shooting hours. Further, the clubs requested that the Service initiate regulations for waterfowl guides and provide more educational information regarding safety, conservation, and regulations.

Service Response: The regulationsdevelopment process is a wellestablished system directly involving the Flyway Councils, the States, nongovernmental organizations and the public. When the preliminary proposed rulemaking document was published in the Federal Register on March 24, 1995, the Service gave notice that the process of promulgating hunting regulations 'must, by its nature, operate under time constraints". Ample time must be given to gather and interpret survey data, consider recommendations and develop proposals, and to receive public comment. Scheduled dates and meetings were set to give the greatest possible opportunity for public input to the process given the time constraints. The Service is obligated to, and does, give serious consideration to all information received as public comment. Further, the Service believes that any party that wishes to become directly involved in the current process can do so through any number of available opportunities.

Regarding population estimates for hunted species, the long-term objectives of the Service include providing opportunities to harvest portions of certain migratory game bird populations and to limit harvests to levels compatible with each population's ability to maintain healthy, viable numbers. Annually, the status of populations are evaluated and the potential impacts of hunting are considered. While the Service recognizes that some population estimates are better than others, the Service has no reason to believe that the hunting seasons provided herein are inconsistent with the current status of waterfowl populations and long-term population goals.

1. Ducks

The categories used to discuss issues related to duck harvest management are as follows: (A) General Harvest Strategy, (B) Framework Dates, (C) Season Length and Bag Limits, (D) Zones and Split Seasons, and (E) Special Seasons/ Species Management. Only those categories containing substantial recommendations are included below.

A. General Harvest Strategy

Public-Hearing Comments: Mr. Bruce Barbour supported the Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) process used in selecting this year's liberal package and specified species restrictions. He indicated that increased hunting opportunity will occur on all species under the liberal option, and efforts should be initiated to cooperatively develop harvest approaches for each of these species.

Dr. Rollin Sparrowe commended the Service and State cooperators for their commitment toward implementing the AHM approach to duck hunting and to distance the process from political influence. He supported partial adoption of the AHM approach this year which recognized goals established in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. He was pleased that after years of concern about the status of ducks, more liberal seasons could be offered.

Mr. Scott Sutherland also expressed support for AHM and the regulatory matrix proposed by the Service this year which resulted in the liberal package recommendation. Under full implementation of AHM, however, Mr. Sutherland expressed a desire to modify the framework packages allowing a consideration of longer seasons with smaller daily bag limits.

Mr. George Vandel supported the proposed use of flexible framework opening and closing dates for duck seasons in the Central Flyway, the liberal regulatory package, and the AHM process that was used in this interim year prior to its full implementation. He thanked the Service for the assistance with communication efforts on behalf of AHM, but pointed out that continuing efforts will be necessary for successful implementation in future years. He then strongly suggested that the Service work closely with the Flyway Councils in developing regulatory packages for next year. He believed that this cooperation will be especially crucial for further implementation by facilitating ownership and support for full implementation of AHM in 1996.

Written Comments: The Pennsylvania Game Commission expressed support for the proposed regulations strategy as an interim approach for 1995 only. They continue to be concerned that the process relies on mid-continent mallards as a basis for regulatory changes in the Atlantic Flyway.

Likewise, the Delaware Department of Fish and Wildlife generally endorsed the concept of regulatory packages but remained concerned that the process was linked to the mid-continent populations of mallards and prairiewetland conditions.

The Illinois Department of Conservation also expressed support for the AHM process but were concerned that there had been insufficient time to properly educate the public. They also felt that the set of regulatory options offered may be too limited, particularly with regard to bag limits.

The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks expressed support for AHM and the interim steps proposed for the 1995-95 hunting season. Additionally, they supported the idea of expanding the status of duck breeding populations and habitat used in AHM from mallards and prairie-Canada ponds to include other duck species and ponds in the Dakotas and Montana.

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks expressed support for the development and implementation of AHM. They continued to stress, however, the need for additional communications efforts relative to the status of duck populations and the implementation of more liberal regulations. They also believed that failure to renew the 1995 Farm Bill poses one of the greatest threats to continued recovery and maintenance of duck populations.

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources commended the Service for their efforts in the cooperative development of AHM and supported implementation of this strategy in 1995 to the extent possible. Although they see a need for further refinement of the regulatory options, particularly for pintails, they supported the proposed option for 1995.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department supported 1995-96 as the transition year to full implementation of AHM for establishing duck seasons and bag limits in 1996-97. Texas believed that the Service Regulations Committee (SRC) must improve the input process for the four Flyway Councils if AHM is to gain the understanding and support needed to assure its longevity in setting duck seasons. In addition, Texas states that the SRC and the Service Director should utilize Flyway Consultants early in the 1996-97 regulations process to facilitate communications between the Flyway Councils and the Service with consultants functioning in a role similar to that played this year by the AHM Task Force in working with the AHM Technical Working Group to facilitate and strengthen Federal/Flyway communications in AHM regulation package development. Texas believed that early involvement by the Consultants would help assure improved coordination and explanation of the various regulation packages with the States and Flyway Councils before and during the March council meetings.

The National Rifle Association agreed that the approach to setting duck hunting regulations is in need of