



NEWS

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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SERVICE ANNOUNCES PROPOSAL TO CONSIDER LATER CLOSING DATE FOR DUCK SEASON IN LOWER MISSISSIPPI FLYWAY

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that it will consider proposals by states in the lower Mississippi Flyway to extend their fall duck hunting season up to January 31. Extensions would be granted by the Service only if the states can demonstrate that a reduction in the length of the season would compensate for increases in harvests expected from the extended framework dates. The harvest offset would ensure the number of ducks harvested remains proportional with other states in the flyway.

The Service's proposal comes in response to a request by the Lower-Region Regulations Committee of the Mississippi Flyway Council. It affects only the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

"With an appropriate reduction in the length of the season in these states, we believe we can honor their longstanding desire for a later closing date without affecting the overall harvest or harvest allocation within the Mississippi Flyway," said Service Director Jamie Rappaport Clark.

This would be the first change in the framework dates for duck hunting seasons since 1995 when the four Flyway Councils, made up of state wildlife officials who advise the Service on waterfowl hunting regulations, asked the Service to keep framework dates constant from year to year.

Since then, the framework dates for the Mississippi, Central, and Pacific flyways have been the Saturday nearest October 1 to the Sunday nearest January 20, while the Atlantic Flyway has been October 1 to January 20. The Service has asked the eligible states that are interested to submit a proposal, along with the necessary analysis, to determine the amount of reduction in season length that would be necessary to offset a later closing date.

All states selecting seasons extending beyond the traditional closing date of the Sunday nearest January 20 (January 17 in 1999) would have the same proportional reduction in season length. Any state choosing the option of a later closing date would have to maintain that closing date and the appropriate season length for a 5-year period beginning in the 1998-99 season.

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The proposal was published in the May 29, 1998, Federal Register. The public may comment in writing on the proposal until July 1, 1998. Comments should be mailed to Chief, Office of Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street NW., MS 634 ARLSQ, Washington, DC 20240.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service's 94 million acres include 514 national wildlife refuges, 78 ecological services field stations, 65 national fish hatcheries, 50 wildlife coordination areas, and 38 wetland management districts with waterfowl production areas.

The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes Federal excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies. This program is a cornerstone of the Nation's wildlife management efforts, funding fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, shooting ranges, and related projects across America.