

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Notice of Agency Rulemaking Proposal

AGENCY: Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Advertise: February 11, 2026

CHAPTER NUMBER AND RULE TITLE: Chapter 16.11 - Migratory Game Bird Hunting

TYPE OF RULE: Routine Technical

PROPOSAL FILING NUMBER:

BRIEF SUMMARY: The Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife is proposing to amend Chapter 16.11 rules pertaining to season dates and bag limits for the hunting of ducks, geese and other migratory game birds. Season frameworks and harvest limits are similar to the previous hunting season. Of note are the two proposed modifications to the South Zone/North Zone waterfowl hunting boundary line to 1) Improve season timing when waterfowl are more available to hunt (e.g., before ice conditions, migration patterns, etc.) and 2) To address some road name reference changes following the I-395 bypass addition in Brewer. In addition, clarifying language is being proposed in reference to the scoter bag limit. Please contact the agency contact person for a complete copy of the rule proposal.

PUBLIC HEARING: March 2, 2026 @ 4:00pm - Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, 353 Water Street, Room 400, Augusta. An online option for attending via Microsoft Teams will also be available. For those wishing to attend remotely, please contact the Agency Contact Person for this filing.

COMMENT DEADLINE: March 12, 2026

CONTACT PERSON FOR THIS FILING:

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CONTACT PERSON FOR SMALL BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT: Click or tap here to enter text.

FINANCIAL IMPACT ON MUNICIPALITIES OR COUNTIES: None anticipated

STATUTORY AUTHORITY FOR THIS RULE: 12 MRS Section 10104, 11855

SUBSTANTIVE STATE OR FEDERAL LAW BEING IMPLEMENTED: Click or tap here to enter text.

AGENCY WEBSITE: www.maine.gov/ifw

EMAIL ADDRESS FOR OVERALL AGENCY RULEMAKING LIAISON:

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Choose one of the following:

The summary provided above is for publication in both the newspaper and website notices.

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Rulemaking Fact Sheet

(see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(1))

Agency: Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Name, Address, Telephone Number, and Email Address of Agency Contact Person:

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Comment Deadline(s): March 12, 2026

Principal Reason(s) or Purpose for Proposing this Rule [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(1)(A)]:

To implement the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act which establishes the general guidelines within which the States are permitted to regulate the hunting of migratory game birds. This rule will protect migratory game birds from over-harvest by setting these limitations.

Is Material Incorporated by Reference into the Rule [see 5 M.R.S. § 8056(2-A)]? No

Analysis and Expected Operation of the Rule [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(1)(B) & (D)]:

This rule implements Maine’s 2026-2027 migratory bird hunting seasons by selecting season dates, bag limits and shooting hours for ducks, coots, mergansers, geese, woodcock and other migratory game birds. Season dates, bag limits and shooting hours will remain the same as previous years except for aligning the hunting season with this year’s calendar. Of note are the two proposed modifications to the South Zone/North Zone waterfowl hunting boundary line to 1) Improve season timing when waterfowl are more available to hunt (e.g., before ice conditions, migration patterns, etc.) and 2) To address some road name reference changes following the I-395 bypass addition in Brewer. In addition, clarifying language is being proposed in reference to the scoter bag limit.

Brief Summary of Relevant Information Considered During Development of the Rule (including up to 3 primary sources relied upon)[see 5 M.R.S. §§ 8057-A(1)(E) & 8063-B]:

Proposed adjustments to the migratory bird hunting seasons are based on a collaborative effort to collect and analyze data by the USFWS and state agencies, including MDIFW. Information included in these analyses includes waterfowl banding information, harvest data, and population surveys.

Waterfowl hunting in Maine occurs within three specific zones: the Coastal Zone, the South Zone and the North Zone. These three zones are divided by lines spanning from western to eastern Maine at their respective points along a South to North gradient. Season dates within each zone are set to

maximize waterfowl hunting opportunity while maintaining sustainable harvest. The season dates differ somewhat between the three zones and are based on weather, habitat and waterfowl migration patterns as well as input from waterfowl hunters.

Periodically, the Department is asked to consider modifying a waterfowl zone or season prompted by a desire to time the season better with open water conditions, when waterfowl are more available to hunt. Over the years we've received requests to modify the South Zone/North Zone boundary in Western Maine through hunter preference surveys, formal comments to waterfowl hunting season rule making proposals and informal comments to Department biologists and Waterfowl Council members.

In 2025, we conducted a survey to assess waterfowl hunter preference for potential changes to South Zone/North Zone season or boundary in the western part of the state. The majority (62%) of survey respondents supported either modifying the South Zone/North Zone boundary line or modifying the season structure of the North Zone. Both options would open the western portion of the state to waterfowl hunting later in December. After reviewing survey results, Maine's Waterfowl Council recommended making a modification to the western portion of the South Zone/North Zone boundary line north following Rt. 2 from Newport to Gilead. Currently the western portion of the boundary line (Newport to the Maine/New Hampshire border) runs south along I-95 to Augusta and then west along Rt 202 to Lewiston and ends on the state border in Newfield on Rt 110. This was the preferred alternative to changing the North Zone season to a split season. Having a split season in the North Zone would affect the entirety of the zone. The split in season would likely take away hunting opportunity in Northern Maine if the last two weeks were moved into the middle of December when waters are frozen and ducks have migrated south.

Estimated Fiscal Impact of the Rule [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(1)(C)]: None anticipated.

FOR EXISTING RULES WITH FISCAL IMPACT OF \$1 MILLION OR MORE, ALSO INCLUDE:

Economic Impact, Whether or Not Quantifiable in Monetary Terms [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(2)(A)]:

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Individuals, Major Interest Groups and Types of Businesses Affected and How They Will Be Affected [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(2)(B)]:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Benefits of the Rule [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(2)(C)]:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Note: If necessary, additional pages may be used.

AMEND CHAPTER 16.11 (9. A-F) (10.) (11.) AND (12.) AS FOLLOWS:

09-137 DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

Chapter 16: HUNTING

16.11 Migratory Game Bird Hunting

9. Seasons, Daily Bag Limits, and Possession Limits for Migratory Game Birds

A. Webless Migratory Birds

WEBLESS MIGRATORY BIRD SEASONS			
SPECIES	OPEN SEASON	DAILY LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
Woodcock	Sept. 27 – Nov. 18, 2025 Sept. 26 – Nov. 17, 2026	3	9
Common (Wilson’s Snipe)	Sept. 1, 2025 – Jan. 2, 2026 Sept. 1, 2026 – Jan. 2, 2027	8	24
Rails (Sora and Virginia)	Sept. 1 – Nov. 20, 2025 Sept. 1 – Nov. 20, 2026	25 (single or in the aggregate)	25 (single or in the aggregate)
Gallinules (Common Moorhens)	Closed Season		

B. Ducks (including all duck species unless otherwise noted in Section F, Mergansers and American Coots)

DUCK SEASONS			
ZONE	OPEN SEASON	DAILY LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
North Zone	Sept. 29 – Dec. 6, 2025 Sept. 28 – Dec. 5, 2026	6 (no more than 4 of any one species*)	18 (no more than 12 of any one species*)
South Zone	Oct. 1 – Oct. 11, 2025 Oct. 29 – Dec. 25, 2025 Oct. 1 – Oct. 10, 2026 Oct. 29 – Dec. 25, 2026	6 (no more than 4 of any one species*)	18 (no more than 12 of any one species*)
Coastal Zone	Oct. 4 – Oct. 11, 2025 Nov. 6, 2025 – Jan. 6, 2026 Oct. 3 – Oct. 10, 2026 Nov. 5, 2026 – Jan. 5, 2027	6 (no more than 4 of any one species*)	18 (no more than 12 of any one species*)

*EXCEPT AS NOTED BELOW SEE (F. - Exceptions) *

C. Brant

BRANT SEASONS			
ZONE	OPEN SEASON	DAILY LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
North Zone	Sept. 29 – Nov. 1, 2025 <u>Sept. 28 – Oct. 31, 2026</u>	1	3
South Zone	Oct. 1 – Oct. 11, 2025	1	3
	Oct. 29 – Nov. 20, 2025	1	3
	<u>Oct. 1 – Oct. 10, 2026</u> <u>Oct. 29 – Nov. 21, 2026</u>		
Coastal Zone	Oct. 4 – Oct. 11, 2025	1	3
	Dec. 11, 2025 – Jan. 6, 2026	1	3
	<u>Oct. 3 – Oct. 10, 2026</u> <u>Dec. 10, 2026 – Jan. 5, 2026</u>		

D. Crows

2026 CROW SEASON		
WMDs	OPEN SEASON	BAG LIMITS
Wildlife Management Districts 1-6	Feb. 2 – Apr. 15 August 1 – Sept. 19	No daily bag or possession limit
Wildlife Management Districts 7-29	Jan. 17 – March 31 August 1 – Sept. 19	No daily bag or possession limit
2027 CROW SEASON		
WMDs	OPEN SEASON	BAG LIMITS
Wildlife Management Districts 1-6	Feb. 2 – Apr. 15 August 1 – Sept. 19 <u>Jan. 30 – Apr. 15</u> <u>August 2 – Sept. 18</u>	No daily bag or possession limit
Wildlife Management Districts 7-29	Jan. 17 – March 31 August 1 – Sept. 19 <u>Jan. 15 – March 31</u> <u>August 2 – Sept. 18</u>	No daily bag or possession limit

E. Geese

GOOSE SEASONS			
SPECIES	OPEN SEASON	DAILY LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
Canada Geese Early Season	(NORTH) Sept. 1 – Sept. 25, 2025 <u>Sept. 1 – Sept. 25, 2026</u>	8	24
Canada Geese Early Season	(SOUTH) Sept. 1 – Sept. 25, 2025 <u>Sept. 1 – Sept. 25, 2026</u>	10	30
Canada Geese Early Season	(COASTAL) Sept. 1 – Sept. 25, 2025 <u>Sept. 1 – Sept. 25, 2026</u>	10	30
Canada Geese	(NORTH)		

Regular Season (including greater and lesser white-fronted geese)	Oct. 1 – Dec. 9, 2025 Oct. 1 – Dec. 9, 2026	2	6
Canada Geese Regular Season (including greater and lesser white-fronted geese)	(SOUTH) Oct. 1 – Oct. 11, 2025 Oct. 29 – Dec. 25, 2025 Oct. 1 – Oct. 10, 2026 Oct. 29 – Dec. 25, 2026	2	6
Canada Geese Regular Season (including greater and lesser white-fronted geese)	(COASTAL) Oct. 4 – Oct. 11, 2025 Oct. 25, 2025 – Jan. 6, 2026 Oct. 3 – Oct. 10, 2026 Oct. 24, 2026 – Jan. 5, 2027	3	9
Snow Geese (including blue geese)	Oct. 1, 2025 – Jan. 30, 2026 Oct. 1, 2026 – Jan. 30, 2027	25	No Possession Limit

F. Exceptions

*EXCEPTIONS TO 2025–2026 2026 – 2027 DUCK and COOT SEASON BAG & POSSESSION LIMITS		
SPECIES	DAILY LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
American Coots	5	15
Mergansers (in addition to limits on other regular ducks)	5	15
Mallards	4	12
Hen Mallards, Black Duck, Redhead and Canvasback, Eiders	2	6
Scaup, Hen Eiders Mottled ducks and Fulvous Whistling Ducks	1	3
Northern Pintails and Wood Ducks	3	9
Scoters in the aggregate (Black, White-winged, Surf) and Long-tailed Ducks (Sea Ducks which include eiders)	3 by species (4 total sea ducks)	9 by species (12 total sea ducks)
Harlequin Ducks and Barrow's Goldeneye NO OPEN SEASON	No Open Season	No Open Season

10. Youth Waterfowl Hunt

YOUTH WATERFOWL HUNT

NORTH ZONE Sept. 20, 2025 Dec. 13, 2025 <u>Sept. 19, 2026</u> <u>Dec. 12, 2026</u>
SOUTH ZONE Sept. 20, 2025 Oct. 18, 2025 <u>Sept. 19, 2026</u> <u>Oct. 17, 2026</u>
COASTAL ZONE Sept. 27, 2025 Oct. 18, 2025 <u>Sept. 26, 2026</u> <u>Oct. 17, 2026</u>

- A. **Special Regulations for Youth Waterfowl Hunt Days:** On the designated youth waterfowl hunt days, holders of a valid junior hunting license may hunt waterfowl with a shotgun in accordance with 12 M.R.S. §11214 §1. F. and §1. N., bow and arrow or crossbow and must be in the presence of and under the effective control of a junior hunter supervisor as defined by Title 12 §11108-C. State and Federal migratory bird hunting stamps are not required for youth hunters who hunt migratory game birds.
- B. **Exceptions**
- (1) If a hunter is 16 years of age and possesses a junior hunting license, they must possess a valid Federal migratory bird hunting stamp.
 - (2) If a hunter is 16 years of age and possess an adult hunting license, they must obtain both the Federal migratory bird hunting stamp and a state migratory waterfowl permit.
 - (3) The junior hunter supervisor shall not possess a firearm or archery equipment while accompanying a youth hunter on youth hunting days except that the supervisor may carry a handgun pursuant to 25 M.R.S. §2001-A, sub-§2, ¶A-1 but it may not be carried for the purpose of hunting.
 - (4) When a youth hunt day occurs during the early Canada Goose season, the junior hunter supervisor may hunt for Canada Geese only.
- C. **Bag Limits for Youth Hunt Day**
- (1) All laws pertaining to the waterfowl hunting season apply including the species specific bag limits as outlined above.
 - (2) Youth day hunters may not take more than 6 ducks. No more than 3 scoters, 2 eiders, or 3 long-tailed ducks or 4 in the aggregate may be taken as part of the 6-bird daily limit and will count towards the 6 ducks. In addition to the 6-bird daily bag limit youth can also take up to 5 mergansers and 5 American coots.

11. Special Falconry Season

In addition to the regular migratory bird season there shall be a special falconry season on ducks, mergansers and American coots:

NORTH ZONE: ~~Dec. 15, 2025 through Feb. 4, 2026~~ Dec. 15, 2026 through Feb. 4, 2027

COASTAL and SOUTH ZONE: ~~Jan. 7 through Feb. 27, 2026~~ Jan. 7, 2027 through Feb. 27, 2027

Falconry season daily bag and possession limits for all permitted migratory game birds shall not exceed 3* and 9* birds respectively, singly or in the aggregate.

*all species restrictions apply.

12. North, South and Coastal Waterfowl Zone Lines and Sea Duck Hunting Area Defined

- A. ~~North/South Waterfowl Zone Line: Maine-New Brunswick border in Baileyville, Maine west along Stony Brook to Route 9 in Baileyville. West along Route 9 to Route 15 in Bangor. West along Route 15 to I-95 in Bangor. Southwest along I-95 to Route 202 (Exit 109A) in Augusta. Southwest along Route 202 to Route 11 in Auburn. Southwest along Route 11 to Route 110 in Newfield. West along Route 110 to Maine-New Hampshire border.~~

Starting at the Maine/New Hampshire border in Gilead, Maine at the North Road (44.394417° N/-71.016260°W) and running east along the North Road, north of the Androscoggin River, to Route 2 in Bethel. East along route 2 to Route 7 in Newport. South along Route 7 to I-95 in Newport (Exit 157). Northeast along I-95 to I-395 in Bangor. East along I-395 to Route 15B in Brewer. North along Route 15B to Route 178 in Brewer. Northeast along Route 178 to Route 9B in Brewer. East along Route 9B to Route 9 in Eddington. East along Route 9 to Stony Brook in Baileyville. East along Stony Brook to the Maine/New Brunswick Border.