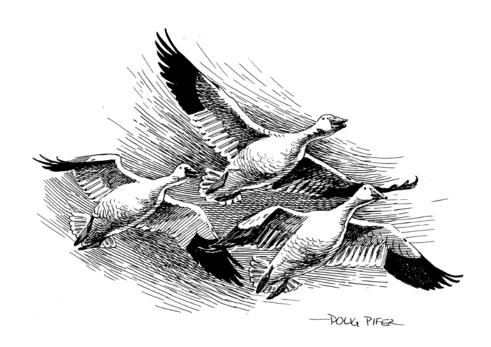
2012 Snow Goose Conservation Season in Pennsylvania

Harvest Summary Report



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July 2, 2012

Introduction

Over the past 3 decades the greater snow goose population has increased dramatically to nearly 1 million birds. The Atlantic Flyway Greater Snow Goose Management Plan (Atlantic Flyway Council 2009) calls for a population goal of 500,000 to 750,000 greater snow geese to bring the birds in balance with their natural habitats and associated biodiversity, and to reduce crop damage on wintering and staging areas.

Concern surrounding the overabundance of snow and Ross's goose populations and the problems associated with high populations of these birds prompted the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to develop a Light Goose Environmental Impact Statement (USFWS 2007) aimed at addressing the overabundance of light geese. The Final EIS recommended federal regulations be modified to allow for additional hunting methods to increase harvest rates on snow geese and Ross's geese.

On November 5, 2008, the USFWS published a final rule (Federal Register 73:215) implementing a Conservation Order for light geese which included allowing the use of special hunting methods to increase the harvest of light geese across the country. Pennsylvania elected to participate in the Light Goose Conservation Season and state regulations were amended by the Board of Commissioners (BOC) in January 2009 to allow the use of electronic calls and extended hunting hours (to ½ hour after sunset). In addition, in January 2011 the BOC legalized electronic decoys (otherwise illegal under state regulations) for the conservation season only, beginning with the 2011 season.

Methods

In 2012, season dates for the conservation season varied by goose zone, in order to allow the expanded hunting methods to go into effect as soon as all other waterfowl seasons closed in a particular zone. Dates were as follows:

Atlantic Population (AP) Zone:

Southern James Bay Population (SJBP) Zone:

Resident Population (RP) Zone:

January 26 – April 27, 2012

January 26 – April 27, 2012

February 27 – April 27, 2012

The daily bag limit was 25 geese, with no possession limit. Additional hunting methods allowed included the use of electronic calls and decoys, and expanded hunting hours (½ hour after sunset). Unplugged guns were not permitted. Hunters were required to obtain a free Snow Goose Conservation Permit either online or by mail. Along with the permit, all hunters were required to possess a general hunting license and a migratory game bird license (HIP registration), and those 16 and older were required to possess a federal duck stamp. Reporting of harvest and hunter activity was mandatory for all permit holders, even if they did not hunt, and harvest reports were due within 30 days of the close of the snow goose conservation season.

As in 2010 and 2011, we did not send reminder mailings to individuals that failed to send in their harvest reports, and we did not conduct an additional survey of non-respondents to

estimate their harvest. Because this methodology differs from that used in 2009, 2009 results presented below may not be directly comparable to 2010-12 results.

Results and Discussion

We issued 2,649 permits to hunters to participate in the 2012 Snow Goose Conservation Season. This included 69 nonresident hunters. We received 915 reports (34.5% reporting rate) by May 28.

Of the 915 reports received, 347 (37.9% of respondents) indicated they did not hunt at all during the conservation season. Of the 568 individuals that indicated they hunted during the conservation season their total retrieved harvest was 3,420 (Table 1). The additional hunting methods of extended hours and electronic calls resulted in a harvest (retrieved + unretrieved) of 542 and 1,356 geese, respectively. Total hunter days were 2,123 and the number of geese bagged per hunter day was 1.61. Electronic calls were used for 38% of the snow geese taken (2009-11 average was 30%) and electronic decoys were used for 31% of geese taken, while extended hunting hours had less effect, with 15% of the total geese taken after sunset (2009-11 average was 10%). (It should be noted that these expanded methods categories are not mutually exclusive; for example, a goose taken after sunset while using both electronic calls and electronic decoys would be recorded as harvested under all 3 methods).

The conservation season has provided additional recreational opportunity for Pennsylvania hunters, and increased the harvest of greater snow geese in Pennsylvania. However, USFWS Harvest Information Program data suggests that hunter effort and harvest may be shifting somewhat from the regular season to the conservation season; therefore, overall snow goose harvests in Pennsylvania may not be increasing as much as indicated by the conservation season data alone.

Literature Cited

- Atlantic Flyway Council. 2009. Management plan for Greater Snow Geese in the Atlantic Flyway. Snow Goose, Swan and Brant Committee of the Atlantic Flyway Migratory Game Bird Technical Section.
- U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2007. Final Environmental Impact Statement Light Goose Management. Washington, D.C., USA.

Table 1. Number of permits issued, reports received, hunter days and number of geese taken by hunting method during the 2009 to 2012 Snow Goose Conservation Season in Pennsylvania.

Year	Permits	No.	%	Days	Geese	Geese	After	W/e	W/ e
	Issued	Hunted	Hunted	Hunted	Bagged	Lost	Sunset	calls	decoys
2009 ^a	3,276	1,724	53	3,840	5,903	317	736	1,522	_b
2010	3,107	668	21	2,409	2,985	141	330	1,101	_b
2011	3,401	900	26	2,959	5,197	259	475	1,845	Unknown ^c
2012	2,649	568	21	2,123	3,420	134	542	1,356	1,091

^a Results from 2009 (89% reporting rate by permit holders due to use of reporting reminder postcard) may not be fully comparable to 2010-12 (no reminders used, reporting rates by permit holders 35-43%).

b Method prohibited by state regulation.
c No data collected on this method during 2011 conservation season.