

WEST VIRGINIA MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING

REGULATIONS SUMMARY
SEPTEMBER 2026 -
JANUARY 2027



WEST VIRGINIA

DNR

WVdnr.gov

WHAT'S NEW FOR 2026-2027

- South Branch WMA is no longer under special regulations for dove hunting.
- Stonewall Jackson WMA is now under special regulations for dove hunting. See inside brochure for details.

CANADA GEESE MANAGEMENT

West Virginia introduced giant Canada geese in the late 1970s and early 1980s to provide recreation for residents. While the introduction was a success, the population grew to nuisance levels in some areas. Despite being largely resident, these birds are regulated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, leading West Virginia to adopt a special September hunting season in 1994 to manage the population.

The state operates under a resident population management strategy because hunters primarily harvest birds that originate within West Virginia. This focus allows for more liberal hunting seasons compared to neighboring states with migratory zones. To support this management, WVDNR wildlife managers annually leg-band geese in mid-summer to track resident breeding birds. This data helps set annual regulations, ensures proper management strategies and prevents over-harvesting of migratory populations.



Each mid-summer, WVDNR wildlife biologists corral and leg-band Canada geese to help track resident breeding birds.



This pamphlet is a summary of the applicable laws and regulations governing migratory bird hunting in West Virginia. It is for informational purposes only and subject to change. It is created for your convenience and designed to provide simplified statements of the controlling law. However, nothing contained herein shall be read to preempt or supercede the laws themselves. Instead, the Code of Federal Regulations, the West Virginia Code and the West Virginia Code of State Rules are, at all times, the controlling laws, and if there is a conflict or a question, it is the Code of Federal Regulations, West Virginia Code and West Virginia Code of State Rules which prevail. The West Virginia Code and the West Virginia Code of State Rules are available for review in the Director's Office and at the Division of Natural Resources District Offices. Copies of the Code may also be found at: <https://code.wvlegislature.gov>. Copies of the state Code of State Rules can be obtained from the West Virginia Secretary of State. Copies of the Federal Code pertaining to migratory game birds can be found at ecfr.gov/current/title-50/chapter-I/subchapter-B/part-20?toc=1.

This program receives Federal financial assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Under Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability.

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STATE REGULATIONS

- > All licensed hunters (including lifetime and senior citizens) must possess a valid Harvest Information Program (HIP) registration card to hunt any migratory game birds.
- > Youth waterfowl hunting season is open to youths under 18 years old for taking ducks, geese, coots, gallinules and mergansers. Youth hunters under the age of 15 must be accompanied by a licensed adult age 18 or older. The accompanying adult may not hunt or possess a firearm and must remain near enough to the youth to render advice and assistance. An adult assisting a youth hunter during any special youth season may handle the hunter’s firearm to provide safe handling advice and help. Youth hunters age 15-17 must comply with the state and federal licensing requirements.
- > Concurrent hunting of waterfowl on all major streams, rivers, lakes, reservoirs, and wetlands is legal during the bucks-only deer season if the season for the waterfowl is also open.
- > Only nontoxic shot size T or smaller approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service may be used or be in the hunter’s possession while hunting waterfowl.
- > McClintic Wildlife Management Area
 - Hunting hours for waterfowl within the controlled waterfowl hunting area will be from legal shooting time until noon (prevailing time) Oct. 3-11, 2026.
 - Waterfowl hunting in the controlled hunt area will be by permit only Oct. 3-11, 2026. Go to WVhunt.com to apply.
 - Concurrent hunting is prohibited Oct. 3-11, 2026, in the controlled waterfowl hunting area.
 - Waterfowl hunting in the controlled hunt area is permitted during the remainder of the waterfowl season without a permit.
- > Green Bottom Wildlife Management Area
 - Hunting hours for waterfowl will be from legal shooting time until noon Oct. 3-11, 2026.
 - Concurrent hunting is prohibited Oct. 3-11, 2026.
- > Deed restrictions prohibit all hunting, including waterfowl, at Warden Lake Wildlife Management Area.

SHOOTING HOURS

Shooting hours for dove are from noon to sunset on opening day of the first segment and from one-half hour before sunrise to sunset during the remainder of the season. Shooting hours for rails, snipe, woodcock and waterfowl are from one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

STONEWALL JACKSON WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

There is controlled hunting on two designated mourning dove fields. These fields are restricted to dove hunting from state-controlled hunting posts, by permit only, during the period of Sept. 1-2, 2026, even if other hunting seasons run concurrently. Permits are non-transferable. Go to WVDnr.gov to apply. Applications are due by August 1, 2026. The controlled dove hunting area is marked by signs and includes marked hunting posts. Hunting must occur withing five yards of assigned posts. Shooting hours in the controlled dove hunting area follow the statewide shooting hours for mourning doves.

SUNDAY HUNTING

Waterfowl hunting is permitted on private and public lands (state or federal lands owned, leased, licensed to or under the control of the West Virginia DNR for wildlife management purposes, including all waterways) on Sundays.

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

Rules and Regulations for hunting on National Wildlife Refuges may be obtained from:

- > **OHIO RIVER ISLANDS NWR**
3982 Waverly Road, Williamstown, WV 26187
304-375-2923
- > **CANAAN VALLEY NWR**
6263 Appalachian Highway, Davis, WV 26260
304-866-3858

SEPTEMBER 2026 - JANUARY 2027 MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SEASONS				
SPECIES	OPEN SEASONS (All Dates Inclusive)	DAILY BAG LIMITS (a)	POSSESSION LIMITS	
Mourning Dove <i>3-way Split Season</i>	Sept. 1 - Oct. 11	15	45	
	Nov. 2 - Nov. 15			
	Dec. 7 - Jan. 10			
Sora and Virginia Rails	Sept. 1 - Nov. 9	10(d)	30(d)	
Wilson's Snipe	Sept. 1 - Dec. 16	8	24	
Woodcock	Oct. 17 - Nov. 21	3	9	
	Nov. 30 - Dec. 8			
Youth Waterfowl <i>(2 Single Days)</i>	Sept. 19	(b)	(b)	
	Oct. 31			
Ducks <i>3-way Split Season</i>	Oct. 3 - Oct. 11	6(c)(d)	18(c)(d)	
	Nov. 7 - Nov. 15			
	Dec. 21 - Jan. 31			
Scaup <i>(included in duck daily bag limit)</i>	Oct. 3 - Oct. 11	1(c)(d)		
	Nov. 7 - Nov. 15			
	Dec. 21 - Jan. 11			
	Jan. 12 - Jan. 31	2(c)(d)		
Coots	Same as Ducks	15	45	
Gallinules <i>2-way Split Season</i>	Oct. 3 - Oct. 11	15	45	
	Dec. 2 - Jan. 31			
Mergansers	Same as Ducks	5(d)	15(d)	
Early Canada Geese	Sept. 1 - Sept. 13	5(d)	15(d)	
Canada Geese/White-fronted Geese <i>3-way Split Season</i>	Oct. 3 - Oct. 18			
	Nov. 7 - Nov. 15			
	Dec. 8 - Jan. 31			
Snow and Blue Geese <i>3-way Split Season</i>	Oct. 3 - Oct. 18	5(d)	15(d)	
	Nov. 7 - Nov. 15			
	Dec. 8 - Jan. 31			
Brant	Jan. 2 - Jan. 31	1	3	
Closed Seasons	Tundra and Trumpeter Swans, King and Clapper Rails, Eiders, Whistling Ducks, Mottled Ducks, and Harlequin Ducks			
(a) The daily bag limit for falconry hunting is three (3) migratory game birds in the aggregate, and the possession limit is nine (9) migratory game birds in the aggregate.				
(b) The bag limit for the youth days is the same as the daily limit of the regular duck and geese seasons, except two (2) scaup may be taken as part of the six (6) duck daily bag limit.				
(c) The daily bag limit is six (6) ducks, including no more than four (4) mallards [no more than two (2) of which can be female], two (2) black ducks, three (3) pintails, three (3) wood ducks, two (2) redheads, two (2) canvasbacks, scaup (see the above table), four (4) sea ducks (including no more than three (3) scoters and three (3) long-tailed ducks). The duck possession limit can include only three times the daily bag limit.				
(d) In aggregate.				

SUMMARY OF FEDERAL REGULATIONS

The following is a synopsis of federal regulations that pertain to the hunting of migratory game birds. Persons requiring more information should go to ecfr.gov/current/title-50/chapter-I/subchapter-B/part-20, where they will find a complete version of 50 CFR Part 20. When state law is different from the following federal law, the hunter must comply with the most restrictive law.

WHAT TERMS DO I NEED TO UNDERSTAND?

Migratory Birds are birds protected by federal law as a result of treaties signed with other countries. Protected migratory birds are listed in Title 50 Code of Federal Regulations, Section. 10.13. This list includes almost all birds found in the United States with the exception of the house sparrow, feral pigeon (commonly called rock dove), European starling, Eurasian collared-dove, mute swan and upland game birds (which are protected by state laws). All migratory birds are protected. However, a subset of migratory birds is classified as migratory game birds and may be hunted in accordance with state and federal regulations. The list of migratory game birds includes species of ducks, geese (including brant), swans, doves and pigeons, cranes, rails, coots, gallinules and moorhens, woodcock and snipe, if there is an open season.

Daily bag limit means the maximum number of migratory game birds of a single species or combination (aggregate) of species permitted to be taken by one person in any one day during the open season in any one specified geographic area for which a daily bag limit is prescribed.

Aggregate daily bag limit means the maximum number of migratory game birds permitted to be taken by one person in any one day during the open season when such person hunts in more than one specified geographic area and/or for more than one species for which a combined daily bag limit is prescribed. The aggregate daily bag limit is equal to, but shall not exceed, the largest daily bag limit prescribed for any one species or combination of species, or for any one specified geographic area in which taking occurs.

WHAT HUNTING METHODS ARE ILLEGAL?

No persons shall take migratory game birds:

- With a trap, snare, net, rifle, pistol, swivel gun, shotgun larger than 10 gauge, punt gun, battery gun, machine gun, fish hook, poison, drug, explosive or stupefying substance;
- With a shotgun of any description capable of holding more than three shells, unless it is plugged with a one-piece filler, incapable of removal without disassembling the gun, so its total capacity does not exceed three shells;
- From or by means, aid or use of a sinkbox or any other type of low floating device, having a depression affording the hunter a means of concealment beneath the surface of the water;
- From or by means, aid, or use of any motor vehicle, motor-driven land conveyance or aircraft of any kind, except that paraplegics and persons missing one or both legs may take from any stationary motor vehicle or stationary motor-driven land conveyance;
- From or by means of any motorboat or other craft having a motor attached, or any sailboat, unless the motor has been completely shut off and/or the sails furled, and its progress there from has ceased;
- By the use or aid of live birds as decoys; although not limited to, it shall be a violation of this paragraph for any person to take migratory waterfowl on an area where tame or captive live ducks or geese are present unless such birds are and have been for a period of 10 consecutive days prior to such taking, confined within an enclosure which substantially reduces the audibility of their calls and totally conceals such birds from the sight of wild migratory waterfowl;
- By the use or aid of recorded or electrically amplified bird calls or sounds, or recorded or electrically amplified imitations of bird calls or sounds;
- By means or aid of any motor-driven land, water, or air conveyance, or any sailboat used for the purpose of or resulting in the concentrating, driving, rallying, or stirring up of any migratory bird;
- By the aid of baiting, or on or over any baited area, where a person knows or reasonably should know that the area is or has been baited.

Possession limit means the maximum number of migratory game birds of a single species or a combination of species permitted to be possessed by any one person when lawfully taken in the United States in any one specified geographic area for which a possession limit is prescribed.

Aggregate possession limit means the maximum number of migratory game birds of a single species or combination of species taken in the United States permitted to be possessed by any one person when taking and possession occurs in more than one specified geographic area for which a possession limit is prescribed. The aggregate possession limit is equal to, but shall not exceed, the largest possession limit prescribed for any one of the species or specified geographic areas in which taking and possession occurs.

Personal abode means one's principal or ordinary home or dwelling place, as distinguished from one's temporary or transient place of abode or dwelling such as a hunting club, or any club house, cabin, tent or trailer house used as a hunting club, or any hotel, motel or rooming house used during a hunting, pleasure or business trip.

Migratory bird preservation facility means:

- Any person who, at their residence or place of business and for hire or other consideration; or
- Any taxidermist, cold-storage facility or locker plant which, for hire or other consideration; or
- Any hunting club which, in the normal course of operations; receives, possesses or has in custody any migratory game birds belonging to another person for purposes of picking, cleaning, freezing, processing, storage or shipment.

It is legal to take migratory game birds, including waterfowl, coots, and cranes, on or over the following lands or areas that are not otherwise baited areas:

- Standing crops or flooded standing crops (including aquatics);
- Standing, flooded or manipulated natural vegetation; flooded harvested croplands; or lands or areas where seeds or grains have been scattered solely as the result of a normal agricultural planting, harvesting, post-harvest manipulation or normal soil stabilization practice;
- From a blind or other place of concealment camouflaged with natural vegetation;
- From a blind or other place of concealment camouflaged with vegetation from agricultural crops, as long as such camouflaging does not result in the exposing, depositing, distributing or scattering of grain or other feed; or
- Standing or flooded standing agricultural crops where grain is inadvertently scattered solely as a result of a hunter entering or exiting a hunting area, placing decoys or retrieving downed birds.

It is legal to take migratory game birds, except waterfowl, coots and cranes, on or over lands or areas that are not otherwise baited areas, and where grain or other feed has been distributed or scattered solely as the result of manipulation of an agricultural crop or other feed on the land where grown, or solely as the result of a normal agricultural operation.

WANTON WASTE OF MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

No person shall kill or cripple any migratory game bird without making a reasonable effort to retrieve the bird, and retain it in his actual custody, at the place where taken or between that place and either (a) his automobile or principal means of land transportation; or (b) his personal abode or temporary or transient place of lodging; or (c) a migratory bird preservation facility; or (d) a post office; or (e) a common carrier facility.

NON-TOXIC SHOT

No person may take ducks, geese (including brant), or coots while possessing shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading) other than approved non-toxic shot. For a list of approved non-toxic shot, see ecfr.gov/current/title-50/chapter-I/subchapter-B/part-20.

Normal agricultural planting, harvesting or post-harvest manipulation means a planting or harvesting undertaken for the purpose of producing and gathering a crop, or manipulation after such harvest and removal of grain, that is conducted in accordance with official recommendations of State Extension Specialists of the Cooperative Extension Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Normal agricultural operation means a normal agricultural planting, harvesting, post-harvest manipulation or agricultural practice that is conducted in accordance with official recommendations of state extension specialists of the Cooperative Extension Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Normal soil stabilization practice means a planting for agricultural soil erosion control or post-mining land reclamation conducted in accordance with official recommendations of state extension specialists of the Cooperative Extension Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture for agricultural soil erosion control.

Baited area means any area on which salt, grain or other feed has been placed, exposed, deposited, distributed or scattered, if that salt, grain or other feed could serve as lure or attraction for migratory game birds to, on, or over areas where hunters are attempting to take them. Any such area will remain a baited area for 10 days following the complete removal of all such salt, grain, or other feed.

OPENING DAY OF A SEASON

No person on the opening day of the season shall possess any freshly killed migratory game birds in excess of the daily bag limit, or aggregate daily bag limit, whichever applies.

FIELD POSSESSION LIMIT

No person shall possess, have in custody or transport more than the daily bag limit or aggregate daily bag limit, whichever applies, of migratory game birds, tagged or not tagged, at or between the place where taken and either (a) his automobile or principal means of land transportation; or (b) his personal abode or temporary or transient place of lodging; or (c) a migratory bird preservation facility; or (d) a post office; or (e) a common carrier facility.

TAGGING REQUIREMENT

No person shall put or leave any migratory game birds at any place (other than at his personal abode), or in the custody of another person for picking, cleaning, processing, shipping, transportation or storage (including temporary storage), or for the purpose of having taxidermy services performed, unless such birds have a tag attached, signed by the hunter, stating his address, the total number and species of birds, and the date such birds were killed. Migratory game birds being transported in any vehicle as the personal baggage of the possessor shall not be considered as being in storage or temporary storage.

CUSTODY OF BIRDS OF ANOTHER

No person shall receive or have in custody any migratory game birds belonging to another person unless such birds are properly tagged.

TERMINATION OF POSSESSION

Subject to all other requirements of this part, the possession of birds taken by any hunter shall be deemed to have ceased when such birds have been delivered by him to another person as a gift; or have been delivered by him to a post office, a common carrier, or a migratory bird preservation facility and consigned for transport by the Postal Service or a common carrier to some person other than the hunter.

Baiting means the direct or indirect placing, exposing, depositing, distributing or scattering of salt, grain or other feed that could serve as a lure, attraction or enticement for migratory gamebirds to, on or over any areas where hunters are attempting to take them. An area is considered baited for 10 days after the removal of the bait. In addition, in West Virginia, bait means shelled, shucked or unshucked corn, wheat or other grain or any other feed or edible enticement or any non-edible facsimile of an edible enticement.

Manipulation means the alteration of natural vegetation or agricultural crops by activities that include but are not limited to mowing, shredding, discing, rolling, chopping, trampling, flattening, burning or herbicide treatments. The term manipulation does not include the distributing or scattering of grain, seed or other feed after removal from or storage on the field where grown.

Natural vegetation means any non-agricultural, native or naturalized plant species that grows at a site in response to planting or from existing seeds or other propagules. The term natural vegetation does not include planted millet. However, planted millet that grows on its own in subsequent years after the year of planting is considered natural vegetation.

BANDED BIRDS

Report band recoveries online at reportband.gov. The toll-free phone number for reporting bird bands has been discontinued. Cooperation in reporting banded birds plays a vital role in their management, and continued support in this effort is greatly appreciated.

GIFT OF MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

No person may receive, possess, or give to another, any freshly killed migratory game birds as a gift, except at the personal abodes of the donor or donee, unless such birds have a tag attached, signed by the hunter who took the birds, stating such hunter's address, the total number and species of birds and the date such birds were taken.

TRANSPORTATION OF BIRDS OF ANOTHER

No person shall transport migratory game birds belonging to another person unless such birds are properly tagged.

SPECIES IDENTIFICATION REQUIREMENT

No person shall transport within the United States any migratory game birds, except doves and band-tailed pigeons, unless the head or one fully feathered wing remains attached to each such bird at all times while being transported from the place where taken until they have arrived at the personal abode of the possessor or a migratory bird preservation facility.

MARKING PACKAGE OR CONTAINER

No person shall transport by the Postal Service or a common carrier migratory game birds unless the package or container in which such birds are transported has the name and address of the shipper and the consignee and an accurate statement of the numbers of each species of birds therein contained clearly and conspicuously marked on the outside thereof.

MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING AND CONSERVATION STAMP

The law requires that each waterfowl hunter 16 years of age and older must carry on his person a current Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (Federal Duck Stamp) that is validated by the hunter signing the stamp in ink across the face of the stamp or a valid e-stamp purchased from duckstamp.com/e-stamp or any participating state.

SPECIFIC REGULATIONS

More restrictive regulations may apply to National Wildlife Refuges opened to public hunting. For more information, visit fws.gov/refuges.

DISTRICT OFFICES

> MAIN OFFICE

112 California Avenue
Charleston, WV 25305
304-558-6200

> DISTRICT 1

P.O. Box 99
1110 Railroad Street
Farmington, WV 26571
304-825-6787

> DISTRICT 2

1 Depot Street
Romney, WV 26757
304-822-3551

> DISTRICT 3

163 Wildlife Road
French Creek, WV 26218
304-924-6211

> DISTRICT 4

2006 Robert C. Byrd
Drive
Beckley, WV 25801
304-256-6947

> DISTRICT 5

480 Forks of Coal Way
Alum Creek, WV 25003
304-756-1023

> DISTRICT 6

76 Conservation Way
Parkersburg, WV 26104
304-420-4550

> OPERATIONS CENTER

738 Ward Road
Elkins, WV 26241
304-637-0245

WEST VIRGINIA

DNR

WILDLIFE RESOURCES SECTION

WEST VIRGINIA DIVISION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

112 California Avenue • Charleston • WV 25305

For questions regarding license requirements,
call 304-558-6200 or email
wvdnrcustomerservice@wv.gov.



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