

A BRIEF HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF DARK GOOSE FRAMEWORKS FOR EAST TIER STATES OF THE CENTRAL FLYWAY

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From 1918-29, the bag limit for geese (all species combined) was 8 daily, with no possession limit. During years 1930 through 1945, daily bag varied between 2 and 5, with a possession limit of double the daily bag. From 1946 through 1960, the daily bag limit varied between 4 and 5 geese with a possession limit of one daily bag, 1946 (bag of 2 geese) and 1957 (bag of 6 geese) being the only exceptions.

It was probably around 1944 or so, that bag limits for dark geese were given separate consideration within the overall goose bag, having a limitation of two on geese other than snows and blues. This restriction on geese other than snows and blues stayed at about this level into the 1990's, with the bag limit for dark geese in east tier states of the Central Flyway normally being 2 Canada geese, or 1 Canada goose and 1 white-fronted goose, or one Canada or one white-fronted goose. It wasn't until 1998, when regulations for Canada and white-fronted geese were separated, that we saw a major liberalization in the bag of dark geese. In 1998, a hunter was allowed to harvest 3 Canada and 2 white-fronted geese in one day, provide the shorter 72 day season was selected for white-fronts.

From 1918 through 1960, framework dates (earliest date a season could open, or the latest it could close) for geese were the same as for duck. Beginning in 1961, framework dates for geese were separated from ducks, usually opening earlier and continuing later. During the 1960's, 70's and 80's, the framework dates for dark geese usually ran from around October 1 to January 20.

Season length for geese was the same as for ducks from 1918 to 1954. Beginning in 1955, season length for geese was separated from that for ducks, being 60 days from 1955-1957 and 75 days from 1958 through 1971 (1969 with 86 days, being the only exception during this period). From 1972 to 1994, the season length for dark geese in the east tier states of the Central Flyway was 72 days (with some exceptions in Texas, Oklahoma and South Dakota).

Goose regulation frameworks in the east tier states of the Central Flyway were similar for all states until 1967. There had been some discussion about management of geese on a population basis, but to this point in time no real action had been taken.

In August of 1967, the bag limit on Canada geese in prescribed areas of North Dakota, South Dakota, Oklahoma and Texas was reduced from 2 to 1 because of a concern for the welfare of the small Tall Grass Prairie (TGP) Canada geese. The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife further restricted Texas to 1 Canada or 1 white-fronted goose, based on a concern for the western segment of the white-fronted goose population. These restrictions, based on a concern for small Canadas and white-fronted geese, were modified somewhat throughout the years, but basically remained in effect until 1982. In 1970, Oklahoma was offered an option which allowed the "standard" bag in some restricted counties with a reduced season length. There were also some modifications of the described boundaries in the various states.

About the same time (early 1970's) concern also developed for the large "restoration" geese. In 1971 Kansas was required to go from a 2 Canada goose bag to a one Canada goose bag after December 10th. In 1972, the daily bag on Canada geese was reduced to one east of HY 3 in North Dakota and all of South Dakota and after December 10 in Kansas and Nebraska.

During 1973, regulations for Canada geese were further restricted, with statewide restrictions to 1 Canada goose in all east tier states, with the exception of Oklahoma, which retained a two Canada goose bag outside of the four county high harvest area. In addition, North Dakota and South Dakota could not hunt Canada geese later than November 18 and December 2, respectively. Again, these regulations were based on a concern for the status of the small TGP and restoration Canada geese, with the exception of Texas, where TGP Canadas and white-fronted geese were the motive for the 1 or 1 bag limit.

In order to reduce the harvest of the late migrating "restoration geese", termination dates for Canada goose hunting were enacted in 1974 in North Dakota (Nov. 17), South Dakota (Dec. 1), Nebraska (Dec. 8), and Kansas (Dec. 15). In addition Texas was offered an option of a reduced season length (64 days) with a bag limit of 1 Canada and 1 white-fronted goose. Also, during 1974, recognition of the range of Short-Grass Prairie Canada geese was made, when two Canada geese were allowed in the bag in western Nebraska and western Kansas prior to Nov. 24, at which time the bag limit on Canada geese went to 1 daily.

Although there were some minor modifications (in some instance for local management purposes), the regulations enacted in 1974 remained basically unchanged until 1980, when the terminations dates in ND, SD, NB and KS were removed. The option available to Texas was eliminated in 1979, and, for some reason, the season on white-fronted geese was closed in portions of South Dakota during 1976 and 1977.

In 1981, major regulation changes, based a combination of concerns, were enacted. There was a concern for maintaining the southern migration tradition of TGP Canada geese, which was felt to be in jeopardy because of the heavy harvest of geese which have the most southerly wintering range. There was concern for the welfare of the increasing numbers of large Canada geese delaying their migration and actually wintering on Missouri River impoundment's in South Dakota and finally, there was still concern for the welfare of restoration geese in the Dakotas and Nebraska due to the harvest on the wintering grounds. A unique set of dark goose frameworks were implemented, requiring differing restrictions in harvest opportunity among the various east tier states of the Central Flyway.

One objective of regulations adopted in 1981 was to reduce the harvest of TGP Canada geese in the north (Dakota's), so southern and mid-latitude states could maintain some harvest of these small geese without risk of overharvest, and thereby maintain their migration traditions. The regulations adopted reduced harvest of TGP Canada geese in the Dakotas by restricting the daily bag to 1 Canada goose during peak migration and harvest periods. The bag was restricted to 1 Canada goose prior to October 31 in North Dakota, and prior to November 13 along the Missouri River in South Dakota, and through the entire season in the remainder of that state.

In order to reduce the harvest of the late migrating large "restoration" Canada geese, bag limits were restricted to 1 Canada goose after November 22 in much of Nebraska, and after November 29 in Kansas.

There was concern that the growing numbers of Canada geese lingering into January along the Missouri River in South Dakota were at risk of being caught in a stressful, if not fatal, position during severe late season weather. Because of this concern, the season length along the Missouri River impoundments in South Dakota was extended to 79 days, with a daily bag of 2 Canada geese after November 13, in the hope that the additional late hunting pressure would encourage these geese to migrate south prior to mid-winter severe weather.

Texas was allowed some liberalization of regulations in 1981, going from 1 Canada or 1 white-fronted goose, to 1 Canada and 1 white-fronted goose. All restrictions were lifted in Oklahoma, which was allowed the full basic framework of 72 days with a daily bag of 2 Canada geese.

Although there were some minor changes and calendar adjustments, the regulations adopted in 1981 (early season restriction on the Canada goose daily bag in the Dakota's, and mid/late season restriction in the daily bag in Kansas and Nebraska), remained in effect through 1990.

Beginning in 1991, and continuing through the 1990's, there was a shift from strict limitation of all Canada goose harvest to one of increasing liberalization, particularly on the large, late migrating birds. From 1991 through 1994, states were allowed the option of choosing a 72 day season with a daily bag of 2 Canada, or 1 Canada and 1 white-fronted for 37 consecutive days, and 1 Canada and 1 white-fronted goose for the remainder of the season, or a 79 day season which allowed 2 Canada geese in the bag for 30 consecutive days. The important point was that states could choose that period of the season when they would allow 2 Canada geese in the bag. During 1991, the ending framework was moved from around January 20 to January 31, to further direct harvest at the large, late migrating geese. In 1994 the season was lengthened to 86 days, where it stayed through 1997.

In 1998 a major change was made when white-fronted geese were totally separated from Canada geese in the frameworks. The season length for Canada geese was increased to 93 days, with 3 Canada geese allowed in the daily bag throughout the season. States were allowed a 72 day whitefront season with a bag of 2, or an 86 day season with a bag of 1. The ending framework date for Canada geese was moved later, to the Sunday nearest February 15, but remained at the Sunday nearest January 31 for white-fronted geese.

During 1999, the season length for Canada geese was increased to 95 days to allow better use of split seasons. Texas was allowed the option of a 107 days season with a bag of 1 Canada goose. All states were allowed the option of an 86 day whitefront season with a bag of 2, or a 107 days season with a bag of 1. Framework dates were the Saturday nearest October 1 through the Sunday nearest February 15 for all dark geese. Frameworks have remained unchanged from 1999 through 2001.