Attachment 4

GAME BIRD PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

for 2025–26

UPLAND and MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SEASONS

FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE OREGON FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION
April 18, 2025

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

4034 Fairview Industrial Dr. SE
Salem, OR 97302
Wildlife Division (503) 947-6301

Winning artwork for the 2025 Oregon Upland Game Bird Stamp Art Contest, California Quail by Buck Spencer.

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The recommendations in this packet are based in part 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.

Proposed season dates are for calendar year 2025 unless otherwise noted.

UPLAND GAME BIRDS

Season Frameworks

In the April 2020 adoption of the Game Bird Regulations, the Commission approved the 2020-2025 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, 2020 through August 31, 2025). 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 season structure for ring-necked pheasant, chukar and Hungarian (gray) partridge, California quail, mountain quail, "blue" and ruffed grouse, Greater sage-grouse, and spring and fall wild turkey seasons. As the previous framework expires, the Commission will consider approval of the 2025-2030 Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework through the adoption of the draft 2025-26 Game Bird Regulations as the upland game bird seasons proposed therein reflect the proposed framework criteria. The framework does not preclude mid-term regulations proposals that may arise due to unforeseen circumstances or opportunities.

Population Status and Harvest

The following information about the status and harvest of Oregon's upland game birds is presented to provide additional background and context for the 2025-26 regulations proposals.

Upland Game Bird Trends

Annual fluctuations in upland game bird numbers are consistent with the biology of short-lived species with the ability for high reproductive production. These short-term changes can often be attributed to weather conditions, whether resulting in direct mortality, nest loss, or the resulting effect of weather and climate 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. Nonetheless, potential impacts from harvest are evaluated annually.

After peaking in 2005, upland game bird populations, particularly chukar and California quail, declined sharply in 2007 due to a severe drought (Fig. 1). From 2007-2015 (2011 was an exception) precipitation was below average and consequently suppressed upland game bird

populations, especially chukar in eastern Oregon. Weather in the winter of 2016-2017 included deep persistent snow cover that caused mortality in some areas, reducing breeding populations, but populations have been rebounding ever since. Hunter effort has been slightly increasing over the past decade in response to improving upland game bird populations. Increasing harvest is driven by exceptional chukar populations which have been on the rise since 2020.

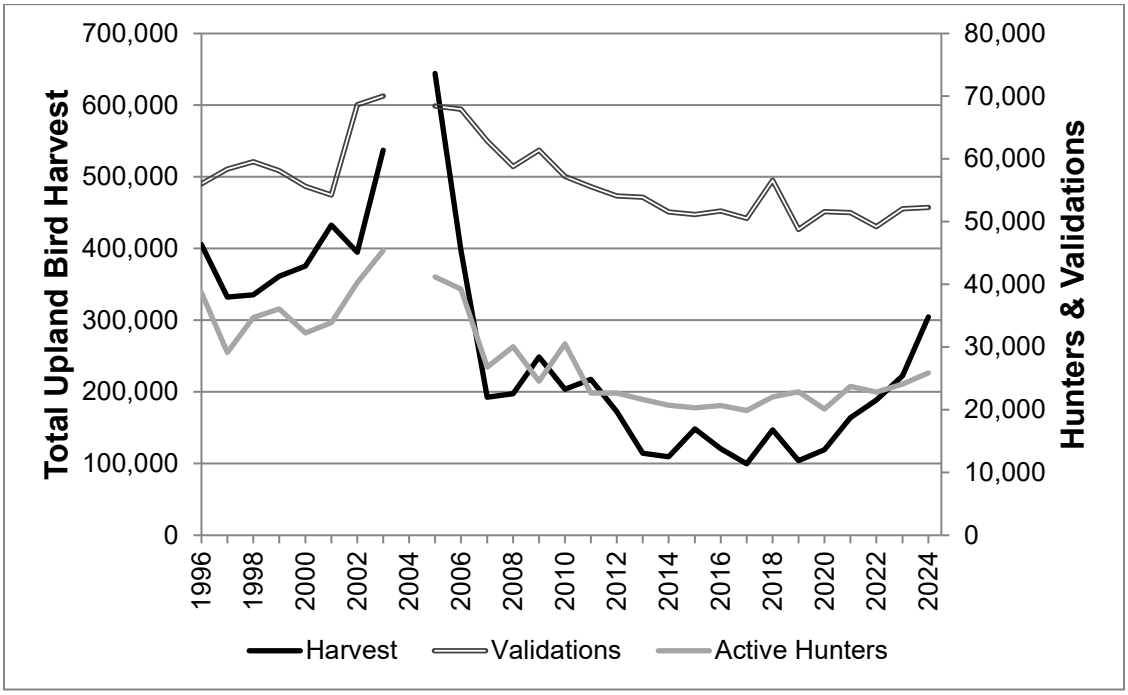

Figure 1. Long-term trend of upland game bird harvest, hunters, and upland validation (stamp) sales obtained through phone (2020 and prior) and email surveys (2021 to present). No survey was conducted in 2004.

Upland Game Bird 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. Peak hatch for most upland game birds in Oregon is mid-May through mid-June. Upland game bird chicks develop quickly but are still susceptible to cold and wet weather conditions until they can thermoregulate independently.

Nesting conditions in 2024 were good to excellent in most locations. April temperatures were mild and snow water equivalents were average to above average. The spring precipitation gave a timely boost to vegetation and insects important to broods.

The summer of 2024 was warmer than average and abundant dry vegetation resulted in severe large-scale fires in the Blue Mountains, foothills, and rangelands of eastern Oregon. Beginning in July, fires burned a record 1.9 million acres, with large fires occurring in nearly every county in eastern Oregon, as well as Douglas County. Habitat impacted included various forest types,

foothills, and rangeland. The effect of these fires on upland game bird populations is not yet known. There was likely some direct mortality, and there will be reduced nesting and hiding cover and increased likelihood of invasive annual grasses replacing perennial cover in disturbed areas.

Summer production surveys indicated that chukar, gray partridge, and ring-necked pheasant densities were above the 5-year average, while California quail abundance was down slightly, but chicks/adult were above average. Sample sizes for other species were not adequate to evaluate.

Upland Game Bird Harvest Surveys

A random email survey of 8,853 upland game bird validation holders was used to estimate 2024-25 upland game bird harvest (Table 1). Upland game bird hunter numbers, harvest effort, and overall harvest were up for non-forest species. Forest grouse and mountain quail hunter numbers were down, likely due to inaccessibility in post-fire habitat. Chukar were the most harvested upland game bird in 2024-25 season, followed by California quail, and ruffed grouse. Gray partridge harvest was surprisingly strong, exceeding the 5-year average by 285%.

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 while sage-grouse harvest estimates are based on a combination of email and direct mailing of survey questionnaires to successful controlled hunt applicants.

Table 1. Results of 2024-25 upland game bird harvest surveys in Oregon in comparison to the previous season and previous 5-year average.

		Total Harvest 2024-25	% Change 2023-24	5-Year Average	% Change from 5-Year Average
Blue Grouse	Hunters	7,849	-4%	8,918	-12%
	Days	76,867	6%	68,832	12%
	Harvest	17,766	-4%	12,234	45%
Ruffed Grouse	Hunters	12,508	-3%	12,619	-1%
	Days	119,927	0%	111,910	7%
	Harvest	29,496	-13%	30,151	-2%
Mountain Quail	Hunters	4,498	-8%	3,572	26%
	Days	35,484	4%	28,663	24%
	Harvest	15,411	40%	6,950	122%
California Quail	Hunters	7,987	18%	5,857	36%
	Days	52,599	24%	38,487	37%
	Harvest	54,925	42%	31,770	73%
Chukar	Hunters	10,213	35%	5,674	80%
	Days	66,273	29%	37,632	76%
	Harvest	137,737	54%	53,266	159%
Hungarian (Gray) Partridge	Hunters	4,361	48%	2,011	117%
	Days	31,343	54%	12,827	144%
	Harvest	25,925	104%	6,731	285%
Ring-necked Pheasant	Hunters	7,023	3%	6,028	16%
	Days	32,690	16%	27,018	21%
	Harvest	23,334	27%	17,116	36%

Greater Sage-Grouse

A long history of greater sage-grouse conservation efforts in Oregon and throughout the West has resulted in plans, executive orders, and agreements that provide direction for sage-grouse management in the state, prioritize research, and coordinate the many state, federal, and NGO partners involved. A brief history of the most relevant actions is summarized below.

On March 5, 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced its determination that listing the sage-grouse range-wide under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was warranted but precluded by higher-priority listing actions. This finding prompted the development of the Oregon Sage-Grouse Conservation Partnership (SageCon), a collaborative effort to leverage funding across Oregon's sage country and building agreements to balance natural resource protection with local livelihoods. Concurrently, the department's Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon (2011) laid the groundwork for sage-grouse management in the state and identified the core areas critical to development of SageCon's Oregon Sage-Grouse Action Plan (2015), a collaborative framework for sage-grouse conservation in Oregon. Governor Brown then issued Executive Order 15-18 (2015), directing state agencies to implement the Oregon Sage-Grouse Action Plan.

The sage-grouse controlled hunt is addressed in the Action Plan and has been managed according to the agreed-upon objectives and action items (pp 191-192). Specifically, the Action Plan does not propose additional restrictions on the hunt due to the already restrictive and conservative management of the season. The Action Plan directs the continuation of two related conservation actions for sage-grouse hunting seasons: no more than 5 percent of the fall population is to be harvested annually and no harvest is allowed in WMUs where the estimated spring population is <100 males in consecutive years.

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 the species. This collaborative, science-based strategy for greater sage-grouse is likely the largest conservation effort in U.S. history. The determination found that the main threats to sage-grouse range wide were, and continue to be, 1) habitat loss, fragmentation, and modification, and 2) inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms, particularly in relation to energy and other development actions. 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."

Sage-grouse are intensively monitored in Oregon. The primary monitoring method is spring lek counts which provide year-by-year comparisons in lek attendance by male sage-grouse. Production surveys seek to locate female sage-grouse and their broods, estimating the average brood size for comparison among years and locations. Other demographic information such as nest success, sex ratios, and age ratios are obtained through hunter-collected wings, and through specific academic research projects. Hunter effort and success rates are obtained through the

annual sage-grouse harvest survey.

In addition to annual monitoring, the department supports numerous academic research projects to answer specific questions about sage-grouse biology, demographics, and habitat. These projects have examined the impacts of feral horses on brood survival and summer habitat, post wildfire recovery, juniper removal, invasive annual grass treatment, nest-site selection, the impact of raven predation, and the effects of legal harvest on sage-grouse. Each research project is designed to inform managers of best practices to improve sage-grouse conservation outcomes by recommending actions based on the study results. For example, Dr. Andrew Olsen (Oregon State University) found that large-scale juniper removal starting in 2012 (Warner Unit) increased sage-grouse population growth rates by 12 percent as compared to the control areas, but the effect took 5-6 years. These results justify the continued effort and expense of stopping the invasion of western juniper in sagebrush habitats.

Sage-grouse Survey Results— During the 2024 greater sage-grouse breeding season, 1,550 ground and 63 aerial lek surveys were conducted at 696 individual lek sites comprising 424 lek complexes (i.e. a group of allied leks within 1 mile of each other between which a set of males may move). Surveys were conducted at 55.7 percent of known lek sites and 50.3 percent of known lek complexes in the state. Access to most sage-grouse leks was moderate to good in most areas. Statewide, survey effort during 2024 was down -2.3%, -13.7%, and -7.1% from the 9-year average (2015–2023) for the number of ground surveys conducted, number of leks surveyed, and number of complexes surveyed, respectively. Results from these surveys indicate the sage-grouse spring breeding population in Oregon increased by 63.9 percent between 2023 and 2024, to 25,253 estimated individuals (95% CI: 23,801–26,706 individuals), the highest estimate recorded in Oregon since 2006. These results suggest Oregon's sage-grouse populations are still trending upward in the current population cycle, and the apparent population decline in 2023 was likely low-biased due to poor lek accessibility. Population increases occurred in the Burns, Lakeview, Prineville, and Vale BLM districts at 66.5%, 75.6%, 13.4%, and 69.0%, respectively. The estimated sage-grouse population in the Baker BLM Resource Area apparently increased by 15.9%, Observed population increases or decreases in the Baker Resource Area are likely accurate but the magnitude of annual population trends is likely inflated due to issues with the population model and very small populations. A full review of sage-grouse monitoring efforts can be found in the annual population report.

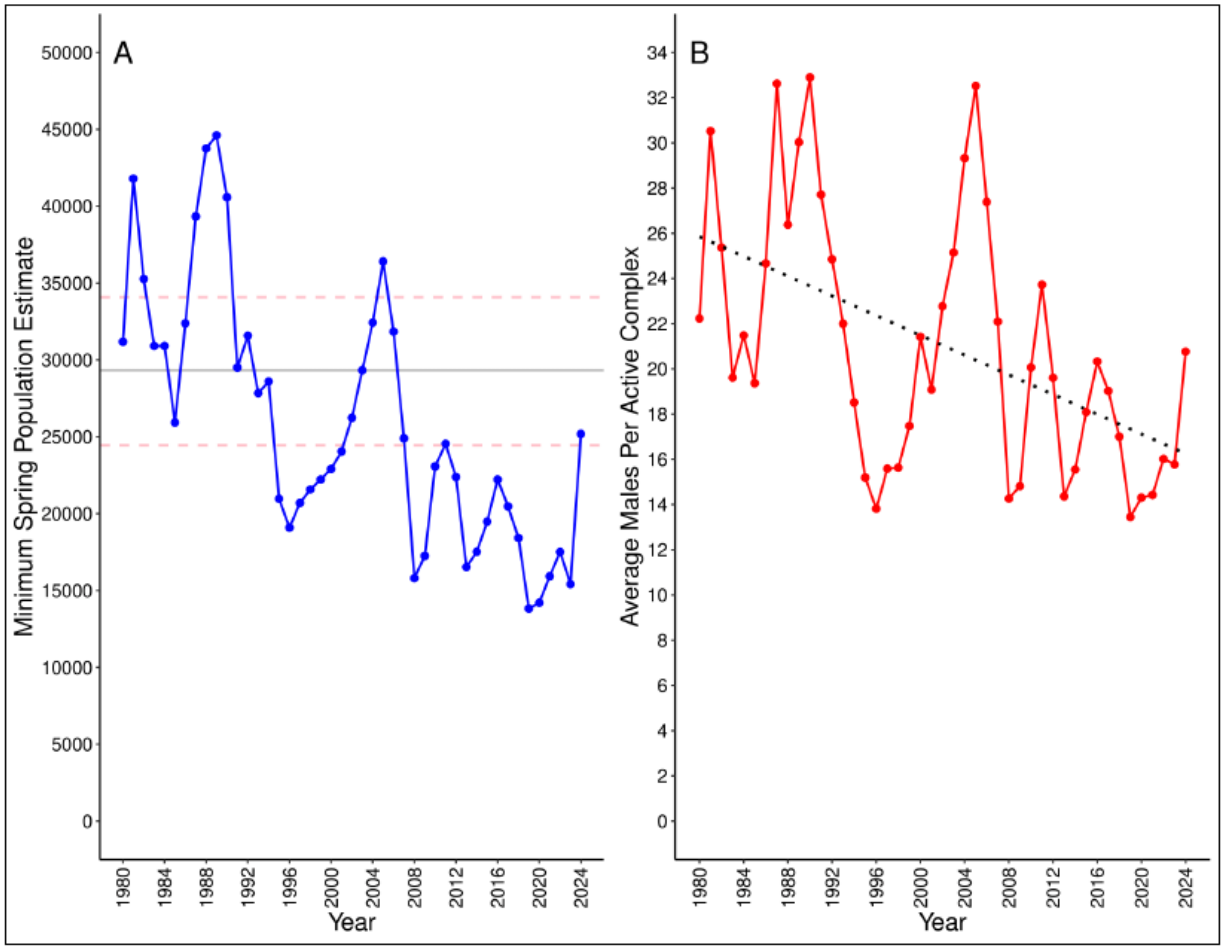

Figure 2. Greater sage-grouse population trends in Oregon, 1980 – 2024. A - Estimated spring breeding population of greater sage-grouse, gray line indicates 2003 baseline population level of 29,327 individuals, pink dotted lines indicate the 95% confidence interval around the 2023 baseline estimate. B – Change in average lek complex size (males per active lek complex).

Sage-grouse Controlled Hunt Results— A total of 670 permits were authorized for the 2024 season. The Lookout Mountain, Sumpter, South Wagontire, and Juniper Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) remained closed due to concerning population declines. Some of these declines followed large-scale range fires, while others are long-term declines related to changing land use and habitat quality. Permits were increased slightly on the Beatys Butte, Trout Creek Mountains, Steens, Whitehorse, North Wagontire, and Warner units from the previous year. Although survey data warranted a permit increase for 2024 in the Beulah and Owyhee units, permits were reduced in those units out of concern for possible impacts from the 2024 wildfires.

Of the 670 permits authorized for the 10 hunt units, 435 hunters participated in the season, compared to 431 in 2023. Hunters harvested an estimated 501 sage-grouse, averaging 1.15 birds/hunter (Table 2). Harvest rates were between 0 - 3.7 percent of the estimated fall population in each unit. There was no harvest in the Silvies WMU due to fire-related access limitations. Hunter-returned wings (n = 310) were examined at the annual sage-grouse wing bee to estimate age ratios, sex ratios, proportion of successful hens and timing of hatch. In 2024,

wings showed 2.25 juveniles/hen in the harvest, the second highest recorded age ratio since the first wingbee in 1982 and above Oregon's long-term average (LTA) of 1.47 juveniles/hen. Additionally, the proportion of juveniles in the harvested sample was 54.5% above the long-term average of 47%. Age ratios varied widely across the units, but were particularly high in Malheur River, North Wagontire, Steens, Beulah, and Warner WMUs.

Table 2. 2024 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	125	125	92	67	45	82	1.22	76%
J66	100	100	56	64	163	46	0.73	80%
J67	50	50	30	27	49	8	0.30	86%
J68A	40	40	34	36	51	56	1.56	70%
J68B	100	100	74	66	146	109	1.65	79%
J69	50	50	38	36	73	53	1.46	66%
J70	90	90	65	58	92	65	1.12	57%
J71	0	0						
J72	20	20	12	5	5	0	0.00	85%
J73A	25	25	22	22	38	21	0.93	68%
J73B	0	0						
J74	70	70	52	58	102	71	1.22	77%
Totals	670	670	475	435	763	501	1.15	74%

Wild Turkey

Turkey population trends are primarily monitored through the mandatory harvest reporting system. The main hunting season is focused on male turkeys and takes place during the spring. Fall seasons are designed to alleviate damage and allow the harvest of hen turkeys. The beardless turkey permit was introduced in 2023-24 to a pilot area in the vicinity of Grant County and expanded to the Willamette Valley in 2024-25. The permit allows for the harvest of up to 3 hens or beardless turkeys for each permit, but the hunt is limited to private lands.

Spring Turkey – Tags issued for general spring turkey were down 4.1 percent from the previous year. Since 2022, SportsPac holders are allowed to select either a spring or fall turkey tag, resulting in a decrease in spring tag holders. The number of hunters in 2024 who pursued spring turkeys decreased 1.4 percent from the previous year. These hunters harvested 4 percent more birds than 2023. The youth spring turkey hunt continues to be very popular and well received. Youth accounted for about 14 percent of total spring harvest of turkeys.

Fall Turkey –With the extension of fall turkey season through January 31st, mandatory reporting data will not be available until after the late season reporting deadline of April 15th. Staff will analyze the data for the 2024-25 fall turkey season once it becomes available.

Beardless Turkey Permit - After the second year of the Beardless Turkey Permit Season, staff report that landowners and hunters like the product and are adopting its use. A total of 450 permits were sold for the 2024-25 season, up from 204 the previous year. This is likely due to increased awareness of the product and the addition of the Willamette Valley units to the hunt area. Many landowners in the John Day valley relied on ODFW staff to organize hunters on their property, while others operated independently. Final numbers from mandatory reporting will be available in mid-April. Staff also report that the presence of hunters, whether successful or not, did have a desirable hazing effect on the turkey flocks on the most heavily hunted properties.

Table 3. Wild turkey mandatory harvest reporting results for 2024-25 spring and fall seasons.

HUNT	Tags Authorized	Tags Issued	Hunters	Hunter Days	Birds Harvested	Birds/ Hunter	% Response
Spring Turkey	Unlimited	30,244	12,563	51,397	5,112	0.41	75%
Spring Youth Turkey	Unlimited	4,869	1,807	6,173	836	0.46	
Western Oregon Fall	Unlimited	7,818	*Data not yet available*				
Eastern Oregon Fall	Unlimited	5,958					
Beardless Turkey Permit	Unlimited	450					
TOTALS		35,113	14,370	57,570	5,948	0.41	75%

For most upland game birds, all aspects of the seasons (e.g., season dates, daily bag limits, possession limits) are covered by the jointly proposed Upland Game Bird Hunting Season 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. Fall turkey is another season where the hunts may be adjusted annually based on population trends or damage/nuisance issues.

Table 4. The 2025-26 season proposals for forest grouse, partridge, pheasant, quail, and general turkey.

UPLAND GAME BIRDS	OPEN AREA	OPEN SEASON	Daily Bag limit
"Blue" and Ruffed Grouse	Statewide	Sept. 1 – Jan. 31	3 each species
Chukar and Hungarian (Gray) Partridge	Statewide	Oct. 11 – Jan. 31	8 (except Lower Klamath Hills = 2)
Rooster Pheasant	Statewide	Oct. 11 – Dec. 31	2
California Quail	Western Oregon	Sept. 1 – Jan. 31	10 in aggregate
	Eastern Oregon	Oct. 11 – Jan. 31	10 in aggregate
Mountain Quail	Western Oregon	Sept. 1 – Jan. 31	10 in aggregate
	Eastern Oregon	Oct. 11 – Jan. 31	2 in aggregate
Spring Turkey	Statewide	Apr. 15 – May 31	1 (season limit 3)
Youth Spring Turkey	Statewide	Apr. 11 – Apr. 12	
Fall Turkey – Western Oregon	WMUs 14-30	Sept. 1 – Jan. 31	2 (season limit 2 Fall Turkey tags)
Fall Turkey – Eastern Oregon[1,2]	WMUs 36, 37[3],38, 40, 43-44, **45 (N of Wheeler Co line), 48 (N of Grant Co line),** 49, 51, 52, 53-65, **66**-67, **69, 71-72.**	Oct. 11 – Jan. 31	1 (season limit 1)
	WMUs 37[4]**,45 (S of Wheeler Co line),** 46, 47, **48 (S of Grant Co line),** 50**,** and 65[5]	Sept. 1 – Jan. 31	
Fall Turkey – Beardless Turkey Permit	Western Oregon: Private lands[2] excluding private industrial forestland[6] within the boundaries of Marion, Polk, Yamhill, Benton, Linn, and eastern Lane[7] cos (WMUs 14-21), **and WMUs 23, 28, 29 (S of Josephine and Jackson co line), and 30.**	**Oct. 1** – Feb 28	3 turkeys including all hens and turkeys without a visible beard (season limit 3 permits)
	Eastern Oregon: Private lands[2] within, WMUs 37[4]**,45 (S of Wheeler Co line),** 46, 47, **48 (S of Grant Co line),** 50**,** and 65[5]		

[1] From Dec. 1 – Jan 31, 2025 hunting is allowed only on private lands by permission.
[2] Private lands are any lands not owned or controlled by any state, county, or federal agency.
[3] That part of WMU 37 west of FS Rd 12 and S of the Ochoco NF boundary
[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.
[6] Private industrial forestland is land owned by a company or corporation that owns 5,000 or more acres of land used for growing and harvesting forest tree species in Oregon. A map of private industrial and non-industrial forestland can be found at: https://oregon-department-of-forestry-geo.hub.arcgis.com/datasets/f3a55ad91a3c42548432a04e9544aa93_0/explore.
[7] That part of WMU 18 and 20 within the Lane Co boundary E of the Range 7/8 W boundary extending from the N to the S border of the co.

2025 Controlled Sage-grouse Hunt

The season framework for sage-grouse establishes a controlled hunt with a 9-day season between September 1-20. The 2025 proposed season dates are September 6-14 with a two bird daily and season bag limit. The department's policy is for sage-grouse harvest not to exceed 5 percent of the fall population and in practice, actual harvest is estimated at 3-4 percent 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 considered in 10 of the 21 WMUs where sage-grouse occur.

Volunteers and state and federal personnel are currently conducting the 2025 lek surveys. Over the next several months, lek data will be entered and analyzed. Permit numbers are determined annually based on a mathematical formula combining spring lek count information, production, hunter participation rates, and results from the analysis of wings taken during the previous hunting season. Permit numbers for 2025 (Table 5) made permanent through these proposed rules may be changed through future rulemaking if finalized sage-grouse population estimates by WMU vary notably from expectations after sage-grouse population and production surveys are completed in mid-July. Staff expects to maintain a very conservative permit allocation with existing closures maintained in the Juniper, South Wagontire, Lookout Mountain, and Sumpter WMUs.

As stated above, permit numbers are calculated using a formula that incorporates various sage-grouse demographic information. Spring lek surveys are used to estimate the adult male breeding population. Based on a sage-grouse sex ratio of females per male (from harvested wing analysis), the adult breeding population is then estimated. A very conservative chick/hen ratio of 0.5 chicks/hen is applied to the adult breeding population to estimate the total sage-grouse fall population. Sage-grouse production is typically much higher than this estimate, but summer brood counts have not shown strong congruence with age ratios from hunter-harvested wings. In 2019 the decision was made to err on the side of caution and not use the brood count data to calculate fall populations. The formula is designed to authorize the take of 5 percent or less of the estimated fall population. The 5 percent is the maximum allowed harvest and not a harvest goal. Research has concluded that harvest rates of 10 percent or less are unlikely to have any meaningful effect on the population dynamics of sage-grouse. The department is collaborating with Oregon State University on research to determine the veracity of this guideline specific to Oregon's sage-grouse. The number of permits offered by WMU during the past two years is shown in Table 5.

An important benefit of hunting sage-grouse is the collection of essential biological information that would otherwise be very difficult to obtain. 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 that allow for population reconstruction based simply on age at harvest data and known hunting effort. Without this wing analysis data, it would be very difficult to determine how sage-grouse populations are

performing through time. It is particularly critical to have this information as land managers implement habitat improvements designed to benefit sage-grouse.

Of the western states where sage-grouse are hunted, Oregon sage-grouse hunting regulations are among the most conservative. 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.

Table 5. Oregon sage-grouse hunting permit numbers in 2023, 2024, and recommendations for 2025.

Sage-grouse Permit Recommendations			
MANAGEMENT UNIT	**2023 PERMITS**	**2024 PERMITS**	**2025 RECOMMENDATIONS[1]**
Beulah	150	125	125
Malheur River	100	100	100
Owyhee	60	50	50
Trout Creek Mountains[2]	35	40	40
E. Whitehorse[3]	85	100	100
Steens Mountain	40	50	50
Beatys Butte	70	90	90
Juniper	0	0	0
Silvies	20	20	20
North Wagontire	20	25	25
South Wagontire	0	0	0
Warner	60	70	70
TOTAL	640	670	670

[1] Permit numbers may change by future rule if finalized sage-grouse population estimates by management unit vary notably from expectations after sage-grouse population and production surveys are completed in mid-July.

[2] The part of unit 68 south of Whitehorse Ranch Rd; west of Hwy 95; and east of Fields-Denio Rd.

[3] Unit 68 excluding that area described for Trout Creek Mountains hunt.

2025-26 Beardless Turkey Permit and Fall Turkey Seasons

Fall turkey seasons are utilized to address nuisance and damage situations by allowing the harvest of any turkey, including hens. Eastern Oregon fall seasons were historically conservative as turkey populations gained a foothold, beginning as controlled hunts, then shifting to a limited general season as populations increased. Statewide, low fall harvest rates and hunter participation coupled with increasing nuisance complaints on wild turkey wintering range allowed for the removal of the tag limitations in 2020 and the extension of the fall season through January 31st. In 2021, the Commission adopted rules to allow additional fall hunting opportunity in those units that overlap Grant County, allowing the season to begin on September 1. Beginning on December 1, 2021, Sports Pac holders for the 2022 license year were also allowed to select either a General Spring, General Eastern Oregon Fall, or General Western Oregon Fall turkey tag. In 2022, the daily bag limit for General Western Oregon Fall Turkey Season was increased to two turkeys per day.

In 2023-24, the department moved the Western Oregon Fall Turkey Season opener to September 1, rather than the second Saturday in October, and piloted the special Beardless Turkey Permit concept in 4 WMUs associated with Grant County. In 2024, the Commission approved the expansion of the Beardless Turkey Permit zone to the Willamette Valley and extended the season through the end of February. Despite more liberal fall harvest strategies, wild turkeys in Oregon continue to create severe nuisance and damage issues in parts of the state.

The Beardless Turkey Permit is intended to empower landowners to use hunters to address chronic winter turkey damage complaints at a reduced cost to the hunter. The John Day District has annually removed an average of 600 wild turkeys every winter from private land to address landowner damage complaints with no realized improvement in the complaint situation. 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.

For 2025-26, staff are proposing to expand the Grant County hunt area to include the Fossil WMU south of the Wheeler County boundary, and the Heppner WMU south of the Grant County boundary. The Fossil and Heppner units are experiencing chronic wild turkey damage in the vicinity of Fossil, Spray, and Monument. Carefully 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. To reduce confusion, these expanded boundaries will be part of the eastern Oregon Fall Turkey season that opens on September 1.

Secondly, staff are proposing to expand the beardless permit boundary to southwest Oregon to include the Melrose, Applegate, Evans Creek south of the Josephine and Jackson County boundaries, and Rogue WMUs. These districts have a long history of chronic wild turkey nuisance and damage issues. The hunts would still be on private land, and similar to other western Oregon beardless permit hunts, would exclude private industrial forestland.

Staff also propose to begin the beardless permit hunt on October 1, rather than November 1. Wintering turkeys begin 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 permit hunt to start earlier will provide additional management tools for landowners to address their turkey nuisance and damage issues through the use of hunters.

Specific to the Fall Wild Turkey season, staff are proposing to combine the Western Oregon and Eastern Oregon Fall Wild Turkey tags. Harvest data shows that some hunters are 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 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.

Finally, staff propose to expand the Fall Wild Turkey Hunt boundary to include the Silvies, Malheur River, Juniper, and Steens Mountain 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 Mt. unit will only have opportunity in the far northwest portion of the unit, and the Juniper unit only in the far northeast portion. As a general practice, we have not divided WMUs into subunits for fall turkey.

The 2025-26 Game Bird Regulations will describe the legal hunting methods for fall turkey and shooting hours (dogs may be used during the fall turkey season).

2025 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.

These hunts, which are very popular with a segment of hunters living in western Oregon, are currently offered on the following four wildlife areas in western Oregon: E. E. Wilson, Sauvie Island, Fern Ridge, and Denman. In these hunts, rooster pheasants are released (typically daily) on hunt areas throughout the season. Each participant in the hunt must possess a Western Oregon Fee Pheasant Permit, good for two birds, in addition to a hunting license and upland game bird validation. These roosters are purchased from private breeders using funds from the sale of pheasants permits. The program typically purchases 3,800 pheasants for four western Oregon wildlife areas. In 2023, the department raised the administrative fee for a Western Oregon Fee Pheasant permit from $17 to $25 to account for the rising cost of pheasants and concurrently created a Youth Western Oregon Fee Pheasant permit for $10.

Table 6. Proposed locations and dates for the 2025 western Oregon fee pheasant hunts.

2025 Proposed Western Oregon Fee Pheasant Hunts	
HUNT AREA	**DATES**
Fern Ridge Wildlife Area	September 8 – October 5
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area	September 22 – October 5
Denman Wildlife Area	September 22 – October 10
E. E. Wilson Wildlife Area	September 29 – October 31

2025 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). These 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 2024, 634 youth hunter-visits were recorded for the program, up from 577 visits in 2023. All participants, including adults are required to wear a blaze orange hat and vest, in addition to safety glasses.

Instructors provide youth shotgun skill clinics in association with the youth hunts at many locations. Sporting clay trailers provide a convenient method for participants to learn how to hit flying targets and use a shotgun more safely and effectively. 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 2025 youth upland hunt dates, locations, and maximum number of hunters allowed on area at any one time (hunter limitation).

2025 Proposed Youth Upland Game Bird Hunts		
HUNT AREA	**DATES**	**HUNTER LIMITATION**
Central Oregon (Near Madras)	September 13 & 14	80
Coquille Valley Wildlife Area	September 27 & 28	40
Denman Wildlife Area	September 20 & 21	85
E. E. Wilson Wildlife Area	September 27 & 28	70
Fern Ridge Wildlife Area	September 6 & 7	75
Irrigon Wildlife Area	September 20	15
John Day (private land)	September 13 & 14	30
Klamath Wildlife Area	September 20 & 21	80
Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area	September 13 & 14	35
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area	September 20 & 21	50
White River Wildlife Area (Mid-Columbia)	September 13 & 14	20

2025 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 25 and 26. 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.

2025 Pheasant Hunting Workshops

The department's Information and Education Program proposes to offer two pheasant hunting workshops on E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area. These hunts take place prior to the regular season and require special approval from the Commission.

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

2025 Proposed Pheasant Hunting Workshops		
HUNT AREA	**DATE**	**EVENT**
E. E. Wilson Wildlife Area	September 14	Pheasant Workshop
E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area	September 20-21	Family Pheasant Workshop

2025-26 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: September 1 – March 31, 2026
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[1]: September 1 – January 31, 2026
Daily Bag Limit: One sage-grouse
Season Limit: Two sage-grouse
Open Areas: Those areas with permits allocated for controlled sage-grouse hunting in 2025.

[1]Although the seasons are long; falconry harvest of sage grouse is low. In a 2021 harvest survey with 69 of the 148 licensed Oregon falconers responding, a total of two sage grouse were reported as harvested during the previous hunting season. 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.

See Attachment 6

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, or earlier, than the proposed seasons. For example, the proposals identified in this document for 2025-26 seasons are based in part on population status information collected in 2024 or earlier.

Mourning doves

The USFWS uses an integrated population model (IPM) to estimate annual abundance for previous years and predict the abundance (2024) of mourning doves in Western Management Unit, which includes Oregon, California, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, Arizona, and Utah. The IPM makes use of banding data, harvest survey data, and annual abundance indices from Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). Department staff have been banding mourning doves to generate information for the IPM since 2008. Last summer staff banded 633 doves across the state, down 14 percent from the previous year.

The USFWS predicted 50,700,000 mourning doves resided in the Western Management Unit, during August 2024. This prediction is the 3-year average of estimates from 2021-2023, (45.1 million, 51.9 million, and 55.1 million, respectively) and is up 2% from the LTA (2007-2023).

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 California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia in mid-July. In Oregon, department staff have been conducting these surveys at 20 to 22 mineral sites since 2004. Unlike mourning doves, methods to assess total abundance of pigeons have not been developed.

For 2024, the USFWS estimated no change in the trend of pigeon abundance over the long-term, previous ten years and previous five years. BBS data can also be used to assess population trends for pigeons, and they also show no significant positive or negative trends in band-tailed pigeons over time.

Ducks

The department's breeding waterfowl survey produces estimates for the major breeding waterfowl areas of the state, but its coverage does not extend to the entire state and therefore the survey only provides an index to the statewide breeding population (Figure 3). Oregon's 2024 index for breeding ducks was 303,446, up 53 percent from 2023 and 14 percent from the LTA. The index for breeding mallards, the most abundant breeding species, was 71,047, up four percent from 2022 but down 20 percent from the LTA (Table 9).

The overall duck season framework in the Pacific Flyway is based on the status of "western" mallards, which are those mallards breeding in Alaska, British Columbia, and the lower-48 states within the Pacific Flyway. The status of western mallards is based off breeding waterfowl surveys conducted in Alaska (part of the USFWS's Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey (WBPHS)) and state/provincial surveys in British Columbia, California, Oregon, and Washington. The 2024 index of western mallards was 938,540 which is up 14 percent from 2023 but down five percent from the LTA.

The WBPHS includes much of Alaska, central and northwest Canada, and the U.S. prairie region. In 2024, the estimate for total ducks in this area was 33,988,000, up five percent from 2023 but down four percent from the LTA. Estimates for species breeding in the survey area that an important component of Oregon's migrant and wintering flock can be found in Table 9.

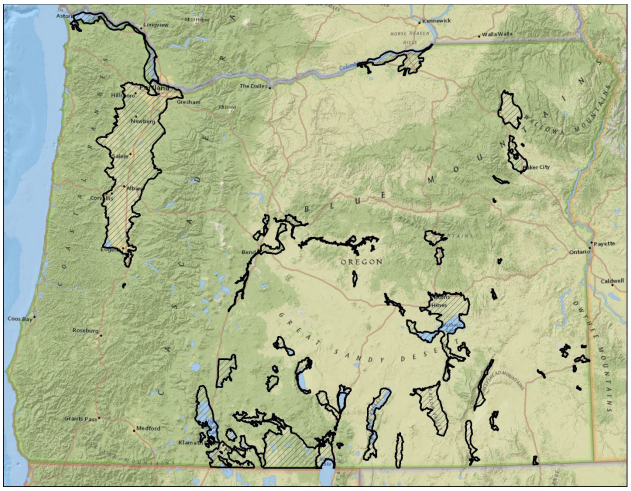

Figure 3. Major waterfowl breeding habitats in Oregon to which the department's spring breeding waterfowl population estimate applies.

Table 9. Population estimates of select species and populations of ducks important to Oregon from the USFWS Breeding Waterfowl Population and Habitat Survey and state and provincial surveys in British Columbia, California, Oregon and Washington.

Species	2024	2023	Change from 2023	Change from LTA	Survey Years
Duck Estimates from the USFWS Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey					
Mallard	6,609,303	6,125,722	8%	-16%	1955-2024, except 2020 & 2021
Scaup	4,069,075	3,517,135	16%	-17%	" "
Green-winged Teal	3,005,466	2,502,585	20%	38%	" "
Wigeon	2,922,015	1,889,704	55%	12%	" "
Shoveler	2,645,811	2,858,356	-7%	0%	" "
Gadwall	2,284,432	2,561,374	-11%	11%	" "
Pintail	1,974,976	2,218,505	-11%	-49%	" "
Ring-necked Duck	1,423,556	1,532,462	-7%	71%	" "
Redhead	782,015	929,942	-16%	6%	" "
Canvasback	566,319	618,898	-8%	-4%	" "
Combined state/provincial breeding population estimates of "western mallards" and Oregon specific indices					
Western Mallards	938,540	824,380	14%	-5%	2010-2024, except 2020 & 2021
Oregon Mallards	71,047	68,587	4%	-20%	1994-2024, except 2001 & 2020
Oregon Total Ducks	302,089	197,490	53%	15%	1994-2024, except 2001 & 2020

Geese

There are six species of geese which regularly occur in Oregon, several of which are divided into multiple populations for management purposes. Various types of surveys are used to monitor the populations, including winter population estimates, breeding population estimates, and breeding population indices (Table 10).

The Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta in western Alaska is the breeding grounds for minima cackling geese, Pacific white-fronted geese, and a portion of the brant wintering in Oregon. Surveys in spring 2024 indicated breeding populations on the delta for minima cackling and Pacific white-fronted geese decreased 21 percent and 2 percent, respectively, from 2023. Surveys for dusky Canada geese on the Copper River Delta were down 15 percent from 2023. Due to the Russia/Ukraine war, there was no information forthcoming about the status of the breeding population of Wrangell Island snow geese in 2024.

Pacific western Canada geese are the only goose population that breed in Oregon. The 2024 spring breeding index for these geese in Oregon was 33,415, up 16 percent from 2023 but down 27 percent from the LTA.

Table 10. Recent population indices and status relative to objective of Pacific Flyway goose populations.

Pacific Flyway Population	Most recent population indices	Recent three-year avg. management index	Population objective	Status of management index relative to objective
Aleutian Cackling Goose	193,655	205,975	60,000	223%
Minima Cackling Goose	126,443	175,055	250,000	-30%
Taverner's Cackling Goose	38,293	38,073	-	-
Lesser Canada Goose	2,694	6,918	-	-
Dusky Canada Goose	8,150	10,274	20,000	-49%
Western Canada Geese	320,271	392,534	200,000	96%
Greater White-fronted Geese	422,869	510,884	300,000	70%
Tule Greater White-fronted Goose	9,655	11,446	10,000	15%
Western Arctic Snow Geese	1,132,330	1,099,232	300,000	266%
Wrangel Island Snow Geese	750,000	686,390	120,000	525%
Ross's Goose	1,100,523	1,102,645	150,000	634%
Brant	188,820	211,823	322,000	-34%

Coots

The 2024 breeding population estimate for American coots from the WBPHS was 1,254,151, up 30 percent from 2023 but down 34 percent from the long-term (1955–2022) average.

Wilson’s snipe

The North American Breeding Bird Survey indicated the 2022 Wilson’s snipe abundance index was up 16 percent from 2021 and down 1.5 percent from the LTA.

2023-24 Hunter and Harvest Estimates

Hunter effort and harvest information for migratory game birds is collected through the Harvest Information Program (HIP), a cooperative survey effort between the USFWS and states. HIP was implemented in Oregon during 1995 and became operational nationwide in 1999. The USFWS is responsible for producing estimates of hunter effort and harvest by sampling potential migratory game bird hunters from records provided by the states.

Before hunting each season, migratory game bird hunters are required to obtain a HIP validation through the Electronic Licensing System. While obtaining the validation, the hunters are asked about their previous season's hunting activity, which is used to stratify them into groups for subsequent survey efforts. Before the start of the migratory game bird seasons, and continuing every two weeks throughout the season, the department transmits the contact and stratification information of hunters to the USFWS. The USFWS then sends surveys to a sample of hunters, asking them to keep track of their waterfowl, dove and pigeon, or snipe and coot hunting activity throughout the season.

Beginning in 2023, the USFWS ceased mailing out paper survey forms and instead invited selected hunters to record and submit their hunting activity information through an online portal. 2023-24 Oregon HIP hunter and harvest estimates can be found in Table 11. Harvest estimates from the 2024-25 seasons will not be available until summer 2025.

Because some species of waterfowl are hunted by a very small number of hunters, HIP estimates can vary widely and are relatively imprecise. For example, sea ducks (white-winged scoter, black scoter, surf scoter, long-tailed duck, and harlequin duck) are hunted by a very small subset of waterfowl hunters and HIP survey coverage in Oregon is not intense enough to sample these hunters at a rate that produces reliable estimates for each species. Therefore, beginning in 2022, the department implemented a sea duck harvest survey of all hunters who purchased a sea duck permit. This permit is required of all hunters who hunt sea ducks and allowed the department to specifically target those hunters for a special sea duck survey. Preliminary estimates for the 2024-25 season indicate that of the 808 hunters who purchased a sea duck permit, 214 hunted sea ducks and they harvested 875 scoters, 21 long-tailed ducks, and 13 harlequin ducks. During the previous season (2023-24), 751 hunters purchased a sea duck permit and 215 hunted sea ducks, harvesting 941 scoters, 26 long-tailed ducks, and nine harlequin ducks.

2024-25 Waterfowl Validation Sales

Oregon waterfowl validation (stamp) sales to resident hunters for the 2024-25 season totaled 67,516, an increase of two percent from 2023-24. However, 72 percent of adults and youths who purchased a Sports Pac (Sports Pacs accounted for 80 percent of validation sales) did not redeem their Sports Pac waterfowl validation voucher for the actual waterfowl validation after July 1, leaving the total number of resident waterfowl validations held by hunters during the 2024-25 season at 28,734, down three percent from 2023-24. Total 2024-25 nonresident game bird validation (valid for both waterfowl and upland game bird hunting) sales were 4,900, up five percent from 2023-24.

Table 11. Harvest Information Program estimates of Oregon migratory game bird hunters and harvest during the 2023-24 season, compared to the previous five-season average.

	Harvest			Hunters		
	2023-24 estimate	Previous 5-season average	Percent change from previous 5-season average	2023-24 estimate	Previous 5-season average	Percent change from previous 5-season average
Mallard	84,122	112,131	-25%			
Gadwall	5,138	9,552	-46%			
American wigeon	63,948	61,228	4%			
Eurasian wigeon	80	295	-73%			
Green-winged teal	44,333	48,475	-9%			
Cinnamon & blue-wing teal	80	536	-85%			
Northern shoveler	16,824	16,425	2%			
Northern pintail	20,492	28,250	-27%			
Wood duck	5,183	6,047	-14%			
Redhead	478	371	29%			
Canvasback	1,754	2,223	-21%			
Greater scaup	797	5,278	-85%			
Lesser scaup	2,950	4,908	-40%			
Ring-necked duck	7,415	7,324	1%			
Barrows goldeneye	159	420	-62%			
Common goldeneye	1,037	1,389	-25%			
Bufflehead	4,385	6,067	-28%			
Ruddy duck	0	283	-100%			
Black scoter	0	0	No Change			
White-winged scoter	0	6	-100%			
Surf scoter	0	229	-100%			
Harlequin duck	0	0	No Change			
Long-tailed duck	0	8	-100%			
Hooded merganser	1,196	1,269	-6%			
Red-breasted merganser	80	47	70%			
Common merganser	159	579	-72%			
Subtotal ducks	**259,222**	**311,212**	**-17%**	**18,316**	**18,583**	**-1%**
Canada & Cackling geese	38,621	42,273	-9%			
White-fronted geese	1,492	4,880	-69%			
Snow geese	497	6,620	-92%			
Ross' geese	166	1,711	-90%			
Brant	16	59	-73%			
Subtotal geese	**40,792**	**69,330**	**-41%**	**9,788**	**9,603**	**2%**
Total waterfowl	**300,014**	**380,542**	**-21%**	**19,600**	**20,217**	**-3%**
Mourning doves	**11,235**	**18,574**	**-40%**	**3,588**	**3,067**	**17%**
Band-tailed pigeons	**1,002**	**1,210**	**-17%**	**501**	**403**	**24%**
American coots	**10,361**	**2,417**	**329%**	**1,300**	**620**	**110%**
Wilson's snipe	**2,340**	**565**	**314%**	**1,300**	**240**	**442%**

Please note: All seasons for migratory game birds are established under USFWS frameworks. The department works through the Pacific Flyway Council (PFC) 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. Seasons may be selected in two zones and the seasons may be spilt into two segments. Shooting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

Recommendation: Adoption of a 60-day season and bag and possession limits of 15 and 45, respectively. This is the standard regulatory alternative as prescribed by the National Mourning Dove Harvest Strategy. Adopt different seasons within two geographic zones (Figure 5). In Zone 1 adopt a split season with half of the days utilized starting September 1 and the remainder utilized beginning on November 15. In Zone 2 adopt a 60-consecutive day season beginning on September 1. This recommendation represents no change from last season.

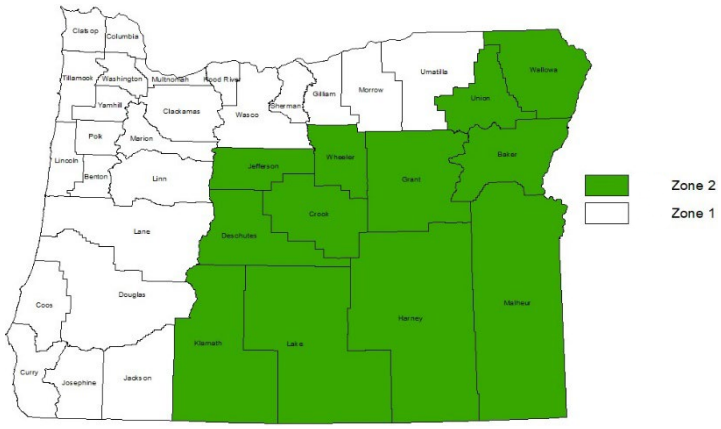

Figure 4. Mourning dove, duck, and Wilson's snipe hunting zones.

Proposed Season:

Zone 1:	Sept. 1 – Sept. 30 Nov. 15 – Dec. 14
Zone 2:	Sept. 1 – Oct. 30
Daily bag limit:	15 mourning doves
Possession limit:	45 mourning doves
Shooting hours:	One-half hour before sunrise to sunset

Discussion: Based on the harvest strategy, current data, and an assessment by the USFWS, the prescribed regulatory alternative for the Western Management Unit is the standard regulatory alternative. The objectives of the harvest strategy are to conserve the mourning dove population and to minimize annual regulatory change.

In most years, especially in eastern Oregon, the effective length the mourning dove season is governed by the first cool temperatures or early storms that initiate southern migration, which usually occurs in early September. However, concentrations of wintering mourning doves can be found in some areas of western Oregon, which accounts for the split season in Zone 1.

Public Comment: None as of March 11.

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. Shooting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

Recommendation: Adoption of a 9-consecutive day season statewide, beginning as early as allowed under federal frameworks with a bag and possession limits of 2 and 6, respectively. This is the restrictive regulatory alternative as prescribed by the Flyway's Pacific Coast Band-tailed Pigeon Harvest Strategy. This recommendation represents no change from last season.

Proposed Season:

Statewide:	Sept. 15 – Sept. 23
Daily bag limit:	2 band-tailed pigeons
Possession limit:	6 band-tailed pigeons
Shooting hours:	One-half hour before sunrise to sunset

Discussion: In July of 2010 the PFC 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. 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.

Public Comment: None as of March 11.

Special youth waterfowl hunting days

Framework: States may select two days per duck-hunting zone, designated as ''Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days,'' in addition to their regular duck seasons but as a component of the total framework allocation. The days may be held concurrently. The days must be held outside any regular duck season on weekends, holidays, or other non-school days when youth hunters would have the maximum opportunity to participate. The days may be held up to 14 days before or after any regular duck season frameworks or within any split of a regular duck season, or

within any other open season on migratory birds. The daily bag limit may include ducks, geese (including brant), mergansers, and coots and would be the same as those allowed in the regular season. Flyway species restrictions would remain in effect. Shooting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

States may use their established definition of age for youth hunters. However, youth hunters must be under the age of 18. In addition, an adult at least 18 years of age must accompany the youth hunter into the field. This adult may not duck hunt but may participate in other seasons that are open on the special youth day. Youth hunters 16 years of age and older must possess a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (also known as Federal Duck Stamp).

Recommendation: Adoption of a two-day youth waterfowl weekend in September. This recommendation represents no change from last season.

Proposed Season:

Statewide:	Sept. 27 & 28
Daily bag limit:	Same as during regular season by zone
Shooting hours:	One-half hour before sunrise to sunset

Discussion: This hunt allows youth hunters, with adult supervision, to have a chance to hunt waterfowl at a time when waterfowl are generally abundant, the weather in pleasant, and without the pressure to keep up with more experienced adult hunters or other distractions. Selection of this hunt does require that the general duck and goose seasons be reduced by two days in length. This is due to the limitation within the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) which restricts the hunting of any species of migratory bird to not more than 107 days. Since states in the Pacific Flyway are afforded a 107-day regular duck and goose seasons, selection of special hunt days necessitates a reduction in the length of the regular seasons, so the total number of days open for hunting does not exceed the MBTA limit of 107 days.

Public Comment: None as of March 11.

Special veterans and active military personnel waterfowl hunting days

Framework: States may select two days per duck-hunting zone, designated as ''Veterans and Active Military Personnel Waterfowl Hunting Days,'' in addition to their regular duck seasons but as a component of the total framework allocation. The days may be held concurrently. The days may be held up to 14 days before or after any regular duck season framework or within any split of a regular duck season, or within any other open season on migratory birds. The daily bag limit may include ducks, geese (including brant), mergansers, and coots and would be the same as those allowed in the regular season. Flyway species restrictions would remain in effect. Shooting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

Veterans (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 (other than for training), may participate. All hunters must possess a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (also known as Federal Duck Stamp).

Recommendation: Adoption of a one-day, Veterans and Active Military Personnel Waterfowl Hunting Day the Saturday following the close of the regular duck season. Persons participating in this hunt would be required to carry valid proof of veterans or active-duty status. This recommendation represents no change from last season.

Proposed Season:

Statewide:	Jan. 31, 2026
Daily bag limit:	Same as during regular season by zone
Shooting hours:	One-half hour before sunrise to sunset

Discussion: This season was established by the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act in 2019 was first adopted by the Commission in 2021-22. Selection of this special season does require that the general duck season be reduced by one day (the youth waterfowl weekend also requires a reduction in the general duck season). This is due to the limitation within the MBTA which restricts the hunting of any species of migratory bird to not more than 107 days. Since states in the Pacific Flyway are afforded a 107-day general duck season, selection of special hunt days necessitates a reduction in the length of the general season, so the total number of days open for duck hunting do not to exceed MBTA limit of 107 days.

Public Comment: As of March 11.

- One person requested that police and firefighters also be allowed to participate in this hunt.

Duck (including merganser)

Framework: A maximum season length of 107 days is allowed between the Saturday closest to September 24 and January 31; daily bag limit is seven birds to include no more than three pintail, two scaup, two hen mallards, two redheads, and two canvasbacks. 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. Seasons may be selected in two zones and the seasons may be split into two segments.

Recommendation: Adoption of maximum days and bag limits as allowed by framework. Maintain traditional shooting hours. Adopt different seasons within two geographic zones (Figure 5). The adoption of a youth waterfowl weekend and a Veterans and Active Military Personnel Waterfowl Hunting Day requires a reduction in regular duck season by three days total, which accounts for the three-day split in each zone. This recommendation represents no change from last season, except the bag limit increase for pintail.

Proposed Seasons:

Zone 1:	Oct. 11 – Oct. 26 & Oct. 30 – Jan. 25, 2026 *Scaup open from Nov. 1 – Jan. 25, 2026*
Zone 2:	Oct. 11 – Nov. 30 & Dec. 4 – Jan. 25, 2026 *Scaup open from Oct. 11 – Nov. 30 & Dec. 4 – Jan. 7, 2026*
Daily bag limit:	7 total; with no more than 3 pintail, 2 hen mallards, 1 harlequin, 2 redheads, 2 scaup, 2 canvasbacks. *Note: scaup may only be taken during the open season specific to them.*
Possession limit:	Three times the bag limit
Shooting hours:	One-half hour before sunrise to sunset

Discussion: Allowed frameworks were developed cooperatively with the USFWS, states, and Flyway Councils under the concept of Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM). 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 are modified. For example, should habitat conditions deteriorate, due to climate change or other factors, to the point where they can no longer support populations robust enough to sustain the current level of harvest, the AHM process would identify the appropriate point at which to scale back hunter opportunity.

In the Pacific Flyway, overall duck season length and bag limits are determined via the Western Mallard Model under AHM. This model, first implemented in 2008, combines information about the mallard population size, population dynamics, and hunter harvest in Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California to develop the appropriate season frameworks for the entire Pacific Flyway.

The proposed season framework is identical to last year, except for the bag limit increase for pintails, and flyway biologists believe continued liberal harvest regulations for most species are justified based on decades of experience and analysis of long-term data sets including, population size, harvest, harvest rate, and recruitment information. For species with lower harvest potential than that which would be realized under the general duck season framework (northern pintail, canvasback, and scaup) species specific national harvest strategies or other decision tools are in place to guide harvest management.

From 2018 to 2024, the USFWS and the Flyway Councils worked to revise the Northern Pintail AHM Strategy (strategy). The Service initially adopted an AHM strategy for pintail in 2010, which guided frameworks for pintail in all four flyways based on the species' status and

demographics. The new strategy supplants the 2010 strategy and incorporates the latest science and additional years of data from annual monitoring programs. Implementation of the new strategy on an interim basis has been recommended by all four Flyway Councils and was adopted by the USFWS in 2024, for use in developing frameworks for pintails starting with the 2025-26 seasons. Because the strategy is identified as interim, the USFWS and the Flyway Councils are taking an adaptive approach and will continue to monitor the strategy annually and once three years of a three bird bag limit is achieved, they will reevaluate the strategy to decide if it meets the objectives or if further adjustments are needed.

The strategy includes a state-of-the-art IPM which uses new information and is better capable of describing the pintail population, under a range of habitat conditions. Additionally, the IMP can be used to model harvest as a function of the estimated fall flight, which was not possible with the previous model. The old model simply assumed a fixed harvest for each bag limit option considered, regardless of population size. Modeling harvest as a function of the estimated fall flight provides a more accurate understanding of how population size impacts harvest and vice versa.

The strategy has several objectives, mainly:

- Ensure long-term health and sustainability of the pintail population in accordance with the MBTA
- Balance conservation and hunting opportunities over the long term
- Keep the hunting season open if the population is above 1.2 million pintails
- Allow a 3-pintail daily bag limit within the overall daily bag limit for ducks when supported by population status
- Minimize regulatory burden on the public
- Encourage hunter participation

The 2010 strategy only included bag limit options of a closed season, one pintail bag, or two pintail bag, regardless of population status. The new strategy maintains those options, as well as an option of a three pintail bag limit. Because of the incorporation of new data and improved modeling capabilities, we expect the strategy to identify a bag limit of three pintails as the appropriate framework in most future seasons, when the pintail population is within the range of population levels observed over the past 40 years.

When implementing the new strategy for this season, the USFWS calculated the optimal pintail regulatory strategy (framework) using: (1) an objective to maximize long-term cumulative harvest; (2) current regulatory alternatives and the closed-season constraint of 1.2 million; and (3) the IMP for pintails. Assuming hunting seasons adopted by states adhered to this strategy (and that current models accurately reflect population dynamics), pintail breeding-population size would be expected to average 2.01 million with a mean observed continental harvest of 467,000 birds. Based on an observed 2024 breeding population size of 1.97 million pintails observed at a mean latitude of 57.02 degrees, the optimal bag limit framework for the 2025-26 season for all four Flyways is the regulatory alternative with a three pintail daily bag limit.

Public reaction to the strategy has been very positive, especially in the Pacific Flyway. Pintail are an abundant wintering species here, that are encountered on nearly a daily basis by many hunters, especially in California, Oregon, Utah, and Washington. However, some hunters have

voiced their preference for a restriction on the number of female pintails that could be taken within the three bird bag limit, fearing increased harvest of female pintail will jeopardize the breeding population. While we applaud these hunters for their conservation mindset, the new strategy suggests that the increase in harvest observed under a three bird bag, including harvest of females, is biologically acceptable and does not jeopardize the population. Decades of research on waterfowl has indicated that regulation of population size for ducks is almost wholly dependent on habitat conditions, primarily on the breeding grounds, and not by harvest, at least under the limitations afforded under modern waterfowl harvest regimes.

While female pintail harvest will increase under a bag limit of three pintail, just as it has when the bag limit has increased from one to two pintails, any increase is not expected to be extreme. Analysis of past harvest patterns suggests that during implementation of the 2010 strategy, Pacific flyway hunters harvested an average of 27 female pintail for every 100 pintail harvested when the bag limit was one per day and they harvested 28 female pintail for every 100 pintail harvested when the bag limit was two per day. This male biased sex ratio in the harvest is due to hunters purposefully selecting for male pintail, which we expect to continue under a bag limit of three per day, and a male biased sex ratio in the overall population.

Additionally, inclusion of a sex restriction in the pintail bag limit would make the regulations more complex (unnecessarily), which would be counter to two of the explicit objectives of the strategy, which are to minimize the regulatory burden on the public and encourage hunter participation.

Adoption of a 104-day regular duck season will accommodate the special youth waterfowl hunting weekend and the Veterans and Active Military Personnel Waterfowl Hunting Day (104-day regular season + 2-day youth weekend + 1-day Veterans and Active Military Personnel Waterfowl Hunting Day = 107-day maximum duck season under the MBTA) and should provide ample opportunity to hunt at preferred times. Splitting the season with a three-weekday closure between the splits in each zone accounts for the days reserved for the special youth waterfowl hunting weekend and the Veterans and Active Military Personnel Waterfowl Hunting Day and maximizes the number of weekend hunt days allowed under the framework. Previous analysis has shown the vast majority of waterfowl hunter effort and harvest occurs on weekends, compared to weekdays.

Public Comment: As of March 11.

- The Oregon Hunters Association voiced support for the proposed increase in the bag limit for pintail.
- One person voiced support for the proposed increase in the bag limit for pintail.
- Four persons voiced support for the proposed increase in the bag limit for pintail but prefer a restriction on the number of female pintails within the bag limit (one or two females allowed within the overall bag limit of three pintail).
- One person requested the harlequin duck season be closed.

Goose seasons

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

Special early Canada goose season

Framework: A Canada goose season of up to 15 days during September 1–20 may be selected. The daily bag limit may not exceed 5 Canada geese. Areas open to hunting of Canada geese in each State must be described, delineated, and designated as such in each State's hunting regulations. Shooting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

Recommendation: Adoption of a September Canada goose season in all areas of the state except the South Coast Goose Zone, with a bag limit of 5 Canada geese in all open areas and possession limits triple the daily bag limit. Adoption of a season length of 15 days in the Northwest Permit Zone and five days in all other open zones, with all areas opening on the traditional opener of the Saturday after the Labor Day weekend. This recommendation represents no change from last season, except six additional season days are proposed in the Northwest Permit Zone.

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

Northwest permit zone:	Sept. 6 – 20
Southwest zone:	Sept. 6 – 10
South coast zone:	Closed
Mid-Columbia zone:	Sept. 6 – 10
High desert and Blue Mountains zone:	Sept. 6 – 10
Daily bag limit (all zones):	5 Canada/cackling geese
Possession limit:	15 Canada/cackling geese
Shooting hours:	One-half hour before sunrise to sunset

Discussion: 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 cackling geese.

Seasons are relatively short but cannot be longer because of the desire to hold long regular goose seasons, as well as avoid season overlap with the Labor Day holiday. Currently, frameworks for regular goose seasons are 107 days, the maximum under the MBTA, except in the Northwest Permit Zone. Season days used for September Canada goose seasons require a subsequent reduction in general Canada goose seasons. In 2017, staff considered a nine-day season in all areas of the state, however, hunter comments indicated a preference to maintain as many days as possible during the regular season.

Because the season length framework in the Northwest Permit Zone for the regular goose season framework has been reduced to 74 days this year (see below), staff can propose utilizing the maximum season length of 15 days for the special early September Canada goose season in that zone this year.

Public Comment: As of March 11.

- The Oregon Hunters Association voiced support for the increase in season length in the Northwest Permit Zone.

General fall/winter goose seasons (excluding the Northwest Permit Zone)

Framework: Different frameworks exist for Canada/cackling, white-fronted, and white geese

- For Canada and cackling geese, a maximum season length of 107 days is allowed between the Saturday closest to September 24 and January 31, except that the season in the South Coast Zone may extend through March 10. The maximum daily bag limit is 4, except the maximum daily bag limit in the South Coast Zone is 6.
- For white-fronted geese a maximum season length of 107 days is allowed between the Saturday closest to September 24 and March 10. The maximum daily bag limit is 10, except the bag limit in Lake County is 1.
- For white geese a maximum season length of 107 days is allowed between the Saturday closest to September 24 and March 10. The maximum daily bag limit is 20.
- For all species the possession limit is three-times the daily bag limit and shooting hours are from one half hour before sunrise to sunset. Seasons may be set within five geographic zones and seasons may be split into two or three segments depending on species and zone.

Recommendation: Adoption of maximum days and bag limits as allowed by framework and select differential seasons in five different zones (Figure 6). Maintain traditional shooting hours. The adoption of a September Canada season, a youth waterfowl weekend, and a Veterans and Active Military Personnel Waterfowl Hunting Day requires reductions in regular goose seasons from three to twelve days in each goose zone. This recommendation represents no change from last season, except to modify the season structure in the Mid-Columbia Zone to include a white and white-fronted goose season that is divided into three season segments (periods).

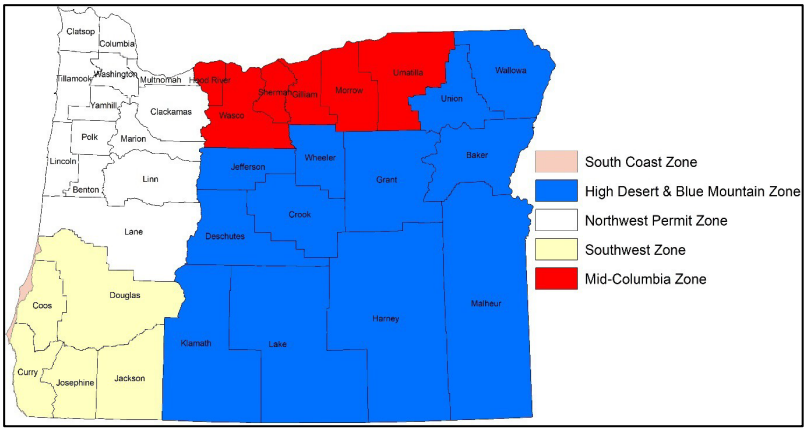

Figure 5. Goose hunting zones.

Proposed Seasons:

Southwest zone: (all of Douglas, Coos, and Curry counties east of Hwy 101, and Jackson and Josephine counties)	Oct. 11 – Oct. 26 & Nov. 4 – Jan. 25, 2026
South Coast zone: (all of Douglas, Coos, and Curry counties west of Hwy 101)	Oct. 4 – Dec. 7 & Dec. 20 – Jan. 9, 2026 & Feb. 21 – March 10, 2026
High Desert & Blue Mountains zone: (Canada and cackling goose seasons)	Oct.11 – Nov. 30 & Dec. 9 – Jan. 25, 2026
High Desert & Blue Mountains zone: (White-front and white goose seasons)	Oct.11 – Nov. 30 & Jan.16 – March 10, 2026
Mid-Columbia zone: (Canada and cackling goose seasons)	Oct.11 – Oct. 26 & Nov. 4 – Jan. 25, 2026
Mid-Columbia zone: (White-front and white goose seasons)	Oct.11 – Oct. 26 & Nov. 4 – Jan. 8, 2026 & Jan. 31 – Feb. 22, 2026
Daily bag limit (all zones unless noted):	4 Canada/cackling geese 10 white-fronted geese 20 white geese
Possession limit:	Three times the daily bag limits
Shooting hours:	One-half hour before sunrise to sunset
Daily Bag Limit Exceptions	
South Coast zone:	6 Canada/cackling geese
Lake County:	1 white-fronted goose

Discussion: Most goose populations have remained robust in recent years, increasing recreational opportunity throughout the state. Snow, Ross's, Aleutian cackling, Pacific western Canada, and Pacific white-fronted goose populations in the flyway are at or significantly above management goals. The number of snow geese wintering in the state has greatly expanded in recent years, with significant wintering flocks now found around Sauvie Island and in the Columbia Basin. Liberal seasons provide substantial hunter opportunity, while helping to alleviate some agricultural damage to private lands caused by geese.

The change to the white and white-fronted goose season in the Mid-Columbia follows on a change last year that was designed to address hunter and landowner desire to have the season open in October, when snow geese begin arriving in the region. Historically, the season had

opened concurrent with the duck and Canada goose seasons in October, but the opening date was delayed until mid-November four seasons ago to shift some white and white-fronted goose hunting days into February. The proposed change this season keeps the October opening date in place, but due to new federal frameworks allowing a three-segment season, allows the department to recommend a white and white-fronted goose season which mirrors the timing of the early season split during the duck and Canada goose season in this zone.

Public Comment: None as of March 11.

Northwest permit zone goose

Framework: A maximum season length of 74 days is allowed between the Saturday closest to September 24 and February 15 for Canada and cackling geese and 107 days between the Saturday closest to September 24 and March 10 for white and white-fronted geese. Maximum daily bag limits are two Canada/cackling geese, 20 white geese and 10 white-fronted geese, except that the season for dusky Canada geese is closed. Possession limit is three-times the daily bag limit. Shooting hour frameworks are from sunrise to sunset. The season may be split into three segments.

Recommendation: Adoption of maximum days and bag limits as allowed by framework. Maintain restricted shooting hours of sunrise to sunset. This season recommendation differs from recommendations offered from 2015 – 2024, as federal frameworks for goose seasons have become significantly more restrictive in this zone (Figure 6) due to declining goose populations.

Proposed Seasons:

Northwest permit zone Canada & cackling goose season:	Oct. 18 – Oct. 26 & Nov. 22 – Jan. 9, 2026 & Jan. 31 – Feb. 15, 2026
Northwest permit zone white & white-fronted goose season:	Oct. 18 – Oct. 26 & Nov. 8 – Jan. 25, 2026 & Jan. 31 – Feb. 15, 2026
Daily bag limit:	2 Canada/cackling geese *(except dusky Canada geese are closed to harvest)* 10 white-fronted geese 20 white geese
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area: Eastside, Westside and Oak Island Only	Wildlife Area hunt days occurring from Oct. 18 – Oct. 26 & Nov. 8 – Jan. 25, 2026
Daily bag limit:	20 white geese
Possession limit (all areas):	Three times the daily bag limits
Shooting hours (all areas):	Sunrise to sunset

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 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 and cackling 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.

- 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 hunting seasons in northwest Oregon have been heavily regulated 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 40 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, provided 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.

In 2013, the department began working with the USFWS and our flyway partners to revise the Flyway's Dusky Canada Goose Management Plan. A major area of emphasis was to review the quota-based harvest strategy and determine if a different approach could obtain similar results without the negative aspects which accompanied the quota system. The Flyway's revised 2015 harvest strategy calls for a closed dusky Canada goose season in northwest Oregon and southwest 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. This strategy applies to all northwest Oregon counties, not just that portion delineated as the Northwest Permit Zone prior to 2015.

Frameworks guided by this new strategy were first adopted by the USFWS for use during the 2015 season and remain in effect for the 2025-26 season. Additionally, the states of Washington and Oregon entered a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the USFWS in 2015 which outlines 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, there is no evidence that adult survival has changed since the check station program ended. The mean annual survival probability during 2001–2015 (pre-closures) was 0.863 (SE = 0.007, 95% CI = 0.849–0.875) and during 2016–2023 (post closures) was 0.880 (SE = 0.009, 95% CI = 0.860–0.897).

In addition to being the core wintering area for dusky Canada geese, the wintering goose flock in this region is also composed of minima cackling geese, Aleutian cackling geese, Taverner's cackling geese, lesser Canada geese, Vancouver Canada geese, western Canada geese, Pacific white-fronted geese, and Wrangel Island snow geese. The most abundant and heavily harvested wintering population are minima cackling geese. The Flyway's minima cackling goose management plan has an objective to maintain a population of 250,000. If the three-year average population index is greater than 10 percent above or 10 percent below the objective, the plan directs impacted states to implement regulatory actions to regain the objective.

The 2024 Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Coastal Zone Survey, expanded to approximate fall population size, indicated the population was 126,443 this past fall and the most recent three-year average management index (2022-2024) was 175,055. The management index has been below 10 percent of the objective since 2021, when the bag limit framework for southwest Washington and northwest Oregon was reduced from four per day to three per day. Bag limits were also decreased in Alaska. However, the population has continued to decline (Figure 6) and is now at its lowest point in 30 years.

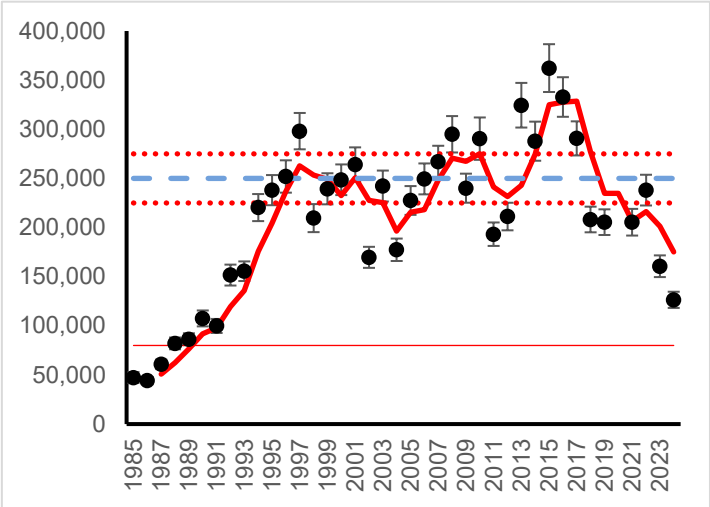

Figure 6. Minima cackling goose abundance in fall. Circles are annual estimates of abundance with 95% confidence intervals. The heavy red line is a moving 3-year average. The blue dashed line is the Pacific Flyway Council's population objective. The red dashed lines are plus and minus 10% of the objective and the red flat line is the Flyway Council's closure threshold.

This region is also a major wintering area for Taverner's cackling geese. These geese have a more widespread breeding distribution in Alaska, but no formal management plan for them has been developed. Unlike cackling geese, methods to estimate the true population size have not been developed but aerial surveys provide an index to population trend. Those indices suggest that segment of the breeding population which winters in the Pacific Flyway (principally in Oregon and Washington) has been declining for some time (Figure 7).

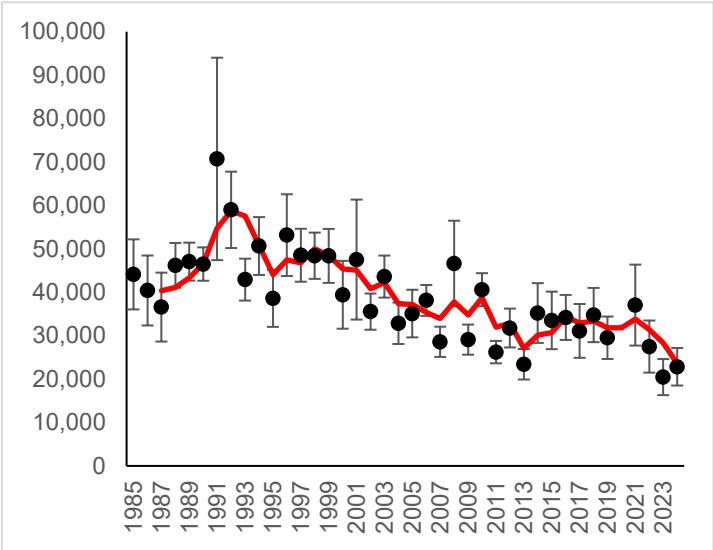

Figure 7. Taverners cackling goose abundance index in spring from western Alaska. Circles are annual indices with 95% confidence intervals. The red line is a moving 3-year average. Data is the total indicated cackling geese from the YK Delta Coastal Zone Survey (assumed Taverners portion), and total indicated cackling geese from Strata 9, 10, & 11 of the Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey. For Strata 9, area also covered by the YK Delta Coastal Zone Survey are removed. Survey information from the Arctic Coastal Plain in Alaska is not presented, as recent research suggests cackling geese nesting there winter in the Central Flyway and are affiliated with the Mid-continent population of cackling geese.

Recognizing that minima and Taverner's cackling geese constitute the bulk of the wintering goose flock in southwest Washington and northwest Oregon, and that both populations are declining, federal frameworks for Canada/cackling goose seasons in this region have become much more restrictive than experienced in many years. Namely:

- Daily bag limit decreased from three Canada/cackling geese per day to two Canada/cackling geese per day
- Season length decreased from 107 days to 74 days
- Open season framework restricted from late-September to March 10, to late-September to February 15.

Additionally, bag limits for Canada/cackling geese in other areas of western Washington and Alaska are being reduced. Flyway managers anticipate these restrictions will reduce harvest in northwest Oregon and southwest Washington by approximately one third from current levels, or more if goose hunter effort decreases relative to recent seasons.

For the 2025-26 season, staff are recommending a three-period season, similar to recent years. However, the season cannot extend past February 15, so the days saved from February 16 through March 10 account for the reduction in season length to 74 days required by framework. If first and second periods remain the same as previous years, this would leave the third period only nine days long. The agricultural community values hunting as late as possible and staff recognize that later hunting opportunity may help dissuade geese from depredating hunted fields. As such, staff are recommending that one week be shifted from the end of the second hunt period to the start of the third period.

Lastly, the framework reductions implemented by the USFWS only apply to Canada/cackling goose seasons, and the department can still offer 107-day seasons for white and white-fronted geese. While the opportunity to specifically target white-fronted geese in the zone is rare, between 15,000 and 35,000 snow geese have wintered in the zone in recent years. To maximize the season length available to pursue white geese, staff recommends the seasons for Canada/cackling geese and white and white-fronted geese be decoupled from each other. Seasons would be structured to allow harvest of any species when Canada/cackling goose seasons are open but allow 30 additional hunt days for white and white-fronted geese during early November and late January.

Public Comment: As of March 11:

- The Oregon Hunters Association prefers a season structure where the season for Canada/cackling geese opens on November 1 and runs for 74 consecutive days, with no splits or "late" hunt periods in February. Additionally, they recommend the bag limit be four Canada/cackling geese per day, except that not more than two could be minima cackling geese.
- The Oregon Seed Council prefers a season structure that extends through at least February 28.
- Two people requested the number of days open to hunting per week be reduced to four to spread the season timeframe over a greater period of time.
- Two people requested the season be extended into March.

Brant

Framework: A maximum season length of 16 days is allowed between the Saturday closest to September 24 and December 15. Maximum daily bag limit is two brant and the possession limit six. 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 two. This recommendation represents no change from last season.

Proposed Season:

Statewide:	Nov. 29 – Dec. 14
Daily bag limit:	2 brant
Possession limit:	6 brant
Shooting hours:	One-half hour before sunrise to sunset

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 concentrations of wintering brant. Surveys conducted each January have detected an average of 153 brant among the three bays during the past four years. Due to the low numbers of wintering birds, relative to the overall Pacific Flyway population, the brant season in Oregon has been kept restrictive season framework.

Reasons for the low wintering numbers in Oregon are unknown, though human disturbance has been documented to have detrimental effects on brant 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 frameworks have allowed more hunting opportunity for Oregon in some years, the department continues to support the 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 low level.

Public Comment: None, as of March 11.

American coot

Framework: Concurrent with duck season with a daily bag limit of 25 and a possession limit of 75. Shooting hours are from one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

Recommendation: Adoption of maximum days and bag limits as allowed by framework. This recommendation represents no change from last season.

Proposed Season:

Statewide:	Concurrent with duck season
Daily bag limit:	25 coot
Possession limit:	75 coot
Shooting hours:	One-half hour before sunrise to sunset

Discussion: Coots are a lightly hunted game bird species, especially considering their visibility and relative abundance in wetland habitats throughout the state. Most coots are taken by hunters while hunting ducks.

Public Comment: None, as of March 11.

Wilson's snipe

Framework: A maximum season length of 107 days between September 1 and February 28, with a daily bag limit of eight and a possession limit of 24. The season can be split into two periods. Hunting zones may be selected by established duck hunting zones.

Recommendation: Adoption of maximum days and bag limits as allowed by framework with the season in Zone 1 (Figure 4) beginning three weeks after the duck season begins and the season in Zone 2 running concurrent with duck season, except the snipe season would be open during the three-day split in the duck season. This season recommendation represents no change from last season.

Proposed Season:

Zone 1:	Nov. 1 – Feb. 15, 2026
Zone 2:	Oct. 11 – Jan. 25, 2026
Daily bag limit:	8 snipe
Possession limit:	24 snipe
Shooting hours:	One-half hour before sunrise to sunset

Discussion: Snipe are a lightly hunted game bird species in Oregon. Federal surveys usually estimate fewer than 500 hunters pursue snipe in Oregon, and they usually harvest fewer than 500 snipe per season. Snipe season dates have varied over the years from 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 the department recommended a season in Zone 1 that opened later than duck season and closed in mid-February, in 2011. 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, as of March 11.

Crow

Framework: Liberal seasons are offered outside of months when nesting may occur. Per MBTA 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. This recommendation represents no change from last season.

Proposed Season:

Statewide:	Oct. 1 – Jan. 31, 2026
Daily bag limit:	No limit
Possession limit:	No limit

Public Comment: None, as of March 11.

Migratory game bird falconry seasons

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. This recommendation represents no change from last season.

Proposed Seasons:

Duck (including merganser), Coot, Crow & Snipe:	Concurrent with gun seasons
Geese:	Concurrent with gun seasons except no hunting is allowed in the Northwest Permit Goose Zone or during any Special September Canada Goose Season
Mourning dove and band-tailed pigeon	Sept. 1 – Dec. 16
Daily bag limits:	3 in the aggregate, though not more than 1 band-tailed pigeon or goose
Possession limits:	Three times the daily bag limits

Discussion: There are approximately 150 licensed falconers in the state, not all of whom fly their raptors after game. Their collective harvest of birds is small. Most migratory game bird season proposals are concurrent with gun seasons since liberal 107-day general duck and goose seasons preclude opportunities for falconers to hunt outside of normal gun seasons.

Public Comment: None, as of March 11.

None as of March 11.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO STATE REFUGES

Background:
The Oregon Revised Statutes identify and describe eight wildlife refuges throughout Oregon. Per ORS, these refuges are closed to hunting and trapping of any wildlife unless provided otherwise in rule. Most of these refuges remain closed to hunting and trapping, though the Commission has adopted rules opening all or portions of the Columbia River Refuge and the John Day River Refuge (JDRR) to hunting of game birds and/or big game.

The JDRR (Figure 8) includes all lands and waters (public and privately owned) within ¼ mile from the high-water 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 the hunting of game birds during authorized seasons in that portion of the refuge from Rock Creek to Thirty Mile Creek. Below Rock Creek, only upland game bird hunting is allowed and only during September and October. Big game hunting is allowed in the entire refuge.

Recommendation: Expand the area where hunting of any game bird is permitted from Thirty Mile Creek downstream to Tumwater Falls.

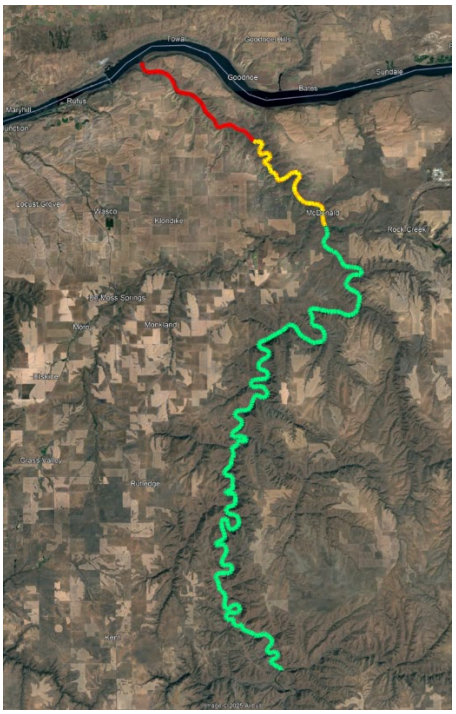

Figure 8. Proposed changes to the John Day River Refuge. Green = no change, open to all game bird hunting, red = no change, open only to upland game bird hunting and only during September and October, and yellow = formerly red but proposed to switch to green.

Discussion: Recent landowner changes within the refuge boundary have placed a greater portion of the area that is currently restricted to September and October upland game bird hunting into public ownership. Opening the area of the refuge from Rock Creek downstream to Tumwater Falls to all game bird hunting will allow the public to pursue game birds, especially chukar and California quail, at all times of the season without impacting neighboring private landowners.

Public Comment: The Oregon Hunters Association indicated support for this recommendation.