

## Summary Sheet

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**Meeting dates:** March 18-19, 2016

**Agenda item:** Migratory Bird Hunting Regulations and Closures – Rule Briefing and Public Hearing

**Presenter:** Don Kraege, Waterfowl Section Manager, Wildlife Program

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**Background summary:**

Department staff will brief the Commission and request action on the proposed amendment of WAC 232-28-436 2016-17 Migratory waterfowl seasons and regulations and WAC 232-16-740 Columbia, Snake, and Yakima River waterfowl, coot, and snipe closures.

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 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 survey information and population models to prescribe optimal regulation packages. 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 those developed under the mid-continent mallard AHM (liberal, moderate, and restrictive), although different models are used to prescribe annual packages.

Prior to 2016, USFWS established season frameworks in late July to consider current year biological information, and states selected seasons in August. This timing resulted in a compressed schedule for rule adoption, public review, and public notice prior to season openers. In 2015, USFWS established a new regulatory process that combined early and late season rulemaking and adjusted timing to allow for more public review. Season framework proposals are now developed one year prior to the opening of seasons, using harvest management models that account for long-term trends rather than annual fluctuations in population size and productivity. USFWS has assured states that the new process will not result in more conservative regulations or emergency regulation changes.

As a result of the new federal process, WAC 232-28-436 now includes proposals for all migratory game bird seasons established each year by USFWS and the Pacific Flyway Council. Several of these seasons were formerly in WAC 232-28-342. The new process allows us to consider seasons for all migratory game birds in one rulemaking action rather than two, and allows the public to review migratory game bird season proposals under the same schedule as other game seasons in Washington.

In 2015, most duck populations continue to benefit from excellent wetland conditions in major breeding areas, and most goose populations are at or above Pacific Flyway objective levels.

As a result, duck season frameworks for 2016-17 are the same as in 2015-16, and the proposed rule contains only calendar date adjustments for duck seasons. USFWS standardized 2016 September goose season frameworks to allow higher bag limits and later seasons, to address increasing numbers of resident Canada geese in many areas. As a result, the proposed rule increases September season daily bag limits in some management areas from 3 to 5, based on increasing population trends. In 2015-16, the Commission modified the southwest Washington goose seasons to eliminate check stations, close the season on dusky Canada geese, and move seasons later to assist with agricultural damage control. The proposed rule continues the goal of season simplification by combining Goose Management Area 2A and 2B into one management area with the same season structure. In addition, a recommended adjustment further defines the public lands that are closed to hunting during the late goose season, to address depredation concerns.

The minor amendment to WAC 232-16-740, Columbia, Snake, and Yakima River waterfowl, coot, and snipe closures corrects an inaccurate boundary description for the closure on the Snake River contained in Section 6.

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

- Combining early and late season rulemaking for migratory game bird seasons, for conformance with the new federal regulatory process and additional public review.
- Standardizing and simplifying goose season regulations.

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**Public involvement process used and what you learned:**

Requests for comments were sent to over 28,000 individuals and organizations through the rulemaking process. Additionally, these individuals and organizations were informed of the opportunity to provide verbal testimony at the March 18-19, 2016 Commission Meeting at Moses Lake.

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**Action requested:**

Take public comment. Adoption is planned for the April 8-9, 2016 Commission Meeting.

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**Draft motion language:**

N/A – Briefing and public hearing only.

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**Justification for Commission action:**

N/A – Briefing and public hearing only.

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**Communications Plan:**

WDFW Website  
News Releases  
Hunting Pamphlet