

Western Zone Season Summary



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

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The updated 60-day duck season format for the Western Zone (WZ) will be used for three years spanning the 2024-25 to 2026-27 seasons. This season structure captures the period of peak abundance for all ducks in the months of October, early November, December and January and much of the migratory movement between October and January, ensuring that new ducks are continually coming into the zone throughout the season. Running the season into mid-January further provides duck hunters in the WZ with some opportunity to hunt ducks when icing conditions concentrate them in larger waterbodies like the Finger Lakes and Niagara River. This season structure maximizes weekend and holiday opportunities that occur in the fall and early winter, both of which are important for recruitment of youth hunters.

The first split will start on the second Saturday in October and run for 23 days. After a 33-day break, the second split will run 37 days from the first Saturday in December until the second Sunday in January, providing important opportunities during the holiday periods for duck hunters to get out in the field.

First Split Open	First Split Close	Second Split Open	Second Split Close
10/12/2024	11/03/2024	12/07/2024	1/12/2025
10/11/2025	11/02/2025	12/06/2025	1/11/2026
10/10/2026	11/01/2026	12/05/2026	1/10/2027

The number of days and weekends open to duck hunting per month will vary slightly depending on the calendar year.

- 20-22 days in October (3 full weekends plus Columbus Day)
- 1-3 days in November
- 25-27 days in December (4 weekends and includes Christmas and New Years)
- 10-12 days in January (2 weekends)

Key Points:

- The five most important species in the WZ continue to be mallard, black duck, wood duck, northern pintail, and green-winged teal. The selected dates capture the migration and abundance of these species. In general, diving ducks were less important, although redheads and canvasbacks were still relatively important to hunters in the zone.
- The earlier opening day captures a significant portion of the wood duck and green-wing teal migration, whose abundance levels would have been missed with a later October opener.
- The season maximizes weekends and holidays to provide increased opportunity, especially for youth hunters.
- The closure of the month of November creates a 30-day split that allows for a 2nd opening day to hunt undisturbed ducks.

Western Zone Duck Abundance, Migration, Icing, and Season Selection

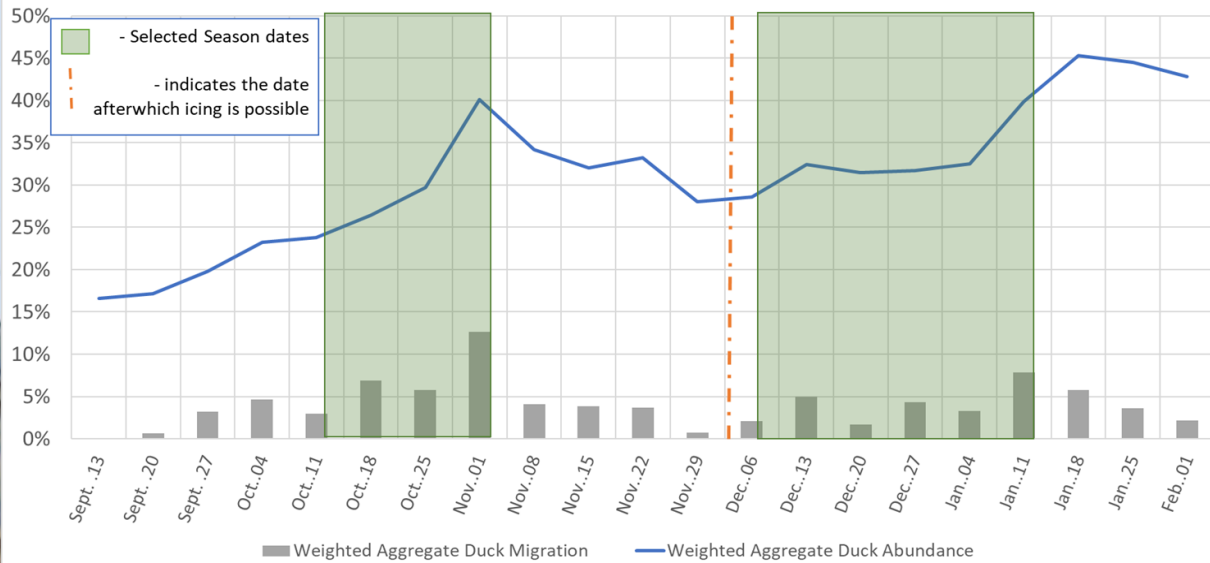


Figure 1 – This graph shows the abundance (blue line) and migration (gray bars) of all ducks in the Western Zone. Each species is weighted based on its importance to Western Zone hunters (i.e., a mallard is nearly 4 times as important as a scoter). The orange dashed line represents the date after which icing is likely to occur on smaller bodies of water in the zone. The green boxes are the selected duck season dates for the zone.

Western Zone Hunter Objective Weights

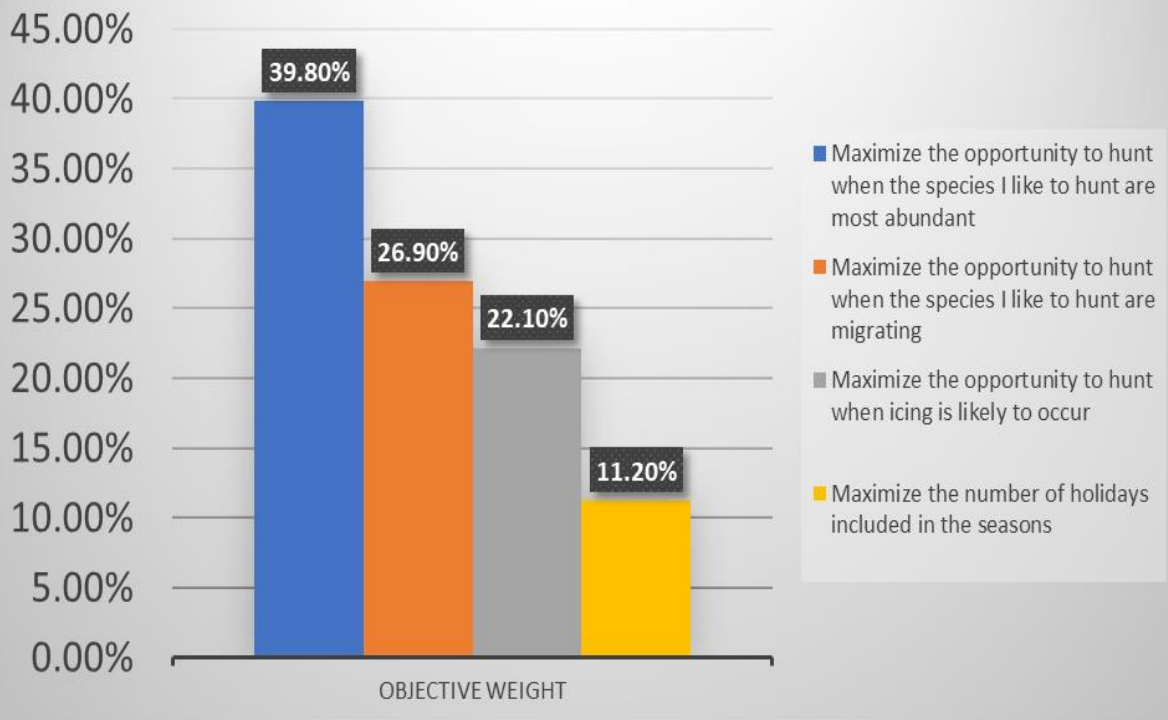


Figure 2 - This graph represents the importance of the 4 survey objectives to Western Zone Duck Hunters (i.e., ~67% of what duck hunters value is based on maximizing abundance and migration of desired species).