

**GAME BIRD PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR 2018-19
UPLAND and MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SEASONS**



**FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE OREGON FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION
April 20, 2018**



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	2
Figures.....	2
Tables	2
UPLAND GAME BIRDS.....	4
Season Frameworks	4
Population Status and Harvest.....	4
Upland Game Bird Season Proposals.....	9
Public Comments Related to Upland Game Bird Regulations	15
MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS	16
POPULATION STATUS.....	16
2016-17 HARVEST ESTIMATES	18
2017-18 MIGRATORY WATERFOWL VALIDATION SALES	18
2018-19 MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SEASON PROPOSALS.....	20

FIGURES

Figure 1. Long-term trend of upland game bird harvest and hunters.....	5
Figure 2. Minimum spring population estimates for sage-grouse in Oregon, 1996-2017.....	7
Figure 3. Cackling Canada goose population index, 1985 – 2017.....	27
Figure 4. Current and proposed goose hunting closure areas near Pacific City, OR.	31

TABLES

Table 1. Results of 2017-18 harvest survey in Oregon in comparison to last season and the 5-year average.....	6
Table 2. 2017 sage-grouse hunting effort and harvest by wildlife management unit.....	7
Table 3. Oregon 2017 turkey hunting effort and harvest.....	8
Table 4. The 2018-19 season proposals for forest grouse, partridge, pheasant, quail, and general turkey.....	9
Table 5. Oregon sage-grouse hunting permit numbers in 2016 and 2017.....	11
Table 6. Proposed locations and dates for the 2018 western Oregon fee pheasant hunts.....	13
Table 7. Proposed 2018 youth upland hunt dates, locations, and maximum number of hunters allowed on area at any one time (hunter limitation).....	13
Table 8. Oregon outdoor skills education program pheasant hunting workshops.....	14
Table 9. Current population status and objectives for Pacific Flyway goose populations.....	17

Table 10. Harvest Information Program estimates of Oregon migratory game bird hunters and harvest during the 2016-17, season compared to the previous 5 seasons. 19

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

SEASON FRAMEWORKS

In 2014, the Commission adopted the 2015-2020 Upland Game Bird Hunting Season Framework; a policy document that guides the development of standardized upland game bird seasons for a period of 5 years (September 1, 2015 through August 31, 2020). Standardized regulation frameworks are biologically sound management tools that help the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) provide consistent, stable regulations that reduce confusion, assist hunters with planning trips, and lower administrative costs. The framework includes seasons for ring-necked pheasant, chukar and Hungarian (Gray) partridge, California quail, mountain quail, “blue” and ruffed grouse, sage-grouse, and spring and fall turkey seasons.

Based on external and internal comments received over the previous five years, the Department solicited comments on proposed framework changes at 23 public meetings held across the state in May 2014. Changes receiving public support were incorporated into the current framework adopted by the Commission. Upland game bird seasons proposed in the draft 2018-19 Game Bird Regulations reflect framework criteria.

POPULATION STATUS AND HARVEST

The following information about the status and past harvest of upland game birds is presented to provide additional background and context for the 2018-19 regulation proposals.

General Trends: Annual fluctuations in upland bird numbers are normal and these short-term changes can often be attributed to weather conditions. These changes should not be the basis for setting annual hunting seasons because many upland game bird populations exhibit high annual death rates whether hunted or not. 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. In addition, the hunting of upland game bird populations are generally subjected to density dependent hunting pressure; when populations go down hunting pressure decreases. Long-term population trends are often attributed to changes in the quality and quantity of habitat.

After moderate levels of upland game bird populations in the early 2000’s, populations and harvest peaked in 2005 (Fig 1). A severe drought in 2007 caused upland game bird populations to tumble. From 2007-2015 (2011 was an exception) precipitation has generally been below average and consequently has continued to suppress upland game bird populations, especially chukar in eastern Oregon. The lack of grass and forb growth during dry conditions reduces hiding cover, food, and insect abundance (a key component in a chick’s diet).

Weather in the winter of 2016-17 included deep persistent snow cover that caused high mortality in some areas, reducing breeding populations. Some areas received late season snow or rain near

the peak of hatch which also caused some chick mortality, but overall the proportion of young in the population for most species was above average due to good habitat conditions. Summer 2017 production inventories indicated mixed results. Chukar showed a decline in northern Harney and Malheur counties and in NE Oregon, but were stable to increasing in the Columbia Basin. Pheasant numbers were similar to last year as were California quail and forest grouse. The winter of 2017-18 has been relatively mild with below average snow pack. Upcoming conditions in the spring and through the summer will shape the localized conditions for population changes.

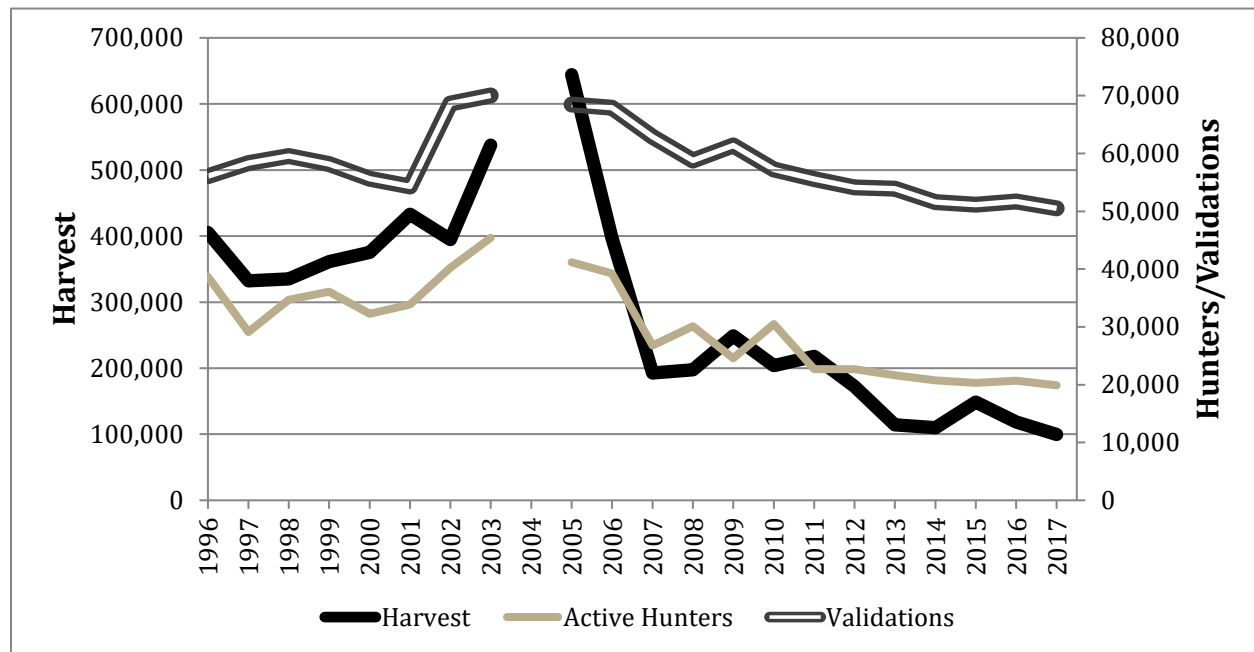


Figure 1. Long-term trend of upland game bird harvest and hunters (no survey in 2004).

Production: Upland game bird season recommendations are not based on annual production surveys, but it is still important to collect this information to determine the status, trends, and to provide accurate hunting forecasts. Most birds in the fall harvest are hatched in the same year, so reproductive success is an important index of hunter success. There are no reliable indicators for turkey population trends.

Peak hatch for most upland game birds in Oregon is the last of half of May through mid-June. Consequently, it is too early to predict upland game bird reproductive success for 2018. Although snowpack this winter was below average throughout the state for most of the winter, storm patterns through March provided great opportunity to improve water conditions and outlook for habitat (cover) and food (including insect abundance) in many areas.

Harvest Surveys: Random phone surveys of ~3,600 upland game bird validation holders was used to estimate annual upland game bird harvest (Table 1). Overall harvest was lower than last year, with the exception of ruffed grouse and Hungarian partridge. Few people specifically hunt Hungarian partridge so the estimated harvest is highly variable from year to year due to the sample size of hunters called. Separate harvest surveys are conducted for sage-grouse (Table 2) and turkeys (Table 3). Turkey surveys are included under the mandatory reporting system; sage-

grouse harvest estimates are based on direct mailing of survey questionnaires to successful controlled hunt applicants.

Table 1. Results of 2017-18 harvest surveys in Oregon in comparison to last season and the 5-year average.

		Total Harvest for 2017-18	% Change from 2016-17	5-Year Average
Blue Grouse	Hunters	9,578	-19%	9,972
	Days	79,429	-16%	87,328
	Harvest	8,578	-17%	11,751
Ruffed Grouse	Hunters	12,198	2%	12,008
	Days	130,379	-4%	123,992
	Harvest	32,216	8%	32,027
Mountain Quail	Hunters	3,275	25%	3,869
	Days	13,555	-30%	23,674
	Harvest	4,409	-21%	5,598
Valley Quail	Hunters	4,584	-10%	4,894
	Days	38,089	26%	35,517
	Harvest	19,744	-20%	22,398
Chukar	Hunters	4,584	-10%	4,768
	Days	21,672	7%	23,142
	Harvest	23,458	-24%	26,784
Hungarian Partridge	Hunters	819	17%	1,082
	Days	2,398	21%	5,509
	Harvest	948	82%	2,744
Ring-necked Pheasant	Hunters	5,485	-21%	5,630
	Days	22,508	-25%	31,713
	Harvest	10,333	-44%	17,285

Sage-grouse – A total of 800 permits were offered for the 2017 season, down from 845 in 2016. For the third year, no permits were offered for the Lookout Mountain and Sumpter Wildlife Management Units (WMUs). These Baker County WMUs have experienced long-term population declines. A portion of the Whitehorse WMU remained closed, largely to prevent conflict with research following the large fires of 2012. The south Wagontire unit was closed in 2017 due to the declining population in the Picture Rock Pass area.

Of the 800 permits authorized for 10 WMUs, some WMUs were undersubscribed during the controlled hunt draw resulting in 561 permits drawn. Hunters harvested an estimated 412 sage-grouse (down 23% from 2016), averaging 1.00 birds/hunter (Table 2). Hunters returned one wing from 269 birds. These wings were examined at the annual sage-grouse wing bee to estimate age ratios, sex ratios, proportion of successful hens and timing of hatch. In 2017, wings showed 1.0 juveniles/hen in the harvest, lower than Oregon’s long-term average of 1.5 juveniles/hen indicating

production in 2017 was below average. The minimum spring population estimate from lek counts was also down slightly in 2017 after three years of increase (Fig. 2)

Table 2. 2017 sage-grouse hunting effort and harvest by wildlife management unit.

Hunt	Tags Authorized	Tags Drawn	Tags Issued	Did Hunt	Hunter Days	Birds Harvested	Birds/Hunter	% Response
J51	0	0	0	--	--	--	--	--
J64	0	0	0	--	--	--	--	--
J65	150	29	24	22	47	18	0.82	76
J66	100	50	33	32	72	28	0.89	60
J67	75	29	16	15	34	16	1.11	62
J68	70	70	62	49	73	62	1.26	63
J69	75	69	53	55	117	62	1.11	81
J70	150	150	121	115	204	125	1.09	85
J71	50	34	28	24	46	0	0	74
J72	20	20	19	13	20	0	0	40
J73a	30	30	25	26	46	22	0.84	73
J73b	0	0	0	--	--	--	--	--
J74	80	80	65	57	99	67	1.16	75
Totals	800	561	446	413	767	412	1.00	74

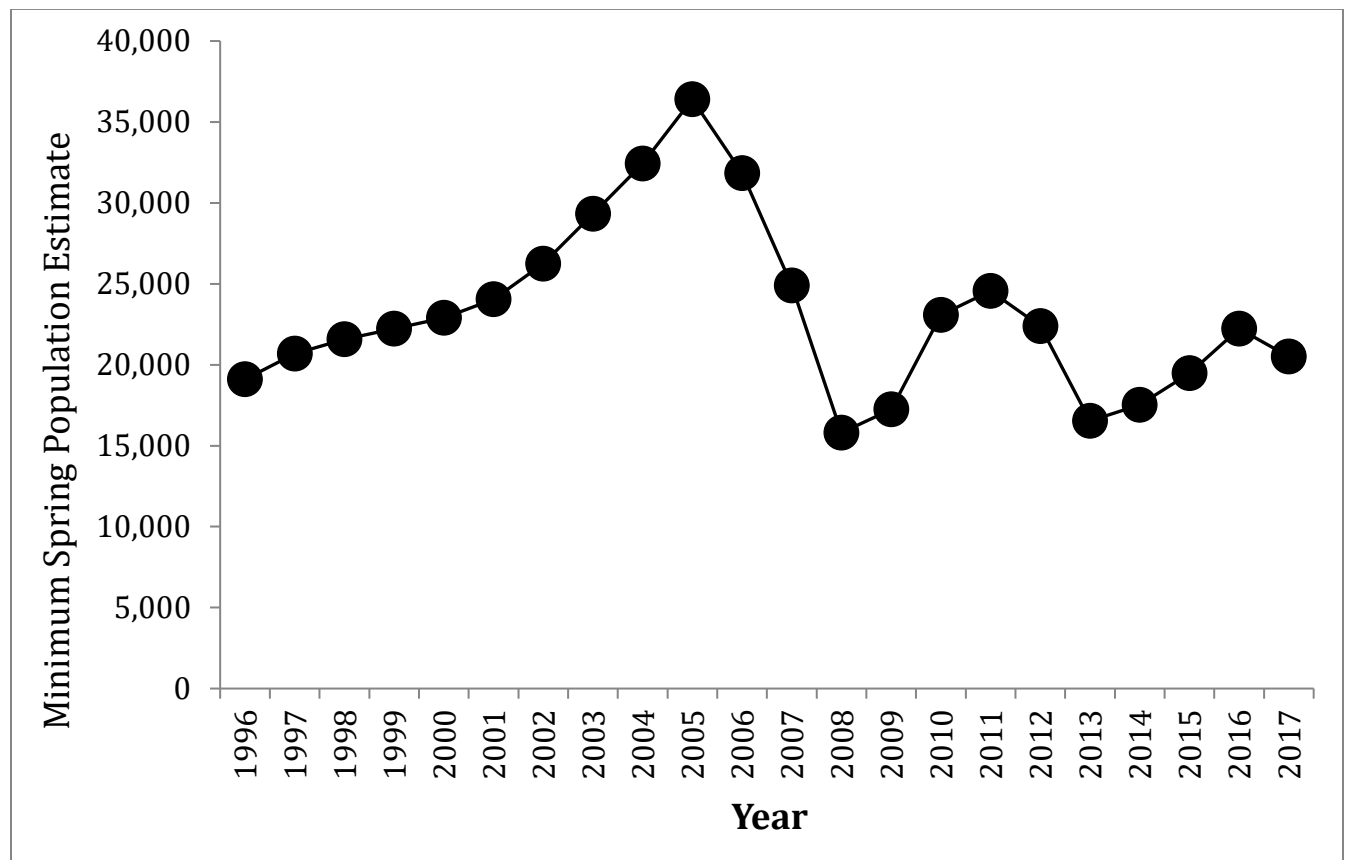


Figure 2. Minimum spring population estimates for sage-grouse in Oregon, 1996-2017.

Spring Turkey – Harvest estimates for turkeys are obtained from the mandatory reporting system. Survey results for the 2017 spring season indicated a 9% decrease in harvest from the previous year, likely due to the harsh winter in some areas of the state.

The youth spring turkey hunt continues to be very popular and well received. Youth harvested 220 turkeys during the 2-day youth weekend. Youth harvested an additional 523 turkeys during the 47-day general spring season. On average, youth account for about 15% of total spring harvest of turkeys.

Fall Turkey – The western Oregon General Fall Turkey Season includes 17 WMUs where 4,000 permits were authorized (first-come, first-served). For the 2017 fall season, 2,271 tags were issued and the reporting rate was 75%. Expanded estimates suggest the fall harvest was up slightly (9%) and the success rate was similar to last year. Reporting rate for the White River controlled fall turkey hunt was 97% and 86-89% for the two Eastern Oregon General Fall Turkey Hunts (Table 3). A total of 1,100 tags were available for the three eastern Oregon fall turkey hunts (100 tags more than 2016).

Table 3. Oregon 2017 turkey hunting effort and harvest.

HUNT	Tags Authorized	Tags Issued	Hunters	Hunter Days	Birds Harvested	Birds/Hunter	% Response
General Spring	Unlimited	48,538	12,890	54,716	4,797	0.37	81%
Western Oregon Fall	4,000	2,271	1,251	5,320	600	0.48	75%
Blue Mountain Fall	600	601	357	1,592	157	0.44	86%
Northeast Fall	450	450	292	1,420	149	0.51	89%
White River Fall Controlled	50	37	32	91	18	0.58	97%
TOTALS		51,897	14,822	63,139	5,721	0.39	81%



UPLAND GAME BIRD SEASON PROPOSALS

Regulation Proposals: For most upland game birds, all aspects of the seasons (e.g. season dates, daily bag limits, possession limits) are covered by the 2015-2020 upland game bird framework and presented in Table 4. However, for some species like sage-grouse, there is a controlled hunt where the permit numbers are determined annually based on fall population projections. Eastern Oregon fall turkey is another season where the number of hunts and permit numbers may be adjusted annually based on population trends or damage/nuisance issues.

Table 4. The 2018-19 season proposals for forest grouse, partridge, pheasant, quail, and general turkey.

2018-19 Upland Game Bird Season Proposals			
UPLAND GAME BIRDS	OPEN AREA	OPEN SEASON	Daily Bag limit
"Blue" and Ruffed Grouse	Statewide	Sept. 1 – Jan. 31	3 each species
Chukar and Hungarian (Gray) Partridge	Eastern Oregon counties	Oct. 6 – Jan. 31	8 (except Lower Klamath Hills = 2)
Rooster Pheasant	Statewide	Oct. 6 – Dec. 31	2
California Quail	Western Oregon	Sept.1 – Jan. 31	10 in aggregate
	Eastern Oregon counties	Oct. 6 – Jan. 31	10
Mountain Quail	Western Oregon, Hood River and Wasco counties	Sept. 1 – Jan. 31	10 in aggregate
	Crook, Gilliam, Grant, Klamath, Morrow, Umatilla, Wallowa, and Wheeler cos	Oct. 6 – Jan. 31	2
	Remaining Eastern Oregon Counties	NO OPEN SEASON	
Spring Turkey – General	Statewide	Apr. 15 – May 31	1 (season limit 3)
Youth Spring Turkey – General	Statewide	Apr. 7 – Apr. 8	
Fall Turkey – General Western Oregon	17 Western Oregon WMUs	Oct. 15 – Dec. 31	1 (season limit 2 Fall Turkey tags)
Fall Turkey – General Blue Mountains	12 Eastern Oregon WMUs	Oct. 6 – Dec. 31	1 (Season limit 1)
Fall Turkey – General Northeast	13 Eastern Oregon WMUs	Oct. 6 – Dec. 31	

2018 Controlled Sage-grouse Hunt. The season framework for sage-grouse establishes a controlled hunt with a 9-day season between September 1-20. The 2018 proposed season dates are September 8 -16 with a two bird daily and season bag limit. The Department’s policy is for sage-grouse harvest not to exceed 5% of the fall population and 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; a limited number of sage-grouse permits are proposed in 9 of the 21 WMUs where sage-grouse occur.

Overall, the breeding population of sage-grouse increased in 2014-2016, then dropped slightly in 2017. At this time, volunteers and state and federal personnel are wrapping up the 2018 lek surveys. Over the next couple of months, lek data will be analyzed and production surveys will be conducted in July. 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. Permit numbers for controlled sage-grouse hunting will be set in early August 2018 by temporary rule. This year staff is proposing no permits for the Juniper WMU due to a continued population decline since the Miller Homestead fire in 2012. From 2011-2017 males counted at leks is down from 544 to 147 (73%). In 2017 the number of permits in the Juniper unit was reduced to 50 and hunters have not been successful recently with no birds harvested in 2016 or 2017. Staff is also proposing no permits be offered again in the South Wagontire WMU due to a declining breeding population in the Picture Rock Pass core area. Staff will also propose for the fourth consecutive year that no permits be authorized for the Lookout Mountain and Sumpter WMUs because of a declining trend in the Baker core area, and continue the Trout Creek Mountain closure of the Whitehorse WMU for one more year, primarily for research purposes. There has been positive recovery of the breeding population in the Trout Creek Mountains since the large Holloway Fire in 2012.

As stated above, permit numbers are calculated from a 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 shown in Table 5. 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. Research has concluded that harvest rates of 10% or less are unlikely to have any meaningful effect on the population dynamics of sage-grouse.

An important benefit of hunting sage-grouse is collection of essential biological information. Each hunter is provided wing envelopes and asked to send in one wing from each bird harvested. Analysis of these wings provides an estimate of overall production, hatching chronology, and pre-winter sex and age composition of the population. The sex and age composition allows the prediction of breeding population trends for the following year. Age-at-harvest models are also being refined 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. The Department will continue to evaluate the limited harvest of sage-grouse in the state on an annual basis; making any necessary adjustments and/or closures as warranted.

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. On September 22, 2015, the USFWS determined greater sage-grouse did not warrant protection under the ESA because unprecedented, landscape-scale conservation efforts across the western United States had significantly reduced the threats to greater sage-grouse. This collaborative, science-based greater sage-grouse strategy is likely the largest land conservation effort in U.S. history. The main threats to sage-grouse were, and are, 1) habitat loss, fragmentation, and modification and 2) inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms, particularly in relation to energy and other development. In Oregon, two of the largest threats are invasive species (non-native annual grasses and conifer encroachment) and wildfire. The USFWS also evaluated the "utilization" (e.g., hunting) of sage-grouse and concluded, "the greater sage-grouse is not threatened by over-utilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes now or in the foreseeable future."

Table 5. Oregon sage-grouse hunting permit numbers in 2016 and 2017. Permit numbers for 2018 will be adopted by temporary rule in early August after population and production surveys are completed.

Sage-grouse Permit Recommendations			
MANAGEMENT UNIT	2016 PERMITS	2017 PERMITS	2018 RECOMMENDATIONS
Beulah	150	150	Permit numbers will be adopted in early August after completion of population surveys.
Malheur River	100	100	
Owyhee	75	75	
Whitehorse	70	70	
Steens Mountain	75	75	
Beatys Butte	150	150	0
Juniper	70	50	
Silvies	20	20	0
North Wagontire	35	30	
South Wagontire	20	0	
Warner	80	80	
TOTAL	845	800	

2018 Controlled Fall Turkey Season. Specific hunts and tag numbers for eastern Oregon fall turkey seasons are not covered in the 2015-2020 Upland Game Bird Framework. Responding to the general trend of increasing turkey populations and associated nuisance/damage complaints, the Department recently expanded fall turkey hunting opportunities in eastern Oregon; there are now two general season hunts with a limited number of tags (available over-the-counter, on a first-come first-served basis) and one controlled hunt.

The two general season hunts (Northeast and Blue Mountains) are proposed to open October 6 and end December 31, 2018, however only private land would be open during the last month of the season (December 1-31).

Due to the popularity of the White River Controlled Fall Turkey hunt, which usually averages about three applicants for each of the 50 available tags, staff is proposing this hunt remain a controlled

hunt. Maintaining the controlled hunt status for the White River Hunt (K41) will ensure interested hunters will have an equitable chance of obtaining a tag.

Hunters can purchase two western Oregon general fall turkey tags, or obtain one fall turkey tag for eastern Oregon and one western Oregon general season fall turkey tag per season. The 2018-19 Game Bird Regulations will describe the legal hunting methods for fall turkey and shooting hours (dogs may be used during the fall turkey season).

Turkey Legal Hunting Methods. The Department is proposing to remove the minimum shotgun gauge restriction for hunting wild turkeys to make it legal to hunt turkeys with a shotgun smaller than 20 gauge. Currently, the regulations read that “it is unlawful to hunt turkeys with a shotgun larger than 10 gauge or smaller than 20 gauge”. By simplifying the regulations to remove the minimum gauge allowed, turkeys will have the same shotgun gauge size limits as all other game birds, which is “no one may hunt game birds with a shotgun larger than 10 gauge”. Allowing hunters to use smaller gauge shotguns will provide additional opportunity to youth and smaller hunters since .410s and 28 gauge shotguns are often lighter with less recoil than larger gauges. Oregon provides a good opportunity for youth to harvest a spring turkey with a liberal season and a youth only weekend, which is very popular. Youth account for 15% of the total spring harvest and The Department wants to continue to encourage youth to take advantage of this season. Recent improvements in ammunition has resulted in heavyweight sub-gauge (smaller than 20 gauge) loads that have the shot count, velocity, patterning, and penetration energy to kill a wild turkey at a typical distance with a smaller gauge shotgun. Regardless of the weapon, the Department encourages hunters to call turkeys to within 25 yards before attempting a shot.

2018 Western Oregon Fee Pheasant Hunts. The Department has offered special western Oregon fee pheasant hunts on public hunting areas for over 25 years. Since the hunts occur entirely or partially outside of the general statewide pheasant season, a special season must be adopted for these site-specific hunts. 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.

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 pheasant tag, good for two birds, in addition to a hunting license and upland game bird validation. Tags are purchased from POS agents, and the revenues applied toward the cost of the program. Additional tags can be purchased throughout the season. 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 shortfall is paid with upland game bird stamp revenue.

Hunters are generally supportive of this program with the main complaint being they would like to see more birds stocked. However, increasing the total number of birds released would increase program costs without any assurance of a corresponding revenue increase.

Based on performance of past seasons, staff is proposing a 2018 season similar to that held in 2017 (Table 6). A pheasant tag allowing hunters two birds would again be required.

Table 6. Proposed locations and dates for the 2018 western Oregon fee pheasant hunts.

2018 Proposed Western Oregon Fee Pheasant Hunts	
HUNT AREA	DATES
Fern Ridge Wildlife Area	September 10 – October 7, 2018
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area	September 17 – September 30, 2018
Denman Wildlife Area	September 17 – October 5, 2018
E. E. Wilson Wildlife Area	October 1 – October 31, 2018

2018 Youth Upland Game Bird Hunts. Special youth hunts for pheasants began at E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area in the early 1950s, and expanded to currently 9 other areas throughout the state (Table 7). The Baker Youth Hunt is cancelled this year due to declining participation, frequent changes in the location (held on private land) which impacts participation, and high overlap with participants in the Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area youth hunt due to close proximity. All of the youth hunts provide a controlled opportunity for young hunters to experience bird hunting without competition from adult hunters. Youths ages 17 and younger are eligible to participate. The program has been popular and well received but has been experiencing a long-term declining trend in participation for most locations. In 2017, 640 youth hunter-visits were recorded for the program, a 6% decrease from 2016.

Sporting clay trailers are used to conduct youth shotgun skill clinics in association with the youth hunts at many locations. These provide instruction and a challenging opportunity to learn how to hit flying targets and 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).

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.

Table 7. Proposed 2018 youth upland hunt dates, locations, and maximum number of hunters allowed on area at any one time (hunter limitation).

2018 Proposed Youth Upland Game Bird Hunts		
HUNT AREA	DATES	HUNTER LIMITATION
Denman Wildlife Area	September 15 & 16	85
E. E. Wilson Wildlife Area	September 29 & 30	70
Fern Ridge Wildlife Area	September 8 & 9	75
Irrigon Wildlife Area	September 22 & 23	15
John Day (private land)	September 15 & 16	30
Klamath Wildlife Area	September 15 & 16	80
Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area	September 15 & 16	35
White River Wildlife Area (Mid-Columbia)	September 15 & 16	20
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area	September 15 & 16	50
Central Oregon (Near Madras)	September 8 & 9	80

2018 Pheasant Hunting Workshops. Pheasant hunting workshops have also proven to be very popular. To try to meet demand, the Department’s Outdoor Skills Education Program is proposing two weekends of workshops this year at two ODFW Wildlife Areas (Table 8). Additional workshops may also be scheduled during the general pheasant season. Each workshop will be directed at families, which would also allow mentored youth participation. Topics covered at the workshops include safe gun handling, shooting skills, and pheasant hunting. The number of participants in each workshop will be limited. General season regulations will apply; for example bag limits and shot restrictions.

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

2018 Proposed Pheasant Hunting Workshops	
HUNT AREA	DATES
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area	September 8 & 9 (Family Workshops)
E. E. Wilson Wildlife Area	September 15 & 16 (Family Workshops)

2018 Lower Klamath Hills Youth Chukar Hunt. The Klamath Chapter of the Oregon Hunters Association, in cooperation with the Department, will again offer a youth hunting opportunity for chukar in the Lower Klamath Hills regulated hunt area. The hunt is planned for October 20 and 21. The primary intent of this hunt is to provide youth 17 years of age and younger an upland hunting opportunity immediately following the release of chukar into the hunt area. Each youth shall be accompanied by one adult chaperone. The adult chaperone will be asked to refrain from hunting. Mentored Youth Hunter Program rules will apply to this hunt since it is within the general season dates for chukar. Youth hunters will be required to wear hunter orange and safety glasses. Adult chaperones will be required to wear hunter orange. Hunting is available by reservation. Daily bag limit is two chukar.

2018-19 Upland Game Bird Falconry Seasons. Few hunters in Oregon use raptors to take upland game birds. All falconers are licensed and staff coordinates with the USFWS on the monitoring of falconry activities in the state.

Open Season¹: September 1, 2018 – March 31, 2019

Daily Bag Limit: One pheasant (either sex), two California quail, two Hungarian (Gray) partridge, two chukar partridge, two ruffed grouse, and two blue grouse.

Possession Limit: Three times the daily bag limit.

Open Areas: Statewide

Sage-grouse Season¹: September 1, 2018 – January 31, 2019

Daily Bag Limit: One sage-grouse

Season Limit: Two sage-grouse

Open Areas: Those areas open to controlled sage-grouse hunting in 2018.

¹Although the seasons are long, falconry harvest is believed to be low with only about 140 licensed falconers in Oregon. A conservative sage-grouse season and bag limit is proposed. The falconry season for sage-grouse closes at the end of January, prior to the time birds begin gathering on leks where they are more vulnerable.

PUBLIC COMMENTS RELATED TO UPLAND GAME BIRD REGULATIONS

See Attachment 5

MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

POPULATION STATUS

Population Status: Because of the Federal rulemaking schedule, migratory game bird population status information used to inform hunting season proposals is information collected during the calendar year prior to the proposed seasons. For example, the proposals identified in this document for 2018-19 seasons are based in part on population status information collected in 2017-18 or earlier.

Mourning Doves: Mourning dove abundance is assessed by a model using a combination of banding data (harvest probability) and hunter harvest information to estimate population size. Because doves must be harvested to generate this information, the derived population estimates produced are for preceding years. Oregon has been banding mourning doves to generate information for this population model since 2008. Last summer (2017) staff banded 720 doves across the state.

For August 2016, the USFWS estimated 45,773,738 mourning doves resided in the Western Management Unit (WMU), which includes Oregon, California, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, Arizona, and Utah. Information on the 2017 WMU population size is dependent on an estimate of the 2017-18 season harvest, which has not been finalized at this time. Mourning dove population trends can also be assessed by the US Geological Survey's Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). For Oregon, during the past 10-years, the trend is inconclusive.

Band-tailed Pigeons: Band-tailed pigeon population status is assessed by a model calculating the trend in pigeons counted at 51 mineral sites in mid-July in California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. In Oregon, ODFW staff has been conducting these surveys at 21 mineral sites since 2004. Unlike mourning doves, methods to assess total abundance of pigeons have not been developed.

For 2017, the USFWS estimated no change in the trend of pigeon abundance over the last 10 years and the 3-year relative abundance index is slightly lower than the objective. BBS data can also be used to assess population trends for pigeons. Over the long (1968-2016), mid (2007-2016), and short-term (2012-2016) trends are inconclusive for pigeons in Oregon, though range-wide the trend is negative over the long-term, but inconclusive over the mid and short-term. When considering all factors, the Pacific Coast Population of band-tailed pigeons is currently considered stable.

Ducks and Mergansers: In general for 2017, total ducks from major breeding areas in Alaska, Canada, Montana and the Dakotas were down 2% from 2016 and up 34% from the 1955-2016 long-term average (LTA). The estimate of 47.3 million breeding ducks is the fifth highest estimate on record for this region since surveys began in 1955. All common species except pintails and scaup remain above their LTA. In 2017, scaup and pintails were down 13% and 27% from their LTA, respectively. Populations in most areas which contribute the majority of their breeding waterfowl to the Pacific Flyway were down compared to 2016, but up compared to the LTA for most species,

except for scaup and pintails. Habitat conditions in these breeding areas were rated as good in Alaska, good to excellent in northwest Canada, and good in southern Alberta.

Oregon breeding waterfowl surveys were conducted from late April through late May in 2017. Statewide, total duck numbers were up 12% from 2016 and down 9% from the 1994-2016 LTA. The breeding mallard population was down 18% from 2016 and down 22% from the LTA. Breeding waterfowl habitat conditions were excellent in many areas of Oregon because of runoff from the heavy snow pack from the winter of 2016-17.

Geese: Most goose populations in the Pacific Flyway remain healthy. However, dusky Canada geese remain a population of concern and their 2017 population estimate was 13,479, similar to 2016. The 3-year average of 14,803 geese still remains below the goal of 20,000 outlined in the Pacific Flyway’s Dusky Canada Goose Management Plan. For cackling Canada geese, the estimated fall 2017 population was 289,867, which is down 11% from last year and represents the second consecutive annual population decrease, suggesting the population may be declining from record high numbers estimated in 2015. However, the 3-year average of 321,475 geese is still 29% above the population goal of 250,000. Table 9 summarizes the population status and objectives for geese in Oregon. Habitat conditions for nesting geese were good in most of Alaska in 2017. Habitat conditions on Wrangel Island, Russia, were also good and production was above average.

Table 9. Current population status and objectives for Pacific Flyway goose populations.

	Most Recent Population Indices	Most Recent 3-Year Average	Population Objective	Status Relative to Objective
Cackling Canada Geese	289,900 (2017)	321,500 (2015 - 2017)	250,000	Above
Dusky Canada Geese	13,500 (2017)	14,800 (2015 - 2017)	20,000	Below
Aleutian Canada Geese	168,500 (2017)	173,600 (2015 - 2017)	60,000	Above
Taverner's Canada Geese	45,700 (2017)	44,500 (2015 - 2017)	None	NA
Lesser Canada Geese	2,800 (2017)	4,400 (2015 - 2017)	None	NA
Pacific Western Canada Geese	297,900 (2017)	313,200 (2015 - 2017)	None	NA
Brant	155,700 (2017)	144,100 (2015 - 2017)	162,000	Below
Pacific Greater White-fronted Geese	735,600 (2017)	633,400 (2015 - 2017)	300,000	Above
Tule White-fronted Geese	16,100 (2016)	10,600 (2013, 2015 - 2016)	10,000	Above
Wrangel Island Snow Geese	352,000 (2017)	297,300 (2015 - 2017)	120,000	Above
Western Canadian Arctic Snow Geese	451,000 (2013)	NA	200,000	Above
Ross' Geese @ Karrak Lake Only	624,100 (2016)	634,400 (2014 - 2016)	100,000	Above

Coots: The estimated continental breeding population was 2.15 million in 2017, which is 24% lower than the 2016 estimate but 11% above the LTA (1955-2016).

Wilson’s Snipe: According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey the estimated annual change in the snipe population in the Western Region was –1.0% over the long-term (1966–2015) and –1.0% over the short-term (2005–2015).

2016-17 HARVEST ESTIMATES

The Harvest Information Program (HIP), a cooperative harvest survey between the USFWS and states, was implemented in Oregon during 1995. The USFWS estimates hunter effort and harvest by sampling hunters from records provided by the Oregon Point of Sale (POS) licensing system. This cooperative survey continues to be refined yearly. Hunter and Harvest estimates for 2016-17 can be found in Table 10. Harvest estimates from the 2017-18 seasons will not be available until summer 2018.

Total Waterfowl Hunters: HIP estimates that during the 2016-17 season, 21,000 people hunted ducks and/or geese at least one day in Oregon. This estimate is up 9% from the previous 5-year average. The Department has had concerns that the HIP estimates of waterfowl hunter numbers, and subsequently harvest numbers, was biased low and last season we conducted a short random telephone survey of licensed waterfowl hunters in Oregon to produce an independent estimate of the number of active waterfowl hunters for comparison purposes. This survey estimated 20,500 people hunted for ducks and/or geese at least one day last season, slightly (2%) lower but very similar to the HIP estimate.

2017-18 MIGRATORY WATERFOWL VALIDATION SALES

Waterfowl Validation/Stamp Sales: State of Oregon waterfowl validation (stamp) sales to resident hunters for the 2017-18 season totaled 56,189, a decrease of 2% from 2016-17. However, 62% of adults and youths who purchased a Sports Pac (Sports Pacs accounted for 72% of validation sales) did not return to a license agent to obtain their waterfowl validation after July 1st, leaving the total number of resident waterfowl validations actually held by hunters at 30,974, unchanged from 2016-17. Total 2017-18 nonresident game bird stamps (valid for both waterfowl and upland game bird hunting) sales were 3,990, up 3% from 2016-17.

Table 10. Harvest Information Program estimates of Oregon migratory game bird hunters and harvest during the 2016-17, season compared to the previous 5 seasons.

	Hunters			Harvest		
	2016/17	% Change		2016/17	% Change	
		Previous 5- Season Avg	from 5- Season Avg		Previous 5- Season Avg	from 5- Season Avg
Total Ducks	18,700	17,400	7%	315,698	345,077	-9%
Mallard				119,827	134,045	-11%
Gadwall				9,725	11,263	-14%
American Wigeon				49,131	52,681	-7%
Eurasian Wigeon				254	441	-42%
Green-winged Teal				51,753	41,719	24%
Cinnamon & Blue-winged Teal				0	526	-100%
Northern Shoveler				11,162	17,496	-36%
Northern Pintail				43,127	47,785	-10%
Wood Duck				6,089	9,117	-33%
Redhead				254	413	-38%
Canvasback				1,353	1,689	-20%
Greater Scaup				3,213	4,933	-35%
Lesser Scaup				2,537	5,189	-51%
Ring-necked Duck				6,089	7,340	-17%
Barrows Goldeneye				1,353	269	402%
Common Goldeneye				1,268	535	137%
Bufflehead				5,919	6,429	-8%
Ruddy Duck				254	509	-50%
Black Scoter				0	0	0%
White-winged Scoter				21	18	17%
Surf Scoter				170	109	56%
Harlequin Duck				0	0	0%
Long-tailed Duck				0	0	0%
Hooded Merganser				1,015	1,663	-39%
Red-breasted Merganser				0	18	-100%
Common Merganser				1,184	890	33%
Total Geese	10,500	9,200	14%	56,439	55,313	2%
Canada Geese				40,448	48,251	-16%
Greater White-fronted Geese				6,271	3,944	59%
Snow Geese				9,406	2,912	223%
Ross' Geese				314	206	53%
Brant	100	<50	100%	200	<50	100%
Mourning Doves	4,300	7,000	-39%	27,200	39,500	-31%
Band-tailed Pigeons	300	400	-25%	1,300	1,200	8%
American Coots	100	900	-89%	900	3,600	-75%
Wilson's Snipe	100	700	-86%	0	1,000	-100%

2018-19 MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SEASON PROPOSALS

Please note: All seasons for migratory game birds are established under USFWS frameworks. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife works through the Pacific Flyway Council process and the USFWS regulatory process to make recommendations on these federal frameworks. Additionally, all recommendations must fall within established frameworks (can be more conservative but not more liberal) and all season selections by the Fish and Wildlife Commission are subject to approval by the USFWS.

- **MOURNING DOVE**

Framework: Under the national harvest strategy, when mourning dove abundance dictates a standard mourning dove season, Oregon is allowed a 60-day season between September 1 and January 15, with daily bag and possession limits of 15 and 45, respectively. The season may be split into two segments.

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 proposal is 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 no change from last season. The Department's Game Birds Committee did consider a split season last year, however, it was not supported at that time as mourning dove seasons cannot currently be set by zone in Oregon under Federal frameworks. Due to constraints of the Federal regulations setting process, the earliest that Oregon could consider a split season by hunting zone is the 2021 season.

Proposed Season:

Open Season:	September 1 – October 30, 2018
Open Area:	Entire State
Daily Bag Limit:	15 mourning doves
Possession Limit:	45 mourning doves

Public Comment: One comment was received requesting a split season with most hunting days in November or later. One comment was received requesting the Department classify Eurasian-collared doves as a game bird and regulate their harvest via season length and bag limit in hopes the population expands and provides increased hunting opportunities.

- **BAND-TAILED PIGEON**

Framework: Under the Flyway adopted harvest strategy, when band-tailed pigeon abundance dictates a restrictive season, Oregon is allowed a 9-consecutive day season between September 15 and January 1, with daily bag and possession limits of 2 and 6, respectively.

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 pigeons with a harvest strategy based on the 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 26 seasons.

Proposed Season:

Open Season: September 15 – September 23, 2018
Open Area: Entire State
Daily Bag Limit: 2 band-tailed pigeons
Possession Limit: 6 band-tailed pigeons

Public Comment: None

• **DUCK AND MERGANSER**

Framework: A maximum season length of 107 days is allowed between the Saturday closest to September 24 (September 22, 2018) and the last Sunday in January (January 27, 2019); daily bag limit of seven birds to include no more than three scaup, two hen mallards, two redheads, two canvasback, and two pintails. The season for scaup may only be open for 86 days during the general duck season. For all species the possession limit is three-times the daily bag limit. Shooting hours are from one half hour before sunrise to sunset. Zoning options approved by the USFWS may be retained. One split in season dates may occur in each zone. Two federal youth waterfowl days are allowed for ducks, mergansers, coots and geese. Youths 17 years of age and under may participate.

Recommendation: Adoption of maximum days and bag limits as allowed by framework. Maintain traditional shooting hours and adoption of a federal youth waterfowl weekend. The adoption of a youth waterfowl hunt weekend requires a reduction in regular waterfowl seasons by two days, which accounts for the two day split in each zone. This recommendation is identical to last season's except the bag limit for pintails is increased back to two per day, the maximum allowed under Federal frameworks as outlined in the Northern Pintail Harvest Strategy.

Proposed Seasons:

Statewide Youth Weekend:	September 22 & 23
Zone 1: (Zone 1 is western Oregon and Columbia Basin counties)	October 13 – October 28 & October 31 – January 27, 2019 Scaup open from November 3 – January 27, 2019
Zone 2: (Zone 2 is remaining eastern Oregon counties)	October 6 – November 25 & November 28 – January 20, 2019 Scaup open from October 6 – November 25 & November 28 – January 1, 2019

Daily Bag Limit (all seasons): 7 total; with no more than 2 hen mallards, 2 pintails, 2 redheads, 2 canvasbacks and 3 scaup. Note: scaup may only be taken during the open season specific to them.

Possession Limit: Three times the bag limit

Discussion: Allowed frameworks were developed cooperatively with the USFWS, states and all Flyway Councils under the Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) program. AHM is a process that increases objectivity and efficiency in the annual process of setting duck hunting regulations. AHM improves upon past approaches by using clearly defined harvest-management objectives, a limited set of regulatory options, and robust data assessment procedures. It is important to note the AHM process is dynamic, and as new information is obtained decision criteria is modified. This year represents the 11th year of implementation of the Western Mallard Model under AHM. This model takes information from breeding duck surveys in Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California to guide the season for the entire Pacific Flyway.

The proposed season framework is nearly identical to last year and flyway biologists believe continued liberal harvest regulations are justified based on population information. Many duck populations have remained relatively abundant in recent years, especially the mallard, which is the most commonly harvested species. National harvest strategies are in place for pintail, scaup and canvasback. The only change is an increase in the bag limit for pintail back to 2 per day. The increase was called for by the Northern Pintail Harvest Strategy which was adopted by all Flyway Councils and the USFWS in 2010. Except for last season, the daily bag limit for pintails has been two per day since 2009.

Adoption of a 105-day duck season will accommodate the federal youth waterfowl hunting weekend (105 + 2 = 107 day maximum) and should provide ample opportunity to hunt at preferred times.

Public Comment: All comments received regarding the proposed increase in the pintail limit were supportive of the increase. Several comments were received regarding the use of electronic decoys for waterfowl hunting. Two comments supported changing the regulations prohibiting their use, while four supported maintaining the current prohibition on their use. One comment requested the waterfowl season be shorted by removing days from both the start and end of the season to allow waterfowl more uninterrupted time to recover from the rigors of migration.

- **GOOSE SEASONS**

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

- **SEPTEMBER CANADA GEESE**

Background: A September Canada goose season, designed to focus harvest on resident western Canada geese, was initiated in 1990 to alleviate agricultural crop depredation and provide a recreational opportunity on a growing resident goose population occurring in the lower Columbia River area. In later years the September season was expanded statewide, however, this season has been closed in the South Coast Zone since 2006 due to a desire to hold late-winter Canada goose seasons in that Zone to address damage caused by Aleutian Canada geese.

Framework: The current federal framework for Oregon allows up to a 15 consecutive day season from September 1 – 20. Daily bag and possession limits are 5 and 15 Canada geese, respectively. Shooting hours for the September Canada goose hunt are one half hour before sunrise to sunset.

Recommendation: Staff recommends adoption of a September Canada goose season in all areas of the state except the South Coast Goose Zone. Staff recommends adoption of a bag limit of 5 Canada geese in all open areas with possession limits triple the daily bag limit. The traditional opener of the Saturday after the Labor Day weekend is recommended.

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

Northwest Permit Zone:	September 8 – 16
Southwest Zone:	September 8 – 12
South Coast Zone:	Closed
Eastern Oregon Zone:	September 8 – 12
Klamath, Lake, Harney, & Malheur Zone:	September 8 – 12
Daily Bag Limit (all zones):	5 Canada geese
Possession Limit:	15 Canada Geese

Discussion: Seasons are relatively short but cannot be longer because of the desire to hold long general goose seasons as well as avoid season overlap with the Labor Day holiday. Currently, all frameworks for regular goose seasons are 107 days, the maximum allowed under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Season days used for September Canada goose seasons require a subsequent reduction in other Canada goose seasons. Last year, staff considered a nine day season in all areas of the state (federal frameworks allow this), however, hunter comments indicated a preference to maintain as many days as possible during the regular season.

Public Comment: One commenter requested the Department to allow electronic calls during the late goose hunt in the Klamath, Lake, Harney, & Malheur Zone. Note: Federal regulations prohibit electronic calls for waterfowl hunting except they may be used for hunting white geese so long as all other migratory game bird seasons are closed in the area. Since white-fronted geese may also be hunted concurrently with white geese in this area, the white-fronted goose season would need to be closed to implement this request.

• **GENERAL FALL/WINTER GEESE**

Framework: A maximum season length of 107 days is allowed between the Saturday closest to September 24 (September 22) and the last Sunday in January (January 27) for Canada geese, except that the season for Canada geese in the South Coast Zone may extend through March 10. For white-fronted and white geese 107 days is allowed between the Saturday closest to September 24 (September 22) and March 10. Maximum daily bag limits are 4 Canada geese, 10 white-fronted geese, and 6 white geese, except that the white-front bag limit in Lake County may not exceed 1 per day, the Canada goose limit in the South Coast Zone may not exceed 6 per day, and the white goose limit after the last Sunday in January (January 27) may not exceed 20 per day. For all species the possession limit is three-times the daily bag limit. Shooting hours are from one half hour before sunrise to sunset. Two federal youth waterfowl days are allowed for ducks, mergansers, coots and geese. Youths 17 years of age and under may participate.

Recommendation: Adoption of maximum days and bag limits as allowed by framework. Maintain traditional shooting hours and adoption of a federal youth waterfowl hunt. The adoption of a youth waterfowl hunt weekend requires a reduction in regular waterfowl seasons by two days. This recommendation is identical to last season’s except for date adjustments to align with the 2018-19 calendar.

Proposed Seasons:

Statewide Youth Weekend:	September 22 & 23
Southwest Zone: (all of Douglas, Coos, and Curry counties east of Hwy 101, and Jackson and Josephine counties.)	October 13 – October 28 & November 5 – January 27, 2019
South Coast Zone: (all of Douglas, Coos, and Curry counties west of Hwy 101)	September 29 – November 27 & December 15 – January 14, 2019 & February 23 – March 10, 2019
Klamath, Lake, Harney & Malheur Zone: (Canada Goose Seasons only)	October 6 – November 25 & December 10 – January 27, 2019
Klamath, Lake, Harney & Malheur Zone: (White-front and White Goose Seasons only)	October 6 – November 25 & January 16 – March 10, 2019
Remainder of Eastern Oregon Zone:	October 13 – October 28 & November 5 – January 27, 2019
Daily Bag Limit (all zones unless noted):	4 Canada geese 10 white-fronted geese 6 white geese
<i>Daily Bag Limit Exceptions</i>	
South Coast Zone:	6 Canada geese
Lake County:	1 white-fronted goose
Klamath, Lake, Harney & Malheur Zone:	20 white geese (January 28 – March 10)
Possession Limit:	Three times the bag limit

Discussion: Most goose populations have remained robust in recent years, increasing recreational opportunity throughout the state. Snow, Ross's, Aleutian Canada, cackling Canada, Pacific western Canada, and Pacific white-fronted goose populations in the flyway are at or significantly above management goals. Numerous population and harvest surveys are in place to monitor population trends and harvest levels. Hunting days for duck and goose hunting will not always coincide in some counties due to boundary differences between duck and goose zones and the desire to offer September Canada goose seasons. However, in order to optimize opportunity, it is critical to utilize the full frameworks allowed. Extended frameworks allow later hunting opportunity, which is a common request by hunters and agricultural producers. In order to utilize this opportunity, split seasons will be fully utilized similar to previous years.

Public Comment: None

- **NORTHWEST PERMIT ZONE GEESE**

Background: Goose hunting seasons in Northwest Oregon have been restrictive since the 1950s to protect the dusky Canada goose which winters in this area. Dusky Canada geese have a small population size (range 7,000 – 18,000 over the last 30 years) and are more vulnerable to harvest than other geese. Beginning in 1985, after steep declines in the dusky Canada goose population, a quota based season was implemented which assigned a quota of dusky Canada geese to Oregon, which if reached would mandate a closure of the goose season. This system allowed goose seasons to be long, so long as the dusky Canada goose quota was not attained, but also required all successful goose hunters to bring their geese to check stations so dusky Canada geese could be tallied toward the season quota.

When the first quota season was implemented only a small portion of the area was initially open for goose hunting (Sauvie Island Wildlife Area and adjacent private lands), however, over time this hunt program grew to encompass nearly the entire winter range of the dusky Canada goose in Oregon. The season achieved its objectives of keeping dusky Canada goose harvest minimal, while allowing long, liberal seasons for other types of geese to provide agricultural depredation relief and hunting opportunities. Dusky Canada goose subunit quotas were rarely exceeded though overall goose harvest during the last 10 seasons with check stations sometimes exceeded 10,000 geese a season; on average only 28 of those were dusky Canada geese (last 10 seasons with check stations).

However, the quota system had some significant drawbacks. It was generally disliked by the hunting community as it forced all hunters harvesting geese to drive to hunter check stations (sometimes over 20 miles from their hunting area), which were only open limited hours. Additionally, the agricultural community was frustrated that goose hunting could not be allowed every day of the week. Hunting was limited to fewer than seven days a week since an entire new check station staff would be required to keep the stations open every day. Hunting geese everyday may help alleviate some of the depredation issues in this area. Lastly, due to increased personnel costs the program became more costly for the Department to administer. Staffing the nine check stations annually cost the agency approximately \$200,000, which traditionally was funded by the sale of waterfowl validations. Additionally, in past years a special \$50,000 overtime contract was in place with Oregon State Police to devote additional hours to enforcement, bringing the total cost for administration of this season to \$250,000. Validation sales are approximately \$500,000 annually, so 50% of the waterfowl stamp budget was being used to administer the season.

Beginning in 2013, the Department began working with the USFWS and our Pacific Flyway partners to revise the Flyway's Dusky Canada Goose Management Plan. A major discussion item was to review the quota based harvest strategy and determine if a different approach could obtain similar results without the negative aspects which accompany the quota system. The Flyway's revised 2015 harvest strategy calls for a closed dusky Canada goose season in NW Oregon and SW Washington, the core wintering area for dusky Canada geese. Since the Federal framework for the dusky Canada goose seasons is a closed season, there is no need to use check stations to monitor harvest toward a quota. Additionally, the strategy recommends seasons for other geese should follow the general goose season frameworks for the rest of the state. This strategy applies to all of northwest Oregon, not just that portion delineated as the Northwest Permit Zone prior to 2015.

In recommending this strategy, the Flyway did recognize there are some risks of moving to a closed season for dusky Canada geese. One concern the Flyway has is that without check stations there is no way to monitor the harvest of dusky Canada geese, except in those cases where law enforcement detects a hunter with a dusky Canada goose. The Department will continue to work with Oregon State Police and USFWS law enforcement officers to promote the importance of hunter compliance checks during this season. Another concern is what to do if the dusky Canada goose population begins to decline in the future. If that happens, the overall goose season may need to become more restrictive. If the dusky Canada goose population falls below 7,500 geese, the plan calls for goose hunting to only be allowed over crops or pastures which could be damaged by geese.

Frameworks guided by this new strategy were first adopted by the USFWS for use during the 2015 season and remain in effect for the 2018-19 season. Additionally, the states of Washington and Oregon entered into an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the USFWS in 2015 which outlines all of the voluntarily actions the states will take to ensure hunters are equipped to identify the different types of geese in the hunt area and avoid taking dusky Canada geese. The MOU requires the Department to continue to conduct surveys for neck collared dusky Canada geese. The data is used to estimate annual adult survival rates, which are used as an index to determine if dusky Canada goose harvest has changed over past levels. Currently, average annual adult survival for neck collared dusky Canada geese is about 82% (2001 – 2016) and no evidence of a change in adult survival of the collared population has been detected since closure of the check stations.

Cackling Canada geese make up the vast majority of the wintering goose flock in northwest Oregon and they are responsible for the majority of the agricultural depredation in the region. The cackling Canada goose management plan was recently revised by the Flyway (2016) and now gives clearer guidance to harvest management actions when the cackling Canada goose population exceeds the population objective. Specifically, the plan says, "if the 3-year average population index is greater than 10% above (275,000) or 10% below (225,000) the objective (250,000), implement regulatory actions to regain the objective." Since 2014, the Canada goose bag limit in the Permit Zone has been 4 per day and since 2015 the 3-year average population has exceeded 275,000 (currently 321,475). However, annual estimates in 2016 and 2017 indicate the population may be declining from the record high count in 2015 (Figure 3). For the 2018-19 season, Federal Frameworks have been liberalized to allow an increase in the Canada goose bag limit from 4 per day to 6 per day.

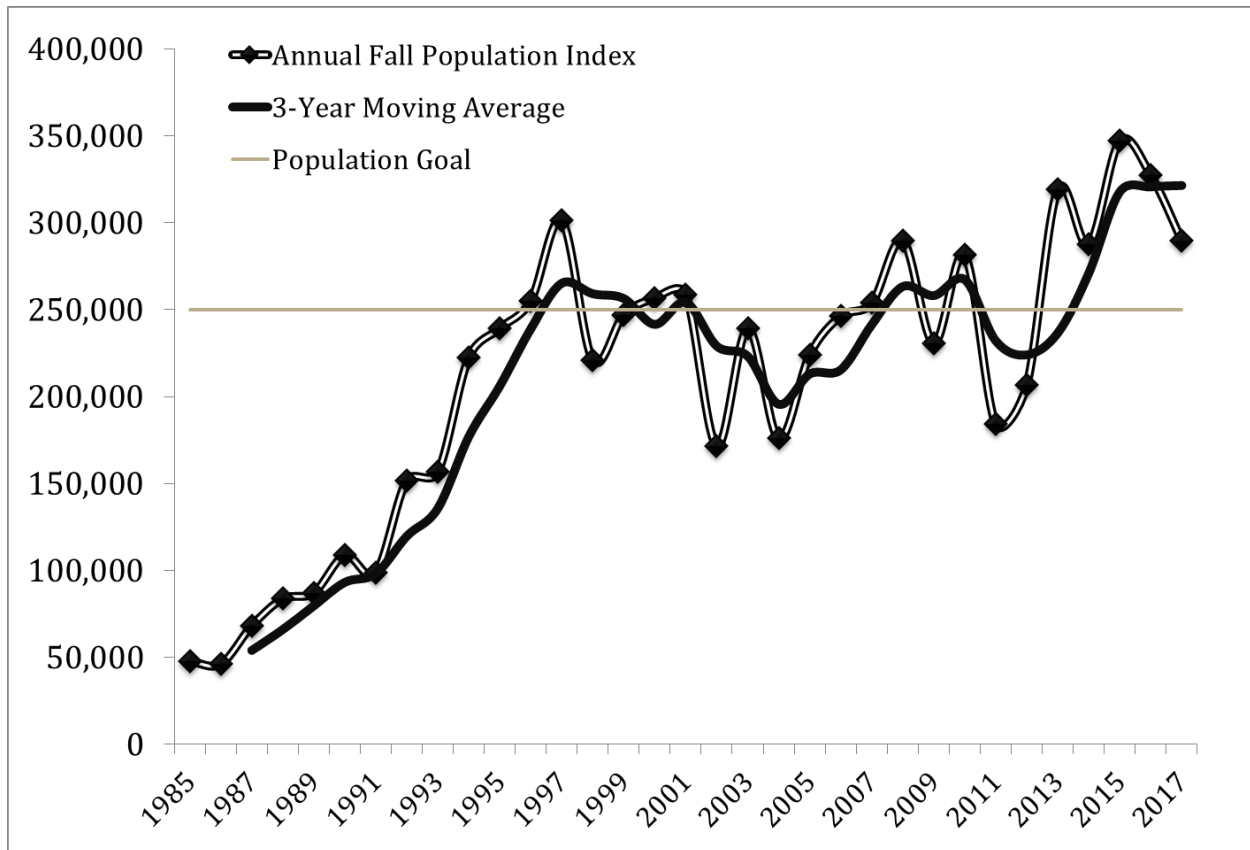


Figure 3. Cackling Canada goose population index, derived from the total indicated birds estimated from the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Coastal Zone survey, expanded by a constant factor to estimate total fall population size.

Framework: A maximum season length of 107 days is allowed between the Saturday closest to September 24 (September 22) and March 10. Maximum daily bag limits are 6 Canada geese, 10 white-fronted geese, and 6 white geese, except that the season for dusky Canada geese is closed. For all species the possession limit is three-times the daily bag limit. Shooting hour frameworks are from sunrise to sunset.

Recommendation: Adoption of maximum days allowed by framework and the maximum bag limits as allowed by framework except adopt a Canada goose bag limit of not more than 4 per day. However, if the 2018 cackling Canada goose population estimate derived from the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Coastal Zone Survey exceeds that from 2017 (289,867), adopt temporary rules before October 2018 to change the bag limit from 4 Canada geese per day to 6 Canada geese per day. Adopt a federal youth waterfowl weekend. The adoption of a youth waterfowl hunt weekend requires a reduction in regular waterfowl seasons by two days.

Proposed Seasons:

Northwest Permit Zone: (all of Benton, Clatsop, Columbia, Clackamas, Lane, Linn, Marion, Multnomah, Tillamook, Washington, and Yamhill counties)	October 20 – October 28 & November 17 – January 12, 2019 & February 9 – March 10, 2019
Daily Bag Limit:	4 Canada Geese (except dusky Canada geese are closed to harvest) 10 white-fronted geese 6 white geese
Sauvie Island Wildlife Area: Eastside, Westside and Oak Island Only	Wildlife Area hunt days occurring from October 20 – October 28 & November 17 – January 12, 2019
Daily Bag Limit:	6 white geese
Possession Limit (all areas):	Three times the bag limit

Additional Regulations:

- Maintain goose hunting during all days of the week. Hunting all days of the week allows hunters to hunt on their preferred days and provides landowners suffering depredation the opportunity to utilize hunting to address the damage whenever it occurs.
- Maintain goose hunting during the federal youth waterfowl weekend. Dusky Canada geese usually do not arrive in Oregon until mid to late October, so unintentional harvest of dusky Canada geese during the youth hunt is unlikely.
- Reduce the size of the goose hunting closure area in Tillamook County, surrounding Nestucca Bay, where a small closure is in place to protect Aleutian Canada geese which nest on the Semidi Islands, Alaska. Maintain all other private lands being open for goose hunting. Maintain the goose hunting closures on state wildlife areas (Sauvie Island, Fern Ridge, and E. E. Wilson) except maintain the white goose hunting opportunity at Sauvie Island Wildlife Area. Wildlife Area closures are meant to encourage Canada geese to forage on public lands in an effort to reduce agricultural damage to neighboring private lands.
- Maintain the requirement that all hunters must possess a valid Northwest Oregon Goose Permit while hunting.
- Maintain shooting hours for geese in this zone as the maximum allowed by federal frameworks, sunrise to sunset.
- In addition to potentially receiving a citation; maintain the penalty that any hunter taking a dusky Canada goose have their Northwest Oregon Goose Permit invalidated for the

remainder of the season and must retake the goose identification exam prior to hunting geese in the permit zone during subsequent seasons.

- Maintain the goose hunter education program for permit zone hunters. This will continue to improve knowledge of goose management issues and the role hunters play in this process.

Discussion: Goose hunters in northwest Oregon have proven over the last 30 years that they can shift their harvest towards other Canada geese and avoid taking dusky Canada geese. Significant changes occurred to this season in 2015 which were generally very well received by hunters and the agricultural community. No major issues related to closed season dusky Canada goose take have been noted during the previous seasons. Managers believe the Flyway's Dusky Canada Goose Management Plan has the necessary checks in place to respond appropriately should the dusky Canada goose population decline in the future.

As mentioned above, Federal Frameworks do allow selection of a Canada goose bag limit of up to 6 per day in this zone this season. This framework increase is supported by the Flyway's recently revised cackling Canada goose management plan. However, survey data suggest the cackling Canada goose population may already be declining towards the objective of 250,000 under the current Canada goose bag limit of 4 per day. The Department is concerned that a bag limit increase to 6 per day could drive the population below the objective if it is already declining. If the population drops 10% below the objective more restrictive seasons could be called for.

Because the aerial surveys to estimate the cackling Canada goose population include a degree of variability, it is possible the population is not declining and the bag limit increase is warranted for the 2018-19 season. The Department believes it is prudent to wait for the 2018 survey results before making a decision to increase the bag limit. Unfortunately, these results will not be available until sometime in July of 2018, after the Game Bird Hunting Regulations have been published. As mentioned previously, the Department is recommending the Commission adopt a bag limit of 4 Canada geese per day for the 2018-19 season at this time and request the Department implement temporary rules prior to the beginning of the season to increase the bag limit to 6 Canada geese per day if the 2018 Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Coastal Zone Survey indicates the 2018 cackling Canada goose population exceeds the 2017 estimate of 289,867 geese. If the bag limit is increased by temporary rule, the Department intends to notify hunters of the change from the published regulations via news release, email, and social media.

Lastly, federally approved modifications to goose hunting zones allow goose hunting on a portion of lands, both public and private, near Pacific City that have been closed to goose hunting since the early 1980s. These lands were closed to protect Aleutian Canada geese, which were listed as endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) at that time. Specifically, the closure protected Aleutian Canada geese nesting in Alaska's Semidi Islands, which comprised the bulk of the wintering flock in this area in the 1980s and early 1990s. However, as Aleutian Canada geese recovered and were eventually delisted, Aleutian Canada geese from other breeding areas began migrating through or wintering in the area, as did several thousand Canada geese from other populations (dusky Canada geese, Taverner's Canada geese, cackling Canada geese). This increase in wintering and migrant goose numbers has caused serious depredation concerns on the private agricultural lands within the closure boundary.

Although the overall Aleutian Canada goose population is no longer protected under the ESA and has grown to over 170,000 geese, the flock from the Semidi Islands likely only numbers in the low hundreds. However, due to the remoteness of the breeding islands and the fact that geese from the Semidi Islands are no longer isolated on the wintering grounds, no current estimate of flock size is available. Past monitoring of neck banded individuals by the USFWS has demonstrated geese from the Semidi Islands almost exclusively use several pastures just northeast of Pacific City for foraging and rarely, if ever, use pastures south and east of Pacific City, which are currently in the closure area. Therefore, the USFWS has approved shrinking the current closure zone to allow goose hunting in the southern portion of the closure (Figure 4). The majority of the USFWS managed Nestucca Bay NWR would no longer be in the hunt closure area, however, it would remain closed to goose hunting to provide undisturbed foraging for wintering geese and provide sanctuary for dusky Canada geese, which are very common in the area.

Public Comment: One comment was received expressing support for the changes made to the permit zone season three years ago, however, a different person commented that their hunt quality has decreased due to the changes. All comments received regarding a potential increase in the bag limit for Canada geese were supportive of the possible change. Additionally, a comment was received requesting that at minimum, some portions of Sauvies Island Wildlife Area be opened to Canada goose hunting.

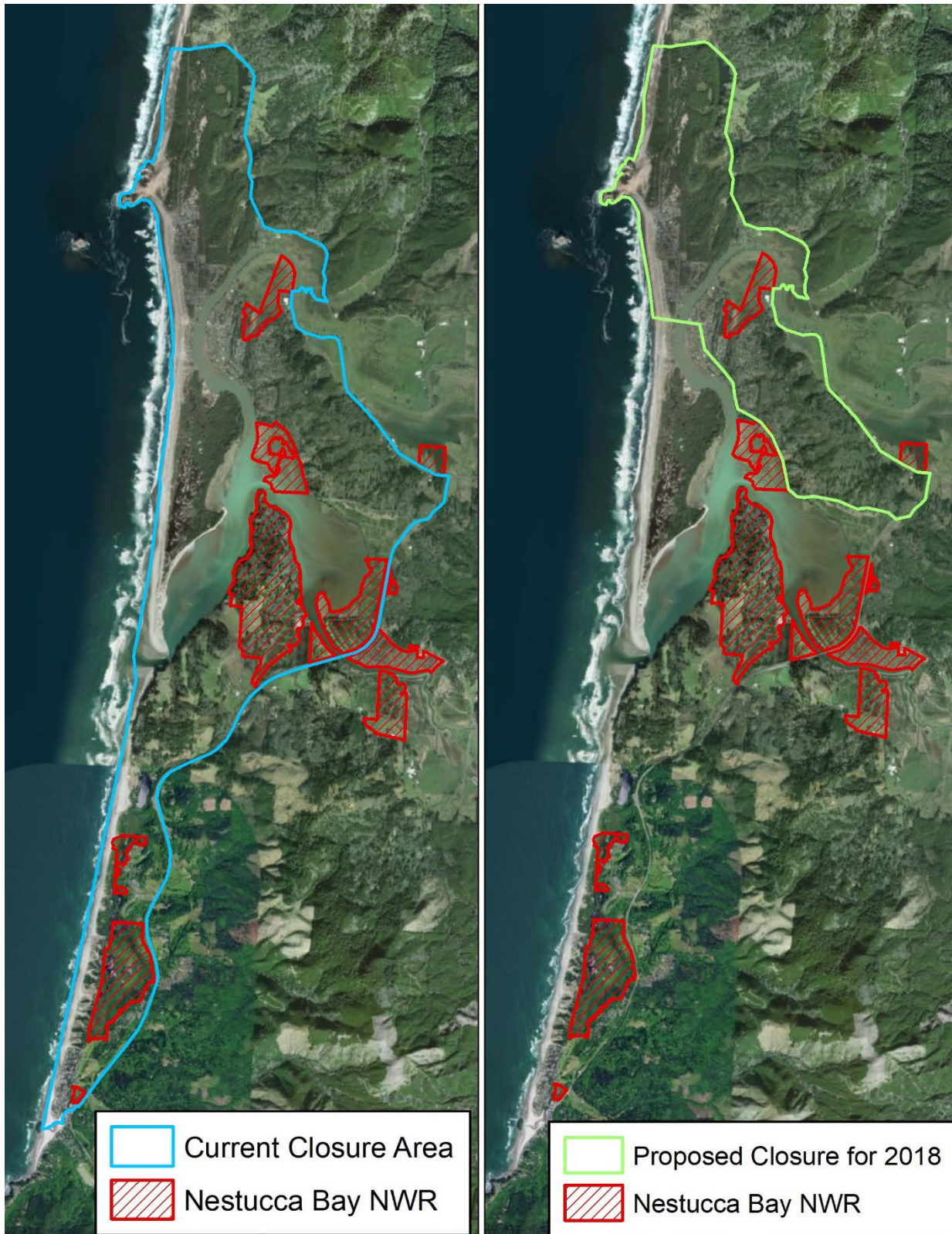


Figure 4. Current (left) and proposed (right) goose hunting closure areas near Pacific City, OR.

- **BRANT**

Framework: A maximum season length of 16 days is allowed between the Saturday closest to September 24 (September 22) and December 15. Maximum daily bag limit is 2 brant. Shooting hours are from one half hour before sunrise to sunset. Additionally, in the past the Commission has supported brant seasons in Oregon which overlap completely with seasons in California.

Recommendation: Adoption of maximum days and bag limits as allowed by framework. This recommendation is identical to last season's.

Proposed Season:

Statewide:	November 24 – December 9
Daily Bag Limit:	2 brant
Possession Limit:	Three times the bag limit

Discussion: The brant season in Oregon is short in duration with restrictive bag limits. Oregon coastal bays are a minor wintering site for brant in the Flyway and likely provide more migration than wintering habitat. Human disturbance has been documented to have detrimental effects on brant populations in other areas of the Flyway. Expanding acres of oyster plants, which can destroy eelgrass beds, and other non-hunting recreational activities in Oregon, are of concern. Brant hunter numbers in Oregon are low and minimal harvest occurs in Oregon. The Department continues to support a conservative approach to brant hunting adopted by the Commission over two decades ago. Two objectives of the strategy were to overlap Oregon and California seasons whenever possible and maintain harvest in Oregon at a moderate level. The proposed season coincides with California's brant season. Also, the Department continues to support Flyway polices on managing populations based on breeding derivation rather than winter distribution of individual flocks.

Public Comment: None.

- **AMERICAN COOT**

Framework: Concurrent with duck season with a daily bag limit of 25.

Recommendation: Adoption of maximum days and bag limits as allowed by framework.

Proposed Season:

Statewide:	Concurrent with duck season
Daily Bag Limit:	25 coot
Possession Limit:	Three times the bag limit

Public Comment: None

- **WILSON'S SNIPE**

Framework: A maximum season length of 107 days between September 1 and February 28, with a daily bag limit of 8. A two-way season split can be selected. Hunting zones may be selected by established duck hunting zones.

Recommendation: Adoption of maximum days and bag limits as allowed by framework.

Proposed Season:

Duck Zone 1:	November 3 – February 17, 2019
Duck Zone 2:	October 6 – November 25 & November 28 – January 20, 2019
Daily Bag Limit:	8 snipe
Possession Limit:	Three times the bag limit

Discussion: Snipe are a lightly hunted game bird species in Oregon. Federal surveys estimate an average of about 500 hunters pursue snipe in Oregon and they generally harvest about 1,200 snipe per season. Snipe season dates have varied over the years to a season concurrent with duck season to a season which opens later than duck season or has a split in December which allows some hunting into February, when duck season is closed. From 2005 – 2010 the season was concurrent with duck season, but after several public requests in 2011 the Department recommended a season that opened later than duck season in Zone 1 only and closed in mid-February. Hunter effort and harvest estimates are difficult to generate accurately for lightly hunted species, so federal survey data cannot be used to gauge the impact of the season change. Some hunters do take advantage of the opportunity to hunt snipe during February.

Public Comment: None

- **FALCONRY**

Framework: Maximum season length of 107 days, including those days when the gun season is open. Falconry daily bag and possession limits for all permitted migratory game birds shall not exceed 3 and 6, respectively, singly or in the aggregate. During that time when the season for dove, pigeons, crow and/or snipe, overlaps that for waterfowl, the falconer's bag may contain no more than 3 of all the federally regulated species.

Recommendation: Adoption of maximum days and bag limits as allowed by framework.

Proposed Season:

Duck, Coot, Merganser, Crow and Snipe:	Concurrent with gun seasons
Geese:	Concurrent with gun seasons except no hunting is allowed in the Northwest Permit Goose Zone or during any September Canada goose season.
Mourning Dove and Band-tailed Pigeon:	September 1 – December 16
Daily Bag Limits:	3 in the aggregate, though not more than 1 band-tailed pigeon or goose
Possession Limits:	Three times the bag limit

Discussion: There are approximately 140 licensed falconers in the state, not all of who fly their raptors after game. Their collective harvest of birds is small. Most migratory game bird season proposals are concurrent with gun seasons. Liberal 107-day general duck and goose seasons deny opportunities for falconers to hunt outside of normal gun seasons.

Public Comment: None

CROW

Framework: Liberal seasons are offered outside of months when nesting may occur. Per treaty stipulations between the United States and Mexico, a 124 day season is allowed during a calendar year. Depredation and nuisance crows can still be taken outside of established hunting seasons under a federal depredation order; however, federal action since 2010 has made the take of depredation and nuisance birds more restrictive. Now crows taken under the depredation order must be taken with non-toxic ammunition and all take must be reported to the USFWS.

Recommendation: Adoption of maximum days allowed.

Proposed Season:

Open Season:	October 1 – January 31, 2019
Open Area:	Entire State
Daily Bag Limit:	No limit
Possession Limit:	No limit

Public Comment: None