



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Tuesday, Oct. 21, 2025

**Media contact:** [dnr.pio@illinois.gov](mailto:dnr.pio@illinois.gov)

## **IDNR announces waterfowl season dates and zone lines for 2026-2030**

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) has selected waterfowl season dates and zone lines for the 2026-2030 seasons based on a thorough review of scientific information and input from waterfowl hunters.

“Illinois is a large, diverse state with weather and climate patterns that change significantly from north to south,” said **Doug McClain, IDNR’s wetland wildlife program manager**. “Taking this reality into account, along with the federal waterfowl framework and the diverse hunting styles and opinions of waterfowl hunters, these dates and zone lines offer opportunity for all waterfowl hunters across the state. Illinoisans hunt in different habitat types and with different styles, necessitating compromises on these regulations.”

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) regulations require states to establish zone lines for a five-year period, and the USFWS establishes the frameworks within which states must select their regulations.

Since 2011, Illinois has had four waterfowl hunting zones without split duck seasons. Over the past several years, hunters have shown increasing support for alternative options.

For the 2026-2030 seasons in Illinois, the former South-Central and South zones have been combined to form one South Zone. All other zone boundaries will remain the same because 90% of waterfowl hunters surveyed across the state indicated their county is in the correct zone.

Waterfowl hunters expressed considerable support to incorporate a split within the duck season. This included hunters who responded to the Illinois Waterfowl Hunter Survey, as well as those who attended one of seven public meetings during the spring.

“A split duck season is not permitted under the federal framework if Illinois had continued with four zones, so these changes went hand in hand,” **McClain said**. “In addition, hunters generally preferred later season dates, so splits were implemented in all zones to allow for later end dates for duck seasons. Those preferences were balanced with biological data to avoid mismatches of season timing and peak waterfowl abundance.”

In general, duck season start dates are similar to those used previously for the North and Central zones, with seasons ending slightly later through the use of a split. The South Zone structure will look different, with a duck season start date similar to that of the former South-Central Zone and with the second segment of the season ending in late January every year.

New zone lines and season dates will not take effect until the 2026 season. A map of waterfowl zone lines for the 2026-2030 seasons, as well as season dates for each zone, can be found [online](#).

Season dates and zone lines for the 2025-2026 hunting season are already set and can be found in IDNR's current [hunting and trapping digest](#) or on the [Hunt Illinois](#) website.

###

#### **About IDNR**

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources is celebrating 100 years of conservation and service to the people of Illinois throughout 2025. The department was established July 1, 1925, as the Illinois Department of Conservation, bringing under one umbrella oversight of fish and game, forestry, public works, and lakes.

Today, IDNR's work encompasses management of about 400 sites across Illinois, including state parks and historic sites; wildlife, fisheries, forestry, and natural heritage; Lake Michigan water allocation and coastal management; conservation police; mines and minerals; oil and gas; issuance of licenses, permits, and numerous grants; the World Shooting and Recreational Complex in Sparta; and the Illinois State Museum. Visit <https://dnr.illinois.gov> for more information.