

recently within the last three years. It’s also now easier to show proof-of-license. Now hunters can use a digital image of their license as proof-of-license for any hunting that doesn’t require a tag, like dove hunting. Accepted formats include: (1) a digital photo, (2) an emailed receipt, (3) within the Outdoor Annual app or the My Texas Hunt Harvest app, or 4) online purchase record.

In addition to a hunting license, anyone born after Sept. 1, 1971, must successfully complete a hunter education training course in order to hunt legally in Texas. The TPWD Hunter Education certification is valid for life and is honored in

all other states and provinces. More information about hunter education is available online. If you misplace your certification you can print a replacement online at no cost.

Hunting stamp endorsements which are required in addition to your license include an archery stamp - \$7; migratory game birds - \$7; upland game birds - \$7; and a federal migratory game bird (duck stamp) - \$25.

Hunting Lease License (Types 132, 133, and 134)

Required of a landowner or landowner’s agent who leases hunting rights to another person on property they own or control for pay or other consideration.

The license must be displayed on the property.

License fee: \$79 for 1 through 499 acres; \$147 for 500 through 999 acres; or \$252 for 1,000 acres or more: Note - Recordbook no longer required.

In closing, we want you to have a wonderful time during your stay in our area. Please remember that you are ambassadors for all of us involved in the hunting and outdoor industries. Don’t forget to think SAFETY every time you handle a firearm, and make proper gun handling and safe shooting a part of your everyday life at home or in the field. Have a safe and successful season.

Habitat conditions could present challenges for waterfowl hunters this season

Dry conditions across the state could pose some challenges as waterfowl hunters gear up for the start of the new season. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) biologists indicate habitat conditions are not ideal for ducks and duck hunters in many parts of Texas. However, weather pattern changes in addition to timely cold fronts and significant rain events could help improve hunter’s fortunes.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) completed its May Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey for the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, the survey revealed that most duck species saw substantial decreases since the last survey, conducted in 2019. Drought conditions over most of the prairie-parklands, the most important breeding area for ducks coming to Texas, played a significant role in the decline. Blue winged-

teal and redheads are the only duck species that saw population increases since 2019.

“The drought that occurred in 2020 and 2021 had a large impact on duck hunting success in Texas,” said Kevin Kraai, TPWD Waterfowl Program Leader. “Last year, Texas observed a significant decrease in total duck harvest compared to the previous hunting season. The total estimated duck harvest was down 41 percent in 2021 compared to 2020.”

Currently, most of the state is well below seasonal precipitation averages, except for South Texas and parts of the Texas Panhandle. These conditions across the state haven’t been seen since the record drought in 2010.

Typically, when there is less water spread out across the landscape, it concentrates birds in areas where hunters tend to be waiting, increasing hunting success. However, ducks are very intolerant of excessive

disturbance and move on quickly after hunting begins if habitat conditions don’t improve substantially before or during the hunting season.

In East Texas, reservoir levels are very low due to the dry and hot summer. This can be a good thing when it starts to rain again because vegetation that produces small seeds has grown along the exposed shorelines. When water levels rise and the vegetation is flooded, it will provide a substantial increase in the foods available for wintering ducks.

The Texas coast is one of those places that has been a real hit or miss for hunters. The region still needs a lot of rain as the marshes are very salty, many of the wetlands are dry and the overall amount of freshwater is extremely limited. The hunt clubs and leases that are fortunate enough to have access to water to flood rice fields or wetlands will have an advantage this fall if current conditions persist.

Despite some of the challenges in Texas, there is

some good news on the horizon with habitats on the mend up north in key breeding areas.

“This spring, habitat conditions in eastern North and South Dakota were much improved than the previous two years,” added Kraai. “Much of the landscape was not farmed or plowed due to wet conditions, leaving most of the landscape idle and available for excellent nesting conditions for dabbling ducks. The subsequent hatch of ducklings was above average for this very important area for breeding ducks. After two years of significant drought and very poor productivity, this means that there should be more young and vulnerable ducks winging their way south this winter.”

The special youth-only duck season along with veterans and active-duty military season occurs in the High Plains Mallard Management Unit Oct. 22-23, followed by youth-only/active-duty military duck season in the South Zone Oct. 29-30 and the North Zone Nov. 5-7. Regular duck season in the High Plains Mallard Management Unit opens Oct. 29, in the South Zone on Nov. 5 and the North Zone on Nov. 12. Additional information regarding duck seasons and daily bag limits can be found in the Outdoor Annual.

Light and dark goose season starts Nov. 5 in the East Zone and West Zone. The light geese conservation order season begins

in the East Zone on Jan. 30 and on Feb. 6 in the West Zone. More information regarding goose seasons and daily bag limits can be found in the Outdoor Annual.

Hunters should purchase their new 2022-23 Texas hunting license prior to hitting the field. In addition, waterfowl hunters must have a migratory game bird endorsement, federal duck stamp, and be Harvest Information Program (HIP) certified. Biologists note the importance for those purchasing a hunting license to answer HIP survey questions correctly as these surveys allow biologists to get an accurate sample of hunters so harvest surveys can be delivered to hunters later in the year from the USFWS.

It’s also required by law for hunters to have proof of their completion of a hunter education course.

Anyone hunting on Texas public hunting lands are also required to purchase an Annual Public Hunting Permit. Texas has more than 1 million acres of land accessible to the public. More information about these lands and locations can be found on the TPWD public hunting website. Hunters using public lands can complete their on-site registration via the My Texas Hunt Harvest app.

Consult the Outdoor Annual for other season dates and bag limits, including those for “Dusky” duck.

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