

PROPOSAL 16

5 AAC 85.065(4)(A-F)(H) and (I). Hunting seasons and bag limits for small game.

Shift the hunting season for migratory game birds in Units 1–4 as follows:

If adopted, the migratory game bird season for Units 1–4 would be open **Sept. 1—Dec. 16** [SEPT. 16—DEC. 31] for residents and nonresidents.

Should the Board of Game (board) members find themselves unable to adopt this proposal, I urge them to consider alternating the waterfowl season annually, a September 1 – December 16 season on odd years and a September 16 – December 31 season on even years. This would be a reasonable compromise for all hunters should there continue to be interest in late December hunting opportunities.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? In 2008, the board passed a proposal that changed the waterfowl season opening date for Units 1–4 from September 1 to September 16. I hold some responsibility for the change as I spearheaded the effort by submitting the proposal. The purpose of my proposal was to allow for a couple more weekends of mallard hunting in December as late season hunting in the early 2000s was excellent. At the time, a hunter survey completed by the Department of Fish and Game showed a small preference toward the later start date, however, opinions varied throughout the region.

This proposal is submitted in an effort to return the Southeast Alaska waterfowl season back to a start date of September 1. Following the implementation of the current September 16 start date, there have been several board proposals and public comments supporting a return to the former start date. Reports from the Gustavus area indicate that access to sandhill crane hunting has been reduced by the later start date and folks in the Haines area seem unhappy with the current season structure as well. The loss of opportunities for other hunters was an unintended consequence of the change in season dates and this issue has weighed on me for some time.

My observations, as well as those of others, over the past five or six years have shown good numbers of pintail, teal and wigeon moving down the outer coast in late August and early September and many of these birds have passed through the area prior to the September 16 opener. I have made fewer late season hunting trips recently and have not seen the consistency in those December trips that there was a decade ago. I continue to find myself gravitating more toward opportunities earlier in the season and can no longer advocate for the delayed season.

It is my opinion that the importance of restoring those regional hunting opportunities in early September outweighs any benefit of the later hunting season. I cannot offer any information on current hunter participation levels during the last two weeks of December, but I ask the board to consider upcoming public and advisory committee comments when addressing this issue.

PROPOSED BY: Mike Vaughn

(HQ-F18-015)
