

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 19, 2018

Agenda Item: 2018-19 All Migratory Bird Regulations

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time for this Presentation: 15 Minutes

Background: Montana is in both the Central and Pacific Flyways for migratory game birds and follows U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) frameworks. Tentative season dates were proposed as part of the biennial season setting process in December, with final approval in April in order to meet USFWS deadlines for season selections. Other than normal calendar rotation and the 3 exceptions below, all aspects of the 2017-18 season are to remain in place.

The three proposed changes are:

- The season for the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) of Sandhill Cranes (all special drawing permits) to open on Sept. 1 instead of Sept. 9 and be 58 days long.
- Increase the Broadwater County RMP sandhill crane unit permits from 10 to 20.
- Increase the daily bag limit for pintails from 1 to 2

Proposed dates for ducks, coots, geese, and swans:

Pacific Flyway (PF) - Ducks, coots, and geese: Sept 29 - Jan 6 and Jan 12-16 (closed 5 days, Jan 7-11) (except scaup season closing Dec 23); Swans: Oct 6 - Dec 1

Central Flyway (CF) - Ducks and coots: Zone 1 - Sept 29 - Jan 3; Zone 2 - Sept 29 – Oct 7 and Oct 20 -Jan 15 (closed for 12 days, Oct 8-19). A bonus teal season Sept 29 - Oct 7 in the CF will allow hunters to take 2 additional blue-winged teal.

Central Flyway - Geese - Zone 1 - Sept 29 - Jan 6 and Jan 12-16 (closed 5 days, Jan 7-11); Zone 2 - Sept 29- Oct 7 and Oct 20 - Jan 23 (closed 12 days, Oct 8-19); CF Tundra swans: Sept 29 - Jan 3 (both zones, no split season).

Other than for pintails as mentioned above, duck, coot, and goose daily and possession limits for both flyways are proposed to be the same as in 2017-18. The special two-day Youth Waterfowl Season will be Sept 22-23 in both flyway parts of the state.

Proposed season dates for “webless” migratory birds:

Mourning doves: Sept 1 – Oct 30

Common snipe: Sept 1 – Dec 16

RMP sandhill cranes (all special drawing permits): Sept 1 – Oct 28 (58 days).

Mid-continent sandhill cranes in CF (over the counter permit): Sept 29 – Nov 25

Public Involvement Process & Results: Public comment on season dates was open from Dec 7 to Jan 24 and we received 7 comments. Some spoke to wanting later opportunities and having duck and goose season dates in the CF align. The longer RMP crane season was not out for public comment as this framework option from the USFWS just recently became available. Complaints are still heard from some hunters about losing 12 days of waterfowl hunting in Oct in the CF Zone 2.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends that the Commission approve the proposed 2018-19 migratory bird regulations as presented by FWP.

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt final 2018-19 migratory bird regulations as presented by FWP, and that all other aspects of the 2017-18 season except for normal calendar rotation date changes are adopted.