

United States Department of the Interior

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Division of Migratory Bird Management
Branch of Assessment and Decision Support
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Chief, Branch of Assessment and Decision Support

FROM: Mark Seamans, Wildlife Biologist, Branch of Assessment and Decision Support,
Division of Migratory Bird Management

DATE: 18 August 2023

SUBJECT: American woodcock harvest strategy assessment

This memo provides results from the annual assessments of the status of American woodcock (henceforth woodcock) in support of the harvest regulation setting process. It does not, however, represent a regulatory recommendation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or Flyway Councils. Based on the harvest strategies, current data, and this assessment, the prescribed regulatory alternative for the two management regions during the 2024–25 hunting season is the moderate alternative. Specific details of the harvest strategies and assessments follow.

Woodcock are managed based on two regions or populations, Eastern and Central, and the boundary between the two regions conforms to the boundary between the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways. The management objective of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for woodcock is to stabilize woodcock populations, while ultimately returning the populations to levels that occurred in the early 1970s. The Woodcock Singing-ground Survey (SGS) was developed to provide indices to changes in abundance, and these indices are used to assess the status of the populations.

There is a one-year lag in the SGS data used to make regulatory decisions in the U.S. Regulatory decisions for the 2024–25 season will be made in the fall 2023 using SGS data collected through spring 2023. Therefore, decisions for the 2024–25 hunting season will be based on the 3-year average of 2021, 2022, and 2023 data. Decisions are made separately for each management region (Eastern and Central) based on the 3-year average of the SGS index (males/route) and its associated 70% credible interval (CI). The strategy adopts a negative presumption approach with regards to selection of a regulatory package based on the lower 70% credible interval (CI; see Regulatory Thresholds below). For example, if the lower 70% CI of the 3-year average is ≥ 3.25 , then liberal regulations (60-day season) are implemented. If the lower 70% CI is < 3.25 but ≥ 2.0 then moderate regulations (45-day season) are implemented. Finally, if the lower 70% CI is < 2.0 , then a restrictive season (30-day season) would be implemented.

Regulatory packages:

Liberal season: 60 days, 3 bird bag
 Moderate season: 45 days, 3 bird bag
 Restrictive season: 30 days, 3 bird bag

Regulatory thresholds:

Liberal season: Lower 70% CI of 3-year average Singing-ground Survey (SGS) ≥ 3.25
 Moderate season: Lower 70% CI of 3-year average SGS ≥ 2.0 but < 3.24
 Restrictive season: Lower 70% CI of 3-year average SGS ≥ 1.0 but < 2.0
 Closed season: Lower 70% CI of 3-year average SGS < 1.0

Outside Framework dates:

Eastern Management Region: September 13 to January 31
 Central Management Region: September 13 to January 31

Stabilization of regulations:

Any change in regulations would remain in place for three years.

2024–25 Strategy Recommendation:

The 3-year average for the SGS indices and associated 70% CIs are within the *Moderate Package* for both the Eastern ($\bar{x}_{2021-23} = 2.62$, 70% CI = 2.51 – 2.73) and Central ($\bar{x}_{2021-23} = 2.51$, 70% CI = 2.43 – 2.59) Management Regions (see Figures 1 and 2 for a comparison to historic 3-year averages). Thus, the strategy recommends a Moderate season for both management regions for the 2024–25 hunting season.

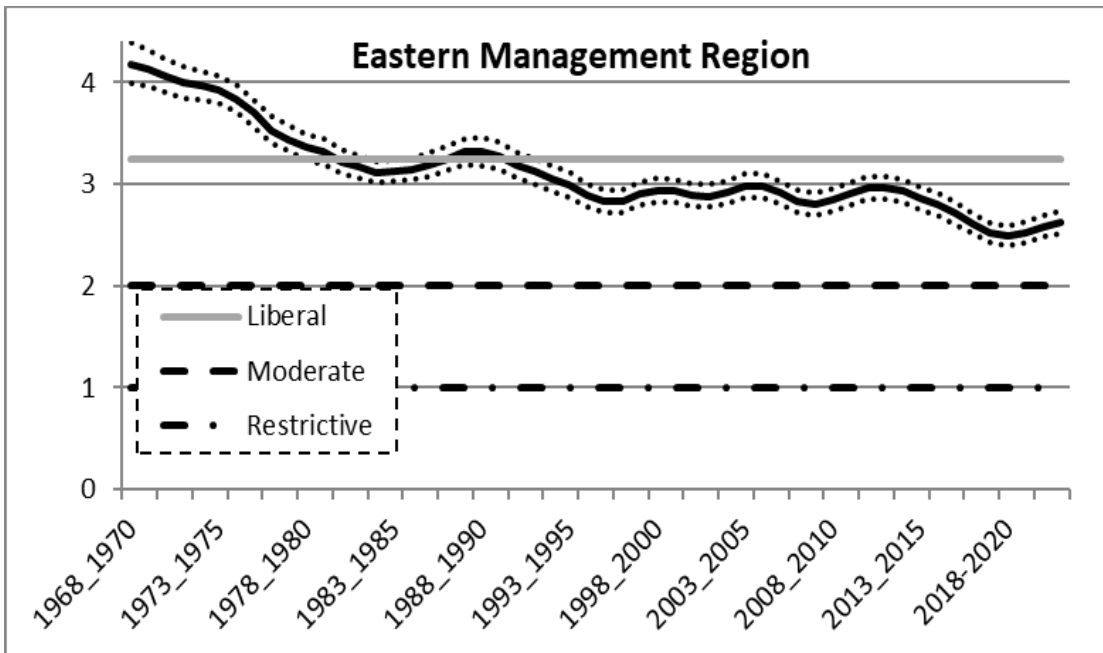


Figure 1. Woodcock Singing-ground Survey indices (3-year average; singing males/route) in relation to regulatory thresholds for the Eastern Management Region, 1968–70 through 2021–23. Upper and lower bounds of the 70% credible interval of the index (solid line) are depicted by the dashed lines around the 3-year average.

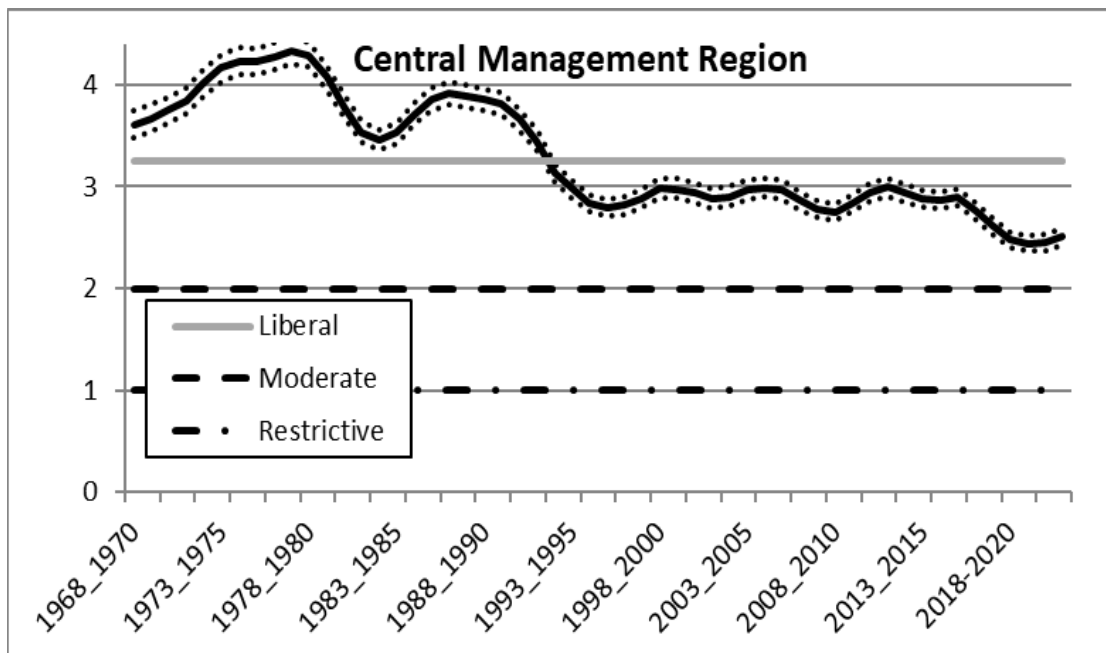


Figure 2. Woodcock Singing-ground Survey indices (3-year average; singing males/route) in relation to regulatory thresholds for the Central Management Region, 1968–70 through 2021–23. Upper and lower bounds of the 70% credible interval of the index (solid line) are depicted by the dashed lines around the 3-year average.