



NEWS

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

For release July 18, 1997

Hugh Vickery 202-208-1456

SERVICE PROPOSES REGULATORY CHANGES FOR WOODCOCK SEASONS IN RESPONSE TO POPULATION DECLINES

In response to continuing long-term declines in the woodcock population, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing several changes in this fall's hunting season for the popular game bird.

In the Eastern Region, the Service proposes to change the opening date from Oct. 1 to Oct. 6 and shorten the season from 45 days to 30 days. The closing date would remain Jan. 31 and the bag limit would stay at 3 birds.

In the Central Region, which generally includes the Mississippi migratory bird flyway and portions of the Central Flyway, the opening of the season would be moved from Sept. 1 to the Saturday closest to Sept. 22, which this year is Sept. 20. The season would be shortened from 65 days to 45 days, and the daily bag limit would be reduced from 5 birds to 3 birds.

Woodcock populations have experienced long-term declines throughout the bird's range. Woodcock breeding populations have fallen 52 percent in the Eastern Region since 1968. In the Central Region, breeding populations have declined 39 percent since 1968.

The proposal is an effort to reduce harvest. While the intent is to stem the population decline, the Service recognizes harvest reduction alone is not the solution.

Most biologists believe degradation and loss of habitat on both the breeding, migration and wintering grounds have been the major reasons for the declines, although adverse weather conditions may have contributed in recent years.

The Service will publish the proposal in the Federal Register in mid-July as part of its overall proposals for early season migratory bird hunting.

The public may comment in writing on the proposal through August 5, 1997. Comments should be mailed to: Chief, Migratory Bird Management Office, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Mail Stop 634, Arlington, VA 22203.

-FWS-

*Office of Public Affairs
1849 C Street, NW
Room 3447
Washington, DC 20240*

*(202)208-5634
FAX (202)219-2428*