

Texas Parks Dept. Says This Year's Duck Season Could Be One Of Best

Duck hunters are bracing for what could be one of the best waterfowl hunting seasons in many years, with near record duck populations building to the north and ideal habitat conditions awaiting them in Texas.

State waterfowl biologists announced proposed hunting regulations for the upcoming season and are currently seeking public comment.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, along with four other states in the Central Flyway, will be in the second year of an experimental Hunter's Choice bag limit during the 2007-08 seasons.

The Hunter's Choice allows hunters to shoot five ducks daily, but only one in the aggregate of certain species.

In the aggregate category of less abundant ducks, that one bird could be either a pintail, or a canvasback, or a "dusky duck" (mottled, black duck or Mexican-like duck) or a hen mallard.

The general duck season length will be the same as last year in the North and South Zones at 74 days and up seven days in the High Plains Mallard Management Unit to 96 days.

"This year because of habitat conditions and duck population estimates we felt we'd be in the liberal framework, so we made the decision to several days off the early teal season and add them into the big duck season," said Dave Morrison, TPWD waterfowl program leader.

This year's North American

waterfowl spring breeding population survey showed populations of the 10 most popular duck species was up 14 percent over last year with an estimated 41.2 million birds.

The counts are the highest since 2000 and just below the all-time record of 43.8 million ducks recorded in 1999.

How the final season structure will unfold is still being discussed, but TPWD has developed a proposal and is seeking public comments prior to presenting recommendations to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission for final approval on Aug. 23.

According to federal guidelines, the general duck hunting seasons in Texas can only occur between Sept. 24 and Jan. 27.

In making its recommendations, TPWD takes into consideration calendar shifts to maximize weekend and holiday hunting opportunity, and factors in years of survey data on bird migration and hunter harvest.

Following is a rundown of the TPWD recommendations being considered:

North and South Zones -- TPWD proposes the following dates: youth-only season Oct. 27-28, regular season Nov. 3-25 and Dec. 8-Jan. 27.

This season format will provide a two-week split giving hunters and ducks a rest, while maximizing opportunity during peak historic migrations.

It will also provide hunting opportunities until the end of

the framework, something many hunters have requested.

High Plains Mallard Management Unit.

The HPMMU offers one of the longest duck hunting seasons in the nation.

To provide a season that takes advantage of this lengthy opportunity, TPWD is recommending season dates of Oct. 13-14 for the youth-only season and Oct. 20-21 and Oct. 26-Jan. 27 for the regular season.

The proposed daily bag limit for all ducks is five and may include no more than two redheads, two scaup, two wood ducks, and one aggregate duck.

As for geese, TPWD is proposing a season similar to last year, except for an increase in the Canada goose bag limit for the Western Goose Zone.

Eastern Goose Zone--White-fronted geese: Nov. 3-Jan. 13; Canada and light geese: Nov. 3-Jan. 27. The daily bag limit is three Canada, two white-fronted and 20 light geese.

Western Goose Zone -- Nov. 3-Feb. 5 with a daily bag limit of five dark geese, of which four may be Canada geese and one white-fronted.

The bag limit on light geese is 20 per day.

The possession limit is twice the daily bag limit for Canada and white-fronted geese and no possession limit for "light geese."

The Light Goose Conservation Order would start at the close of the regular goose seasons and run

through March 30 in both zones.

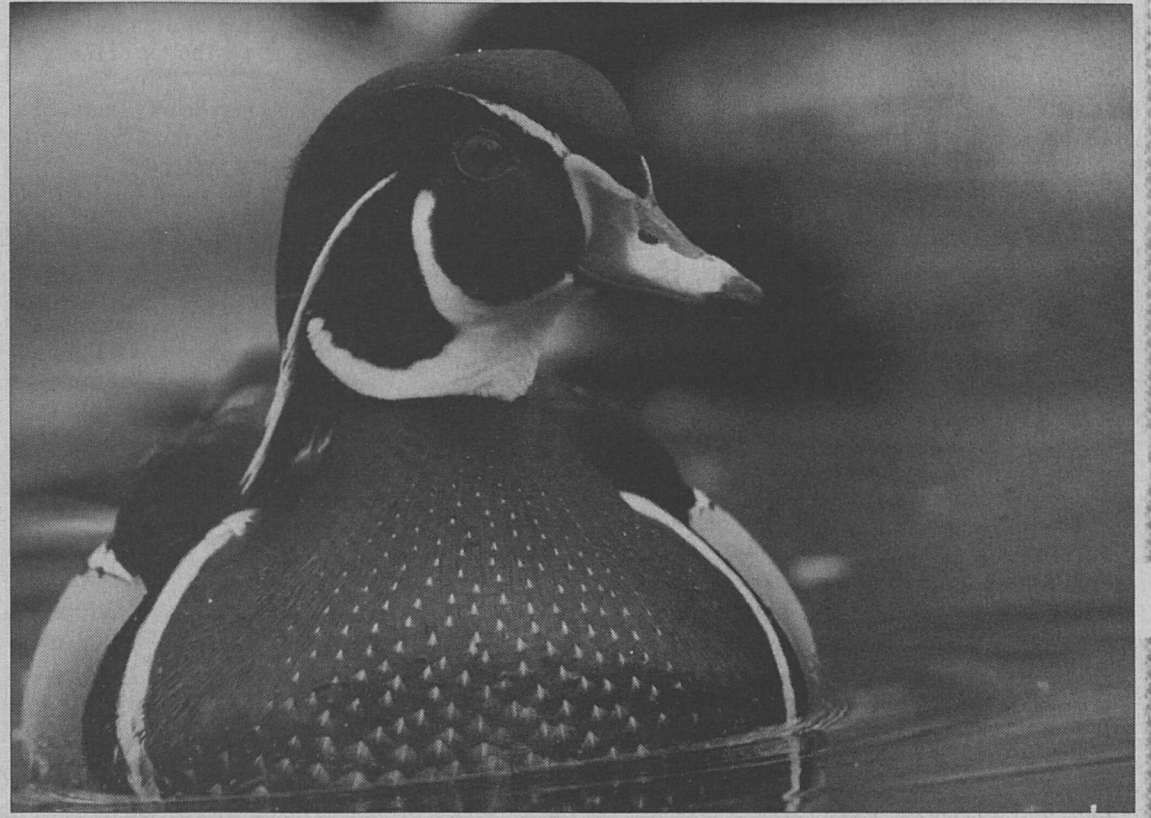
This allows relaxed regulations to hunt through various atypical means in order to control light goose over population that has caused damage to Canadian

habitat.

Public comment about the waterfowl proposals will be accepted through Aug. 21. Comments should be sent by e-mail to dave.morrison@tpwd.state.tx.us or by regular mail to Dave Mor-

ison, TPWD Waterfowl Program Leader, 4200 Smith School Rd., Austin, TX 78744.

Input may also be made online via the Public Comment link on the TPWD Web site home page.



Cotton Production Up Five Percent

The 2007 Texas Upland cotton crop is expected to total 6.1 million bales, five percent higher than in 2006, and 28 percent less than 2005.

Yield is expected to average 623 pounds per acre, compared with 679 pounds last year.

Acreage expected for harvest is estimated at 4.7 million acres, up 15 percent from 2006.

"The forecast record yields for corn and sorghum are the result of favorable moisture conditions across the state", says State Director David Abbe.

"Farmers reported mostly good to excellent growing conditions for these two crops for the Aug. 1 reference date."

Corn production is forecast at 262.7 million bushels, up 50 percent from last year, and 25 percent more than in 2005.

Based on Aug. 1 conditions, statewide yield is expected to average 142 bushels per acre, 21 bushels more than in 2006.

Acres to be harvested for grain, is at 1.85 million, up 28 percent from last year.

Sorghum production is fore-

cast at 94 million hundredweight (cwt), 168 percent more than last year.

Acres to be harvested are estimated at 2.5 million acres, up 92 percent from last year.

Yield, at 3,752 pounds per acre, is up 1,064 pounds from last year.

Peanut production is up 24 percent from last year, at 666 million pounds.

Statewide yield, at 3,600 pounds per acre, is down 100 pounds from last year.

Harvested acreage is up 28 percent to 185,000 acres.

Rice producers expect to harvest 10.1 million cwt, down 6 percent from 2006.

Yield is forecast at 6,800 pounds per acre, 370 pounds less than last year.

The 2007 Texas soybean crop is forecast at 2.4 million bushels, down 35 percent from last year's production.

Harvested acreage, at 75,000, is down 52 percent from last year, and yield is expected to average 32 bushels per acre, compared with

24 bushels last year.

Oat production is forecast at 4.4 million bushels, up 19 percent from last year.

Yield is forecast at 44 bushels per acre, up 7 bushels from 2006.

Grape production is forecast at 9,500 tons, up 34 percent from last year's 7,100 tons.

United States corn production is forecast at 13.1 billion bushels, up 24 percent from last year's crop.

A yield of 152.8 bushels per acre is forecast, up 3.7 bushels from last year.

The sorghum crop is expected to be up 71 percent to 266 million cwt.

The U.S. upland cotton crop is expected to total 16.5 million bales, down 21 percent from last year.

Soybean production is forecast at 2.63 billion bushels, down 18 percent from last year.

The U.S. peanut crop is estimated at 3.37 billion pounds, down 3 percent from a year ago.

U.S. rice production is forecast at 190 million cwt, down 2 percent from 2006.

Notice of Public Hearing on Tax Increase

The Colorado County Commissioners' Court will hold two public hearings on a proposal to increase total tax revenues from properties on the tax roll in the preceding tax year by 3.7 percent (percentage by which proposed tax rate exceeds lower of rollback tax rate or effective tax calculated under Chapter 26, Tax Code). Your individual taxes may increase at a greater or lesser rate, or even decrease, depending on the change in the taxable value of your property in relation to the change in taxable value of all other property and the tax rate that is adopted.

The public hearings will be held on August 27th @ 9:15 a.m. and August 31st @ 9:00 a.m. in the County Courtroom-Courthouse 1st Floor, Columbus, Texas.

The members of the governing body voted on the proposal to consider the tax increase as follows:

FOR: A.G. Jamison, Doug Wessels, Herbie Helmcamp, Darrell Gertson
 AGAINST: None
 PRESENT and not voting: None
 ABSENT: Tommy Hahn

Comparison of Proposed Budget with Last Year's Budget

The applicable percentage increase or decrease (or difference) in the amount budgeted in the preceding fiscal year and the amount budgeted for the fiscal year that begins during the current tax year is indicated for each of the following expenditure categories:

Maintenance and operations	6.46% (increase)	or	_____ % (decrease)
Debt service	1.62% (increase)	or	_____ % (decrease)
Total expenditures	5.45% (increase)	or	_____ % (decrease)

Total Appraised Value and Total Taxable Value as calculated under section 26.04, Tax Code

	Preceding Tax Year	Current Tax Year
Total appraised value of all property	\$ 1,540,508,346	\$ 1,675,546,746
Total appraised value of all new property	\$ 20,453,490	\$ 30,109,990
Total taxable value of all property	\$ 1,405,174,578	\$ 1,532,218,290
Total taxable value of all new property	\$ 18,244,665	\$ 27,378,540

Bonded Indebtedness

Total amount of outstanding and unpaid bonded indebtedness \$ 1,785,000.00

Tax Rates

Adopted tax rate for the preceding tax year	\$ 0.4189	per \$100 in value
Proposed tax rate for the current tax year	\$ 0.4300	per \$100 in value
Difference in the proposed tax rate and the adopted tax rate for the preceding tax year	\$ 0.0111	per \$100 in value

Percentage increase or decrease in the proposed tax rate and the adopted tax rate for the preceding tax year _____ % increase OR _____ % decrease

These tax rate figures are not adjusted for changes in the taxable value of property.

Comparison of Residence Homestead Values

Average appraised and taxable values on residence homesteads are compared from the preceding tax year and the current tax year.

	Preceding Tax Year	Current Tax Year
Average residence homestead appraised value	\$ 79,866.00	\$ 86,236.00
Homestead exemption amount for the taxing unit (excluding special exemptions for persons 65 years of age or older or disabled)	\$ 16,722.00	\$ 18,424.00
Average taxable value of a residence homestead (excluding special exemptions for persons 65 years of age or older or disabled)	\$ 63,144.00	\$ 67,812.00

Comparison of Residence Homestead Taxes

The taxes that would have been imposed in the preceding tax year on a residence homestead at the average appraised value (excluding special exemptions for persons 65 years of age or older or disabled) are estimated to be \$ 264.51. The taxes that would be imposed in the current tax year on a residence homestead appraised at the average appraised value in the current tax year (excluding special exemptions for persons 65 years of age or older or disabled), if the proposed tax rate is adopted, are estimated to be \$ 291.59. The difference between the amount of taxes on the average residence homestead in the current tax year, if the proposed tax rate is adopted, and the preceding tax year would be an increase of \$ 27.08 or a decrease of \$ _____ in taxes.

Texas Leads Nation In Hunting

According to preliminary state data from the new 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, Texas led the nation in 2006 with 1.1 million Texans going hunting at some point during the year, while Florida led the nation in total fishing participation with 2.8 million anglers and California was the top wildlife-watching state with 6.2 million of its residents observing wildlife.

The Lone Star State was also among the national leaders in fishing participation at 2.5 million and wildlife viewing with 4.17 million Texans participating.

Texas also leads the nation in hunting-related expenditures, and the Lone Star State generates among the highest spending levels in the country for fishing and wildlife watching.

The survey showed hunters spent about \$2.3 billion in Texas, more than any other state.

Angler spending in Texas was about \$3.2 billion, second only to Florida at \$4.5 billion.

Texas ranked third nationally for expenditures by wildlife-watchers at about \$2.9 billion, with California first at \$4.6 billion and Florida edging above Texas at close to \$3 billion.

These figures reflect spending on food, lodging, transportation, equipment and other items.

"The National Survey is an

important tool that measures in economic and participatory terms the value that wildlife has in Americans' hearts and to the nation's economy.

Wildlife related recreation rejuvenates our spirit, connects us with nature and gets us outside pursuing healthy activities," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director H. Dale Hall.

In 2006, more than 87 million Americans, or 38 percent of the United States' population age 16 and older hunted, fished or watched wildlife.

They spent \$120 billion that year pursuing those activities.

Further broken down by category, 30 million or 13 percent fished and spent a total of \$41 billion on their activities, 12.5 million or 5 percent hunted and spent a total of \$23 billion, and 71 million or 31 percent observed wildlife and spent a total of \$45 billion.

The National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation has been conducted every 5 years since 1955 and is one of the nation's most important wildlife recreation databases.

It is considered to be the definitive source of information concerning participation and expenditures associated with hunting, fishing and other forms of wildlife-related recreation nationwide.

The Survey is conducted at the request of State fish and wildlife agencies and is funded by grants from the Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Acts' Multistate Conservation Grant Program.

A wide range of individuals and groups depend on the survey to analyze participation rates, economic impacts of expenditures, demographic characteristics, and trends in participation and activities.

It is important to note that the National Survey counts only participants who actually went hunting, fishing or observed wildlife in 2006 and does not represent the total number of anglers, hunters, and wildlife watchers in the U.S.

Many people who consider themselves hunters, anglers or wildlife watchers do not participate every year.

For example, examination of survey data shows that over the five-year period from 2002 to 2006, a cumulative total of 44.4 million people fished and 18.6 million hunted.

This 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation State Overview report, as well as previous surveys and reports, can be found at federalaid.fws.gov/surveys/surveys.html.

The Service expects to publish the final National Report in November 2007.

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