa County in northeast Oregon. The population was augmented several times since but is no longer at detectable levels. There is not currently a viable source population in the U.S. to supplement this population, but Washington has had some success trapping and transplanting birds from British Columbia. The next step in

this effort is re-evaluating habitat suitability as the previous location likely lacked adequate winter shrub cover.

Changes from previous framework: None.

WILD TURKEY

GENERAL SPRING SEASON

- Season Dates: April 15 through May 31.
- Daily Bag Limit: One male turkey or a turkey with a visible beard.
- Season Limit: Three legal turkeys.

YOUTH SPRING TURKEY HUNT

- Season Dates: The first weekend prior to and excluding April 15.
- Daily Bag/Season Limits: One male turkey or a turkey with a visible beard.
- Only youths 17 years of age and younger accompanied by a non-hunting adult may participate. Unfilled tags are valid for the general spring season.

FALL SEASON

Western Oregon

- Open area includes the following Wildlife Management Units: Trask, Willamette, Santiam, Stott Mtn., Alsea, McKenzie, Siuslaw, Indigo, Dixon, Melrose, Tioga, Sixes, Powers, Chetco, Applegate, Evans Creek, and Rogue.
- Season Dates: September 1 through January 31.
- Daily Bag/Season Limits: Two turkeys of either sex daily, two per season, of which only one can be from eastern Oregon.

Eastern Oregon

- Open area includes Maury, Ochoco, Grizzly, Maupin, Biggs, Columbia Basin, Fossil, Murderers Creek, Northside, Heppner, Ukiah, Desolation, Sumpter, Starkey, Catherine Crk, Mt. Emily, Walla Walla, Wenaha, Sled Springs, Chesnimnus, Snake River, Minam, Imnaha, Pine Creek, Keating, Lookout Mtn, Beulah, Malheur River, Owyhee, Steens Mtn, Juniper, and Silvies.
- Season Dates: Second Saturday in October through January 31 or September 1 through January 31 for select units as designated in the regulations. December 1- January 31 hunting is allowed only on private land.
- Daily Bag/Season Limits: One turkey of either sex daily/one per season.

Discussion: Oregon's spring turkey season is among the most liberal in the United States but the range of turkeys in Oregon continues to expand. The long season provides abundant opportunities with fall hunting offered in high-density areas and in areas where

turkeys are less desired. Breeding begins as early as late February, and much of it has already occurred by mid-April. A male-only (bearded hens also legal) spring season has proven to have minimal impacts on populations.

As turkey populations have increased, the department has expanded fall hunting opportunities. Fall seasons can be used to control turkey populations and assist landowners with addressing damage. Emergency hunts for turkeys can also be used to address turkey nuisance and damage. The Oregon Wild Turkey Plan was updated and adopted by the Commission in 2018 and has provided a guide to turkey management since 2004.

Since the adoption of the previous framework, Commission approved an experimental turkey management tool called the Beardless Wild Turkey Permit Season. This season is intended to empower landowners to use hunters to address chronic winter turkey damage complaints at a reduced cost to the hunter. The cost of a turkey tag ($26.50 with a bag limit of 1) is viewed as a barrier in situations where hunters could increase turkey harvest. The Beardless Turkey Permit costs $26.50 and allows for the harvest of three "hen wild turkeys and/or wild turkeys without a visible beard" for each permit. Hunters can possess up to 3 permits with a three-bird daily bag limit. Successful hunters record harvest information on the permit (electronically or on paper) but are not required to physically tag each bird. The beardless turkey requirement increases the likelihood of removing reproductive females from the population while protecting toms for the popular spring sport hunt. As this season is still in pilot phase, it is not included in the 2025-2030 Upland Game Bird Season Framework at this time but will be considered by the Commission on an annual basis.

Changes from previous framework:

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. 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. The department will maintain the 2-bird bag limit for western Oregon and the 1-bird bag limit for eastern Oregon.

Expand Eastern OR Fall Turkey Season to include Malheur Rvr, Steens Mtn, Juniper, and Silvies WMUs. 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, the department has 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. 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.

OTHER FRAMEWORKS

SHOOTING HOURS

Shooting hours for upland game bird seasons are proposed to remain at ½ hour before sunrise to sunset. The shooting hours table for game birds presented in the annual Game Bird Regulations has been expanded to standardize shooting hours in different regions of the state.

CARCASS IDENTIFICATION

One fully feathered head or wing must be left naturally attached to all upland game birds in the field or while in transit to the place of permanent residence of the possessor.

No changes from previous framework.

MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

The frameworks offer hunting opportunities based on a combination of biological and social factors. However, they are just one component of overall upland game bird management in Oregon. Managed hunting has minimal impacts on overall upland bird populations, with habitat and weather factors playing the largest role in determining upland game bird abundance. It is still important to monitor populations to determine the status, and to provide accurate hunting forecasts. For some species, population census methods have not been precise enough to accurately reflect either numbers or availability of birds for harvest. Minimizing annual changes in regulations offers opportunities to focus on improving survey methods. Improved surveys could meet the following objectives:

- Provide better information about the status of bird populations.
- Provide more precise data for making changes in long-term hunting frameworks.
- Provide better information to support hunting seasons if they are challenged.

Another important component of upland management is research to assist in gathering basic life history information to assist in management decision-making. The department has a long history of cooperative research with Oregon State University and it is planned to continue these efforts, with a priority on native upland species. In addition, public access programs and habitat enhancement programs will be reviewed and developed to meet the needs of Oregon's upland game bird hunters.

WINTER EMERGENCIES

When seasons extend into late December or January harsh winter conditions may be encountered. In some years deep and/or crusted snow have placed birds under stress, concentrated them in smaller areas, limited access to food, and made them more vulnerable to harvest and harassment.

These conditions can impact segments of populations. There is little that can be done to alleviate the effects when these conditions occur, including stopping hunting. In fact, a hunting closure may have the opposite affect by allowing more birds to compete for limited resources. Populations, which are stressed in winter, may have many weeks to survive before spring. When these conditions occur, the stage is set for several undesirable social situations. Birds that are concentrated along roads in valley floors allow unethical persons to harvest birds illegally by shooting from vehicles or from the road. Another issue is the ethical concern on the part of many hunters, landowners, and non-hunters that the birds should not be hunted when they are so stressed and concentrated. But again, many of these birds may not survive the winter. In addition, in some parts of eastern Oregon, chukar range coincides with important, high-density winter ranges for deer, bighorn sheep, and elk. Under harsh winter weather conditions, disturbance to big game by bird hunters late in the winter can be a concern.

The department recognizes the need to consider localized, early closure of certain game bird seasons during unusually severe and extended winter conditions. Since conditions requiring an emergency closure vary on a case-by-case basis, a closure may be implemented at the recommendation of the involved Wildlife District and Region followed by consultation with the Wildlife Division. When a decision is made to recommend a closure, the Wildlife Division Administrator will request the Director close the season under the temporary rule process. To provide consistency and certainty for hunters and businesses that depend on upland game bird seasons, the department is proposing that any emergency closures take effect on the 15th or last day of the month. For example, if winter conditions do not warrant the closure of Chukar season on December 31st, hunters will know that the season will extend through at least January 14th. Similarly, if the season is not closed on January 15th, hunters will know the season will extend through January 31st. Closures will be by county or WMU and publicized (internet, newspapers and radio) as widely as possible.

POPULATION STATUS AND FRAMEWORK REVIEW

Annual surveys conducted for upland bird species will be evaluated to track any long-term trends and identify any concerns with populations. It is the foundation of this document that upland game bird seasons do not require annual adjustment. Occasional season adjustments may be needed, however, based on long-term evaluation of populations and/or habitats. All frameworks will be re-evaluated at 5-year intervals.

PUBLIC PROCESS

The department accepts public comments regarding the Upland Game Bird Framework at any time. For the 2025-2030 Framework the department solicited comments with presentations at the Portland and Central Oregon Sportsman's Shows, meetings with sportsman's groups, direct emails to interested citizens, issued a news release requesting comment, and posted a draft on the agency website.