



## Overview of Changes for 2022-2023 Migratory Game Bird Seasons

### **ELIMINATION OF THE SPECIAL SEA DUCK SEASON AND REDUCED SEA DUCK BAG LIMITS IN THE ATLANTIC FLYWAY**

Prior to 2016, sea duck hunting season frameworks allowed for 107 hunting days, the maximum under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and a bag limit of seven sea ducks per day. These liberal hunting season frameworks for sea ducks stemmed from decades ago, when sea ducks were pursued infrequently and were considered an underutilized species. However, over time participation in sea duck hunting has increased, and Atlantic Flyway biologists became concerned that increased harvest on sea ducks was negatively impacting sea duck populations.

In 2016, the Atlantic Flyway Council and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) approved reducing the number of sea duck hunting days from 107 to 60 days, and the bag limit from 7 sea ducks to 5 sea ducks per day, and no more than 4 of any sea duck species.

The goal of the 2016 changes to sea duck hunting season frameworks were to reduce sea duck harvest in the Atlantic Flyway by 25% over the next 5 years. However, during the next 5 years, harvest increased for long-tailed ducks (73%), black scoter (40%), surf scoter (18%), and common eider (14%). These increases in harvest prompted Atlantic Flyway biologists to reconsider sea duck hunting season frameworks beginning in 2022-2023 to achieve the original goal of a reduction in sea duck harvest.

Atlantic Flyway and USFWS biologists evaluated the expected level of harvest reduction under several scenarios that included combinations of the number of sea duck hunting days allowed, timing of when those hunting days occurred, species specific bag limits, and total sea duck daily bag limits. The scenario that was agreeable and best fit the goal of reducing sea duck harvest was the elimination of the Special Sea Duck Season in the Atlantic Flyway beginning with the 2022-2023 waterfowl hunting season. Under this new framework, sea duck season dates and bag limits will be included within the regular duck season frameworks. Sea duck daily bag limits have also been reduced to 4 total sea ducks with no more than 3 scoters, 3 eiders (only 1 hen eider) and 3 long-tailed ducks.

In North Carolina, sea ducks can now only be taken during the Coastal Zone season dates and all sea ducks taken, regardless of a hunter's location (i.e. within or outside of the Sea Duck Area), will count toward a hunter's daily bag limit of 6 ducks. The Sea Duck Area will remain in place to allow open-water hunters to chase crippled waterfowl while in a boat under power.

## **INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF HUNTING DAYS IN THE NORTHEAST CANADA GOOSE HUNT ZONE**

The Atlantic Flyway Council recently adopted a revised Atlantic Population (AP) Canada Geese Harvest Strategy to guide setting of AP Canada geese hunting regulations beginning with the 2022-2023 season. During this process, and after careful review of trends in hunter harvest and participation over the last 10 years within North Carolina's Northeast Canada Goose Hunt Zone, the revised harvest strategy allows an increase from 14 to 30 total hunting days in the Northeast Hunt Zone when the status of the AP goose population prescribes either a restrictive, moderate, or liberal hunting season. The Northeast Hunt Zone bag limit will remain at 1 goose/day during restrictive and moderate hunting seasons and will increase to 2 geese/day during liberal seasons. For 2022-2023, all AP harvest areas in the Atlantic Flyway, including the Northeast Hunt Zone, are under a restrictive season and will be allowed no more than 30 hunting days.

In order to track trends in harvest and participation into the future, a permit and harvest survey will continue to be required to hunt Canada geese in the Northeast Hunt Zone during the regular waterfowl season, and during Youth and Veterans\Military Waterfowl Days. An unlimited number of permits will be issued.

## **INCREASE IN THE HOODED MERGANSER BAG LIMIT IN THE ATLANTIC FLYWAY**

Hooded merganser populations appear healthy and have been increasing at a rate of 2 to 7%/year in 4 independent surveys during the past ~25 years. Accordingly, in the Atlantic Flyway, the hooded merganser bag limit restriction of 2 hooded mergansers/day will be lifted beginning with the 2022-2023 season. Hunters may now take an aggregate bag of 5 total mergansers (hooded, common, or red-breasted) daily.