

Waterfowl

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Issue 1: Add a second special waterfowl hunt date for Veteran and Active Military Personnel

Species: Waterfowl

WAC(s): 220-416-060

Background: Waterfowl seasons are limited to 107 total days by federal law. In 2019, the option of providing up to two special waterfowl hunt dates to Veterans and Active Military personnel, in addition to the two provided for Youth, was made available. Washington currently uses one of these dates as a joint Youth, Veteran and Active Military special waterfowl hunt date on the first Saturday following the closure of the regular duck season. This proposal would provide an additional date, which would require a third consecutive closure day during the regular duck season.

Alternatives:

1. No change.
2. Support adding additional date before the regular duck season, taking a 3rd closure date during the regular duck season to be in compliance with 107 total days.
3. Support adding additional date after the regular duck season, taking a 3rd closure date during the regular duck season to be in compliance with 107 total days.

Issue 2: Placement of the required closure period during the regular duck season

Species: Waterfowl

WAC(s): 220-416-060

Background: Waterfowl seasons are limited to 107 total days by federal law. A required closure period occurs during the regular duck season to provide the necessary days to allow the youth and/or Veteran and Active Military personnel special hunt dates, and to enable the regular duck season to open and close on weekends in Washington. This closure period must occur during consecutive days. Currently, this is a 2-day closure on Monday-Tuesday during the second week of duck season, but may become a 3-day closure with the addition of a Veteran and Active Military personnel day. This proposal seeks to understand desired placement of this closure period during the regular duck season.

Alternatives:

1. No change.
2. Alternative 2: Support the placement of this required closure on Thursday-Friday (or Wednesday-Friday, if 3-days) during the first week of duck season.
3. Alternative 3: Support the placement of this required closure on Thursday-Friday (or Wednesday-Friday, if 3-days) during the second week of duck season.
4. Alternative 4: Support the placement of this required closure on Monday-Tuesday (or Monday-Wednesday, if 3-days) during the third week of duck season.
5. Alternative 5: Support the placement of this required closure on Thursday-Friday (or Wednesday-Friday, if 3-days) during the third week of duck season.

Issue 3: Placement of the special youth-only waterfowl hunting date in western Washington

Species: Waterfowl

WAC(s): 220-416-060

Background: A Youth-only waterfowl hunt date typically occurs on a Saturday during late-September in western Washington. This structure creates a separate youth waterfowl date for western Washington and eastern Washington allowing qualified youth waterfowl hunters to explore both opportunities. The specific Saturday in western Washington is complicated by the Youth Ring-necked Pheasant weekend being followed by the Regular Season Ring-necked Pheasant dates the next weekend under WAC 220-416-010. Currently, there is no specified placement for the youth-only waterfowl hunting date in western Washington. This proposal seeks to understand desired placement of this hunting date in relationship to the youth Pheasant Weekend.

Alternatives:

1. No change.
2. Alternative 2: Support the youth waterfowl date being held on a separate Saturday in September, not overlapping any pheasant hunts.
3. Alternative 3: Support overlap on the same weekend in September of the youth waterfowl date (Saturday-only) and youth pheasant hunt in western Washington in all years.

Issue 4: Change the boundary of Goose Management Area 1 to align with management objectives

Species: Waterfowl

WAC(s): 220-416-060

Background: Goose Management Area 1 currently includes Skagit, Snohomish and Island counties. This Goose Management Area is designated to assist in management responsibilities for the Wrangel Island population of Lesser Snow Geese that winter in the Skagit-Fraser region. Shifting of season dates into February in Goose Management Area 1 have highlighted differences that exist between Goose Management Area 1 and Goose Management Area 3. This proposal would change the boundary of Goose Management Area 1 (with February white goose-only season dates) and by extension modify the adjacent Goose Management Area 3 (without February goose season dates).

Alternatives:

1. No change.
2. Alternative 2: Remove Island County only (Island County shifts into GMA 3).
3. Alternative 3: Modify Snohomish County only (a portion of Snohomish County remains in GMA1 and the remainder shifts into GMA3).
4. Alternative 4: Add Whatcom County only (Whatcom County shifts into GMA1).
5. Alternative 5: A combination of alternatives 2, 3, and 4.

Issue 5: Increase the bag-limit for white geese (snow, Ross', and blue phase variants) in Washington

Species: Waterfowl

WAC(s): 220-416-060

Background: Harvest strategies related to white geese (including snow, Ross', and blue phase variants) outlined in Pacific Flyway Management Plans for goose populations and the WDFW Game Management Plan prompt consideration of increased bag-limits for white geese in Washington based on current population status. This proposal would increase the bag-limit on white geese in Washington.

Alternatives:

1. No change.
2. Alternative 2: Support, a uniform bag-limit increase across all zones and season segments
3. Alternative 3: Support, differential bag-limit increase across zones and season segments to enhance management actions (for example: a white goose bag-limit that is higher during white goose-only season segments)

Issue 6: Allow the use of electronic calls during a White Goose-only (snow goose) season segment

Species: Waterfowl

WAC(s): 220-414-090

Background: Federal Law allows an exception to the use of electronic calls during a White Goose-only season segment, explicitly when no other migratory gamebird seasons are open in the same zone. In Washington, WAC 220-414-090 prohibits the use or aid of electronic calls at all times. This proposal would bring WAC 220-414-090 in alignment with the federal exception during a White Goose-only season segment.

Alternatives:

1. No change.
2. Alternative 2: Support bringing WAC 220-414-090 in alignment with the federal exception for use or aid of electronic calls during a white goose-only season segment in Washington

Issue 7: Waterfowl hunter opinion regarding future Sea Duck harvest management

Species: Waterfowl

WAC(s): 220-416-060

Background: Washington hosts a unique assemblage of sea duck species, ducks that are highly dependent upon marine environments during the non-breeding season. WDFW has documented significant declines in several sea duck species, resulting in implementation of species-specific bag-limits in some form since 1998, in order to prioritize conservation of these species while maintaining general harvest opportunity. This proposal seeks waterfowl hunter input regarding future harvest strategies, should population status require further harvest restrictions.

Alternatives:

1. No change.
2. Alternative 2: Support shortened seasons, less than the regular duck season
3. Alternative 3: Support, waterfowl closure zones in high disturbance areas of the Puget Sound to address reduced numbers of sea ducks in these areas
4. Alternative 4: Support, species-specific closures
5. Alternative 5: A combination of alternatives 2, 3, and 4 to address sea duck conservation concerns while maintaining harvest opportunity

Issue 8: Waterfowl hunter opinion regarding future Brant harvest management

Species: Waterfowl

WAC(s): 220-416-060

Background: Brant seasons in Washington must balance the number of hunters and the number of hunter days spent pursuing brant, with the resulting potential total harvest in creating appropriate season structure. This proposal seeks waterfowl hunter input regarding future harvest strategies, to address concerns created by a limited, set-date structure, while prioritizing brant conservation concerns.

Alternatives:

1. No change.
2. Alternative 2: Support a known number of season dates to start the Skagit County brant season based on the most recent 3-year average of counts
3. Alternative 3: Support season length being informed by the population status recorded that winter
4. Alternative 4: Support more flexibility in hunter days, with a set season quota for allowable harvest in order to avoid detrimental annual harvest levels
5. Alternative 5: A combination of alternatives 2, 3, and 4 to address brant conservation concerns and harvest strategies

Issue 9: Waterfowl hunter opinion regarding the need for Waterfowl Regulated Access Areas on public lands to assist waterfowl harvest opportunities and hunter experience

Species: Waterfowl

WAC(s): 220-416-060 and 220-500-040

Background: Public lands in Washington facilitate the majority of waterfowl hunter days afield. Balancing waterfowl hunting opportunities with resource requirements and habitat management have direct implications to the waterfowl hunting experience on these limited public lands. Changes to local waterfowl production, proximity of feeding to resting areas, the quality of wetland habitat management, and the amount of disturbance pressure can all influence what waterfowl hunters experience in various areas of the state. This proposal asks waterfowl hunters in Washington, what should the department prioritize when crafting waterfowl hunting opportunities on public lands?

Alternatives:

1. No change.
2. Alternative 2: Prioritize waterfowl population status and wetland habitat enhancements on public lands
3. Alternative 3: Prioritize waterfowl hunters' access to public lands
4. Alternative 4: Work with local stakeholders to identify limited access opportunities appropriate for improving a particular public land site by reducing pressure and competition (example: on a specific Wildlife Area Unit)
5. Alternative 5: A combination of alternatives 2, 3, and 4 to balance waterfowl conservation, habitat management, and waterfowl hunter opportunities and experience on public lands

Issue 10: Waterfowl hunter opinion regarding the use of electronic decoys for waterfowl hunting in Washington

Species: Waterfowl

WAC(s): 220-414-090

Background: The use or aid of battery-powered or other electronic devices as decoys is prohibited under WAC 220-414-090. Increases in the annual harvest or harvest rate of mallard could trigger a prescribed reduction in the season length and allowable duck season bag-limits throughout the entire Pacific Flyway. Reduced season alternatives would result in 86 days or less in western Washington and 93 days or less in eastern Washington for duck season, with additional restrictions that would, at a minimum, lower mallard daily bag limits. Mallard are consistently the number one harvested species of duck in Washington, regularly accounting for 50% of total harvest or approximately 200,000 mallards. Washington consistently ranks in the Top-2 for total mallard harvest of the Pacific Flyway states. This proposal asks waterfowl hunters in Washington, what is your current stance regarding the use of electronic decoys for waterfowl hunting in Washington?

Alternatives:

1. No change: Oppose use of electronic decoys
2. Alternative 2: Support use of electronic decoys if they did not lead to hunting restrictions
3. Alternative 3: Support use of electronic decoys unconditionally