

BEFORE THE
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS
WM-07-13(E)

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that pursuant to ss. 29.014, 29.041 and 227.11(2)(a), and 227.24 Stats., interpreting ss. 29.014, 29.041 and 29.192, Stats., the Department of Natural Resources will hold public hearings on revisions to ch. NR 10, Wis. Adm. Code, relating to the 2013 migratory game bird seasons and waterfowl hunting zones. This emergency order took effect upon publication in the official state paper on September 6, 2012.

NOTICE IS HEREBY FURTHER GIVEN that the hearing will be held on October 28, 2013 beginning at 1:00 p.m. in room 606 of the Natural Resources State Office Building (GEF-2), 101 South Webster St., Madison, 53707.

Plain Language Analysis: SECTION 1 of this rule order establishes the season length and bag limits for the 2012 Wisconsin migratory game bird seasons. For ducks, the state is divided into three zones, each with 60-day seasons. The proposed seasons in each zone are:

North duck zone - the season begins at 9:00 a.m. September 22 and continues through November 4, followed by a 5 day split, and reopens on November 10 and continues through November 25.

South duck zone - the season begins at 9:00 a.m. on September 29 and continues through October 7, followed by a 5-day split, and then reopens on October 13 and continues through December 2.

Mississippi River duck zone - the season begins at 9:00 am on September 22 and continues through September 30, followed by a 12 day split, reopening on October 13 and continuing through December 2.

The daily bag limit is 6 ducks including no more than: 4 mallards, of which only 1 may be a hen, 1 black duck, 1 canvasback, 3 wood ducks, 4 scaup, 2 pintails and 2 redheads.

For Canada geese, the state is apportioned into 2 goose hunting zones, Horicon and Exterior, each with a 92 day season. The Mississippi River Subzone is a special goose management subzone within the Exterior Zone. Season lengths are:

Horicon Zone – Two hunting periods, the first period beginning September 16 and the second on October 29

Exterior Zone in the northern duck zone - September 16 to November 4 and November 10 to December 21

Exterior Zone in the southern duck zone – September 16 to October 7 and October 13 to December 21

Mississippi River subzone - September 22 to September 30 and October 13 to January 3.

The statewide daily bag limit for Canada geese in all zones is 2 birds per day during the open seasons within the zones.

SECTION 2 establishes that the youth waterfowl hunting season will be held on September 15 and 16.

SECTION 3 lifts a sunset of special migratory bird hunting regulations at the Mead and Zeloski Marsh Wildlife Management Areas.

SECTION 4 relaxes the prohibition on hunting waterfowl in open water for holders of permits for hunters with disabilities.

SECTION 5 reestablishes a duck hunting zone that consists of the Wisconsin portions of the Mississippi River west of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad tracks. This is the same zone configuration that was in place for the 2011 season and has been approved by the USFWS for a five year period.

Summary of, and Comparison with, Existing or Proposed Federal Regulations: Under international treaty and Federal law, migratory game bird seasons are closed unless opened annually via the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) regulations process. As part of the Federal rule process, the USFWS proposes a duck harvest-management objective that balances hunting opportunities with the desire to achieve waterfowl population goals identified in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP). Under this harvest-management objective, the relative importance of hunting opportunity increases as duck populations approach the goals in the NAWMP. Thus, hunting opportunity would be maximized when the population is at or above goals. Additionally, while USFWS believes that the NAWMP's population goals would tend to exert a conservative influence on overall duck harvest-management. Other factors, such as habitat, are to be considered.

Wisconsin Canada goose harvest is supported by 2 different Canada goose populations; the local giant Canada geese which are part of the Temperate Breeding Population (TBP) of the Mississippi Flyway provide about 40% of our fall harvest while the Mississippi Valley Population (MVP) that breeds in northern Ontario provide about 60% of the fall harvest. These 2 populations are managed under cooperative management plans developed by several states and provinces. The TBP population has steadily grown and management goals are to provide additional harvest opportunity and control population growth. In contrast, the MVP population has been on a slow decline so management objectives are to maintain a lower rate of harvest and have a stable or increasing population. These contrasting goals create a challenge in the development of hunting regulations. In order to improve our harvest management, the Mississippi Flyway Council tested the use of a standard season framework for 5 years while monitoring population size and harvest rates for the MVP and TBP. From 2007 - 2011, season lengths and bag limits for each MVP harvest state were unchanged. Each state retained the flexibility to schedule the timing of their Canada goose season. In addition, if the MVP spring population numbers dropped to a predetermined low level during the 5-year period, the stable season framework could be adjusted. At the winter 2012 flyway meeting, analysis of the impacts of these 5 years of stable regulation were reviewed and the results were mixed with regard to the management objectives. It was decided among the member states that a cautious and slow approach be taken toward continued liberalization of Canada goose hunting seasons.

The proposed modifications included in this rule order are consistent with these parameters and guidelines which are annually established by the USFWS in 50 CFR 20.

Comparison with Rules in Adjacent States: Since migratory bird species are managed under international treaty, each region of the country is organized in a specific geographic flyway which represents an individual migratory population of migratory game birds. Wisconsin along with Minnesota, Michigan, Illinois and Iowa are members of the Mississippi Flyway. Each year the states included in the flyways meet to discuss regulations and guidelines offered to the flyways by the USFWS. The FWS regulations and guidelines apply to all states within the Flyway and therefore the regulations in the adjoining states closely resemble the rules established in this rule order, and only differ slightly based on hunter desires, habitat and population management goals. However, these variations fall within guidelines and sideboards established by the USFWS.

Summary of Factual Data and Analytical Methodologies: For the regular duck season, a data based process called Adaptive Harvest Management is used annually by the USFWS and the Flyways to determine which of 3 framework alternatives best matches the current year's data on populations and habitat (data from the spring pond and duck survey). The option of a closed season is also possible if survey conditions indicated that this is necessary for the management of duck populations. The determination of which alternative is selected is based in part on the spring wetland conditions on the

breeding grounds and the Mid-Continent Mallard population. These data come from the May Pond and Breeding Waterfowl Population Surveys conducted by the USFWS and Canadian Wildlife Service on traditional survey areas as well as surveys from select states, including Wisconsin.

In 2011 the USFWS gave our state the option of reconfiguring duck hunting zones and after an 11 month public input process Wisconsin implemented changes for a 5 year period. Waterfowl hunters appear to have been supportive of the new zone configuration and this proposal contains the same zone configuration that was in effect for the 2011 season. The department's position has been that the configuration of duck zones is an issue of hunter opportunity and satisfaction which does not have significant impact on duck populations.

The parameters of Wisconsin's regular goose seasons are guided by the Mississippi Flyway management plans for the MVP and TBP Canada goose populations and approved by the Mississippi Flyway Council and the USFWS. The health of these populations was measured with spring breeding population surveys, survival data and harvest rates obtained from banding and production studies. The surveys and studies are conducted annually and are supported by the State of Wisconsin as part of the MFC. The result of this work is reviewed annually by the MFC committee and the USFWS to measure the impact of the stable season framework trial period.

The primary elements of Wisconsin's waterfowl regulatory process include conducting spring waterfowl surveys, participation in MFC meetings, commenting on federal proposals, and soliciting input from the public. The state process begins with Flyway meetings in February and March each year where staff provide input to the development of federal framework alternatives and requests related to the early seasons. In spring and summer, breeding waterfowl surveys and banding are conducted in support of the regulatory process.

In early July, staff conducted a public meeting to solicit input from interest groups, including representatives of the Conservation Congress Migratory Committee. At this meeting, staff provided the attendees with breeding status information and asked for any items that they wish the department to pursue at the MFC meeting in mid July. Department staff then attended the MFC Technical and Council meetings. At these meetings, staff were provided status information and the proposed framework alternative from the USFWS. Department staff worked with the other states in our Flyway to discuss and develop proposals and recommendations that were voted upon by the MFC. Proposals that passed at the MFC meeting were forwarded to the USFWS for consideration by the Service Regulations Committee (SRC) at their meeting. The USFWS announced its final waterfowl season framework recommendation at the end of July. Department staff then summarized waterfowl status and regulation information for Wisconsin citizens and presented this information to the Migratory Committee of the Conservation Congress and at a public meeting (Post-Flyway Meeting) of interest groups and individuals on July 28. Staff gathered public input and citizen suggestions at those meetings for the development of Wisconsin's waterfowl regulations, given the federal framework. Public hearings were held from July 30-August 2 around the state to solicit additional input on the proposed annual waterfowl rule.

This rule will expand opportunity for waterfowl hunters with disabilities. Open water waterfowl hunting is currently prohibited on all but a handful of lakes in WI. A hunter who is "concealed" in emergent vegetation under current rules is not considered to be in open water. The concern is that those with disabilities may physically not be able to get into a smaller John boat, skiff, or blind and that it may be difficult or impossible to place an accessible boat or blind near vegetation capable of meeting the concealment requirements. This proposal will make it possible for disabled permit holders, and their companions, to hunt from a craft such as a pontoon boat, which may be impossible to conceal in emergent vegetation.

Closing migratory bird hunting hours early on managed public hunting areas in some states has been shown to provide good hunting across an entire property rather than just near refuges, hold ducks in an area for a longer period of time, and provide better hunting opportunities throughout the season. An experimental early closure has been applied at the Mead Wildlife Area in Marathon and Wood counties

and at Zeloski Marsh in Jefferson. The regulation has been in place only during the early part of the season when hunting pressure is heaviest. The regulation has sunset after a three year trial period. There continues to be support for the special regulations and reauthorization by rule is needed for them to remain in effect.

Anticipated Private Sector Costs: These rules, and the legislation which grants the department rule making authority, do not have a significant fiscal effect on the private sector. Additionally, no costs are associated with compliance to these rules.

Effects on Small Business: These rules are applicable to individual sportspersons and impose no compliance or reporting requirements for small businesses, and no design or operational standards are contained in the rule. Because this rule does not add any regulatory requirements for small businesses, the proposed rules will not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small businesses under 227.24(3m).

NOTICE IS HEREBY FURTHER GIVEN that pursuant to s. 227.114, Stats., it is not anticipated that the proposed rule will have an economic impact on small businesses. The Department's Small Business Regulatory Coordinator may be contacted at SmallBusiness@dnr.state.wi.us or by calling (608) 266-1959.

NOTICE IS HEREBY FURTHER GIVEN that the Department has made a determination that this action does not involve significant adverse environmental effects and does not need an environmental analysis under ch. NR 150, Wis. Adm. Code.

NOTICE IS HEREBY FURTHER GIVEN that pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act, reasonable accommodations, including the provision of informational material in an alternative format, will be provided for qualified individuals with disabilities upon request. Please call Scott Loomans at (608) 267-2452 with specific information on your request at least 10 days before the date of the scheduled hearing.

The proposed rule and fiscal estimate may be reviewed and comments electronically submitted at the following Internet site: <http://adminrules.wisconsin.gov>. Written comments on the proposed rule may be submitted via U.S. mail to Mr. Scott Loomans, Bureau of Wildlife Management, P.O. Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707 or by email to scott.loomans@wisconsin.gov. Comments may be submitted until October 29, 2012. Written comments whether submitted electronically or by U.S. mail will have the same weight and effect as oral statements presented at the public hearings. A personal copy of the proposed rule and fiscal estimate may be obtained from Mr. Loomans.

Dated at Madison, Wisconsin September 27, 2013

STATE OF WISCONSIN
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

By Cathy Stepp
Cathy Stepp, Secretary *en*