



GRETCHEN WHITMER  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
LANSING



M. SCOTT BOWEN  
DIRECTOR

SUBMITTED: February 12, 2024  
RESUBMITTED: March 18, 2024



MEMORANDUM TO THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

Subject: Migratory Game Bird Hunting Seasons  
Wildlife Conservation Order Amendment No. 2 of 2024

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. The approach to set annual migratory bird hunting seasons and bag limits relies on biological data from the previous year to set hunting season dates and project appropriate harvest limits for each game species. This is possible because the USFWS and the Department have decades of data from population surveys, banding, and harvest surveys for many migratory game bird species that is used to develop models and harvest strategies to predict population change and inform harvest management decisions. These frameworks are adjusted to influence harvest regulations based on the previous year's monitoring information and regulatory decisions. This process gives biologists time to analyze survey data from the USFWS's regulatory decisions and allows time for public comment.

The Department's recommendations for the 2024-25 migratory game bird hunting seasons are based on the 2023 State and Federal assessments of waterfowl population status and habitat conditions, and public input including discussion with the Citizens Waterfowl Advisory Committee (CWAC) at their January 13, 2024, meeting.

*Biological*

Since 1991, Michigan has collaborated with other states, the USFWS, and Canadian agencies in conducting aerial surveys of breeding ducks and geese. Spring mallard population estimates from Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin are included in estimates of mid-continent mallard abundance. These population estimates are included in the models for establishing annual waterfowl hunting season frameworks for the Mississippi and Central Flyways. Michigan conducted the 2023 Breeding Waterfowl Survey in late April to mid-May. The 2023 statewide

wetland abundance estimate of 461,348 wetlands was six percent below the 2022 estimate and five percent below the long-term average. May 2023 Great Lakes water levels remained above the long-term average and very near May 2022 levels. Based on wetland abundance, Great Lakes water levels, and drought indices, wetland conditions were considered “excellent” for breeding waterfowl statewide except for “good” conditions in portions of southeast Michigan and the central Lower Peninsula. However, very little rainfall throughout June resulted in moderate and severe drought conditions and dry wetland basins throughout much of the Lower Peninsula.

The 2023 estimate of total ducks was 136,420, which was 32 percent below the 2022 estimate and 78 percent below the long-term average. The 2023 estimate for mallards was 82,731, which was 40 percent below the 2022 estimate, 75 percent below the long-term average, and the lowest estimate ever recorded. Poor survey conditions (e.g., rain and storms delayed the recommended survey start date and observers reported poorer visibility due to leaf out conditions on some transects in the Lower Peninsula) and modifying several survey transects due to interference from airport traffic and wind turbines may account for fewer birds detected.

The 2023 estimate for Canada geese was 218,574, which was 11 percent above the 2022 estimate, six percent below the long-term average, and 20 percent below the 10-year average. For the second year in a row, the Canada goose population estimates are within the Department’s long-term desired abundance range (175,000-225,000 birds).

Flyway Councils are advised by flyway technical committees consisting of state and provincial biologists. These technical committees evaluate species and population status, harvest, and hunter-participation data during the development of the Flyway Council recommendations. The USFWS then evaluates the Flyway Councils’ recommendations, considering species status and biology, cumulative effects of regulations, and existing regulatory policy. Likewise, the Department’s Waterfowl Workgroup and the CWAC review information on species status and habitat conditions when developing recommendations for waterfowl hunting seasons.

#### *Social*

The Department develops recommendations based on Waterfowl Workgroup discussions with the CWAC. The CWAC met on January 13, 2024, to make recommendations for the 2024-25 waterfowl seasons. The Department’s recommendations are the same as those made by the CWAC.

The Department’s Waterfowl Workgroup established goals for duck hunting seasons that include maintaining Michigan’s waterfowl hunting heritage by increasing hunter recruitment and retention, simplifying regulations with maximum hunting opportunity, and ensuring that seasons encompass maximum duck numbers and abundant species.

Biannually, the Department mails Waterfowl Harvest Surveys to a sample of waterfowl hunters to estimate hunting activity and determine opinions and satisfaction with hunting regulations. The Department last conducted the Waterfowl Harvest Survey after the 2022 waterfowl hunting season.

#### *Economic*

Businesses located in communities near well-known waterfowl hunting areas receive economic benefits from waterfowl hunting trips.

### Youth Waterfowl Season and Veterans and Active-Duty U.S. Military Personnel Waterfowl Hunting Days

The Department recommends that the Federal youth waterfowl hunting season remain the third weekend in September (September 21 and 22, 2024). These dates are consistent with 2023, avoid overlap with the Liberty Hunt, and ensures duck abundance during the youth hunting days.

The Department recommends continuing to hold the Veterans and Active Military Personnel Waterfowl Hunting Days concurrently with the Youth Waterfowl Season (September 21 and 22, 2024). These dates are consistent with 2023. States may designate two days as “Veterans and Active Military Personnel Waterfowl Hunting Days” in addition to regular duck seasons. Waterfowl regulations and bag limits set for the Youth Waterfowl Season apply to the Veterans and Active-Duty U.S. Military Personnel Waterfowl Hunting Days. Participating veterans and active-duty U.S. military personnel are required to possess documentation of verification afield and must present upon request of a Michigan conservation officer, tribal conservation officer, or any law enforcement officer.

Holding this hunt concurrently with the Youth Waterfowl Season provides simplified regulations and better enforcement.

### Early Teal Season

The Department recommends:

- September 1-16 statewide
- Daily bag limit of six teal and a possession limit of 18, which is three times the daily limit
- Hunting hours begin at sunrise

The Department and the CWAC recommend opening the 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. Available information on teal migration in Michigan indicates that the peak of fall blue-winged teal migration is late August through early September. The Department and CWAC recommend utilizing the entire 16 days allowed under Federal Frameworks.

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). Identifying duck species is difficult under low light conditions. The Canada goose season dates overlap the proposed teal season and goose hunting hours begin one half hour before sunrise. Very few (if any) enforcement issues have occurred related to these different opening hours, yet 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.

### Duck Seasons

The USFWS offered a 60-day season and six-duck daily limit framework for 2024-25. The Department developed the following duck season dates for 2024 based on feedback from CWAC, analysis of data on waterfowl populations, hunter opinions, migration timing, and hunter success.

The recommended dates for the 2024 duck season are:

- North Zone: September 28 to November 24 and November 30 to December 1
- Middle Zone: October 5 to December 1 and December 14 to December 15
- South Zone: October 12 to December 8 and December 28 to December 29

### Duck Bag Limits

The daily bag limit for ducks will be six ducks with the following species-specific restrictions: four mallards (no more than two hens), three wood ducks, two black ducks, two redheads, two canvasbacks, two scaup for 45-days and one scaup for 15-days, and one northern pintail. In addition to the duck limit, hunters may take five mergansers, only two of which may be a hooded merganser. The possession limit is three times the daily limit for ducks, coots, and mergansers.

Similar to 2023, there is a split scaup bag limit. Scaup harvest restrictions are implemented under a Scaup Harvest Strategy which is based on the current scaup population model and an objective to achieve 95 percent of the maximum, long-term cumulative harvest. Based on a restrictive regulatory alternative selected for the 2023 hunting season and a 2023 survey result of 3.52 million scaup, the optimal regulatory choice for the 2024 hunting season for all four Flyways is the restrictive regulatory alternative. This restrictive framework allows for a 60-day season with a limit of two birds for 45 days and one bird for 15 days. The 45 and 15-day segments must be consecutive hunting days.

Based on fall diving duck abundance measures from Lake St. Clair and western Lake Erie as well as an analysis of scaup harvest in Michigan, the Department recommends the following dates for the hybrid scaup bag limits which reflect a two-bird limit for the first 45 days of the season in the North Zone and a one-bird limit for the first 16 days of the season in the Middle and South Zones (an additional day of a one-bird limit is included so that a bag limit change doesn't occur during a weekend). The Department believes that this will maximize scaup harvest opportunity in each zone and is consistent with 2023:

- North Zone: September 28 to November 11 (two-bird limit); November 12 to November 24 and November 30 to December 1 (one-bird limit)
- Middle Zone: October 5 to October 20 (one-bird limit); October 21 to December 1 and December 14 to December 15 (two-bird limit)
- South Zone: October 12 to October 27 (one-bird limit); October 28 to December 8 and December 28 to December 29 (two-bird limit)

### Goose Seasons

The Department recommends goose season dates based on Canada goose population goals, feedback from the CWAC, and surveys of waterfowl hunters. Waterfowl hunters expressed their desire for additional opportunities to hunt ducks and geese on the same days. The recommended season dates provide for overlap of goose and duck seasons.

Federal goose frameworks for the Mississippi Flyway are unchanged from 2023. 2024-25 Canada goose hunting frameworks allow for a 107-day Canada goose season with a daily bag limit of five for the entire season. The possession limit is three times the daily limit for geese.

While few other goose species are harvested in Michigan, the Department makes recommendations that allow goose hunters to take these species if they have the opportunity. The recommended dates for the season for white, blue, and Ross' geese, white-fronted geese,

and brant are the same as the Canada goose seasons in each respective zone and Goose Management Unit (GMU). The daily bag limits for white, blue, and Ross' geese is 20. To maximize opportunity, the Department is again recommending a dark goose aggregate daily bag limit for Canada geese, white-fronted geese, and brant of five, only one of which can be a brant.

While the 2022 and 2023 population estimates were within the Department's long-term desired abundance range (175,000-225,000 birds), the estimates for the previous six years were all above the desired range. Therefore, we continue to make full use of hunting season days and daily limits available within Federal hunting season regulation frameworks and this decision is supported by high goose abundance and productivity over the last several years, as well as numerous human-Canada goose conflicts. Federal frameworks for Canada geese in the Mississippi Flyway are liberal and allow for 107 days of hunting, the maximum allowed under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The recommended season dates and bag limits take advantage of the most days and highest bag limits possible. September dates of the Canada goose season are timed so that resident geese are most susceptible to harvest. This is a good tool to help maintain Michigan's Canada goose population at or near the goal range, which will help address human-Canada goose conflicts.

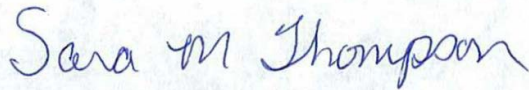
The Department and the CWAC recommend the following dates for goose seasons:

- North Zone: September 1 to December 16
- Middle Zone: September 1 to September 30 and October 5 to December 20
- South Zone: September 1 to September 30; October 12 to December 8; December 28 to January 5, 2025; and February 1 to February 10, 2025
- Allegan Goose Management Unit: September 1 to September 30; November 19 to December 8; December 21 to February 15, 2025
- Muskegon County Wastewater Goose Management Unit: October 15 to December 21

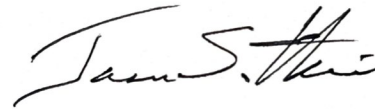
### Falconry

For the falconry season, the recommended dates for the additional days outside the gun hunting seasons for ducks, mergansers, coots, and common gallinule are December 30 to January 12, 2025, and February 22 to March 10, 2025. The daily and possession limits remain unchanged.

Relevant Divisions have contributed to the preparation of this order. This order was submitted for information on March 14, 2024, at the Natural Resources Commission meeting. This item appeared on the Department's April 2, 2024 calendar and may be eligible for approval on April 11, 2024.



Sara Thompson, Chief  
Wildlife Division



Jason S. Haines, Chief  
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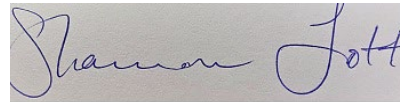
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Randall M. Claramunt, Chief  
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Shannon Lott  
Natural Resources Deputy

I have analyzed and discussed these recommendations with staff and concur as to matters over which the Director has authority.

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M Scott Bowen, Director

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Date

# WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ORDER

## Amendment No. 2 of 2024

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 April 11, 2024, 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 <del>30</del> <b>28</b> to November <del>26</del> <b>24</b> and December <del>2</del> <b>November 30</b> to December <del>31</del>
	Middle Zone	October <del>7</del> <b>5</b> to December <del>31</del> and December <del>16</del> <b>14</b> to December <del>17</del> <b>15</b>
	South Zone	October <del>14</del> <b>12</b> to December <del>10</del> <b>8</b> and December <del>30</del> <b>28</b> to December <del>31</del> <b>29</b>
Merganser		Same dates as ducks in the respective zones
Coots		Same dates as ducks in the respective zones
Common Gallinules	Statewide	September 1 to November 9
Canada Goose, White-fronted Goose, Brant, Snow Goose, and Ross' Goose	North Zone	September 1 to December 16
	Middle Zone	September 1 to September 30 and October <del>7</del> <b>5</b> to December <del>22</del> <b>20</b>
	South Zone, excluding GMUs listed below in the table	September 1 to September 30, October <del>14</del> <b>12</b> to December <del>10</del> <b>8</b> , December <del>30</del> <b>28</b> to January <del>7</del> <b>5</b> , <b>2024 2025</b> , and February <del>3</del> <b>1</b> to February <del>12</del> <b>10</b> , <b>2024 2025</b>
	Allegan County GMU	September 1 to September 30, November <del>4</del> <b>19</b> to November <del>12</del> <b>December 8</b> , November <del>25</del> to December <del>3</del> , and December <del>16</del> <b>21</b> to February <del>12</del> <b>15</b> , <b>2024 2025</b>
	Muskegon County W.W. GMU	October <del>17</del> <b>15</b> to December <del>23</del> <b>21</b>

### 3.416 Migratory game birds; daily limit.

Sec. 3.416. The daily limit of migratory game birds for the seasons specified in section 3.415 shall be as follows:

(1) Ducks, daily limit. The daily limit shall be 6 ducks of which no more than 4 may be mallards, no more than 2 may be a hen mallard, no more than 2 may be black ducks, no more than 3 may be wood ducks, no more than 1 may be a pintail, no more than 2 may be redheads, and no more than 2 may be canvasbacks.

(a) As part of the total daily limit for ducks as described in section (1), the daily limit for scaup for the zones and dates specified shall be as follows:

Zone or Management Unit	Dates	Daily Limit
North Zone	September <del>30</del> <b>28</b> to November <del>43</del> <b>11</b>	No more than 2 scaup
	November <del>44</del> <b>12</b> to November <del>26</del> <b>24</b> and <del>December 2</del> <b>November 30</b> to December <del>31</del> <b>1</b>	No more than 1 scaup
Middle Zone	October <del>7</del> <b>5</b> to October <del>22</del> <b>20</b>	No more than 1 scaup
	October <del>23</del> <b>21</b> to December <del>31</del> <b>1</b> and December <del>46</del> <b>14</b> to December <del>47</del> <b>15</b>	No more than 2 scaup
South Zone	October <del>44</del> <b>12</b> to October <del>29</del> <b>27</b>	No more than 1 scaup
	October <del>30</del> <b>28</b> to December <del>40</del> <b>8</b> and December <del>30</del> <b>28</b> to December <del>31</del> <b>29</b>	No more than 2 scaup

(2) Merganser, daily limit. The merganser daily limit shall be 5 mergansers of which no more than 2 may be a hooded merganser.

(3) Dark geese (Canada, white-fronted and Brant), north, middle, and south zones, including GMUs, daily limit. In the north, middle, and south zones as described in sections 1.7, 1.8, and 1.9 of this order, respectively, and all GMUs as described in sections 12.702 and 12.703 the daily limit of dark geese shall be 5, only 1 of which can be a Brant.

(4) Light geese (snow, blue and Ross), daily limit. The daily limit on light geese (snow, blue, and Ross) shall be 20.

(5) Coot, daily limit. The daily limit of coot shall be 15.

(6) Common gallinule, daily limit. The daily limit of common gallinule shall be 1.

### 3.422 Migratory birds, falconry, open seasons; daily limit, possession limit.

Sec. 3.422. (1) The open season for taking Wilson's snipe, woodcock, and Virginia and Sora rails by falconry shall be the same dates as the firearm seasons in the respective zones for these species as described in sections 3.415 and 3.420.

(2) The open season for taking geese shall be the same dates as the firearm seasons in the respective zones and goose management units.

(3) The open season for taking duck, merganser, coot and common gallinule shall be the same dates as the firearm seasons in the respective zones for these species, plus the season shall be open statewide ~~January 4~~ **December 30** to January ~~44~~ **12**, ~~2024~~ **2025** and February ~~24~~ **22** to March 10, ~~2024~~ **2025**.

(4) The daily limit for migratory game birds taken by falconry shall be 3 birds combined, and the possession limit shall be 9 birds combined.



**3.424 September teal hunt; open season; areas defined.**

Sec. 3.424 (1) The open season for teal shall be September 1 to September ~~45~~ **16** statewide.

(2) All state parks shall be closed.

Issued on this 11th day of April, 2024.

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

Thomas Baird, Chair  
Natural Resources Commission

Approved as to matters over which the Director has authority.

M. Scott Bowen  
Director