

Summary of KDWPT 2012 Southeast Zone Duck Hunter Survey

Introduction

Incorporating stakeholder feedback is an important component when developing wildlife regulations, particularly on issues that are of societal nature (stakeholder preferences). For example, individual states can select season dates for migratory game birds within the given frameworks derived by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS). The manner in which individual states set their season dates within the Federal Frameworks does not largely impact continental waterfowl populations, but can greatly impact duck hunter satisfaction.

Kansas has a diverse landscape that offers many different waterfowling opportunities. Matching season dates with available habitat types, migration chronology, and season preferences of duck hunters for specific areas is not only important to maximize harvest opportunity but also to improve hunter satisfaction. For the 2011-12 duck season, the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism (KDPWT) was able to offer an additional zone to its Low Plains Unit (see map). This new zone was created in an attempt to satisfy waterfowl hunters who might prefer hunting later in the season in Southeast Kansas. Waterfowl hunters are passionate about their craft and KDWPT received very strong sentiment regarding the setting of the season dates for the new Southeast zone and the use of formal opinion surveys may assist KDPWPT in the waterfowl season setting process.

Methods

A survey was conducted to gauge duck hunters' satisfaction and gain insight into season preferences in the Kansas Low Plains Unit Southeast Zone. Survey participants were targeted whose zip codes were in or within close proximity to the Southeast zone. Hunters from the metropolitan areas of Kansas City and Wichita who may travel to take advantage of this zone were also targeted.

In January 2012, 6,516 surveys (Appendix A) were mailed to Kansas residents who identified themselves as a duck hunter with the purchase of a 2011-12 Kansas HIP Stamp. Anyone required by law to buy a hunting license must participate in the Harvest Information Program (HIP) if they hunt migratory birds. In the two-page survey an introductory paragraph stated the purpose of the survey, how they selected to participate, and the importance of promptly completing the 11 question survey. In February a reminder and a second survey were issued to 3,866 individuals who did not respond to the first mailing.

Results & Discussion

By April 1, 2012, 3,808 surveys were either returned via US Mail or through the online option. This equals a direct response rate of 58.4%. After accounting for incorrect addresses and survey refusals, the corrected response rate was 60.0%. This is a relatively high response rate for a wildlife survey (KDWPT 2010 Small Game Hunter Activity Survey response rate was 25%). This might be due in part to the new designation of the Southeast and duck hunters in the area have personal stakes regarding season dates for this zone. Hunters that were affected were likely to respond. This is also supported in that KDWPT has received very strong sentiment regarding the season dates from those who want earlier season dates as well those in favor of later dates.

As this survey attempted to gain information about the preferences of those who hunt in the Southeast Zone, Question 1 instructed those who hunted only in the Southeast Zone (n=1,848, 48.5%) during the 2011-12 duck season to complete the survey. Those who did not hunt in the Southeast Zone in the 2011-12 season (n = 1,919, 51.5%) were instructed not to complete the survey any further and to return the survey in the postage paid envelope.

It is important to know where hunters from the survey hunted the most. Question 2 asked the participants to identify the county in which they hunted the most during the 2011-12 season. Linn (n=356, 19.0%) and Neosho (n = 192, 10.2%) were the most reported counties. Marais Des Cygens Wildlife Area in Linn County and Neosho Wildlife Area in Neosho County are two of the most popular public waterfowl hunting areas in eastern Kansas, and also have a number of private duck hunting clubs in these counties. So, it is reasonable that Linn and Neosho counties are the two most hunted counties. See Table 1 for a list of the counties reported.

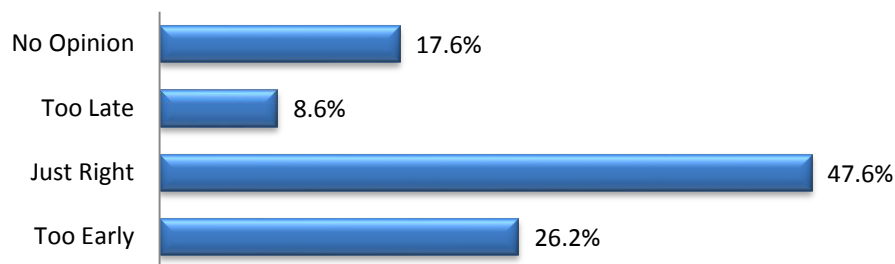
As survey participants were selected from the eastern portion of the state, it was expected most of the respondents would also hunt in the Southeast and Late Zones. Question 3 was to quantify which zones the respondents hunted in. Ninety-three percent reported to have hunted in the Southeast Zone, and 42% hunted in the Late Zone. These zones provide ample opportunity for quality duck hunting, and they have a number of public areas (see question 11 for areas mostly hunted), as well as a high number of private lands specifically managed for duck hunting. Waterfowl hunters are also highly mobile and many took advantage of hunting opportunities in the Early and High Plains Zones. Ten percent hunted in the Early Zone and a little over 1% hunted in the High Plains. Hunters living in the eastern portion of the state that hunted these western zones likely do so to take advantage of the early season opportunities when the season is closed in the Low Plains Late and Southeast Zones.

A justification of the creation of the Southeast Zone was that it would increase hunter satisfaction which in turn may improve hunter recruitment and retention. Question 4 was designed to gauge how the creation of this new zone affected hunter satisfaction. For 57.2% (n=1,064) of the respondents the new Southeast Zone boundary had no impact in overall

satisfaction with duck hunting in Kansas. For 33.1% (n = 616) it improved satisfaction (slightly = 303, 16.3% and greatly = 313, 16.8%). For 9.6% it decreased their satisfaction (slightly = 104, 5.6% and greatly = 75, 4.0%). There are a variety of factors that affect hunter satisfaction (hunter opportunities, hunter success, and etc). In this inaugural season, KDWPPT took a conservative approach to the change of season dates from the late zone to the southeast zone. Further manipulations in these dates could greatly affect hunter satisfaction (i.e. greatly moving season dates on either side of the frameworks, or if the number of days in the frameworks was reduced).

Season dates are a component that might affect hunter satisfaction. Matching season dates to hunter preference gives the hunter the ability to hunt when they want to hunt; however, this can also vary greatly from hunter to hunter based on where they hunt, what they hunt, how they hunt, other time commitments, other non-waterfowl hunting seasons (deer, pheasant, and etc.) and other variables. In Kansas some hunters prefer earlier season when it is warmer and target early migrants like teal and wood ducks. Others prefer targeting mallards in December and January. Question 5 was asked to gather an overall impression of the timing of the 2011-12 season dates in the Southeast Zone (Nov. 5 – Jan. 8 and Jan. 21-29). The majority of respondents (n = 852, 47.6%) found the timing of the season “Just Right”. Twenty-six percent believed the season was “Too Early” (n = 469), 8.6% thought it was “Too Late” (n = 154) and 18% did not have an opinion (n=314). Kansas waterfowl hunters are just as diverse as Kansas waterfowl hunting opportunities and it is a daunting task to create a package that works for all. Zones and splits are one tool that helps to serve a broad constituent base and hunting opportunities.

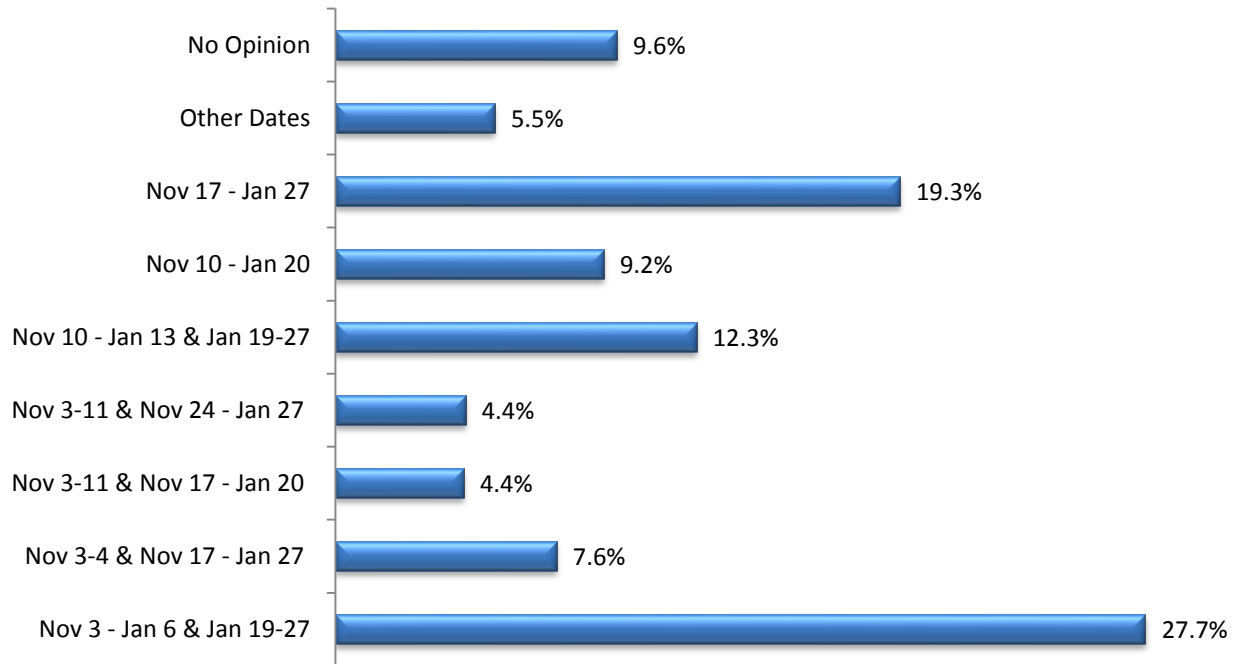
Question 5. Timing of the 2011-12 Duck Season in Southeast, KS



Question 6 was the most direct question about hunters’ preferred dates for upcoming 2012-13 duck season in the Southeast Zone. The most preferred dates (n = 498, 27.7%) mirror the 2011-12 season with changes to the calendar year which would be Nov. 3 – Jan. 6 and Jan. 19-27. The second preference (n=347, 19.3%) was for Nov. 17 - Jan. 27 even though this option would

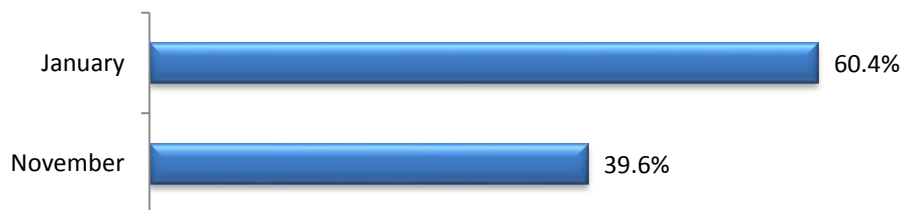
result in 72 hunting days rather than the 74 hunting days allotted under the USFWS Frameworks.

Question 6. Season Dates Preference for the 2012-13 Duck Season in Southeast, KS



Many hunters may believe it is important to have later season dates and this is reflected in question 7 where 60.4% of the respondents (n = 1062) would prefer more duck hunting days in January than in November (n = 696, 39.6%).

Question 7. Month which duck hunters prefer more days to hunt ducks in Southeast, KS



Having a hunting location is one of the greatest obstacles to why people don't hunt or quit hunting. With its great number of waterfowling opportunities, this is not a factor for waterfowl

hunters in Southeast Kansas where 90% of respondents (n = 1,620) replied that they do have a location in the Southeast Zone to hunt ducks in January (Question 8).

Weather conditions greatly affect waterfowl hunting. Fronts can bring new birds to area, change bird behavior and increase harvest opportunities. However, prolonged cold periods can freeze marshes and reduce the amount of area available to hunting. Question 9 asked participants how the season dates of Nov. 17, 2012 – Jan. 27, 2013 would impact their ability to hunt ducks in Kansas' Southeast Zone: Forty-six indicated that those dates would positively impact their duck hunting in Southeast Kansas (n = 828, 45.9%), while 18% noted that it would negatively impact their duck hunting in Southeast Kansas (n = 327). Thirty-six responded that it would have no impact on their hunting (n = 648).

The debate of season dates might be posed as a private land vs. public land hunter issue. Question 10 was posed to quantify where most hunters hunted during the 2011-12 season. One thousand four hundred and twenty-four indicated that during the 2011-12 they hunted private land at least once. Two thousand one hundred and fifty-one responded that they hunted public areas. Marais Des Cygnes Wildlife Area was the most hunted (n = 408, 22.6%) followed by Neosho Wildlife Area (n = 291, 16.1%), of those wildlife areas listed on the survey (see question 10 on Appendix A).

Seventeen percent of the respondents provided additional comments (n = 659). Comments varied with the greatest number of comments relating to opinions on season dates, zone boundaries, and management on public lands.

Table 1. List of Kansas counties in which respondents reported hunting the most during the 2011-12 duck season.

County	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Linn	356	19.0%
Neosho	192	10.2%
Butler	121	6.4%
Coffey	119	6.3%
Montgomery	100	5.3%
Miami	96	5.1%
Crawford	91	4.8%
Cowley	82	4.4%
Lyon	74	3.9%
Greenwood	62	3.3%
Labette	60	3.2%
Cherokee	57	3.0%
Elk	45	2.4%
Sedgwick	40	2.1%
Anderson	38	2.0%
Franklin	38	2.0%
Bourbon	36	1.9%
Woodson	29	1.5%
Sumner	27	1.4%
Reno	23	1.2%
Osage	20	1.1%
Johnson	18	1.0%
Wilson	18	1.0%
Douglas	17	0.9%
Jefferson	15	0.8%
Chautauqua	12	0.6%
Kingman	11	0.6%
Allen	10	0.5%
Harvey	10	0.5%
Barton	8	0.4%
Marion	7	0.4%
Stafford	7	0.4%
Pratt	6	0.3%
Atchison, Jackson, Shawnee, McPherson, Shawnee	3	0.2%
Barber, Chase, Ellsworth, Leavenworth, Riley	2	0.1%
Clay, Cloud, Dickinson, Ford, Harper, Jewell, Rice, Saline, Trego, Wabuaunsee	1	0.1%

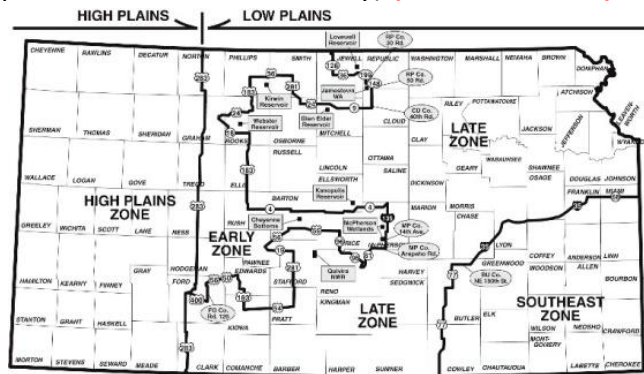
Appendix A. Survey instrument with corresponding number of responses and percentages.

January 15, 2012

Thank you for taking the time to complete the Kansas Duck Hunting Zone survey. Your name was chosen from individuals who purchased a HIP stamp. Your answers are confidential and will be used to help guide waterfowl management in Kansas. Please return the survey even if you did not attempt to hunt ducks during the 2011-12 hunting season and return it to us in the pre-paid envelope provided, or log on to <http://www.surveymonkey.com/KSDucks1> to complete the survey online. Your prompt response will eliminate the need for additional mailings.

1. Did you attempt to hunt ducks in the Southeast Zone during the 2011-12 duck season? (See Map Below)

- Yes (n=1,848, 48.5%)
- No (Please stop here and return the survey) (n=1,919, 51.5%)



Kansas Duck Hunting Zones

2. In which county did you do most of your duck hunting? _____ (n=1,877)

3. Please check all zones that you hunted ducks in during the 2011-12 season.

- Southeast Zone (n=1,809, 92.8%)
- Late Zone (n=819, 42.0%)
- Early Zone (n=190, 9.7%)
- High Plains Zone (n=26, 1.3%)

4. How did the new Southeast Zone boundary impact your satisfaction with duck hunting in Kansas?

- Greatly increased my satisfaction (n=313, 16.8%)
- Slightly increased my satisfaction (n=303, 16.3%)
- Had no impact on my satisfaction (n=1064, 57.2%)
- Slightly decreased my satisfaction (n=104, 5.6%)
- Greatly decreased my satisfaction (n=75, 4.0%)

5. What did you think about the 2011-12 season dates in the Southeast Zone? (Nov. 5 – Jan. 8 and Jan. 21-29)

- Too Early (n=469, 26.2%)
- Just Right (n=852, 47.6%)
- Too Late (n=154, 8.6%)
- I don't know (n=314, 17.6%)

6. What would be your preferred duck season dates for the 2012-13 duck season in the Southeast Zone? (Federal regulations allow for 74 days with up to 1 split (2 segments) opening no earlier than Sept. 22 and ending no later than Jan. 27)

- Nov. 3 – Jan. 6 and Jan. 19-27 (similar to 2011) (n=498, 27.7%)
- Nov. 3 – 4 and Nov. 17-Jan. 27 (n=136, 7.6%)
- Nov. 3 – Nov. 11 and Nov. 17 – Jan. 20 (n=80, 4.4%)
- Nov. 3 – Nov. 11 and Nov. 24 – Jan. 27 (n=79, 4.4%)
- Nov. 10 – Jan. 13 and Jan. 19-27 (n=80, 4.4%)
- Nov. 10 – Jan. 20 (n=164, 9.2%)
- Nov. 17 – Jan. 27 (Resulting in 72 hunting days rather than 74) (n=347, 19.3%)
- Other _____ (n=98, 5.5%)
- No Opinion (n=173, 9.6%)

7. Which month do you prefer to hunt ducks in the Southeast Zone?

- November (resulting with fewer days in January) (n=696, 39.6%)
- January (resulting in fewer days in November) (n=1062, 60.4%)

8. Do you have a location in the Southeast Zone to hunt ducks in January?

- Yes (n=1,620, 89.8%)
- No (n=184, 10.2%)

9. How would the following season dates impact your ability to hunt ducks in Kansas? Southeast Zone: Nov. 17, 2012 – Jan. 27, 2013

- Positively impact my duck hunting in Southeast Kansas (n=828, 45.9%)
- Negatively impact my duck hunting in Southeast Kansas (n=327, 18.1%)
- No impact on my hunting (n=648, 35.9%)

10. Please check all areas you where hunted ducks during the 2011-12 season.

- Private Land (n=1,424, 78.8%)
- Flint Hills NWR/John Redmond Reservoir (n=191, 10.6%)
- Neosho Wildlife Area (n=291, 16.1%)
- Marais Des Cygnes Wildlife Area (n=408, 22.6%)
- El Dorado Wildlife Area/Reservoir (n=84, 4.6%)
- Other Public Areas (n=518, 28.7%)

11. Please provide any additional comments below. (n=659, 17.3%)