MEMORANDUM

To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

From: Diane Eggeman, Director, Division of Hunting and Game Management

Date: June 24, 2015

Subject: Migratory Bird Hunting Regulations

Purpose:
The purpose of this item is threefold:

1. To inform the Commission of a change to the process in which the US Fish and Wildlife Service establishes hunting regulation frameworks for migratory birds and the resultant changes necessary for FWC rulemaking procedures;
2. To inform the Commission of the potential addition of a purple swamphen season to Florida’s migratory bird seasons; and,
3. To provide a summary of the anticipated Early Migratory Bird Seasons for 2015-16.

Summary:
The establishment of migratory bird hunting regulations is led by a federal process that is subsequently codified into State rule by Commission action. The timing of the federal process has not aligned well with Commission meetings, resulting in staff having to utilize a more complicated process and impacts the ability of the Commission to print and distribute relevant hunting communication with stakeholders. A recent change in the federal process will lead to improvements from both perspectives of administrative action and communication with stakeholders.

The Commission currently establishes the migratory bird hunting regulations and seasons by Executive Order, followed by Commission action at the November/December Commission meeting to codify in rule any changes established by the order. This process has two segments, early-season and late-season regulations, which causes the Commission to take separate action on both seasons.

The federal process recently has been changed to combine the current early and late season regulatory actions into a single process for establishing all migratory bird hunting regulations. Consequently, the timing of decisions also has changed. The updated federal process will begin in early October, and final federal season frameworks will be available in late March. Commission staff will now be able to present a holistic Migratory Bird Season report and any needed draft rule changes to the Commission at the April meeting. All rules concerning early and late season migratory game birds can be finalized at the June Commission meeting. This new schedule will begin in October 2015 for the 2016-17 hunting season.
Because of this earlier timing, all migratory bird seasons can be set by Commission rules, within the established federal frameworks, before the seasons begin. This will also allow for earlier publication of the season dates and brochures, which benefits stakeholders by allowing for better hunt planning.

In addition to this change in federal process, staff will also present the anticipated 2015-16 Early Migratory Bird Season frameworks. These include no changes for Florida, other than the potential addition of the nonnative purple swamphen as a legal species to take during any waterfowl hunting season.

**Staff Recommendation:**
Approve the proposed regulations

**Staff Contact and/or Presenter:**
Jaime Feddersen, Waterfowl and Small Game Management Program Coordinator, Division of Hunting and Game Management