

SUMMARY SHEET

Meeting: August 7-8, 2015

Agenda Item: 2015-16 Migratory waterfowl seasons and regulations –**Public Hearing and Decision**

Presented by: Don Kraege, Waterfowl Section Manager, Wildlife Program

Background:

Department staff will brief the Commission and request action on the proposed amendment of WAC 232-28-436, 2015-16 Migratory waterfowl seasons and regulations; proposed amendment of WAC 232-12-289 Official hunting hours for game birds—Migratory game birds, upland birds, and wild turkeys; and repeal of WAC 232-16-790 Hayton Game Reserve.

Migratory waterfowl season frameworks are established through ongoing interagency management programs involving U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and flyway organizations, including input from Canada, Russia, and Mexico. Federal frameworks for fall and winter waterfowl seasons are established in late July each year, and include maximum bag limits, season lengths, season timing, and other regulations. Pacific Flyway season frameworks follow harvest strategies and management plans that have been developed cooperatively by USFWS and the Pacific Flyway Council. All states adopt waterfowl seasons within federal frameworks, and in many cases are more restrictive to address regional conservation needs.

Management agencies utilize Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) to establish duck season frameworks. AHM relies on annual survey information and population models to prescribe optimal regulation packages each year. The population of ducks in the western part of North America is managed separately from the eastern flyways, as part of the models developed for western mallard AHM. Western mallard AHM uses results from breeding surveys and other information from western areas rather than from the Canadian prairies, recognizing differences in Pacific Flyway breeding areas. The season packages proposed for western mallard AHM are the same as developed under mid-continent mallard AHM (liberal, moderate, and restrictive), although different models are used to prescribe annual packages.

Throughout north American survey areas, duck breeding populations are still benefitting from good wetland conditions during the past several years, and breeding populations increased to record levels in 2015. Pacific Flyway survey areas affecting Washington's fall and winter waterfowl populations can often show different trends from eastern survey areas that contribute more to north American breeding indices. Certain species of ducks, including pintail, canvasback, and scaup, have received additional nationwide management emphasis due to their population status and trends. These species have independent population models and harvest strategies, developed cooperatively with USFWS, and rely on population trend analyses available in late July. Most goose populations at or above Pacific Flyway objective levels.

Over the past year, Pacific Flyway agencies have been developing a new season structure for SW Washington and NW Oregon goose seasons, which will save over \$300,000 of funding each year for check stations in the two states, assist in reducing agricultural damage complaints from geese in this region, and conserve dusky Canada geese. The proposal involves closed seasons for dusky Canada geese, elimination of check station requirements in Oregon and Washington when populations exceed specified thresholds, expanding and opening the late goose season to all hunters, and extending goose hunting hours in SW Washington. The new season structure will

require additional field monitoring of harvest and collar surveys to estimate changes in survival.

The Hayton Game Reserve in Skagit County was created in 1997. The reserve was originally established as part of a farming lease agreement between Hayton Farms and WDFW on the adjacent Fir Island Farm Game Reserve, which is part of the Skagit Wildlife Area. Through this agreement, both of the areas have provided winter forage for snow geese by planting of cover crops. In 2015, WDFW awarded the farming lease for Fir Island Farm to another contractor. Because the agreement to keep its lands in game reserve status is no longer active, Hayton Farms has requested that the Commission repeal WAC 232-16-790, Hayton Game Reserve.

Policy Issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

- Establishing waterfowl hunting seasons within frameworks established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, including continuation of a 107-day season for ducks.
 - Restructuring the SW Washington goose season in conjunction with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and other Pacific Flyway agencies, to reduce operational costs for the season and agricultural damage complaints.
 - Remove game reserve status on Hayton Farms, because a prior agreement with the landowner is no longer in effect.
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Public involvement process used and what you learned:

These proposed recommendations were sent to approximately 9000 organizations and individuals for their review and consideration. In addition, proposed recommendations were presented to the Waterfowl Advisory Group on August 1. These organizations and individuals were also informed of the opportunity to provide public testimony at the August Commission meeting in Olympia.

Action requested (identify the specific Commission decisions you are seeking):

Take public comment; amend WAC 232-28-436 2015-16 Migratory waterfowl seasons and regulations; amend WAC 232-12-289 Official hunting hours for game birds—Migratory game birds, upland birds, and wild turkeys; and repeal WAC 232-16-790, Hayton Game Reserve, as presented.

Draft motion language:

I move to amend WAC 232-28-436 2015-16 Migratory waterfowl seasons and regulations, and WAC 232-12-289 Official hunting hours for game birds—Migratory game birds, upland birds, and wild turkeys, as proposed, and repeal WAC 232-16-790, Hayton Game Reserve.

Justification for Commission action:

Provide hunting recreation and agricultural damage control consistent with the status of waterfowl species.

Communications plan:

- News Release
 - Website
 - Hunting Pamphlet
 - Washington State Register
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