

# MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING ZONES IN NEW JERSEY

## Background

New Jersey has several zones for different migratory bird hunting seasons. Zoning is the establishment of independent seasons in two or more areas (zones) within States for the purpose of providing more equitable distribution of harvest opportunity for hunters throughout the State. Zones are also established when designing special seasons including the Special Sea Duck Area and the Special Winter Canada Goose Season Hunting Areas. The purpose of this document is to guide hunters in where migratory bird zones are located in New Jersey and to provide background on the purpose of these zones.

---

## Waterfowl Zones

New Jersey was one of the pioneer states to implement zoning and has had 3 waterfowl zones since 1980. Under current Federal regulations, States can choose from the following options for structuring duck hunting seasons:

- 1) No more than 4 zones with no season splits
- 2) No zones with up to 3 season segments
- 3) No more than 3 zones with up to 2 season segments in each zone (i.e. NJ)

A handful of states have “grandfathered” zoning arrangements different from that described above. Federal regulations allow states to change how they structure their duck hunting zones at established, 5-year intervals and states need to retain that zoning structure for a 5-year period. The next opportunity for states to restructure zoning will be in 2021.

Selecting hunting season dates for migratory game birds is a balance between science and social factors. Generally, seasons are selected to occur when the birds are most abundant within a particular zone. In addition, managers consider social factors including hunter preferences, traditions, and holiday periods. For example, in New Jersey, seasons are generally earlier in the North Zone which has an abundance of wood ducks, which migrate early and depart when cold weather sets in. Conversely, seasons in the Coastal Zone tend to be later to take advantage of late arriving diving ducks and the stubbornness of saltwater to freeze.

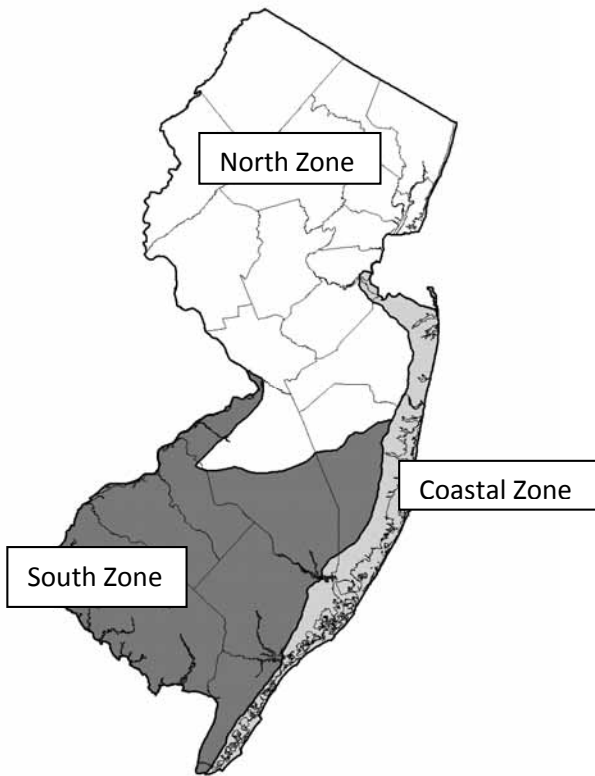
The following **Waterfowl Zones apply to ducks, coots, mergansers, regular season Canada geese, brant, regular season light geese and Youth Waterfowl Days.**

**Coastal Zone:** That portion of the State seaward of a line beginning at the New York State line in Raritan Bay and extending west along the New York State line to NJ 440 at Perth Amboy;

west on NJ 440 to the Garden State Parkway; south on the Garden State Parkway to the shoreline at Cape May and continuing to the Delaware State line in Delaware Bay.

**North Zone:** That portion of the State west of the Coastal Zone and north of a line extending west from the Garden State Parkway on NJ 70 to the New Jersey Turnpike, north on the turnpike to U.S. 206, north on U.S. 206 to U.S. 1 at Trenton, west on U.S. 1 to the Pennsylvania State line in the Delaware River.

**South Zone:** Portion of the State not within the North Zone or the Coastal Zone.

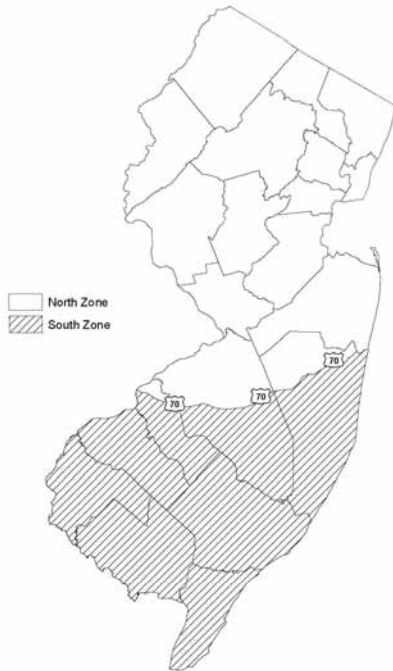


## Woodcock Zones

New Jersey has had woodcock zones since 1977. Given that 50% and 25% of New Jersey's woodcock harvest occurs in Sussex and Cape May Counties, respectively, zoning is designed to provide equitable harvest to the early woodcock migration seen in the northern part of the state versus the late migration in the south. Since woodcock and ruffed grouse are frequently pursued together, ruffed grouse hunting seasons follow this same zone format.

**North Zone**—North of Route 70 from Point Pleasant to Camden.

**South Zone**—South of Route 70 from Point Pleasant to Camden.



## Special Winter Canada Goose Season Hunting Areas

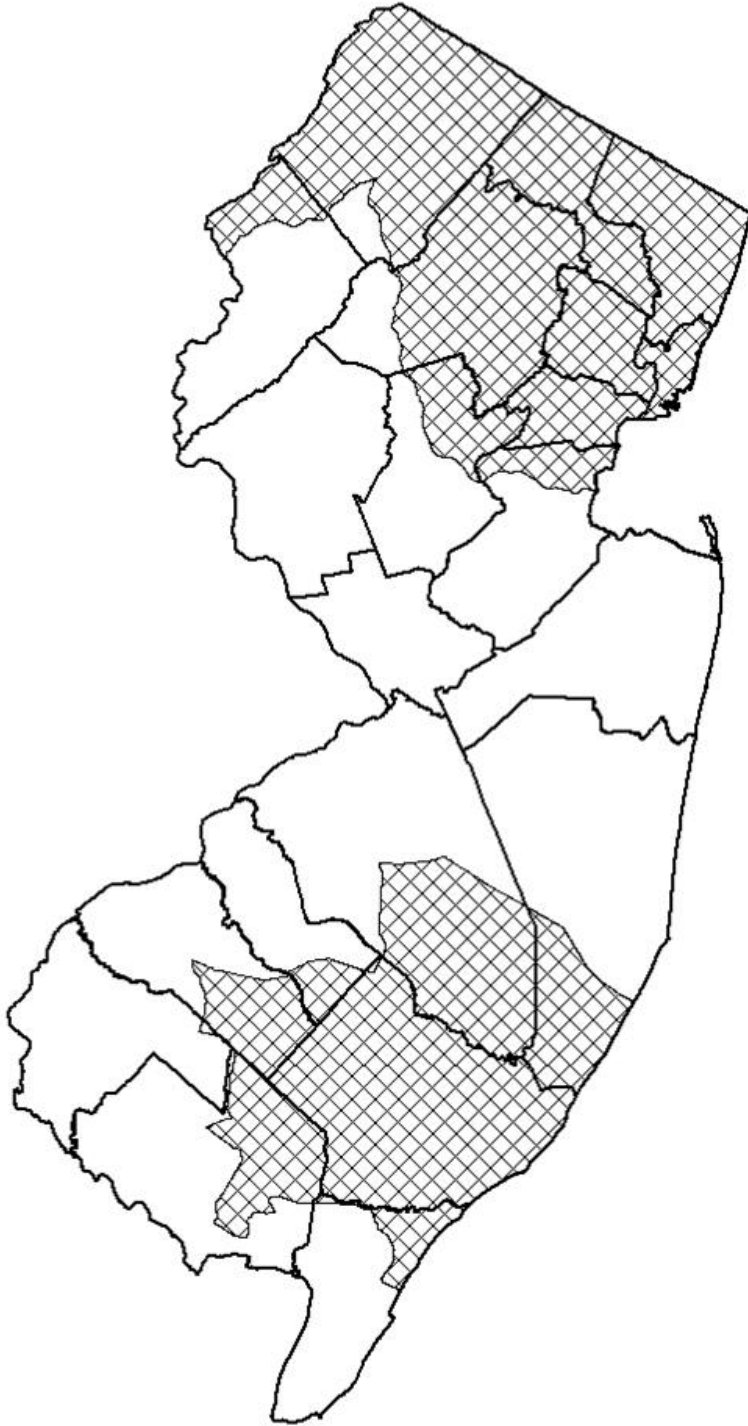
New Jersey has had Special Winter Canada Goose Areas since 1994. The zone boundaries were tweaked several times up through 2001 but have not changed since that time. In Atlantic Flyway states including New Jersey, special winter seasons are held in areas of the state that have relatively low populations of migrant population geese during late winter after Canada geese typically “settle out” after migration. Explicit criteria established by the Atlantic Flyway Council and US Fish and Wildlife Service require that no more than 20% of the Special Winter Season harvest can be comprised of migrant population Canada geese. New Jersey’s zones were established based on patterns of migrant goose leg band recoveries, neckband observations, and satellite telemetry data predominantly from the 1990s. Although no satellite telemetered or neck banded geese have been marked in recent years, contemporary patterns of leg band recoveries of Atlantic Population Canada geese marked on the breeding grounds on the Ungava Peninsula of northern Quebec suggest that there have not been major changes in the winter distribution of migrant Canada geese within New Jersey. In addition, leg band recoveries of the 3 populations of Canada geese (Resident Population, Atlantic Population, and North Atlantic Population) are used to estimate the proportion of migrant geese in the harvest. These data suggest that the selected winter zones barely meet the agreed 20% criteria. Excluded areas of the state, particularly southwestern and central New Jersey, appear to greatly exceed the 20% migrant criteria.

*The two hatched areas of the map are open to hunting.*

For the north, it is that portion of New Jersey within a continuous line that runs east along the New York boundary line to the Hudson River; then south along the New York State boundary to its intersection with Route 440 at Perth Amboy; then west on Route 440 to its intersection with Route 287; then west along Route 287 to its intersection with Route 206 in Bedminster (Exit 18); then north along Route 206 to its intersection with Route 94; then west along Route 94 to the toll bridge in Columbia; then north along the Pennsylvania State boundary in the Delaware River to the beginning point .

For the south, it is that portion of New Jersey within a continuous line that runs west from the Atlantic Ocean at Ship Bottom along Route 72 to Route 70; then west along Route 70 to Route 206; then south along Route 206 to Route 536; then west along Route 536 to Route 322; then west along Route 322 to Route 55; then south along Route 55 to Route 553 (Buck Rd.); then south along Route 553 to Route 40; then east along Route 40 to Route 55; then south along Route 55 to Route 552 (Sherman Av e.) ; then west along Route 552 to Carmel Rd.; then south along Carmel Rd. to Route 49; then east along Route 49 to Route 555; then south along Route 555 to Route 553; then east along Route 553 to Route 649; then north along Route 649 to Route 670; then east along Route 670 to Route 47; then north along Route 47 to Route 548; then east

along Route 548 to Route 49; then east along Route 49 to Route 50; then south along Route 50 to Route 9; then south along Route 9 to Route 625 (Sea Isle City Blvd.); then east along Route 625 to the Atlantic Ocean; then north to the beginning point.



## **Special Sea Duck Area**

Defined as all New Jersey coastal waters seaward from the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGS) Demarcation Lines shown on National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Nautical Charts and further described in 33 CFR 80 Districts 1 and 5. Note that this is a new regulation effective beginning with the 2016 hunting season.

In essence, the Special Sea Duck Area is limited to waters of the Atlantic Ocean. COLREGS lines are used to delineate the “standard” waterfowl zones from the Special Sea Duck Area at inlets and bay mouths. For example, the COLREGS line at any ocean inlet and the mouth of Raritan Bay separates the “Regular” Coastal Zone from the Special Sea Duck Area. At the mouth of Delaware Bay, COLREGS Demarcation Line 80.503 separates the Special Sea Duck Area from the South Zone. Delaware Bay is included in the South Zone.