

## AGENDA

Board of Wildlife Resources  
Wildlife and Boat Committee  
7870 Villa Park Drive  
Henrico, Virginia 23228

January 22, 2025  
10:00 am

Committee Members: Mr. James Edmunds, Chair, Mr. Woody Woodall, Ms. Laura Walters, Mr. Will Wampler (Alternate), Mr. Brian Vincent (Alternate)

DWR Staff Liaisons: Mr. Michael Lipford, Dr. Mike Bednarski, Ms. Stacey Brown, and Ms. Amy Martin

1. Call to Order and Welcome  
Mr. Edmunds
2. Approval of the October 23, 2024, Committee Meeting Minutes **Final Action**  
Mr. Edmunds
3. Public Comment – Non - Agenda Item  
Mr. Edmunds
4. Proposals regarding Migratory Game Birds Seasons and Bag Limits **Action**  
Mr. Ben Lewis
5. Public Scoping Overview of Wildlife Regulations  
Mr. Cale Godfrey
6. Smallmouth Bass Management Plan  
Mr. Jason Hallacher and Ms. Kristen Chestnut-Faull
7. Wildlife Division Update  
Mr. Michael Lipford

8. Fish Division Update  
Dr. Mike Bednarski
9. Nongame Program Update  
Ms. Amy Martin
10. Boating Division Update  
Ms. Stacey Brown
11. Director's Report  
Mr. Ryan Brown
12. Chair's Report  
Mr. Edmunds
13. Next Meeting Date: Wednesday, March 19, 2025  
Mr. Edmunds
14. Additional Business/Comments  
Mr. Edmunds
15. Adjournment  
Mr. Edmunds

Draft Meeting Minutes  
Wildlife and Boat Committee  
Board of Wildlife Resources  
7870 Villa Park Drive – Board Room  
Henrico, VA 23228

October 23, 2024  
10:00 am

**Present:** Mr. James Edmunds, **Chair**, Mr. Woody Woodall, Ms. Laura Walters, Mr. Will Wampler (alternate), **Absent:** Mr. Brian Vincent; **Board Members** in attendance: Mr. Jon Cooper, Mr. Lynwood Broaddus, and Dr. Mamie Parker; **Executive Director:** Mr. Ryan Brown; **Deputy Directors:** Ms. Becky Gwynn and Mr. Darin Moore; **Director's Working Group:** Dr. Mike Bednarski, Ms. Stacey Brown, Mr. George Braxton, Mr. Michael Lipford, Ms. Shelby Crouch.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 10:00 am and noted for the record that a Quorum was present for today's meeting.

**Recognitions of Employees:**

The Chair called on Director Ryan Brown for Recognition of Employees.

The Director called on Dr. Mike Bednarski for presentation of an award. Dr. Bednarski called Mr. John Odenkirk to the podium to accept the Biologist of the Year award.

The Director called on Mr. Michael Lipford for presentation of an award. Mr. Lipford called Mr. Brad Mawyer to the podium to accept the SOBA award.

The Director called on Ms. Becky Gwynn for presentation of an award. Ms. Gwynn called Ms. Megan Thomas to the podium to accept the AFWA's Mark J. Reeff Award.

The Director and Wildlife and Boat Committee applauded and congratulated the recipients of their awards.

**Approval of the August 21, 2024, Committee Meeting Minutes:**

The Chair called for a motion to approve the August 21, 2024, Wildlife and Boat Committee meeting minutes. Mr. Woodall made a motion to approve the minutes of the August 21, 2024, committee meeting. Mr. Walters seconded the motion. Ayes: Edmunds, Woodall, Walters, Wampler

**Public Comment - Non-Agenda Item:** The Chair called for Public Comment – Non-Agenda Items.

- Mr. Gary Kimberlin spoke regarding hunting regulations.

The Chair thanked Mr. Kimberlin for his comments.

**Proposed Aquatic Regulations:** The Chair called on Dr. Mike Bednarski for a presentation.

Dr. Bednarski gave a presentation on the Proposed Aquatic Regulations.

After comments and questions, The Chair thanked Dr. Bednarski for his presentation.

The Chair called for a motion, Mr. Woodall made a motion, I move that the Wildlife and Boat Committee of Wildlife Resources recommend the amendments to the general aquatic regulations as presented by staff for adoption by the full board. It was seconded by Ms. Walters. Ayes: Edmunds, Woodall, Walters, Wampler

**Proposed Boating Regulations:** Mr. Edmunds called on Ms. Stacey Brown for a presentation.

Ms. Brown gave a presentation on the Proposed Boating Regulations.

After comments and questions, The Chair thanked Ms. Brown for her presentation.

The Chair called for a motion. Mr. Woodall made a motion. I move that the Wildlife and Boat Committee of the Board of Wildlife Resources recommend the amendments to the Proposed Boating Regulations as presented by staff for adoption by the full board. It was seconded by Ms. Walters. Ayes: Edmunds, Woodall, Walters, Wampler

**Proposed Non-Game Regulations:** Mr. Edmunds called on Ms. Amy Martin for a presentation.

Ms. Martin gave a presentation on the Proposed Non-Game Regulations.

After comments and questions, The Chair thanked Ms. Martin for her presentation.

The Chair called for a motion. Mr. Woodall made a motion, I move that the Wildlife and Boat Committee recommend to the Board of Wildlife Resources final adoption of the amendments to the Non-Game Regulations as presented by staff. It was seconded by Ms. Walters. Ayes: Edmunds, Woodall, Walters, Wampler

**Wildlife Division Update:** The Chair called on Mr. Michael Lipford for his Wildlife Division update.

Mr. Lipford reported:

- Deer updates for the 2024 deer season
- Staff working new 10-year Turkey Management Plan
- Attended the Atlantic Flyway Council meeting.
- Staff attended the VA Bear Hunters Association Field Trail
- Update on news of Bear Sarcoptic Mange
- Annual Safety and Operations meeting held by Lands and Access Team
- 2025 – 2026 Wildlife Regulatory Review Process
- Elk Hunt – 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual hunt was held on October 12-18, 2024.

After comments and questions, The Chair thanked Mr. Lipford for his update.

**Fish Division Update:** The Chair called on Dr. Mike Bednarski for a Fish Division Update.

Dr. Bednarski reported:

The Aquatics Division provided an overview of the impacts of Helene to the hatchery system. Five hatcheries were damaged.

Buller received significant damage to the water intake structure, dam, and several roads with an approximate impact of \$115,000. About 2000 lbs. of trout were lost.

Paint Bank experienced tree damage and loss of power, at a cost of about \$5,000.

Montebello experienced extensive erosion at a cost of about \$63,000.

Marion was impacted by flood waters, incurring \$12,500 of costs and the loss of about 750 lbs. of trout.

Vic Thomas received shoreline damage, with an estimate of \$150,000 to repair.

The Aquatics Division is preparing to revise the Stocked Trout Management Plan, with a survey to go out to constituents this winter. Of particular interest is how DWR shares information relative to trout stocking events.

Outreach has selected the Atlantic sturgeon for the Restore the Wild Art Contest, and Dr. Bednarski will be speaking at the ceremony.

After comments and questions, The Chair thanked Dr. Bednarski for his update.

**Nongame Program Update:** The Chair called on Ms. Amy Martin for a Nongame Program Update.

Ms. Martin reported:

- Impacts of Hurricane Helene at the Aquatic Wildlife Conservation Center (AWCC)
- Decline in our bat population due to white-nose syndrome is massive (90-99%) but seems to be plateauing. We'll be keeping an eye on them.
- Just started a scarlet kingsnake project at Big Woods WMA. This beautiful snake was first described in Virginia in 2007 and we are still learning about it.
- Nongame staff meeting – held at HQ, in person all healthy full-time staff attended.
- Continuing to work on our Sea Turtle and Marine Mammal Conservation Plans. We have been editing the sea turtle plan based on expert reviewer comments and hope to have it finalized soon.

After comments and questions, the Chair thanked Ms. Martin for her Update.

**Boating Division Update:** The Chair called on Ms. Stacey Brown for a Boating Division Update.

Ms. Brown reported:

- 80,000 customer contacts
- New staff in Customer Service – Brooke Landers and Paul; Mashak
- New Regional boating coordinator - Manuel Overby
- New Boating Division Assistant Director Jim Patrillo has been promoted
- Thanked the Grants Team for their assistance in applying for the Federal 2025 USCG Annual Grant to the States as well as their assistance in amending the grant closeout from the Federal Fiscal Year 2023
- Over 20,000 students take a boating safety course.
- 80 boating incidents
- Fatalities rose to 14

After comments and questions, The Chair thanked Ms. Brown for her Update.

**Director's Report:** The Chair called on Director Ryan Brown for his report.

- Attended the Hunter guide dinner (Elk) in Southwest VA
- Commended and proud of staff in region 3 staff for all their efforts and work during the Helene Hurricane.
- Public has until December 6, 2024, for public comments on Hunting Regulations

**Chair's Report:** The Chair called on Cale Godfrey to respond to how DWR reaches the public for comments on Hunting Regulations.

- Mr. Godfrey commented that we send emails to a list of 1,000+ who sign up wanted the notice, Notes of the Field has around 600,000 email addresses we send to, and we put on our web site.

The Chair reported the next meeting will be Wednesday, January 22, 2025, and asked for any additional business or comments The Chair adjourned the meeting at 11:50 noon.

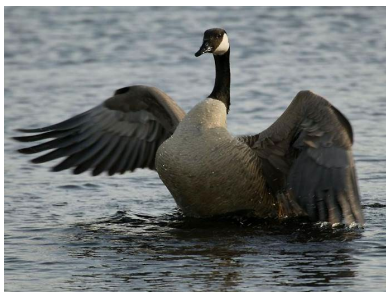
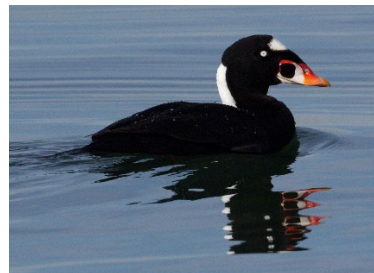
Respectfully submitted,  
Frances Boswell  
/s/





# VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

## 2025-26 MIGRATORY GAME BIRD HUNTING SEASONS – FEDERAL FRAMEWORKS AND STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS



Prepared by Wildlife Division  
January 2025

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

PRELIMINARY FEDERAL FRAMEWORKS AND STAFF PROPOSALS FOR 2025-26  
MIGRATORY GAMEBIRD SEASON DATES AND BAG LIMITS

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# **Doves**

## **Mourning Dove Background Information and Population Status**

There are three dove management units (or flyways) across the country, including the Eastern (EMU), Central (CMU) and Western (WMU) Management Units. Virginia is in the EMU.

- Population trends in the EMU:
  - 10-yr (2015-2024): gradually declining population trend.
  - Long term (1966-2024): gradually declining population trend.
- Dove Banding Project – Annual program since 2003 to leg-band over 500 doves annually in VA, and 33,000 nationwide. Data used to provide estimates of movements, survival and harvest rates, and is the main monitoring program used to develop annual hunting regulations.
- Harvest Strategy: Revised Harvest Strategy adopted in 2014 allows for a standard dove hunting season of 90 days with a bag limit of 15 birds/day when appropriate.
- Data from HIP (past 3-yr avg.): Hunters = 15,000 Harvest = 219,300

## **Recent Seasons**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Season Dates (all 70 days until extended to 90 days in 2014-15)</u>		
2024-2025	Sept. 2 – Oct. 20	Nov. 23 – Dec. 01	Dec. 20 – Jan. 20
2023-2024	Sept. 2 – Oct. 22	Nov. 18 – Nov. 26	Dec. 22 – Jan. 20
2022-2023	Sept. 3 – Oct. 23	Nov. 19 – Nov. 27	Dec. 23 – Jan. 21
2021-2022	Sept. 4 – Oct. 27	Nov. 20 – Nov. 28	Dec. 22 – Jan. 17
2020-2021	Sept. 5 – Oct. 28	Nov. 21 – Nov. 29	Dec. 24 – Jan. 19
2019-2020	Sept. 2 – Oct. 27	Nov. 27 – Dec. 4	Dec. 24 – Jan. 18
2018-2019	Sept. 1 – Oct. 28	Nov. 21 – Nov. 28	Dec. 22 – Jan. 14
2017-2018	Sept. 2 – Oct. 29	Nov. 22 – Nov. 29	Dec. 23 – Jan. 15
2016-2017	Sept. 3 – Oct. 30	Nov. 19 – Nov. 27	Dec. 24 – Jan. 15
2015-2016	Sept. 5 – Nov. 1	Nov. 21 – Nov. 29	Dec. 24 – Jan. 15
2014-2015	Sept. 1 – Oct. 31	Nov. 22 – Nov. 30	Dec. 27 – Jan. 15
2013-2014	Sept. 2 – Oct. 14	Oct. 19 – Nov. 2	Dec. 31 – Jan. 11
2012-2013	Sept. 1 – Oct. 13	Oct. 17 – Oct. 27	Dec. 28 – Jan. 12
2011-2012	Sept. 3 – Oct. 10	Oct. 25 – Nov. 5	Dec. 26 - Jan. 14
2010-2011	Sept. 4 – Oct. 11	Oct. 20 – Nov. 6	Dec. 27 – Jan. 8
2009-2010	Sept. 5 - 26	Oct. 7 – Nov. 7	Dec. 25 – Jan. 9
2008-2009	Sept. 1 - 27	Oct. 4 – Oct. 31	Dec. 27 – Jan. 10
2007-2008	Sept. 1 – 29	Oct. 5 – Oct 27	Dec. 26 – Jan. 12
2006-2007	Sept. 2 – 23	Oct. 7 – Nov. 4	Dec. 28 – Jan. 15
2005-2006	Sept. 3 – 24	Oct. 8 – Nov. 5	Dec. 27 – Jan. 14
2004-2005	Sept. 4 – 25	Oct. 9 – Nov. 6	Dec. 28 – Jan. 15
2003-2004	Sept. 1 – 27	Oct. 8 – Nov. 8	Dec. 31 – Jan. 10
2002-2003	Sept. 2 - 28	Oct. 9 – Nov. 9	Jan. 1 – Jan. 11
2001-2002	Sept. 1 - 29	Oct 13 – Nov. 10	Dec. 29 – Jan. 9

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**DOVE**

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**FEDERAL FRAMEWORKS**

**OUTSIDE DATES:** September 1, 2025 - January 31, 2026  
Hunting dates may run consecutively or be split into no more than three (3) segments.

**SEASON LENGTH:** Not more than 90 days.

**BAG LIMIT:** 15 daily and 45 in possession. Daily bag limit can be composed of mourning doves and white-winged doves, singly or in combination

**SHOOTING HOURS:** Between ½ hour before sunrise and sunset daily (State may select ½ day shooting in any segment).

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

**SEASON DATES:** September 1 - October 19 (49 days)  
November 22 - November 30 ( 9 days)  
December 19 - January 19 (32 days)

**SHOOTING HOURS:** September 1 Noon until sunset  
September 2 – October 19 ½ hr before sunrise to sunset.  
November 22 – November 30 ½ hr before sunrise to sunset.  
December 19 - January 19 ½ hr before sunrise to sunset.

**BAG LIMIT:** 15 daily and 45 in possession. Composed of mourning doves and white-winged doves, singly or in combination

# Rails

## Background Information and Population Status

- **Harvest** – Comprised predominantly of clapper rails (85%), some sora (14%), and small number of Virginia rails taken. Clappers are mostly local VA birds, some are migrants from NY, NJ, and other coastal states.
- **Nesting** - Clapper rails nest from May through June, with re-nesting in July/August. Late nesting rails have broods that do not reach flight stage until August or September. This occurs in years when 1<sup>st</sup> nests are flooded by spring storms/tides and re-nests contribute significantly to production. Therefore, we generally wait until the second week of September to open the hunting season. The key to setting the season is to bracket the greatest number of high tides possible.
- **Harvest Data** - Avg. No. hunters = 290, Avg. Harvest = 3,300 (HIP, past 5-yr avg.)

## Past Seasons

<u>Year</u>	<u>Season Dates (all 70 days)</u>	
2024	Sept. 14 – Nov. 3	Nov. 13 – Dec. 1
2023	Sept. 11 – Nov. 5	Nov. 13 – Nov. 26
2022	Sept. 9 – Nov. 17	
2021	Sept. 7 – Nov. 15	
2020	Sept. 9 – Nov. 17	
2019	Sept. 7 – Nov. 15	
2018	Sept. 8 - Nov. 16	
2017	Sept. 9 – Nov. 17	
2016	Sept. 10 - Nov. 18	
2015	Sept. 8 - Nov. 16	
2014	Sept. 8 – Nov. 16	
2013	Sept. 7 - 28	Sept. 30 – Nov. 16
2012	Sept. 8 – 29	Oct. 1 – Nov. 17
2011	Sept. 10 – Oct. 1	Oct. 3 – Nov. 19
2010	Sept. 8 – Oct. 2	Oct. 4 – Nov. 17
2009	Sept. 8 – Oct. 3	Oct. 5 – Nov. 17
2008	Sept. 10 – Nov. 18	
2007	Sept. 10 – Nov. 17	
2006	Sept. 8 – Nov. 16	
2005	Sept. 12 – Nov. 19	
2004	Sept. 13 – Nov. 20	
2003	Sept. 10 – Nov. 18	
2002	Sept. 9 - Nov. 16	
2001	Sept. 11 – Nov. 19	
2000	Sept. 13 – Oct. 2	Oct. 11 – Nov. 29

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## **RAILS (Clapper, King, Sora, Virginia) & Gallinules (Common, Purple)**

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### **FEDERAL FRAMEWORKS**

**OUTSIDE DATES:** September 1, 2025 - January 31, 2026

**SEASON LENGTH:** 70 days, straight or 2 segments.

**DAILY BAG LIMIT:** Clapper/King - 15, in aggregate.  
Sora/Virginia - 25, in aggregate.  
Gallinules - 15, in aggregate.

**SHOOTING HOURS:** ½ hour before sunrise until sunset daily

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

**SEASON DATES:** September 6 – October 25 (50 days)  
November 11 – November 30 (20 days)

**DAILY BAG LIMIT:** Clapper/King: 15 - in aggregate, only 1 can be a King Rail.  
Sora/Virginia: 25 - in aggregate.  
Gallinules: 15 - in aggregate.

**SHOOTING HOURS:** ½ hour before sunrise until sunset

**NOTES:** - This recommendation provides 30 days of 3-ft or greater lunar tides.  
- Non-Toxic shot is required for Rail, Snipe and Gallinule hunting in Virginia.

# Woodcock

## Background Information and Population Status

- Harvest Strategy includes 3 regulatory options (Liberal, Moderate and Restrictive). Annual regulation based on the 3-year mean of the call count survey. For 2025-26, Harvest Strategy calls for Moderate Regulations (45 days/3 birds).
- Singing-ground survey (SGS) in Eastern Management Region from most recent survey:
  - 1 year trend (2021-2023): 6.03% increase
  - 10 year trend (2013-2023): 0.11% decline per year.
  - Long-term (1966-2023): 0.70% decline per year.
- The 2023 recruitment index for the U.S. portion of the Eastern Region (1.53 jv/ad female) was 21% above the 2022 index and slightly below the long-term index 1.61.
- Research suggests that habitat loss is the major factor of the long-term population decline.
- Virginia participated in a Flyway-wide study of woodcock movements and habitat use for the past several years. GPS transmitters are tracking woodcock migration routes and chronology, and this data is being used to better inform woodcock management strategies and hunting seasons.
- Federal regulations prohibit zones for woodcock hunting, however, we are permitted to split the season into two segments. In Virginia, this allows us to provide both early and late opportunities for hunters across the state.

### Recent Seasons (bag limit has been 3 birds)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Season Dates</u>		<u>Days</u>
2024-2025	Nov. 11 – Nov. 30	Dec. 27 – Jan. 20	45
2023-2024	Nov. 10 – Nov. 27	Dec. 26 – Jan. 21	45
2022-2023	Nov. 11 – Dec. 3	Dec. 27 – Jan. 17	45
2021-2022	Nov. 11 – Dec. 8	Dec. 27 – Jan. 12	45
2020-2021	Nov. 7 – Nov. 30	Dec. 24 – Jan. 13	45
2019-2020	Nov. 20 – Dec. 8	Dec. 21 – Jan. 15	45
2018-2019	Oct. 27 – Nov. 2	Dec. 8 – Jan. 14	45
2017-2018	Nov. 20 – Dec. 8	Dec. 21 – Jan. 15	45
2016-2017	Oct. 29 – Nov. 4	Dec. 9 – Jan. 15	45
2015-2016	Nov. 23 – Dec. 5	Dec. 15 – Jan. 15	45
2014-2015	Nov. 24 – Dec. 6	Dec. 15 – Jan. 15	45
2013-2014	Oct. 26 – Nov. 1	Dec. 5 – Jan. 11	45
2012-2013	Oct. 27 – Nov. 2	Dec. 6 – Jan. 12	45
2011-2012	Oct. 29 – Nov. 12	Dec. 16 – Jan. 14	45
2010-2011	Oct. 30 - Nov. 13	Dec. 27 – Jan. 10	30
2009-2010	Nov. 7 – 21	Dec. 26 – Jan. 9	30
2008-2009	Nov. 8 – 22	Dec. 20 – Jan 3	30
2007-2008	Oct. 27 – Nov. 10	Dec. 22 – Jan. 5	30
2006-2007	Nov. 4 – 18	Dec. 23 – Jan. 6	30
2005-2006	Nov. 12 – 26	Dec.17 – Dec 31	30
2004-2005	Oct. 30 – Nov. 13	Dec.18 – Jan. 1	30
2003-2004	Nov. 1 – 15	Dec. 20 – Jan. 3	30

Avg. No. hunters = 1,620. Avg. Harvest = 2,860 (Data from HIP, past 5-year avg.)

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# WOODCOCK

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## **FEDERAL FRAMEWORKS**

**OUTSIDE DATES:** September 13, 2025 - January 31, 2026

**SEASON LENGTH:** 45 days, straight or 2 segments.

**BAG LIMIT:** 3 daily, 9 in possession.

**SHOOTING HOURS:** ½ hour before sunrise until sunset daily.

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

**SEASON DATES:** November 11 – November 30 (20 days)  
December 26 – January 19 (25 days)

**BAG LIMIT:** 3 daily, 9 in possession

**SHOOTING HOURS:** ½ hour before sunrise until sunset



# **Snipe**

## **Background Information**

- Season generally set to overlap duck season. There are relatively few snipe hunters in VA and most snipe are taken opportunistically by other migratory bird hunters.
- Harvest Data (HIP, past 5-yr avg.): No. hunters = 225, Harvest = 550

## **Recent Seasons**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Season Dates (all 107 days)</u>	
2024-2025	Sept. 30 – Dec. 1	Dec. 19 – Jan. 31
2023-2024	Sept. 25 – Nov. 26	Dec. 19 – Jan. 31
2022-2023	Sept. 26 – Nov. 27	Dec. 17 – Jan. 29
2021-2022	Oct. 8 – Oct. 11	Oct. 21 – Jan. 31
2020-2021	Oct. 9 – Oct. 12	Oct. 21 – Jan. 31
2019-2020	Oct. 11 – Oct. 14	Oct. 21 – Jan. 31
2018-2019	Oct. 5 – Oct. 8	Oct. 21 – Jan. 31
2017-2018	Oct. 6 – Oct. 9	Oct. 21 – Jan. 31
2016-2017	Oct. 7 – Oct. 10	Oct. 21 – Jan. 31
2015-2016	Oct. 9 – Oct. 12	Oct. 21 – Jan. 31
2014-2015	Oct. 10 – Oct. 13	Oct. 21 – Jan. 31
2013-2014	Oct. 11 – Oct. 14	Oct. 22 – Jan. 31
2012-2013	Oct. 4 – Oct. 8	Oct. 22 - Jan. 31
2011-2012	Oct. 6 – Oct. 10	Oct. 22 – Jan. 31
2010-2011	Oct. 7 – Oct. 11	Oct. 22 – Jan. 31
2009-2010	Oct. 8 – Oct. 12	Oct. 21 – Jan. 30
2008-2009	Oct. 9 – Oct. 13	Oct. 22 – Jan.31
2007-2008	Oct 4 – Oct. 8	Oct. 22 – Jan. 31
2006-2007	Oct 4 – Oct. 9	Oct. 23 – Jan. 31
2005-2006	Oct 5 – Oct.10	Oct. 24 – Jan. 31
2004-2005	Oct 7 – Oct 11	Oct. 22 – Jan. 31
2003-2004	Oct. 8 – Oct 11	Oct. 21 – Jan. 31
2002-2003	Oct 9 – Oct 12	Oct. 21 – Jan. 31
2001-2002	Oct. 10 - Oct. 13	Oct. 22 - Jan. 31
2000-2001	Oct. 11 - Oct. 14	Oct. 21 - Jan. 31
1999-2000	Oct. 6 - Oct. 9	Oct. 21 - Jan. 31
1998-1999	Oct. 7 - Oct. 10	Oct. 20 - Jan. 30
1997-1998	Oct. 8 - Oct. 11	Oct. 21 - Jan. 31
1996-1997	Oct. 9 - Oct. 12	Oct. 21 - Jan. 31
1995-1996	Oct. 11 - Oct. 14	Oct. 21 - Jan. 31

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# SNIPE

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## **FEDERAL FRAMEWORKS**

OUTSIDE DATES: September 1, 2025 - January 31, 2026

SEASON LENGTH: 107 days, straight or 2 segments

BAG LIMIT: 8 daily, 24 possession

SHOOTING HOURS: ½ hour before sunrise until sunset

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

SEASON DATES: September 29 – November 30 (63 days)  
December 19 – January 31 (44 days)

BAG LIMIT: 8 daily, 24 in possession

SHOOTING HOURS: ½ hour before sunrise until sunset

# SEPTEMBER TEAL SEASON FACT SHEET - 2025

- Special teal seasons were initiated in late 1960's to provide harvest opportunities on blue-winged and green-winged teal. When the blue-winged teal breeding population (BPOP) is above 3.3 million, a 9-day season can be offered. If the BPOP exceeds 4.7 million, a 16-day season can be offered. If the BPOP estimate is between 3.3 and 4.7 million birds a 9-day season can be offered.
- Blue-winged teal are one of the earliest migrants. Many pass through Virginia from late August through October, prior to the opening of the late duck season.
- Green-winged teal are also early migrants and arrive in September and October. However, some Green-wings remain through the winter depending on weather conditions.
- Virginia has held a special September teal season since 1999 (see dates listed below). The season was initially held only in the area east of I-95 because there are greater numbers of teal and teal hunters in the coastal plain. Even in the coastal plain, teal are not widespread, and the harvest has been relatively small. The season was expanded in 2011 to provide some teal hunting opportunity in the area west of I-95.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Season Dates</u>	<u>Season Dates</u>
	<u>East of I-95</u>	<u>West of I-95</u>
2024	Sept. 16 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2023	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2022	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2021	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2020	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2019	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2018	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2017	Sept. 16 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2016	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2015	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 21 - 30
2014	Sept. 17 – 30	Sept. 22 - 30
2013	Sept. 16 – 30	Sept. 23 - 30
2012	Sept. 17 – 29	Sept. 24 - 29
2011	Sept. 19 – 30	Sept. 26 - 30
2010	Sept. 20 – 30	na
2009	Sept. 21 – 30	na
2008	Sept. 20 – 30	na
2007	Sept. 17 – 26	na
2006	Sept. 15 – 25	na
2005	Sept. 16 – 24	na
2004	Sept. 16 – 25	na
2003	Sept. 13 – 23	na
2002	Sept. 14 – 24	na
2001	Sept. 15 – 25	na
2000	Sept. 14 – 23	na
1999	Sept. 16 – 25	na

Average Annual Harvest: 600 teal

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# SEPTEMBER TEAL SEASON

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## FEDERAL FRAMEWORKS

OUTSIDE DATES: September 1 – September 30, 2025

SEASON LENGTH: Up to 9 days

BAG LIMIT: 6 daily, 18 in possession (Blue-winged and Green-winged teal only)

SHOOTING HOURS: ½ hour before sunrise to sunset

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

SEASON DATES: September 20 – September 28  
HUNT AREA: East of I – 95

September 23 – September 28  
HUNT AREA: West of I – 95

BAG LIMIT: 6 daily, 18 in possession (Blue-winged and Green-winged teal only).

SHOOTING HOURS: ½ hour before sunrise to sunset

## **FACT SHEET - Waterfowl Hunters and Harvests – 2025**

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- Liberal duck seasons (60 days, 6 bird bag limit) and resident goose seasons have resulted in high waterfowl harvests in Virginia during the past ten years. Harvest has averaged ~125,540 ducks and ~42,450 Canada geese from 2013-2022, compared to 114,770 ducks and 25,000 geese during the 1990's. The long season length and liberal bags offer greater opportunity and a greater cumulative harvest over the course of the season.
- Waterfowl hunter numbers in Virginia have been generally stable since the late 1990's. Since 1999, the Harvest Information Program (HIP) has been used to estimate hunter effort and harvest. The average number of duck and goose hunters over the past 3 years, as measured by HIP, was 15,500 and 9,600 respectively.
- Conditions during the 2023-2024 season were mild for most of the season but puddle duck harvest was higher than the previous year. Mallards were the most commonly harvested duck in Virginia, followed by buffleheads, wood ducks, green-winged teal and black ducks.

## FACT SHEET - The Status of Ducks - 2025

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- Waterfowl harvest in the Atlantic flyway is managed by the stocks of four different species of eastern waterfowl populations (wood ducks, American green-winged teal, ring-necked ducks and goldeneyes). In 2024 estimated breeding population size for wood ducks was 0.87 million (SE = 0.12 million), 0.47 million (SE = 0.10 million) for American green-winged teal, 0.73 million (SE = 0.12 million) for ring-necked ducks and 1.20 million (SE = 0.32 million) for goldeneyes.
- The total 2023 mid-continent mallard breeding population is predicted to be 6.10 million (SE = 0.25 million)

**Virginia:** Habitat conditions in Virginia during the spring of 2024 were average with slightly drier conditions towards the end of the breeding season that could have potentially impacted brood rearing habitat.

- The 2024 Virginia breeding pair estimate for mallards (15,100) was lower than last year (21,033). Estimated black duck pairs (64) decreased from last year (629). The number of Wood duck pairs (6,245) was lower than last year (9,259). The breeding pair estimate for Canada geese (25,230) was also lower than the 2023 estimate (44,516).

### **Mallard Bag Limit in the Atlantic Flyway**

The mallard has been one of the most abundant duck species in eastern North America. However, mallard numbers in the Northeastern U.S. declined about 40% from the late 1990's through around 2019. About 60% of the mallards harvested in Atlantic Flyway states, and around 80% of those harvested in Virginia, are derived from the Northeastern U.S. Mallard numbers in Eastern Canada were stable or slightly increasing during this same time period, but overall, the breeding mallard population in eastern North America had declined. This decline prompted waterfowl managers to enact harvest restriction on mallards in the Atlantic Flyway in 2019. The bag limit was reduced from 4 to 2 mallards daily, with a limit of 1 hen mallard. Those restrictions were in place for the past 4 hunting seasons.

Since 2019, Eastern Mallard numbers have increase 15%. In addition, a new Eastern Mallard Harvest Strategy and Population Model was developed based on recent population dynamics. This Strategy was put in place for 2023-2024 hunting season regulation process, and allows for a return to a 4-mallard bag limit (2 hens). Projections from the new harvest strategy indicate that under current conditions, Atlantic Flyway regulations should allow for a liberal mallard bag limit (4 mallards total, only 2 hens) around 80% of the time.

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## YOUTH and VETERANS WATERFOWL DAYS

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### Guidelines for the Youth Days and Veterans Days include:

1. States may select 2 days per duck-hunting zone, designated as "Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days," in addition to their regular duck seasons. States may also select 2 days per duck-hunting zone designated as "Veterans Waterfowl Hunting Days" in addition to their regular duck seasons. The Youth and Veterans days could be combined and held on the same day or could be held separately.
2. Youth Days must be held outside of any regular duck season on a weekend, holidays, or other non-school days when youth hunters would have the maximum opportunity to participate.
3. Youth and Veterans Days could be held up to 14 days before or after any regular duck season frameworks or within any split of a regular duck season.
4. The daily bag limit is the same as that allowed in the regular season and includes ducks, mergansers, coots, moorhens, gallinules, 1 Canada geese (except in Canada Goose Zones where the bag limit is higher), and 1 tundra swan (if the hunter possesses a tundra swan permit). Flyway species restrictions remain in effect.
5. Youth hunters must be 15 years of age or younger. Youth 12 years of age and older will need a valid Virginia state hunting license. A licensed adult at least 18 years of age or older must accompany youth hunters into the field. This adult may not duck hunt but may participate in other open seasons.
6. Those allowed to participate in the special **Veterans Days** include Veterans (as defined in section 101 of title 38, United States Code) and members of the Armed Forces on active duty, including members of the National Guard and Reserves on active duty (other than for training).

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## DUCKS

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### **FEDERAL FRAMEWORK**

**Outside Dates:** September 27, 2025 - January 31, 2026

**Season Length:** 60 hunting days; plus 2 Youth/Veterans Waterfowl Hunt Days.

**Bag Limits:** **Daily Bag limit of 6 ducks, with the following restrictions:**  
Can include no more than 4 mallards (only 2 hens), 3 wood ducks, 2 black ducks, 2 canvasbacks, scaup: 1/day for 40 days and 2/day for 20 days, 2 redheads, **3 pintails**, 1 mottled duck, 1 fulvous whistling duck, 4 total sea ducks (no more than 3 scoters, 3 eider (only 1 hen), 3 long-tailed ducks). Closed season on harlequin duck. Possession limit is three times the daily bag limit.

**Split Season Options:** 3-way split season, no zones

**Shooting Hours:** 1/2-hour before sunrise until sunset daily

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Season Length:** 60 hunting days; plus 2 Youth/Veterans Waterfowl Hunting Day

**Season Dates:** October 10 - 13 (Black Duck closed)  
November 19 – November 30  
December 19 – January 31  
October 25, February 7 – Youth/Veterans Waterfowl Days

**Bag Limit:** **Daily Bag limit of 6 ducks, with the following restrictions:** can include no more than 4 mallards (only 2 hens), 3 wood ducks, 2 black ducks (except closed Oct. 11–14), 2 redheads, 2 canvasbacks, **3 pintails**, 1 mottled duck, 1 fulvous whistling duck, scaup: 1/day from October 10-13, November 19- November 30, December 19 - January 11, and 2/day from January 12-31. Sea Ducks: 4 total sea ducks to include no more than 3 scoters, 3 eiders (only 1 hen), 3 long-tailed ducks. Closed season on harlequin ducks. The possession limit is three times the daily bag limit.

**Shooting Hours:** 1/2-hour before sunrise until sunset daily



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## **MERGANSER AND COOT**

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### **MERGANSER**

#### **FEDERAL FRAMEWORK**

##### **Option A**

Season Length: 60 hunting days.  
Outside Date: September 27, 2025 - January 31, 2026.  
Bag Limit: 5 birds daily.  
15 in possession.

##### **Option B**

To be included into the general duck bag. If included in the general duck bag, the restriction on 2 hooded mergansers would apply.

#### **STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **Option A**

Season Dates: To coincide with general duck season  
Bag Limit: 5 birds daily, 15 in possession.

### **AMERICAN COOT**

#### **FEDERAL FRAMEWORK**

Season Length: 60 hunting days  
Outside Date: September 27, 2025 - January 31, 2026  
Bag Limit: 15 birds daily (45 in possession)

#### **STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS**

Season Dates: To coincide with general duck season.  
Bag Limit: 15 daily (45 in possession)

## **FACT SHEET - The Status of Resident Canada Geese - 2025**

- The resident Canada goose population increased significantly in Virginia during the 1980's and 1990's, and peaked at 260,000 geese in the late 1990's. This population caused significant conflicts with human and wildlife populations, and management actions were taken to reduce their numbers. The current population estimate is 122,400 (+/- 49,000) in Virginia and over 1 million in the Atlantic Flyway.
- Special resident goose hunting seasons were initiated in 1993 to help manage this population and to provide recreational opportunities for hunters. These seasons occur prior to the arrival of most migrant geese (~Sept. 25 in Virginia), or in areas where there are fewer migrant geese. The Federal Framework allows Virginia to conduct a statewide September Resident Goose season from September 1-25.
- There are fewer migrant geese in the western portion of Virginia, and special “Goose Hunting Zones” have been established that allow more liberal seasons in areas with a greater percentage of resident geese.
- Special resident goose hunting seasons have been very popular and have increased hunter participation and resident goose harvests. These seasons have been very effective in managing resident goose populations and helping to meet our statewide population objectives.
- In areas where hunting is not feasible, other options including special Depredation Orders for Airports, Agricultural areas, and Nest and Egg removal have been implemented to help manage resident goose conflicts.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Population Estimate *</b>	<b>September Harvest</b>
2024	143,529 +/- 29%	n/a
2023	161,747 +/- 24%	n/a
2022	170,540 +/-26%	3,300
2021	177,056 +/-29%	6,300
2020	163,198 +/- 24%	13,000
2019	125,966 +/-20%	6,300
2018	132,633 +/- 24%	5,600
2017	142,167 +/- 21%	5,500
2016	158,200 +/- 19%	900
2015	150,651 +/- 22%	6,100
2014	130,503 +/- 26%	7,500
2013	144,910 +/- 26%	10,700
2012	158,267 +/- 28%	9,700
2011	165,022 +/- 28%	14,700
2010	147,313 +/- 29%	15,600
2009	145,019 +/- 29%	16,800
2008	157,560 +/- 29%	17,500
2007	154,030 +/- 27%	13,600
2006	136,700 +/- 27%	11,100
2005	129,486 +/- 26%	10,100
2004	143,741 +/- 25%	17,000
2003	186,753 +/- 23%	14,800
2002	218,719 +/- 24%	14,300
2001	218,384 +/- 27%	11,800
2000	227,164 +/- 32%	10,800
1999	261,554 +/- 34%	11,400

\*3-year running average

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# SEPTEMBER CANADA GOOSE

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## FEDERAL FRAMEWORKS

OUTSIDE DATES: September 1 – September 25, 2025

BAG LIMIT: 15 daily, 45 in possession

SHOOTING HOURS: ½ hour before sunrise to sunset (except as provided for in special hunting options \*)

\* SPECIAL HUNTING OPTIONS: Allows the use of electronic calls, unplugged shotguns and extended shooting hours (1/2 hr after sunset) when **no other** waterfowl seasons are open.

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

SEASON DATES: September 1 – September 25 (25 days)

BAG LIMIT: 10 daily, 30 in possession

HUNT AREA: Statewide

SHOOTING HOURS:

East of I-95

September 1 – 19: ½ hr before sunrise to ½ hr after sunset.

September 20 – 25: ½ hr before sunrise to sunset.

West of I-95

September 1– 20: ½ hr before sunrise to ½ hr after sunset.

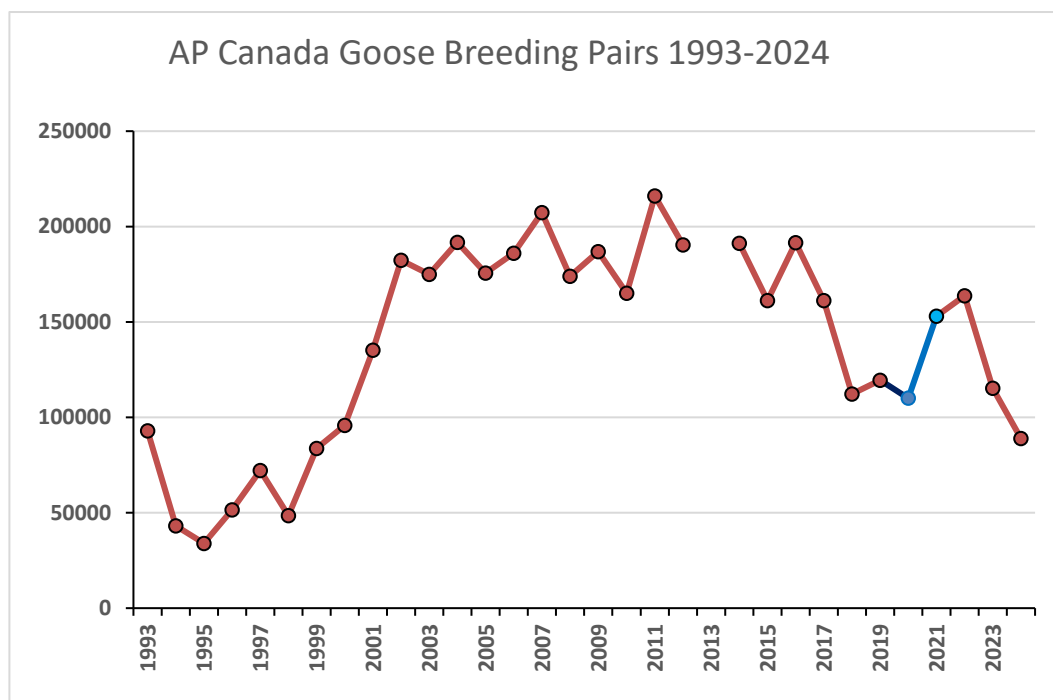
September 22 - 25: ½ hr before sunrise to sunset.

NOTE: Staff is not recommending the options of using electronic calls or unplugged shotguns for hunting geese in the September season.

## FACT SHEET- History and Status of Migrant Canada Geese - 2025

- Migrant Canada geese from the Atlantic Population (AP) declined significantly from 1985-1995. The hunting season was closed in 1995 to allow the population to recover. Goose numbers rebounded quickly and a limited season (6 days with a 1-bird bag) was held in both 1999 and 2000. As the population increased, the season was extended to 30 days in 2001, then 45 days in 2002, and 50 days from 2012-2018.
- As the population increased, hunting regulations were liberalized. The season was extended to 30 days in 2001, then 45 days in 2002, and 50 days in 2012. The AP bag limit was increased to 2 per day in 2004. In 2019 the AP bag limit was reduced to 1 per day with a 30-day season. This was the result of several years of poor conditions on the arctic breeding grounds.
- After several years of below average productivity, two concurrent above average breeding seasons led to an increase in AP Canada goose production. This led to liberal harvest regulations for the 2022-2023 hunting season. Unfortunately, this was followed by a poor production year in 2023 and 2024 where the observed pair estimates (115,300 in 2023) and (89,000 in 2024) were down significantly from 2022 (164,000). The 2024 predicted number of breeding pairs based on the integrated population model was 133,500 which falls within the range (125,000 to 160,000 pairs) under which moderate harvest regulations are recommended in the AP Canada goose Harvest Strategy. However, due to a significant discrepancy between the integrated population model result and the observed breeding pair estimate in 2024, the Atlantic Flyway Council voted to go with the restrictive harvest regulation for the 2025-2026 season which is a 30 day season with a 1 goose daily limit.

**Figure 1.** Atlantic Population Canada Goose Breeding Pair survey estimates 1993-2024. Blue dots/lines are population model estimates for surveys that were not conducted in 2020 and 2021.

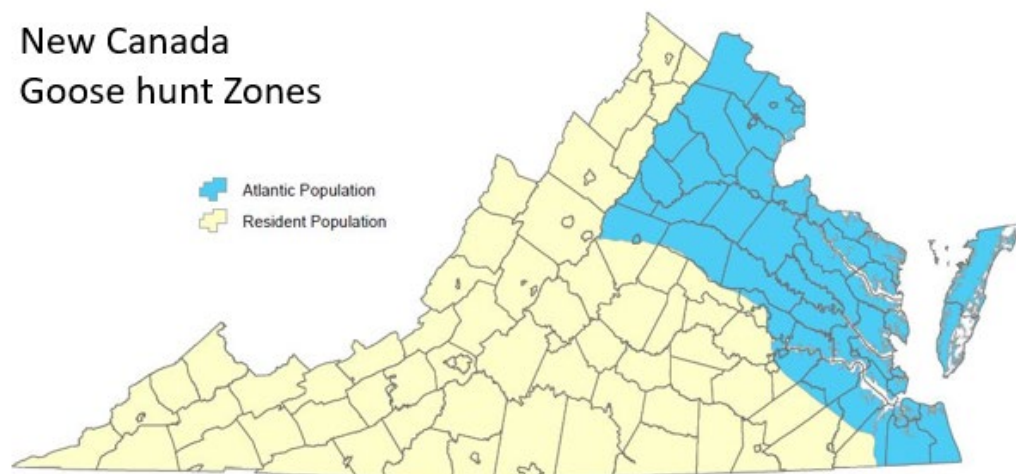


# Canada Goose Populations and Hunt Zones

- In 2020 there was a change in the way the Atlantic Flyway, the Mississippi Flyway and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are defining and managing the different “Migrant” Canada goose populations in the Eastern United States. The Southern James Bay Population (SJBP) is no longer recognized as a separate population, and the eastern portion of this population is now considered part of the Atlantic Population (AP). The Atlantic Population along with the North Atlantic Population (NAP) are now the only recognized subpopulations of “migrant” Canada geese in the Atlantic Flyway. Nearly all the migrant geese that winter in Virginia are from the Atlantic Population, with only ~1% from the NAP.
- Due to this change, during the 2023-2024 season Virginia had to eliminate the SJBP Hunting Zone in Virginia. Some of this former zone (predominantly the northern portion) has been placed in the AP Zone, while the remainder of the area, where fewer migrant geese are located, has been included in the Resident Population Zone (RP).
- The hunting regulations for those areas that are now part of a different zone have changed significantly, so hunters need to make sure they are aware of the new zone boundaries. The description and map of these new Canada geese hunt zones is shown below.

**Atlantic Population (AP) Hunt Zone** – The area to the east of the following line: the “Blue Ridge” (Loudoun County-Clarke County border) at the West Virginia-Virginia Border, south to Interstate 64 (the Blue Ridge line follows county borders along the western edge of Loudoun-Fauquier-Rappahannock-Madison-Greene-Albemarle and into Nelson Counties), then east along Interstate Rt. 64 to Interstate 95 in Richmond, then south along I-95 to Route 460 in Petersburg, then southeast along Route 460 to Route 32 in the City of Suffolk, then south to the North Carolina border.

**Resident Population (RP) Hunt Zone** – The portion of the state west of the above AP Zone boundary.



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# CANADA GOOSE

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## FEDERAL FRAMEWORKS

### ATLANTIC POPULATION ZONE (AP):

Outside Dates: November 15, 2025 – February 5, 2026  
Season Length: 30 hunting days  
Bag Limit: 1 bird daily (3 in possession)

### RESIDENT POPULATION ZONE (RP):

Outside Dates: November 15, 2025 – March 10, 2026  
Season Length: 80 hunting days  
Bag Limit: 5 birds daily (15 in possession)

NOTE – All seasons also include White-fronted geese along with Canada geese.

## STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

### ATLANTIC POPULATION ZONE: (AP)

Season Dates: December 19 – January 1 (14 days)  
January 16 – January 31 (16 days)  
Bag Limit: 1 goose per day (3 in possession)  
Shooting Hours: 1/2-hour before sunrise until sunset daily

### RESIDENT POPULATION ZONE: (RP)

Season Dates: November 19 – November 30  
December 19 - February 22  
Bag Limit: 5 geese daily (15 in possession)  
Shooting Hours: 1/2-hour before sunrise until sunset daily

NOTE – All seasons also include White-fronted geese along with Canada geese.

## **FACT SHEET - Status of Light Geese (Greater and Lesser Snow Geese, and Ross's Geese) - 2025**

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- The majority (95%) of the “Light” geese found in the Atlantic Flyway are Greater Snow Geese, while less than 5% are Lesser Snow Geese, with even smaller numbers of Ross’s Geese.
- The principal nesting areas for greater snow geese are on Bylot, Axel Heiberg, Ellesmere, and Baffin Islands, and on Greenland. They winter along the Atlantic Coast from New Jersey to North Carolina.
- The Greater Snow Goose population is monitored on spring staging areas along the St. Lawrence Valley in Quebec. The 2024 population estimate was 628,000 geese.
- Banding crews at the major snow goose breeding colony on Bylot Island reported above average nest densities and low levels of nest predation.
- Over the last 30 years, snow goose populations increased nearly ten-fold. A shift from feeding almost exclusively in marshes to feeding more on agricultural grains has allowed them to expand their range and habitat use. This shift has also allowed them to return to their breeding habitats in better physical condition, which has led to increased productivity.
- This population has generally stabilized over the past 5 year, however concerns about habitat degradation on their breeding, migration and wintering areas still remain. Snow geese can cause damage to these habitats by pulling up plant roots and denuding marshes of vegetation. Snow geese can also cause conflicts with agricultural interest by pulling up green grains including wheat and barley.
- Current hunting regulations for snow geese are as liberal as Federal Frameworks will allow and include a 107-day season that runs from October to January, and a bag limit that was increased from 15 to 25 in 2010. Liberal seasons have helped increase the harvest, however, the population is still quite large.
- In addition to the regular hunting season, a Conservation Order (CO) was established in 2009 that authorizes additional snow goose hunting after the end of the regular season frameworks. The CO allows the use of alternative management strategies (unplugged shotguns, electronic calls, shooting to ½ hour after sunset, no daily bag limit) to further increase the harvest of snow geese. The snow goose harvest in Virginia has averaged around 300 birds during the regular season and 600 birds during the Conservation Order over the past 5 years.

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# LIGHT GOOSE SEASONS

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## REGULAR LIGHT GOOSE SEASON

### FEDERAL FRAMEWORK

<b><u>Season Length:</u></b>	107 hunting days
<b><u>Outside Dates:</u></b>	October 1, 2025 - March 10, 2026
<b><u>Split Season Option:</u></b>	3-way split season
<b><u>Bag Limit:</u></b>	25 birds daily (no possession limit)

### STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

<b><u>Season Dates:</u></b>	October 17 – January 31	(107 days)
<b><u>Bag Limit:</u></b>	25 birds daily (no possession limit)	



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# LIGHT GOOSE CONSERVATION ORDER

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## FEDERAL FRAMEWORK

**Outside Dates:**

When no other waterfowl seasons are open

**Bag Limit:**

No daily or possession limit

**Special Hunting Methods:**

Electronic calls, unplugged shotguns and extended shooting hours to one-half hour after sunset **only in areas and at times when other waterfowl seasons are closed.**

**Special Requirements:**

States participating in the Conservation Order are required to monitor hunter participation, effort, and success.

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

**Conservation Order Zone:** The same as the new AP Canada Goose Zone - The area to the east of the following line: the “Blue Ridge” (Loudoun County-Clarke County border) at the West Virginia-Virginia Border, south to Interstate 64 (the Blue Ridge line follows county borders along the western edge of Loudoun-Fauquier-Rappahannock-Madison-Greene-Albemarle and into Nelson Counties), then east along Interstate Rt. 64 to Interstate 95 in Richmond, then south along I-95 to Route 460 in Petersburg, then southeast along Route 460 to Route 32 in the City of Suffolk, then south to the North Carolina border.

**Season Dates:**

February 1, 2026 – April 5, 2026

**Bag Limit:**

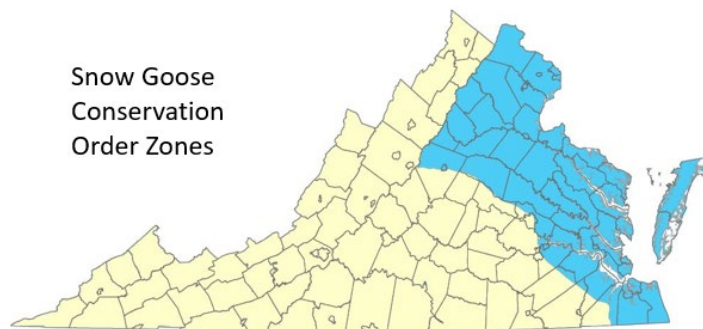
No daily or possession limit

**Special Hunting Methods:**

Electronic calls, unplugged shotguns and extended shooting hours to one-half hour after sunset.

**Special Requirements:**

Hunters participating in the Conservation Order **must register with DWR**, keep a record of their harvest and participation, and return a harvest report form within two weeks following the close of the season.



## FACT SHEET - Status of Atlantic Brant and Tundra Swan - 2025

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- **BRANT**. The main breeding areas for Atlantic Brant are in the Eastern Canadian Arctic on Baffin, Southampton, and Ellesmere Islands. Most brant winter along the Atlantic Coast from MA to NC.
- The 2023 mid-winter survey count for brant was 121,000, which was higher than the previous year's count (109,000) but still lower than the previous 5-year average (132,000). The Atlantic brant productivity estimate was 8.6%. Which was higher than the previous year estimate (7.4) but still 41% lower than the long-term average.
- The annual brant hunting regulation is now based on the Atlantic Brant Integrated Population Model (IPM) that was adopted by the Atlantic Flyway in 2021 and provides an index to the brant population. The model prediction for this year is 107,000 birds. As per the Brant Harvest Strategy, this estimate calls for a 2024-2025 harvest regulation of 30 days with a 1-bird daily limit. This is a restriction from the past several years when the harvest regulation was 50 days with a 2-bird daily limit.
- **TUNDRA SWANS**. The Eastern Population of tundra swans nest in arctic tundra areas from Alaska, east to Hudson Bay and Baffin Island. These birds winter in coastal areas from Maryland to North Carolina.
- Estimated productivity of eastern population tundra swans in 2022 was 12% immature birds. This estimate is higher than the 2021 estimate (9%) but slightly lower than the long-term average (13%).
- There were 138,000 eastern population tundra swans counted in the Atlantic Flyway on the 2023 Mid-Winter Survey. This count was 31% higher than last year, but still below the past 10-year average (2014-2023: 105,817)
- Nine states in the U.S. hunt tundra swans including Alaska, Utah, Montana and Nevada in the Pacific Flyway, North Dakota and South Dakota in the Central Flyway, and Delaware, Virginia and North Carolina in the Atlantic Flyway.
- There are no changes in the total number of hunting permits allowed for EP tundra swans this year (9,600 across the U.S., with 5,600 of those in the Atlantic Flyway) as the population estimate is still within the 70,000 to 110,000 range. In the Atlantic Flyway, the allocation of hunt permits is split between the 3 states in approximate proportion to the number of swans in each state. The 5,600 permits available in the Atlantic Flyway for the 2023-2024 season will be distributed as follows: NC– 4,721, VA-532, and DE-347.
- The tundra swan hunting season in Virginia is authorized and conducted as specified in the Atlantic Flyway Tundra Swan Management Plan and Hunt Plan, with limits and guidelines as specified under an MOU with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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# ATLANTIC BRANT

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## **FEDERAL FRAMEWORK**

<b><u>Season Length:</u></b>	30 hunting days
<b><u>Outside Dates:</u></b>	September 23, 2025 - January 31, 2026
<b><u>Split Season Option:</u></b>	2-way split season
<b><u>Bag Limit:</u></b>	1 bird daily (3 in possession)

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS**

<b><u>Season Dates:</u></b>	December 22 – December 31 (10 days)
	January 12 – January 31 (20 days)
<b><u>Bag Limit:</u></b>	1 bird daily (3 in possession)

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# TUNDRA SWAN

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## **FEDERAL FRAMEWORK**

**Season Length:** 90 hunting days

**Outside Dates:** October 1, 2025 - January 31, 2026

Virginia may issue up to 475 permits and must obtain harvest and hunter participation data. Each permittee is authorized to take one (1) tundra swan per season.

**Bag Limit:** One per permittee per season

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Season Dates:** November 15 - January 31

**Bag Limit:** One per permittee per season

**Hunt Area:** All counties and portions of counties east of U.S. Route I- 95 and south of the Prince William/Stafford county line in Chopawamsic Creek at Quantico Marine Corps Base.

**NOTE:** VDWR will issue no more than 475 swan-hunting permits to holders of a valid Virginia hunting license. Only hunters with a valid 2025-2026 tundra swan-hunting permit issued by VDWR shall be authorized to hunt tundra swans. Each permittee will be authorized to take one tundra swan during the season. Swan hunting permits are non-transferable and are valid for use only by the person to whom issued. Permits must be in the immediate possession of the permittee while swan hunting. Immediately at the time and place of kill, successful hunters must permanently record the month and day of kill on their permit and attach it to their swan. The VDWR is required to obtain hunter participation and harvest information to offer this Tundra Swan hunting season. **Hunters are required to complete the tundra swan hunt questionnaire (survey) and submit their results to the Department by February 15, 2026.** Those who fail to submit their results are ineligible for future drawings.

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# FALCONRY

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## FEDERAL FRAMEWORK

<b><u>Season Length:</u></b>	No more than 107 on any species (Gun and Falconry combined)
<b><u>Outside Dates:</u></b>	September 1 - March 10
<b><u>Bag Limit:</u></b>	3 daily (9 in possession)
<b><u>Hawking Hours:</u></b>	½ hour before sunrise until sunset.

## STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

<b><u>Dove:</u></b>	September 1 – October 19 November 22 – November 30 December 19 – January 31
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<b><u>Rail, Gallinule, Moorhen:</u></b>	September 6 – December 21
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<b><u>Woodcock:</u></b>	October 17 – January 31
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<b><u>Snipe:</u></b>	October 1 – December 2 December 19 – January 31
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<b><u>Canada Goose:</u></b>	September 1 - September 25 November 19 – November 30 December 19 - February 22
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<b><u>September Teal:</u></b>	September 16 - September 30
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<b><u>Ducks, Mergansers, Coot:</u></b>	October 10 - 13 November 19 – February 8
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<b><u>Brant and Snow Goose:</u></b>	October 17 – January 31
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**NOTE:** Recommended dates based on adoption of preceding gun season proposals; if amended, staff requests permission to calculate permissible dates for each species within the allowable federal framework.

# DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

## 2025-2026 WILDLIFE REGULATION REVIEW AND AMENDMENT PROCESS

### *Public Scoping Period – Summarization of Public Feedback*

January 2025

#### Introduction

The Department’s 2025-2026 Wildlife Regulation Review and Amendment Process began with a 60-day public scoping period from October 7 – December 6, 2024. During that time, the Department received 4,171 comment submissions (4,146 online submissions, 25 email/handwritten submissions) containing 5,138 individual comments from the public regarding desired regulation amendments. The number of comment submissions received during the public scoping period phase of the current wildlife regulation review and amendment process increased by ~68% from the previous wildlife regulation review and amendment process.

<b>Regulation Review &amp; Amendment Process</b>	<b><u>2017-2018</u></b>	<b><u>2019-2020</u></b>	<b><u>2021-2022</u></b>	<b><u>2023-2024</u></b>	<b><u>2025-2026</u></b>
<b># Comment Forms</b>	424	1,099	1,722	2,476	4,171

Online comment forms were compiled in a single database that was shared with Wildlife Division regional staffs and regulation committee chairs. Emails received via the Department’s [regcomments@dwr.virginia.gov](mailto:regcomments@dwr.virginia.gov) inbox were forwarded to the appropriate wildlife regulation committee chair, and handwritten submissions were electronically scanned and forwarded to the appropriate staff member(s). Wildlife regulation committee chairs compiled all comments received regarding their committee’s regulatory issues. These public comments, along with the Department’s biological and sociological data and administrative capabilities, are being evaluated and considered by the committees in preparation for the Department to bring forward staff recommendations for regulation amendments during the Board’s March 20, 2025 meeting.

#### **Outreach efforts to encourage public input**

1. Throughout the 60-day comment period, a link to the online scoping period comment form was featured on the Department’s homepage. This included being showcased in a brand-new featured news section that appears just below the homepage’s main feature.
2. The online scoping period comment form was also shared on DWR’s Facebook, Instagram, and X (Twitter) accounts. All combined, these posts reached 29,283 users.
3. Subscribers to the Department’s *Notes from the Field* newsletters received an email regarding the public scoping period. This email was sent to 901,498 contacts.
4. Constituents who previously indicated they wanted to receive notification when the Department was seeking public input received an email regarding the public scoping period. This email was sent to 1,799 individuals.
5. These outreach efforts generated 17,697 visits to the online comment form for the scoping period.

### **Deer (3,094 comments)**

Staffs reviewed more than 2,000 individual online and emailed submissions which included comments referencing deer. Across all the online and emailed submissions, 3,094 separate comments regarding deer issues were tallied split into the following categories:

**Table 1.** Summary of comments received during the public scoping period for the 2025-2026 regulation review and amendment process that referenced deer.

<b>Category</b>	<b># of Comments</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Firearms	332	10.7%
EAB	71	2.3%
Seasons-Other	170	5.5%
Baiting/feeding	52	1.7%
Dogs	892	28.8%
Bag, Tags, ES	954	30.8%
Licenses	8	0.3%
APR	164	5.3%
Miscellaneous	188	6.1%
Archery	93	3%
Muzzleloader	172	5.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3094</b>	<b>100%</b>

Comments in the Firearms category dealt mostly with firearms seasons. Many constituents in southwest VA and others west of the Blue Ridge requested to extend rifle seasons beyond the traditional 2-week season for more time to harvest deer due to busy work/life schedules. Several constituents wished to eliminate the EAB requirement statewide or within their county, while others desired EAB to help control deer numbers and improve the quality of bucks. Comments in the “Seasons-Other category” included requests for a velvet buck season, prohibiting hunting on Sunday, extending the youth/apprentice deer hunting season, and more. Majority of the baiting/feeding comments requested legalizing the use of bait for hunting, although a handful of constituents requested to ban feeding year-round statewide. Most archery comments requested an earlier start to archery season or more archery-only opportunity. There were very few comments relative to hunting licenses.

Roughly 29% of the total deer comments were related to deer hunting with hounds (“Dogs” Category). Comments included requests for no changes to be made relative to hunting deer with hounds, a total ban of deer hunting with hounds, requests for a deer hound training season, opposition to a deer hound training season, inclusion of hounds during the youth/apprentice deer season, creating a special youth/disabled vet deer hunting opportunity with hounds, requests for measures to prevent dog trespass, allowing the use of hounds for deer on Sunday, and more.

The most comments came from the Bag, Tags, and either-sex (ES) category, comprising nearly 31% of the scoping period total. A total of 607 comments were specifically related to either-sex days (or “doe days”), which were nearly 21% of ALL deer comments received. A large number of constituents from southwest VA requested an increase in either-sex hunting opportunities.

Several constituents requested antler point restrictions (APRs) to be implemented in their respective counties to help manage for mature bucks. The top comment in the Miscellaneous category was the request for the creation of a CWD Certification Program for taxidermists that would allow them to accept

heads from CWD Disease Management Areas, followed by requests for allowing .22 centerfire rifles as a legal deer hunting weapon. The top comment within the Muzzleloading category was the request to allow air rifles during the muzzleloading season, followed by the request to allow straight-walled cartridge rifles during the muzzleloading seasons.

**Bear (1,170 comments):**

During the public scoping period, a total of 835 comments were “tagged” bear within the scoping database as the primary species impacted. Additionally, comments from the other species groups which mentioned bear in the comment are included below. Most comments contained more than one recommendation for a total of 1,170 bear regulation related comments received during the scoping period.

**Table 2.** Summary of comments received during the public scoping period for the 2025-2026 regulation review and amendment process that referenced bear.

<b>Comment Category</b>	<b># of Comments</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
Hounds_Hunting	239	20.4%
Seasons_General	229	19.6%
Bag Limits/Tags	151	12.9%
Miscellaneous	109	9.3%
Hounds_Chase	103	8.8%
Firearms Season	87	7.4%
Muzzleloader Season	86	7.4%
Weapons	37	3.2%
3-Day Season	35	3.0%
Licenses	33	2.8%
Non-Regulatory	29	2.5%
Youth/Apprentice	19	1.6%
Archery Season	13	1.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1170</b>	<b>100%</b>

The most common regulation comment types pertained to hunting with hounds and general season recommendations (not specific to type of season). Both categories accounted for ~20% of the overall comments respectively. Comments related to hunting with hounds ranged from asking for increased areas or seasons to use hounds, banning the use of hounds for bear (and/or other species), restrictions on the time of using hounds for hunting, private property/hound interactions, and requests for no changes to the current hound seasons. General season comments ranged from asking for increased seasons, decreased seasons, a spring season, and simplifying regulations by running the deer and bear seasons concurrently.

Comments related to bag limits or number of tags were the second most frequently noted comment type (13%). These comments primarily requested an increase in the bear bag limit/tag numbers to 2 bears, although some asked for 3 (or more), or for the ability to earn a bear tag after harvest of your first bear. While many of these comments did not specify a certain area, the majority (77%) noted a southwestern Virginia county as their primary area of concern or interest in an increased bear bag limit.

The bear hound training (chase) season made up 9% of the total comments and primarily included comments asking for additional chase opportunities (either in new areas or expanded timeframes).



Comments related to the various bear seasons (3-day early, archery, muzzleloader, firearms) were generally asking for increased opportunities for the respective season type, changes to the dates, and/or allowing bear harvest concurrently through the entirety of deer seasons in Virginia. In contrast to prior cycles, there were comments asking for season reductions (primarily during archery season, although noted in the 3-day, and firearms sections as well). These comments were primarily targeted to those areas currently or recently affected by mange in black bears.

Comments related to licenses were primarily asking for the bear tag to be put back on the deer/turkey license. Weapons related comments were varied and asking for the allowance of different weapon types (air rifles, air bows, arrow guns, straight walled cartridges) for certain seasons or individuals (private landowners, >65). Non-regulatory issues primarily pertained to local, or county ordinances related to firearms. Miscellaneous comments covered a wide spectrum of topics including baiting, prohibiting hunting on Sunday, stricter law enforcement penalties for various crimes, and public land access and management.

### **Wild Turkey (215 comments)/Grouse (15 comments)**

Regulation comments pertaining to wild turkey can generally be categorized as those referencing bag limits (91), fall seasons (75), spring seasons (31), or weapons and techniques (45).

The most common comment regarding bag limit was to reduce the season bag limit (48 comments) although there were comments to increase the season bag limit (2). There were also several comments requesting to eliminate or reduce hen bag limits in the fall (22), while other comments requested to increase the fall bag to match the spring bag limit (6). There were also several comments requesting to increase the daily bag limit to 2 birds per day (7).

The most common fall season comments were to increase the amount of overlap with deer muzzleloader and deer firearms seasons (17), increase the hunting opportunities around the week of Thanksgiving (11), as well increasing the hunting opportunities in the current 2-week fall counties (10), and to simplify the fall season structure (7). There were a number of comments requesting to reduce or eliminate fall seasons (11) in order to increase turkey populations. There were also several county specific requests, depending on what people were experiencing in their counties.

The most common comments from the spring season category were to move the opener earlier by 1-2 weeks (18), and to allow for all-day hunting for the entirety of the season (6).

There were several comments that are best categorized as weapon or techniques. By far the most common comment in this category was to eliminate the use of rifles in spring seasons (26) or during both fall and spring seasons (13). There were also calls to eliminate decoy use (2) or the use of fanning/reaping (3).

Grouse regulation comments (15) were focused on restoring the grouse population. These comments generally involved the idea of shortening or closing all or a portion of the season, with one exception that was interested in an earlier opening date (increasing the time to hunt before deer muzzleloader seasons). There were also mentions of improving habitat on public lands and stocking birds to supplement populations.

### **Elk (30 comments)**

The most frequent comment submitted (7) involved changing the elk hunt lottery for the Elk Management Zone (EMZ) so that only Virginia residents would be eligible to receive a special elk hunting license. One

individual requested a special elk hunting license to be guaranteed to a Buchanan County resident. One individual asked for an increase in the non-resident elk license price. Another comment asked for more elk licenses, while two comments requested a reduction in elk hunting days. Three comments asked for an over-the-counter elk tag in the EMZ. Two individuals suggested expanding the EMZ and ending harvest outside of the EMZ, while one comment opposed expanding the EMZ and supports the continuation of allowing harvest of elk outside the EMZ on a deer tag. Four individuals requested a preference point system for the elk hunt lottery. Two suggested separating archery and firearms elk hunts and one suggested separate cow and bull lotteries. Two comments requested that air rifles be allowed for elk hunting and one requested .22 centerfire or greater caliber to be allowed for elk hunting. One comment requested a more forthcoming timeline for the elk lottery, one comment requested a special elk license for special lifetime hunting permit holders, and one individual asked for a chase season and hunting season for elk with hounds. Finally, the only non-hunting related elk comment requested putting elk on National Forest lands.

**Small Game (45 comments)**

Forty-five (45) comments were received regarding quail, rabbit, or squirrels during the public scoping period. Of these comments, there were 11 related to quail, 12 for squirrel, 11 for rabbit, and 11 which dealt with multiple small game species.

**Table 3.** Summary of comments received during the public scoping period for the 2025-2026 regulation review and amendment process for small game species.

<b>Species</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Suggestions</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Quail</b>	Harvest Limits	- 1 per day - 75 per season	2
	Seasons	- Close season - Open same day as woodcock - Split season to exclude first 2 weeks of general deer	5
	Licenses	- Add a daily license for shooting preserves	1
	Habitat Management	- Increase management for early succession species on wildlife management areas	3
<b>Squirrel</b>	Harvest Limits	- Unlimited harvest and urban hunting - 10 per day for gray squirrels - Increase limit	3
	Fall Season	- Extend fox squirrel season to match other squirrels on private land west of the blue ridge - Add one month to squirrel seasons - Urban squirrel seasons	5
	Spring Season	- Eliminate spring season - Extend Season - Extend season through January - Make available on National Forests	4
<b>Rabbit</b>	Harvest Limits	- Decrease to 4 per day - Change to 6 per person	2
	Season	- Change start to after deer muzzleloader ends - Change to end last day in Jan - Open season everywhere	9
	Hound Training	- Open all department land for hound training	3

<b>Other</b>		- Open year-round on public land west of the blue ridge - Season for all species training July 1 - last Saturday in Sep east of blue ridge	
	Hound Hunting	- Limit days for small game dogs on public land during deer season	2
	Weapons	- Allow .22LR on dismal swamp - Allow blowguns - Clarify rules on slingshots	4
	Season	- End seasons on Sunday	1
	Disabled/Youth	- Create a multispecies disabled/youth hunting day with dogs	1
<b>Total</b>			<b>45</b>

**Furbearers/Trapping (346 comments)**

A total of 301 submissions containing 346 separate comments were received during the public scoping period referencing one or more furbearer species.

**Table 4.** Summary of comments received during the public scoping period for the 2025-2026 regulation review and amendment process for furbearer species.

<b>Category</b>	<b># of Comments</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
Hunting/Training with Hounds	130	37.6%
Banning Predator Hunting Contests	65	18.8%
Ban/limit Hunting	33	9.5%
Expand Hunting Season	15	4.3%
Ban/limit Trapping	16	4.6%
Expand Trapping Season	19	5.5%
Weapons allowances	14	4.0%
Fox Pens	13	3.8%
Licenses	9	2.6%
Bag Limits	7	2.0%
Bounties	7	2.0%
Miscellaneous	18	5.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>100%</b>

Roughly 38% of the total furbearer comments related to hunting with hounds. Most comments called for a ban on hunting on private property and the right to retrieve. Several constituents called for additional restrictions for hound hunting, including requiring that hounds be licensed and/or have GPS collars, for there to be a minimum acreage for hound hunting, and for there to be better enforcement of hound hunting laws and stricter penalties for violations. However, we also received eleven requests for the establishment of a hound hunting training season and five comments with requests to keep hunting with hounds legal.

The 65 comments relating to banning predator hunting contests and cash prizes in the state were likely influenced by a social media post made by the Wildlife Center of Virginia in early December. Other comments relating to hunting and trapping bans included calls to ban hunting and trapping for all furbearer species, to ban hunting for specific species (gray fox, red fox, otter, mink, bobcat), to ban all hunting on Sundays, and to ban hunting on specific public lands. One person would like for all foot-hold traps to be banned, and another would like all snares banned.

A few constituents requested changes to the hunting seasons for furbearers, including moving the start date for bobcats earlier, expanding hunting for foxes to those counties that currently have a closed season, the opening of an archery season for foxes, and expanding the season for all species. Of the requests to expand the trapping seasons, the majority related to expanding the trapping season for raccoons, opossums, and skunks to cover the spring/bird nesting season, with concerns about turkey and small game nest predation. A few comments were received requesting the bag limits to be increased for otters and raccoons and decreased for bobcats in certain counties.

Bounties were mentioned a few times as one constituent would like to have a bounty allowed for opossum and raccoon, and a few others would like to have a coyote bounty in their county. A few comments related to fox pens as three constituents would like for more fox pens to be established and one requested that coyotes be allowed in the pens. The weapon-related comments were varied and included the request to ban the use of infrared scopes and predator calls when hunting foxes. Two constituents would like to be able to hunt using bait for raccoons and coyotes. Most of the non-regulatory comments related to hunting and trapping license exemptions.

#### **Migratory Game Bird/Waterfowl Blinds (22 comments)**

Public feedback on migratory game bird topics ranged from comments on waterfowl season dates to waterfowl blind laws and opening areas that are closed to waterfowl hunting. Several commentors requested increases in the length of the duck season and an increase in the Canada goose season length and bag limit. Waterfowl blind comments (5) focused on shortening the distance between blinds and not releasing coordinates of licensed waterfowl blinds. There were no comments on other waterfowl species (brant, snow geese, swans, ...) or other webless species (rails, snipe, coots...).

#### **Other/Nongame (201 comments)**

While most comments submitted by constituents focus on issues specific to harvested species, the scoping period comment form enables constituents to offer feedback on items, which are not species-specific, by offering categories for “Other” and “Nongame” regulation issues. Comments submitted by constituents selecting these categories cover a variety of topics; however, common themes include legal/permits/enforcement issues, hunting with hounds, license structure and fees, public lands issues, hunting digest and website information, and a few fishing-related comments. Multiple constituents requested higher penalties for hunting violations, particularly for illegal dumping and trespass issues. Additional enforcement of hunting laws and increasing the number of CPOs was requested by several individuals, and amendments to the Department’s scientific collection permit and wildlife rehabilitator permit were cited by educators wanted more flexibility to possess macroinvertebrates and wildlife rehabilitators desiring greater flexibility in treating wildlife. Prohibiting Sunday hunting, the use of drones for scouting and game retrieval, and the use of lead ammunition were cited by multiple individuals submitting comments. Additionally, some respondents wanted to allow baiting, mandate hunter safety courses in schools, and improve regulations regarding wanton waste. Comments related to management of public lands centered on improving habitat conditions, allowing year-round target shooting, creating

more shooting ranges, opening WMA roads year-round, and allowing the use of ATV's/UTV's for removal of harvested game from public lands. While many comments sought to expand recreational opportunity and access to public lands, some individuals wanted to prohibit the use of Ebikes, remove the Sunday hunting provision, and eliminate game cameras on public lands. Multiple individuals wanted to create special licenses (e.g., all-inclusive senior lifetime license, lifetime license for nonresident disabled veterans), reduce or eliminate license fees, or exempt a landowner's siblings from the requirement to purchase a hunting license. One individual would like to see the better oversight of waterfowl blind license sales to avoid purchasing licenses within 500 yards of existing blinds/stakes. Comments related to hunting with dogs included prohibiting dog hunting on public lands, increasing dog training on National Forest and state lands, enacting a hound training season for any game species between July 1 and the last Saturday in September, require hunters to contact landowners prior to retrieving their hunting dogs, creating a dog registry, requiring GPS devices on dogs, and establishing an acreage minimum for hunting with dogs. Developing an annual hunting calendar/mobile app where individuals could more easily understand what species could be hunted in a specific locality on a certain date was mentioned by a few individuals, and one individual wanted to create a veteran's section within the annual hunting digest to enhance opportunities for veterans to understand hunting licenses and privileges specific to their constituency. Fifteen fishing-related comments covering spearfishing, trout stocking and rod limits, classification of snakeheads, and saltwater species issue were also received.

### **Conclusion**

Because some individual comment forms included multiple suggested changes, the total number of individual comments (5,138) reviewed by staffs exceeded the total number of comment forms (4,171) submitted to the Department. As with past regulation review and amendment processes, subjects such as deer hunting, bear hunting, and hunting with dogs composed a very significant portion of constituent comments. Overall, the types of regulatory suggestions offered by constituents remains relatively unchanged from previous public scoping periods: increase hunting and harvest opportunities for abundant game species, reduce hunting and harvest opportunities on species where populations may be declining, and expressions of support/concern for certain hunting or trapping techniques. The consistency displayed in the public's feedback to the Department enables staffs to monitor issues continuously and collect/evaluate biological and sociological data trends to develop regulation amendments to best ensure appropriate management of our wildlife resources to meet the needs of Virginia's diverse citizenry.