

In 2001, the Service concurred with the Atlantic Flyway Council's recommendation to expand the youth hunt to 2 consecutive hunting days because Sunday hunting is prohibited in some States in the Flyway. We do not support further expansion of the special youth hunt to 2 nonconsecutive hunting days. Further separation of hunting days would be inconsistent with the purpose identified earlier by the Flyway Councils for expanding the special hunt to 2 days, which was to reduce travel difficulties and scheduling conflicts inherent with the former 1-day hunt.

2. Sea Ducks

During last year's season, we were made aware of a conflict between the framework closing date for ducks and that for sea ducks. The latest closing dates for ducks was extended to the last Sunday in January, while the closing date for sea ducks remained at January 20. Therefore, to avoid the complications of sea ducks in the regular-duck-season bag, we propose that the closing date for sea ducks be January 31.

4. Canada Geese

A. Special Seasons

Council Recommendations: The Atlantic Flyway Council recommended that the Service increase the special September Canada goose hunting season bag limit to 8, with no possession limit, beginning with the 2003–04 hunting season. They further recommended that the framework closing date for the special September Canada goose season in North Carolina's Northeast Hunt Zone be extended from September 20 to September 30. They also recommended that the September 1–30 framework dates for Rhode Island's September resident Canada goose season be made operational.

The Upper- and Lower-Region Regulations Committees of the Mississippi Flyway Council recommended that the experimental early Canada goose season in Huron, Tuscola, and Saginaw counties in Michigan be extended for 1 year. Further, the Committees recommended that the Service grant operational status to Minnesota's Special September Canada Goose Season extension (16–22 September).

The Central Flyway Council recommended that South Dakota's 3-year experimental September Canada goose season (September 16–30) become operational for all of eastern South Dakota (east of the Missouri River), beginning in 2003.

The Pacific Flyway Council recommended that Wyoming's special-season framework for the Rocky Mountain population of western Canada geese consist of an 8-day season during September 1–15 in Bear River, Salt River, Farson-Eden Area, Bridger Valley, and Teton Counties, and the Little Snake River drainage portion of Carbon County. All participants must have a valid State permit for the special season. The number of permits may not exceed 240 in the Bear River, Salt River, Farson-Eden Area, and Bridger Valley area, and 20 permits in the Little Snake River drainage portion of Carbon County. The daily bag limit would be 3, with season and possession limits of 6. Where applicable, the season must be concurrent with the September portion of the sandhill crane season.

Service Response: We concur with the Atlantic Flyway Council's request regarding North Carolina and Rhode Island. We also concur with the recommendation to increase the daily bag limit in the September Canada goose seasons from 5 to 8, but believe that the possession limit should be 16.

Regarding South Dakota's experimental September Canada goose season, we believe the season should remain experimental until a final report is prepared, approved by the Flyway Council, and transmitted to the Service. This is consistent with the normal procedures for approval of experimental seasons. We do not concur with the recommendation for operational status of any areas outside the current experimental area. Special seasons after September 15 in other portions of the State initially must be experimental.

We concur with the recommendations from the Upper- and Lower-Region Regulations Committees of the Mississippi Flyway Council and the Pacific Flyway Council.

B. Regular Seasons

Council Recommendations: The Upper- and Lower-Region Regulations Committees of the Mississippi Flyway Council recommended that the framework opening date for all species of geese for the regular goose seasons in Michigan and Wisconsin be September 16, 2003.

Service Response: We concur.

9. Sandhill Cranes

Council Recommendations: The Central Flyway Council recommended accepting the 2002 Rocky Mountain population of sandhill cranes harvest allocation of 668 birds as proposed by the Pacific Flyway.

Service Response: We concur.

20. Puerto Rico

Written Comments: The Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources requested increasing the daily bag limit for doves from 10 to 15 doves in the aggregate, of which no more than 3 could be mourning doves.

Service Response: We concur. Surveys in Puerto Rico indicate that white-winged and Zenaida doves are increasing while mourning doves are declining. Additionally, a review of banding records failed to document any interchange of doves between Puerto Rico and the United States; thus, a change in hunting regulations would have no impact on U.S. dove populations.

Public Comment Invited

The Department of the Interior's policy is, whenever practicable, to afford the public an opportunity to participate in the rulemaking process. We intend that adopted final rules be as responsive as possible to all concerned interests and, therefore, seek the comments and suggestions of the public, other concerned governmental agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and other private interests on these proposals. Accordingly, we invite interested persons to submit written comments, suggestions, or recommendations regarding the proposed regulations to the address indicated under the caption **ADDRESSES**.

Special circumstances involved in the establishment of these regulations limit the amount of time that we can allow for public comment. Specifically, two considerations compress the time in which the rulemaking process must operate: (1) the need to establish final rules at a point early enough in the summer to allow affected State agencies to adjust their licensing and regulatory mechanisms; and (2) the unavailability, before mid-June, of specific, reliable data on this year's status of some waterfowl and migratory shore and upland game bird populations. Therefore, we believe that to allow comment periods past the dates specified in **DATES** is contrary to the public interest.

Before promulgation of final migratory game bird hunting regulations, we will take into consideration all comments received. Such comments, and any additional information received, may lead to final regulations that differ from these proposals. You may inspect comments received on the proposed annual regulations during normal business hours at the Service's office in room