

SMALL GAME, MIGRATORY BIRDS & WETLANDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING REPORT
MARCH 19, 2024

PRESENT: Maya Basdeo, Chair; Chris Bayles, Vice Chair; Kerry Coleman; Kelly McLean
Rick Moore; Brooke Wright

ABSENT: Thomas Benoit; James Chambers; Chris Davies; Vince Falcigno; Stephen Huntley
Emma Northey; Roy Polsky; Jeffrey Pye; Kathy Richardson

STAFF: Matthew Robbins, Liaison; Mark Ryckman

GUESTS: Randy Fawcett, Zone D; Eric Smith, Zone E; Merrill Elliott, Zone F; Chris Roman, Zone G
Stu Paterson, Zone H; Neil Wiens, BGAC; Don Vanderlip, SDAC

The Small Game, Migratory Birds & Wetlands Committee (SGAC) met via ZOOM on March 19, from 7:00pm to 8:15pm. Maya Basdeo chaired the meeting; Brooke Wright took Minutes.

The majority of the committee meeting was dedicated to updates from staff on a number of topics and policy issues.

Amendments to Migratory Bird Regulations

Proposed increase in Black Duck bag limits

The CWS is proposing increases to bag limits in a number of WMUs in the Hudson-James Bay, Northern, Central, and Southern Hunting Districts.

Proposed Sandhill Crane season

After many years of discussion around the SGAC table and OFAH at large, the CWS has finally put forward a proposal for a 14-day, geographically limited harvest of Eastern population Sandhill Cranes in Ontario. In reference to the below map of Migratory Bird Hunting Districts, the CWS recommends harvest to occur in Hudson-James Bay District (1) and farmland only in the following WMUs in Northern and Central Districts (2 & 3): 23, 24, 27-30, 36, 37, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 47 and 48.



The season would begin on September 1 in District 1, and on the first Saturday following September 11 in Districts 2 & 3. The daily bag limit would be 1 and possession limit would be 1.

OFAH has asked CWS to consider adding WMUs in the Southern District (4) that experience high crane activity during fall migration (WMUs 83A, 84, 90). Additional details about the proposed changes can be found [HERE](#). A map of WMUs proposed for Sandhill Crane harvest can be found [HERE](#).

Although implementation could not occur until 2026 at the earliest, the OFAH has been pursuing a harvest of Sandhill Cranes for two decades, and it has been front and centre on the SGAC radar since 2018. This is an all-around great piece of news!

Chukar and field training authorizations

Chukars are a non-native game bird typically used in field training of dogs and falconry birds. Recently there have been a number of complaints within the MNRF Aurora District regarding limitations being imposed by MNRF staff on use of Chukars, and the impression that there might have been changes to policy. OFAH staff were able to clarify with MNRF Senior Biologist Patrick Hubert that the confusion likely arose from additional training for certain Aurora district staff, and concern that given changes in climate (increasingly mild winters), Chukars that are not recovered during training exercises may survive and become naturalized, thereby posing a threat to native species.

The SGAC agreed that while there is always a concern with non-native species becoming invasive, there hasn't been any literature made available to support this becoming an issue, nor have any first-hand accounts been documented. Chukars are not particularly hardy to survive in Ontario conditions, and not likely to compete to the extent of being detrimental to native species.

Use of .410 shotguns for turkey

Every now and again, the issue of using .410s for turkey hunting comes up. The SGAC last discussed this at our August 2022 meeting, when the committee unanimously agreed this was not something that should be pursued primarily because of the ethical implications of wounding rather than having a lethal impact.

Recently, an OFAH member reached out via the Zone E Facebook page to inquire about the possibility of OFAH pursuing the ability to use .410 for turkeys in Ontario. This person had approached Winchester and Federal ammunition suppliers to get ballistics information on shot efficacy, and Kerry Coleman will share with the SGAC once he receives it. Matthew Robbins also shared a ballistics graph that indicated lethal penetration using .410, though the caveat was that it was demonstrated using tungsten shot which is considerably more expensive than lead.

The SGAC will continue this discussion at the next meeting when we hopefully have more ballistics data.

Draft Wetland Policy Framework

Matthew Robbins has participated as part of the Canadian Wetlands Roundtable in creating a draft wetland policy framework to help promote wetland conservation around the country. Although not a regulatory document, it sets out guidelines for best practices for wetland management. Matthew will provide greater detail at the next SGAC meeting.

Decision notice for ERO 019-2927, "Proposed updates to the regulation of development for the protection of people and property from natural hazards in Ontario"

As part of the sweeping changes to numerous Acts and Regulations related to the "More Homes Built Faster" initiative brought forward by the Ontario government ([ERO 019-6162](#)), MNRF posted a decision on February 24, 2024 to move forward with proposed changes to the Conservation Authorities Act. The notice was initially posted in October 2022 for a comment period of 66 days. Details of the decision can be found [HERE](#).

Snowshoe (Varying) Hare

Following the October 2023 SGAC meeting when we hosted MNRF senior staff and addressed the negative impacts to small game hunters and falconers in the north of an unwarranted shortened season for snowshoe hare, the MNRF Wildlife Branch appears to be considering options for inclusion in a possible ERO proposal. However, nothing official has been communicated or confirmed by MNRF, so we will continue to raise the issue until we receive an official response.

Wild game and food banks

Recently, OFAH staff were contact by [Feed Ontario](#), a non-profit organization dedicated to alleviating hunger to Ontarians struggling with food security. Feed Ontario is formulating a proposal to legalize the donation of wild game to food banks and has reached out to OFAH for support as a sounding board as they work through details of the proposal. They are currently proposing a system similar to the one being used in Alberta, where it is legal to donate hunter-harvested game to food banks under specific conditions, including:

- Hunters transport the carcass(s) within a certain period of time after harvest and within specific climatic conditions.
- The carcass(s) is taken to a licensed meat/butcher shop where the paperwork would be filled out for Public Health.
- The meat can then only be distributed by a local non-profit that is licensed to do so.
- In some jurisdictions, the wildlife organization or local non-profit is handling the fees.

Details for an Ontario program is still being considered, such as who would be responsible for any fees (butchering, permits, etc.) and if this would be restricted to certain categories of game (e.g., big game, waterfowl). However, they are interested in input from OFAH.

Currently, OFAH does not have an official policy regarding wild game donations to food banks. This is a topic that is relevant to multiple advisory committees, and to the overall role hunters could have in helping their communities. Thus, rather than create an official policy, the SGAC thought we might consider having an organizational position. The SGAC will bring forward a recommendation on this subject during the May 9 board of directors meeting.

RECOMMENDATION by the OFAH Small Game, Migratory Birds & Wetlands Advisory Committee that the OFAH Board of Directors support the proposal from Feed Ontario, to support and implement the donation of wild game to the food banks program.

Welcome new committee members!

Lastly but not least, on behalf of the SGAC, I'd like to welcome new committee members Stu Paterson and Brittany Gravel. Stu is on the Zone H Executive and has attended several meetings as a guest and does a great job of relaying information and concerns between the SGAC and Zone H, and always actively contributes. Brittany is a falconer in the Thunder Bay area and is also on the Executive of the Ontario Hawking Club. Brittany attended the October 2023 SGAC meeting and was able to speak directly to MNRF about the impacts that the shortened Varying hare season in the north has on falconers and falconry birds that need to fly - something that our MNRF guests made a point of acknowledging. Brittany is also an avid angler and loves hunting big game - she does it all!

Respectfully submitted,

Maya Basdeo
Chair