2014 Waterfowl Hunter Survey: Iowa Hunter Preference for a special September teal season

Orrin Jones, Waterfowl Research Biologist, Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources
Peter Fritzell, Human Dimensions Specialist, Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources
Chris Jennelle Ph.D., Biometrician, Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources

For the first time since 1969, Iowa will be allowed to offer a special September teal hunting season. Traditionally Iowa has been considered a “production” state and, along with the other production states of the Mississippi Flyway (MN, WI, and MI), has not been offered a special September teal season. As a result of a recent harvest assessment which reported that blue-winged teal are under-harvested, the Mississippi Flyway Council and the USFWS are reconsidering the policy to exclude production states from special September teal seasons.

A special September teal hunting season would be a significant change to Iowa’s waterfowl hunting season structure. Since 1979 Iowa has had a special exemption to hold five days of its regular duck hunting season beginning the Saturday nearest September 20th. This season has been very popular and is a tradition among many Iowa duck hunters. Iowa will not be allowed to have both a special September teal season and the traditional five day September season. Therefore the DNR conducted a survey to quantify hunters’ opinions on a special September teal season.

Methods

The survey instrument we used to gauge interest in a special September teal season included seven questions (see appendix A).

The sample frame included purchasers of both a 2013 Iowa hunting license and a Iowa Migratory Bird Fee. We designated 10 strata composed of nine regions of Iowa (northwest, north central, northeast, west central, central, east central, southwest, south central, southeast) and non-residents. Approximately 500 individuals were randomly selected from each stratum resulting in a sample of 4,939 survey recipients (adjusted for undeliverable addresses).

The survey was mailed out on February 5th, 2014. Those selected received a cover letter explaining the survey and the potential special September teal season and a postage paid return envelope. They were asked to respond by March 1st. The initial mailing of the survey was the only mailing, no additional attempts to solicit responses from non-respondents were made. The cover letter and survey are included as Appendix A.

Surveys received by March 11th were electronically scanned and compiled. We used SAS v.9.3 to perform all data analyses. Given the sampling design and survey instrument, we used PROC SURVEYFREQ to perform estimation of response distributions. We calculated strata-specific response rates, and weighted responses relative to the strata-specific sampling frame.
population. We adjusted variance estimates (and 95% confidence intervals) using a finite population correction factor, determined by the rate at which survey respondents were chosen from the sampling frame population (i.e., inverse of survey weight).

**Results**

As of March 11th, 1,639 completed surveys had been received resulting in a response rate, corrected for non-deliverables, of 33%. The largest percentage of hunters (47%) most often hunted ducks in the North Zone, followed by the South Zone (35%), and the Missouri River Zone (1%). An additional 16% of hunters did not hunt ducks in Iowa in 2013.

Hunters were asked how a special teal-only season would affect their waterfowl hunting in Iowa. The largest group (48%) responded that a teal season would improve their waterfowl hunting, while 32% expected no change, and 19% expected the teal season would damage their duck season (Fig. 1).

![Bar chart showing the distribution of responses on how a teal-only season would affect waterfowl hunting in Iowa.]

**Figure 1.** The affect a teal-only season will have on waterfowl hunting in Iowa.
When asked their level of support for establishing a special teal-only season in Iowa, the majority (66%) support a teal season (Fig. 2).

![Figure 2. Support for a teal-only season.](image)

Hunters were asked, how likely they are to hunt if a September teal season is made available. The majority (69%) indicated they were likely to hunt (Fig. 3).

![Figure 3. Likelihood of hunting in a teal-only season.](image)
When asked which of three waterfowl hunting season structures they prefer, hunters were divided with the largest group (31%) preferring a teal season followed by a continuous regular duck season (Fig. 4).

![Figure 4. Preferences for a duck hunting season structure.](image)

Hunters were asked to respond to a series of statements regarding Iowa’s duck hunting seasons and a special September teal hunting season. The majority of hunters (61%) agreed to the statement “there should be a rest period before the regular duck season begins in each zone” (Fig. 5).

![Figure 5. "There should be a rest period before the regular duck season begins in each zone."](image)
In response to the statement “the first segment of the regular duck season should open in September”, hunters were divided, with a slight preference toward agree (45%) (Fig. 6).

Figure 6. "The first segment of the regular duck season should open in September."

Hunters were again divided in response to the statement “the first segment of the regular duck season should open in early-October”, with an equal percentage agreeing or disagreeing (Fig. 7).

Figure 7. "The first segment of the duck season should open in early October."
In response to the statement “the first segment of the regular duck season should open in mid-October”, the largest group of hunters disagreed (45%)(Fig. 8).

**Figure 8.** "The first segment of the duck season should open in mid-October."

When asked: “the regular duck season should be open for more days in October than December”, a slight majority (52%) of hunters agreed (Fig. 9).

**Figure 9.** "The regular duck season should be open for more days in October than December."
Most hunters either agreed or had no opinion toward the statement “the South and Missouri River zones should open one and two weeks after the North zone, respectively” (Fig. 10).

![Bar chart showing opinions on duck hunting season structure.]

**Figure 10.** "The South and Missouri River zones should open one and two weeks after the North zone respectively."

**Discussion**

The survey results indicate that Iowa duck hunters are not in total agreement regarding a special September teal hunting season. However, when categories are simplified, 56% of hunters support a teal season, 22% are opposed, and 21% are neutral. Significantly more hunters appear to be strongly in support (34%) of a teal season than strongly opposed (10%) (Fig. 3). Similarly, when asked how likely they were to participate in a teal season, four times as many hunters were extremely likely (43%) to participate as opposed to extremely unlikely to participate (11%) (Fig. 4). Those strongly in support and interested in participating in a teal season outnumber those opposed and unlikely to participate.

When presented with three options for the duck hunting season structure, hunters were again divided. A slight majority (31%) preferred a special September teal season with a continuous regular duck season, 26% preferred a special September teal season with a split regular duck season, 26% preferred to decline a special September teal season and maintain Iowa’s current structure, and 17% had no preference. Clearly, there are differences in opinion on how the duck hunting season should be structured. While a special September teal season with a split regular duck season is the most complex option and is a significant departure from the traditional structure, it is a compromise between hunters who would like to see a teal season and those who would like to decline a teal season because it allows for a both a special September teal season and also an early segment of the regular duck season.
Hunters were in agreement (61%) that there should be a rest period in each zone before the regular duck season. This is an indication that hunters do not want the special September teal season to impact the success of the first segment of the regular duck season. To allow for a rest period the special September teal season will either have to be shorter than the total number of allowed days or the first segment of the regular duck season will have to begin later than it traditionally has. Therefore, statements regarding the date of the first segment of the regular season were presented for hunters’ response. Unfortunately responses were variable with no clear consensus, however, 52% of hunters agreed that the regular duck season should be open more days in October than in December.

The majority of Iowa’s waterfowl hunters either support or are neutral in regards to a special September teal season, however there is a minority who oppose. There is no clear consensus or majority on the structure or dates of the duck hunting season. Hunters do agree that there should be a rest period before the regular duck season begins. The information gathered through this survey will help inform a decision regarding a special September teal season and the structure and timing of the regular duck hunting season.
January 21, 2014

Dear Iowa Waterfowl Hunter,

You were randomly selected from among hunters who purchased a 2013 Iowa migratory game bird fee to receive the enclosed survey. This survey is being conducted to assess hunter interest in the Iowa DNR pursuing a special September teal-only hunting season for Iowa. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is considering offering duck production states such as Iowa a teal-only season option.

You might ask how is this different than the September duck season that Iowa has had in the past? What Iowa has had is a special exemption to the “Regular” duck season framework, which allowed Iowa to use up to 5 days of our regular season allotment before the date that other flyway states were allowed to begin their regular duck seasons on the Saturday nearest Sept 24th. This exemption allowed us to take any legal duck during our early season, but used some of our permitted regular season days. Conversely, a “Teal” season in early September would be a “teal-only” season during which no other types of ducks would be legal, but the days used would not count against Iowa’s Regular duck season allotment which is currently 60 days.

If Iowa was to adopt a Teal season, this season would occur in early to mid September for a period of 5 to 16 days, and the Regular duck season could not begin until the Saturday nearest September 24th. The Regular duck season could still be split into two segments in each duck hunting zone and would no longer be limited to only 5 days prior to October 10. Teal would still be legal species during the Regular duck season which would follow the Teal season, but Iowa would no longer be offered an “any-duck” hunting opportunity before September 24th.

Because Iowa has had the privilege to begin its Regular any-duck season ahead of other states in the past, responding to a potential Teal season option is a challenge for the DNR. A special Teal season could increase hunter opportunity and satisfaction by offering more days to hunt, but could also create dissatisfied hunters due to the variable distribution of teal across the state and having to sacrifice opportunities to take other ducks during September.

This is where your help is needed. The DNR values hunter input and recognizes there is a broad range of opinions about duck seasons. Our goal is to provide hunting opportunity that benefits the greatest number of hunters, and this survey will help inform decisions to reach that goal. We would be most grateful if you would complete this survey and return it in the enclosed postage-paid envelope before March 1, 2014.

Thank you for your consideration and participation.

Orrin Jones, Waterfowl Research Biologist
Peter Fritzell, Human Dimensions Specialist
1) In which Iowa county do you live? [Enter the first 6 letters]

2) In which zone did you hunt ducks most often during 2013?
   ○ North Zone  ○ South Zone  ○ Missouri River Zone
   ○ I did not hunt ducks in Iowa during 2013.

**Special September Teal Hunting Season**
As explained in the enclosed cover letter, Iowa may have the opportunity to add a special September teal season prior to the regular duck season. This season would likely be in early to mid-September. Only teal would be legal and shooting other ducks would be against the law. Initially the season would be designated as experimental and would be evaluated to determine its future use.

3) How would Iowa’s adopting a special teal-only season affect your waterfowl hunting in Iowa?
   ○ Greatly Improve  ○ Somewhat improve  ○ No change  ○ Somewhat damage  ○ Greatly damage

4) What is your level of support for establishing a special September teal-only season in Iowa?
   ○ Strongly Support  ○ Moderately Support  ○ Neutral  ○ Moderately Oppose  ○ Strongly Oppose

5) If a September teal hunting season is made available, how likely are you to hunt in this early teal-only season?
   ○ Extremely Likely  ○ Somewhat Likely  ○ Unknown  ○ Somewhat Unlikely  ○ Extremely Unlikely

6) Given the information provided in the cover letter and the uncertainty about the length of future regular duck seasons, please indicate which of the following formats you believe would be most beneficial to your duck hunting participation.
   ○ A special September teal-only season and a continuous regular duck season in each of the existing 3 zones.
   ○ A special September teal-only season and a split regular duck season in each of the existing 3 zones.
   ○ Decline an early teal-only season, and maintain Iowa’s special exemption and split regular duck season.
   ○ I have no preference.

7) Please indicate how you feel about EACH of the following statements regarding Iowa duck seasons.

   **After an early September teal-only season...**

   - ...There should be a rest period before the regular duck season begins in each zone.
     ○ Strongly Agree  ○ Somewhat Agree  ○ No Opinion  ○ Somewhat Disagree  ○ Strongly Disagree

   - ...The first segment of the regular duck season should open in September.
     ○ Strongly Agree  ○ Somewhat Agree  ○ No Opinion  ○ Somewhat Disagree  ○ Strongly Disagree

   - ...The first segment of the regular duck season should open in early-October.
     ○ Strongly Agree  ○ Somewhat Agree  ○ No Opinion  ○ Somewhat Disagree  ○ Strongly Disagree

   - ...The first segment of the regular duck season should open in mid-October.
     ○ Strongly Agree  ○ Somewhat Agree  ○ No Opinion  ○ Somewhat Disagree  ○ Strongly Disagree

   - ...The regular duck season should be open for more days in October than in December.
     ○ Strongly Agree  ○ Somewhat Agree  ○ No Opinion  ○ Somewhat Disagree  ○ Strongly Disagree

   - ...The South and Missouri River zones should open one and two weeks after the North zone respectively.
     ○ Strongly Agree  ○ Somewhat Agree  ○ No Opinion  ○ Somewhat Disagree  ○ Strongly Disagree

Please use the back of this form to provide comments about a teal-only season in Iowa.

Please Use BLUE or BLACK ballpoint pens only and print neatly within the white areas.