

Canada Goose Harvest Management

Canada goose harvest regulations in Virginia have been based on two Management zones since 1996 (Eastern and Western, Figure 1). The zones were established to manage the harvest of 4 different Canada goose populations based on their distribution and timing of migration across the state. Evaluation and delineation of these zones is based on various surveys, band-returns and neck-collar observations. These goose populations include the Atlantic Population (AP), North Atlantic Population (NAP), Southern James Bay Population (SJBP), and Atlantic Flyway Resident Population (AFRP) (see Figure 2). The AP, NAP, and SJBP are migrant populations that breed in northern Canada and winter in the US. The AFRP is a temperate population that breeds south of the 49th parallel (including southern Canada) and has a much reduced or no migratory pattern. The Atlantic Flyway Council (AFC) has developed management plans for each of these populations that define population objectives and harvest strategies.

Virginia's Eastern Canada goose zone

The majority of Virginia's migrant Canada geese, and all four of Virginia's Canada goose population, are found in the Eastern (or Atlantic Population) Zone. This area contains the largest number of AP geese in the state and harvest management follows the prescriptions for the AP regulations. The AP population (and this management zone) has the most conservative harvest regulations. This zone also contains the Back Bay harvest area. An experimental hunting season was opened in the Back Bay harvest area 3 years ago after being closed for 16 years because of concerns about long-term declines of AP wintering geese in this area. The federal frameworks for 2008-09 allow for a 45 day season with a 2 bird bag in the AP Zone while in the Back Bay area the framework allows a 30 day season with a 2 bird daily bag.

Zone Description - This zone encompasses the portion of the state east of the Stafford/King George County line from the Potomac River south to the Rappahannock River, then west along the Stafford County line to Interstate 95, then south along I-95 to Route 460 in Petersburg, then southeast along Route 460 to Route 32 in the City of Suffolk, then south to the North Carolina border.

Back Bay Harvest Area- The waters of Back Bay and its tributaries and the marshes adjacent thereto, and on the land and marshes between Back Bay and the Atlantic Ocean from Sandbridge to the North Carolina line, and on and along the shores of North Landing River and the marshes adjacent thereto, and on and along the shores of Binson Inlet Lake (formerly known as Lake Tecumseh) and Red Wing Lake and the marshes adjacent thereto.

Western Canada Goose Zone

This zone encompasses the area west of I-95 and south of Rt. 460. Canada geese from the AP, SJBP and AFRP populations are found in this zone, the AFRP being the most numerous. Information collected by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries during the past 5 years (2002-2007), including band recovery data, neck-collar observations, and harvest data, has allowed us to identify the western-most portion of Virginia as an area with very few migrant Canada geese. This area meets the criteria

established by the Atlantic Flyway Council and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to be part of the Atlantic Flyway Resident Canada Goose Zone (AFRP). We therefore have the option to split our current Western Zone into two separate areas: the western portion could become part of this AFRP zone, and the eastern portion could become part of a migrant goose harvest area known as the Southern James Bay Population (SJB) Zone. In the Atlantic Flyway, this AFRP zone includes portions of 6 states from western North Carolina through the western portions of Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York and Connecticut, and accounts for < 1% of the migrant geese in the flyway. Harvest regulations can be more liberal in the AFRP zone than in the migrant goose population zones. The federal frameworks for the 2008-09 season in the Atlantic Flyway Resident Population (AFRP) zone allows for 80 days, outside dates of November 15 – March 10, with a 5 bird bag.

The Southern James Bay Population Zone contains migrant geese from both the Southern James Bay population of Canada geese and the Atlantic Population of Canada geese. However, there are fewer total migrant geese in this SJB zone than in the AP zone. In addition, there have been changes made to the SJB Management Plan this year that include a liberalization in the Federal Frameworks for the SJB population. The bag limit has been increased from 2 to 3 per day for this population. Harvest regulations in the SJB zone are more liberal than in the AP zone, but more restrictive than in the AFRP zone. The federal frameworks for the 2008-09 season allows for 40 days (Nov. 15 – Jan. 14) with a 3 bird bag, and from Jan 15- Feb 15 with a 5 bird bag.

Zone Descriptions:

The Southern James Bay Population (SJB) Zone would be defined as the area to the west of the AP Zone boundary and east of the following line: the “Blue Ridge” (mountain spine) at the West Virginia-Virginia Border (Loudoun County-Clarke County line) south to Interstate 64 (the Blue Ridge line follows county borders along the western edge of Loudoun-Fauquier-Rappahannock-Madison-Greene-Albemarle and into Nelson Counties), then east along Interstate Rt. 64 to Route 15, then south along Rt. 15 to the North Carolina line (Figure 2).

The Atlantic Flyway Resident Canada Goose Zone (AFRP) would be defined as the area to the west of the SJB Zone and east of the West Virginia border (Figure 2).

Recommendation

VDGIF staff recommends maintaining only 2 management zones for Canada goose hunting and not implementing any zone changes for this year. Justification for this recommendation includes:

- 1.) Changes made earlier this year (July 2008) to liberalize goose hunting regulations will offer additional hunting opportunity that will increase the goose harvest. These changes include increasing the bag limit for the September Canada goose hunting season from 5 to 10 per day, and allowing extended shooting hours (1/2 hour before sunrise to 1/2 hour after sunset) for the entire September season (Sept 1-25).

2.) There has also been an increase in the bag limit (from 2 to 3 geese daily) for the SJPB population this year. This change will allow an increase in the bag limit in the Western Zone from 2 to 3 per day for the first segment of the season (November 15 – January 14), while the last segment (January 15 - February 14) will remain at 5 geese per day.

3.) Virginia's resident Canada goose population has been decreasing steadily in step with liberalizations in the hunting seasons. These seasons have increased hunter participation and resident goose harvests, and have been very effective in reducing goose populations in areas where hunters have access. There is growing concern that these seasons are having a significant impact on the number of geese available for harvest in many local areas.

4.) Splitting the state into three Canada goose hunting zones would be a significant change from past seasons. Such a change may be applicable in the future, but we feel a zone change is not the best option at this time and would make the regulations unduly complicated this year.

5.) VDGIF is continually monitoring the effects of these seasons as liberalizations are implemented and will continue to proceed in a stepwise fashion of managing the goose harvests and populations in the state. VDGIF works cooperatively with the Atlantic Flyway Council and the USFWS to manage our goose resource and to work towards our mission of maintaining optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth and to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife.

Thanks for your interest in Canada goose management in Virginia. Canada geese are a shared resource for all to enjoy and as such VDGIF encourages your comments and suggestions on the management of this resource. You can provide comments by phone, email, letter, or by attending one of our public input meetings or Board meetings (which are listed on our website).

Figure 1. **Virginia's Canada Goose Management Zones & Population Units.**

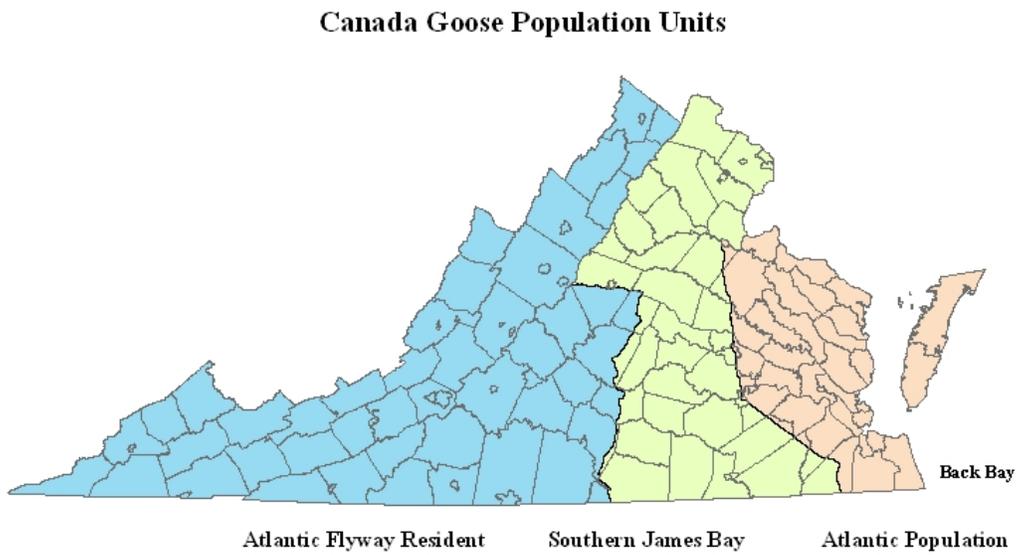
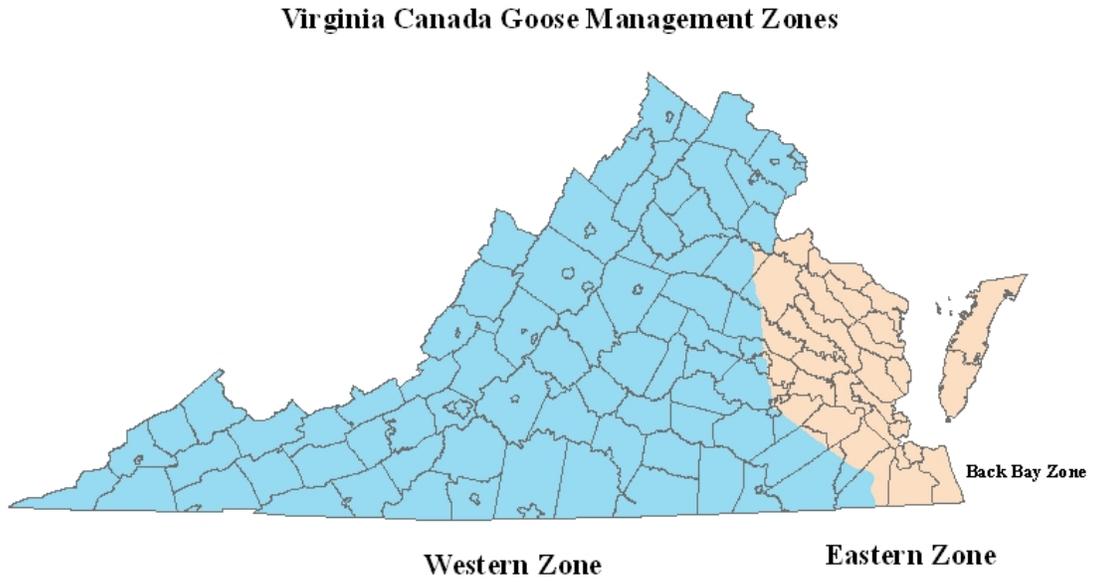


Figure 2. **Virginia's Migrant Canada Goose Populations**

