

Background Report
Summary of Potential Changes to Migratory Bird Hunting Seasons, 2014-2015
Constant Agenda Item 3
September 10, 2014

The federal schedule for setting migratory bird hunting regulations precludes the Commission from taking timely conforming action to modify Rules 68A-13.003, F.A.C., Hunting Regulations for Ducks, Geese, and Coots, and 68A-13.008, F.A.C., Hunting Regulations for Migratory Birds other than Ducks and Coots. This report is to update the Commission on developments that have occurred recently, allowing us to anticipate changes in federal frameworks and our proposed rule changes for the 2014-2015 migratory bird seasons. The federal frameworks will not be final until late August for early-season migratory bird hunting regulations (dove, rail, gallinule, woodcock, snipe, and special early waterfowl seasons) and mid-September for the late-season migratory bird hunting regulations (regular waterfowl and coot season and limited Canada goose season). If final federal frameworks differ from our predictions, the Executive Director will confer with the Commission Chairman regarding any necessary decisions, and any resulting rule changes will be made initially by executive order, followed by a corresponding rule change at the November Commission meeting. Please note that the 2014-2015 migratory bird seasons information on the attached tables is not final and is subject to change.

Migratory Bird Seasons (other than Ducks, Geese, and Coots)

We anticipate an increase in the number of days to hunt doves from 70 days to 90 days. Results of a dove hunter preference poll, regarding placement of the additional hunt days, were presented at the April Commission meeting, and the structure of a 90-day dove season was approved by the Commission. The change in the structure of the dove hunting season also necessitates changes to the falconry dove hunting season because federal frameworks limit the total number of days for hunting any species or group of species to 107 days. In previous years, the falconry season coincided with the regular, 70-day, dove hunting season. The additional 37 hunting days afforded to falconers occurred during the closed periods between phases of the regular season with extra days added at the end of the regular season. After consultation with members of the falconry community, the falconry season for doves will be changed to mirror the proposed 90-day regular dove season, with the additional 17 days added at the end of the regular season. These changes will be made by executive order after final federal frameworks for early season migratory bird regulations are published, followed by a corresponding rule change at the November Commission meeting. Dates and bag/possession limits for the 2014-2015 dove season, based on proposed federal frameworks and Rule 68A-13.008, F.A.C., are as indicated in the attached tables (Tables 1 and 2).

There are no proposed changes to federal frameworks for rail, gallinule, woodcock, and snipe seasons. Dates and bag/possession limits for the 2014-2015 seasons for these species, based on proposed federal frameworks and Rule 68A-13.008, F.A.C., are as indicated in the attached tables (Tables 1 and 2).

Special September Duck Season

There are two proposed changes to Florida's special September duck season within the federal frameworks. The first proposed change is an increase in the daily bag limit from four to six birds. Of the six birds, only two may be wood ducks; teal may be taken up to the six bird daily bag limit. The second proposed change is the addition of a four-day teal season immediately following the five-day wood duck/teal season. In February 2013, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and its state partners released a report that assessed the harvest potential of teal. The analyses indicated that harvest rates for blue-winged teal could be up to nine times higher than current harvest rates. In response, the Atlantic Flyway Council proposed initiation of an experimental September teal season in Florida, to be held in conjunction with its existing September wood duck and teal season. The proposal was endorsed by the Service in June 2014. Staff recommends changing FWC's rules to allow for these changes. Staff will make these changes by executive order after final federal frameworks for early season migratory bird regulations are published, followed by a corresponding rule change at the November Commission meeting. Dates and bag/possession limits for the 2014 season, based on proposed federal frameworks and Rule 68A-13.003, F.A.C, are as indicated in Table 3.

Regular Waterfowl and Coot Season

Proposed late season frameworks will be published in the Federal Register on or about August 20. We anticipate that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will propose a 60-day season with a six-bird bag limit again for 2014-2015 in Atlantic Flyway states, including Florida. The Atlantic Flyway Council Technical Section has endorsed this proposal.

There is one proposed change to the species' bag limits: the canvasback daily bag limit will be reduced from two to one. This proposed change is in response to the current breeding population for this species. Staff recommends changing FWC's rules to incorporate this change, and making the change by executive order in late September, followed by a corresponding rule change at the November Commission meeting. At this time, we expect all other daily bag limits will remain the same as last year and as currently contained in Rule 68A-13.003, F.A.C. Details for Florida's anticipated season structure based on these expectations, recommendations, and Rule 68A-13.003, F.A.C. are provided in Table 4.

Canada Goose Season

We anticipate no changes to federal frameworks for the regular Canada goose season; however, staff recommends adjusting the closing date of the September Canada Goose season to coincide with the ending of the Special September Duck Season. Adjusting the season closure to the last Sunday in September would provide four additional days in 2014 by increasing the season from 19 days to 23 days. Closing the last Sunday in September would result in a 23-day (eight out of ten years) or 30-day season (two out of ten years). Additionally, this season adjustment would make Florida's September Goose Season mirror Georgia's September Canada goose season, reducing potential conflict or stakeholder dissatisfaction with differing season dates, particularly on Lake Seminole in Jackson County. This change will be made by executive order after final federal frameworks for early season migratory bird regulations are published,

followed by a corresponding rule change at the November Commission meeting. The attached table (Table 5) shows season dates and bag/possession limits for all phases of the statewide Canada goose season, based on the proposed and anticipated federal frameworks and Rule 68A-13.003, F.A.C.

Table 1. Previous (2013-2014) dates and anticipated (2014-2015) dates, bag and possession limits for seasons for migratory birds other than ducks and coots. The 2014-2015 season dates and bag and possession limits reflect anticipated federal frameworks. **Please note – these regulations are not final and are subject to change.**

Species	2013-2014	2014-2015	
		Dates	Bag/Possession
Mourning Dove and White-winged Dove	Oct. 5 – Oct. 28 ¹ Nov. 16 – Dec 1 Dec. 14 – Jan. 12	Sept. 27 – Oct. 27 ¹ Nov. 8 – Dec. 1 Dec. 12 – Jan. 15	15/45 ²
Snipe	Nov. 1 - Feb. 15	Nov. 1 - Feb. 15	8/24
Crow	Aug. 10 – Oct. 27 ³ Nov. 11 – Feb. 18	Aug. 9 – Oct. 26 ³ Nov. 11 – Feb. 18	None

¹ Shooting hours: noon until sunset.

² The daily bag limit of doves is mourning and white-winged doves in the aggregate.

³ Saturdays and Sundays only.

Table 2. Previous (2013-2014) dates and anticipated (2014-2015) dates, bag and possession limits for falconry season for migratory birds other than ducks and coots. The 2014-2015 season dates and bag and possession limits reflect anticipated federal frameworks. **Please note – these regulations are not final and are subject to change.**

Species	2013-2014	2014-2015	
		Dates	Bag/Possession
Mourning Dove and White-winged Dove	Oct. 5 – Jan. 20	Sept. 27 – Oct. 27 ¹ Nov. 8 – Dec. 1 Dec. 12 – Feb. 2	3/9
Rails	Sept. 1 – Dec. 16	Sept. 1 – Dec. 16	3/9
Common Moorhen	Sept. 1 – Dec. 14	Sept. 1 – Dec. 14	3/9
Snipe	Nov. 1 - Feb. 15	Nov. 1 - Feb. 15	3/9
Woodcock	Nov. 24 - Mar. 10	Nov. 24 - Mar. 10	3/9

Table 3. Previous dates and anticipated (2014) dates, bag and possession limits for the special September duck season. The 2014 season dates and bag and possession limits reflect anticipated federal frameworks. **Please note – these regulations are not final and are subject to change.**

2012	2013	2014	
		Dates	Bag/ Possession
Sept. 24-28	Sept. 22-26	Sept. 20-24	6/18 teal and wood ducks in the aggregate, no more than 2/6 of which may be wood ducks;
N/A	N/A	Sept. 25-28	6/18 teal only

Table 4. Previous dates and proposed (2014-2015) dates and bag and possession limits for ducks, coots, and light geese (snow [including blue] and Ross' geese). The 2014-2015 season dates and bag and possession limits reflect anticipated federal frameworks. **Please note – these regulations are not final and are subject to change.**

Year	First Phase	Second Phase	Leon County ¹	Falconry
2012-2013	Sat., Nov. 17 – Sun., Nov.25 (Thanksgiving Nov. 22)	Sat., Dec. 8 – Sun., Jan. 27 Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days: Sat/Sun., Feb. 2 – 3, 2013	Thurs., Nov. 22 Fri. Nov. 23 Mon. Dec. 24 Tues. Dec. 5 Mon. Dec. 31 Tues. Jan. 1 Mon. Jan. 21	Oct. 30 – Nov. 12 Feb. 4 – Mar. 1
2013-2014	Sat., Nov. 23 – Sun., Dec.1 (Thanksgiving Nov. 28)	Sat., Dec.7 – Sun., Jan. 26 Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days: Sat/Sun., Feb. 1 – 2, 2014	Thurs., Nov. 28 Fri., Nov. 29 Tues., Dec. 24 Wed., Dec. 25 Tues., Dec. 31 Wed., Jan. 1 Mon., Jan. 20	Oct. 30 – Nov. 12 Feb. 2 – Mar. 3
2014-2015	Sat., Nov. 22 – Sun., Nov 30 ² (Thanksgiving Nov. 27)	Sat., Dec. 6 – Sun., Jan. 25 ² Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days: ³ Sat/Sun., Jan. 31, 2013 and Feb 1, 2014	Thurs., Nov. 27 Fri., Nov. 28 Wed., Dec. 24 Thurs. Dec. 25 Wed. Dec. 31 Thurs. Jan. 1 Mon., Jan. 19	Nov. 3 – Nov. 12 ⁴ Feb. 2 – Feb. 27

¹In addition to Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays.

²Bag/Possession limits: Ducks - 6/18. The 6-duck limit shall consist of no more than 1 black duck; 1 mottled duck, 1 fulvous whistling-duck, 2 pintail, 1 canvasback, 2 redheads, 2 scaup, 3 wood ducks, 4 scoters, and 4 mallards (no more than 2 of which may be females). All other species of duck (except harlequin ducks) may be taken up to the 6-duck daily limit. Coots - 15/45. Mergansers - 5/15, only 2/6 of which may be hooded mergansers. Light geese - 15/none.

³Bag/Possession limits: same as above; plus, common moorhen - 15/45.

⁴Bag/Possession limits: ducks, coots, and light geese - 3/9, singly or in the aggregate.

Table 5. Previous dates and proposed (2014-2015) dates and bag and possession limits for the Canada goose season. The 2014-2015 season dates and bag and possession limits reflect anticipated federal frameworks. **Please note – these regulations are not final and are subject to change.**

Year	September Season	First Phase	Second Phase
2012-2013	Sept. 1-26	Sat., Nov. 17 – Sun., Nov. 25 (Thanksgiving Nov. 22)	Sat., Dec. 1 – Wed., Jan. 30
2013-2014	Sept. 7-25	Sat., Nov. 23 – Sun., Dec. 1 (Thanksgiving Nov. 28)	Sun., Dec. 1 – Thur., Jan. 30
2014-2015 ¹	Sept. 6-28	Sat., Nov. 22 – Sun., Nov. 30 (Thanksgiving Nov. 27)	Mon., Dec. 1 – Fri., Jan. 30, 2014

¹Bag/Possession limits: 5/15