

2023 New Jersey Waterfowl Hunter Survey

INTRODUCTION

Waterfowl hunting in New Jersey is a diverse recreational activity where waterfowlers can pursue 28 species of ducks and 6 species of geese in a variety of habitats from small beaver ponds to the Atlantic Ocean. Due to New Jersey's diversity of waterfowl species and habitats, the state was divided into 3 zones (North, South and Coastal; Figure 1) in 1980.

Although hunting season date selections for most game species (e.g., deer, turkey) are under the authority of the state wildlife agency, migratory bird regulations are set under the authority of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). While states have input into regulations through their respective Flyway Councils, the USFWS has final authority. A state's migratory game bird regulations can be more restrictive, but not more liberal, than federal frameworks. For example, in Atlantic Flyway states the current duck season is 60 days with season framework dates between the last Saturday in September and January 31. Most states select seasons when birds are most abundant within a state or zone. However, managers also consider social factors including hunter preferences, traditions, and holiday periods. Because of the diversity of habitats waterfowlers hunt, competition with hunters' work schedules and other conflicts, and different traditions of when sportsmen prefer to hunt, hunters will have varied opinions on waterfowl season selections. This diversity of opinions can make selecting annual waterfowl season dates challenging and sometimes contentious.

New Jersey Fish and Wildlife (NJFW) and the Fish and Game Council (Council) receive input from hunters during the year on season date selections although typically only hunters dissatisfied with season dates offer comment. Although this input is considered when setting annual regulations, periodic surveys are the most effective way to gather hunters' opinions in an unbiased fashion. To better serve the state's waterfowl hunters, NJFW conducted an online survey during the fall of 2023.

The challenge for state wildlife agencies is to develop migratory game bird season dates that account for migration patterns, average weather conditions, traditions, and the preferences of their states' hunters. A primary goal of NJFW and Council in annually setting waterfowl seasons is to select dates that satisfy the majority of the state's hunters while recognizing that whichever season date selection is chosen will not satisfy all waterfowl hunters. A well-designed survey allows for a transparent process to help guide season selections for several years.

Every 5 years, the USFWS allows each state to select a zone and split "package", but the state must maintain their selected zone and split package for the following 5 years. The next zone and split package choice for states will be offered for the 2026-2031 seasons. There are 4 zone/split choices (see question 39) for states to choose from but essentially only 2 choices for a mid-latitude state like NJ are optimal. One feature question during this survey was that hunters were asked to choose between 2 presented zone and split packages, one status quo (3 zones; 2 season segments) and one new alignment (2 zones; 3 season segments) using 2023-24 dates as agreed upon by the New Jersey Migratory Bird Season Setting Committee.

Figure 1. New Jersey waterfowl zones

METHODS

On September 20, an introductory paragraph and the survey link were sent by e-mail to individuals ($n = 19,917$) who purchased a NJ Waterfowl Stamp in at least one of the previous 3 hunting seasons and provided a valid e-mail address ($n=17,342$; 87% stamp buyers). To distribute the survey widely, an e-mail message with the survey link was also sent to 40,431 additional individuals who subscribed to the NJ Hunting Listserv. A follow-up survey message was sent on September 27. The survey closed October 5.

We used a “convenience” survey administered by Survey Monkey. A convenience survey is a non-random sampling technique which is open to all effected parties. Several studies have found that convenience surveys can be administered at a fraction of the cost, yet still yield similar results for determining attitudes or opinions, when compared to statistically designed, random sampling surveys (e.g., mail surveys).

Survey participants were required to enter a Conservation Identification Number (CIDN) to ensure respondents were waterfowl hunters who obtained a NJ Waterfowl Stamp during the past 3 years (survey universe). Surveys with CIDNs that were not included in the survey universe, or multiple surveys with the same CIDN, were excluded from analyses.

Although the survey included 53 questions (Appendix 1), hunters were asked to choose their most hunted zone for ducks and Canada geese and hunters only saw questions on regulations and season structure choices for the zone they selected. Similarly, responses to several questions lead respondents to different questions in the survey. As a result, the number of questions a hunter had to answer varied but was generally only about 35 questions.

Note that totals in some figures or tables in this report or in Appendix 1 may not sum to 100% due to rounding errors.

RESULTS

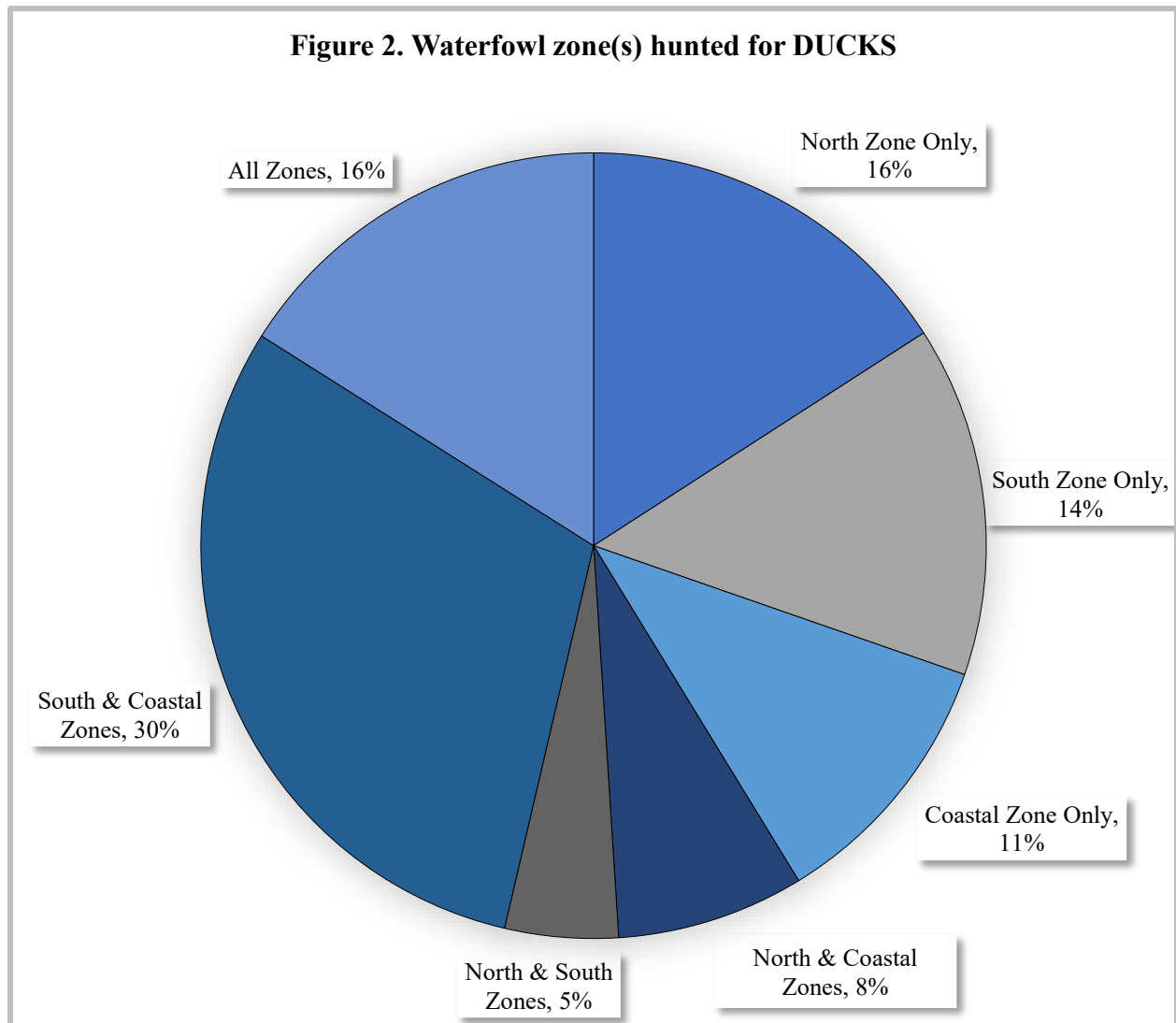
A total of 910 surveys were received but removal of duplicate and invalid submissions yielded 779 usable surveys, resulting in a 4.5% response rate. In the following results, the “Q#” references the specific Question number in Appendix 1 (e.g., Q1 references Question 1).

72% of respondents hunted both ducks and geese in NJ during the past 3 years, while 16% hunted only ducks, 5% hunted only geese, and 7% did not hunt waterfowl even though they had purchased a NJ Stamp during the previous 3 years (Q2).



Zones hunted for ducks

41% of hunters only hunted one zone for ducks while the remaining 59% hunted 2 or more zones (Figure 2; Q3). 16% of respondents hunted ducks in all 3 waterfowl zones. When asked about their zone crossing habits for duck hunting, 35% indicated they only hunted one zone, 43% said they crossed zones regularly, and 22% said they only crossed zones when their most-hunted zone was closed (Q4). Hunters were nearly equally divided into thirds listing their most-hunted duck zone, with 39% indicating South Zone, 33% and 28% listing Coastal and North Zones, respectively (Q5).



Zones and split seasons choice and opinions on zoning

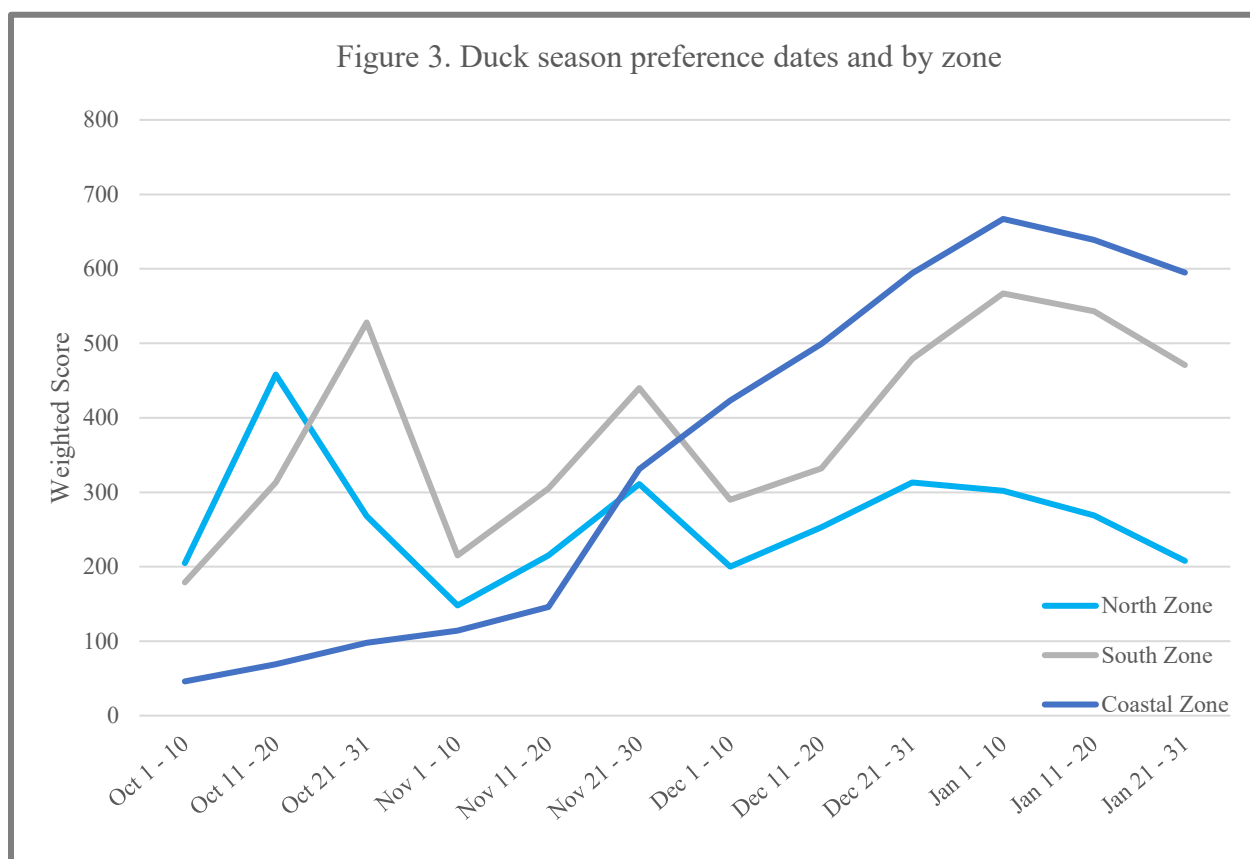
Hunters were not in agreement on whether zoning created crowding in the areas they hunt (Q34). However, most hunters (57%) felt zoning increased hunting opportunity by staggering season dates across zones while few (15%) disagreed with this statement (Q34). Most (61%) hunters were satisfied with the geographic alignment of NJ's duck zones while 12% were dissatisfied (Q34). When asked about whether the Hackensack Meadowlands "fit" best in the North Zone (Q10), a

majority of hunters agreed (36%) with this statement while many fewer (17%) felt that area would be better served as part of the Coastal Zone.

When presented with 2 options for a zone and split alignment for 2026-2030 (Q39), hunters preferred (52%) the status quo alignment used since 1980 of 3 zones and 2 season segments over a new zone and split alignment of 2 zones and 3 season segments (39%). 9% of hunters were undecided.

Preferred calendar periods and current season structure in duck zones

Hunters were asked to identify their most-hunted zone for ducks and then directed to 2 questions which had them choose, and then rank, their 6 preferred 10-day season periods between October 1 and January 31 for their most-hunted zone (Figure 3). Hunters who chose the North or South Zones as their most hunted duck zone were also directed to a question that asked them to list a mutually exclusive season structure split preference.



In the North Zone (Q8) there was a preference for the mid-October period with the next strongest support for the Thanksgiving and Christmas Holiday periods. In the North Zone (Q9), the strongest preference (38%) was to maintain the status quo of 1 week for the early split in October while 7% wanted the October early split to be eliminated entirely. In contrast, 45% of North Zone hunters wanted the length of the October season lengthened to 2 full weeks at the expense of days taken

from the second split. In essence, there was little agreement among North Zone hunters on their opinion of the early split in October. 10% of North Zone hunters were undecided.

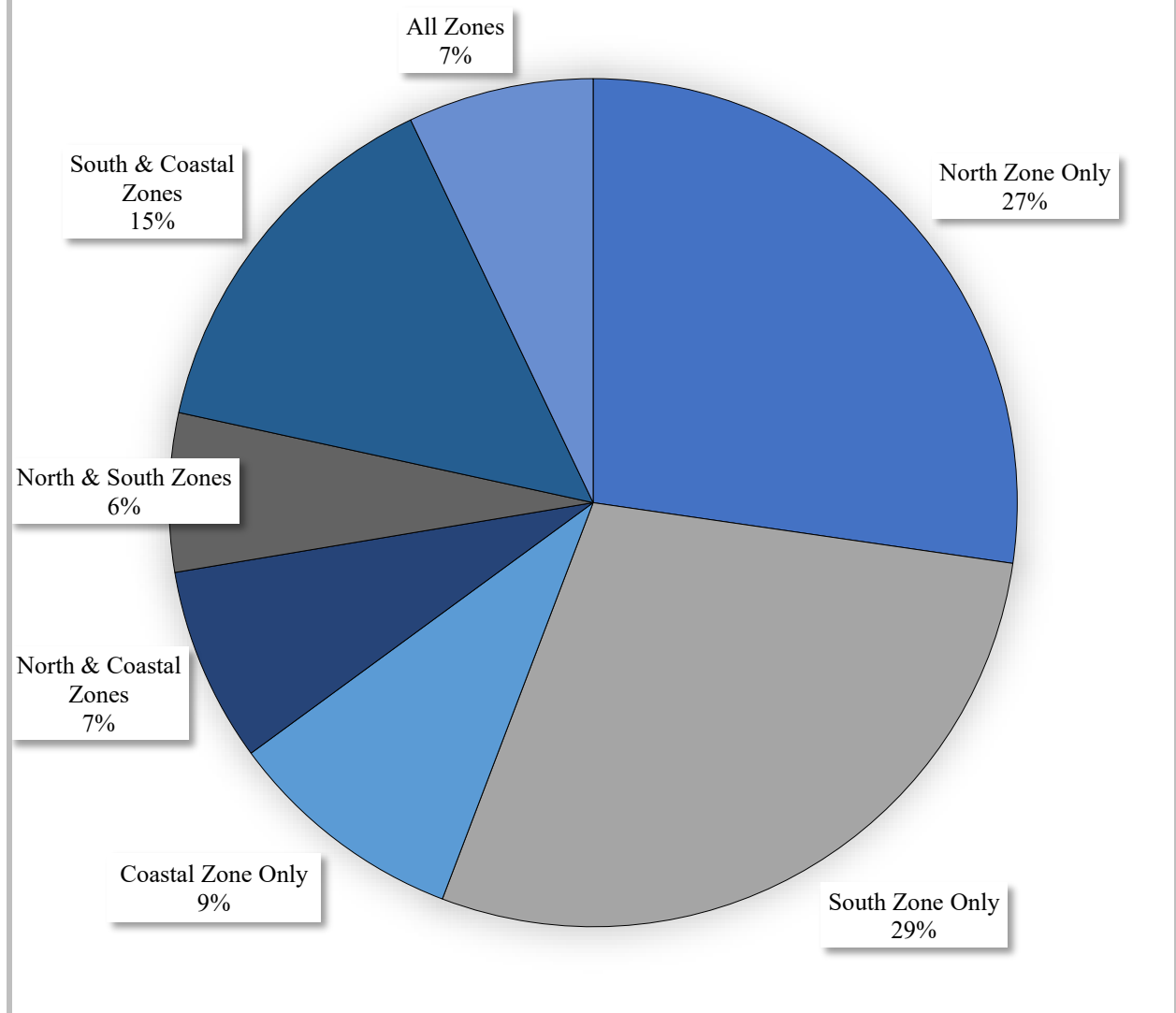
For the South Zone (Q13), the most preference was for the early and mid-January periods and late October while there was nearly equal preference for late November and late January. However, when asked about the current season structure (Q15), 63% of hunters supported hunting later into January even at the expense of fewer days in November (26% opposed). In the South Zone (Q14) there was the most preference for the status quo (45%) for the 1-week October split while 13% wanted the October split to be removed entirely. However, 32% wanted the October split to be extended to 2 full weeks, and 10% were undecided.

In the Coastal Zone (Q18) there was a strong preference for hunting until the end of the duck season framework (Jan. 31) and little support to hold hunting seasons prior to Nov. 21. 83% of Coastal Zone hunters wanted the Coastal Zone duck season to end on Jan. 31 (Q19). During recent years, NJFW has received some complaints that the Coastal Zone suffers crowding after mid-January when both the North and South Zone duck seasons (and nearby PA) have closed. Interestingly, Coastal Zone hunters (Q19) reported similar agreement toward crowding both before (46% reported crowding) and after (41% reported crowding) mid-January. In the Coastal Zone, where Canada goose and duck seasons are each both typically 60 days, there was strong support (85%) to hold the seasons concurrently (Q33).

Zones hunted for Canada geese

Relative to duck hunters, Canada goose hunters were much less mobile with 65% reporting they only hunted one zone while the remaining 35% hunted 2 or more zones (Figure 4; Q20). Only 7% of respondents hunted geese in all 3 zones. When asked about their zone crossing habits for Canada hunting, 29% said they crossed zones regularly, and 16% said they only crossed zones when their most-hunted zone was closed (Q21). When asked about their most-hunted Canada goose zone, 44% indicated South Zone, with 39% and 17% listing North and Coastal Zones, respectively (Q22).

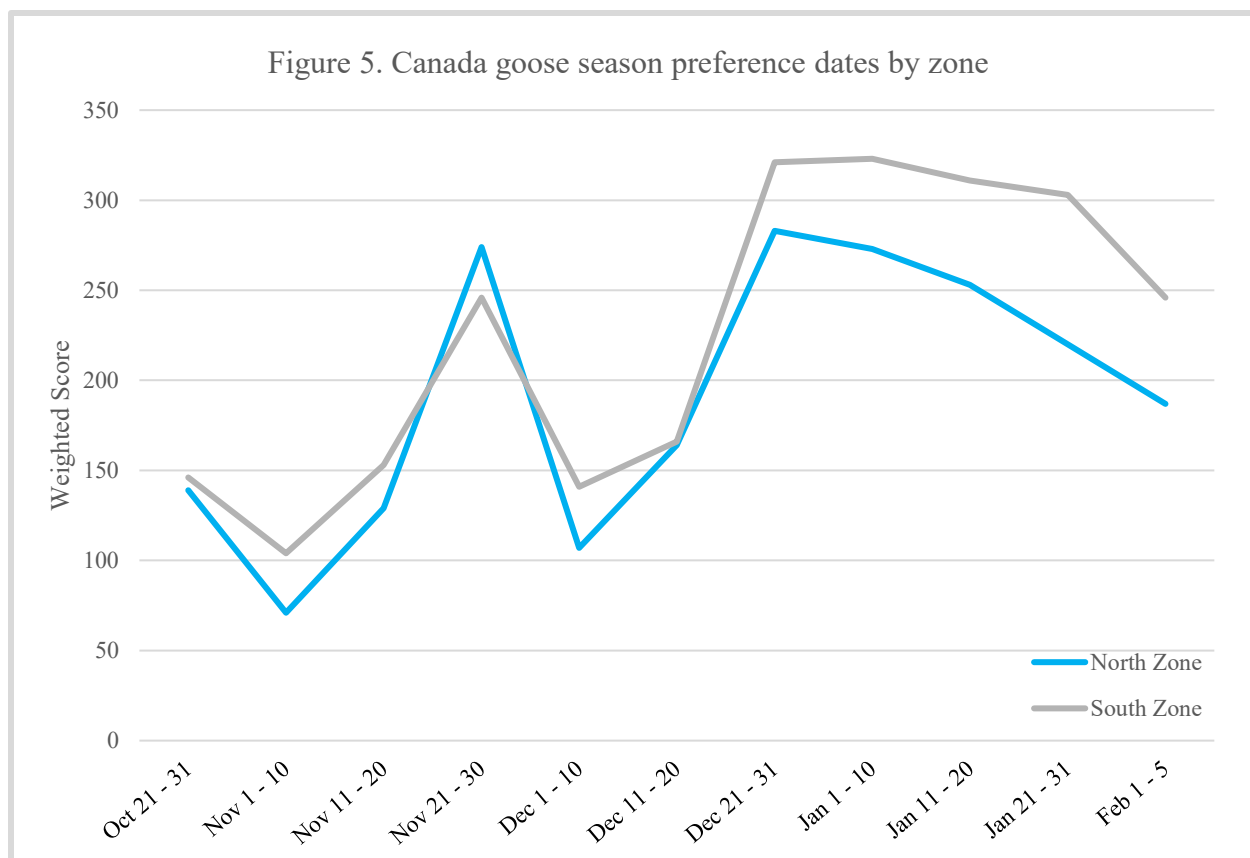
Figure 4. Waterfowl zone(s) hunted for Canada geese



North and South Zone hunters were asked about their most common hunting strategy while pursuing Canada geese. In the North Zone (Q23), 46% of hunters most commonly used field hunting while 23% hunted ducks and geese together and 31% were about equally split between the 2 strategies. In the South Zone (Q28), only 32% of hunters field hunted Canada geese, while 41% hunted ducks and geese together and 27% used a combination of these 2 techniques.

Preferred calendar periods and season structure in Canada goose zones

Like duck hunters, goose hunters were asked to identify their most-hunted zone for Canada geese, then directed to 2 questions which had them choose and rank their 5 preferred season periods between Oct. 21 and Feb. 5 (Figure 5). In the North Zone (Q27), the preferred periods were the Thanksgiving and Christmas Holiday periods, with preference slowly waning with each successive period in January. For the South Zone (Q32), preference was relatively equal from late December to late January with slightly lesser preference for late November and early February.



Hunters' opinions on various season dates and issues

Q34 asked hunters opinions on a myriad of topics. A strong majority of waterfowl hunters felt all zones should be open during the Christmas to New Years (81%) and Thanksgiving (76%) holiday periods. The majority (58%) of hunters felt seasons should open on a Saturday while there was no consensus concerning season openers on a weekday; hunters showed more support for opening a season on a Saturday than closing a season on a Saturday. There was no consensus on whether waterfowl seasons should avoid the Six-Day Firearm Deer Season (46% indicated no conflict vs 32% who wanted to avoid overlap).

Twice as many hunters (31% vs 15%) indicated they saw fewer Atlantic brant than a decade ago and 83% felt the change to allow a bag limit of 2 black ducks per day was a welcome regulation change. Most hunters (57%) felt that most ducks arrived after the season closed. However, hunters were mixed on their opinions when asked whether they believed hunting seasons in February would harm duck populations (39% disagreed; 35% unsure; 26% agreed).

Hypothetical Sunday hunting for waterfowl

Currently, hunting on Sunday is prohibited in New Jersey by state statute except for bowhunting deer on private land and Wildlife Management Areas. Rescinding the prohibition on Sunday hunting is beyond the purview of the Fish and Game Council and can only be done by the state legislature. The USFWS allows states that have statutory Sunday hunting closures (all of which are in the Atlantic Flyway) the option to have compensatory days for Sundays, or simply put, Sundays

do not count against (for example) a state's allotment of 60 duck season days. The implication is that if the statutory Sunday hunting prohibition in NJ were rescinded, Sundays would count as part of New Jersey's allotment of 60 days as opposed to being just "extra" days added within the course of the hunting season.

When hunters were presented with a choice of maintaining the status quo of Sundays closed, the majority (56%) preferred this option while a minority (37%) preferred a hypothetical change where Sundays would be open to waterfowl hunting (Q35). Apparently, those who preferred Sunday hunting felt strongly as this topic generated 29 write-in response comments supporting Sunday hunting. 8% had no opinion.

Waterfowl hunting guides

During the past 5 years, 80% of waterfowl hunters did not use a hunting guide while 20% used a guide with various frequencies (Q40). Perhaps not surprising, there was a slight skew toward nonresidents (22%) using guides while 78% were NJ residents (respondent proportion was 12% nonresident to 88% NJ resident). For hunters who used guides, 45% used them for field hunting geese, 28% in a Coastal Zone hunt, 10% in an ocean sea duck hunt, and 16% for some other type of waterfowl hunt (Q41). For guide users (Q42), 69% of hunters reported excellent or good service, 19% reported mediocre service and 10% noted they had a poor, but safe hunt; only 0.7% of hunters ($n=1$) reported an unsafe hunt while using a waterfowl guide.

All hunters were asked which land or water types waterfowl guides should be allowed to operate on (Q43 & Q44). The majority (65%) of hunters indicated private land, while the ocean (45%) and tidal habitats (39%) received moderate support. Fewer (24%) hunters felt guides should be allowed to operate on nontidal portions of WMAs (e.g., lakes or fields). Hunters who had used guides had more permissive feelings on all habitat types guides should be allowed to operate upon when compared to hunters who had not used a guide in the past 5 years.

Waterfowl blind regulations

Permanent waterfowl blind regulations vary by state. For this question we defined blinds, indicated the current NJ blind regulations, and asked hunters their opinion on blind regulations in NJ. Hunters were nearly equally divided in their opinion (Q46). 45% indicated blinds should only be allowed on private land or prohibited everywhere. 32% indicated that current blinds regulations were adequate while 16% expressed that blinds should be allowed on all land types. Only 6% had no opinion.

Season structures for Canada geese and brant

North and South Zone hunters were asked their preference for a restrictive Canada goose season when the population warrants a conservative regulation (Q25 & Q30). Hunters were evenly split over a 15-day/2 bird bag (32%) and a (status quo) 30-day/1 bird bag (32%), while a minority (18%) indicated that if the season needs to be restricted that it might as well be closed entirely; 18% had no opinion.

When asked a similar question for brant (Q36), a slim majority (34%) preferred a 30-day/1 bird bag while 26% felt that if the season needs to be restricted, that it might as well be closed entirely. Most (40%) hunters had no opinion likely because they are unfamiliar with, or do not hunt brant. When

asked about a “standard” season for brant when the population is moderate (Q37), nearly twice as many (39%) hunters preferred a 50-day/2 bird bag (status quo) for brant over a 60-day/1 bird bag (21%).

Resources used by waterfowl hunters to access regulations

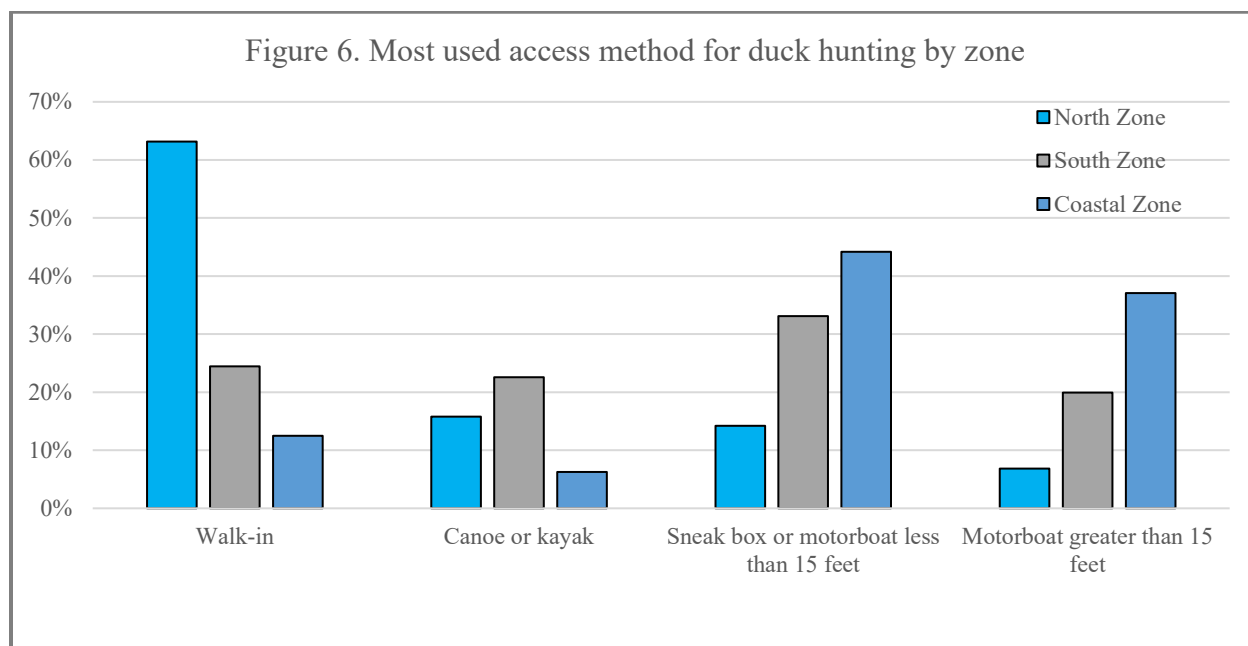
Printed media were the most common resources used (Q38) with use listed as frequently or usually for the Migratory Bird Regulations Card (80%) and Hunting Digest (72%). Online sources were used less with the NJFW web page (48%) and NJFW Hunting Explorer App (22%) logged as usual or frequent use. Most (51%) waterfowl hunters had never used the Explorer App for regulations.

Barriers to waterfowl hunting

Hunters were provided a list of potential barriers and asked if these items affected their waterfowl hunting experiences and participation (Q45). Crowding on public areas (79%) and difficulty finding places to hunt on private land (74%) were listed as the 2 most serious barriers. Unethical behavior by hunters (62%), local firearms discharge ordinances (60%), finding public lands to hunt (58%), and inadequate boat ramp access (55%) appeared as moderate barriers while not enough free time (48%), low waterfowl populations (48%), expense (44%), waterfowl regulations complexity (36%), and finding a hunting partner (22%) or mentor (18%) were lesser barriers to hunting.

Access methods and land types for waterfowl hunting

Hunters were asked to describe their most used access method to their hunting site for their most-hunted duck zone. Walk-in (63%) was the most common method in the North Zone (Q6), power boats (81%) were most common in the Coastal Zone (Q16), while hunters in the South Zone (Q11) used variable methods (Figure 6).



Hunters in the North (Q24) and South (Q29) Zones were asked to describe their most common Canada goose hunting location. In the North Zone, hunters most commonly used private land where they had permission (41%) or non-tidal wetlands (23%) while in the South Zone, private land where

hunters had permission (35%), or tidal wetlands (28%) were most prevalent. Leased properties comprised only 14% and 9% of Canada goose hunting locations in the North and South Zones, respectively.

Survey respondent demographics

Interestingly, survey respondents (Q47; mean=48.0; SE=0.63) were older ($P<0.001$) than the survey universe (mean=43.2; SE=0.12). Most online surveys show that respondents tend to be younger (e.g. more likely to be familiar with internet) than average. The survey was completed by 88% NJ residents and 12% nonresidents (Q52) which matches recent NJ duck stamp sales. Resident respondents were equally from the coastal counties (33%) of Monmouth, Ocean, Atlantic and Cape May; southern inland counties (33%) of Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, Salem, and Cumberland; and northern (34%) counties (Q53).

Respondents were generally avid hunters where 82% listed waterfowl as their most important or one of their most important (Q50) types of hunting and 73% indicated they hunted waterfowl during each of the last 5 years (Q51). Also, 70% of survey respondents hunted waterfowl more than 10 years (Q48) and 59% hunted more than 10 days last year (Q49)

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Appendix 1. Survey instrument, number who answered question, percent responses for each item, and question routing.

2023 New Jersey Waterfowl Hunter Survey

New Jersey Fish and Wildlife

You are receiving this survey because you purchased a New Jersey Waterfowl Stamp during at least one of the last 3 hunting seasons and provided an e-mail address.

This survey allows you to provide input concerning New Jersey's future waterfowl season dates and regulations. This survey will close on October 5 after which the survey will be taken down from the website.

The survey should take less than 20 minutes to complete.

1. Please enter your 9-digit Conservation ID Number (CID#) without hyphens or spaces. Enter all leading zeroes. (*n* = 779)

2. Which statement below best describes your waterfowl hunting activity during the past 3 years? (*n* = 779)

16% I hunted only ducks →Go to Q3
5% I hunted only geese →Go to Q20
72% I hunted both ducks and geese →Go to Q3
7% I did not hunt ducks or geese →Go to end of survey

3. Please indicate which of the New Jersey zones where you have hunted **DUCKS** during any of the past 3 years. (*check all that apply*) (*n* = 686)

16% North Zone Only	8% North & Coastal Zones	16% All Zones
14% South Zone Only	5% North & South Zones	
11% Coastal Zone Only	30% South & Coastal Zones	

4. Which of the following best describes your zone-crossing habits for **DUCK** seasons in New Jersey? (*n* = 685)

35% I only hunt one zone
22% I only cross zones when my most-hunted zone is closed
43% I cross zones regularly whether my most-hunted zone is open or closed

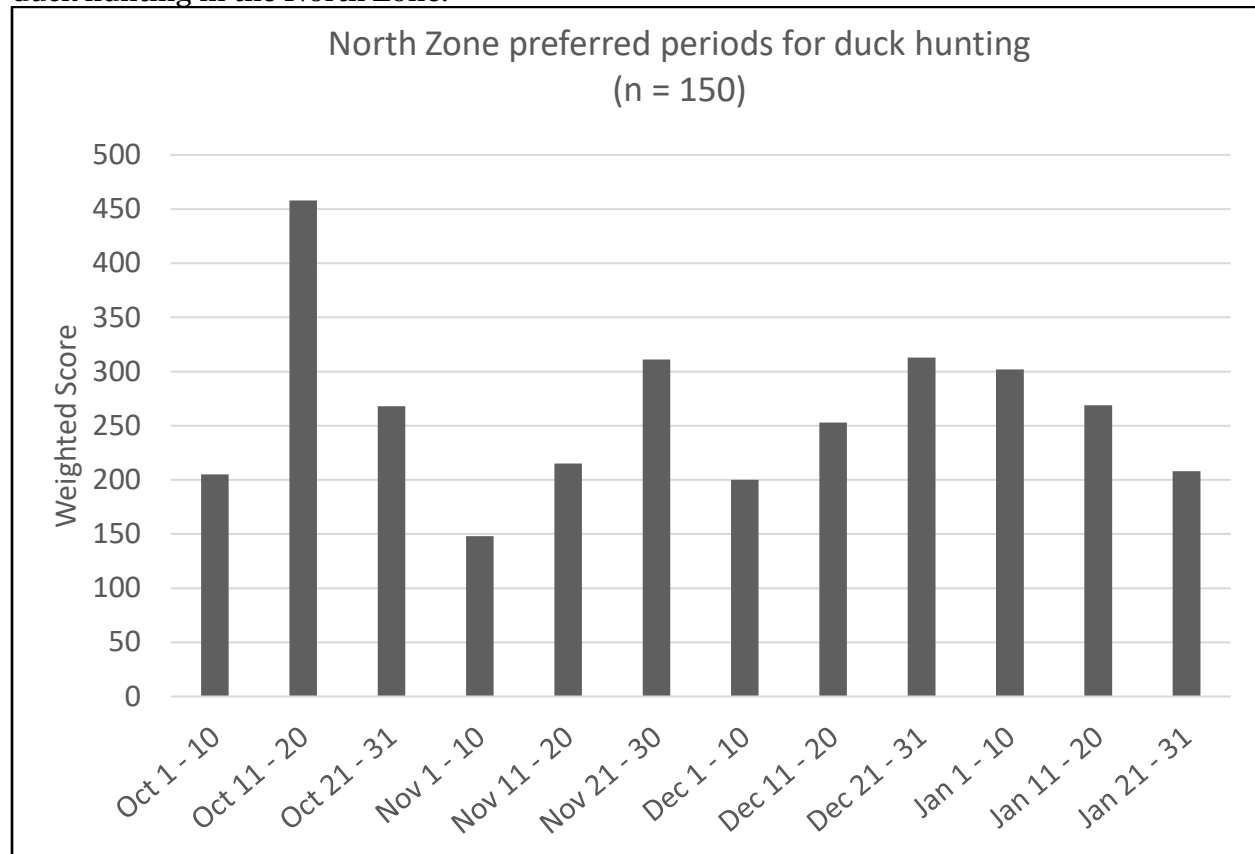
5. During the last 3 years, in which zone did you hunt **ducks most often**? (*select one*) (*n* = 685)

28% North Zone →Go to Q6
39% South Zone →Go to Q11
33% Coastal Zone →Go to Q16

6. What method do you *most commonly use* to access your duck hunting locations in the North Zone? (*n* = 190)

63% Walk-in
16% Canoe or kayak
14% Sneak box or motorboat less than 15 feet
7% Motorboat greater than 15 feet

7. & 8. Please indicate and **rank** the **6 time periods** you consider to be the most important for duck hunting in the North Zone.



9. Prior to 2016, the first segment of the duck season in the North Zone was 2 or more weeks in length (3 Saturdays). Since 2016, the first segment of the North Zone duck season during October was shortened to 1 week (Saturday to Saturday) in length with the extra days moved to the second segment. Which of the following choices best describes your preference of how the North Zone duck season should be structured? (n = 174)

38%	The first segment in October should remain the way it is now (status quo) at 8 days long to include 2 Saturdays.
25%	The first segment in October should be lengthened to at least 2 full weeks, to include 3 Saturdays with the needed days taken from the front of the second segment in November.
20%	The first segment in October should be lengthened to at least 2 full weeks, to include 3 Saturdays with the needed days taken from the end of the second segment in January.
7%	The first segment in October should be eliminated entirely and the North Zone not opened until November.
10%	No opinion

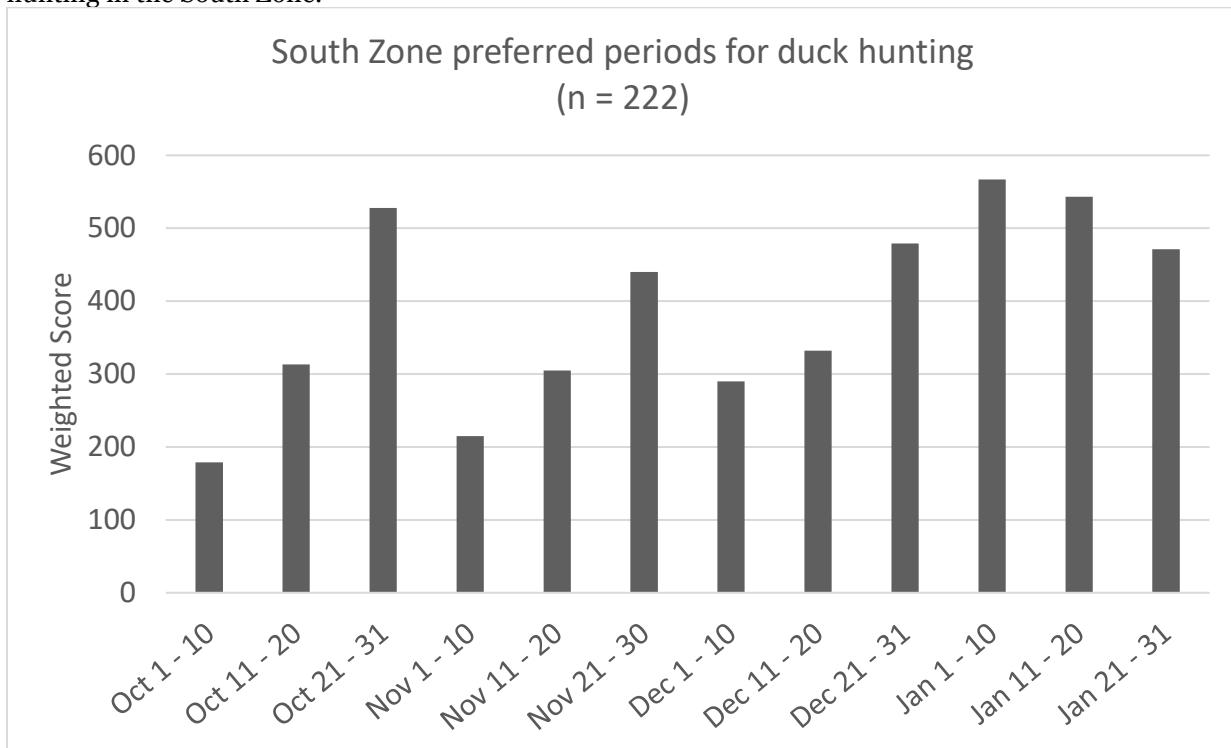
10. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about New Jersey's North Zone duck seasons.

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The tidal wetlands of the Hackensack Meadowlands "fit" better as part of the North Zone than as part of the Coastal Zone (<i>n</i> = 169)	26%	10%	47%	11%	6%
The Canada goose season should run later than the duck season (<i>n</i> = 170)	51%	24%	15%	5%	5%
The Canada goose season should overlap the duck season as much as possible (<i>n</i> = 174)	65%	19%	11%	3%	2%

11. What method do you *most commonly* use to access your duck hunting locations in the South Zone? (*n* = 266)

24% Walk-in
23% Canoe or kayak
33% Sneak box or motorboat less than 15 feet
20% Motorboat greater than 15 feet

12. & 13. Please indicate and **rank** the **6 time periods** you consider to be the most important for duck hunting in the South Zone.



14. Before 2013, the first segment of the duck season in the South Zone was 2 or more weeks long (3 Saturdays). Since 2013, the first segment of the South Zone duck season during October was shortened to 1 week (Saturday to Saturday) long with the extra days moved to the second segment. Which of the following choices best describes your preference of how the South Zone duck season should be structured? (*n* = 251)

45%	The first segment in October should remain the way it is now (status quo) at 8 days long to include 2 Saturdays.
15%	The first segment in October should be lengthened to at least 2 full weeks, to include 3 Saturdays with the needed days taken from the front of the second segment in November.
17%	The first segment in October should be lengthened to at least 2 full weeks, to include 3 Saturdays with the needed days taken from the end of the second segment in January.
13%	The first segment in October should be eliminated entirely and the South Zone not opened until November.
10%	No opinion

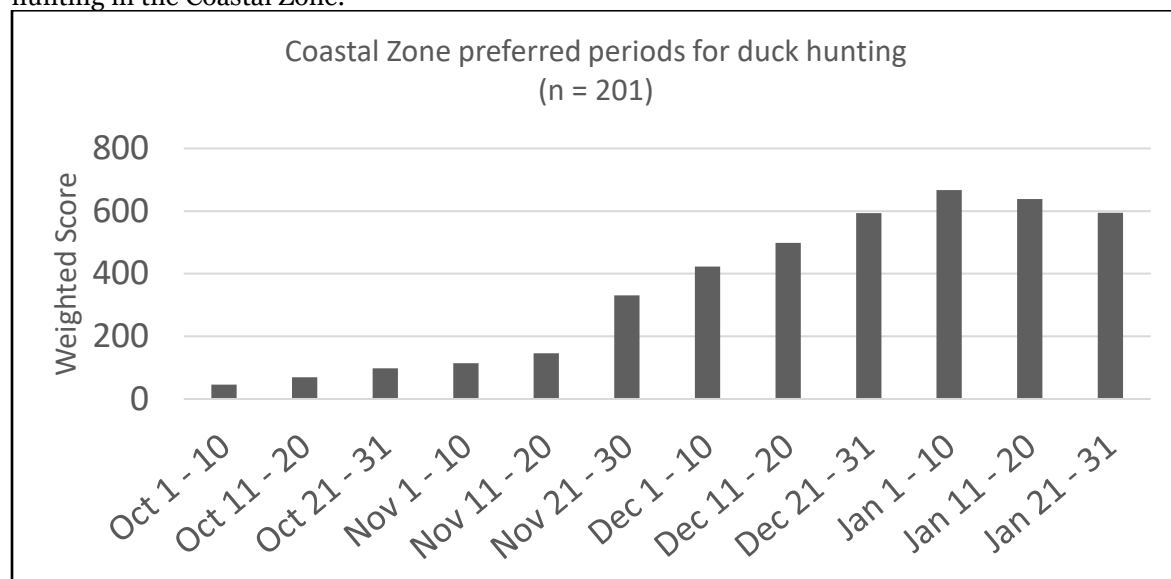
15. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about New Jersey's South Zone duck seasons.

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
In the South Zone, the duck season should run to late January, even if it means fewer days in November. (<i>n</i> = 250)	42%	21%	11%	15%	11%
The Canada goose season should run later than the duck season (<i>n</i> = 245)	38%	20%	35%	6%	2%
The Canada goose season should overlap the duck season as much as possible (<i>n</i> = 251)	58%	24%	15%	3%	0%

16. What method do you most commonly use to access your duck hunting locations in the Coastal Zone? (*n* = 224)

13%	Walk-in
6%	Canoe or kayak
44%	Sneak box or motorboat less than 15 feet
37%	Motorboat greater than 15 feet

17. & 18. Please indicate and **rank** the **6 time periods** you consider to be the most important for duck hunting in the Coastal Zone.



19. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about New Jersey's Coastal Zone duck seasons.

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The Coastal Zone is crowded before mid-January (n = 211)	13%	33%	28%	18%	7%
The Coastal Zone is crowded after mid-January (n = 210)	16%	25%	30%	19%	10%
The Coastal Zone should always run to January 31 (n = 212)	72%	11%	11%	2%	3%
The Coastal Zone should end on the last Saturday in January (n = 210)	27%	15%	25%	11%	22%

20. Please indicate which of the NJ zones where you have hunted **CANADA GEESE** during any of the past 3 years. (check all that apply) (n = 579)

27% North Zone Only	7% North & Coastal Zones	7% All Zones
28% South Zone Only	6% North & South Zones	
9% Coastal Zone Only	15% South & Coastal Zones	

21. Which of the following best describes your zone-crossing habits during **Canada goose** seasons in New Jersey? (n = 577)

55% I only hunt one zone
16% I only cross zones when my most-hunted zone is closed
29% I cross zones regularly whether my most-hunted zone is open or closed

22. During the last 3 years, in which zone did you hunt **Canada geese most often?** (select one)
(n = 575)

39% North Zone →Go to Q23
44% South Zone →Go to Q28
17% Coastal Zone →Go to Q33

23. Which of the following best describes your most common Canada goose hunting strategy in the North Zone during the 'regular' (November-January) Canada goose season? (n = 224)

46% Most of my Canada goose hunting is targeted specifically towards geese (i.e. field hunting).
23% I hunt Canada geese and ducks at the same time in my decoy spread.
31% My Canada goose hunting is about equally split between specifically targeting geese and opportunistically shooting geese while duck hunting.

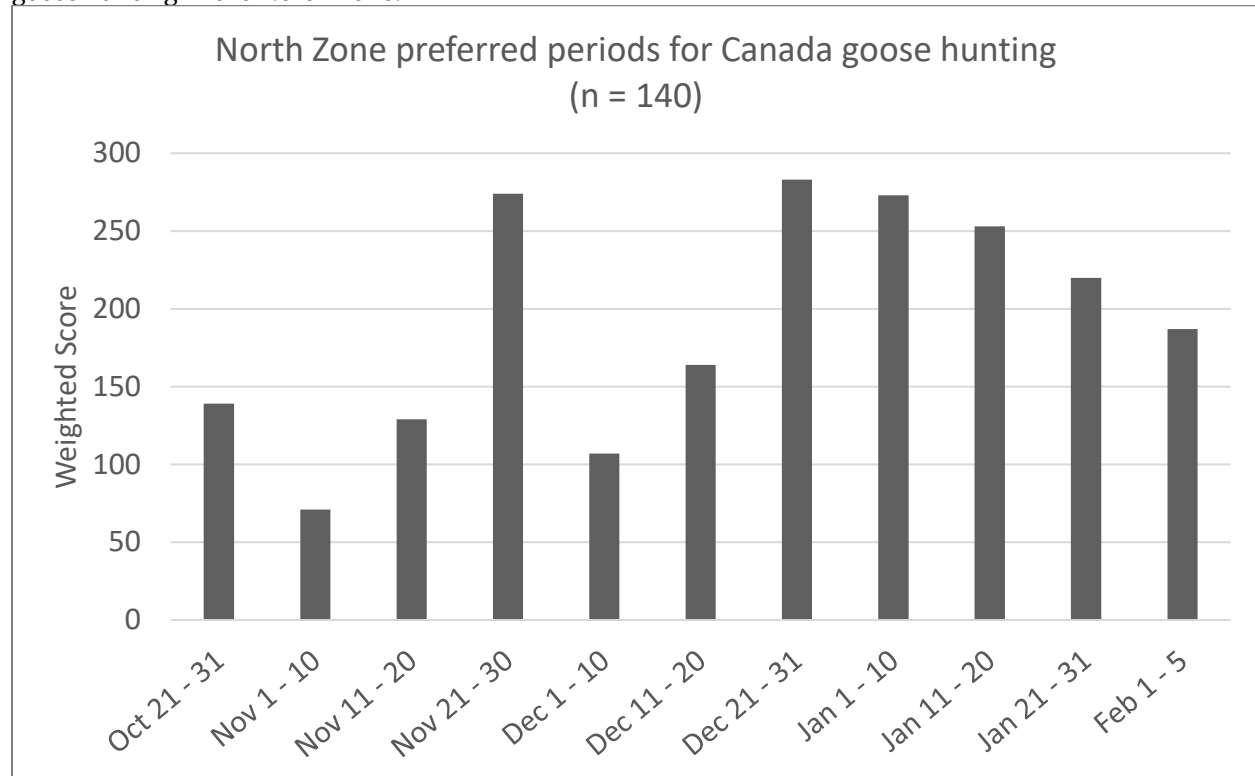
24. Which of the following best describes the type of land or water you most commonly hunt for Canada geese during the 'regular' (November-January) Canada goose season in the North Zone? (n = 225)

5% Private land that I own
14% Private land where I pay a lease or fee
41% Private land where I have permission or am invited to where I do not pay a fee
23% Non-tidal lake or wetland
6% Tidal marsh
11% Other

25 & 30. Managers will implement restrictive seasons when migrant population birds are low to rebuild population size. Which of the following would you prefer for a restrictive 'regular' Canada goose season? (n = 474)

32% I would prefer a 15-day season with a 2-bird bag
32% I would prefer a 30-day season with a 1-bird bag
18% If the Canada goose population cannot sustain a 30-day season with a 2-bird bag, I would prefer to see the regular Canada goose hunting season just be closed, even if closure might last several years
18% No opinion or not sure

26. & 27. Please indicate and **rank** the **5 time periods** you consider to be the most important for Canada goose hunting in the North Zone.



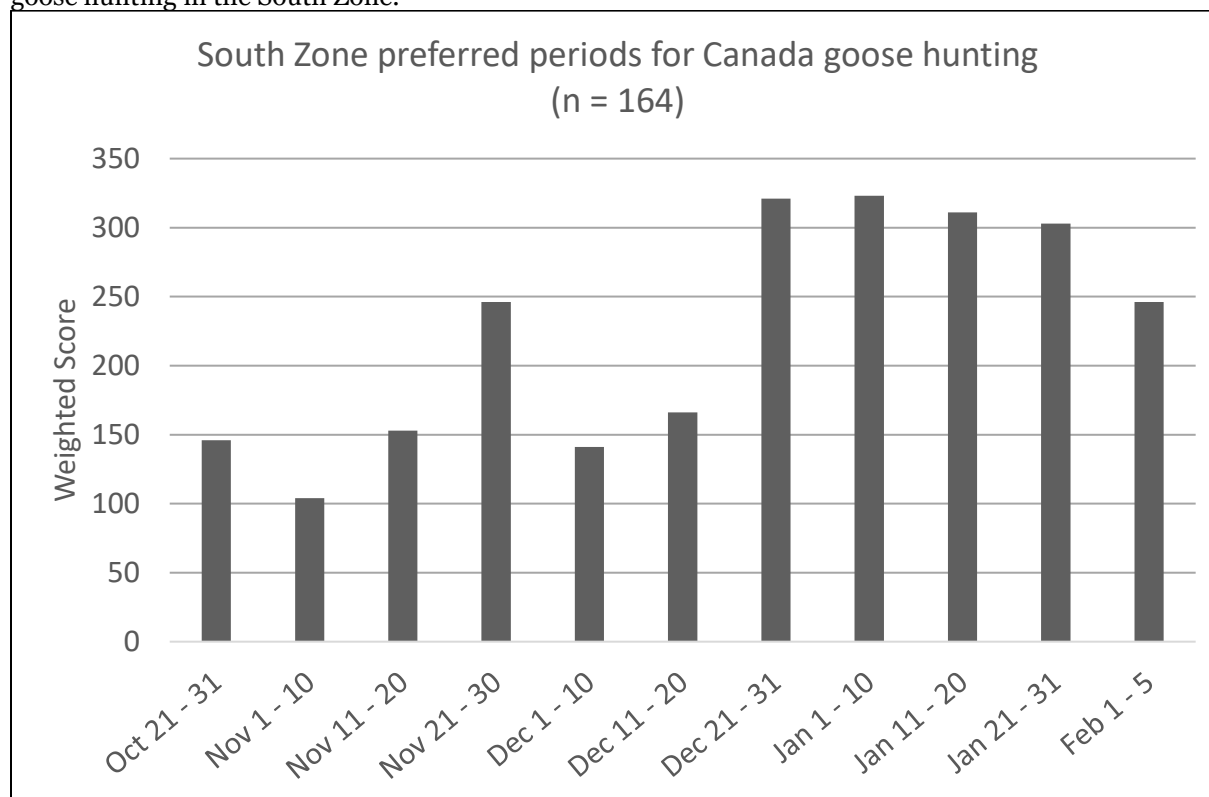
28. Which of the following best describes your most common Canada goose hunting strategy in the South Zone during the 'regular' (November-January) Canada goose season? (n = 251)

32% Most of my Canada goose hunting is targeted specifically towards geese (i.e. field hunting).
41% I hunt Canada geese and ducks at the same time in my decoy spread.
27% My Canada goose hunting is about equally split between specifically targeting geese and opportunistically shooting geese while duck hunting.

29. Which of the following best describes the type of land or water you most commonly hunt for Canada geese during the 'regular' (November-January) Canada goose season in the South Zone? (n = 250)

4% Private land that I own
9% Private land where I pay a lease or fee
35% Private land where I have permission or am invited to where I do not pay a fee
18% Non-tidal lake or wetland
28% Tidal marsh
6% Other

31. & 32. Please indicate and **rank** the **5 time periods** you consider to be the most important for Canada goose hunting in the South Zone.



33. The Coastal Zone is a North Atlantic Population Canada Goose Zone meaning that in most years there is likely to be a 60-day season with a 2-bird bag. The duck season is also expected to be 60 days during most years. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement:

When both duck and Canada goose seasons are each 60 days in the Coastal Zone, those seasons should have the same season dates. (n = 95)

85% Yes
5% No
9% No Opinion

34. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about New Jersey's waterfowl seasons.

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Zones create crowding in the area I hunt (n = 664)	10%	20%	42%	15%	13%
Zones give more hunting opportunity by providing staggered days across zones (n = 664)	23%	34%	28%	11%	4%
I am satisfied with the geographic layout of New Jersey's duck zones (n = 664)	30%	31%	27%	9%	3%
The duck season should be open during Thanksgiving holiday weekend in all zones (n = 665)	58%	18%	19%	3%	2%
The duck season should be open during Christmas-New Years holiday in all zones (n = 668)	64%	17%	15%	3%	1%

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
In the areas I hunt, most ducks arrive after the season closes (<i>n</i> = 668)	26%	31%	22%	15%	6%
Duck hunting seasons during February would probably harm duck populations (<i>n</i> = 666)	11%	15%	35%	17%	21%
Waterfowl seasons should open on Saturday or major holiday like Thanksgiving (<i>n</i> = 666)	34%	24%	27%	10%	6%
Waterfowl seasons should open on a weekday (<i>n</i> = 664)	19%	13%	40%	15%	14%
Given the choice, it is more important that waterfowl seasons OPEN on Saturday than CLOSE on Saturday (<i>n</i> = 667)	27%	19%	40%	8%	6%
Waterfowl seasons should avoid the firearm buck season week in December (<i>n</i> = 662)	18%	14%	22%	13%	33%
The increase in the black duck bag limit from 1 bird to 2 birds since 2016 was a good change (<i>n</i> = 665)	58%	25%	15%	1%	0%
I see fewer Atlantic brant during the hunting season than I did a decade ago (<i>n</i> = 668)	12%	19%	54%	9%	6%

35. Sunday hunting is closed by state statute in New Jersey except for bow hunting deer on some land types. However, the US Fish and Wildlife Service gives “compensatory days” to states closed on Sunday by state statute. Specifically, states with Sunday closures in the Atlantic Flyway get 60 hunting-days for ducks.

If each of the following options provided equal conservation for duck populations, which option would you prefer as a duck season structure in New Jersey? Please note that both options allow 60 days of duck hunting. (*n* = 665)

56% A 60-day, 10-week season with Sundays closed to duck hunting (status quo)
37% A 60-day, 8.5-week season with Sundays open to duck hunting (hypothetical season structure that would require statutory change by NJ Legislature)
8% No opinion or not sure

36. Managers will implement restrictive seasons when the population is low to rebuild population size. Which of the following would you prefer for a restrictive **Atlantic brant** season? (*n* = 663)

34% I would prefer a 30-day season with a 1-bird bag
26% If the brant population cannot sustain a 50-day season with a 2-bird bag, I would prefer to see the brant hunting season just be closed, even if closure might last several years
40% No opinion or not sure

37. The current “standard” hunting season package for Atlantic brant when the population is of moderate size is a 50-day season with a 2-bird bag. The 50-day brant season is embedded within the 60-day duck season. Which of the following would you prefer for a “standard” Atlantic brant season? (*n* = 664)

39% I would prefer a 50-day brant season with a 2-bird bag (status quo)
21% I would prefer a 60-day brant season with a 1-bird bag that coincides with the duck season
41% No opinion or not sure

38. What resource(s) do you use to get New Jersey waterfowl regulations? Please list your choices in the chart below.

	Frequently	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Annual Hunting Digest (<i>n</i> = 659)	54%	18%	22%	6%
Migratory Bird Regulations Card (<i>n</i> = 659)	64%	16%	14%	6%
Online Hunting & Trapping Explorer App (<i>n</i> = 644)	15%	7%	27%	51%
NJ Fish and Wildlife Webpage (<i>n</i> = 651)	28%	20%	33%	19%

States must choose within guidelines promulgated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) when selecting annual hunting season dates and the alignment of zones and splits. Every 5 years, the USFWS allows each state to select a zone and split “package” but the state must maintain their selected zone and split package for the next 5 years. New Jersey was one of the first states to implement zoning and has had the same 3-zone alignment (North, South, and Coastal) since 1980. The next zone and split package choice for states comes for the 2026-2030 seasons.

Zone and split options for the 2026-30 seasons are likely to be:

Option 1: Four zones with 1 season segment per zone Option 2: No zones with 3 season segments

Option 3: Two zones with 3 season segments

Option 4: Three zones with 2 season segments (NJ option since 1980)

Option 3 is a relatively new option and has been offered by the USFWS only since the last zone/split packages in 2019.

In New Jersey, no hunters have ever lobbied for Option 1 and most hunters agree that Option 3 is more desirable than Option 2. As such, it would seem the zone/split choice in New Jersey would come down to our status quo alignment (Option 4 with 3 zones and 2 segments) or the relatively new Option 3 choice of 2 zones with 3 segments.

Below are 2 choices with maps and 2023-24 real (3 zones; 2 segments) and potential (2 zones; 3 segments) season dates. Note that the potential, 2 zone, 3 segment alignment, retains the existing North Zone (renamed “Upper Zone”), and combines the existing South and Coastal Zones (renamed “Lower Zone”) into 1 zone. For the 2023-24 season, the table below indicates the number of days available for duck hunting both for hunters who stay in one zone and for hunters who cross zones.

39. Which of the following zone and split options would you prefer for New Jersey duck seasons for the 2026 to 2031 hunting seasons? (*n* = 663)

52% I would prefer Option A (status quo) that uses 3 zones and 2 season segments
39% I would prefer Option B (new alignment) that uses 2 zones and 3 season segments
9% No opinion

40. Hunting guides provide opportunities for less experienced hunters and for hunters with limited equipment or time. Many do-it-yourself hunters view guides as competition for private land for hunting leases or that guides put too much hunting pressure on birds in many areas. Like other service-driven businesses, hunting guides run the spectrum from experienced and well respected in their field to guides who provide a poor experience for their clients. The following questions are intended to gather your opinions about waterfowl hunting guides in New Jersey.

During the past 5 years, how many times have you hunted waterfowl with a guide service in New Jersey? (*n* = 661)

80% Never →Go to Q44
8% Once
9% 2-5 times
3% More than 5 times

41. Which of the following best describes most waterfowl hunts that you took in New Jersey with a guide? (*n* = 135)

45% Field hunt for snow geese or Canada geese
10% Sea duck hunt in the ocean
28% Coastal Zone hunt for ducks and brant
16% Other type of waterfowl hunt

42. Which of the following best describes your experiences with waterfowl guide services in New Jersey during the past 5 years? (*n* = 134)

37% Excellent
32% Good
19% Mediocre
10% Not a good hunting experience, but at least safe
1% An unsafe hunting experience

43. & 44. Which types of lands and waters should waterfowl guides be allowed to operate on in New Jersey?
Check all that you think should apply. (*n* = 661)

65% Private land (eg: goose fields)
24% Nontidal parts of WMAs (eg: lakes or WMA fields)
39% Tidal waters and marshes
45% Ocean
27% No opinion

45. Some things may affect your waterfowl hunting experiences and participation. Indicate which of the following that are either not barriers, minor barriers, or major barriers, to your waterfowl hunting in New Jersey.

	Not a Barrier	Minor Barrier	Major Barrier	Not Sure
Difficulty finding areas to hunt waterfowl on private land (<i>n</i> = 654)	18%	25%	49%	8%
Difficulty finding areas to hunt waterfowl on public land (<i>n</i> = 657)	39%	36%	22%	3%
Difficulty finding a mentor (<i>n</i> = 653)	62%	12%	6%	20%
Public waterfowl hunting areas are too crowded (<i>n</i> = 656)	16%	46%	33%	5%
Not enough boat ramps for access (<i>n</i> = 656)	33%	34%	21%	13%
Waterfowl populations are too low (<i>n</i> = 657)	37%	34%	14%	14%
Unethical behavior by other hunters (<i>n</i> = 656)	27%	40%	22%	11%
Not enough free time or health problems (<i>n</i> = 657)	48%	30%	18%	4%
Waterfowl hunting regulations are too confusing (<i>n</i> = 655)	63%	30%	6%	2%
Waterfowl hunting is too expensive (<i>n</i> = 657)	54%	37%	7%	2%
Local ordinances concerning firearm discharge (<i>n</i> = 657)	36%	32%	28%	4%
Trouble finding a hunting partner (<i>n</i> = 656)	75%	17%	5%	3%
I don't have a boat (<i>n</i> = 656)	79%	11%	7%	3%

46. Waterfowl blind regulations vary by state. This question pertains to constructed blinds that are left in place either on the marsh, shoreline, or dug into the ground as a pit blind (hereafter, “permanent” blinds). In New Jersey, permanent blinds are prohibited on state Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) that have limited space for waterfowl hunting (13 of 120 WMAs) and all federal National Wildlife Refuges. Which of the following statements best describes your opinion of what regulations should be in New Jersey for permanent waterfowl hunting blinds? (*n* = 657)

16% Permanent blinds should be allowed anywhere
42% Permanent blinds should be allowed only on private land, but be prohibited on all public lands
32% The current regulations are fine and should not be changed
3% Permanent blinds should be prohibited everywhere
6% No opinion

47. What is your age

Mean = 48

48. How many years have you been hunting waterfowl? (*n* = 658)

16% 1-5 years
14% 6-10 years
10% 11-15 years
60% 16 or more years

49. How many days did you hunt waterfowl in New Jersey last year? (*n* = 658)

3% None
17% 1-5 day
21% 6-10 days
14% 11-15 days
45% More than 15 days

50. Many hunters pursue different species, such as waterfowl, deer, or pheasants. Of all the species you hunt, how important is waterfowl hunting relative to other types of hunting? (*n* = 658)

45% Waterfowl is most important
37% Waterfowl is one of my most important
16% Waterfowl is average importance
2% Waterfowl is one of my least important
0% Waterfowl is least important

51. How many of the last 5 years did you hunt waterfowl in New Jersey? (*n* = 658)

0% 0 years
5% 1 years
5% 2 years
9% 3 years
6% 4 years
73% 5 years

52. I am a: (*n* = 657)

88% New Jersey resident →Go to Q53
9% Resident of Pennsylvania, Delaware, or New York →Go to end of survey
4% Nonresident not from states listed above →Go to end of survey

53. I reside in the following New Jersey County: (*n* = 575)

9% Atlantic	8% Gloucester	9% Ocean
2% Bergen	1% Hudson	1% Passaic
11% Burlington	6% Hunterdon	6% Salem
4% Camden	1% Mercer	3% Somerset
7% Cape May	4% Middlesex	4% Sussex
5% Cumberland	8% Monmouth	1% Union
1% Essex	6% Morris	3% Warren