

Seasons

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"We have been working through the CFC with the USFWS to develop a package of duck hunting regulations that will allow additional opportunity when times are good like they are now" said Brian Sullivan, waterfowl program leader with TPWD. "We have record numbers of birds heading our way, so there's no biological reason not to increase the overall bag limit from five to six birds, increase pintails from one to three and hen mallards from one to two. Our hunters have requested more than one pintail for many years and finally it happened."

Breeding duck populations are up significantly in 1997, the fourth consecutive year of increases. The total number of breeding ducks in the traditional survey area of Canada, Alaska and the north-central U.S. reached a new record high level of almost 43 million. Several species made impressive gains over last year, including mallards (up 25%), pintails (up 30%), gadwalls (up 31%) and widgeon (up 37%).

A strong nesting effort is winding down and good production should mean another large fall flight of ducks heading for Texas.

Included this season were the first-ever special youth-only duck hunting day in Texas, for hunters 15 years old or younger. Youth duck hunt days were Oct. 18 in the North and South zones and Oct. 4 in the HPMMU. "These special youth-only hunting days enabled

young hunters to get first shot at the ducks and hopefully wet their appetite for more during the regular season," suggests Vernon Bevil, TPWD migratory game bird program director.

The youth duck hunting day was offered by the USFWS last year and was highly successful in states where the special day was implemented.

Last year, TPWD lacked statutory authority to implement special hunting seasons based on age but obtained that authority during the recent legislative session.

Federal guidelines required the youth day to be set on a weekend or holiday within 14 days before or after the regular duck season or during a split (closed period between season segments).

Youth hunters must be accompanied by an adult at least 18 years old and regular season bag limits apply.

Additionally, all youth hunters must comply with state hunter education requirements.

The Commission also adopted goose season dates for the Eastern zone: Nov. 1-Feb. 15 for light geese and Nov. 1-Jan. 25 for dark geese, with a bag limit of 10 light geese and two dark geese (one white-front and one Canada, except two Canadas during Jan. 19-25).

Goose seasons in the Western zone will run from Nov. 1-Feb. 15 for both light and dark geese, with a bag limit of 10 light

geese and 5 dark geese (four Canadas and one white-front).

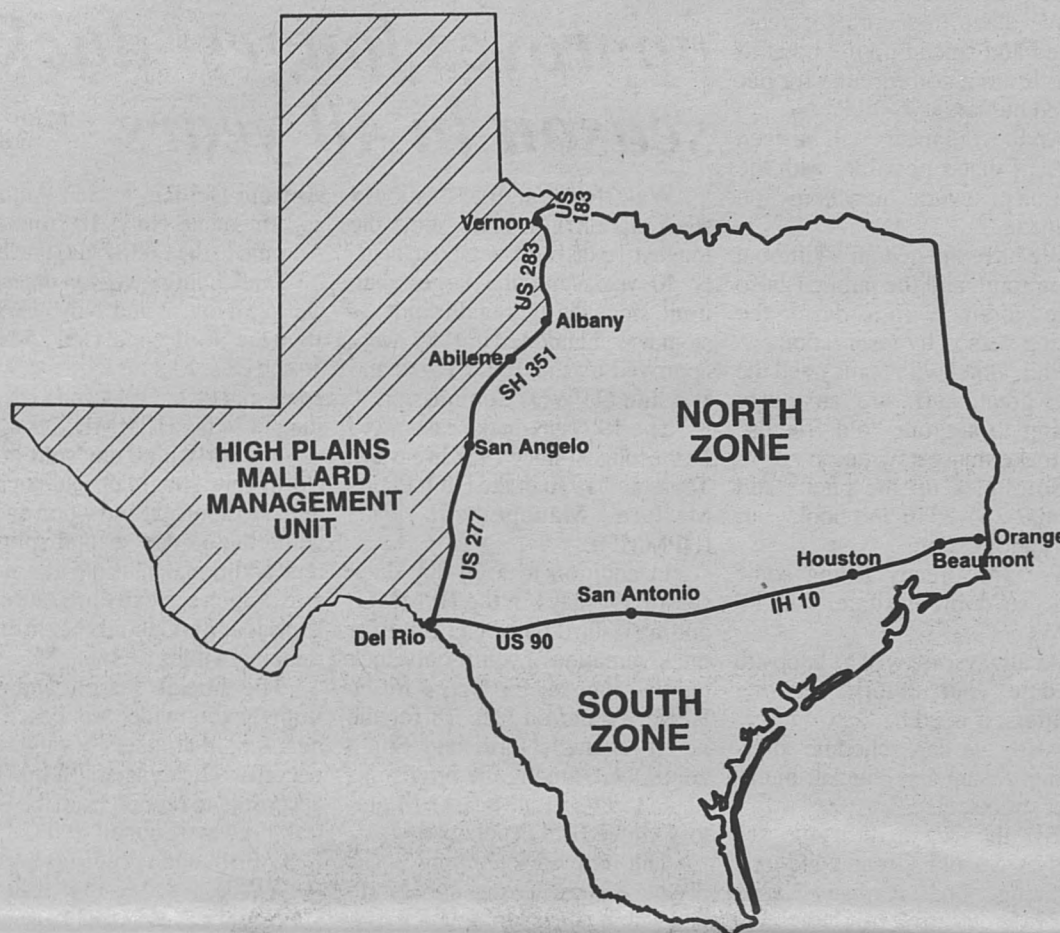
Merganser and coot seasons are set to run concurrent with duck seasons, with bag limits of five mergansers (no more than one hooded merganser) and 15 coots.

The sandhill crane season is Nov. 8-Feb. 8 in Zone A; Nov. 29-Feb. 8 in Zone B; and Jan. 3-Feb. 8 in Zone C, with a bag limit of three cranes.

Season dates for snipe are Oct. 25-Feb. 8 with a bag limit of eight.

Dates for woodcock are Dec. 18-Jan. 31 with a bag limit of three.

Federal frameworks required cuts in season length and bag limit for woodcock due to suspected population declines in primary breeding areas.



Texas duck season zone map for 1997-98



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