
OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
4034 FAIRVIEW INDUSTRIAL DR SE; SALEM, OR 97302
WILDLIFE DIVISION TELEPHONE: (503) 947-6301

**GAME BIRD PROGRAM
RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR 2014 – 2015
UPLAND and MIGRATORY
GAME BIRD SEASONS**



**FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE OREGON FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION
AUGUST 1, 2014**

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The recommendations in this packet are based on public correspondence (including telephone and e-mail communications), Pacific Flyway Study Committee and Council discussions, discussions with field personnel, federal regulatory requirements and past Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) direction concerning hunting seasons.

UPLAND GAME BIRDS

POPULATION STATUS AND HARVEST

The following information about the status and past harvest of upland game birds is presented to provide the background and context for the 2014-15 regulation proposals.

Production: Upland game bird season recommendations are not based on annual production surveys. It is natural for upland game bird populations to fluctuate from year to year. Much of this short-term fluctuation in populations can be attributed to weather. Upland bird populations in 2014 are expected to remain below the long term average but improve over the previous year. Much of central and SE Oregon received below average precipitation from January-May, but it was improved over the extreme drought experienced during the same period the previous year. Reduced grass and forb growth in many areas negatively impact habitat conditions. On the positive side, temperature and precipitation amounts were favorable during the peak hatch for most upland game birds (late May and early June). At the time of this writing 2014 brood surveys have not been initiated. A more complete briefing will be provided to the Commission on August 1st.

Stamp Sales: In 2013, activated upland game bird validations (stamps) totaled 49,506, which was ~ 8.5% fewer than were active in 2012. As in most years, thousands of upland game bird validations are sold with the Sports Pac licenses but are not activated by the purchasers, it is not known how many of these license holders are hunting upland game birds. Total nonresident game bird stamp (valid for both waterfowl and upland game bird hunting) sales in 2013 were 5,079, a 3.5% decrease over the previous year.

2013-14 Harvest Surveys: Results from the 2013-14 harvest survey for pheasants, quail, partridge, and grouse are found in Table 1 (pg. 4). Harvest surveys for sage-grouse and turkeys are conducted separately and were as follows:

Sage-grouse – Approximately the same number of sage-grouse permits were offered during the 2013 season as in 2012. A portion of the Whitehorse Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) was reopened after being closed for the 2012 season due to wildfire and the number of permits offered in the Warner WMU was reduced. Statewide, 870 permits were authorized during 2013, 592 were drawn and 501 permits were purchased. Hunters harvested an estimated 360 sage-grouse and returned at least one wing from 254 birds. These wings were examined at the annual sage-grouse wing bee. Examination of wings indicated that production in 2013 was 2.01 chicks/hen; a significant improvement over 2012 (0.8 chicks/hen) and well above the 20-year average of 1.5 chicks/hen.

Fall turkey – There are no reliable indicators for turkey population trends, but anecdotal observations indicated turkey production improved for the second year in a row.

For the 17 Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) in Western Oregon open for the 2013 fall season, 4,000 permits were authorized (first-come, first-served). A total of 2,099 permits were issued. Due to the relative high mandatory reporting rates for fall turkey seasons, no phone surveys were conducted. For the general fall season the reporting rate was 71%. Hunter success averaged 39% for the 1,207 hunters who spent 5,269 days in the field and harvested 475 turkeys.

The mandatory reporting rate for controlled fall turkey hunts was 93%. A total of 1,025 tags were available for the five eastern Oregon controlled fall turkey hunts. There were 801 successful applicants and 653 tags issued; of which 508 tag holders went hunting and bagged an estimated 217 turkeys for a success rate of 43%.

Spring Turkey – As of this year (2014), spring phone surveys were discontinued. Harvest rates for turkey will be obtained from the mandatory reporting system; however, since the deadline for reporting on spring tags is not until January 31st of the following year, spring 2014 harvest data will not be available until February 2015. Phone surveys for the 2013 spring season indicate 13,328 hunters harvested 3,878 turkeys; representing little change from the previous year's harvest of 3,860. Below average production from 2010 – 2012 is likely responsible for the lower spring harvests in recent years. The youth spring turkey hunt continues to be very popular and well received.

Table 1. The 2013-14 upland game bird season estimates of hunters, hunter days, and harvest by species and harvest unit.

Estimated 2013-14 Oregon Upland Game Bird Harvest and Effort by Harvest Unit ¹										%
Species	Indices	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5	Area 6	Area 7	Total	Change from 2012-13
Blue Grouse	Hunters	3,863	2,515	898	2,156	1,707	269	629	11,049	1.40%
	Days	25,647	26,055	4,031	11,619	18,316	1,346	2,955	89,969	-2.90%
	Harvest	3,746	4,283	830	1,029	3,204	0	321	13,413	15.40%
Ruffed Grouse	Hunters	5,210	3,593	1,078	2,156	2,156	269	808	14,194	11.80%
	Days	43,785	32,760	4,689	15,713	17,624	961	2,955	118,487	14.60%
	Harvest	10,293	9,513	1,568	4,615	5,813	0	697	32,499	38.50%
Mountain Quail	Hunters	1,797	1,707	629	898	449	449	0	5,480	-3.40%
	Days	12,431	13,516	2,510	1,581	712	154	0	30,904	-27.30%
	Harvest	837	2,283	1,016	0	626	0	0	4,762	-64.80%
California Quail	Hunters	1,617	1,527	719	539	539	449	1,078	5,749	-32.80%
	Days	12,871	9,381	4,475	2,222	2,819	1,306	10,415	43,489	-29.80%
	Harvest	922	709	3,303	1,656	154	652	11,437	18,833	-56.00%
Chukar	Hunters			1,258	988	898	269	2,246	5,031	-25.50%
	Days			4,470	3,036	6,330	1,988	12,966	28,790	-28.90%
	Harvest			6,266	989	6,159	692	8,720	22,826	-44.80%
Gray Partridge	Hunters			449	539	808	0	629	2,066	-0.20%
	Days			2,094	1,613	3,640	0	3,352	10,699	-44.40%
	Harvest			1,171	77	905	0	77	2,230	-76.40%
Pheasant	Hunters	269	269	1,707	359	719	180	1,078	4,402	-34.80%
	Days	3,382	1,114	9,616	3,033	8,861	658	13,193	39,857	-31.00%
	Harvest	860	551	7,649	2,003	2,855	328	5,684	19,930	-34.30%

Note: These data are derived from a random phone survey of 4,200 upland game bird validation holders.

¹Harvest Units

Area 1 - Northwest Oregon Counties (all counties north of Douglas and west of the crest of the Cascades)

Area 2 - Southwest Oregon Counties (Douglas, Coos, Jackson, Josephine, & Curry)

Area 3 - Columbia Basin Counties (Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam, Morrow, & Umatilla)

Area 4 - Central Oregon Counties (Deschutes, Crook, Jefferson, Wheeler & Grant)

Area 5 - Northeast Oregon Counties (Wallowa, Union, & Baker).

Area 6 - Klamath and Lake Counties

Area 7 - Harney and Malheur Counties

UPLAND GAME BIRDS

➤ SEASON FRAMEWORKS

In 2009 the Commission adopted the 2010-2015 Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework which provides standardized upland game bird seasons for September 1, 2010 through August 31, 2015. The framework includes seasons for ring-necked and Sichuan pheasants, chukar and Hungarian (Gray) partridge, California quail, mountain quail, "blue" and ruffed grouse, sage-grouse, and spring and fall turkeys seasons. The seasons listed in the draft 2014-15 Game Bird Regulations reflect season criteria adopted by the Commission.

➤ 2014 CONTROLLED SAGE-GROUSE HUNT

Proposed sage-grouse season dates for 2014 are September 6-14. The Department's policy is for sage-grouse harvest to not exceed 5% of the fall population; in practice, harvest is estimated at 3% or less of the fall population in the hunted areas. Sage-grouse are not hunted range-wide in Oregon; regulated hunting is permitted in 12 of 21 wildlife management units where sage-grouse occur.

During 2013, fewer sage-grouse permits were offered because of the unknown effects of the large wildfires that occurred during the summer of 2012. At the time of this writing, staff is predicting that a similar number of sage-grouse permits will be offered in 2014 as in 2013. Staff will propose that the Trout Creek Mountain portion of the Whitehorse WMU remain closed. This area had some of Oregon's best sage-grouse habitat and highest densities of sage-grouse and accounted for over 60% of the sage-grouse harvest in the Whitehorse WMU. A large portion of the Trout Creek Mountains was impacted by the Holloway fire in 2012. Staff is recommending the area remain closed in part because of research that was initiated in cooperation with OSU and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to measure the response of sage-grouse to the landscape altering wildfires. Some permits may be offered for the remainder of the Whitehorse WMU and numbers will be based on the fall population projection.

Permit numbers are determined annually based on a mathematical formula combining spring lek count information, brood survey information, hunter participation rates, and results from the analysis of wings taken during the previous hunting season. Spring lek surveys are used to estimate the adult male breeding population. Based on a sage-grouse sex ratio of females per male, the adult breeding population is then estimated. A chick/hen ratio is estimated from summer brood surveys and then applied to the adult breeding population to estimate the total sage-grouse fall population. The number of permits offered by WMU during the past two years is in Table 2. The formula is designed to authorize the take of 5% or less of the estimated fall population. The 5% is the maximum allowed harvest and not a harvest goal. A 2010 paper in the Journal of Wildlife Management examined several years of sage-grouse band recovery data from Nevada and Colorado and concluded that harvest rates of 11% or less of the fall population are unlikely to have an important influence on local population dynamics of sage-grouse. This conclusion is similar to the range-wide sage-grouse management guidelines that recommend a harvest rate of 10% or less.

At this time, the 2014 lek survey data have not been completely analyzed and production surveys have not been initiated, however preliminary data suggests male lek attendance in 2014 was similar to or slightly up from the previous year. More information about population trends will be presented on August 1st after production surveys are completed.

An important benefit of hunting sage-grouse is collection of essential biological information. Each hunter is provided two wing envelopes and asked to send in one wing from each bird harvested. Analysis of these wings provides an estimate of overall production, hatching chronology, and pre-winter sex and age composition of the population. The sex and age composition allows the prediction of breeding population trends for the following year. Age-at-harvest models are also being refined for upland game birds that allow for population reconstruction based simply on age at harvest data and known hunting effort. Without this information it would be very difficult to determine how sage-grouse populations are performing through time. It will become even more critical to have this information as land managers implement habitat improvement treatments designed to benefit sage-grouse.

Of the western states where sage-grouse are hunted, Oregon is among the most conservative. Under current harvest strategies, population data indicate population trends are within the range of historical variation since 1980. The controlled hunt process allows the Department to manage harvest and hunters and collect important information. Collecting this information by other means would be difficult and costly. Eliminating responsible and regulated hunting would likely mislead the public by implying hunting is responsible for the current status of sage-grouse, and thus distracting attention from the real threats to sage-grouse which are habitat loss and fragmentation. The Department will continue to evaluate on an annual basis the limited harvest of sage-grouse in the state; making any necessary adjustments and/or closures as warranted.

On March 5, 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced its determination that listing the greater sage-grouse range-wide under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was warranted, but precluded by higher-priority listing actions. Therefore, sage-grouse are a "candidate" species under the federal ESA, but remain a state-managed species. In light of this decision, concerns have been expressed about the potential impacts of hunting greater sage-grouse. In their listing decision, the USFWS concluded key threats to the continued survival of sage-grouse are 1) habitat loss, fragmentation, and modification and 2) inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms, particularly in relation to energy and other development. The USFWS also evaluated the "utilization" (e.g., hunting) of sage-grouse and concluded that "the greater sage-grouse is not threatened by over-utilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes now or in the foreseeable future". The USFWS will, by court order, decide in late 2015 if sage-grouse should be listed as threatened or endangered under the federal ESA.

Table 2. Oregon sage-grouse hunting permit numbers for 2012 and 2013. The calculation of proposed permit numbers for 2014 will include production data not available at the time of this writing.

SAGE-GROUSE PERMIT RECOMMENDATIONS			
<u>Management Unit</u>	<u>2014 Recommendations</u>	<u>2013 Permits</u>	<u>2012 Permits</u>
Sumpter	Available at Commission	10	10
Lookout Mountain	Meeting	10	10
Beulah	“	150	150
Malheur River	“	100	100
Owyhee	“	75	75
Whitehorse	“	70	0
Steens	“	75	80
Beatys Butte	“	150	175
Juniper	“	75	75
Silvies	“	20	20
N. Wagontire	“	35	35
S. Wagontire	“	20	20
Warner	“	80	130
TOTAL		870	880

➤ 2014 CONTROLLED FALL TURKEY SEASONS

Background

Specific hunts and tag numbers for the controlled fall turkey season are not covered under 2010-15 Upland Game Bird Framework. Responding to the general trend of increasing turkey populations and associated damage complaints the Department has expanded fall turkey hunting opportunities in recent years; however no further expansion is being proposed for the 2014 season. With only calendar adjustments, staff is proposing the same number of controlled turkey hunts and the same number of tags as authorized last year (tag numbers were last increased in 2011). Staff is also proposing no changes to the general fall turkey season offered in western Oregon.

Controlled and General Fall Turkey Seasons

It is unlawful to obtain and possess more than two fall turkey tags of which only one can be a controlled fall turkey tag. Thus, hunters can purchase two general fall turkey tags, or obtain one controlled fall turkey tag and one general season fall turkey tag per season. At time of harvest, a hunter must validate their tag immediately by removing the triangle in its entirety for the appropriate month and day of harvest and attach the tag securely to the carcass. The 2014-15 Game Bird Regulations describe the legal hunting methods for fall turkey and shooting hours (dogs may be used during the fall turkey season).

➤ 2014 WESTERN OREGON FEE PHEASANT HUNTS

Background

For over 20 years the Department has offered special western Oregon fee pheasant hunts on public hunting areas. Initially the Oregon Legislature directed the Department to offer these hunts, which have been very popular with a segment of hunters living in western Oregon metropolitan areas. The hunts are currently offered on the following four wildlife areas in western Oregon: E. E. Wilson, Sauvie Island, Fern Ridge and Denman. The Department annually allocates 3,300 rooster pheasants among the four areas and this past year total harvest was about 2,432 pheasants. Collectively, the wildlife areas recorded 5,843 hunter-visits during the 2013 fee pheasant hunts (up 3% from the previous year).

In these hunts, rooster pheasants are purchased from private breeders and released (typically daily) on hunt areas throughout the season. Each participant in the hunt must possess a \$17.00 pheasant tag, good for two birds, in addition to a hunting license and upland game bird validation. Tags are purchased from license agents, and the revenues are applied toward the cost of the program. Additional tags can be purchased throughout the season. In 2013, there were 3,121 fee pheasant tags sold (down 3% from the previous year).

While the intent of the program is to cover costs with tag revenue, the balance between annual program costs and hunter participation is difficult to predict with precision. Therefore, pheasant tags pay the bulk of the program costs, and any short fall is paid with upland game bird stamp revenue. After remaining unchanged since 1991 at \$11.50, Fee Pheasant Hunt tag prices were increased to \$17.00 in 2010.

Hunters are generally very supportive of this program with the main complaint being they would like to see more birds stocked. However, due to the increasing cost of birds, increasing the total number of birds released would increase program costs.

Recommendation: Based on performance of past seasons, staff is proposing a 2014 season similar to that held in 2013. A \$17.00 pheasant tag, obtainable through license agents, allowing hunters two birds would again be required. Proposed season dates are in the table below.

TABLE 3. PROPOSED WESTERN OREGON FEE PHEASANT HUNTS

<u>Hunt Area</u>	<u>Dates</u>
Fern Ridge Wildlife Area	September 15 – October 12, 2014
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area	September 22 – October 5, 2014
Denman Wildlife Area	September 22 – October 10, 2014
E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area	October 1 – October 31, 2014

➤ 2014 SEPTEMBER YOUTH PHEASANT HUNTS

Special youth hunts for pheasants began at E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area in the early 1950s, and have since been expanded to 11 other areas throughout the state (Table 4).

The 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 participation has been declining for most hunts. The youth hunt in Ontario will not be held this year due to declining attendance over the last several years in spite of increased publicity of the event. Last year, 780 youth hunters participated in the program. In addition, sporting clay trailers are used to conduct youth shotgun skill clinics in association with many of the hunts. These provide instruction and a challenging opportunity to learn how to hit flying targets and to use a shotgun more effectively. All participants, including adults are required to wear a blaze orange hat and vest, in addition to shooting glasses (eye protection).

Staff is proposing a pheasant hunting opportunity for mentored youth on Sept. 21 at E. E. Wilson WA. This one day event will be for those youth participating in the mentored youth hunt program which requires them to be mentored by a licensed adult. The number of mentored youth participating in the event will be limited to 20. This hunt will provide opportunity for youth who have not yet passed hunter's safety to participate in a youth upland game bird hunting opportunity. E. E. Wilson WA will continue to offer regular youth hunts on Sept. 20, 27, and 28.

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 youths and their parents.

Proposed hunt dates and maximum allowable hunters at any one time are listed in the table below.

TABLE 4. PROPOSED YOUTH AND MENTORED PHEASANT HUNTS

<u>Hunt Area</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Hunter Limitation</u>
Baker City Area (private land)	Sept. 27 & 28	50
Denman Wildlife Area	Sept. 20 & 21	85
E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area	Sept. 20, 27 & 28	70
Fern Ridge Wildlife Area	Sept. 13 & 14	75
Irrigon Wildlife Area	Sept. 20 & 21	60
John Day Area (private land)	Sept. 13 & 14	30
Klamath Wildlife Area	Sept. 13 & 14	80
Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area	Sept. 20 & 21	35
Mid-Columbia (The Dalles area)	Sept. 27 & 28	20
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area	Sept. 20 & 21	50
Willow Creek (Prineville Area)	Sept. 20 & 21	80

PROPOSED MENTORED YOUTH PHEASANT HUNT

E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area	Sept. 21	20
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➤ 2014 PHEASANT HUNTING WORKSHOPS

Pheasant hunting workshops have proven to be very popular; to meet demand the Department's Outdoor Skills Education Program is proposing to have several workshops this year (Table 5). Proposed are six adult pheasant hunting workshops at three locations. Topics will include safe gun handling, shooting skills, and an afternoon pheasant hunt. The number of participants in each workshop will be limited. General season regulations will apply.

TABLE 5. PROPOSED PHEASANT HUNTING WORKSHOPS

Fern Ridge Wildlife Area	Sept. 5 & 6
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area	Sept. 12 & 13
E. E. Wilson Wildlife Area	Sept. 19 & 26

➤ 2014 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 primary intent of this hunt will be to provide youth 17 years of age and younger an upland hunting opportunity, immediately following the release of chukars into the hunt area. Each youth shall be accompanied by one adult chaperone. The adult chaperone will be asked to refrain from hunting. The youth mentor program 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. Please reserve a hunt day by calling, Rick Viera, Klamath Chapter OHA at (541) 591-2452 prior to the hunt. The number of participants for this youth hunt will be limited.

For the 2014 hunt season, the proposed hunt dates and special regulations are as follows:

Hunt Dates: October 11 & 12, 2014

Bag Limit: 2 chukars (per the existing special regulations for the Lower Klamath Hills hunt area)

➤ 2014-15 UPLAND GAME BIRD FALCONRY SEASONS

Background

The use of falcons for the take of upland game birds is practiced by few hunters in Oregon. All falconers are licensed and staff coordinates with the USFWS on the monitoring of falconry activities in the state.

Recommendation

PROPOSED UPLAND GAME BIRD FALCONRY SEASON

Open Season: September 1, 2014 – March 31, 2015

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.

Sage-grouse Season: September 1, 2014 – January 31, 2015

Daily Bag Limit: One sage-grouse

Season Limit: Two sage-grouse

Open Areas for Sage-grouse: Those areas open to controlled sage-grouse hunting.

While the seasons are long there are only about 100 licensed falconers so the harvest of upland game bird species is believed to be minimal. A conservative sage-grouse season and limit is proposed. The falconry season for sage-grouse closes at the end of January, just prior to the time birds begin gathering on leks where they are more vulnerable.

➤ PUBLIC COMMENTS RELATED TO UPLAND GAME BIRD REGULATIONS

A couple of comments were received regarding the current annual game bird regulations. One comment suggested allowing the use of handguns firing .410 rounds be allowed for taking forest grouse. This suggestion has been occasionally raised in the past. There are a few manufacturers of handguns (e.g. Thompson/Center, Taurus) capable of firing .410 shells; however these firearms do not meet the definition of a shotgun and consequently are not lawful for hunting upland game birds. Shotguns firing .410 rounds are legal for taking game birds. The Department received one comment which opposed allowing the use of .410 handguns at the public meetings in May. Field and headquarter's staff do have concerns about the limited effective range of .410 handguns, which is substantially less than .410 shotguns because of pattern spread and reduced velocity. Rimfire handguns are allowed for taking forest grouse only, but these handguns have an effective range similar to shotguns (or longer depending on skill).

The Department received several public comments about the proposed 2015-2020 Upland Game Bird Framework which would take effect with the fall 2015 seasons; these comments are included in the Public Correspondence section of this Commission packet.

MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

PACIFIC FLYWAY

POPULATION STATUS and HARVEST

Population Status: 2014 population status reports for migratory game birds have not been released by the USFWS. Population status updates will be provided in a supplement to the Commission prior to August 1st.

Harvest: The Harvest Information Program (HIP), a cooperative harvest survey between the USFWS and states, was implemented in Oregon during 1995. The USFWS estimates effort and harvest by sampling hunters from records provided by the Oregon licensing system. This cooperative survey continues to be refined yearly.

2014 harvest estimates have not yet been finalized by the USFWS for these migratory game birds. Harvest summaries will be provided in a supplement to the Commission prior to August 1st.

Stamp Sales: State of Oregon waterfowl validation (stamp) sales to resident hunters for the 2013 – 14 season totaled 58,463, an increase of approximately 2% from 2012 – 13. The increase is likely due to the continued popularity of Sports Pac licenses, which include a waterfowl validation. However, 56% of adults and juveniles who purchased a Sports Pac did not return to a license agent to obtain their waterfowl validation after July 1st, leaving the total number of resident waterfowl validations held by hunters at 35,805. Total 2013 – 14 nonresident game bird stamps (valid for both waterfowl and upland game bird hunting) sales were 5,079, down 3.5% from 2012 – 13. For all license types, there were 44,173 individuals licensed to hunt waterfowl last season, which was up slightly from 2012 – 13.

MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS 2014 – 15 SEASON PROPOSALS

Season frameworks for migratory game birds are established annually in late-July by the USFWS. The Department works through the Pacific Flyway Council process and the USFWS regulatory process to make recommendations on these federal frameworks. All recommendations to the Commission must meet final USFWS framework guidelines and all seasons selected by the Commission are subject to approval by the USFWS.

The Pacific Flyway Council will not meet to propose frameworks to the USFWS for most migratory game bird seasons until July 25, 2014. The USFWS will meet to review those proposals and adopt final frameworks July 30-31, 2014. Therefore, most migratory game bird season recommendations are not presented at this time, recommendations cannot be finalized until the USFWS approves final frameworks. **Season proposals for the following migratory game birds will be provided to the Commission via email in late July.**

- **DUCK AND MERGANSER**
- **SEPTEMBER CANADA GEESE**
- **FALL/WINTER GEESE**
- **BLACK BRANT**
- **WILSON'S SNIPE**
- **AMERICAN COOT**
- **FALCONRY**

➤ **MOURNING DOVE**

Framework

Efforts between the flyways and USFWS to reassess harvest strategies for mourning dove have resulted in the adoption of a new harvest strategy by the flyways and the USFWS. This strategy uses the estimated mourning dove population in the Western Management Unit to develop a predictable regulatory harvest system similar to other stocks of migratory game birds; 2014 is the first season in which this harvest strategy is being used

Under the Nationally adopted harvest strategy, when mourning dove abundance dictates a standard mourning dove season, Oregon is allowed a 60-consecutive day season between September 1, 2014 and January 15, 2015 with a daily bag and possession limits of 15 and 45, respectively.

Recommendation

In most years the effective length of Oregon's mourning dove season is governed by the first cool temperatures or early storms that initiate southern migration, which usually occurs in early September. The following season provisions are recommended in accordance with the federal framework which calls for a standard season framework as outlined by the harvest strategy for the Western Management Unit for mourning doves and represents a change of an additional 30 days season length and an additional 5 doves in the daily bag limit over prior seasons.

PROPOSED MOURNING DOVE SEASON

Open Season:	September 1 – October 30, 2014
Open Area:	Entire State
Daily Bag Limit:	15 mourning doves
Possession Limit:	45 mourning doves

Public Comment

Public comment received at the May public meetings regarding the increased mourning dove opportunity was supportive of longer seasons and higher bag limits.

One comment was again received requesting mourning dove season open on the first Saturday in September, instead of September 1st. Traditionally, because mourning dove migration is well underway by late summer, the Department, as well as most other states, have opened the season as early as possible (September 1st) regardless of what day of the week September 1st falls on. Although some hunters may not be able to participate during the opening day of the season due to work or school schedules, the Department believes it is advantageous to most dove hunters to continue to open the season as early as possible to take advantage of the time period when mourning doves are likely most abundant. Opening on a later date would trade early season opportunity when the hunting is generally best, for days in November after most doves have left the state.

➤ **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, 2014 and January 1, 2015, with a daily bag and possession limits of 2 and 6, respectively.

Recommendation

Although there has been concern over the status of the pigeon population in past years, hunting restrictions have reduced hunter numbers and harvest to minimal levels, which are believed to have no significant impact on the population. In July of 2010 the Pacific Flyway Council adopted an updated management plan for Pacific Coast band-tailed pigeon which contains a harvest strategy for pigeons based on population status derived from the coordinated July mineral site survey. The following season provisions are recommended in accordance with the federal framework which calls for a restrictive season framework as outlined by the harvest strategy for the Pacific Coast Population of band-tailed pigeons and represents no change from the previous 23 seasons.

PROPOSED BAND-TAILED PIGEON SEASON

Season Dates: September 15 – 23, 2014
Open Area: Entire State
Daily Bag Limit: 2 pigeons
Possession Limit: 6 pigeons

Similar to black brant, a special permit is required to hunt band-tailed pigeon which allows the USFWS to more accurately estimate the number of pigeon hunters and pigeon harvest. This permit also improves the ability to obtain pigeon wings from successful hunters so that the age composition of the harvest may be monitored.

Public Comment

No public comment has been received.

➤ **CROW**

Framework

Liberal seasons are offered outside of months when nesting may occur. 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 in 2010 has made the take of depredation and nuisance birds more restrictive. Now crows taken under the depredation order must be taken with non-toxic ammunition and all take must be reported to the USFWS.

Recommendation

Adoption of maximum days allowed.

PROPOSED CROW SEASON

Season Dates: October 1, 2014 – January 31, 2015
Open Area: Entire State
Daily Bag Limit: No Limit
Possession Limit: No Limit

Crow hunting seasons are required because of a treaty negotiation with Mexico. Crow hunting in Oregon is likely minimal with more crows being taken via the federal depredation order.

Public Comment

No public comment has been received.

GAME BIRD REGULATION CHANGE PROPOSALS

➤ HUNTING IN THE COLUMBIA RIVER REFUGE

The Oregon State Legislature has established several state wildlife refuges through legislative action. These refuges differ somewhat from the typical image of a refuge in that they are not necessarily owned by a public entity and managed for wildlife values. They are simply delineated areas where the legislature has established a wildlife refuge and may contain a mix of private and public lands and waters. By statute, these state wildlife refuges are closed to hunting and trapping, however, the Commission has the authority to allow hunting and trapping in the refuges when *the Commission determines that such action is necessary to properly manage the supply or condition of the wildlife on such range* (ORS 501.025). Currently, the Commission allows game bird hunting in portions of two state refuges, The John Day River Refuge and the Columbia River Refuge.

The Columbia River Refuge is all lands and waters from the railroad bridge at Celilo upstream to Boardman and between the railroad right-of-way to the south and the state boundary in the Columbia to the north (ORS 501.400). As early as 1901 the Oregon Legislature passed laws protecting geese on the Columbia River in eastern Oregon. Statutory language from 1901 – 1923 varied slightly but generally followed the text used in the 1911 law, “*it shall be unlawful at any time to shoot at, or take, or kill, or attempt to take, kill, injure, or destroy by any means, any wild goose on any island or sandbar in or along the Columbia River and within the State east of the Cascade Mountains on which wild geese habitually rest or roost.*” Overtime, the statute was amended to include all wildlife and eventually in 1973, the Columbia River Refuge was formally included in the list of Legislative State Refuges and the current boundary (Celilo to Boardman between the railroad right of way and the state boundary) was established.

The area of this refuge open to game bird hunting has varied through time. From the 1950s through the 1960s some portions of the refuge around Boardman were open to hunting, however, beginning in 1968 and through 1982, the entire refuge was closed. Finally in 1983, the Fish and Wildlife Commission opened the portion of the Columbia River Refuge from Arlington to Boardman to hunting for pheasant, quail, partridge, waterfowl, snipe and rabbit with shotgun and archery (flu-flu arrows only) and those regulations have persisted to this day.

The area from Celilo to Arlington continues to act as a goose refuge, as it has for over 100 years. Canada geese generally use this stretch of the Columbia River as a roost and fly out to feed in agricultural fields north or south of the River (predominately dry-land wheat) one or two times each day. The number of geese using this stretch of the river is unknown since neither the Department nor the USFWS conduct waterfowl surveys to document the number of geese roosting on the river. The Department does conduct the mid-winter waterfowl survey along the Columbia in Hood River, Wasco, and Sherman Counties; however, when the survey is conducted it is likely many of the geese using the river as a roost are feeding in fields outside of the survey area. Ducks and American coots also winter in moderate numbers along this stretch of river. Mid-winter surveys in Sherman County generally tabulate about 200 – 1000 dabbling ducks (mostly wigeon and gadwall) and 1500 – 3000 diving ducks (mostly lesser scaup). Although

Wasco County is covered by the mid-winter survey, only a small portion is within the refuge. Additionally, no mid-winter survey is conducted in Gilliam County.

Recently, there has been some public, as well as Department, interest in opening the remainder of the Columbia River Refuge (Celilo to Arlington) to game bird hunting. Game bird populations using the current closure area are secure. Both resident Canada and migrant Canada geese, for which the refuge was originally created, have increased dramatically over the past decades. In some areas near the refuge these high populations have led to conflicts with human activities.

Recommendation

Staff recommends opening the remaining closed portion of the Columbia River Refuge (Celilo to Arlington) to game bird hunting and modifying the following text in the game bird regulations.

- Columbia River Refuge from the railroad bridge at Celilo in Wasco County to Arlington is closed to all hunting. ~~The Columbia River Refuge from Arlington to 4.3 miles west of Boardman is open to pheasant, quail, partridge, waterfowl, snipe, and rabbit hunting with shotgun and bow with flu-flu arrows only.~~

Waterfowl hunting in the refuge is expected to have minimal effects on the local winter populations of ducks, geese, and coots and no effects on populations at the flyway scale. Since the current closure area offers very limited upland game bird habitat, hunting effort and harvest would likely be very minimal for those birds.

Public Comment

At this time the Department has received two comments from the public which support opening the remainder of the Columbia River Refuge to game bird hunting. Two comments from attendees at the Department's May public meeting held in The Dalles who were concerned that allowing hunting within the refuge could affect waterfowl use of the river and lower success for hunters in areas away from the River. The Department contacted the State Habitat Chairman for Ducks Unlimited (DU) who lives in The Dalles and hunts the area. He stated local DU members have discussed the proposal and feel it would add some opportunity along the river and probably not have much of an effect on the goose hunting in the fields.

➤ SAUVIE ISLAND WILDLIFE AREA EASTSIDE RESERVATION HUNT AREA SELECTION

The Sauvie Island Wildlife is divided into four major hunting areas, Oak Island, the Northside, Eastside and Westside. All four offer different hunting opportunities and access systems, but the eastside and westside are most popular with waterfowl hunters. During the duck season the eastside and westside are generally open for hunting every-other day of the season. Hunters wanting to hunt the westside must arrive to the westside check station at least 1.5 hours before shooting light, at which time an onsite lottery is conducted to determine which group of hunters has first chance to select a hunting location. The lottery continues until all of the available hunt areas (42) are filled or all hunt parties present have chosen a hunting location.

The eastside differs substantially from the westside. It is composed of 13 hunting units, some of which have designated hunting sites or blinds (blinds units) and some of which have no designated hunting sites, but a limit on the number of people who may be hunting in the unit at any given time (roam units). Hunters wishing to hunt in one of the units have two choices to secure an opportunity. First, they can apply in advance for a specific hunt day and unit using the Department's Controlled Hunt System. The season is divided into seven periods and each hunter may apply once for each period, allowing each hunter to possibly receive seven reservations per season. If successful in the drawing, the applicant must obtain a reservation permit and arrive at the eastside check station at least 1.5 hours before shooting time on their hunt day. Upon arrival, the successful applicant parks their vehicle in the "Reservation Line", then drives forward as the line advances to the check station (hunter processing begins 1.5 hours before shooting time).

Sauvie Island Wildlife Area Eastside Hunt Subunits			
Blind Units		Roam Units	
Subunit	# of Blinds	Subunit	Max # of Hunters
Hunt	9	Aaron	10
Johnson	7	Deadwillow	10
Mudhen	13	Footbridge	8
Racetrack	5	Malarky	10
		McNary	20
		Pope Lake	8
		Reeder	1 party of 4
		Rentnaar	10
		Stutzer	8

When they reach the check station, they are allowed to choose a blind from those remaining (if the reservation is for a blind unit), or they are given a permit for their unit (if the reservation is for a roam unit). If a hunter does not have a reservation they can still hunt at the eastside by arriving at the check station and parking their vehicle in the "Non-reservation Line". Once all hunters with reservations who arrived on time have been processed, the vehicles in the non-reservation line are allowed to proceed to the check station and the first vehicle in line is given first choice of all hunting areas still vacant. The second

vehicle is then allowed to choose and hunt area selection continues like this until all areas are full or all vehicles have been process, whichever comes first.

Since hunters with reservations get to pick a hunting blind or enter a hunting unit based on their order of arrival it is not uncommon for hunters who want a reliable chance at securing their preferred area, or who want the blind they consider to be the best, to arrive in excess of 24-hours in advance. For example, some hunters will park in line Tuesday afternoon to be at the head of the line on Thursday morning. This has led to a situation where by a hunter that is successful in the controlled hunt drawing but is unable to commit the time to wait in line, has very little chance of securing one of the more popular hunting areas.

Many successful public waterfowling areas across the country, including Oregon's own Fern Ridge Wildlife Area and the USFWS's Umatilla National Wildlife Refuge avoid this issue by assigning reservation holders a random number during the reservation draw process which determines the order for selecting a blind pick or area entry. Using this type of system a reservation holder can have a reliable idea of their chances of securing their preferred hunting area without having to spend greater than an entire night sitting in their vehicle. The Department has received requests to change the eastside hunt area selection process to this type of system. When asked for input the majority of hunters responding indicated they support a change to this type of system.

Recommendation

Staff recommends changing the way hunt reservation holders for the eastside area of Sauvie Island Wildlife Area choose hunting blinds or access the wildlife area from the current first come – first served system, to a system where hunt area selection or access order is determined by random number assigned during the controlled hunt drawing process, beginning with the 2015-16 hunting season.

Public Comment

On several occasions the Department has solicited hunter opinions as to whether they prefer the current system or a system in which hunt areas are selected via random number. To date we have received 90 comments, 61 of which favor a system where order of hunting area selection or access into a hunting area is determined by random number.

Additional Information

If approved by the Commission, the recommended changes cannot be implemented for the 2014-15 season due to the time required for infrastructure changes to the eastside check station (expansion of parking area) and programming changes to the controlled hunt system for assignment of random numbers to successful applications. Therefore, if the Commission approves the recommendation, the changes will be implemented for the 2015-16 waterfowl season.

➤ GAME BIRD HUNTING WITHIN THE CITY LIMITS OF WARRENTON

Game bird hunting has been allowed within the city limits of the City of Warrenton (City), OR by City Ordinance and Department OAR for many years. The Department recently learned the City had reduced the portion of its city limits open to hunting several years ago but the change was never recognized in the Department's OARs. The Department reviewed the City's new Ordinance and determined the language was incompatible with traditional waterfowl hunting currently occurring there. Over the past year the Department worked with the City to develop new language which satisfied the City and area waterfowl hunters. The City has recently adopted updated Ordinances.

Recommendation

Staff recommends amending OAR 635-051-0048(1) so it is consistent with the City of Warrenton's new Ordinance. The change restricts hunting in two areas where significant residential and commercial development has occurred since the initial OAR was adopted and modifies the boundary of the remaining open area to conform to the area delineated by the City of Warrenton. See Attachment 4 for old and new rule language. Maps of the old and new areas will be provided at the Commission meeting.

Public Comment

No public comment has been received.