

STATEMENT OF SCOPE

Department of Natural Resources

Rule No.: WM-13-25 (E) and WM-14-25

Relating to: Establishing the 2026-2030 migratory bird season framework and regulations (ch. NR 10)

Rule Type: Permanent and Emergency

1. Finding/nature of emergency (Emergency Rule only):

The emergency rule procedure, pursuant to s. 227.24, Stats., is necessary and justified in establishing rules to protect the public welfare. The federal government and state legislature have delegated to the appropriate agencies rule-making authority to control the hunting of migratory birds. The State of Wisconsin must comply with federal regulations in the establishment of migratory bird hunting seasons and conditions. Federal regulations are not made available to states until the same year that the regulations must be implemented in order to have annual migratory bird hunting seasons. This proposed rule is designed to bring state hunting regulations for the 2026 season into conformity with the federal regulations. Normal rule-making procedures will not allow the promulgation of permanent rules prior to when the seasons should be open. Failure to modify department rules will result in the failure to provide hunting opportunities and the continuation of rules that conflict with federal regulations.

2. Detailed description of the objective of the proposed rule:

These rule orders will establish the migratory bird hunting season framework, which primarily includes hunting seasons and regulations for ducks and geese for a five-year period beginning in 2026.

3. Description of the existing policies relevant to the rule, new policies proposed to be included in the rule, and an analysis of policy alternatives:

These rules may modify season dates, bag limits, and other regulations for the duck and goose hunting seasons, most of which begin in September. These seasons are part of the federal migratory bird season frameworks and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) needs to be informed of the State of Wisconsin Natural Resources Board decisions on these seasons by late April, 2026. Publication and the effective date of a permanent rule is unlikely to occur prior to the start of many of the fall seasons in September of 2026 which is why the department is utilizing an emergency rule.

Additionally, the department will explore setting the migratory framework for a five-year period. An emergency rule will be used to establish the 2026 season. The permanent rule will be used to establish the 2027-2030 seasons. Historically, the season frameworks were established on a yearly basis. However, the season dates and bag limits typically don't fluctuate much from year to year. Recently, the department implemented a trial setting the migratory seasons for three years with the goal of moving to five-year intervals. Setting the seasons every five years would match the federal timeline for establishing migratory hunting zones. Moving away from setting the season structures on a yearly basis will save staff time and give hunters additional time to plan for the hunting seasons.

Migratory game bird hunting is regulated by the USFWS, in 50 CFR part 20, who will offer a final season framework to Wisconsin in the spring of 2026. The State of Wisconsin's season proposal will be based on the federal framework, flyway agreements, and local conditions. The season framework implemented by the emergency rule and companion permanent rule will remain in effect until superseded by future rule-making.

These rules may make additional updates, such as correcting cross-reference citations, updating road names on maps, changes needed in order to update application forms or revisions which are necessary for consistency with recently enacted legislation.

Migratory birds include wild ducks, geese, brant, doves, rails, coots, gallinules, woodcock, Wilson's snipe and jacksnipe.

4. Detailed explanation of statutory authority for the rule (including the statutory citation and language):

The chapter on wild animals and plants, in s. 29.014, Stats., "rule making for this chapter", establishes that the department shall maintain open and closed seasons for fish and game and any limits, rest days, and conditions for taking fish and game. This grant of rule-making authority allows the department to promulgate rules related to migratory game bird hunting and hunting and trapping for other species.

Special regulations on the taking of certain wild animals are authorized under s. 29.192, Stats., including specific language that authorizes rules related to Canada goose hunting.

The establishment of migratory game bird refuges is authorized in s. 23.09(2)(b), Stats., relating to the department's ability to designate locations reasonably necessary for the purpose of providing safe retreats in which birds may rest and replenish adjacent hunting grounds.

Wisconsin's boundary waters with other states are popular waterfowl hunting locations. Specific authority to regulate hunting in and on all interstate boundary waters and outlying waters is established in s. 29.041, Stats.,.

Sections 23.11 and 29.014, Stats., allow for the protection of natural resources on state lands such as migratory bird refuges, establish general department powers and authority to establish hunting and trapping regulations on department-managed lands.

5. Estimate of amount of time that state employees will spend developing the rule and of other resources necessary to develop the rule:

Approximately 420 hours will be needed by the department prior to and following the hearings.

6. List with description of all entities that may be affected by the proposed rule:

These rules will impact migratory game bird hunters and those who enjoy viewing waterfowl in Wisconsin.

7. Summary and preliminary comparison with any existing or proposed federal regulation that is intended to address the activities to be regulated by the proposed rule:

Migratory game bird hunting is regulated by the USFWS, in 50 CFR part 20. Under international treaty and federal law, migratory game bird seasons are closed unless opened annually through the USFWS regulations process. As part of the federal rule process, the service annually evaluates migratory game

bird populations and breeding habitat in cooperation with state provincial agencies and the Canadian Wildlife Service. After considering recommendations from the flyway councils of states and the guidance of cooperatively developed harvest strategies, the USFWS establishes annual frameworks within flyway or bird population regions. States can then establish hunting seasons within the sideboards for each species and region. As a result, the hunting seasons of neighboring states are similar to Wisconsin migratory game bird hunting regulations because they are subject to the same federal frameworks.

8. Anticipated economic impact of implementing the rule (note if the rule is likely to have an economic impact on small businesses):

No economic impacts are anticipated. The hunting season frameworks proposed in this rule will be comparable to those in place during the previous season. These rules are applicable to individual hunters and impose no compliance or reporting requirements for small business, nor are any design or operational standards contained in the rule.

9. Anticipated number, month and locations of public hearings:

The department anticipates holding several public hearings around the state in March 2026. Exact hearing dates and locations are to be determined.

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Signed by:

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For Karen Hyun, Ph.D., Secretary

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