

Population of Canada geese be suspended; except for West Virginia, the Southern James Bay Population harvest areas of Pennsylvania, and a newly created New England Zone [Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont (excluding the Lake Champlain Zone), Massachusetts (excluding the Western Zone), and Connecticut (excluding Litchford and Hartford Counties)]. In the New England Zone, the Council recommended a 30-day season, with a framework of October 1 through November 30, with a 1-bird daily bag limit. The Atlantic Flyway Council also recommended that, in light of the decision to suspend the regular season on migrant Canada geese flyway-wide, the Service should immediately begin a review of framework dates for resident Canada goose seasons to determine whether dates could be expanded to increase harvests.

The Upper-Region and Lower-Region Regulations Committees of the Mississippi Flyway Council recommended several changes in Canada goose quotas, season lengths, etc., based on population status and population management plans and programs.

The Central Flyway Council recommended several changes for western dark geese: (1) an increase in the aggregate bag limit from 3 to 4 birds, (2) an extension of the framework closing date from January 31 to the Sunday nearest February 15 (February 18) for the Western Goose Zone of Texas, and (3) an increase in the dark goose bag limit from 2 to 4 birds in Sheridan County, Montana.

The Pacific Flyway Council recommended that the bag limit for Canada geese in central Montana, western Wyoming, and southeastern Idaho be increased from 3 to 4 birds. The Council also recommended that the daily bag limit for cackling Canada geese in the quota zones of western Oregon and western Washington be increased from 1 to 2 birds.

*Public-Hearing Comments:* Mr. Lloyd Alexander supported the Service's proposal to close the Canada goose season throughout the Atlantic Flyway. He stated that existing data do not support a limited season in the New England States and that survival rates on birds migrating through the Maritime Provinces of Canada are actually lower than those breeding in northern Quebec, to delineate this population, he suggested that better data was needed. He also encouraged the Service to contact the Canadian Wildlife Service and request that the sport harvest on Atlantic Population Canada Geese be suspended in Quebec and Ontario by

emergency closure this year. Further, he asked the Service to work with representatives of the native communities to reduce subsistence harvest in northern Quebec and to ask the Canadian Wildlife Service to review the harvest and consider restrictions on Canada geese in the Maritime Provinces.

Mr. Bruce Barbour recommended that further restrictions on the Atlantic and Southern James Bay Population of Canada geese and the dusky subspecies should be sought for their recovery.

Mr. Mike Harris commented that Canada geese have changed their movement patterns in recent years and no longer migrate north in the spring, as they once did. Rather, he believes they remain as resident birds and breed locally. He maintains that although these geese are in good numbers, early seasons on these birds should not be allowed, because it reduces the overall numbers of geese available during the regular season. He claims that it is difficult to stay in business and suggests that if the hunting season is closed on Canada geese, the guides and outfitters should receive some financial assistance from the Federal Government. He recommended that a 30-day season with a 1-bird daily bag limit be offered until the changing patterns of resident geese could be reviewed.

Dr. Rollin Sparrowe commended the Service and the Atlantic Flyway Council for proposing the closure on Canada goose hunting in the Atlantic Flyway, urged the Service to request the Canadian Wildlife Service take similar action in Canada, and expressed support for initiating research to better understand the problem.

*Written Comments:* The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, and the Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife, expressed support for the suspension of the 1995-96 regular Canada goose season throughout most of the Atlantic Flyway, but opposed the Service's proposal to extend the season closure into several New England States. They strongly urged the Service to adopt the Atlantic Flyway Council's recommendation to provide a reduced 30-day season, between October 1 and November 30, with a 1-bird daily bag limit for States in the newly created New England Zone. They argued that migrant Canada geese harvested in this Zone are derived from Maritime Canada and believed that the status of this group of geese is better than that of geese breeding in Northern Quebec. Further, they believed a limited season is necessary to control the

rapidly growing resident population of Canada geese and to reduce the number of nuisance complaints. The New York State Division of Fish and Wildlife also requested that the western half of Long Island be considered for inclusion into the New England Zone, based on band recovery data, and be permitted a limited season as outlined above.

In Massachusetts, the Town of Yarmouth and two local sportsmen organizations urged the Service to reconsider the Atlantic Flyway Council's proposal for a 30-day season, 1-bird daily bag limit to control numbers of non-migratory geese. Several individuals from Massachusetts also complained about the growing public nuisance problem with resident geese and stressed the need for an open regular season to control their numbers. Special seasons on resident geese in September and late January have not been an effective population-control mechanism. Another individual from New York commented that resident geese will explode as a result of the season closure on migrant Canada geese and that farmers' fields will be eaten bare. He recommended a 30-day season with a 2-bird daily bag limit, which would also increase the income from Duck Stamp sales.

The Susquehanna River Waterfowler's Association of Pennsylvania also requested that the Service consider a greatly reduced season of 30 days with a 1-bird daily bag limit rather than a complete closure. They believe that once the season is closed, it will be difficult to reopen because of opposition from anti-hunting groups. Another individual from Maryland also worried that the season may not reopen when the goose population rebuilds because of the strong anti-hunting forces. He further objected to the late notice of the closure and stated that hunting leases were, in many cases, already paid to the landowners.

Individuals from Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, and Pennsylvania expressed opposition to the season closure on Canada geese, suggesting that migrant geese have changed their migratory behavior and now breed locally. Thus, there are actually great numbers of geese available to hunters. Individuals from Pennsylvania and New York commented that local Cree Indians in Canada were responsible for taking too many eggs and killing the birds on the nests on the breeding ground in Canada. They suggested that the Service consider the economic impacts of a closed goose season on farmers and those sportsman who pay for leases.