

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

2023-2024 Waterfowl Season Dates Preferences

Survey Report

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2023-2024 Waterfowl Season Dates
Preferences Survey Results
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Drought conditions in the prairies the last few years indicated that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service may impose a more restrictive harvest package for the 2023–2024 season for the first time in over 20 years (in general terms, harvest packages are selected based off of the status of the breeding population of mid-continent mallards, as well as the number of ponds in prairie Canada). To clarify duck hunter preferences for the 2023 and 2024 waterfowl seasons given the possibility of a more restrictive harvest package (i.e., 60-day or 39-day season), Nebraska Game & Parks Commission (NGPC) conducted a survey of hunters that had registered for the Harvest Information Program (HIP) between 2019–2021. The sample frame was limited to one per household for hunters that included an email address with their HIP profiles. The initial sample size was 33,724. Hunters received an email invitation to participate in the survey on 19 July. Email invitees received two reminder emails on 26 July and 2 August. The survey closed on 10 August.

At the close of the survey, there were 4,566 responses. There were 1,786 email bounce backs, resulting in an effective sample size of 31,938 and a response rate of 14.3%. To prevent “ballot stuffing,” once a responding hunter completed the survey, their username became inactive and unusable.

Unlike previous surveys that asked specifically about when season should be open and closed, this survey design asked hunters to select up to five weeks important to their duck hunting. This allows data to be used to inform *any* harvest package that is designated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Peaks in preference lines represent the most important week(s) for duck hunting to the survey respondents.

Results

The figures below summarize the responses received, broken down by zone.

Because questions were voluntary, not all responding hunters completed every question. Narratives provide sample sizes per zone.

Zone 1

There were 413 people that indicated hunting in zone 1, of those 51 (12.3%) did not have a preference for season dates. Peak preference occurs on the week of 11/18, with similar rates of declines both earlier and later in the season.

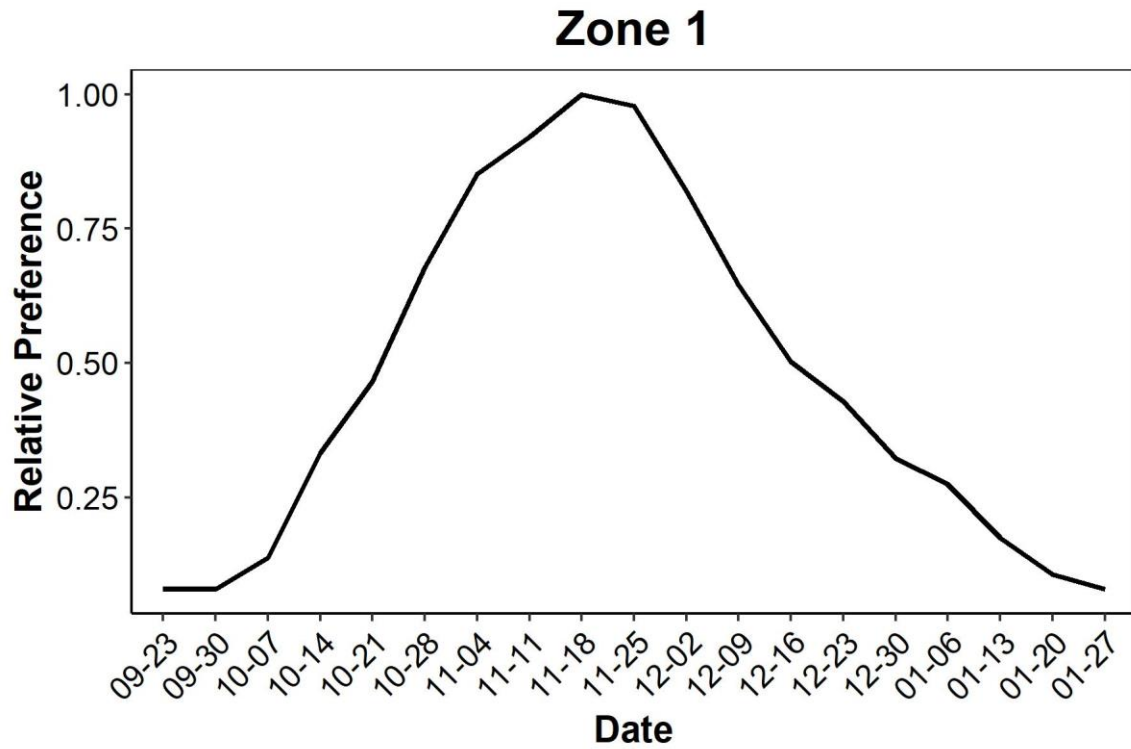


Figure 1. Relative importance of any week to duck hunting in zone 1 based on survey respondents.

Zone 2

There were 2,081 people that indicated hunting in zone 2, of those 236 (11.3%) did not have a preference for season dates. Peak preference occurs on the week of 10/28, with a sharp increase from 9/30 to 10/28 and a general slow decline in preference through the end of January.

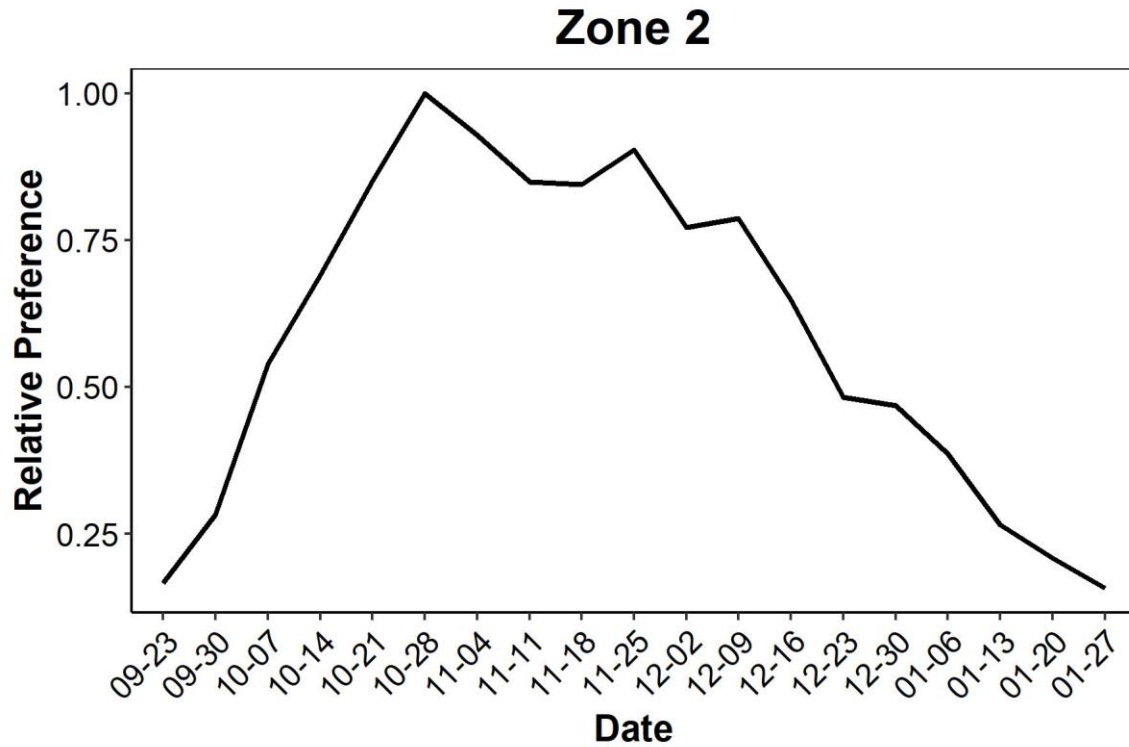


Figure 2. Relative importance of any week to duck hunting in zone 2 based on survey respondents.

Zone 3

There were 1,231 people that indicated hunting in zone 3, of those 153 (12.4%) did not have a preference for season dates. Peak preference occurs on the week of 12/30, with an initial peak around Thanksgiving. Preference continues to increase through 12/30 and declines sharply thereafter.

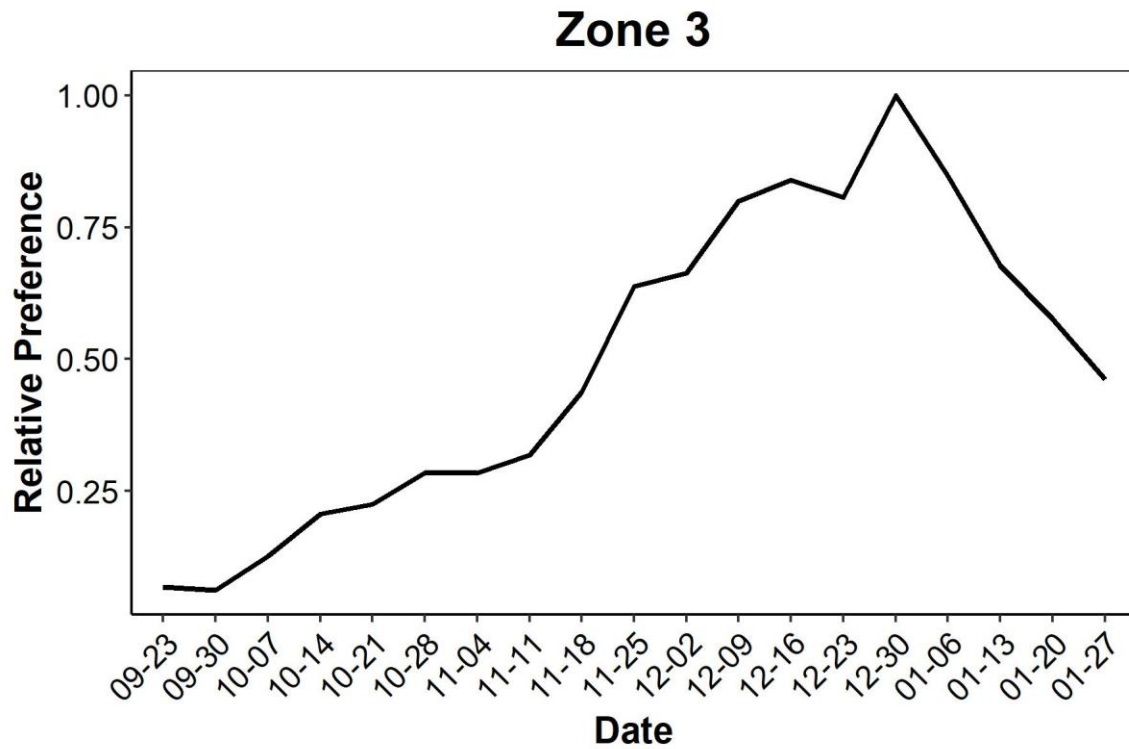


Figure 3. Relative importance of any week to duck hunting in zone 3 based on survey respondents.

Zone 4

There were 1,749 people that indicated hunting in zone 4, of those 166 (9.5%) did not have a preference for season dates. Peak preference occurs on the week of 11/25, and 12/09. There is a sharp increase from mid-November through 11/25, and a slow decline through 12/30, before dropping off through January.

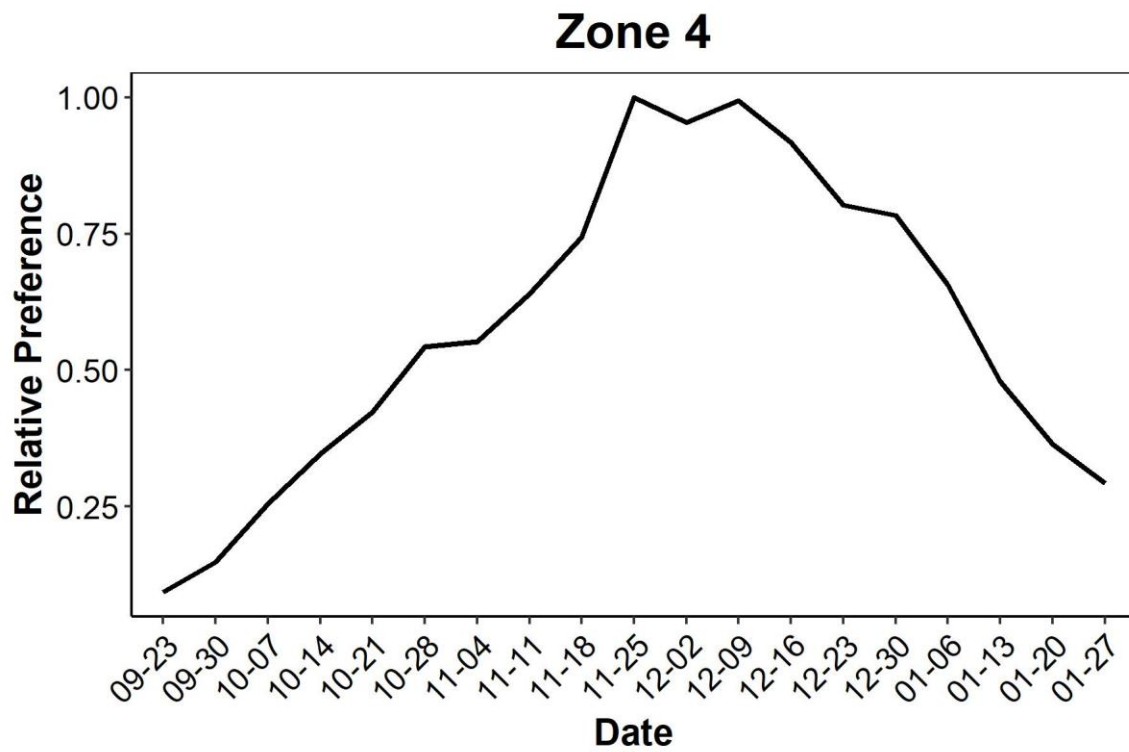


Figure 4. Relative importance of any week to duck hunting in zone 4 based on survey respondents.