

Assessing the Conservation Order for Light Geese in the Atlantic Flyway in 2015



Submitted in Fulfillment of the Reporting Requirements of the Conservation Order on Behalf of
the Participating States in the Atlantic Flyway

Snow Goose, Brant, and Swan Committee of the Atlantic Flyway Council

Assessing the Conservation Order for Light Geese in the Atlantic Flyway in 2015

In 2015, seven Atlantic Flyway states participated in the conservation order (CO) on light geese that was established by the light goose final rule (Federal Register Vol. 73, no 227) (Table 1). States differed in their administration of the CO season. All of the states, except for New York, required participants to obtain a permit to participate. Permits were obtained either online or through the mail. Maryland also issued permits through their automated licensing system. Maryland (\$5) and New Jersey (\$2) charged a fee for the permit. Pennsylvania, Delaware, Vermont, and Virginia issued free permits. Participation in New York was complimentary of existing waterfowl hunting privileges.

The Atlantic Flyway developed a standard survey form template for use by states in assessing the impact of the CO (Appendix A). Hunter activity was solicited through a paper hunting diary and/or an online data entry screen. Reporting of activity, regardless of participation, was required in five states that issued permits. New York surveyed a sample of people who registered in the Harvest Information Program (HIP) to estimate participation and harvest. Likewise, Maryland sampled a portion of hunters that had obtained their Snow Goose Conservation Order Permit. Follow up letters, emails, or phone calls to non-respondents were conducted in Delaware and Virginia. Pennsylvania sent e-mail reminders only to those individuals for whom they had an e-mail address on file.

Table 1. Light goose harvest regulations in the key staging and wintering states within the Atlantic Flyway, 2015.

State	Participate in CO in 2015?	Special Measures outside CO?	CO Dates	Special Measures in CO	Bag/Possession Limit	Participation requirements
Vermont	Yes	No	11 March - 24 April	All	15/None	Free permit
New York	Yes	Yes ¹	15 January - 15 April	All	25/None	Covered under existing waterfowl hunting privileges
New Jersey	Yes	No	16 February - 4 April	All	None/None	\$2 permit
Delaware	Yes	No	2 February - 6 February & 9 February - 11 April	All	None/None	Free Permit
Pennsylvania	Yes	No	24 January - 24 April (SJB zone), 27 January - 24 April (AP zone), 2 March - 24 April (RP zone)	Extended hours, e-calls	25/None	Free Permit
Maryland	Yes - in AP goose zone	No	1 December - 13 December, 9 February - 11 April	All	None/None	\$5 permit
Virginia	Yes - in AP goose zone	No	1 February - 5 April	All	None/None	Free Permit
North Carolina	No	Yes ¹				

¹ New York and North Carolina elected to use unplugged guns and electronic calls outside of the special CO, but within the normal light goose hunting frameworks.

Harvest and Hunter Participation

Five states (DE, NJ, PA, VA, and VT) utilized a permit system and sampled all hunters to estimate hunter effort and harvest. One state, Maryland, sampled a proportion (14%) of their permittees. In the six states that utilized a permit system, a total of 8,784 permits were issued (Table 2). A total of 2,062 permits were returned from 5 states that sampled all permit holders for a response rate of 40%. In the six states that issued permits, an estimated 40% of all permit holders participated in the CO (n = 3,510). In New York, a harvest survey was sent to 3,000 hunters, including every HIP registrant who said they had bagged a snow goose in 2014 (n=1,758) and 1,242 who did not hunt or were unsuccessful for snow geese in 2014. In New York, overall response rate was 33%.

Flyway wide an estimated total of 6,073 hunters participated in the CO in 2015, up 40% from the previous year (Table 2). The estimated retrieved flyway harvest of light geese was 86,641 with an additional 4,487 birds shot and lost (Table 2). Total retrieved harvest in 2015 was 34% higher than the 2014 estimate (Figure 1). Likewise, number of days hunted in 2015 was 34% higher than 2014 (Table 2, Figure 1).

In 2015, the most useful of the special measures was the use of electronic calls, which accounted for approximately 63% of the total kill (includes unretrieved birds) from those states that collected this information. (Table 2, Figure 2). This is much higher than the previous year and much higher than the long-term average. The proportional take of geese in 2015 attributed to extra shells and extended shooting hours was similar to their long-term averages. As of March 2015, data is no longer required to be collected for harvest attributed to expanded hunting methods. Most states are not expected to continue to collect this information. Therefore, this marks the last flyway summary where this information will be reported.

Table 2. Hunter activity and estimated harvest in the Atlantic Flyway Light Goose Conservation Order, 2015.

State	Permits Issued	Permits Returned	Response Rate	# of Hunters	Percent Participate	Days Hunted	Geese Shot and Retrieved	Geese Shot and Lost	Geese shot after Sunset	Geese shot with electronic calls	Geese taken with shot shell >3
Delaware	1061	528	50%	739	70%	2,894	13,684	1,103	1,246	9,837	2,309
New Jersey	938	176	19%	760	81%	2,862	14,283	624	2,000	4,856	4,713
Pennsylvania	2,661	1,223	46%	806	30%	2,260	4,684	147	475	1,452	NA
Virginia	301	80	27%	141	47%	380	910	81	60	591	291
Vermont	160	55	34%	75	47%	358	30	2	0	0	1
Total from 5 states that sampled all permit holders	5,121	2,062	40%	2,521	49%	8,754	33,591	1,957	3,781	16,736	7,314
Maryland ¹	3,663			989	27%	2,265	20,274	495	0	17,314	2,676
Total from 6 states that issued special permits	8,784			3,510	40%	11,019	53,865	2,452	3,781	34,050	9,990
New York ²				2,563		12,500	32,776	2,035			
Atlantic Flyway Total				6,073		23,519	86,641	4,487			

¹ Maryland sampled a portion (500 or 13.7%) of their special permit holders.

² In New York, all hunters holding existing waterfowl hunting privileges may participate in the Conservation Order. New York sampled 3,000 individuals registered in HIP for the 2014-15 season. This included all registrants that indicated they had bagged one or more snow geese in 2014 and a proportion that did not hunt or were unsuccessful for snow geese the previous year. New York did not collect information regarding numbers of snow geese taken with the various expanded methods. This information was no longer required to be collected as of March, 2015.

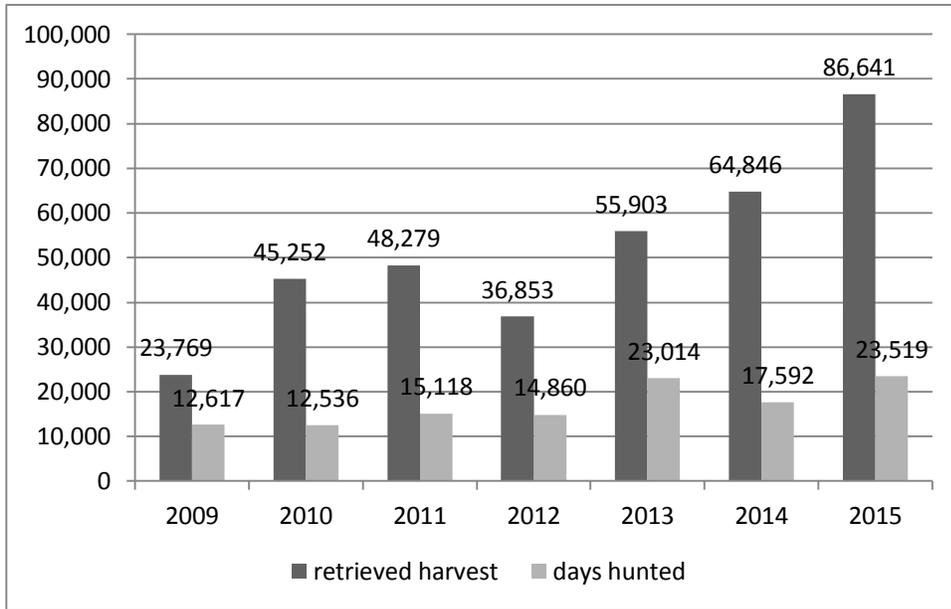


Figure 1. Retrieved harvest and number of days hunted in the Light Goose Conservation Order in the Atlantic Flyway, 2009-2015.

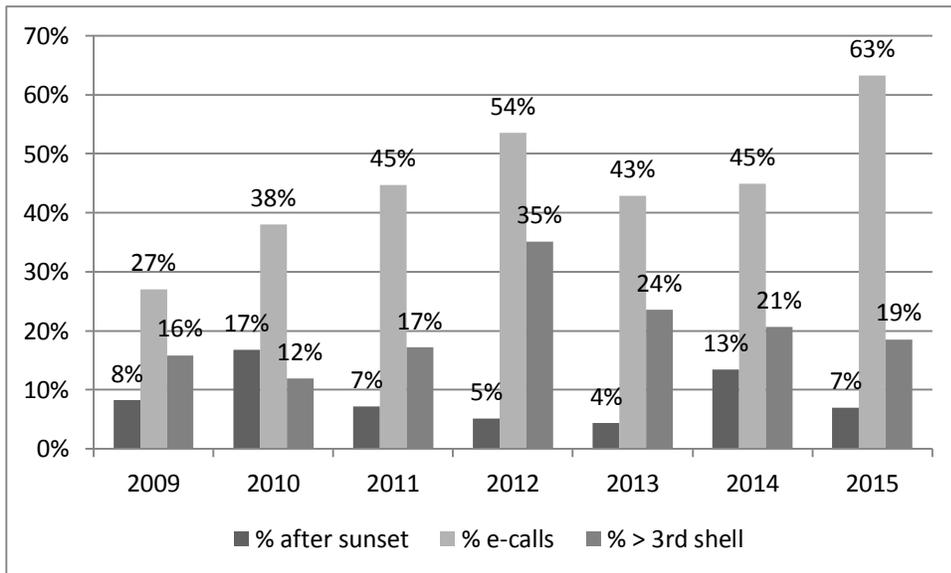


Figure 2. Percentage of kill in the Light Goose Conservation Order in the Atlantic Flyway, 2009-2015, attributed to various expanded hunting methods. Results for 2015 does not include New York as data was not required to be collected.

Appendix A. Hunter survey form.

Snow Goose 2015 Spring Season Harvest Survey - *State Name*

The special spring season for snow geese is designed to increase harvest of these birds, which have increased to more than one million birds in the Atlantic Flyway and now threaten the long-term health of the ecosystems they inhabit. As a requirement for establishing a spring season in *State Name*, we must collect information on hunter participation, use of special regulations, and snow goose harvest during the season. This information will help managers assess effectiveness of the spring season for reducing snow goose populations. Please take a few minutes to accurately and completely fill out this survey and return it in the pre-paid envelope by May 31, 2015. ***Failure to return this survey may make you ineligible to participate in the 2015 spring season!***

Snow Goose 2015 Spring Season regulations in *State Name*:

Season dates:

Daily bag limit: **No limit**

Unplugged guns allowed: **Yes**

Electronic calls allowed: **Yes**

Shooting hours: **½ hour before sunrise to ½ hour past sunset**

Hunter Survey:

1. Your *State Name* HIP (or other authorization) number for 2014-15: _____
2. Your home (or cell) phone number: _____ and birthdate: ____/____/____
3. How many days did you hunt and how many snow geese did you personally shoot during each of the time periods listed below:

	Feb 1-15	Feb 16-28	March 1-15	March 16-31	April 1-15	April 16-30	Total
# days hunted							
# geese shot and retrieved							
# geese downed and not retrieved							

4. How many of the total number of birds you shot were taken with the aid of the following **special regulations:**

	Geese shot after sunset	Geese shot with aid of electronic call	Geese shot with 4 th , 5 th , or 6 th shell in magazine
Shot and retrieved			
Downed and not retrieved			

5. Please list the counties where you hunted snow geese during the 2014 spring season in *State Name*, and how many geese you shot and retrieved in each county:

County	# days hunted	# geese shot and retrieved

6. Will you hunt snow geese in 2016 if a spring season is offered again in *State Name*?
7. _____
Please add any comments you have on the 2015 spring season for snow geese in *State Name*:

Please return this survey in the envelope provided. Thank you very much!