

# DEVELOPING 2016 WATERFOWL HUNTING SEASON REGULATIONS

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There are many factors consider when developing waterfowl hunting regulations. Waterfowl are influenced by factors occurring both within the state and beyond Iowa's borders. Because waterfowl are an international migratory resource the ultimate responsibility for managing migratory birds rests with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Working with state wildlife agencies through the Flyway Councils the USFWS identifies a range of reasonable alternatives for waterfowl hunting seasons.

On an annual basis the USFWS reviews the habitat conditions and breeding populations of waterfowl and selects a hunting regulation package. States are then able to select season dates and bag limits that fall within these federal frameworks.

There is a diversity of information to consider when developing waterfowl hunting seasons. The time period that waterfowl are present and migrating through Iowa is longer than the allowable hunting season length, making the dates selected particularly important.

Additionally, hunters have a range of preferences in regards to how and when they hunt. In order to select season dates that benefit the greatest number of hunters the Iowa DNR examines a variety of information sources. We recently summarized information to develop a proposal on season dates and zone boundaries.

## Migration Chronology

Perhaps the most important consideration is whether birds will be available to hunters. Many of the ducks harvested in Iowa did not hatch in Iowa, thus it is vital to time the duck season to coincide with the migration through the state. Migration varies annually primarily due to weather. The Iowa DNR has a long term fall migration survey that documents the chronology of waterfowl passing through the state. Wildlife staff survey waterfowl weekly on select areas from September through December. This information can be summarized by regions and years to provide documentation on the timing of migration through the state. The two graphs below depict average migration dates through Iowa's north and south hunting zones from 2006-13.

## Harvest Survey

Data from the federal Harvest Information Program shows that in the north zone duck hunting participation and harvest are highest early in the season. In the south zone duck hunting participation is substantial during the early season but is highest in November, while harvest is highest during the opening weeks early in the season and in mid-November. The results were similar for Canada geese. In the north zone, hunting participation gradually declined as the season progressed and the majority of the harvest occurred early in the season. In the south zone, goose hunting participation was relatively stable while harvest was highest on the opening weeks of the season.

## Hunter Preference

A mail survey was sent to waterfowl hunters in 2015 asking their preferences and opinions on various topics and the results provide a representation of Iowa waterfowl hunters. In all three zones, waterfowl hunters selected November as the most important time to hunt ducks. The difference occurs on whether there should be more days to hunt ducks during October or December. North zone hunters selected weeks earlier in the season than south zone hunters, and Missouri River zone hunters. The results for goose hunting were again similar; November was identified as the most important time to hunt geese in both the north and south zones. Missouri River hunters were divided between November and January.

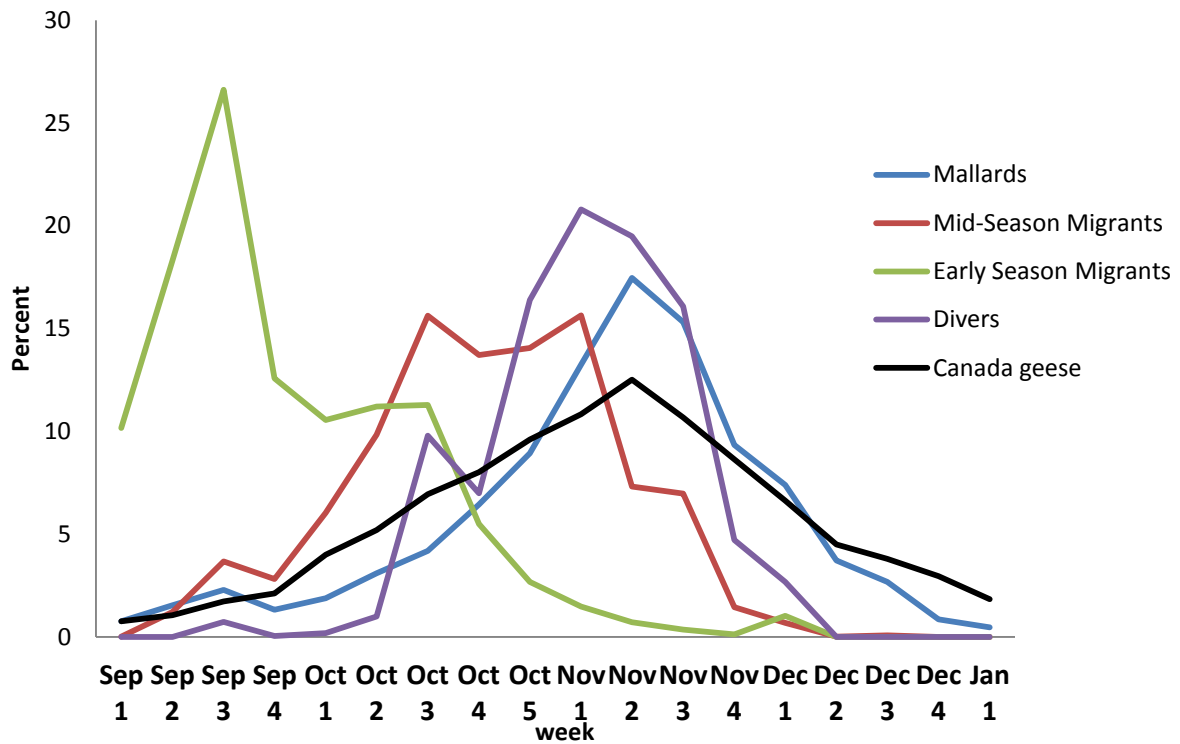


Figure 1. Waterfowl migration through the North Zone (2006-13).

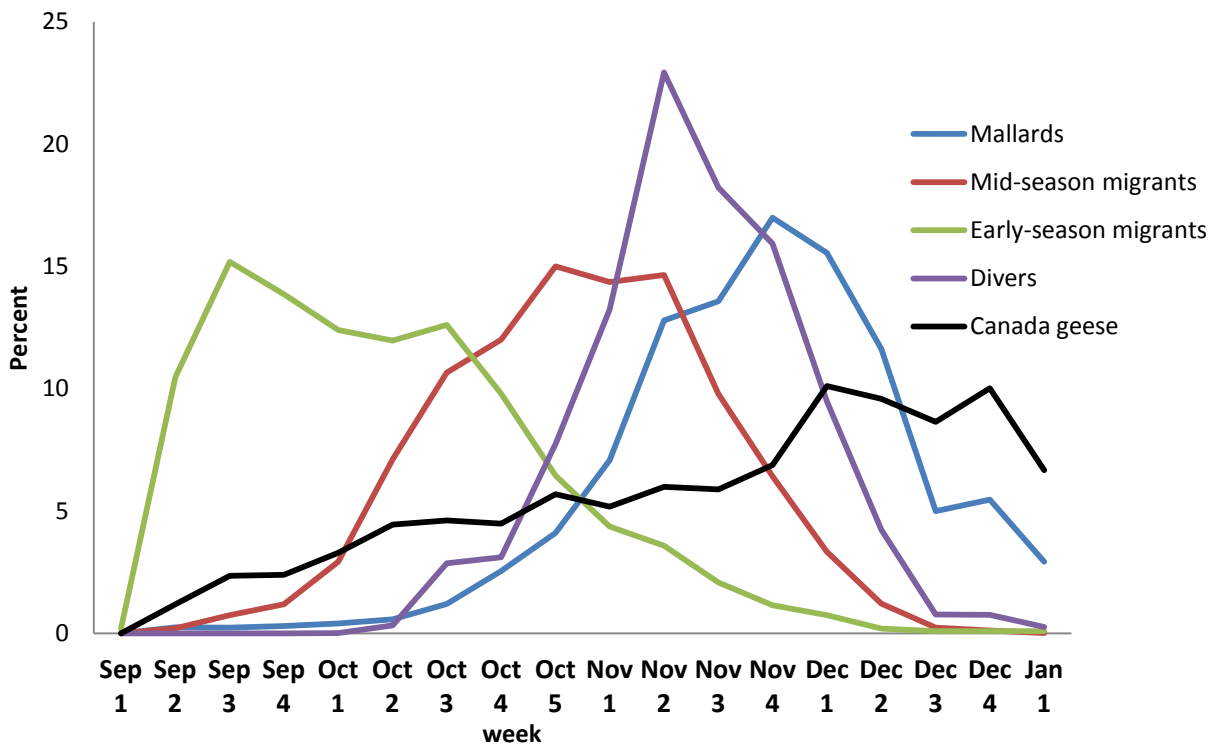


Figure 2. Waterfowl migration through the South Zone (2006-13).