

## **Results of New York's Spring 2019 Conservation Order Season Harvest**

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### **Background**

From January 16 through April 15, 2019, New York held its ninth special season allowing hunters to harvest snow geese in accordance with the "Conservation Order" designed to help reduce the population of Greater Snow Geese in the Atlantic Flyway. A conservation order is a special management action authorized by the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act to control certain wildlife populations when traditional management programs are unsuccessful in preventing overabundance. Federal and state regulations were amended in fall 2008 to allow this additional harvest of snow geese, in response to concerns about their growing numbers across North America.

### **Regulations for Spring 2019**

Under New York's regulations, any person who had migratory game bird hunting privileges in New York was allowed to take snow geese and Ross' geese (a smaller but nearly identical species) in the Western, Northeastern, Southeastern, and Lake Champlain Waterfowl Hunting Zones from January 16 through April 15, in addition to the regular snow goose hunting seasons in each zone. A special season was not held on Long Island, because relatively few snow geese occur in huntable areas there during the spring.

All migratory game bird hunting regulations and requirements applied to the taking of snow geese during this spring harvest period, except that use of recorded or electrically amplified calls or sounds, and use of shotguns capable of holding more than three shells, were allowed. Shooting hours were ½ hour before sunrise to ½ hour after sunset when all other waterfowl hunting seasons are closed; shooting hours end at sunset if waterfowl seasons are open. A daily bag limit of 25 birds (no possession limit) was in effect to be consistent with regular snow goose hunting seasons.

### **Permit and Reporting Requirements**

The only requirements to participate in the special snow goose harvest program were to have current small game hunting privileges, a federal duck stamp, and current registration in New York's Harvest Information Program (HIP). No special permit was required and harvest reporting was not mandatory.

### **Hunter Surveys**

To estimate participation and harvest for the 2019 special snow goose season, DEC surveyed a sample of people registered in HIP for the 2018-2019 hunting season. Conducting a harvest survey was a federal requirement for continuation of the program in future years. Similar data was collected by other participating states in the Atlantic Flyway to help evaluate overall effectiveness of the Conservation Order.

Soon after the season closed, we mailed a harvest survey to 3,000 people who registered in HIP during the 2018-2019 migratory bird hunting season. We included all registrants with valid addresses who indicated that they had bagged one or more snow geese in the previous hunting season; this included 557 who had bagged 10 or more snow geese the previous year and 1,176 who had bagged 1-10 snow geese the year before. We also mailed surveys to a random sample of 123 registrants who had hunted but not bagged any snow geese in 2017 and 1,144 who had not hunted snow geese at all the previous year. We received 1,403 responses (47%

response rate) as of August 1, 2019. We sent one urge letter and an e-mail (if provided) to non-respondents.

Hunters were stratified into four groups: Group 1 = did not hunt snow geese the year prior; Group 2 = hunted but did not bag any snow geese the year prior; Group 3 = bagged 1-10 snow geese the year prior; and Group 4 = bagged more than 10 snow geese the year prior. We calculated participation and harvest separately for each of the four Hunt Groups and combined those figures to derive total estimates for the season. Raw results are presented in Table 1.

<b>Table 1</b>	Hunt Group				<b>Total</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	
Total HIP registered	29,576	3,333	1,195	557	34,661
# surveyed	1144	123	1,176	557	3,000
# responded	589	71	542	201	1,403
# of respondents participated	21	13	164	111	309
# of respondents did not hunt	568	58	378	90	1094
# of respondents successful	10	4	97	94	205
% participated	3.5%	18.3%	30.2%	55.2%	
# days hunted by respondents	61	49	908	956	1974
# days hunted/respondent	2.9	3.8	5.5	8.6	
# retrieved by respondents	34	9	913	2399	3355
# retrieved/respondent	1.6	0.7	5.6	21.6	
# not retrieved by respondents	1	0	43	193	237
# not retrieved/respondent	0.05	0	0.26	1.74	
% not retrieved	2.9%	0%	4.7%	8.0%	

\*assuming non-respondents did not hunt

### Estimated Participation and Harvest

We calculated two estimates of participation and harvest based on different assumptions about non-respondent participation. First, we estimated participation and harvest assuming all non-respondents did not hunt in any of the Hunt Groups. We calculated an estimated 1,163 hunters participated in the Special conservation season, spending 4,758 days afield, recovering an estimated 4,431 snow geese, and 263 non-retrieved birds (Table 2).

<b>Table 2<sup>1</sup></b>	Hunt Category				<b>Total</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	
Estimated hunted	532	353	167	111	1163
% participated	1.8%	10.6%	13.9%	19.9%	
Estimated days hunted	1,543	1,341	919	955	4758
Estimated retrieved	851	247	935	2,398	4431
Estimated not retrieved	27	0	43	193	263

<sup>1</sup>assumed non-respondents did not hunt

Next, we estimated participation and harvest assuming all non-respondents in Group 1 did not hunt and non-respondents in Groups 2, 3, and 4 participated at an equal rate as respondents. We calculated an estimated 1,810 hunters participated in the Special conservation season, spending 8,487 days afield, recovering an estimated 9,931 snow geese, and 655 non-retrieved birds (Table 3).

Table 3 <sup>2</sup>	Hunt Category				
	1	2	3	4	Total
Estimated hunted	532	610	361	307	1810
% participated	1.8%	18.3%	30.2%	55.2%	
Estimated days hunted	1,543	2,318	1,986	2,640	8487
Estimated retrieved	851	427	2,022	6,631	9931
Estimated not retrieved	27	0	94	534	655

<sup>2</sup>assumed non-respondents did not hunt in Group 1 and non-respondents in Groups 2, 3, and 4 participated at an equal rate as respondents

### Discussion and Conclusions

New York's ninth year in the special snow goose special Conservation Order season was again successful in harvesting a substantial number of snow geese during the spring migration. The harvest estimates of 4,431 - 9,931 birds are less than the 2018 estimates of 12,840 - 28,277. The decrease in the number of birds harvested this year may have been due to weather conditions. New York will continue to participate in and promote this special snow goose management program.