

Early Fall Canada Goose Hunting Season

As resident Canada goose populations increased during the 1980's and 1990's conflicts with agriculture began to appear. Damage to agricultural crops, especially soybeans and corn increased significantly in 1995 and 1996 in eastern South Dakota. In 1996, South Dakota became the first state in the Central Flyway to implement an early September Canada goose hunting season in 10 eastern South Dakota counties that specifically targeted resident Canada geese. This season was in addition to the regular Canada goose hunting season. The primary mortality factor for resident Canada geese is hunter harvest and hunting remains the best method to control their numbers.

At the time early September goose hunting seasons were established in South Dakota (1996) the federal framework allowed a daily bag of 5 from September 1-15. South Dakota gradually increased the daily bag from 1&2 (depending on county) in 1996 to 2 in 1997, 4 in 1998 and 5 in 1999 during this time period. These seasons remained in effect from 1996-1999. Average harvest during this time period was 16,468 birds. South Dakota received permission from the USFWS to conduct a 3-year experimental late-September Canada goose hunting season from 2000-2002. Hunting during the experimental period was allowed in 20 eastern South Dakota counties starting on September 16 up to the start of the regular Canada goose hunting season. The harvest increased substantially when late-September hunting was also allowed. From 2000-2004, the average annual harvest increased to 38,443 birds.

In order for the experimental late-September season to become operational, South Dakota had to prove that less than 10% of the harvest consisted of non-target small Canada geese. Subsequent analyses of 1,044 tail fans from the Parts Collection Survey (Central Flyway Wingbee) during 5-day periods in September from 1996-2002 indicated less than 3% of the harvest consisted of non-target small Canada geese. Therefore, South Dakota's September season is now operational and is called the Early Fall Canada Goose hunting season. Daily bag limit was 5 from 1999-2009 and increased to 8 beginning with the 2010 season. The daily bag limit for Canada geese during the regular Canada season is 3. In 2009, season dates for the Early Fall Canada goose hunting season started on the 1st Saturday of September and continued to the end of September. The regular Canada goose season opened on October 1 with a daily bag limit of 3 in order to protect small Canada geese from excessive harvest.

From 2004-2008 hunter numbers declined to 6,118 with an average harvest of 25,597. This decline in hunter numbers and harvest occurred despite an increase in the number of counties opened to hunting from 28 to 55. In 2009 hunter numbers and harvest did increase to 6,157 and 39,275, respectively. A concerted effort by SD GFP to get more hunters into the field during the Early Fall Canada hunting season in 2009 may have had an impact. The federal framework allows a maximum Canada goose hunting season length of 107 days. South Dakota is using all 107 during the Early Fall and regular Canada goose hunting seasons. We believe that the harvest of resident Canada geese has increased due to the Early Fall season.

Early Fall Canada Goose Hunting Seasons, 1996-2009

<u>Year</u>	<u># Hunter</u>	<u>Daily Limit</u>	<u># Counties Open</u>	<u>Harvest</u>
1996	6,586	1 & 2	10	12,866
1997	6,506	2	13	11,281
1998	6,682	4	13	15,768
1999	9,173	5	14	25,960
2000	10,142	5	20	37,365
2001	8,358	5	27	51,491
2002	9,459	5	27	34,831
2003	10,152	5	27	42,417
2004	7,662	5	27	26,113
2005	5,686	5	28	21,499
2006	6,095	5	28	25,755
2007	5,876	5	56	26,698
2008	5,275	5	55	27,924
2009	6,157	5	55	39,275