

High Plains Mallard Management Unit

The High plains Mallard Management Unit, more commonly called the 'High Plains', had its origin in the 1960's. This area is generally west of the 100th Meridian, encompassing most of West River South Dakota, including much of the Missouri River. An intensive winter banding program was started in this area by several Central Flyway states in 1963 and expanded to all flyway states by 1965. Justification for and delineation of the High Plains was based on hunting season band recoveries from 1963-1969. During this period, 125,317 mallards were banded by Central Flyway states and 8,414 recoveries were made. Subsequent analysis of the band recoveries for distribution and survival rates indicated wintering mallards associated with the High Plains were generally distinct from mallard populations wintering east of this area and also exhibited higher survival rates. In other words, here was a population of mallards that could provide more hunting opportunity without jeopardizing the resource.

In 1969, South Dakota participated in a special late 23 day experimental point system season in a portion of the High Plains. The area open for the additional 23 days consisted of Butte, Lawrence, Custer, Fall River, Pennington west of the Cheyenne River, and Meade County west of the Cheyenne and south of the Belle Fourche River. Permits were issued to hunters out of the Game, Fish, and Park's Pierre office. These extra days had a 40 point daily bag with drake mallards being 10 points and all other ducks being 40 points. Thus, a hunter being selective could take 4 drake mallards. By 1972 South Dakota had an operational High Plains season that offered 20 additional days of hunting, provided that these additional days occurred late in the season after December 10.

The eastern boundary of the High Plains has changed a bit over the years with the most recent modification occurring in 2006. While it still generally conforms to being west of the 100th Meridian, some prime duck hunting areas along the Missouri River, including Red Lake southeast of Chamberlain, are now within the boundaries of the High Plains. The High Plains concept was reconfirmed by a Report to the Central Flyway Council, dated July, 1997, entitled "Evaluation of the High Plains Mallard Management Unit" authored by Joe Gabig, Nebraska Game & Parks Commission, and Howard Funk, Jim Gammonley, and Jim Ringelman of the Colorado Division of Wildlife. This in-depth analysis used more contemporary banding data to reconfirm the original conclusions of the High Plains analysis, that is, that additional hunting opportunity could be provided in the High Plains without jeopardizing the health or status of the mallard resource. What this means for contemporary duck hunters is an area covering half the state of South Dakota gets an extra 23 days of hunting opportunity when liberal or moderate duck hunting seasons are in effect. These extra 23 days must start no earlier than the Saturday closest to December 10, affording some great late duck hunting opportunity, especially for those beautiful drake mallards.