

Results of the 2015 Light Goose Conservation Order in Colorado

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10 July 2015

The Colorado Division of Wildlife (now Colorado Parks and Wildlife) established a conservation order for light geese in 1999. The conservation order period was again held in 2015 during February 16 – April 30. Shooting hours were from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset. There was no bag or possession limit. Electronic calls and unplugged shotguns were allowed. Participants were required to be registered for the Harvest Information Program (HIP) and to have a Colorado state duck stamp. All other federal and state regulations pertaining to the take of migratory birds were in effect during the conservation order.

A stratified random sample of 4,500 potential light goose hunters was drawn from among 2014-2015 HIP registrants. The sample was stratified into HIP registrants that responded they did not hunt light geese during the 2013-2014 seasons and conservation order, light goose hunters that did not bag any light geese during 2013-2014, light goose hunters that bagged 1-30 birds during 2013-2014, and light goose hunters that bagged >30 birds during 2013-2014. A post-season harvest survey was conducted by phone; individuals within the sample that provided email addresses when registering for HIP were sent email surveys as well.

A total of 1,533 (34% of the original sample) hunters responded to the survey. In 2015, 76% of participants hunted north of Interstate 70 and harvested 71% of the total conservation order harvest, and 29% hunted and harvested 29% of total geese south of I-70 in eastern Colorado, continuing a recent trend of hunting activity shifting more to northeastern Colorado. The 2015 estimates of hunter numbers, hunter days, and harvest were lower than in 2014 (Table 1); hunter numbers and days hunted were slightly higher than the 1999-2014 averages (2,174 hunters and 10,406 days), but harvest was lower than the 1999-2014 average (20,507). In 2015, the average harvest per hunter was 5.8 and the average number of days hunted per hunter was 5.2.

Electronic calls were used by 31% of participants (834 ± 215) and 51% of harvest was obtained using electronic calls. Twenty percent of participants (527 ± 105) hunted after sunset and 19% of the total harvest was obtained through hunting after sunset. Unplugged shotguns were used by 21% of participants (561 ± 112) and 28% of total harvest was obtained using unplugged shotguns. Based on reported wounding loss by participants, we estimate that 941 ± 52 light geese were wounded but not retrieved during the 2015 conservation order (6% of reported retrieved harvest).

In 2015, 63% of respondents indicated they were very likely and 30% responded they were somewhat likely to participate in a light goose conservation order if it is offered in future years.

Table 1. Estimates (\pm SE) of participation and harvest during the light goose conservation action in Colorado.

Year	Hunters	Total-Hunter Days	Total Harvest	Harvest Using Electronic Calls	Harvest After Sunset	Harvest with unplugged shotguns
1999	1,638 (179)	6,709 (62)	13,417 (550)	Not permitted	Not permitted	Not permitted
2000	3,276 (511)	15,316 (3,178)	31,783 (7,877)	17,441 (5,607)	3,364 (1,417)	Not permitted
2001	2,495 (616)	8,836 (2,521)	22,457 (8,673)	16,671 (7,068)	2,060 (964)	Not permitted
2002	1,323 (351)	5,016 (1,502)	7,594 (1,923)	3,445 (1,011)	1,153 (505)	Not permitted
2003	2,162 (205)	10,193 (1,563)	27,395 (5,336)	19,828 (5,044)	3,658 (809)	Not permitted
2004	1,877 (184)	8,547 (911)	24,497 (3,286)	13,467 (2,457)	3,051 (652)	Not permitted
2005	1,281 (157)	6,593 (1,194)	16,135 (3,620)	12,417 (3,473)	1,886 (323)	Not permitted
2006	2,704 (511)	12,568 (3,406)	18,535 (751)	8,357 (466)	2,338 (170)	Not permitted
2007	2,367 (229)	10,847 (1,613)	23,375 (1,362)	16,041 (6,210)	3,509 (1,232)	Not permitted
2008	2,555 (250)	11,886 (1,595)	13,745 (1,268)	7,212 (896)	1,381 (233)	Not permitted
2009	1,951 (208)	8,744 (936)	23,072 (1,246)	15,190 (5,669)	6,485 (3,155)	Not permitted
2010	1,899 (200)	8,829 (1,343)	11,473 (861)	6,149 (1,260)	2,058 (468)	2,443 (639)
2011	1,385 (157)	10,905 (1,884)	28,193 (1,853)	14,438 (4,651)	3,066 (974)	3,246 (655)
2012	1,847 (203)	8,659 (1,215)	18,971 (1,316)	13,168 (2,921)	1,916 (337)	2,785 (580)
2013	2,461 (285)	7,533 (1,027)	13,246 (868)	8,821 (1,963)	2,049 (586)	2,766 (1,157)
2014	3,555 (310)	25,311 (4,035)	34,216 (1,435)	14,774 (3,217)	3,878 (1,461)	7,956 (1,912)
2015	2,693 (298)	13,907 (1,996)	15,719 (732)	8,075 (2,525)	2,981 (1,148)	4,478 (2,171)