



Oregon Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework

Effective dates: September 1, 2015
through August 31, 2020

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Proposed 2015 -2020 Upland Game Bird Framework Executive Summary

Oregon's diverse habitats support 12 species of upland game birds, 8 of which are native, and 10 of which have hunting seasons. This document contains the proposed framework for upland game bird hunting seasons for the next five years. The seasons are designed to provide recreational hunting opportunities compatible with the overall status of upland game bird populations. The multi-year framework approach for setting upland game bird regulations was first adopted by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission in 1996 for a 3-year period and again in 1999, 2004, and 2009 for 5-year periods.

The role of regulations in game bird management has many functions including protection of a species, providing recreational opportunities, and in consultation with hunters to provide bag limits and seasons. Regulations should be as simple as possible to make them easy to understand.

These frameworks are also based on the concept that annual fluctuations in upland bird numbers, which can vary greatly and are normal, should not be the basis for setting hunting seasons year by year. Standardized frameworks are biologically sound management tools that help the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) provide consistent, stable regulations that reduce confusion, assist hunters with planning trips, and lower administrative costs.

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

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

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

Table 1. Comparison of current and proposed upland game bird frameworks.

CURRENT 2010-2015 FRAMEWORK			PROPOSED 2015-2020 FRAMEWORK
UPLAND GAME BIRDS	OPEN AREA	OPEN SEASON	
"Blue" and Ruffed Grouse (Forest grouse)	Western Oregon, Hood Rvr and Wasco cos	Sep. 1, – Jan. 31.	No change
	Eastern Oregon	Sep. 1- Dec. 31	Sept. 1. – Jan. 31
Chukar/ Hungarian (Gray) Partridge	Umatilla and Morrow cos	Saturday nearest Oct. 8 – Dec. 31	Saturday nearest Oct. 8 – Jan. 31
	Remaining Eastern Oregon cos	Saturday nearest Oct. 8 – Jan. 31	No change
Rooster Pheasant	Statewide	Saturday nearest Oct. 8 – Dec. 31	No change
California Quail	Western Oregon	Sep.1 - Jan. 31	No change
	Umatilla and Morrow cos	Saturday nearest Oct. 8 – Dec. 31	Saturday nearest Oct. 8 – Jan. 31
	Remaining Eastern Oregon cos	Saturday nearest Oct. 8 – Jan. 31	No change
Mountain Quail	Western Oregon, Hood Rvr and Wasco cos	Sep. 1 - Jan. 31	No change
	Crook, Gilliam, Grant, Klamath and Wheeler cos	Saturday nearest Oct. 8 – Jan. 31	No Change
	Umatilla and Morrow cos	Saturday nearest Oct. 8 – Dec. 31	Saturday nearest Oct. 8 – Jan. 31
	Remaining Eastern Oregon cos	NO OPEN SEASON	No change
Spring Turkey	Statewide	Apr. 15 – May 31	No change in season length, but statewide season bag limit would be increased to three.
Fall Turkey – General Western Oregon	16 Wildl. Mgmt Units. 4,000 available tags.	Oct. 15 – Dec. 31	No change



OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

OREGON UPLAND GAME BIRD HUNTING SEASON FRAMEWORK

September 1, 2015 – August 31, 2020

INTRODUCTION

This document contains the framework for upland game bird hunting seasons that will be in place for the period of September 1, 2015 through August 31, 2020. The seasons are designed to provide recreational hunting opportunities compatible with the overall status of upland game bird populations. This document is not designed to provide a history of upland game bird populations, nor outline and prioritize habitat programs in Oregon. The intent is to focus on harvest regulation. The multi-year framework approach for setting upland game bird regulations was first adopted by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission in 1996 for a 3-year period and again in 1999, 2004, and 2009 for 5-year periods.

The role of regulations in game bird management has many functions including protection of a species, providing recreational opportunities, and in consultation with hunters to provide bag limits and seasons. Regulations should be as simple as possible to make them easy to understand.

These frameworks are also based on the concept that annual fluctuations in upland bird numbers, which can vary greatly and are normal, should not be the basis for setting hunting seasons year by year. Standardized frameworks are biologically sound management tools that help the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) provide consistent, stable regulations that reduce confusion, assist hunters with planning trips, and lower administrative costs.

UPLAND GAME BIRD RESOURCES

Oregon's non-migratory upland game bird species are gallinaceous birds. Eight of the 12 gallinaceous species are native to Oregon. These include the mountain quail (*Oreortyx pictus*), California quail (*Callipepla californica*), greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*), *sooty grouse (*Dendragapus fuliginosus*), *dusky grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*), spruce grouse (*Falci pennis canadensis*) and ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*). Some native species are, or were, limited to small geographical regions within the state such as California quail and spruce grouse. Others had wide distribution, but were extirpated, such as the Columbian sharp-tailed grouse. Sharp-tailed grouse were re-introduced into Wallowa County, Oregon in 1991. Four species not native to Oregon have been introduced. One introduced species is from North America; the wild turkey (*Meleagris*

gallopavo). The other species, which are from Eurasia include the ring-necked and Sichuan pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus ssp.*), chukar partridge (*Alectoris chukar*), and gray (Hungarian) partridge (*Perdix perdix*).

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

MANAGEMENT APPROACH

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

- Many upland game bird populations exhibit a high annual death rate and cannot be stockpiled from year to year. Some upland game bird species, such as quail, are short-lived and from 60 to 80 percent will die annually, although not all species have such high mortality rates. Nearly all upland birds produce large broods and exhibit high turnover rates from year to year. Additionally, forest grouse may exhibit cyclic population fluctuations, in which their population numbers may rise or fall over an extended period of time. Some species, such as greater sage-grouse, tend to be longer-lived and have lower reproductive capacities than other upland game birds and require more conservative management.
- Similar annual death rates occur in most upland game bird populations whether they are hunted or not. Some populations have been shown to exhibit compensatory mortality. The outcome of compensatory mortality is that the overall number of animals dying annually does not change much even though causes of death may differ from year to year or from one area to another. Because of this tendency, the often-held belief that populations can be “built-up” by not hunting is often incorrect.
- Dramatic short-term fluctuations occur because of weather conditions. Weather directly affects the physical condition of birds, availability of food and the survival of young, but also causes annual changes in habitat that may affect game birds in several ways. These are factors that cannot always be predicted, changed or controlled.
- Long-term increases and decreases in population numbers are related to changes in the quality and quantity of habitat. Factors such as conversion of older age timber, changes in predominant crop types or farming methods, invasive plant species, and urban expansion are examples that can have lasting detrimental impacts on bird populations.
- Hunted upland game bird populations are generally subjected to density dependent hunting pressure. This means that when populations are low, hunter pressure is also

low and does not reduce populations to such low levels that they are unable to recover to population levels supported by the habitat when weather conditions are favorable.

Based on these concepts, the Department maintains a policy to maximize upland game bird hunting opportunities consistent with the adequate protection of the bird populations. In most cases the quality and quantity of habitat has a much greater impact on long-term population numbers than does hunting. An exception may be when heavy hunting pressure is applied to small populations in marginal or isolated habitat or during severe winter weather that concentrates birds. Because of the high reproductive potential of many upland bird species, relatively liberal hunting seasons have minimal impacts on population numbers for most species. Generally, it is unnecessary to curtail seasons and bag limits for the recovery of most upland populations from low levels. Given adequate habitat and favorable weather conditions during nesting and brood rearing, most game bird populations will recover rapidly with no change in hunting regulations.

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

One last important consideration in setting game bird regulations is public access for hunting. Many parts of the state, especially southeast Oregon, provide ample opportunities for access to a variety of public lands. Access in many parts of the state is controlled by private landowners who supply a large habitat base for many upland species.



HUNTING SEASON FRAMEWORK PROPOSALS

RING-NECKED PHEASANT

Statewide Season

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

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

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

No changes from previous framework.

CHUKAR AND GRAY (HUNGARIAN) PARTRIDGE

Statewide Season

- Season Dates: From the Saturday on or nearest October 8 through January 31.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 8/24.

Discussion: Chukar habitat in Oregon is both widespread and relatively secure. By its nature the habitat is also difficult to hunt under most circumstances. Factors most affecting chukar populations are severe winters, spring drought, and/or wet conditions during the hatching period. With no other species is the self-limiting nature of upland bird hunting better demonstrated than with chukar. In years and in areas when populations are low, hunting pressure and harvest diminishes dramatically. The reverse is also true. Populations have on numerous occasions demonstrated the ability to quickly rebound without implementation of restrictive harvest regulations. While chukar populations throughout most of their range in Oregon are not limited by hunter harvest, the vulnerability of the birds is sometimes greatly increased when severe weather forces birds to areas that have good hunter access.

Hungarian partridge are seldom the specific target of hunters and usually hunted incidentally with chukar, and sometimes pheasants. Habitat is more limited for this species, but population characteristics are similar to chukar. Harvest is relatively low except in years when populations are particularly abundant.

Changes from previous framework: Season extended by one month in Morrow and Umatilla counties resulting in all of eastern Oregon having the same season length.

CALIFORNIA (VALLEY) QUAIL

Western Oregon (concurrent with mountain quail season):

- Season Dates: September 1 through January 31. Concurrent with adopted mountain quail season.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 10/20, singly or in aggregate with mountain quail.

Eastern Oregon (concurrent with chukar season):

- Season Dates: From the Saturday on or nearest October 8 through January 31.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 10/20.

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

Changes from previous framework: Season extended by one month in Morrow and Umatilla counties resulting in all of eastern Oregon having the same season length.

MOUNTAIN QUAIL

Western Oregon (including Hood River and Wasco counties):

- Season Dates: September 1 through January 31.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 10/20 singly or in aggregate with California Quail.

Eastern Oregon:

- Season Dates in Crook, Gilliam, Grant, Klamath, Morrow, Umatilla, Wallowa, and Wheeler, Counties: From the Saturday on or nearest October 8 through January 31.
- Closed season continues in remainder of eastern Oregon.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 2/2.

Discussion: In western Oregon, mountain quail provide some of the most difficult game bird hunting available because of the brushy and often steep nature of occupied habitat and the tendency of birds to run in heavy cover. This species is one of Oregon's least hunted upland species. In recent years, more than 85% of the harvest occurs Sept – Nov. In eastern Oregon, populations declined from historic levels as they have throughout the intermountain regions of the west for reasons that are not completely understood. However, since the mid-1990's some populations are rebounding, especially in the John Day Watershed. In the John Day Watershed populations have increased and their distribution has expanded. Mountain quail have also been translocated from S.W. Oregon to several sites in eastern Oregon, most recently to eastern Klamath and western Lake Cos. The translocation program is expected to continue for the next few years. There is no open season for mountain quail in much of eastern Oregon because of relatively low numbers in most areas and uncertain status of populations. Hunters pursuing California quail and chukar are the most likely to encounter and incidentally harvest mountain quail. The small daily bag limit offered in select areas of eastern Oregon allows for the incidental harvest of these birds, but should not hamper future range expansion of the species.

Changes from previous framework: Season extended by one month in Morrow and Umatilla counties resulting in all open areas of eastern Oregon having the same season length. The length of season was adjusted to run concurrent with California quail and chukar seasons which extended the season through Jan. 31.

FOREST GROUSE – “BLUE” GROUSE, RUFFED GROUSE AND SPRUCE GROUSE.

- Season Dates: From September 1 through January 31.
- Daily Bag/Possession Limits: 3 “blue” grouse and 3 ruffed grouse/6 “blue” grouse and 6 ruffed grouse. “Blue” grouse includes both dusky and sooty grouse.
- No open season for Spruce grouse.

Discussion: Forest grouse, with the exception of spruce grouse, are widely distributed in the state and are some of the most hunted game birds in Oregon. In western Oregon, hunting for grouse is difficult due to heavy cover conditions and frequent rainfall. The previous framework extended the season in western Oregon. As expected, the longer season did not result in a dramatic increase in harvest, because about 94% of ruffed grouse and 97% of “blue” grouse are harvested in Sept – Nov. After mid-October, “blue” grouse spend most of their time in trees feeding on conifer needles; largely out of reach of hunters.

The Department has increased wing collection efforts in western Oregon and will continue to do so to learn more about the population dynamics of these birds. In addition, the department worked with Oregon State University to develop an unbiased survey to detect calling male “blue” (sooty) grouse during spring to provide an index to detect population trends. In 2014, the survey was fully implemented for the third consecutive year.

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

Changes from previous framework: This framework extends the forest grouse season in eastern Oregon by one month (compared to the previous framework). A minimal increase in harvest is expected, because like in western Oregon, nearly the entire forest grouse harvest occurs before mid-November. In addition, snow, road conditions, and road closures will likely limit access. The change however, could provide some additional hunting opportunity, especially for ruffed grouse.

SAGE-GROUSE

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

Discussion: Sage-grouse are widely distributed across the ~ 30,000 square miles of sagebrush-steppe habitat in Oregon. Sage-grouse have relatively low reproductive rates and high adult survival rates compared to other upland game bird species and their response to improved habitat conditions may be slower than that of most species. Because of the status of this species and sagebrush habitats across its range, hunting will remain conservative through the issuance of hunting permits assigned to specific wildlife management units so that there will be no significant impact on populations.

Since 1989, Oregon has held a sage-grouse season each fall. Every season had a daily and season bag limit of two birds. However, the length of the season has varied. There were 6 years with a 2-day season, 10 years with 5-day season, and for the last 9 years a 9-day season. Average individual hunter success was comparable despite the differences in length of the season, with the 2-day season at 1.09 birds/hunter, 5-day season at 1.07 birds/hunter, and 9-day season at 1.06 birds/hunter. The 9-day season does not increase harvest since the daily bag and season limit remains at two birds and the average Oregon sage-grouse hunter spends 1.8 days hunting, successful or not. The 9-day season does make scheduling a hunt easier for successful applicants by giving the option of two different weekends of opportunity.

Permit numbers are determined annually based on a mathematical formula combining spring lek count information, 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 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. Oregon's harvest is below the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies recommendation to limit sage-grouse harvest to no more than 10% of the fall population. A 2010 paper in the *Journal of Wildlife Management* examined several years of band recovery data from Nevada and Colorado and concluded that harvest rates of 11% or less of the fall population are unlikely to have an important influence on local population dynamics of sage-grouse. Based on harvest surveys, Oregon's sage-grouse harvest in recent years has been 3% or less of the estimated fall population. Units without adequate breeding population information or breeding populations below the minimum breeding population level will be closed to hunting.

The timing of Oregon's sage-grouse hunting season maximizes the opportunity to gather biological information from wings solicited from hunters because it occurs before most grouse have completed their wing molt. Information gathered from wings has been

important in recent years in gathering information for this species, including peak hatching dates and age and sex ratios. In the recent range-wide conservation assessment for greater sage-grouse it was noted that states lacking a hunting season do not routinely monitor sage-grouse production.

In addition, during a 6 year period, hunters were provided the necessary materials to collect and submit blood samples from harvested sage-grouse. The purpose of this effort was to monitor the population for West Nile virus in cooperation with National Wildlife Health Center. The Department received exceptional cooperation from the hunters and the results of the study will soon be published in a peer-reviewed science journal.

Changes from previous framework: None.

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE

➤ No season is proposed for Columbian sharp-tailed grouse.

Discussion: Sharp-tailed grouse, once common throughout large areas of eastern Oregon, were extirpated in the state by the 1960s. A 1991 reintroduction of this native species was undertaken in Wallowa County in northeast Oregon. The population has been augmented several times since 1991, but remains at low levels, likely fewer than 100 birds. Current population status does not warrant a hunting season. Radio-telemetry was used to monitor movements, reproductive effort, and mortality. Results indicated good productivity with many of the hens nesting successfully. However, low adult survival to the following spring and possibly emigration suggests the winter habitat, particularly the availability of shrub and deciduous tree component, may not be adequate for the population at the current location. The Zumwalt Prairie may provide additional habitat in the future.

Changes from previous framework: None.

WILD TURKEY

General Spring Season:

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

Youth Spring Turkey Hunt:

- Season Dates: The first weekend prior to and excluding April 15.
- Daily Bag/Season Limits: One male turkey or a turkey with a visible beard.

- Only youths 17 years of age and younger accompanied by a non-hunting adult may participate. Unfilled tags are valid for the general spring season.

Fall Season:

Western Oregon

- Open area includes only the following Wildlife Management Units: Trask, Willamette, Santiam, Stott Mt., Alsea, McKenzie, Siuslaw, Indigo, Dixon, Melrose, Tioga, Sixes, Powers, Chetco, Applegate, Evans Creek, and Rogue.
- Season Dates: October 15 through December 31.
- Daily Bag/Season Limits: One turkey of either sex daily, and two per season.
- Permits for fall would be limited to 4,000 and distributed on a first come, first serve basis.

Eastern Oregon

- Add fall turkey hunts as populations warrant, including conversion to general season hunts. Currently 5 controlled fall turkey hunts have been established in eastern Oregon.

Discussion: Oregon's spring turkey season is among the most liberal in the United States, but the range of turkeys in Oregon continues to expand. The long season provides abundant opportunities with fall hunting offered in high-density areas and in areas where turkeys are less desired. Breeding begins as early as late February, and much of it has already occurred by mid-April. A male-only (bearded hens also legal) spring season has proven to have minimal impacts on populations. As turkey populations have increased the Department has expanded fall hunting opportunities. Fall seasons can be used to control turkey populations and assist landowners with addressing damage. Emergency hunts for turkeys can also be used to address turkey nuisance and damage. In 2004 an Oregon wild turkey plan was adopted by the Commission and has guided turkey management for the past 10 years.

Changes from previous framework: The statewide spring season limit for turkeys is increased from two to three. The western portion of Oregon already had a season limit of three birds.

OTHER FRAMEWORKS

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

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

Changes from previous framework: Allows retention of only the wing (or head) on upland game birds for proof of species and gender. In the past, the head was required to be attached to all upland game birds. The change will align the rule with waterfowl so that all game birds will have the same requirement for proof of sex and species.

MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

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

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

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

WINTER EMERGENCIES

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

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

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

POPULATION STATUS AND FRAMEWORK REVIEW

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

PUBLIC PROCESS

The Department accepts public comments about the Upland Game Bird Framework at any time. Based on the external and internal comments over the past five years, the Department identified five possible changes for the 2015-2020 Upland Game Bird Framework (see below). The Department solicited comments on these five proposals at the 23 public meetings held across the state in May 2014. Comments specific to the upland game bird proposals were recorded at nine of the public meetings. A summary of those public comments follow the possible five possible changes.

POSSIBLE CHANGES FOR THE 2015-2020 UPLAND GAME BIRD FRAMEWORK

Upland Game Bird Season Frameworks are set for five year period, frameworks and potential changes for 2015-16 through 2019-20 seasons are under review at this time. Final proposals will be presented to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission August 1, 2014 when 2014-2015 Game Bird Regulations will be adopted. Concepts being considered include:

- Extend quail and partridge (chukar and Hungarian) seasons in Umatilla and Morrow Counties through Jan. 31. This would simplify eastern Oregon regulations by removing the early closure in these two counties. Quail and partridge season are currently open through Jan. 31 in the remainder of Eastern Oregon. The exception for Morrow and Umatilla counties was in place over concern about maintaining public access to private lands. (This concept was carried forward in the proposed framework.)
- **Extend eastern Oregon forest grouse seasons through January 31.** This change would simplify the regulations by creating a single statewide season for forest grouse. The eastern Oregon season currently closes Dec. 31. Extending the season for “blue grouse” likely will not noticeably increase opportunity or harvest in most areas because the grouse are generally not very accessible to hunters in January. There could be some additional opportunity and harvest for ruffed grouse, but the majority of ruffed grouse harvest (>85%) occurs during the first 6 weeks of the season (Sept 1 through Oct 15). (This concept was carried forward in the proposed framework.)

- **Increase spring turkey season limit to three statewide.** This would simplify the regulations and provide some additional hunting opportunity. Currently two legal turkeys are allowed statewide, except an additional (3rd) legal turkey may be taken with a bonus tag in 17 western Oregon WMUs. During the spring 2013 season, there were an estimated 146 tag holders who hunted on a third turkey tag and those hunters average 2.2 birds for the season. Increasing the statewide season limit to three legal turkeys would simplify the regulations but would not result in a biologically significant increase in harvest. A prior purchase of a tag for each turkey would still be required. (This concept was carried forward in the proposed framework.)
- **Replace eastern Oregon controlled fall turkey hunts with a general fall season and limited number of tags.** Currently there are 5 controlled fall turkey hunts in eastern Oregon. A proposal is being considered to combine some, or all, controlled hunt areas into a general fall season with over-the-counter tags. There would be a limit on the number of tags available. This would be the same season structure as for the general fall turkey season in western Oregon. (Due to lack of public support, this concept was not included in the proposed framework.)
- **Increase the daily bag limit for turkey.** Currently hunters are limited to a daily bag limit of one turkey during both spring and fall seasons, regardless of how many valid tags in their possession. The one bird daily bag limit is an attempt to spread hunting opportunity. Removing the one bird daily bag limit would allow a hunter to harvest the same number of turkeys as valid tags in possession (e.g. one, two, or three in some cases). (Due to lack of public support, this concept was not included in the proposed framework.)

In addition to Department concepts, a hunter has asked about allowing handguns that fire .410 shotgun shells to take forest grouse.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS ABOUT UPLAND GAME BIRD PROPOSALS FROM PUBLIC MEETINGS, MAY 2014

Mid- Columbia:

- Attendees oppose statewide 3 bird season limit for spring turkey
- Oppose allowing multiple turkeys taken in the same day
- All but one attendee opposed general fall turkey season

Medford: (49 attendees)

- One attendee in opposition of changing daily turkey bag, another in favor

Ontario/Jordan Valley: (10 attendees in Ontario, 4 in Jordan Valley)

- Support at both meetings for chukar/ quail season in Morrow and Umatilla Cos to end with remainder of eastern Oregon
- Support for longer forest grouse season
- Support for turkey season proposals, but one person opposed to first come/first serve general fall turkey season in eastern Oregon, with limited tags it should be controlled hunt.

Heppner: (6 attendees)

Support for all upland game bird changes, e.g.

- Support for chukar/ quail season in Morrow and Umatilla Cos to end with remainder of eastern Oregon
- Support for statewide 3 bird season limit for spring turkey
- Support allowing multiple turkeys taken in the same day
- Support general fall turkey season
- Support extending forest grouse season through Jan 31 in eastern Oregon

Gold Beach:

- Oppose allowing multiple turkeys taken in the same day

John Day: (8 attendees)

- Oppose allowing multiple turkeys taken in the same day
- Opposes fall hunting of turkeys
- Turkey tags cost too much

Harney:

- Multiple attendees opposed increasing daily turkey bag limit
- Support for increasing season limit to three turkeys statewide

Enterprise: (3 attendees)

- Oppose increasing season limit to three turkeys statewide
- Oppose general season fall turkey hunt
- Neutral on extending forest grouse season