State News You Can Use!

IOWA

DNR ASKS FOR PUBLIC TO REPORT PRAIRIE CHICKEN SIGHTINGS

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is looking for prairie chickens this spring and Iowans can help.

Iowa's prairie chicken population had resided in three locations in Ringgold County – two on or near the Kellerton Wildlife Area; the third on private land - but have been seen in Union, Clarke, Decatur and Taylor counties.

"Whether your checking on the cattle or working the fields, we'd like you to keep an eye out for prairie chickens and let us know if you see them," said Stephanie Shepherd, wildlife biologist with the Iowa DNR's diversity program.

Prairie chicken sightings can be reported by calling 515-230-6599 or emailed to vwmp@dnr.iowa.gov.

"There's a concern for this population," Shepherd said. "Our numbers are down, not just here, but across the border in Missouri, and we want to keep tabs on any birds that we missed as part of our previous surveys."

MISSOURI

SPRINGFIELD SCHOOL STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN MDC MENTORED PHEASANT HUNT

Yellow school buses can usually be spotted driving in and out of a shooting range in Ash Grove at least once a week. Over the past several Tuesdays in the first two months of the year, the weekly trips were a coordinated effort in giving Springfield students the opportunity to go on a mentored pheasant hunt.



MDC Staff and volunteers meet with students during a Mentored Pheasant Hunt Photo by MDC

While it's not the overall goal, nearly every student bagged a bird.

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) has hosted mentored hunts for different groups throughout the years. In southwest Missouri, public hunting clinics and hunts for children and women first launched in 2004 at Bois D'Arc Conservation Area. A few years ago, the mentored hunts expanded to include Springfield Public Schools' Outdoor Adventure classes.

The safety of the participants, staff, and spectators during the mentored hunt are critical to the overall success of the upland bird hunting clinic program. These requirements match up with MDC's Nature and Health, which focuses on the health benefits of being out in nature.

Teaching students the lesson of 'field to table'

The students have either been taking an outdoor awareness course with Springfield Public Schools (SPS) or were enrolled in the Wonders of the Ozarks Learning Facility (WOLF), which offers learning opportunities for fifth-grade students who have a special interest in nature and the outdoors. Each student also completes their hunter education certification.

Once students arrived at the shooting range, MDC instructors went over safety reminders and offered clay pigeon practice before the controlled hunt commenced. MDC conservation agents carried the firearms from each zone while pairing with students as other MDC staff guided the group through several stations.

"There's been ongoing instruction within the classroom as well as by MDC staff, including with field agents, who prepare the students to successfully complete the controlled hunt," said Marty Marsh, MDC education district supervisor. "Seeing the collaboration between the school staff with MDC staff and volunteers truly represents what we would want to see within the education community."

Offering a controlled hunt is just one component of a comprehensive education plan, Marsh explained.

"It is one way we are educating students with real world learning experiences that engages them with the outdoors, and, if nothing else, creates both a conservation and community-minded citizen," Marsh said.

In addition to their own processed bird, students hopefully also take home "a field to plate understanding," better comprehension of game and wildlife management, and more, Marsh added.

Brad Brummel, SPS curriculum coordinator of health and physical education, echoed Marsh's sentiments.

"The students' well-being is a priority," Brummel said.

Helping students be successful means providing children with an awareness of the natural resources they take part in, as well as preparing them to be accomplished community members and stewards, Brummel added.

"We partner with MDC on a number of instructional units in the outdoor awareness course, but with a controlled hunt, it's just icing on the cake in helping students see the conservation model all the way through," Brummel explained, from students learning about firearm safety, conservation history, and more. "Students harvesting a bird, taking the meat home, and the bird making it all the way to the table with the students' families is hard to replicate, and it's a program we value greatly."

As was exclaimed by the young people many times over the weeks, Brummel said this was the students' first time hunting or they had only participated in deer and turkey hunting seasons.

"They have not had the opportunity to hunt for pheasants, so that's a unique opportunity for them as well," Brummel said.

A parent's perspective

Ryan and Jen Savage watched their 11-year-old son, Graham, proudly hold up a bird he harvested while participating in the controlled pheasant hunt on Feb. 17.

"My son, being in WOLF, is the first time that I've experienced the collaboration between the Missouri Conservation Department and the schools with the WOLF program, and honestly, my feeling is I wish every kid in Missouri could participate in all that the Missouri Conservation Department has to offer," said Ryan Savage, a former SPS principal.

As his son trotted off to get his harvest processed by MDC staff and volunteers, Ryan Savage said he was already thinking of the next opportunity he could take his son bird hunting.

Discover the benefits of nature to one's health with MDC's resources at research.mdc.mo.gov/project/health-benefits-nature.

Find out more about events and programs at Andy Dalton Shooting Range and Education Center at mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/places/andy-dalton-shooting-range-outdoor-education-center.

NEBRASKA

COMMISSIONERS APPROVE 2026-2027 WATERFOWL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission approved 2026-2027 waterfowl hunting season recommendations at its March 20 meeting at Ponca State Park.

Approved staff recommendations include a transition to a three duck-zone configuration instead of four. Boundary changes to duck zones and goose units approved by commissioners last June resulted in duck Zone 4 being relabeled to Zone 1. The former Zone 1 is being absorbed into Zone 2.

Also approved was a nine-day early teal season in both Low Plains and High Plains zones due to blue-winged teal breeding population status.

THE APPROVED 2026-2027 NEBRASKA WATERFOWL SEASONS ARE:

Early Teal

Low Plains – Sept. 5-13

High Plains – Sept. 5-13

Daily bag limit – six; Possession limit – 18

Youth, Veteran, and Active-Duty Military

Zone 1 – Oct. 17-18

Zone 2 – Sept. 26-27

Zone 3 – Oct. 17-18

Daily bag – Same as regular season

Duck and Coot

Zone 1 – Oct. 24-Dec. 6 and Dec. 19-Jan. 17

Zone 2 – Oct. 3-Dec. 15 and Jan. 6-27 (High Plains)

Zone 3 – Oct. 24-Jan. 5 and Jan. 6-27 (High Plains)

Daily bag – Tier 1: six ducks, with restrictions; Tier II: three ducks, any species, any sex; Possession limit – three times the daily bag limit

Dark Goose

Platte River Unit – Oct. 28-Feb. 9

Niobrara Unit – Oct. 28-Feb. 9

North Central Unit – Oct. 3-Jan. 15

Daily bag limit – five; Possession limit – 15

White-fronted Goose

Statewide – Oct. 17-Dec. 27, and Jan. 25-Feb 9

Daily bag limit – two; Possession limit – six

Light Goose Regular Season

Statewide – Oct. 3-Dec. 30 and Jan. 25-Feb. 9

Daily bag limit – 50; Possession limit – none

Light Goose Conservation Order

East Zone – Feb. 10-April 15

West Zone – Feb. 10-April 5

Rainwater Basin Zone – Feb. 10-April 5

Daily bag and possession limits – none

NORTH DAKOTA

2026 WATERFOWL HUNTING SEASON

North Dakota's waterfowl season opens for residents Sept. 26, while nonresidents may begin hunting waterfowl Oct. 5.

The resident-only portion of the season has been extended from seven days in previous years to nine days in 2026. This change, which was first presented to the public starting summer 2025, provides additional early season opportunities for resident hunters.

The zones and overall season structure for nonresident hunters will remain the same as the 2025 hunting season.

The North Dakota 2026-27 Hunting and Trapping Guide will be available this summer and will provide further details on the waterfowl hunting season.

SPRING LIGHT GOOSE CONSERVATION ORDER

North Dakota's spring light goose conservation order opens Feb. 21 and continues through May 10.

Residents must have a 2025-26 (valid through March 31) or 2026-27 (required April 1) combination license; or a small game, and general game and habitat license. Resident youth under age 16 only need the general game and habitat license. The 2026-27 license is available for purchase beginning March 15. In addition, all hunters need an electronic waterfowl restoration stamp.

Nonresidents need a 2026 spring light goose conservation order license. The cost is $50 and valid statewide. Nonresidents who hunt in spring remain eligible to buy a fall season license. The spring license does not count against the 14-day fall waterfowl hunting season regulation.

Nonresident youth under 16 can purchase a license at the resident fee. A federal duck stamp is not required for either residents or nonresidents. Yet, like resident hunters, nonresidents also need an electronic waterfowl restoration stamp.

Resident and nonresident licenses are available online at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov.

Hunters must register annually with the Harvest Information Program prior to hunting in each state. The HIP number obtained for North Dakota's spring conservation order is also valid for North Dakota's fall hunting season. The number can be obtained online on the Game and Fish website.

The spring conservation order is only open to light geese – snows, blues and Ross's. Species identification is important because white-fronted and Canada geese travel with light geese. The conservation order is closed to whitefronts, Canada geese, swans and all other migratory birds.

MIDWINTER WATERFOWL SURVEY NUMBERS

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual midwinter waterfowl survey in early January indicated about 135,000 Canada geese and 9,500 mallards in the state.

Mason Ryckman, department migratory game bird biologist, said numbers were pretty similar to years when Lake Sakakawea is still open, besides the record-breaking number of 300,000-plus Canada geese in 2024.

"Unlike last year when Lake Sakakawea was completely frozen at the time of the survey, this year a portion of the lake remained relatively ice free from Garrison Dam to the mouth of the little Missouri River," Ryckman said. "We were able to count 39,000-plus Canada geese on the lake this year. We would have probably overwintered more waterfowl if we didn't receive the snow we did in late November and early December. It likely pushed birds south of the border due to not having access to waste grain in ag fields. However, the snow didn't last long, which helped the birds that did stay until the time of the survey."

During the 2026 survey, an estimated 109,112 Canada geese were observed on the Missouri River and Lake Sakakawea, another 16,894 on Nelson Lake in Oliver County, and an additional 8,500-plus geese in other parts of the state. Ryckman said Game and Fish staff and partners with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recorded the additional 9,500 mallards across the state.

The 10-year average (2017-26) for the midwinter survey in North Dakota is 115,950 Canada geese and 13,400 mallards. The survey helps biologists gauge wintering distribution of waterfowl in North Dakota, and other states throughout the Central Flyway.

PENNSYLVANIA

COMMENTS ON PROPOSED WATERFOWL SEASONS ACCEPTED

Hunters and members of waterfowl organizations have several options to ask questions and voice opinions on the 2026-27 proposed migratory game bird seasons.

Questions or comments can be submitted by email to waterfowlcomments@pa.gov, or by mail to Pennsylvania Game Commission, Bureau of Wildlife Management, 2001 Elmerton Ave., Harrisburg, PA 17110-9797.

An informational livestream, followed by a live question-and-answer session, will be held on the proposed seasons on Wednesday, March 11 at 6:30 p.m. on the Game Commission's YouTube channel. The briefing will be recorded, and a link will be available to view at https://www.youtube.com/pagamecommission.

And a Waterfowl Open House is scheduled to take place at the Game Commission's Northeast Regional Office, 3917 Memorial Hwy, Dallas, PA 18612 on Saturday, March 14 from noon to 4 p.m. Attendees will have the opportunity to interact with Game Commission staff and view proposed seasons presented.

It still hasn't been determined whether Sundays will be included in the 2026-27 migratory game bird seasons. Because migratory seasons follow federal frameworks that establish the maximum number of hunting days for each season, including Sundays would create more-compact seasons. The Game Commission is conducting a random survey to find out more about which option waterfowl hunters prefer, and all who are interested in this matter can submit comments to the agency. If Sundays are included in the migratory game bird seasons, they cannot be closed in the future.

The season proposal document that's posted on the Game Commission's website shows two proposed season structures, one with Sundays and one without. Both proposals follow the federal framework. These proposed migratory seasons are in accordance with the preliminarily approved 2026-27 general hunting seasons that, if adopted, would allow small game hunting during regular firearms deer season, meaning woodcock and snipe hunting would be open then.

Another notable proposal for 2026-27 seasons would increase the Atlantic Population Canada goose regular season to 45 days, with a daily bag limit of 3. This change to the framework would take effect once published by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Additionally, the regular snow goose season is proposed to run from November through March 10, with the light goose conservation order not utilized unless 2026 spring snow goose surveys indicate its necessity. This recommendation to drastically reduce or forgo the conservation order will be followed by all high-harvest states within the Atlantic Flyway due to 2025 spring snow goose surveys indicating populations are below the target range.

If you have questions or are interested in commenting on proposed seasons, please provide the species, zone (if applicable) and County/Counties you are specifically commenting on. The comment period closes March 22.

PGC Media Contacts

Travis Lau 717-705-6541

SOUTH DAKOTA

GFP COMMISSION HOLDS MARCH MEETING

The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission held their March meeting at the State Library in Pierre on March 5-6.

FINALIZATIONS

Iron Creek Lake No Wake Zone

The Commission created a "No Wake Zone" on Iron Creek Lake in Lawrence County. Iron Creek Lake is a 24-acre impoundment, and the no wake zone will address safety, user conflict, and shoreline erosion concerns.

Lake Albert Waterfowl Refuge

The Commission removed refuge status from Lake Albert Waterfowl Refuge.

The Lake Albert Waterfowl Refuge was comprised of private property owned by eight landowners. The landowners formally requested that their property be removed from the Waterfowl Refuge status and provided signed consents to remove their property. By removing the refuge status, landowner control over hunting access on their property will be restored.

PROPOSALS

Waterfowl Hunting Seasons

The Commission proposed to reduce the daily limit of Canada geese during the August Management Take and the Early Fall Canada Goose hunting seasons from 15 to 8 geese.

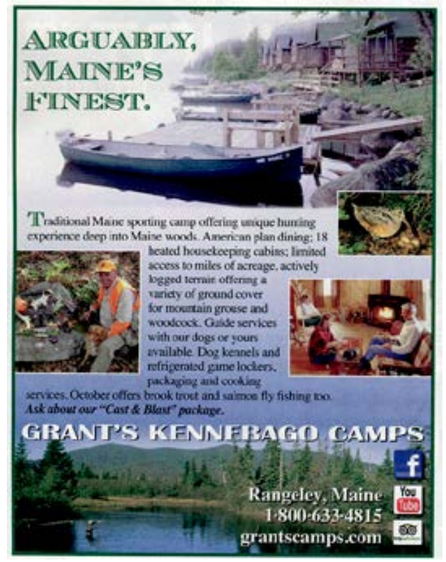
They also proposed to remove Brown, Edmunds, Faulk, McPherson, and Spink counties from the August Management Take unit.

There were no changes proposed to the Duck, Goose, Spring Light Goose, Youth, Non-resident Waterfowl, Crane or Tundra Swan hunting seasons.

Public Comments Being Accepted

To hear the discussion on these proposals, audio from the meeting is available through South Dakota Public Broadcasting and will soon be available on the GFP website as part of the meeting archive.

To see these proposals in their entirety, visit gfp.sd.gov/commission/information.



WISCONSIN

DNR SEEKING PUBLIC INPUT ON 2026-2030 MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING SEASON FRAMEWORKS

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is seeking public input on migratory bird hunting season frameworks for the years 2026-2030. Comments can be submitted through various formats (an online comment tool, email or at any of the public hearings) through March 6, 2026.

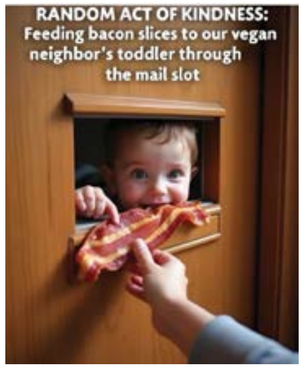
Historically, waterfowl and migratory bird season frameworks were developed on an annual basis. However, with near-unanimous support from conservation organizations and the public, a new process was developed to set season structures for multiple years at a time. This year is the first time the DNR is doing so.

An online public input form and supporting information are available on the DNR's Waterfowl Hunting webpage for those interested in submitting comments electronically. Anyone interested in Wisconsin's migratory bird hunting seasons is encouraged to provide feedback.

Individuals may also submit comments via email to Taylor Finger, DNR gamebird specialist, at Taylor.Finger@wisconsin.gov or Alissa Kakatsch, DNR assistant gamebird specialist, at Alissa.Kakatsch@wisconsin.gov. Comments will be accepted through **11:59 p.m. Friday, March 6, 2026**.

The final way people can submit feedback is at one of four public hearings. Three of the public hearings are in-person meetings on March 2, 3 and 5, and the fourth is a virtual session on March 4. After public comments have been collected, a final season structure will go to the Natural Resources Board for approval.





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Don't complain of lack of media support for hunters if you don't support the ones that support you!