

# WDFW Waterfowl Advisory Group

Virtual Meeting

March 1, 2022

Requested Topics:

“Sea Duck status and concerns & Brant season structure”

Presentation prepared by:

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# Prompts for presentation:

- Monitoring sea ducks and brant overview
- Mandatory harvest report card overview and timelines
- Harvest strategies
- Sea duck status and harvest management
- Brant status and season structure, harvest management



## WDFW Waterfowl Management Goals (Game Management Plan):

Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage waterfowl and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations.

Manage statewide populations of waterfowl for a sustained yield consistent with Pacific Flyway management goals.

Maintain state harvest restrictions, in addition to federal frameworks, on waterfowl species of management concern in Washington, depending on harvest rates and populations status.

## Important questions:

- How does WDFW monitor status of sea ducks and brant in Washington?
  - Why winter surveys?
  - Why not like mallard or Canada geese?
- How does WDFW monitor harvest of sea ducks and brant in Washington?
  - Why does WDFW use mandatory harvest report cards?
  - What components make up the estimate?
  - What this harvest estimate includes...
  - What this harvest estimate does not account for...
- Harvest strategies
- Sea duck status and harvest management
- Brant status and season structure, harvest management



# Evaluating pop-status, harvest trends, problems, concerns, and alternatives:

3-year Season Setting  
Public Input

SEA DUCKS

Issue 7	Alternative	Votes	Percentage
	1. No change.	311	36%
	2. Alternative 2: Support shortened seasons, less than the regular c	87	10%
	3. Alternative 3: Support, waterfowl closure zones in high disturba	50	6%
	4. Alternative 4: Support, species-specific closures	76	9%
	5. Alternative 5: A combination of alternatives 2, 3, and 4 to addres	340	39%

BRANT

Issue 8	Alternative	Votes	Percentage
	1. No change.	265	33%
	2. Alternative 2: Support a known number of season dates to start	72	9%
	3. Alternative 3: Support season length being informed by the popu	60	8%
	4. Alternative 4: Support more flexibility in hunter days, with a set :	73	9%
	5. Alternative 5: A combination of alternatives 2, 3, and 4 to addres	328	41%





### Sea Duck Problem Statement#1:

The annual harvest of certain sea duck species has increased without any change in bag-limit since 2010.

### Sea Duck Problem Statement#2:

Recent trends in the non-compliant rate of mandatory harvest reports has created more uncertainty in our estimate of total harvest (estimated harvest is likely biased low compared to reality).

### Sea Duck Problem Statement#3:

The WDFW sea duck harvest strategy does not account for other standard corrections to the reported harvest estimate, like crippling loss (estimates of crippling loss vary between 15-40% in the literature, with the higher estimates associated with open water hunting conditions; again likely biased low compared to reality).

### Sea Duck Problem Statement#4:

The WDFW sea duck harvest strategy seems to suggest the harvest rate of 5% or less should be based on the “adult population” of Harlequin Duck.

### Sea Duck Problem Statement#5:

The WDFW sea duck harvest strategy of a harvest rate of 5% or less, is based on an assumption of non-selection in harvest; with Harlequin Duck extreme bias towards adult males has a disproportionate impact on future breeding pairs and therefore future production (or replacement). Productivity at hatch does not result in sex-biased, therefore the rate of adult male replacement is half the rate of production. In other words, in a known adult male-biased harvest it would be more appropriate to base the 5% or less in relationship to pairs or adult females (this results in a LOWER Prescriptive Take Level).

## Questions for consideration:

Are sea duck hunters asking for short-term or long-term harvest potential ?  
Are sea duck harvest strategies about resource conservation or hunter entitlement?  
How do you decide who gets to participate in the opportunity?  
How do we improve reporting by hunters to reduce uncertainty in annual estimate?

## Alternatives?:

- Follow the current WDFW sea duck harvest strategy targeting annual harvest of 5% or less for the 2022-2023 season setting, regardless of the growing non-compliant harvest record cards.
  - This strategy has been in place since 2013 and is informed by the winter aerial survey and mandatory harvest report cards for scoter, goldeneye, long-tailed duck and harlequin duck.
  - Recent trends in hunter participation, effort, and efficiency (harvest rate) have all increased to pre-2004 levels, despite no bag-limit change since 2010.
  - These increases are not due to population increases, suggesting increasing harvest rates, particularly on certain species, however COVID restrictions caused the 2021 winter survey to be suspended; 2022 has been completed and is being summarized as quickly as possible.
  - The reported harvest estimates are uncorrected for crippling loss (a common correction) which causes to the reported harvest estimate to be biased low.
- Fix the growing non-compliant reporting problem.
  - Currently non-compliance for mandatory harvest reports is extremely high across ALL users/purchaser groups (eg: residents, non-residents, youth, etc)
  - Dollar amounts adjustments are legislative and apply to all wildlife reports (not just waterfowl).
  - The ease at which vendors can give unknowing/unintended purchasers the waterfowl mandatory harvest report cards has diluted the follow up phone calls conducted by WSU; more samples = more calls = more expensive.



## Questions for consideration:

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## Alternatives?:

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ALTERNATIVE	SHORT-TERM	LONG-TERM





### Brant Problem Statement#1:

Skagit County bays have an additional management objective related to gray-bellied brant (WHAs).

### Brant Problem Statement#2:

Skagit County bays have experienced a sustained decline in wintering brant since 2008 (perhaps longer), and this may be more pronounced as recent surveys have improved detection.

### Brant Problem Statement#3:

The harvest rate for brant varies by county, with Skagit County consistently records the highest annual harvest of the four counties open to brant harvest.

### Brant Problem Statement#4:

Brant bag-limits are constrained by federal framework (and are easily obtained), days are constrained to keep harvest rate at <10%, in order to avoid a limited-user system.

### Brant Problem Statement#5:

Annual harvest estimate does not incorporate a correction for crippling loss.

### Brant Problem Statement#5:

A recent surge in hunter days (participation) has increased anticipated annual harvest estimates.

### Brant Problem Statement#6:

Recent trends in the non-compliant rate of mandatory harvest reports has created more uncertainty in our estimate of total harvest (estimated harvest is likely biased low compared to reality).

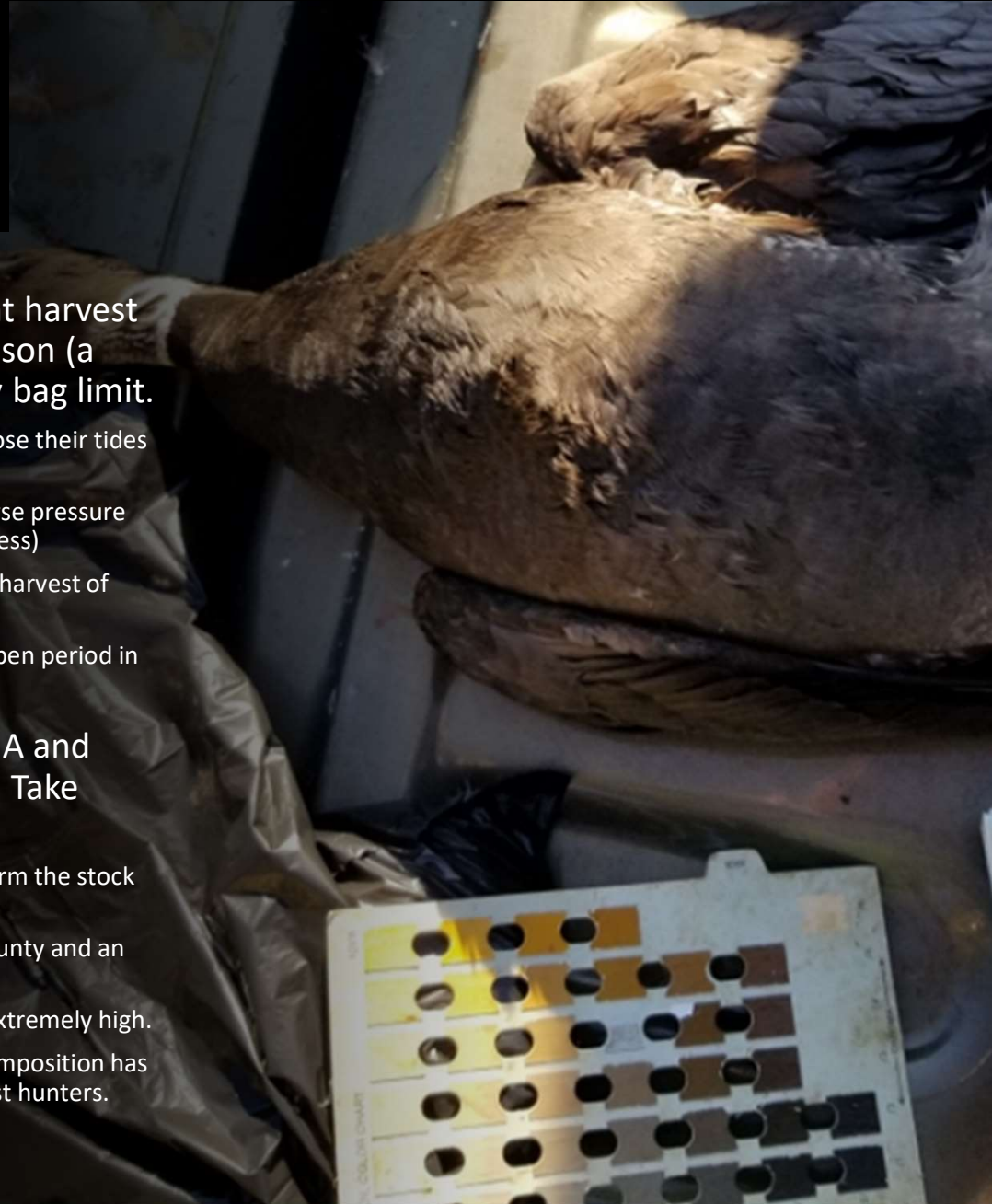


## Questions for consideration:

Are brant hunters asking for short-term or long-term harvest potential ?  
Should brant opportunities to harvest be shared across users or kept for a select few? (example: traditional/avid vs. youth)

## Alternatives?:

- **Dispersing hunter effort/efficiency:** Reformat the brant harvest record card to allow a maximum of 6 brant for the season (a possession limit), while still abiding by the 2-bird daily bag limit.
  - This could work if pressure is not equal across all days (hunters chose their tides and weather, thus dropping hunter efficiency)
  - This could work if all counties are part of the card to further disperse pressure (concern if this would be true in Clallam County due to ease of access)
  - This does not directly address the WHA objective of Skagit, where harvest of WHA is driven by a select number of sites
  - We have no history with this type of strategy, thus the length of open period in Skagit and Clallam pose concerns.
- **Focus the Skagit County brant WHA objective:** Set WHA and Black brant quotas in Skagit County, using Prescriptive Take Level (PTL) based on in-season count.
  - Would require an addition piece of monitoring information to inform the stock composition (WHA in total winter count)
  - Would require in-person checks of all harvested brant in Skagit County and an unknown in-season closure date
  - Currently non-compliance for mandatory harvest record cards is extremely high.
  - Attempts of voluntary data submission regarding color and age composition has been met with fear that the agency will use the information against hunters.



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## Alternatives?:

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