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Governor Pat Quinn Seeks Interior Secretary's Support for Future Duck Zone Flexibility

Illinois seeking approval of fourth duck hunting zone

SPRINGFIELD, IL – Governor Pat Quinn is asking the U.S. Secretary of the Interior to consider granting Illinois more flexibility in setting future duck hunting seasons for the 2011-2015 seasons to enhance hunting opportunities and help retain and recruit waterfowl hunters. Federal rules only allow changes in duck hunting zones every five years and 2011 is the next opportunity states will have to change the rules regarding duck zones and split seasons.

Governor Quinn sent a letter to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar outlining the advantages of allowing Illinois to establish a fourth duck hunting zone. Current federal regulations allow states to be split into only three duck hunting zones, or two zones that can be split in two season segments within each zone or one zone that can be split into three season segments in each zone. The elongated geography of Illinois, with 430 miles from north to south, makes timing of waterfowl hunting seasons in the current three-zone configuration more difficult and contentious.

“A fourth zone would help alleviate the conflicts that are arising in Illinois when zones are forced to be too large to accommodate the weather conditions and available wetland habitats in all parts of a duck zone,” Governor Quinn wrote.

Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Director Marc Miller formally requested that four duck zones (or three zones with a split into two season segments in each zone) be considered in a letter to the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) last February.

This past week, wildlife staff from the IDNR participated in the Mississippi Flyway Council meeting and promoted the proposal for duck zone changes.

“I commend the hard work of IDNR Wildlife Chief John Buhnerkempe, our state waterfowl biologist Ray Marshall and others in advocating for expanded hunting opportunities for duck hunters,” Director Miller said. “Our wildlife professionals collaborated with other state representatives throughout the country to push for this needed change.”

All four Flyway Councils (including both the Upper and Lower Region Regulations Committees of the Mississippi Flyway Council) met earlier this month and endorsed allowing states additional options for duck hunting zones for the 2011-2015 seasons. The new options would include four zones with no splits, and three zones with splits into two season segments. The USFWS Service Regulations Committee was expected to consider the proposal at its meeting this week. This committee is comprised of USFWS personnel.