

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR SEASON SETTING IN NEW YORK'S WESTERN ZONE

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Chief Concerns In Duck Season Selection

- **Availability of the resource**
 - coincidence with waterfowl migration peaks
- **Access to the resource**
 - Availability of open water
- **Coincidence with available time off**
 - Maximize holidays & weekends

Key Western Zone Migratory Time Frames

- There are three critical migratory time frames for this zone:
 - **Mid-to-late October**
 - Peak Wood Duck numbers
 - Good numbers of GW Teal
 - **All of November**
 - Peak numbers of Mallards & Black Ducks
 - Peak harvest of Bluebills
 - **Late December/early January**
 - Peak number of Cans, Redheads, Whistlers etc.

What Are The Critical Weeks?

- In the late 80s/early 90s, duck seasons were reduced to 30 or 40 days
- Waterfowler input at that time identified three weeks as critical within the Western Zone
 - **Last week of October**
 - **First two weeks of November**
 - Surveys have repeatedly identified November as the most productive/important waterfowling month

Weather Can Limit Access To The Resource

- Larger Finger Lakes never freeze - loss of access due to weather generally not a problem
- Freeze-up is a problem for smaller inland lakes & the Niagara River
 - Chautauqua Lake typically frozen every year during the late split
 - Niagara river blinds lost to ice once every three years

Differing Views on Saturday Opener

- A Saturday opener maximizes opportunity for the most hunters, especially youngsters
- Arguments against a weekend opener:
 - weekend openers place extreme pressure on the resource and can literally drive birds out of public areas
 - weekend openers can offer an inhospitable hunting experience especially on heavily hunted public marshes
 - Saturday opener less important with liberal 50/60-day seasons

Facts and Views On The Late Split

- Late split has traditionally been viewed as a time to hunt divers...but this depends on location
 - USFWS harvest data for Finger Lakes counties show that primary harvested duck during late split is the mallard
 - USFWS harvest data shows that majority of Western Zone Bluebills are harvested in October/November; only exception is Erie County
- NYSDEC surveys reveal:
 - Only 40% of NYS Western Zone waterfowlers hunt the late split
 - Nearly 90% hunt the early split
- FL&WNYWA and Region 9 surveys reveal that majority of respondents want:
 - 48/12 split for 60-day season; 40/10 split for 50-day season
 - some days in January each year
 - some days coinciding with shotgun deer season
 - During the 1960s, duck season routinely ran into deer season
 - No recorded instance of a waterfowler being accidentally shot by a deer hunter

Miscellaneous

- Refuges are important as educational/training grounds for new/ young waterfowlers; therefore should maximize number of refuge days (Tues., Thurs., Sat.)
- Late split dates should coincide with shutdowns of schools/businesses for the holidays
- Youth hunt dates should be placed at least 2 weeks after end of Sept. goose season
 - Gunning pressure on geese has been shown to drive ducks from an area
- The Wood Duck and locally-produced mallards are the key ducks in October
 - Few BW Teal are seen in NY Western Zone; numbers are at *critically low levels* in the annual Eastern Survey
 - Good numbers of GW Teal are available in November as well as October