



March 19, 2024

RE: Establishing a MT Central Flyway Zone 3 in 2025

Dear Honorable Commissioners,

Waterfowl hunting in Montana is a well-kept secret. Many opportunities exist throughout the state for waterfowlers. However, the season structure handicaps the resident hunters living in far Northeast Montana. This area is generally comprised of Daniels, Sheridan, and Roosevelt counties (DSR). Reason - these counties are in an area whose weather can be described as "Canadian". Typically, all water in this area is frozen by November 15. In 2023 an early cold snap froze up the area on October 24.

The Central Flyway waterfowl season (in general) runs from approximately October 1st into January of the following year. DSR area hunters (in Zone 1) are handicapped with this structure due to all waterbodies generally freezing over by Thanksgiving each year (and as noted sometimes much earlier). Thus, limiting the number of days for Waterfowling enjoyment.

There is a remedy to this situation. It is federally permissible for the state to establish an early Canada Goose hunting season running from September 1-15 each year. This can be done for the DSR by establishing a new MT Central Flyway Zone 3. This early goose season will enhance the days afield for Canada Goose waterfowl hunters. There would be no impact on Central Flyway Zones 1 & 2 goose hunting seasons.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) establishes frameworks for migratory bird hunting regulations, including season lengths, bag limits, and zones. States can be more restrictive, but not more liberal than the federal frameworks.

It is possible to establish a new MT Central Flyway Zone 3 comprised of the DSR counties. The establishment of new zones must follow the Commission and Central Flyway process, and it requires approval from the USFWS. The creation of new zones is permissible only within the timeframe specified by the USFWS, occurring once every five years. The zoning process will open in 2025, but meetings may begin in August 2024.

Please find attached a proposal to establish a 2025-6 Central Flyway Zone 3 comprised of Daniels, Sheridan, and Roosevelt Counties.

What I am asking of you, the Commissioners is:

1. What is the process for further consideration of my proposal?
2. Who would be the most appropriate personnel (MTFWP Flyway Coordinator?) to work through?

Please feel free to contact me at your convenience for discussions or additional information.

Sincerely,

Stephen J. Christian

Ec: Faye McNew & Ken McDonald, MTFWP – Helena
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Proposal for establishment of a Central Flyway Zone 3 Daniels, Sheridan, and Roosevelt Counties

Currently Montana's Central Flyway (CF) - Waterfowl is split into two zones. The CF was split into Zones 1 and 2 in 2000(?) to increase waterfowl hunting opportunities in Zone 2 later into January. Winter weather conditions in Zone 2 (particularly along the Yellowstone River corridor) make it an important migration and wintering area for Canada Geese and many duck species.

Conversely, some areas of MT CF Zone 1 (far northeast MT) do not offer opportunity for waterfowl to over-winter or for adequate season-long waterfowl hunting. The Hi-Line counties of Daniels, Sheridan, and Roosevelt have severe early winter low temperatures. Most water bodies (if not all) freeze by Thanksgiving, and in many years much earlier (Oct. 24 in 2023).

This is a proposal to increase waterfowl hunting opportunities in the far Northeast corner of Montana - Daniels, Sheridan, and Roosevelt Counties.

The proposal has two components:

1. Create a new CF Zone 3, comprised of Daniels, Sheridan, and Roosevelt counties. This will require an the FWP to petition the US Fish and Wildlife Service.
2. Follow the federal migratory bird hunting framework and establish an early Canada Goose hunting season from September 1-15 each year in new Zone 3. Please see attachment 2 for Federal Register citations.

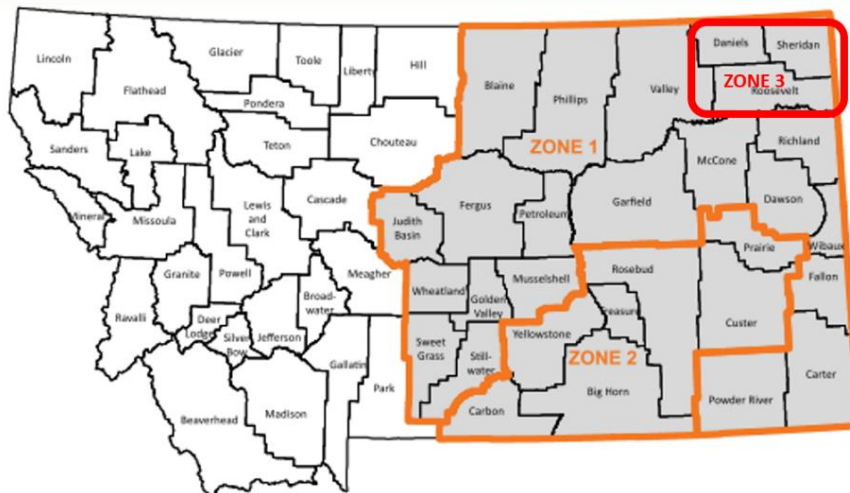
Other Reference:

Attachment 1 - Federal Register Citations and Web Link
2023-24 USFWS Regulatory Season Framework, Central Flyway & MT Excerpts

Proposed Central Flyway Zone 3

Central Flyway - Waterfowl

The Central Flyway includes Blaine, Fergus, Judith Basin, Wheatland, Sweet Grass, Stillwater and Carbon counties and all counties lying east of these.



Zone 1 (Ducks, Coots & Geese): Includes Blaine, Carter, Daniels, Dawson, Fallon, Fergus, Garfield, Golden Valley, Judith Basin, McCone, Musselshell, Petroleum, Phillips, Powder River, Richland, Roosevelt, Sheridan, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Valley, Wheatland and Wibaux counties.

Zone 2 (Ducks, Coots & Geese): Includes Big Horn, Carbon, Custer, Prairie, Rosebud, Treasure and Yellowstone counties.

Attachment 1

Federal Register Citations and Web Link

2023-24 USFWS Regulatory Season Framework, Central Flyway & Montana Excerpts

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/08/11/2023-17175/migratory-bird-hunting-final-2023-24-frameworks-for-migratory-bird-hunting-regulations>

54830 Federal Register / Vol. 88, No. 154 / **Friday, August 11, 2023** / Rules and Regulations

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

50 CFR Part 20

[Docket No. FWS–HQ–MB–2022–0090; FF09M31000–234–FXMB1231099BPP0]

RIN 1018–BF64

Migratory Bird Hunting; Final 2023–24 Frameworks for Migratory Bird Hunting Regulations AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Final rule.

Final Regulatory Frameworks for 2023– 24 Hunting Seasons on Certain Migratory Game Birds (starts on page 54838)

II. Season Frameworks

3. Central Flyway (page 54842)

b. Special Early Canada and Cackling Goose Seasons (page 54843)

Outside Dates and Seasons Lengths: In Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Texas, 30 days between September 1–30; in Colorado, New Mexico, **Montana**, and Wyoming, Canada and cackling goose seasons of **not more than 15 days between September 1–15**; and in North Dakota, 22 days between September 1–22.

Daily Bag Limits: **5 geese in the aggregate** in Colorado, New Mexico, **Montana**, Wyoming, and Texas; 8 geese in the aggregate in Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma; and 15 geese in the aggregate in North Dakota and South Dakota.

c. Canada Goose, Cackling Goose, and Brant Seasons (page 54843)

Outside Dates: Saturday nearest September 24 (September 23)–the Sunday nearest February 15 (February 18).

Seasons and Daily Bag Limits: In Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and the Eastern Goose Zone of Texas, 107 days with a daily bag limit of 8 geese; in Colorado, **Montana**, New Mexico, and Wyoming, **107 days with a daily bag limit of 5 geese**; and in Texas (Western Goose Zone), 95 days with a daily bag limit of 5 geese.

Split Seasons: Seasons may be split into 3 segments. Three-segment seasons require Central Flyway Council and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approval, and a 3-year evaluation by each participating State.

III. Area, Unit, and Zone Descriptions (starts on page 54847)

Geese (starts on page 54854)

Montana (Central Flyway Portion) Page 54857

Zone 1: Same as Zone 1 for ducks and coots. (see page 54851)

The Counties of Blaine, Carter, **Daniels**, Dawson, Fallon, Fergus, Garfield, Golden Valley, Judith Basin, McCone, Musselshell, Petroleum, Phillips, Powder River, Richland, **Roosevelt, Sheridan**, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Valley, Wheatland, and Wibaux.

Zone 2: Same as Zone 2 for ducks and coots. (see page 54851)

The Counties of Big Horn, Carbon, Custer, Prairie, Rosebud, Treasure, and Yellowstone.