

**For Immediate Release
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**IDNR Recommends Waterfowl Season Dates for
2008-2009**

**Proposals Sent to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
for Concurrence**

Duck Season Length Still Under Consideration

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SPRINGFIELD, IL – The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) is recommending 60-day duck seasons in all zones, 85-day Canada goose seasons in the North and Central zones, and a 66-day Canada goose season in the South Zone for the 2008-09 waterfowl season.

The recommendations – which were reviewed by the IDNR Natural Resources Advisory Board – include opening the regular duck and Canada goose seasons on Oct. 18 in the North Zone, Oct. 25 in the Central Zone and Nov. 27 in the South Zone. The state's proposed regulations will be forwarded to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for final approval later this summer.

While Illinois is recommending duck season dates based on a 60-day season, the USFWS has not yet determined whether the duck season will be 60, 45 or 30 days this fall. The USFWS Adaptive Harvest Management Report guiding regulations decisions for the 2008-09 waterfowl seasons is scheduled to be released on or about July 25.

The IDNR is also recommending regulations for early-season goose hunting in September that include a new five-goose daily limit in the North and Central zones.

“These proposed regulations should give waterfowl hunters some good opportunities to get in the field when geese and ducks are there this fall,” said IDNR Acting Director Sam Flood. “Our recommendations are based on our surveys of hunter preferences, along with aerial waterfowl survey and long term weather data in hopes of providing the best hunting opportunities possible in each zone.”

Illinois established duck season dates in the North and Central zones for a five-year period beginning in 2006.

Preliminary results of the 2007 Illinois Waterfowl Hunter Survey indicate that 66 percent of hunters in the North Zone and 64 percent of hunters in the Central Zone were satisfied with duck season dates last year. In the South Zone, 54 percent of hunters were satisfied with the duck season dates. When given the choice for duck seasons starting November 15 or November 27, 54 percent of South Zone duck hunters preferred November 27 compared to 41 percent who liked a November 15 start date and five percent had no opinion. South Zone aerial survey data show no appreciable difference in the number of ducks in areas surveyed for 60-day seasons starting any time between early November and early December. The IDNR adopted a later duck season starting date for the South Zone in 2006, and evaluations have shown no consistent differences in hunter numbers or the number of ducks harvested at public hunting areas at Rend Lake and Carlyle Lake public hunting areas.

Based on a revised Canada goose harvest management strategy, the IDNR eliminated a goose harvest quota system in 2006. Other states in the MVP Canada goose range began the “no-quota” system for Canada goose hunting in 2007. The elimination of goose season quotas ended the practice of closing seasons early when quotas were reached.

The recommendation for the regular Canada goose season calls for a continuous 85-day season in the North Zone ending next Jan. 10, a split 85-day season in the Central Zone ending next Jan. 31, and a split 66-day season in the South Zone ending next Jan. 31.

Illinois is also recommending snow goose seasons for 2008-09 that open with the regular waterfowl seasons and run continuously through the end of each zone’s regular Canada goose season. Conservation Order snow goose hunting commences the day after the regular Canada goose season ends in each zone and continues through next Mar. 31.

Waterfowl Population and Harvest Information

Early June aerial surveys found 305,190 breeding Mississippi Valley Population (MVP) Canada geese, down from 402,640 in 2007 and 17 percent below the 1989-2007 average. Indications of a late spring suggest reduced reproduction on the breeding grounds. Nesting conditions were poor and it should be a poor production year for MVP geese. The 2008 total spring population estimate was 626,358, larger than in 2007 and about four percent above the 1989-2007 average. The decline in the breeding population is attributed to the late spring and a late April blizzard, not an actual decline in the number of breeding-age Canada geese.

A higher percentage of young geese in the flock often indicates better hunting. Biologists expect a lower percentage of young geese in the fall flight than has been seen in recent years.

MVP Canada geese comprise about 51 percent of the Illinois harvest during the regular waterfowl season. Giant Canada geese comprise about 44 percent (less than half of those from Illinois, with the remainder from other Mississippi Flyway states and provinces). Eastern Prairie Population Canada geese (Manitoba) comprise four percent of the Illinois harvest.

Regulations changes are not considered unless the breeding population falls below 225,000 geese. As a result, Illinois hunters will again be offered an 85-day Canada goose season in the North and Central zones and a 66-day season in the South Zone. During the regular Canada goose season in Illinois, the statewide daily bag limit will be two geese with a possession limit of four geese.

The preliminary Canada goose harvest estimate in Illinois last year during the regular season was 141,205, the highest since Illinois began estimating harvest in 1981. During the 2007 September season, hunters took an estimated 16,207 Canada geese.

Duck hunting prospects for this year are average. The recent May pond and duck breeding population surveys in the north-central U.S. and Canada indicated a total duck population estimate of 37.3 million birds, which is nine percent lower than last year and 11 percent above the long term average.

Season length is based primarily on May ponds in Canada and mallard breeding populations in the U.S. and Canada combined. May ponds in Canada (3.1 million) were down 30 percent from last year and were 11 percent below the long term average. Mallard breeding populations on the traditional surveyed area (7.7 million; similar to the long term average) plus the Great Lakes states totaled 8.4 million, which is four percent below last year.

The USFWS will release the Adaptive Harvest Management updated decision matrix for selecting regulations packages on or about July 25. If the decision is for a 45- or 30-day duck season, the IDNR Natural Resources Advisory Board will meet Aug. 6 to consider new duck and goose season dates. If a 60-day duck season is selected by the USFWS, the waterfowl season dates being announced today will not be changed.

Total May ponds in the U.S. and Canada combined were 4.4 million, 37 percent lower than last year and 10 percent lower than the long term average. Abundances of redheads were the highest ever estimated in this survey area, and the abundance of green-winged teal was the second highest for this region. Blue-winged teal were at their fourth highest level.

The pintail population estimates (2.6 million) declined 22 percent from last year and were 36 percent below the long term average. Based on the USFWS interior pintail harvest strategy, pintail season should be the same length as the regular duck season this year.

The canvasback population dropped to 489,000, 44 percent lower than last year and 14 percent below the long term average. As a result, the canvasback season could be closed this year by the USFWS.

The scaup population estimate of 3.74 million increased eight percent over last year, but was still 27 percent below the long term average. The USFWS decreased the daily bag limit from three to two scaup in 2005 because of concerns regarding a decreasing population with increasing harvest rates in recent years. The USFWS will likely recommend reducing the daily bag limit to one scaup for this season or shorten the season to 45 days with a two-bird bag limit. Preliminary results of the 2007 Illinois Waterfowl Hunter Survey indicated that Illinois duck hunters had a slight preference for a 45-day season with two scaup daily (31 percent) versus a 60-day season with one scaup daily (28 percent).

The preliminary Illinois duck harvest estimate for 2007 was 464,366, which was down eight percent compared with 2006, but was the fifth highest harvest since state estimates began in 1981. The preliminary mallard harvest estimate last year was 265,369, the sixth highest since 1981. On average, duck hunters spent just over 12 days afield to harvest 9.5 ducks per hunter for the season. Harvest of teal during the 2007 September season in Illinois was 29,800, compared to 28,016 in 2006.

September Season Recommendations

The recommendation for the September 2008 Canada goose season (Sept. 1-15) includes a higher daily bag limit for the North and Central zones. In recent years, hunters in the Northeast Zone have been allowed to take up to five geese per day during the September season, while hunters elsewhere in the state could take up to two geese per day during the 15-day September season. The recommendation for this September includes a daily limit of five geese in the Northeast, North and Central zones. The daily limit remains two geese in the South Zone.

“The Mississippi Flyway population of giant Canada geese has increased by more than 50 percent during the past 14 years, while the population of these geese is also higher here in Illinois,” Director Flood said. “An increase in the daily Canada goose bag limit during the September season in the North and Central zones will provide more hunter opportunity and won’t adversely affect the statewide or flyway giant Canada goose population.”

Illinois is recommending a 16-day teal hunting season of Sept. 6 – 21 with a daily limit of four teal (possession limit of eight). Federal rules allow for a 16-day teal season when the blue-winged teal breeding population is more than 4.7 million. This year’s blue-

winged teal breeding population estimate of 6.64 million is similar to last year's estimate of 6.71 million, which was the second highest population estimate ever recorded.

The Illinois recommendations sent to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for 2008-09 waterfowl hunting seasons are outlined below. Final approval is expected after the Service Regulations Committee meeting, July 30-31.

**PROPOSED 2008-2009 SEPTEMBER WATERFOWL SEASONS
(COMPARED WITH 2007-08)**

STATEWIDE

	<u>2008-2009</u>	<u>2007-2008</u>
Canada Geese	Sept. 1 - Sept. 15	Sept. 1 - Sept. 15
Teal	Sept. 6 - Sept. 21	Sept. 8 - Sept. 23

2008 SEPTEMBER WATERFOWL SEASON PROPOSAL

Species	Season Dates	Duration	Limits	
			Bag	Possession
Teal	Sept. 6 -21	16 days	4	8
Canada Goose	Sept. 1-15	15 days	5-Northeast, North&Centra <u>1</u> 2 - Remainder of State	10 - Northeast, North&Centra <u>1</u> 4 - Remainder of State

**PROPOSED 2008-09 REGULAR WATERFOWL SEASONS
(COMPARED TO 2007-2008 SEASONS)**

NORTH ZONE

	<u>2008-2009</u>	<u>2007-2008</u>
Youth Hunt	Oct. 11 - Oct 12	Oct. 13 - Oct. 14
Ducks	Oct. 18 - Dec. 16	Oct. 20 - Dec. 18
Canada Geese	Oct. 18 - Jan. 10	Oct. 20 - Jan. 12
Snow Geese	Oct. 18 - Jan. 10	Oct. 20 - Jan. 12
White-fronted Geese	Oct. 31 - Jan. 10	Nov. 2 - Jan. 12

CENTRAL ZONE

	<u>2008-2009</u>	<u>2007-2008</u>
Youth Hunt	Oct. 18 - Oct. 19	Oct. 20 - Oct. 21
Ducks	Oct. 25 - Dec. 23	Oct. 27 - Dec. 25
Canada Geese	Oct. 25 - Nov. 9 & Nov. 24 - Jan. 31	Oct. 27 - Nov. 8 & Nov. 21 - Jan. 31
Snow Geese	Oct. 25 - Jan. 31	Oct. 27 - Jan. 31
White-fronted Geese	Nov. 21 - Jan. 31	Nov. 21 - Jan. 31

SOUTH ZONE

	<u>2008-2009</u>	<u>2007-2008</u>
Youth Hunt	Nov. 15 - Nov. 16	Nov. 10 - Nov. 11
Ducks	Nov. 27 - Jan. 25	Nov. 22 - Jan. 20
Canada Geese	Nov. 27 - Jan. 31	Nov. 22 - Nov. 25 & Dec. 1 - Jan. 31
Snow Geese	Nov. 27 - Jan. 31	Nov. 22 - Jan. 31
White-fronted Geese	Nov. 27 - Jan. 31	Nov. 22 - Jan. 31