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GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
LANSING



KEITH CREAUGH  
DIRECTOR

SUBMITTED: May 11, 2015

MEMORANDUM TO THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

Subject: Migratory Game Bird Early Season Regulations  
Wildlife Conservation Order Amendment No. 6 of 2015  
FOR INFORMATION ONLY

Authority:

The Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451, authorizes the Director and the Commission to issue orders to manage wild animals in this state.

Discussion and Background:

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) annually prescribes migratory bird hunting season frameworks, or outer limits, for dates and times when hunting may occur and the maximum number of birds that may be taken and possessed. Federal frameworks are negotiated with states via the Flyway Councils and this process has for many years been partitioned into early season selections and late season selections. For the 2015 regulations, this process will remain unchanged. Early seasons generally open prior to the Saturday closest to September 24 and state selections will be due to the USFWS by July 31, 2015. Late season selections will be submitted to the USFWS by August 30 of this year.

In February and March, the Department took part in the Mississippi Flyway Council and the Citizen's Waterfowl Advisory Committee (CWAC) meetings. In June, the USFWS Regulations Committee will set the early season federal frameworks.

In 2016, the process will transition from partitioned early and late season selections to one single process. Frameworks will be set on the previous year's data of waterfowl populations and habitat conditions instead of current year conditions. This will promote positive benefits such as a more simplified and efficient process. Waterfowl hunters will also know waterfowl season dates early in the year instead of right before seasons open. This will allow them to plan better for hunting trips. Over the coming months, the Department will be developing a communication strategy to make hunters aware of this change and how the new process will work beginning in January 2016.

The Department's 2015 recommendation for the early season migratory bird regulations will contain four recommendations.

Early Canada Goose Hunting Season

The first recommendation pertains to the early Canada goose hunting season. The Department is recommending that no changes be made to the early Canada goose season dates and bag limits.

The dates for the 2015 season will again be September 1 to 10 in the Upper Peninsula and Huron, Saginaw and Tuscola Counties, and September 1 to 15 in the remainder of the state. The daily bag limit will continue to be five geese statewide.

### *Biological*

The Michigan Canada goose population estimate for 2014 was about 216,000 which was down slightly from the 2013 estimate, and within the goal range of 175,000-225,000. Population estimates for 2015 are not yet available. The Department continues to recommend stabilized regulations for three-to-five years in order to ensure precise abundance information and to ensure harvest levels are consistent with the best available information about Canada goose population dynamics.

The early Canada goose season is timed so that resident geese are most susceptible to harvest and is a good tool to maintain Michigan's Canada goose population near the goal range which will help address human-goose conflicts. Although the early goose season is the most important for targeting our local goose population, sustainable harvest must also consider effects of all hunting seasons in aggregate (early, regular and late); the Federal frameworks for regular seasons were recently expanded from 45 to 92 days in Michigan and the Department is recommending stable seasons to better evaluate the impacts of liberalized regular seasons.

### *Social*

The Department conducts a waterfowl harvest survey every two years. The last survey completed and analyzed was for the 2012 waterfowl season, and it showed that statewide participation was up 10% from 2011 at 21,523 hunters during the early season. In addition, about 100,000 geese were harvested during the 2012 early season, an increase of about 26% from 2011.

The early Canada goose season targets Michigan's resident giant Canada geese. As these are not part of the migratory goose populations, harvesting these waterfowl can help to reduce conflicts with geese.

In February and March, the Department took part in the Mississippi Flyway Council and the CWAC meetings. These season dates are jointly recommended with the CWAC and are within the federal framework. In June, the USFWS Regulations Committee will set the early season federal frameworks.

### *Economic*

As the Department is not recommending a change, no economic impact is expected. Waterfowl hunting is a popular sport in Michigan and benefits many businesses generating an estimate of over \$22 million annually. The economic value of recreational goose hunting in the Mississippi Flyway was estimated at \$185 million in 2006 and the economic costs of goose conflicts was estimated at \$2.2 million in 2000.

#### Regular Canada Goose Season First Segment Dates

The second recommendation pertains to the first segment of the regular Canada goose hunting season that occurs before the Saturday closest to September 24. These first segments will need to be included in the Department's early season selections to the USFWS. The Department recommends the following first segment dates for the regular Canada goose season:

- Saginaw Goose Management Unit (GMU): September 19-27, 2015
- Tuscola/Huron GMU: September 19-27, 2015
- North Zone regular season: September 11- December 11, 2015
- Middle Zone: September 19-December 19, 2015
- South Zone: September 19-27, 2015

#### *Biological*

The Department continues to recommend stabilized regulations for three-to-five years in order to ensure more reliable trend information and maintain populations near the Department's goal range. These first-segment dates have been shifted due to days of the week but are otherwise similar to last season.

#### *Social*

These season dates are jointly recommended with the CWAC and are within the federal framework. The dates were chosen to maximize the hunting opportunity by providing days when there is an abundance of geese. While there are 92 days in the regular Canada goose season, this first 'split' provides opportunity when there has historically been an abundance of migrant Canada geese in the respective zones and GMUs.

#### *Economic*

As this change does not reduce or expand opportunity, no economic impact is expected. Once federal frameworks are announced, the entire season will likely be the same number of days as it was in 2014.

#### Youth Waterfowl Season

The Department is recommending that the season for the federal youth waterfowl season remain the second weekend in September (September 12 and 13, 2015). These dates will allow for greater flexibility when determining regular duck season opening dates and provide maximum opportunity for youth hunters.

As the Department is not recommending a change, no social, biological, or economic impacts are expected.

### Experimental Early Teal Season

The last recommendation pertains to the experimental early teal hunting season. The Department is recommending that regulations remain the same as 2014:

- September 1-7 statewide
- Daily bag limit of 6 teal and a possession limit of 18 which is three times the daily limit
- Hunting hours begin at sunrise

Due to USFWS requirements, the experimental early teal season will continue to be evaluated by each state participating in the experiment for three years to measure take on non-target species.

### *Biological*

The USFWS and the Department conducted a detailed and thorough teal harvest assessment that concluded teal populations could sustain additional harvest, and as a result Michigan and two other “production” (northern) states initiated experimental early teal seasons in 2014. The Department will continue to evaluate attempt rates at non-target species and the kill percentage of non-target species to determine if the early teal season will be approved for operational status in several years.

September 2014 was the first year of what is intended to be a three-year experiment. The first year’s experimental effort was highly successful and Michigan exceeded the target sample size. This was the direct result of a significant investment of Department and USFWS personnel time with observers working approximately 290 hours to complete observations. Hunter performance during the first year was well within the criteria established by the USFWS for both non-target attempt rates and non-target kill. The Department will continue its education efforts to inform hunters of the additional regulations and help improve hunters’ species identification skills. This was the first time many hunters had the opportunity to participate in a September teal season. Therefore it is reasonable to expect that hunter performance will improve as hunters gain experience with the season.

The Department and CWAC are recommending opening the experimental early teal season as early as possible due to the greatest abundance of teal in Michigan during that time. Blue-winged teal are some of the earliest duck species to migrate each fall. Information that is available on teal migration in Michigan indicates that the peak of fall blue-winged teal migration is late August – early September.

### *Social*

The CWAC met on March 7, 2015, and made recommendations for the early teal season that were identical to the workgroup’s recommendations.

In 2010, the Department conducted a survey that asked waterfowl hunters if they would participate in a future September teal hunting season in Michigan. Fifty-four percent of respondents were either very likely or somewhat likely to participate, 36% were either not very

likely or not at all likely to participate, and 9% were either not sure or did not provide an answer (2010 Waterfowl Harvest Report).

The experimental early teal season provides a net increase in the number of duck hunting days available to the public. Currently, the only other waterfowl hunting season in early September is the early Canada goose season. Traditional small game season opening date is September 15; therefore, seasons that open before September 15, such as the early goose season, snipe and rail seasons, and potentially early teal season, provide hunting opportunities for migratory game birds before most small game seasons have opened. Early seasons may also be a good way to introduce youth to waterfowl hunting as the weather is mild and there is an abundance of birds.

Recommended season dates include days with highest abundance of blue-winged teal, increases opportunity for hunters to get out by including Labor Day weekend, and doesn't overlap with the youth waterfowl season. By not overlapping with the youth season, there is less complexity for law enforcement.

The Department recommends that state parks remain closed to the early teal season during this initial experimental season, and state recreation areas be open. Department staff will work together in future years to identify potential teal habitat on state parks and appropriate hunting locations.

In order to improve waterfowl identification, the Department recommends no change to hunting hours (i.e, early teal season begin at sunrise rather than the usual half hour before sunrise for migratory bird hunting hours). The success of the experimental season will depend on a low rate of harvest attempts of non-target species, so the ability of hunters to correctly identify teal is essential. Identifying duck species is difficult under low light conditions. Early Canada goose season dates overlap the proposed teal season and goose hunting hours begin one half hour before sunrise. The Wildlife Division and Law Enforcement Division will continue to work together to mitigate hunter confusion through public education and communication with hunters while in the field, while providing maximum recreational opportunity.

The Department will continue to implement the following additional steps to ensure a successful experimental teal season:

- Educating waterfowl hunters on the accurate identification of teal
- Providing information to hunters to help guide them to hunting locations where they are more likely to encounter teal (e.g., coastal wetlands vs. forested wetlands where they are likely to harvest wood ducks)
- Informing hunters regarding the experimental season and what is being evaluated

*Economic*

Early Canada goose hunting will be open at the same time as the early teal season. However, hunters typically use field hunting to harvest geese. Teal harvest will be best conducted in marshlands. Accordingly, the Department expects that additional hunters will be in the field and buying licenses. Also, there is some equipment specialized for teal hunting (e.g., decoys) and the new teal season will likely result in additional equipment purchases.

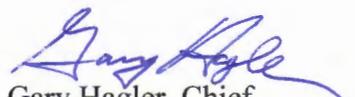
The Department anticipates that the eastern UP, Saginaw Bay, St. Clair Flats, and western Lake Erie will be popular teal hunting areas. In 2012, waterfowl hunters took about 371,000 waterfowl hunting trips and spent an average of \$463 per hunter annually on waterfowl hunting trips. Collectively, waterfowl hunters spent an estimated \$22.7 million on hunting trips primarily to hunt waterfowl in Michigan (2012 Waterfowl Harvest Report). The Department anticipates an increase in the number of waterfowl hunting trips and associated expenditures in Michigan in response to opening the early teal season. Businesses located in communities near well-known waterfowl hunting areas receive economic benefits from these waterfowl hunting trips.

Recommendation:

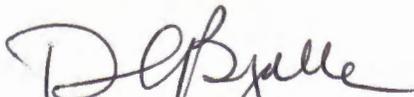
This order is being submitted for information and consideration. This item appeared on the Department's May 2015 calendar and may be eligible for approval on July 10, 2015.



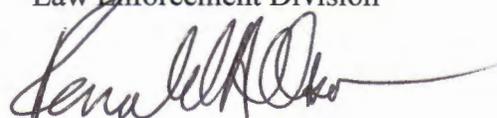
Russ Mason, Ph.D., Chief  
Wildlife Division



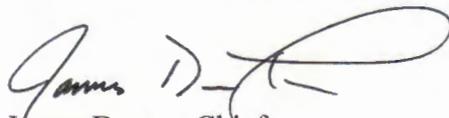
Gary Hagler, Chief  
Law Enforcement Division



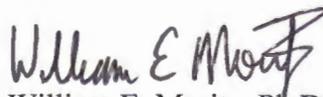
Bill O'Neill, Chief  
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Ronald A. Olson, Chief  
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William E. Moritz, Ph.D.  
Natural Resources Deputy

# WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ORDER

## Amendment No. 6 of 2015

By authority conferred on the Natural Resources Commission and the Director of the Department of Natural Resources by sections 40107 and 40113a of 1994 PA 451, MCL 324.40107 and 324.40113a, it is ordered that effective July 10, 2015, the following section(s) of the Wildlife Conservation Order shall read as follows:

### 3.415 Migratory birds open seasons, possession limit defined, exceptions

Sec. 3.415. The migratory bird possession limit shall be three times the daily limit. The migratory bird hunting open seasons and exceptions are as shown in table 10:

**TABLE 10**  
**Migratory Bird Open Seasons**

Season and Species	Zone or Management Unit	Open Season
Ducks (regular season)	North Zone	September 27 to November 23 and November 29 to November 30
	Middle Zone	October 4 to November 30 and December 13 to December 14
	South Zone	October 11 to December 7 and December 27 to December 28
Merganser		Same dates as ducks in the respective zones
Coots		Same dates as ducks in the respective zones
Common Moorhens (Gallinules)	Statewide	September 1 to November 9
Canada Goose (regular season)	North Zone	September 11 to December 11
	Middle Zone	<del>September 20 to September 28 and October 4 19 to December 25 19</del>
	South Zone, excluding GMUs listed below in the table	<del>September 20 19 to September 22 27,</del> October 11 to December 7, and December 27 to December 28
	Tuscola/Huron GMU	<del>September 20 19 to September 28 27,</del> October 11 to December 7, and December 27 to January 20, 2015
	Saginaw County GMU	<del>September 20 19 to September 22 27,</del> October 11 to December 7, and December 27 to January 26, 2015
	Allegan County GMU	November 1 to January 31, 2015
	Muskegon W.W. GMU	October 15 to November 12 and December 3 to December 21
Canada Goose (special late season)	Southern Michigan Goose Management Unit as defined in section 12.700 of this order	January 17 to February 14, 2015
Snow and Ross' Geese and Brant	North Zone	September 11 to December 11

	Middle Zone	September <del>20 19</del> to September <del>28</del> and October <del>4</del> to December <del>25 19</del>
	South Zone, excluding GMUs listed below in the table	October 11 to December 7, December 27 to December 28, and January 17 to February 14, 2015
	Tuscola/Huron GMU	September <del>20 19</del> to September <del>28 27</del> , October 11 to December 7, and December 27 to January 20, 2015
	Saginaw County GMU	September <del>20 19</del> to September <del>22 27</del> , October 11 to December 7, and December 27 to January 26, 2015
	Allegan County GMU	November 1 to January 31, 2015
	Muskegon W.W. GMU	October 15 to November 12 and December 3 to December 21
White-fronted Geese	North Zone	September 11 to December 7
	Middle Zone	<del>October 4 to December 25</del> <b>September 19 to December 15</b>
	South Zone, excluding GMUs listed below in the table	October 11 to December 7, December 27 to December 28 and January 17 to February 13, 2015
	Tuscola/Huron GMU	October 11 to December 7 and December 27 to January 20, 2015
	Saginaw County GMU	October 11 to December 7 and December 27 to January 25, 2015
	Allegan County GMU	November 1 to January 27, 2015
	Muskegon W.W. GMU	October 15 to November 12 and December 3 to December 21

Issued on this 10<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2015.

Approved as to matters over which the Natural Resources Commission has authority.

John Matonich, Chairman  
Natural Resources Commission

Approved as to matters over which the Director has authority.

Keith Creagh  
Director