

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release August 15, 1977

McGarvey 202/343-5634

## WATERFOWL HUNTING REGULATIONS PROPOSED FOR 1977-78

This fall's waterfowl hunting regulations as proposed by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the August 15 Federal Register are generally the same as last year except as noted below:

--A 5-day reduction in season lengths in the Mississippi and the low plains eastern tier of States in the Central Flyway is proposed. This action is in anticipation of reduced fall flights of ducks, coots, and mergansers, chiefly because of drought conditions on the prairies.

--A special 9-day wood duck season between October 1 and 15 in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia is proposed to allow additional harvest opportunity on lightly harvested southeastern wood duck populations prior to the time that northern wood ducks migrate into the Southeast. An environmental assessment of this experimental season is being prepared.

--Experimental zoning in Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, and Ohio will be allowed to experiment with differing seasons in two zones. This is being tried to better distribute hunting opportunity within each State, not to increase the State's overall harvest. Harvests will be monitored for 3 years and if necessary, penalties will be imposed. An environmental assessment is being prepared on waterfowl zoning.

--The Canada goose season in Delaware and portions of Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia is extended to January 31, the season length is expanded from 70 to 90 days, and the daily bag and possession limits are increased from 3 and 6 to 4 and 8 birds, respectively. The regulation is intended to reduce or stabilize the size of the wintering Canada goose population in the area. There is concern about these extremely large goose concentrations because of increasing winter crop depredations, the growing potential for disease outbreaks, and the impact that may be occurring on food resources utilized by other species of waterfowl.

--The season length for snow geese is being increased from 30 to 60 days in the Atlantic Flyway. The snow goose population is considered about as large as can be supported by the available habitat. Crop depredations and salt marsh eat-outs are becoming serious problems. Present harvest rates appear to be having no effect on the population, which has been increasing in size annually since about 1971. The population numbered approximately 155,000 birds in May 1977.

(over)

--Louisiana is offered the option of selecting separate goose seasons in the eastern and western zones, as is permitted for duck hunting to provide a better means of aligning duck and goose seasons.

--A revision of the boundaries of the Horicon Zone in Wisconsin and the establishment of a second zone adjacent to Horicon is proposed. In addition, the statewide Canada goose harvest quota is increased from 28,000 to 35,000. These actions are in support of efforts to manage Canada geese that concentrate in excessive numbers on and around Horicon National Wildlife Refuge, and improve goose distribution throughout the flyway. As part of the same program, a similar quota change is made in Illinois.

--Various other changes in Canada goose regulations are being proposed. These include daily bag limit changes from 1 to 2 birds in all or parts of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Tennessee, establishment of a harvest quota zone in Kentucky (15,000-bird quota), and establishment of a closure zone in Arkansas.

--In South Dakota, a 2-week restriction on the length of the season for hunting "dark" geese (Canada and white-fronted geese), imposed in 1976 is removed. South Dakota has adopted regulations pertaining to commercial hunting. The season length is therefore restored to that of 1975.

--Canada goose hunting closures are extended 20 days to November 25 in the San Joaquin Valley Area of California to give added protection to the endangered Aleutian Canada geese. Mendocino County, in northwest California, is removed from the tri-county area totally closed to the hunting of Canada geese.

--Special falconry seasons are proposed to allow a maximum of 107 days of hunting. A new provision this year would permit States already allowing falconry hunting seasons to select extended falconry seasons for migratory game birds outside the regular hunting season. A reduced daily bag of 2 birds and 4 in possession for ducks, geese, and mergansers, singly or in the aggregate, would apply. States also are being offered the option to select extended falconry seasons for certain other game birds. These provisions would result in a very small additional harvest of migratory game birds and would allow falconers a small amount of recreational opportunity.

Public comments are invited on these proposals and should be addressed to the Director (Attention: Migratory Bird Management), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. The comment period closes August 25.

Final hunting season framework regulations will be published in the Federal Register after the public comment period ends and after the individual State conservation agencies review and comment on this current proposal. Within the final framework regulations, State game authorities can establish their own seasons and limits.