



# COLORADO

## Parks and Wildlife

Department of Natural Resources

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**To:** Members of the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission

**From:** Jonathan Boydston, Public Involvement Planning Specialist, and Shana Waldman, Policy and Planning Associate, CPW

**Date:** March 3, 2023

**Re:** Northeast Duck Zone Season Date Public Comment Form Results

### Introduction

At the Commission's January meeting, Division staff presented recommendations for 2023-2024 season dates and bag limits for migratory bird hunting seasons in Colorado. Division staff recommend adjusting season dates in the Northeast Duck Zone to accommodate popular demand for more late-season hunting opportunity.

To gauge public opinion about the proposed 2023-2024 Northeast Duck Zone hunting season dates, CPW asked hunters to complete a comment form on our public engagement site, EngageCPW (see Appendix). 166 hunters completed the comment form, which asked respondents for information on their duck hunting habits and preferences, and for their opinions on the proposed season dates.

### Background Information

The Northeast Duck Zone of Colorado receives the most duck hunter activity and the highest duck harvest in Colorado. Since 2001, the regular duck hunting season in the Northeast Zone has been 96 days, and those days occur between the Saturday closest to September 24th and the end of January. Federal rules allow the season dates to be consecutive, or the season can be split into two or three segments, with a closed period between each season segment.

In order to spread out duck hunting opportunity throughout the season, CPW has historically split the season into two or three segments in the Northeast Zone. However, CPW frequently hears requests from some Northeast Duck Zone hunters to add more late-season hunting opportunities. In response to these requests, CPW is proposing to start the first season segment a week later, and start the second season segment a week earlier.

### Comment Form Results

The majority of respondents (54%) indicated that they prefer the proposed 2023-2024 season dates to the 2022-2023 season dates. 24% had no opinion on the season dates, and 15% did not like either the 2022-2023 or 2023-2024 season dates. The fewest number of respondents (8%) preferred the 2022-2023 season dates over the proposed 2023-2024 dates.



In 2022-2023, respondents spent, on average, more days hunting in wetlands that remain accessible to waterfowl after freezing temperatures than in wetlands that are inaccessible to waterfowl after freezing temperatures. Respondents spent an average of 7.0 days hunting in habitat that remains accessible to ducks after freezing temperatures, compared to 3.5 days hunting in habitat that becomes inaccessible to ducks after freezing temperatures.

When asked to rank which factors most influence their satisfaction with the hunting season, respondents indicated that “seeing and shooting any duck species” and “seeing and shooting mallards” influence their satisfaction more than other factors. According to CPW data, peak duck numbers (specifically for mallards) occur in mid-November to mid-December. Preferences by percentage are displayed below.

|  | Percentage of Respondents Who Ranked as Either First or Second Choice |
|--|---|
| Seeing and Shooting Any Duck Species                     | 55%   |
| Seeing and Shooting Mallards                             | 53%   |
| Having Maximum Opportunity to Go Duck Hunting            | 39%   |
| Minimizing Splits in the Duck Season                     | 33%   |
| Minimizing Overlap of Waterfowl and Deer Hunting Seasons | 21%   |

Regarding the season split timing, or whether to have a season split, respondents indicated a variety of preferences. 40% of respondents felt that there should be no more than one split in the duck season, even if that split is relatively long. Within that group, opinion was almost evenly divided on whether the split should fall before or after Thanksgiving. In comparison, 37% of respondents indicated that they would prefer no splits in the season. 13% of respondents preferred two short splits in the season, and 11% had no preference concerning season splits.

## APPENDIX

### Northeast Duck Zone comment form

- 1) When did you start hunting ducks? Please check one box.
  - Before 1980
  - 1980 to 1989
  - 1990 to 1999
  - 2000 to 2009
  - 2010 or later
- 2) Please indicate if you hunted ducks in Colorado in any of the following years (check each applicable box).
  - 2018
  - 2019
  - 2020
  - 2021
  - 2022
  - None of the Above
- 3) During the 2022-2023 season, how many days did you hunt ducks in Northeast Duck Zone in Colorado? If none, write in 0.
- 4) During the 2022-2023 season, how many days did you duck hunt in habitat that becomes inaccessible to ducks after freezing temperatures (e.g. shallow impoundments, shallow marsh, beaver pond, small ponds and creeks)? If none, write in 0.
- 5) During the 2022-2023 season, how many days did you duck hunt in habitat that remains accessible to ducks after freezing temperatures (e.g., big lakes, big reservoirs, big rivers)? If none, write in 0.
- 6) During the 2022-2023 season, how many days did you duck hunt in agricultural fields? If none, write in 0.
- 7) During the 2022-2023, how many days did you duck hunt on public land (federal, state, county, etc.) or publicly-accessible waterways? If none, write in 0.
- 8) During the 2022-2023, how many days did you duck hunt on private land or waters (for free)? If none, write in 0.
- 9) During the 2022-2023, how many days did you duck hunt on private land or waters (for pay) including leased land, shooting preserve, or waterfowl hunting club? If none, write in 0.
- 10) Which of the following best describes your opinion about splits in the duck season in the Northeast Duck Zone? Please check one box.
  - There should be no splits in the season.
  - There should be no more than one split in the duck season, even if that split is relatively long (e.g., up to 2 or 3 weeks), and the split should always be before Thanksgiving.
  - There should be no more than one split in the duck season, even if that split is relatively long (e.g., up to 2 or 3 weeks), and the split should always be after Thanksgiving.

- I would prefer two short (<10 days) splits in the season, one before Thanksgiving and one after Thanksgiving, rather than one long split.
- Splits in the duck season are not important to me.

11) Please RANK the following categories in order from 1 to 5, according to how much they influence your satisfaction with the hunting season dates in the Northeast Duck Zone.

1 = MOST important category, 5 = LEAST important category

- Seeing and shooting mallards (being able to hunt when mallard and black duck are most abundant or most susceptible to decoying)
- Seeing and shooting ANY ducks, regardless of species (being able to hunt when abundance of ducks (any species) is highest, or when the variety of duck species is greatest)
- Having maximum opportunity to go duck hunting (including the most weekend days and holidays in the season)
- Minimizing overlap of waterfowl and deer hunting seasons (minimizing duck season overlap with deer muzzleloader and rifle seasons)
- Minimizing splits in the duck season (avoid having splits, or minimizing the number or length of splits)

12) Which of the following best describes your opinion about the season dates proposed for 2023-2024 in the Northeast Duck Zone? Please check one box.

- I prefer the proposed 2023-2024 season dates to the 2022-2023 season dates.
- I prefer the 2022-2023 season dates to the proposed 2023-2024 season dates.
- I do not like either the 2022-2023 season dates or the proposed 2023-2024 season dates.
- I have no opinion about the proposed 2023-2024 season dates.