

Canada goose season in the Kentucky/Barkley Lakes Zone in west Tennessee.

The Pacific Flyway Council requested modification of the early Canada goose seasons criteria to allow any State to conduct a season between the dates of September 1 and 15 for a 3-year experimental period. The Council recommended that States continue monitoring hunter activity and success until they begin participation in the Harvest Information Program and close areas where evidence from band recoveries or other sources indicated unacceptable (greater than 10 percent) harvest of non-target populations of concern. Special seasons occurring after September 15 would be required to meet all existing Service criteria for special Canada goose seasons and would not be altered in any way during the 3-year experimental period.

The Pacific Flyway Council recommended continuation of the early September Canada goose season in southwestern Wyoming and that an experimental hunt be allowed in Teton County, Wyoming, where it would be by State permit (no more than 40 permits may be issued) with framework dates of September 1 to 15 and a maximum limit of 2 Canada geese permitted per season.

Written Comments: The Illinois Department of Conservation supported the Service's proposal to allow September 1 to 15 Canada goose seasons without requiring the data collection necessary under the Service's special Canada goose season criteria. They noted that this would free States from the constraints of gathering data, which can be difficult and expensive to obtain, and would allow greater management flexibility. Further, believing that the lack of harvest of migrants during these special seasons has been documented, they stated that these special seasons are an important component of their urban/suburban goose programs.

Service Response: The Service has reviewed the existing information from experimental special early Canada goose seasons and has concluded that the proposed modifications will meet the established criteria while reducing the cost and administrative burden of these seasons; however, the Service reaffirms its previously stated commitment to target these special seasons at locally breeding and/or nuisance Canada goose populations that nest primarily in the conterminous United States. The Service proposes to modify the criteria for special Canada goose seasons to permit States to choose one of two options for these special seasons:

Option 1: States (except Alaska and Hawaii) may hold a special early Canada goose season of up to 15 days

between the dates of September 1 and September 15. Such a season must receive Flyway Council endorsement prior to the establishment of federal frameworks, and States must agree to close any areas to hunting where evidence from band recoveries or other sources indicates unacceptable (greater than 10%) harvest of non-target populations during the special season. The Counties of Tuscola, Huron and Saginaw in Michigan are not eligible for this option because evidence of excessively high harvests of Southern James Bay Canada geese was obtained in a previous experimental evaluation. Additionally, because of evidence suggesting early-arriving migrant Canada geese, the special early Canada goose season in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan cannot extend beyond September 10.

Option 2: States may hold a special early Canada goose season that would include dates after September 15, except in those areas identified in Option 1. Such a season would be subject to all data-gathering, monitoring and reporting requirements in the special-season criteria. Additionally, such a season would not be subject to any modification during the experimental period.

The Service also proposes that when the criteria for special Canada goose seasons are modified, no additional modifications will be considered for at least five years, to allow sufficient time for evaluation of cumulative impacts.

The special-season criteria, including the modifications indicated above, are shown below:

Criteria for Special Canada Goose Seasons

1. States may hold special Canada goose seasons, in addition to their regular seasons, for the purpose of controlling local breeding populations or nuisance geese. These seasons are to be directed only at Canada goose populations that nest primarily in the conterminous United States and must target a specific population of Canada geese. The harvest of nontarget Canada geese must not exceed 10 percent of the special-season harvest during early seasons or 20 percent during late seasons. More restrictive proportions may apply in instances where a nontarget Canada goose population of special concern is involved.

2. Early seasons must be held prior to the regular season.

3. Late seasons must be held after the regular season but no later than February 15.

4. The daily bag and possession limits may be no more than 5 and 10 Canada geese, respectively.

5. The area(s) open to hunting will be described in State regulations.

6. For seasons that include hunting days after September 15:

A. All seasons will be conducted under a specific Memorandum of Agreement (Agreement). Provisions for discontinuing, extending, or modifying the seasons will be included in the Agreement.

B. All seasons initially will be considered experimental. The evaluation required of the State will be incorporated into the Agreement and will include at least the following:

(a) Conduct neck-collar observations (where appropriate) and population surveys beginning at least 2 years prior to the requested season and continuing during the experiment.

(b) Determine derivation of neck-collar codes and/or leg-band recoveries from observations and harvested geese.

(c) Collect morphological information from harvested geese, where appropriate, to ascertain probable source population(s) of the harvest.

(d) Analyze relevant band-recovery data.

(e) Estimate hunter activity and harvest.

(f) Prepare annual and final reports of the experiment.

C. If the results of the evaluation warrant continuation of the season beyond the experimental period, the State will continue to estimate hunter activity and harvest for all areas, including those areas where seasons do not extend beyond September 15, and report these to the Service annually until the State begins participating in the Harvest Information Program.

7. All special seasons will be subject to periodic re-evaluation when circumstances or special situations warrant.

B. Regular Seasons

The Service stated in the March 24, 1995, **Federal Register**, that it was reviewing the population status of the Atlantic Population of Canada geese and was conducting an assessment of the past 3 years of harvest reduction to determine whether additional harvest restrictions were necessary. Based on preliminary information from the recently completed spring breeding survey, the Service now believes that further harvest reduction is needed to reverse the downward trend in this population and increase the numbers of breeding pairs. The Service will work cooperatively with the Atlantic Flyway Council to modify the existing regulations and develop appropriate new season frameworks.

9. Sandhill Cranes

Council Recommendations: The Pacific Flyway Council recommended following the management plan with