

WATERFOWL SEASON SETTING PROCESS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service establishes frameworks for migratory bird hunting regulations, including season lengths, bag limits, and zones. States then choose hunting seasons within these frameworks, considering factors like population size, breeding efforts, habitat conditions, and hunter numbers. States can be more restrictive, but not more liberal than the federal frameworks. Harvest regulations for the 2024-25 season will be almost unchanged from last year.

Waterfowl are managed on a Flyway level. The western portion of Montana falls within the Pacific Flyway while the eastern portion of Montana is in the Central Flyway. In addition, Montana is within the High Plains Mallard Management Unit (approx. west of the 100th meridian) of the Central Flyway and thus gets an additional 23 days above the 74 days in the rest of the Central Flyway.

Ducks

Central Flyway: The Federal season framework dates for the duck season are the Saturday nearest September 24-January 31.

The season length is 97 days. The last 23 days must be consecutive and may start no earlier than the Saturday nearest December 10. There can be no season splits in the last 23 days.

The daily bag limit is 6 ducks and mergansers in aggregate, including no more than 5 mallards (only 2 hens), 2 redheads, 3 wood ducks, 1 pintail, 1 scaup, and 2 canvasbacks.

Special Early Teal Season – In lieu of a September teal season Montana may include an additional daily bag and possession limit of 2 and 6 teal respectively for the first 16 days of the season.

Montana may select seasons in each of 2 Zones and may split the season into 2 segments in each zone. Any changes to duck zones must go through the Flyway and USFWS process. New zones may be requested every five years with the next opportunity being in 2025.

Pacific Flyway: The Federal season framework dates for the duck season are the Saturday nearest September 24-January 31.

The season length is 107 days. The season length for scaup is 86 days, which may be split.

The daily bag limit is 7 ducks and mergansers in aggregate, including no more than 2 female mallards, 2 redheads, 1 pintail, 2 scaup, and 2 canvasbacks.

Montana may split the duck season into 3 segments. Any changes to duck zones must go through the Flyway and USFWS process. New zones may be requested every five years with the next opportunity being in 2025.

Geese

Central Flyway: The Federal season framework dates for the dark goose (Canada, Cackling, White-Fronted geese) season are the Saturday nearest September 24 to the Sunday nearest February 15.

The season length is 107 days. The season may be split into 3 segments. Three-segment seasons require Central Flyway and USFWS approval, and a 3-year evaluation. Currently Zone 1 has no split season and Zone 2 is split into 2 segments.

Montana may select a Special Early Canada Goose season of no more than 15 days between September 1-15 with a daily bag limit of 5 geese. The days used during the early season must be taken out of the regular season.

The federal framework dates for the light geese season are the Saturday nearest September 24 to March 10. The season length is 107 days. The daily bag limit is 50 and there is no possession limit.

Pacific Flyway: The Federal season framework dates for the dark goose (Canada, Cackling, White-Fronted geese) season are the Saturday nearest September 24 to the Sunday nearest February 15.

The season length is 107 days. The season may be split into 3 segments. Three-segment seasons require Pacific Flyway and USFWS approval, and a 3-year evaluation. Currently, we have no split season.

Montana may select a Special Early Canada Goose season of no more than 15 days between September 1-20 with a daily bag limit of 5 geese. The days used during the early season must be taken out of the regular season.

The federal framework dates for the light geese season are the Saturday nearest September 24 to March 10. The season length is 107 days. The daily bag limit is 20.

Swans – Montana must evaluate hunter participation, species-specific swan harvest, and hunter compliance in providing bill measurements in both flyways. Montana must have an 80% survey return compliance or the USFWS will reduce the number of permits available.

Central Flyway: The federal season framework dates for swans (Trumpeter and Tundra) are October 1 – January 31. The season length is 107 days and may not be split into segments.

Hunting is by state permit only. Montana may issue 500 permits. Permits will authorize the take of no more than 1 swan per permit. A second permit may be issued to hunters from unissued permits remaining after the first drawing.

Pacific Flyway: The federal season framework dates for swans (Trumpeter and Tundra) are October 1 – January 31. The season length is 107 days and may be split into 2 segments. Currently, the season is not split into segments.

Hunting is by state permit only. Montana may issue 500 permits. Permits will authorize the take of no more than 1 swan per permit. Only 1 permit may be issued per hunter.

Cranes

Central Flyway: The federal season framework dates for Sandhill Cranes are September 1 – February 28. The season length is 58 days and may not be split into segments.

Hunting is by state permit only. The bag limit is 3 cranes.

Pacific Flyway: The federal season framework dates for Sandhill Cranes are September 1 – January 31. The season length is 60 days and may be split into 3 segments.

Hunting is by state permit only. The bag limit is 3 cranes with a possession limit of 9 cranes per season.