

Assessing the Conservation Order for Light Geese in the Atlantic Flyway in 2009



Submitted in Fulfillment of the Reporting Requirements of the Conservation Order on Behalf of
the Participating States in the Atlantic Flyway

Snow Goose, Brant, and Swan Committee of the Atlantic Flyway Council

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In 2009, six states (Table 1) within the Atlantic Flyway participated in the conservation order (CO) on light geese that was established through the promulgation of the final rule regarding light geese (Federal Register Vol. 73, no 227). One state, Virginia, was unable to pass internal regulations in time to participate in 2009. However, Virginia plans to participate in the CO in 2010. States differed in their administration of the conservation order. All of the states, except for New York, required participants to obtain a permit to participate. Permits were obtained either online or through the mail. Maryland also issued permits through their automated licensing system. Maryland (\$5) and New Jersey (\$2) charged a fee for the permit. Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Vermont issued free permits. Participation in New York was complimentary of existing waterfowl hunting privileges and was a question on the New York Harvest Information Program (HIP) questionnaire.

The Atlantic Flyway developed a standard survey form template for use by states in assessing the impact of this conservation order (Appendix A). Hunter activity was solicited through a paper hunting diary and/or an online data entry screen. Reporting of activity, regardless of participation, was required in all 5 states that issued specific permits. New York surveyed a sample of people who registered in HIP to estimate participation and harvest. Follow up letters, emails, or phone calls to non-respondents were conducted in four states (Delaware, New York, Pennsylvania, and Vermont).

Use of special measures in the CO and the use of a bag limit were varied (Table 1). As experience is gained on hunter activity and effectiveness during the CO, hopefully all participating states will relax the constraints towards the maximization of harvest during the small window of opportunity.

Table 1. Light goose harvest regulations in the key staging and wintering states within the Atlantic Flyway, 2008-2009 migratory bird hunting season.

State	Special Measures Outside of CO	CO in 2009?	CO Dates	Special Measures in CO?	Bag/Posse ssion Limit	Harvest Survey
VT	No	Yes	March 11-April 15	No	15/None	Yes
NY	No	Yes	March 11-April 15	Unplugged, E-calls	15/None	Yes
NJ	No	Yes	March 11-April 18	All	None/None	Yes
DE	Unplugged, E-calls	Yes	March 10-April 18	All	None/None	Yes
PA	No	Yes	March 11-April 1	E-calls, extended hours	15/None	Yes
MD	Unplugged, E-calls	Yes	March 11-April 18	All	None/None	Yes
VA	No	No				
NC	No	No				

The following summary of hunter activity and harvest associated with the conservation order is broken down by individual state and for the entire flyway.

In the five states that utilized a permit system, a total of 4,728 permits were issued (Table 2). A total of 3,466 permits were returned for a total response rate of 73%. Four states conducted follow ups to permit holders to boost response rate. In the five states that issued permits for participation, an estimated 46% of all permit holders participated in the CO (n = 2,157). Estimated harvest in those states that required a permit for participation was 16,086.

Table 2. Hunter activity and estimated harvest in the Atlantic Flyway Light Goose Conservation Order, 2009.

State	Permits Issued	Permits Returned	Response Rate	Percent Participate	Days Hunted	Geese Shot and Retrieved	Geese Shot and Lost	Geese shot after Sunset	Geese shot with electronic calls	Geese taken with shot shell >3
NJ	447	153	0.34	0.73	1300	4917	316	503	1671	1873
DE	262	166	0.63	0.60	822	2693	176	357	1515	445
VT	628	213	0.34	0.52	438	104	3	NA	NA	NA
PA	3276	2900	0.89	0.59	3840	5903	317	736	1522	NA
MD	115	34	0.29	0.47	290	2469	139	450	450	856
NY	40188*	NA	0.32	0.04	5927	7683	133	NA	1556	762
5 State Tot	4728	3466	0.73	0.46	6690	16086	951	2046	5158	3174
AF Total	4728	3466	0.73	0.63	12617	23769	1084	2046	6714	3936

*NY surveyed a sample of 1,903 hunters registered in HIP to estimate participation and harvest.

Flyway wide an estimated total of 3,614 hunters participated in the CO. The estimated flyway harvest of greater snow geese was 23,769, with 1,084 birds shot and lost. The most useful of the special measures seemed to be the use of electronic calls, which accounted for approximately 29% of the total harvest. Two states didn't allow shooting after sunset. An estimated 13% of the harvest in those four states that did allow shooting after sunset occurred after normal shooting hours. New Jersey stated that their harvest estimates attributable to the use of extra shells were inflated due to confusion from respondents over the question. Flyway wide an estimated 17% of the harvest was achieved with shells fired after the customary 3rd shot.

Timing of snow goose migration in 2009 was early. Although the satellite data for the spring migration are not readily available at the time of this writing, geese seemed to move out of the Chesapeake and mid-Atlantic region 2-3 weeks earlier than is typical. Similarly, many birds were in southern Quebec in the middle of March, which is much earlier than normal. Estimated harvest during the intervals on the harvest survey (Appendix A) bear further witness to the northward movement of geese in spring 2009. An estimated 60% of harvest in Maryland occurred in March. In Delaware, 93% of the harvest occurred in the month of March. Further north, 88% of harvest in New Jersey occurred in March. In Vermont, 75% of all harvest occurred in March, and in New York, 87% of all harvest occurred in March.

Despite a seemingly early migration, and lower than hoped for participation, the CO was reasonably successful in its first year. Participating states plan on making some changes to their regulations in 2010 and Virginia plans on entering into the CO in 2010. Most changes involve

starting the CO earlier so that special measures can be employed for longer periods of time. In an effort to better promote the CO and successful tactics, the AF is developing a brochure that outlines the do's and don'ts of successful snow goose hunting, an overview of the problems posed by overabundant snow geese, and some links to more information on snow goose recipes and hunting. This brochure will be distributed on Agency websites and through other media outlets.

Appendix A. Hunter survey form.

Snow Goose 2009 Spring Season Harvest Survey - *State Name*

The special spring season for snow geese is designed to increase harvest of these birds, which have increased to more than one million birds in the Atlantic Flyway and now threaten the long-term health of the ecosystems they inhabit. As a requirement for establishing a spring season in *State Name*, we must collect information on hunter participation, use of special regulations, and snow goose harvest during the season. This information will help managers assess effectiveness of the spring season for reducing snow goose populations. Please take a few minutes to accurately and completely fill out this survey and return it in the pre-paid envelope by May 31, 2009. **Failure to return this survey may make you ineligible to participate in the 2010 spring season!**

Snow Goose 2009 Spring Season regulations in *State Name*:

Season dates: **March 11-April 30, 2009**

Daily bag limit: **No limit**

Unplugged guns allowed: **Yes**

Electronic calls

allowed: **Yes**

Shooting hours: **½ hour before sunrise to ½ hour past sunset**

Hunter Survey:

1. Your *State Name* HIP (or other authorization) number for 2008-09: _____
2. Your home (or cell) phone number: _____ and birthdate: ____/____/____
3. How many days did you hunt and how many snow geese did you personally shoot during each of the time periods listed below:

	March 11-15	March 16-31	April 1-15	April 16-30	Total
# days hunted					
# geese shot and retrieved					
# geese downed and not retrieved					

4. How many of the total number of birds you shot were taken with the aid of the following **special regulations**:

	Geese shot after sunset	Geese shot with aid of electronic call	Geese shot with 4 th , 5 th , or 6 th shell in magazine
Shot and retrieved			
Downed and not retrieved			

5. Please list the counties where you hunted snow geese during the 2009 spring season in *State Name*, and how many geese you shot and retrieved in each county:

County	# days hunted	# geese shot and retrieved

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6. Will you hunt snow geese in 2010 if a spring season is offered again in *State Name*?
7.
Please add any comments you have on the 2009 spring season for snow geese in *State Name*:

Please return this survey in the envelope provided. Thank you very much!