

Waterfowl Seasons Frequently Asked Questions

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What licenses and stamps do I need to hunt ducks and geese in Iowa?

Iowa residents 16 years old and older and all nonresidents, except those under 16 years of age, are required to carry a valid hunting license, pay the habitat fee and Iowa migratory game bird fee, and carry a valid federal migratory waterfowl stamp (duck stamp) while waterfowl hunting. Nonresidents under 16 years of age are only required to carry a valid hunting license and pay the habitat fee. Federal duck stamps are available at most post offices, national wildlife refuges and at some license agents. The hunter must sign the stamp across the face. A federal duck stamp is not required to participate in the conservation order for light geese.

For more information on this topic, view hunting regulations and license information on the DNR's website.

Can I hunt ducks and geese anywhere in the state or only in specific zones or at specific times?

Your license allows you to hunt ducks and geese wherever and whenever the duck and goose seasons are open in Iowa.

Are there any areas in Iowa where waterfowl hunting is controlled?

There is only one controlled hunting area in Iowa, the Lake Odessa Wildlife Management Area near Wapello in southeast Iowa. A limited number of permits are issued daily to control hunter access to a portion of the area. Hunting is by boat in the controlled hunting area and parties can only hunt at assigned locations. Hunters in the controlled hunting area must check out of the area and report the number of ducks and geese they kill. Another portion of the Odessa WMA is open to public hunting without controlled access. More information on the Lake Odessa WMA can be found at:

<http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/odessa/index.html> or by calling Odessa Wildlife Management Unit headquarters at 319-523-3102.

To whom should I report the banded duck (or goose) I shot? Can I keep the band?

You should report all banded ducks and geese that you recover to the USGS Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL) in Washington D.C. The BBL keeps records of all migratory birds banded in North America. Bands can be reported at www.reportband.gov or by calling 1-800-327-BAND (2263). You can keep the band. The BBL will send you a certificate indicating where the bird was banded and how old it was at the time of banding. Banded waterfowl that are recovered and reported provide extremely valuable information that is used to maintain waterfowl populations and hunting opportunities.

Why aren't the duck and goose season dates set earlier in the year?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), under the authority of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, determines if, when, and to what extent migratory birds are hunted in the U.S. All migratory bird hunting seasons are closed unless they are opened by the Secretary of the Interior each year. Through the Flyway Council System, state conservation agencies have input into the regulations process, which begins in January each year and concludes in September with the publication of the final hunting regulations in the federal register. The annual process of developing duck and goose hunting regulations involves working through the national processes as well as the process for changing rules in Iowa. The entire process is described on this website in the document titled "The Process of Setting Waterfowl Hunting Seasons." The waterfowl hunting regulations developed each year are based on the current status of duck and goose populations. Population and production information is not available until July. The 4 Flyway Councils in the U.S. examine this new information each summer and recommend hunting regulations to the Service at the end of July. The Service considers the Flyway recommendations and develops regulations during the first week of August. The complexity of developing hunting regulations through national and state processes, as well as the desire to base hunting regulations on the most current waterfowl status information, is why waterfowl hunting regulations are not set until mid-August each year.

Why is duck season longer in Nebraska and South Dakota than in Iowa?

The U.S. is divided into 4 Flyways: Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific. Iowa is a member of the Mississippi Flyway. The Mississippi Flyway includes 14 states in the central part of the U.S. Nebraska and South Dakota are members of the Central Flyway. Nearly half the ducks shot in the U.S. each fall are shot in the Mississippi Flyway, whereas only about 20% of the ducks shot in the U.S. are shot in the Central Flyway. Duck seasons have traditionally been longer in the Central Flyway, up to 2 weeks longer than in the Mississippi Flyway, because Central Flyway states have historically harvested fewer ducks than Mississippi Flyway states. Because hunting pressure is high in the Mississippi Flyway, duck seasons are shorter in this Flyway to ensure duck populations are not overharvested. States cannot choose which Flyway they want to belong to.

Why doesn't Iowa have a teal season like Illinois and Missouri?

Iowa is categorized as a "duck production" state by virtue of geography and geology. The Prairie Pothole Region, the duck factory of North America, extends as far south as Des Moines in Iowa. In the mid-1960s, the Flyway Councils proposed an experiment to evaluate teal-only seasons to provide hunters with additional teal hunting opportunities before the regular duck season opened. Regular duck seasons usually opened near October 1 at that time, well after most of the blue-winged teal had migrated through the north half of the U.S. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service agreed to approve teal-only seasons if states could show that the take of non-teal ducks was minimal. In states with high

numbers of breeding ducks, such as Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, North and South Dakota, the kill of non-teal ducks was high - unacceptably high. As a result, the Flyway Councils and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service agreed that special September teal-only seasons would only be offered in non-production states, e.g., Illinois and Missouri. This constraint has remained in place to the present time. As a production state, Iowa hunters benefit from the acquisition of waterfowl production areas throughout the prairie pothole region of central, north-central and northwest Iowa. Up to \$2 million federal dollars are funneled into Iowa each year to purchase waterfowl production areas. The waterfowl production area acquisition program has increased Iowa's public hunting land base by over 20,000 acres in the past 3 decades. These lands were primarily purchased with federal duck stamp dollars.

Why can't the duck season start earlier in September?

Federal regulations allow the Iowa DNR to use 5 days of our regular duck season in September, but this first split of the duck season can open no earlier than the Saturday nearest September 20. Iowa is the only state in the nation with this option. All other states in the Mississippi Flyway must wait until the Saturday nearest September 24 to open their duck seasons. (Prior to 2002, all other states in the Mississippi Flyway had to wait until the Saturday nearest October 1 to open their regular duck seasons.) This special hunting opportunity comes with an additional constraint. If the first segment of the duck season is opened on the Saturday nearest September 20, the second part of the duck season cannot open before October 10. The duck season in Iowa has opened on the Saturday nearest September 20 every year in at least one zone since 1979, except for the 6 years (1988-93) when duck seasons were only 30 days long. During those years, the option to open the duck season in September was prohibited by federal regulations.

Why can't the duck season be split into more than 2 segments in each zone?

Why can't we change the duck zone boundary?

In 1990, because of concerns about the proliferation of zones and split seasons for duck hunting, a cooperative review and evaluation of the historical use of zone/split options was jointly conducted by the Flyways and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This study indicated that the proliferation of zones and split seasons was making it increasingly difficult to predict duck harvests for specific season length and bag limit combinations as well as measure the impacts of duck hunting regulations on subsequent duck populations. As a result, the Flyway Councils and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service established guidelines in 1991 that limited the number of zone/split options that states could use to structure their duck hunting seasons. They also specified that zone/split season configuration could only be changed once every 5 years. A zone was defined as a geographic area or portion of a state, with a contiguous boundary, for which independent dates could be selected for the duck season. When this policy was established, states could continue to use the configuration that they used for their zones and splits during the previous 5-year period. However, if a state wanted to change its zone/split-season configuration, the new zone/split configuration was required to conform to one of the following options:

1. States could divide their state into 3 zones, but could not split the season in any zone.
 2. States could split their season into 3 segments, but no zones would be permitted.
 3. States could be divided into 2 zones and the season could be split into 2-segments in each zone.
- Once a zone/split option was selected, the state was required to retain it for the next 5 years.

When the zone/split guidelines were first implemented in 1991, several states already had zone/split configurations different from Options 1-3 above. Those states were offered a one-time opportunity to continue those arrangements, i.e., they were grandfathered into the system, with the stipulation that

only minor changes could be made to their zone boundaries. If they ever wished to change their zone/split configuration, the new configuration would have to conform to one of the 3 options identified above. If a grandfathered state changed its zone/split arrangement, it could not go back to the grandfathered arrangement it previously had in place.

Why is Canada goose hunting in early September only allowed in the special zones around cities?

A special 2-day early September Canada goose season was opened statewide in Iowa in 2005, 2006, and 2007. Special 15-day early September Canada goose seasons have been open around Des Moines and Cedar Rapids/Iowa City since 2003. In 2008, the special 15-day early September Canada goose season was opened in the Cedar Falls/Waterloo area as well. In 2006, the Canada goose population was estimated to be 101,500 (+ 16,300) (+95% Conf. Limit). In 2007 it was estimated at 93,400 (+ 16,400) and in 2008 at 88,784 (+13,620). In 2009, the population was estimated to be 104,844 (+ 16,878). Statistically speaking, there were no differences between these estimates. This indicates that the Canada goose population in the state, as a whole, has been stable for the past 4 years. Special September Canada goose seasons were originally developed by the Flyway Councils to reduce populations of resident Canada geese without increasing harvests of other Canada geese. These special early seasons were designed to provide states with the opportunity to harvest local giant Canada geese when there were no other subspecies of Canada geese in the state. Because the Canada goose population is stable in Iowa, the DNR does not feel that additional hunting pressure is needed to suppress this population at this time. It is important to consider that, in addition to the special 2-day Canada goose season that was opened in 2006 and 2007, the length of the regular Canada goose season was also increased from 70 to 90 days in 2006. The DNR requested U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service allow Iowa to have additional regular season days to provide more Canada goose hunting opportunity in late fall/early winter. Those additional hunting days, however, also result in more local Canada geese being harvested. It is also important to note that nearly two-thirds of the Canada geese shot in Iowa are raised in Iowa. Nearly 100% of the geese shot during the early September season are from Iowa. Because the majority of the geese shot in Iowa are raised in Iowa, the DNR believes we must very carefully structure our Canada goose hunting seasons to ensure the local Canada goose population is maintained at a level where it can provide Iowan's with the hunting opportunities they have grown accustomed to in the last decade.

How is the Canada goose population measured in Iowa?

Between April 1–21 each year, Canada geese are counted on 165 randomly selected 2 mi² plots scattered across Iowa: 70 in Iowa's portion of the prairie pothole region and 95 in the rest of the state. A helicopter is used to count all the geese within each 2-mi² plot. Geese are recorded by standard social groups used for surveys throughout the Flyway: pairs, pairs with nests, singles, singles with nests, and geese in groups. Singles and singles with nests are indicators of nesting geese, but only the larger of these two numbers, combined with the numbers of pairs and pairs with nests, is used to estimate the numbers of pairs on each surveyed 2-mi² plot. An average number of geese is calculated per survey plot and this number is expanded for all the 2-mi² plots in the region that have potential goose nesting habitat on them as determined by the National Wetlands Survey. Wildlife biologists for Iowa's 16 Wildlife Management Units also estimate the numbers of geese nesting on specific wetlands in their areas as well as the numbers of geese produced in their wildlife management units. These estimates provide another means of monitoring the Canada goose population and its production in Iowa.

What Canada geese do hunters shoot in Iowa?

Waterfowl hunters in Iowa harvest giant Canada geese (*Branta canadensis maxima*), interior Canada geese (*B. c. interior*) and Cackling geese (*B. hutchinsii hutchinsii*), formerly known as Richardson's Canada geese (*B. c. hutchinsii*). These subspecies of geese belong to 4 populations of geese: the Mississippi Flyway giant Canada goose population, the Eastern Prairie Population (EPP), the Mississippi Valley Population (MVP) and the Tall Grass Prairie Population (TGPP). The Eastern Prairie and Mississippi Valley Populations are comprised of interior Canada geese (*B. c. interior*) that nest along the west and south coasts of Hudson Bay, respectively, and winter in different regions in the U.S. The TGPP is comprised of Cackling geese that primarily nest on Baffin Island in the Arctic. Giant Canada geese are the largest of these geese (9+ lb.) and can be found nesting in the southern parts of the Canadian provinces, as well as from the Midwest to the Atlantic coast. Interior Canada geese are mid-sized Canada geese (6-9 lb.) and Cackling geese are the smallest (<6 lb.) of the "Canada geese" that visit Iowa each fall and spring. With the exception of giant Canada geese, these groups of geese were named for their primary wintering sites during the mid 20th century: MVP for the lower Mississippi Valley, EPP for the area around Swan Lake in MO, and TGPP for the Tall Grass Prairie Region that stretches from Iowa to Louisiana. Flyway Council and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service policy require that all populations of geese be maintained at viable self-sustaining levels. Canada goose hunting season lengths and bag limits are often limited by the status of interior goose populations because these populations have higher mortality rates and lower reproductive rates than giant Canada geese. For more information on geese harvested in Iowa, see the article on Canada Goose Harvest Management on this website.

Why are some areas closed to Canada goose hunting in Iowa and where are they?

There were 12 areas closed to Canada goose hunting in Iowa in 2009. The locations and boundaries of these areas can be found at: <http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/files/cagorefuge.html>

There were several reasons for establishing these closed hunting zones. One was to help restore self-sustaining populations of giant Canada geese, the geese that were native to Iowa prior to European settlement. The closed zones in Iowa were implemented in part to help prevent local geese from being over-harvested on their natal areas where they were most vulnerable and therefore assist the local population in sustaining itself. They were critical to the restoration program because female giant Canada geese must survive 3 hunting seasons before they home back to their natal area to fly to nest. Another reason was to encourage migrating Canada geese to stop in Iowa during the fall. Prior to the establishment of the closed zones, migrating Canada geese usually over-flew Iowa. At that time, Canada goose hunting opportunities were largely limited to opening weekends and a few migration days. With the closed hunting zones, geese linger longer in parts of the state, providing hunting opportunities for weeks or months. This increases both recreational opportunities and economic benefits for Iowans. Areas with consistent Canada goose use and hunting opportunities attract hunters and bird watchers from across the state. Establishing multiple closed hunting zones at various locations across Iowa also helps to keep geese from concentrating in just a few locations and spreads hunting opportunities out across the state. Long before the advent of avian influenza, the DNR was concerned about potential disease outbreaks in waterfowl concentrations. Unlike the Lac qui Parle refuge in west-central Minnesota, which usually holds 150,000-200,000 Canada geese, and the Horicon Marsh NWR in Wisconsin, which often hosts over 300,000 birds, the concentrations of Canada geese in Iowa are usually less than 30,000 in any one place. Having multiple Canada goose closed hunting zones around the state allows us to have 200,000 geese in Iowa while minimizing the risk of a major disease outbreak.

How long will the Canada goose closed hunting areas remain closed?

All the Canada goose closed hunting zones have been reduced from their original size, many by as much as 75%. However, to keep geese using these areas and thus provide season-long Canada goose hunting opportunities and the economic benefits associated with those hunting opportunities, some portion of these areas will have to remain closed into the near future. If the Canada goose closed hunting zones were eliminated, the geese that use them would very likely seek out new areas where they were protected from hunting. It is highly likely that these new areas would be within city limits. Geese have already shown a tendency to use urban areas as refuges during the fall and winter. Eliminating the Canada goose closed hunting zones just might exacerbate the current problems with overabundant numbers of geese in metropolitan areas and relegate most of the goose hunting to areas around cities and towns. We cannot know for sure if this scenario would develop across the state, but it appears likely in some locations. This issue is discussed in greater detail in the article on Canada goose management on this website.