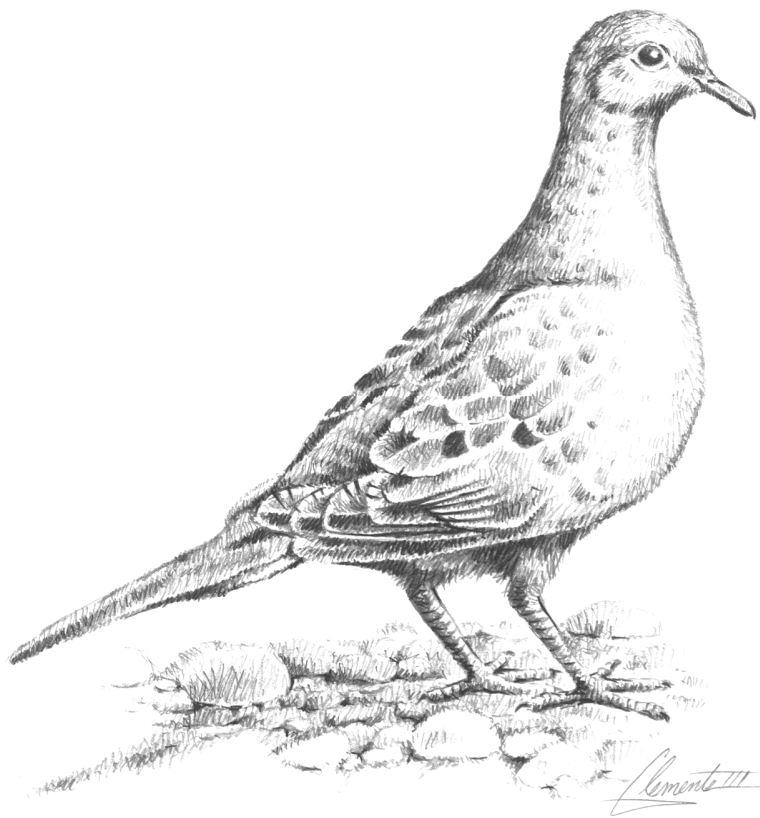


Texas Dove Hunter Opinion Survey Results

Final Report



May 2010

Introduction

In August 2009, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) Wildlife Division Staff sent a mail survey to dove hunters throughout the state to better understand their desires related to season structures and bag limits. The survey provided insight into the opinions of dove hunters about existing regulations as well as recent regulation changes. This report provides the line of questions and results of the survey.

Although mail survey response rates have declined in recent years, they still provide high enough response rates to be valid and include far more participation than TPWD generates from public hearings. Survey responses can be used to gauge hunter sentiments regarding existing and potential regulation changes before TPWD staff invests time working on regulation proposals that are not well understood or supported by hunters. Additionally, in preparing to work with our TPWD Migratory Game Bird Technical Committee and Migratory Game Bird Advisory Committee, these results will be helpful in generating full discussion and consideration of each issue that may lead to potential rule changes.

Besides revisiting several issues of continuing interest, the dove survey specifically sought feedback on three issues that are being scoped in preparation for the 2010-11 dove season. These issues are the late season segment being established in the North Zone (Figure 1), late season segment interest in the South Zone, and the new 15-bird daily bag limit for the Central and South Zones.

Methods

Each survey question was developed by a team from the Wildlife Division's Game Bird and Technical Programs over the course of the summer before being mailed in August 2009. The survey was mailed to 7,500 randomly selected current license holders. Those selected were drawn from a sample of hunters who were Texas residents, Harvest Information Program (HIP) certified, and purchased either a migratory bird stamp or the super combo license. Additionally, the survey was sent only to hunters who reported killing at least one dove the prior year (based on HIP question responses) to ensure that

the respondents had at least some level of dove hunting participation. The sample size, or the number of survey participants that would be needed for a statistically valid analysis, was based on prior experience. The return rate was 23.8%, with 1,650 surveys returned.

Results

Each survey question is listed below, followed by a summary of the responses and an interpretation of the results. A 95% confidence level (CL) is the confidence interval on the estimate. In other words, if the survey was run multiple times, 95% of the time the estimate would fall within this range. It can also be said we are 95% certain that if all hunters were surveyed, the answer would fall in this range.

1. Legal dove shooting hours have been 30 minutes before sunrise to sunset for many years, but changes have been suggested. Which dove shooting hours do you prefer?
____Noon to sunset ____30 minutes before sunrise to sunset

Answer	Count	Percent	95% CL
Noon to sunset	225	15.2%	13.3%-17.0%
30 minutes before sunrise to sunset	1156	78.0%	75.8%-80.1%
Other	102	6.9%	5.6%-8.2%

As in past surveys when this question was asked, dove hunters continue to prefer the all-day option by a sizeable margin. Response preferences have averaged around the 80% rate in every survey we have conducted regarding the all-day option. As long as there is no evidence regarding all-day hunting being harmful to the resource, it would be difficult to consider changing to half-day hunting.

2. Texas has had a 4-day Special White-winged Dove Area hunting season the first two (2) complete weekends (Sat. & Sun., noon to sunset shooting hours) in September in portions of South Texas for over 50 years. What days of the week would you prefer for this season? (*Check only one*)

____Saturday & Sunday ____Friday & Saturday ____No Opinion Other: ____

Answer	Count	Percent	95% CL
Saturday & Sunday	335	51.5%	47.7%-55.4%
Friday & Saturday	102	15.7%	12.9%-18.5%
No Opinion	187	28.8%	25.3%-32.3%
Other	26	4.0%	2.5%-5.5%

At the suggestion of the Migratory Game Bird Advisory Committee, we asked this question to determine whether white-winged dove hunters preferred a Friday/Saturday

option over a Saturday/Sunday option. We learned that the majority felt Saturday/Sunday was best suited even for those with long road trips.

3. If the Special WWD season opens the weekend prior to Labor Day, does this allow you to stay and hunt on Sunday before returning home? (*Check only one*)

_____Yes _____Doesn't affect plan _____Neutral _____No

Answer	Count	Percent	95% CL
Yes	250	41.9%	37.9%-45.8%
Doesn't affect Plan	188	31.5%	27.8%-35.2%
Neutral	118	19.8%	16.6%-23.0%
No	40	6.7%	4.7%-8.8%

The response to "Yes" and "Doesn't affect Plan" provides a 73% majority. This continues to validate hunter sentiment that the current season structure meets their needs.

4. Which Dove Zone do you hunt the most? See map on other side for zone boundaries. (*Check only one*)

_____North _____Central _____South

Answer	Count	Percent	95% CL
North	415	27.6%	25.3%-30.0%
Central	670	44.5%	42.0%-47.1%
South	419	27.9%	25.6%-30.1%

This shows that the majority of dove hunting is done in the Central Zone.

5. Within a 70 day season in the North Zone, which season structure would you prefer? (The dates listed are based on the 2010 calendar and would be adjusted each year to account for date shifts.) (*Check only one*)

_____ Sept 1–Nov 9 (70 consecutive days)
 _____ Sept 1–Oct 24 & Dec 26–Jan 10 (70 days w/ later shorter winter segment)
 _____ Sept 1–Oct 10 & Dec 4–Jan 2 (70 days w/ earlier longer winter segment)
 _____ Other: _____

Answer	Count	Percent	95% CL
Sept 1-Nov 9	174	43.3%	38.4%-48.1%
Sept 1-Oct 24	146	36.3%	31.6%-41.0%
Sept 1-Oct 10	82	20.4%	16.4%-24.3%
Other	0	0.0%	

Recent changes in mourning dove harvest strategies resulted in the Central Management Unit having a single season structure option, a 70-day season, and 15-bird daily bag limit, although state regulations can be more restrictive should the Commission choose. With 10 extra days now available in the Texas North Zone, we asked hunters what season

structure they preferred. A split season was preferred by 56.7%, with a shorter late segment being most preferred. Additionally, under current regulations, this season structure would standardize regulations between the North and Central Zones.

6. The North Zone season should open on: (*Check only one*)

- ☐ Sept 1st regardless of the day of the week
☐ First Saturday in Sept
☐ First Friday in Sept

Answer	Count	Percent	95% CL
Sept 1	236	60.8%	55.9%-65.7%
First Saturday	117	30.2%	25.6%-34.7%
First Friday	35	9.0%	6.2%-11.9%

Even though opening dove season on the 1st is thought to reduce opportunity for working hunters and youth, the 1st is still preferred by a wide majority in the North Zone.

7. Federal regulations have been approved for 2009-10 season that increase the bag limit from 12 to 15 doves in the aggregate in the Central Zone. What is your bag limit preference for the 2010-11 season and beyond?

☐ 15 ☐ 12 ☐ Other

Answer	Count	Percent	95% CL
10	1	0.2%	0.0%-0.5%
12	110	17.1%	14.1%-20.0%
15	532	82.5%	79.5%-85.4%
>15	2	0.3%	0.0%-0.7%

The 15-bird bag limit is the clear preference in the Central Zone. In prior surveys, Central Zone hunters were split over bag and season length, with a slight majority preferring 70 days and 12 birds. However, now that both 70 days and 15 birds are available in one option, it becomes a win-win proposition for the hunters.

8. The Central Zone season should open on: (*Check only one*)

- ☐ Sept 1 regardless of the day of the week
☐ First Saturday in Sept
☐ First Friday in Sept

Answer	Count	Percent	95% CL
Sept 1	388	60.2%	56.5%-64.0%
First Saturday	196	30.4%	26.9%-34.0%
First Friday	60	9.3%	7.0%-11.6%

Central Zone hunters prefer the September 1st opening date for dove season as do North Zone hunters.

9. Federal regulations have been approved for 2009-10 season that increase the bag limit from 12 to 15 doves in the aggregate in the South Zone. What is your bag limit preference for the 2010-11 season and beyond?

_____15 _____12 _____Other_____

Answer	Count	Percent	95% CL
12	67	17.0%	13.2%-20.7%
15	327	82.8%	79.0%-86.5%
>15	1	0.3%	0.0%-0.8%

South Zone hunters highly support the 15-bird bag limit.

10. Which of the following options for the South Zone late season is most important to you? (*Check only one*)

- ☐ Always closing on the third Sunday in January
☐ Opening the late season segment the day after Christmas
☐ Running the season as late into January as possible, even if this means closing on a weekday

Answer	Count	Percent	95% CL
Always closing on the third Sunday in January	105	26.4%	22.1%-30.8%
Opening the late season segment the day after Christmas	126	31.7%	27.1%-36.3%
Running the season as late into January as possible	166	41.8%	36.9%-46.7%

South Zone hunters prefer to hunt as late in the season as allowed by federal law over having a consistent closing date. To accomplish setting a later season will necessitate moving some days from the end of the first segment to the second segment, and a decision must be made to allow the season to close on a weekday or continue to close on a Sunday. Texas is the only state allowed to establish a late season that runs until January 25. We have not used the full framework for many years mainly because the primary hunting interest comes early and the segment of hunters who like the January season is very small. If the late season continues to open the day after Christmas, staff feels it unwise to take more than 7 to 9-days out of the first split, which would cause it to close on the 4th Sunday in October.

11. The South Zone dove season will now open on the Friday nearest September 20th in 2009, which allows Texas to open as early as the 17th and as late as the 23rd. What is your preference for the opening date for the 2010-11 season and beyond? (*Check only one*)

- ☐ Earliest date allowed by Federal Regulations
☐ Oct 1st regardless of day of week
☐ 1st Friday in Oct

Answer	Count	Percent	95% CL
Earliest date allowed by Federal Regulations	355	85.7%	82.4%-89.1%
Oct 1st regardless of day of week	17	4.1%	2.2%-6.0%
1st Friday in Oct	42	10.1%	7.2%-13.1%

South Zone hunters desire to begin their season as early as possible and run it as late as possible. The South Zone opens in mid-September rather than September 1st because previous studies have shown that approximately 11% of mourning doves in south Texas are still nesting in early September. The concession that staff received last summer from the Flyway and the Service to allow Texas to open on the Friday nearest the 20th, but not earlier than the 17th, is all the flexibility that can be expected on this matter.

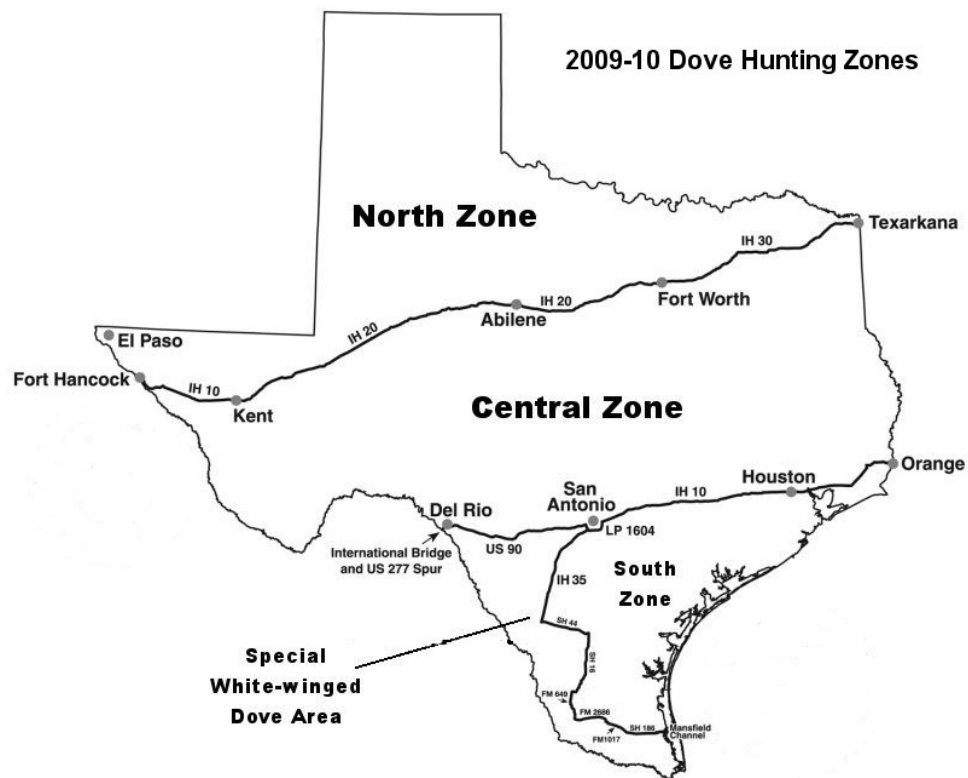


Figure 1. Texas dove hunting zone map.