

# 2012 NORTH CAROLINA DUCK ZONING SURVEY

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Prepared by:

**Dain Palmer**

Human Dimensions Biologist  
Division of Wildlife Management

**Joe Fuller**

Migratory Game Bird Coordinator  
Division of Wildlife Management  
Surveys and Research Section

**Doug Howell**

Waterfowl Biologist  
Division of Wildlife Management  
Surveys and Research Section

## **Introduction**

Duck hunting seasons must follow multiple federal guidelines relating to number of hunting days, earliest opening date and latest closing date. However, within the opening and closing dates, states may choose from a number of options to set actual hunting dates. For many years, North Carolina has chosen to split the duck hunting season into 3 segments and this season has occurred statewide. As an alternative, states may also create geographically distinct duck hunting zones. If duck hunting zones are created, each zone may have its own independent season dates. However seasons within each zone can no longer be split into 3 segments.

For a number of years, we have received anecdotal reports from coastal duck hunters, particularly those attending District 4 waterfowl public meetings, who would prefer to shift October hunting days to later in the year. However, agency staff did not have statewide data to understand the opinions of waterfowl hunters about this issue. During a 2011 statewide waterfowl hunter opinion survey, we asked several questions regarding preference for season dates. Regarding the specific question of whether the Commission should “do away with the early October segment and add these days to the 3<sup>rd</sup> segment,” 52% of hunters statewide agreed with this statement whereas 30% of hunters disagreed. Respondents were asked to rate their level of disagreement/agreement on a five point scale (1=Strongly Disagree; 3=Neutral; 5=Strongly Agree). Statewide, the mean score for this statement was 3.4 indicating “statewide” support for doing away with the October hunting days. However, there were significant differences of opinion based on duck hunting location. Coastal plain hunters had a mean score of 3.6 while scores for Piedmont and mountain hunters ranged from 2.4 to 3.0. Due to the difference of opinions by hunters based on their hunting location, zoning is an option that may allow for these varying season date preferences to be met. We note that while the majority of coastal plain duck hunters appear to prefer doing away with the October hunting days, 14-15% of coastal plain hunters were strongly opposed to doing so.

Our 2011 statewide waterfowl hunter survey did not mention the option of zoning and the questions were not framed in that context. Because hunters were not asked their opinions of zoning directly, we implemented an additional survey in 2012 that specifically mentioned the zoning option and several possible season dates that could be chosen if North Carolina decides to zone the state for duck hunting.

## **Methods**

In April 2012 we surveyed duck hunters about the possibility of zoning the state for duck hunting using an Internet-based survey. In order to make the results as representative as possible of duck hunters statewide, we contacted by email duck hunters identified in a 2011 statewide survey of waterfowl hunters. There were 3,129 respondents to the 2011 statewide survey of waterfowl hunters who indicated they had hunted ducks in the previous five years; of those, we had email addresses for 2,332 (75%). We invited all 2,332 of these hunters to complete the 2012 duck zoning survey. There were six additional duck hunters invited to complete the survey who had requested that their views be included.

Respondents to the 2012 zoning survey tended to have higher education levels and to have reported spending more on waterfowl hunting than duck hunters identified in the 2011 waterfowl hunter survey

who were not respondents to the zoning survey. Therefore, we weighted zoning survey data based on education and reported spending on waterfowl hunting.

## Results

- The 2012 duck zoning survey response rate was 34%.
- Most (71%) of duck hunters preferred having 2 duck hunting zones, 23% preferred having the same duck season dates statewide, and 6% were unsure. Higher percentages of coastal plain duck hunters preferred zoning than Piedmont and mountain hunters (Figure 1, Table 1).
- We asked hunters who preferred having 2 duck hunting zones about three possible season structures. Of the options described in Table 2, 38% preferred Option 1, 33% preferred Option 2, 26% preferred Option 3, and 3% were unsure. There were some differences in preferences based on region duck hunted (Table 3).
- We asked hunters who preferred having 2 duck hunting zones about preferences for a boundary between eastern and western duck hunting zones. Fifty-eight percent of duck hunters preferred Interstate 95, 21% preferred Interstate 77, 9% preferred U.S. Highway 17, 4% preferred having some other boundary, and 9% were unsure about a possible boundary.

Figure 1. Duck hunting regions from a 2011 survey of North Carolina waterfowl hunters.

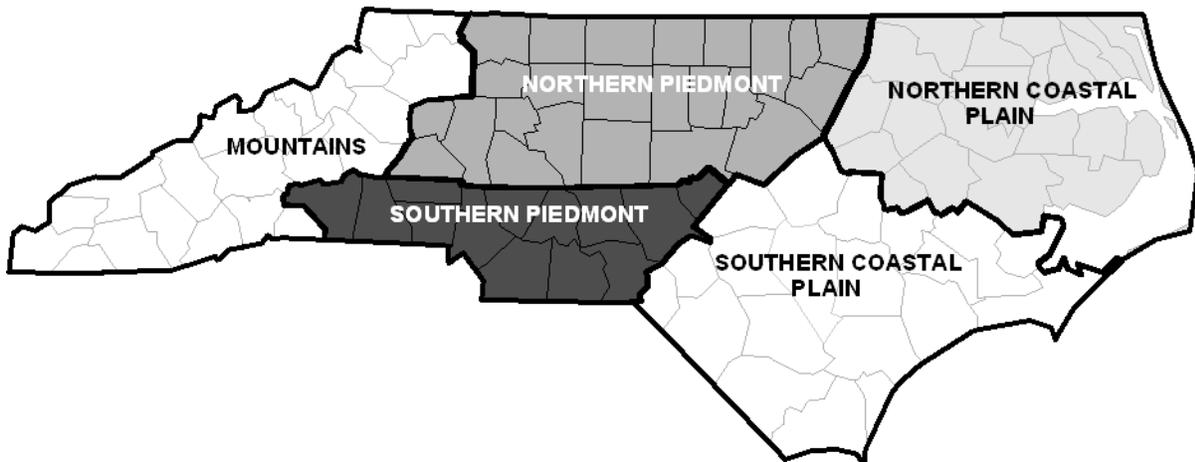


Table 1. Preferences for duck hunting season zones by duck hunting region as reported during a 2011 survey of North Carolina waterfowl hunters and a 2012 survey of North Carolina duck hunters.

Please indicate the region in North Carolina in which you duck hunted the most days during the last 5 years.					
Do you prefer having 2 separate duck hunting zones in North Carolina or continuing to have the same duck season dates statewide?	Northern	Southern	Northern	Southern	
	Coastal Plain	Coastal Plain	Piedmont	Piedmont	Mountains
Prefer having 2 duck hunting zones	77%	73%	61%	62%	57%
Prefer having the same duck season dates statewide	18%	23%	28%	29%	28%
Unsure	5%	4%	11%	9%	15%

Table 2. Season structure options presented during a 2012 survey of North Carolina duck hunters.

	<b>Eastern zone</b>	<b>Western zone</b>
Option 1	All 60 hunting days would be held as late as possible with no season split (This includes the week of Thanksgiving).	The 60 day season would be split into 2 segments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the first segment would open in early October and run for 4 days and</li> <li>the remaining days would be held as late as possible.</li> </ul>
Option 2	The 60 day season would be split into 2 segments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the 1<sup>st</sup> segment would open in <b>mid-November</b> and run through early December,</li> <li>there would be a <b>one</b> week closed period after the first segment, and</li> <li>the 2<sup>nd</sup> segment would open mid-December and run through late January.</li> </ul>	Same as described in Option 1.
Option 3	The 60 day season would be split into 2 segments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the 1<sup>st</sup> segment would open in <b>early November</b> and run through early December,</li> <li>there would be a <b>two week</b> closed period after the first segment, and</li> <li>the 2<sup>nd</sup> segment would open mid-December and run through late January.</li> </ul>	Same as described in Option 1.

Table 3. Preferences for duck hunting season zoning options by duck hunting region as reported during a 2011 survey of North Carolina waterfowl hunters and a 2012 survey of North Carolina duck hunters.

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Please indicate the region in North Carolina in which you duck hunted the most days during the last 5 years.

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Which of the following duck season zoning options do you prefer?	Northern Coastal Plain	Southern Coastal Plain	Northern Piedmont	Southern Piedmont	Mountains
Option 1	42%	39%	30%	25%	39%
Option 2	34%	30%	41%	30%	25%
Option 3	24%	25%	27%	43%	36%
Unsure	1%	6%	2%	1%	0%

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**Summary**

This survey corroborates the 2011 statewide duck hunter survey in that there appears to be support for zoning the state for duck hunting. All geographic regions support zoning, with coastal plain hunters having the highest support for zoning. Of the individual season date options we presented, the option of holding all 60 hunting days as late as possible in a coastal zone received the highest percentage response (38%). However, a majority of hunters would appear to prefer a split season with either a one week (33%) or a two week (26%) split.