

# Proposed Migratory Game Bird Hunting Seasons for 2025-26



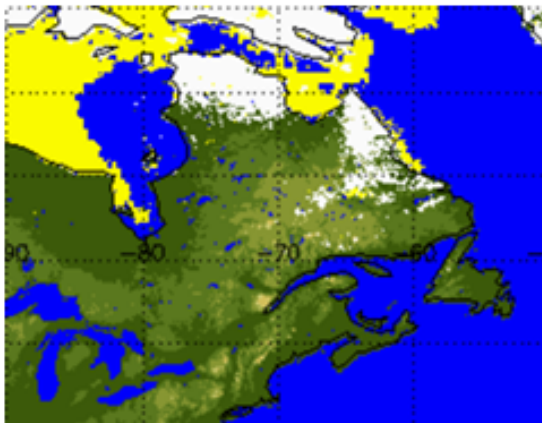
# Helpful Terms



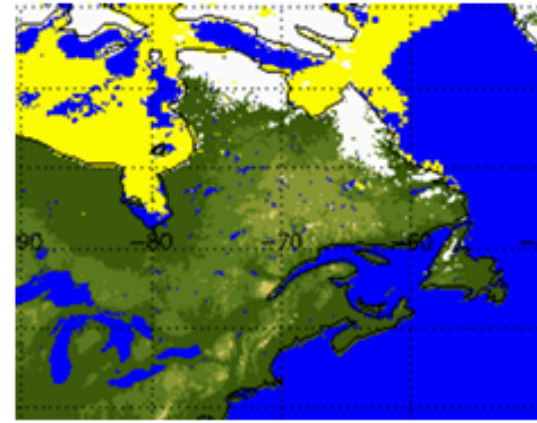
- **AHM: Adaptive Harvest Management**
- **IPM: Integrated Population Model**
- **LTA: Long Term Average**
- **AFC: Atlantic Flyway Council**
- **AFBWS: Atlantic Flyway Breeding Waterfowl Survey**
- **BSS: Breeding Bird Survey**

# 2024 Habitat Conditions

- Surveys and annual pre-season waterfowl banding efforts were conducted normally.
- Snow and ice cover maps from satellite photography.



A) Snow cover map from May 31, 2024



B) Snow cover map from May 31, 2023

Figure 2. Snow depth and ice cover maps for northern Quebec from the last week of May in 2024 (A) and 2023 (B) The color yellow depicts sea ice cover and color white snow cover.



# Eastern Survey Area Population Estimates



## 2024 Breeding Ducks in the Eastern Survey Area (millions)

| Species           | 2024 | 2023 | % Change from 2023 | % Change from LTA |
|-------------------|------|------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Mallard           | 1.17 | 1.22 | similar            | -9%               |
| Black Duck        | 0.86 | 0.74 | similar            | +23%*             |
| Wood Duck**       | 0.9  | 0.97 | similar            | similar           |
| Green-winged Teal | 0.47 | 0.38 | +20%               | +29%              |
| Ring-necked Duck  | 0.73 | 0.66 | similar            | similar           |
| Common Goldeneye  | 1.2  | 0.84 | +42%               | +76%              |

\* Average from 1998-2023

\*\* Wood Duck estimate from AFBWS and BBS

# Multi-Stock Harvest Management



- Models 4 species representing birds important to hunters/harvest and different habitat types in the Atlantic Flyway, used to determine the general duck season.
- Replaced Eastern Mallard AHM in 2018
- Optimal choice for the 2025-26 Atlantic Flyway duck season is the liberal regulatory alternative (60 days/6 birds).



# Traditional Survey Area Population Estimates



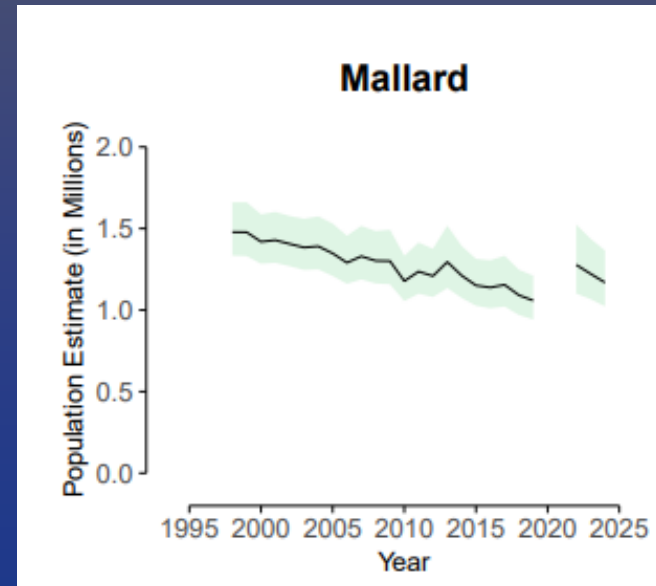
| Species                  | 2024       | 2023       | % Change from 2023 | % Change from LTA |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Mallard</b>           | <b>6.6</b> | <b>6.1</b> | <b>similar</b>     | <b>-16%</b>       |
| <b>Gadwall</b>           | <b>2.3</b> | <b>2.6</b> | <b>similar</b>     | <b>similar</b>    |
| <b>American wigeon</b>   | <b>2.9</b> | <b>1.9</b> | <b>+55%</b>        | <b>similar</b>    |
| <b>Green-winged teal</b> | <b>3.0</b> | <b>2.5</b> | <b>+20%</b>        | <b>+38%</b>       |
| <b>Blue-winged teal</b>  | <b>4.6</b> | <b>5.3</b> | <b>-12%</b>        | <b>-10%</b>       |
| <b>Northern shoveler</b> | <b>2.6</b> | <b>2.9</b> | <b>similar</b>     | <b>similar</b>    |
| <b>Northern pintail</b>  | <b>2.0</b> | <b>2.2</b> | <b>similar</b>     | <b>-49%</b>       |
| <b>Redhead</b>           | <b>0.8</b> | <b>0.9</b> | <b>similar</b>     | <b>similar</b>    |
| <b>Canvasback</b>        | <b>0.6</b> | <b>0.6</b> | <b>similar</b>     | <b>similar</b>    |
| <b>Scaup</b>             | <b>4.1</b> | <b>3.5</b> | <b>similar</b>     | <b>-17%</b>       |



# Eastern Mallards



- **Integrated Population Model, independent of Multi-stock AHM.**
- **Liberal: 4/day (2 Hens) Moderate: 2/day (1 hen) Restrictive: 1/day Closed**
- **Harvest strategy recommends a liberal framework in 2025-26 (60/4 with 2 hens).**



# Interim Pintail Harvest Strategy



- Harvest strategy last updated in 2010
- Updates: Advanced Population Model, additional 10 yrs data, new 3 – bird bag option
- Atlantic Flyway: 3 – bird bag unless season is closed
- <https://www.fws.gov/story/2024-06/new-strategy-inform-northern-pintail-hunting-regulations>
- 2025-2026 season recommendation: 3 bird daily bag





# 2024 Atlantic Population Canada Goose Monitoring



- **Breeding Pair Survey** conducted normally in mid-June.
- **Pre-season Banding**
  - Conducted in 2024 (3,469 birds banded).
  - ~500 GPS/GSM solar powered neck collars deployed over last 3 yrs.
  - 2024 young to adult ratio was 0.89 and lower than the LTA (1.28).



# Recent Changes in AP CAGO Management Strategies



- **The 3 year running average of the pair estimate, formerly used to determine the hunt package, was replaced by an IPM in 2021.**
- **The IPM makes better use of all the available demographic data on AP Canada geese and is capable of making out-year (i.e. advance) predictions of the number of breeding pairs.**
- **Use of the out-year prediction allows for a quicker response to population change under the current regulatory system.**
- **Revised AP Canada Goose Harvest Strategy is more conservative in all packages and requires a bag limit of 1 per day in all U.S. AP hunt zones when the restrictive package is recommended.**

# Atlantic Population Canada Goose Harvest Strategy



- AP Canada goose IPM predicts 133,500 (95% CI = 93,000–187,500) breeding pairs for June 2025, however, AFC recommended restrictive package

| Population Thresholds (Breeding Pairs) | Harvest Package | Target Adult Harvest Rate | Packages for Chesapeake Region AP Areas | Packages for Mid-Atlantic and New England Region AP Areas |
|--|-----------------|---------------------------|---|---|
| > 160,000                              | Liberal         | 7%                        | 45 days and 2 geese/day                 | 45 days and 3 geese/day                                   |
| ≤ 160,00 and > 125,000                 | Moderate        | 5%                        | 30 days and 2 geese/day                 | 30 days and 3 geese/day                                   |
| ≤ 125,000 and ≥ 60,000                 | Restrictive     | 3%                        | 30 days and 1 goose/day                 | 30 days and 1 goose/day                                   |
| < 60,000                               | Closed          | 0%                        | Closed                                  | Closed  |

# Atlantic Population Canada Goose Pair Estimates



- AP CAGO Breeding Pair Data
  - 2024 – 89,000 pairs
  - 2023 - 115,000 pairs
  - 2022 - 164,000 pairs
  - 2021 - No survey
  - 2020 - No Survey
  - 2019 - 120,000 pairs
  - 2018 - 112,000 pairs
- 2021: AFC recommended a restrictive season for 2022-2023 although the harvest plan called for a moderate (30 day/2 bird per day) package. This is an important note because it was a more conservative approach than the harvest strategy called for.
- 2022: AFC recommended a liberal package (45 days/ 2 bird per day) for 2023-24.
- 2023 AFC recommended a moderate package (30 days/ 2 bird per day) for 2024-25 season.
- 2024: AFC recommended a restrictive package for the 2025-26 season.

# Notes Relevant to Season Selection Process



- MD DNR's Migratory Game Bird Hunting Season proposals must remain within the guidelines provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Federal Frameworks.
- MD DNR does not have the authority to legalize Sunday Hunting for Migratory Game Birds. That authority rests with the Maryland General Assembly.
- DNR will collect public comment (from the online forum, email, mail, telephone, etc.) for review by the Migratory Game Bird Advisory Committee and Wildlife Advisory Commission.
- Adjustments to seasons and bag limits will be considered at this time.
- Final season selections will be forwarded to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by April 15.

# September Teal Season



## Federal Framework:

A **9-day** season may be held between Sept. 1 and Sept. 30 with a 6 bird daily bag limit. Teal season may not run concurrently with other seasons that allow special considerations (resident Canada goose) such as modified shooting hours or unplugged guns.

## Proposed Dates:

Sept. 18, 2025 – Sept. 27, 2025

**Daily Bag Limit:** 6 blue-winged or green-winged teal, singly or in aggregate, per day



*Note: Early Resident Goose is Sept 1-15*

# “Regular” Duck Hunting Season



## Federal Framework:

60-day season between Saturday nearest Sept. 24 and January 31 with a daily bag limit of 6 ducks (species restrictions).

| Eastern Duck Zone             | Western Duck Zone             |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Oct. 11, 2025 – Oct. 18, 2025 | Oct. 4, 2025 – Oct. 18, 2025  |
| Nov. 15, 2025 – Nov. 28, 2025 | Nov. 22, 2025 – Nov. 28, 2025 |
| Dec. 16, 2025 – Jan. 31, 2026 | Dec. 16, 2025 – Jan. 31, 2026 |

## Daily Bag Limit:

6 per day (including mergansers) but no more than 4 sea ducks (3 long-tailed ducks, 3 scoters, 3 eiders), 4 mallards (2 hens), 3 wood ducks, 3 pintails, 2 redheads, 1 scaup\*, 2 canvasbacks, 2 black ducks (during black duck season), 1 mottled duck, and 1 fulvous tree duck.

*Scaup hybrid season: Daily bag limit is 1 except between Jan.9, 2026 and Jan. 31, 2026 when 2 scaup per day may be harvested.*



# Youth/Military Waterfowl Hunting Days



**Federal Framework:** States can hold 2 youth/military personnel days outside of regular duck season but within 14 days of the end framework dates (Sept. 21 and Jan. 31). Must be on weekends, holidays, or other non-school days.

**Proposed Dates:** Nov. 1, 2025 and Feb. 7, 2026

**Daily Bag Limit:** 6 ducks (certain species bag restrictions), 1 Canada goose in the AP Zone or 5 Canada geese in the late RP Zone, 1 brant, 25 Light geese, 2 scaup and 15 coots.

Requirements: Youth hunter must be 16 years of age or younger and accompanied by an unarmed adult at least 21 years old. The adult may assist in calling, setting decoys, and retrieving downed birds. Military veterans (as defined in Section 101 of title 38, United States Code) of any age and members of the armed forces on active duty, including members of the National Guard and Reserves on Active duty (other than for training) can participate in these two hunt days.





# Atlantic Population (AP) Canada Goose Hunting Season



## Federal Framework:

A 30-day season may be held between Nov. 15 and Feb. 5 with a 1 bird daily bag limit. The season may be divided into no more than 2 segments.

## Proposed Season:

Dec. 19, 2025 – Jan. 3, 2026

Jan. 14, 2026 – Jan. 31, 2026

**Daily Bag Limit:** 1 per day



# AF Resident Population Canada Goose Hunting Season

(AFRP Zone)



## **Federal Framework:**

80-day season between Nov. 15 and  
Mar. 10

**Daily Bag Limit:** 5 per day

## **Proposed Season:**

Nov. 22, 2025 - Nov. 28, 2025

Dec. 15, 2025 - Mar. 7, 2026

**Daily Bag Limit:** 5 per day

# Atlantic Brant Hunting Season



## **Federal Framework:**

30-day season between the Saturday nearest Sept. 24 and Jan. 31 with a 1-bird daily bag limit.

## **Proposed Season:**

Dec. 29, 2025 – Jan. 31, 2026

**Daily Bag Limit:** 1 per day



# Light Goose Hunting Season



## **Federal Framework:**

107-day season between Oct. 1 and Mar. 10 with a 25-bird daily bag limit and no possession limit.

## **Proposed Season:**

Oct. 1, 2025 - Nov. 28, 2025

Dec. 15, 2025 - Jan. 31, 2026

Feb. 7, 2026

**Daily Bag Limit:** 25 per day  
No Possession Limit

# Light Goose Conservation Order Hunting Season



## Federal Framework:

The Conservation Order allows extended shooting hours for light geese (one-half hour after sunset) and imposes no daily bag limits for light geese. The CO may only open when all waterfowl (including light goose) and crane hunting seasons (excluding falconry) are closed.

## Proposed Season:

Dec. 1, 2025 - Dec. 13, 2025

Feb. 2, 2026 - Feb. 6, 2026

Feb. 9, 2026 - April 15, 2026

**Daily Bag Limit:** No bag limit  
No possession limit



# Mourning Dove Season



## **Federal Framework:**

States may select a 90 day season between Sept. 1 – Jan. 31 with 15 birds/day. There can be no more than 3 season segments.

## **Proposed Season:**

Sept. 1, 2025 – Oct. 18, 2025

Oct. 25, 2025 – Nov. 28, 2025

Dec. 20, 2025 – Jan. 9, 2026

**Daily Bag Limit:** 15 birds/day



# Woodcock Season



## **Federal Framework:**

States may select a 45-day season between October 1 and January 31 with a 3-bird daily bag limit. States may split their seasons into two segments.

## **Proposed Season:**

Oct. 25, 2025 – Nov. 28, 2025

Jan. 12, 2026 – Jan. 28, 2026

**Daily Bag Limit:** 3 birds/day

