

DUCK ZONE BOUNDARIES

AUGUST 20, 2015

BACKGROUND

Zoning is the establishment of independent seasons in two or more areas (zones) within a state for the purpose of providing more equitable distribution of harvest opportunity. Zoning enhances the state's ability to match season dates with available habitat types, migration chronology, and season preferences of duck hunters in specific areas.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) considers states' request to change duck zones every five years. The next opportunity for Kansas to alter its duck zone boundaries, if it chooses, will be for the 2016-17 season. The USFWS must be notified by Dec. 1, 2015 of any proposed changes. Below are the federal guidelines for zoning:

- 1) A zone is a geographic area or portion of a state, with a contiguous boundary, for which independent dates may be selected for the regular duck season.
- 2) Changes for management-unit boundaries (i.e. High Plains Unit) are not subject to the guidelines and provisions governing the use of zones and split seasons for ducks.
- 3) Only minor (less than a county in size) boundary changes will be allowed for any grandfathered arrangement and changes are limited to the open season. (Kansas has no grandfathered boundaries).
- 4) Once a zone/split option is selected, it must remain in place for the following five years. Any State may continue the configuration used in the previous five-year period. If changes are made, the zone/split-season configuration must conform to one of the following options:
 - 1) No more than four zones with no splits,
 - 2) Split seasons (no more than three segments) with no zones,
 - 3) No more than three zones with the option for two-way (two-segment) split seasons in one, two, or all zones.

Although the zone boundaries are permanent for five years, the season dates and bag limits may be adjusted annually.

DISCUSSION

Physiographically diverse states have added difficulty in selecting season dates that will accommodate hunted duck species (early vs. late migrants) and hunting style (i.e. marshes, fields, reservoirs, rivers, etc.) preferences. This is especially true for mid-latitude states like Kansas. Although zoning creates boundaries that can confuse some hunters, the objective of zoning for duck hunting is greater hunter opportunity and harvest. Zoning enhances the state's ability to match season dates with available habitat types, migration chronology, and season preferences of duck hunters for specific areas.

Kansas waterfowl hunters are just as diverse as Kansas waterfowl hunting opportunities. KDWPT typically receives strong – and often conflicting – opinions about seasons. Some hunters prefer early seasons while others prefer hunting in later seasons. Zones and splits are

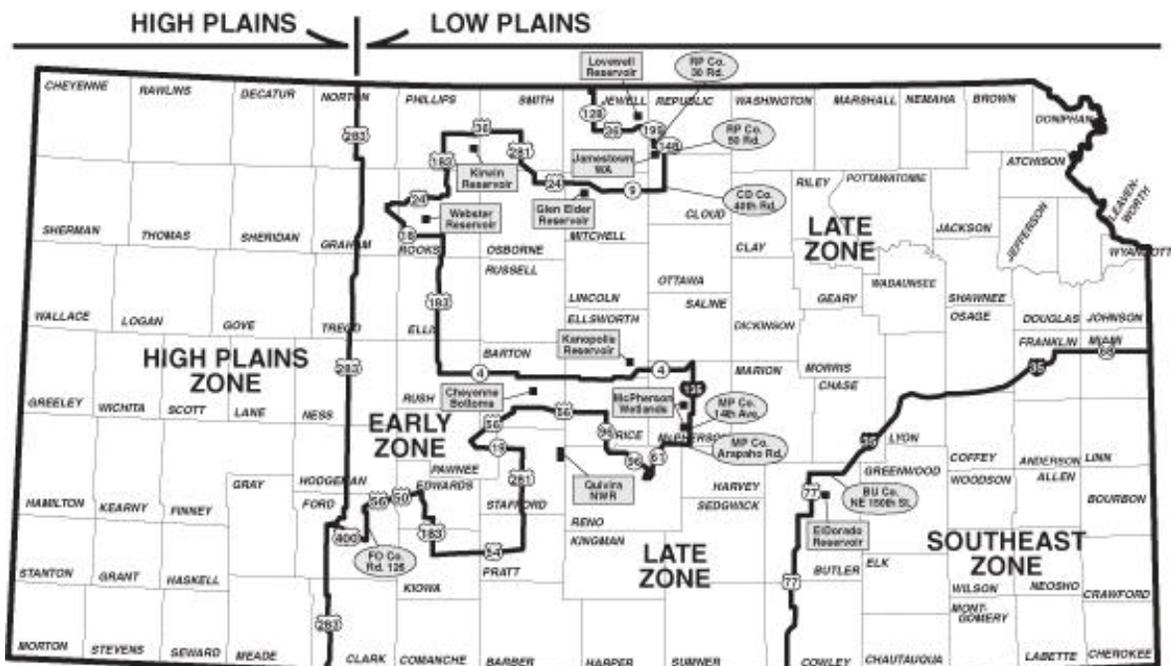
tools that help serve a broad constituent base. Zoning effectively increases season length for hunters willing to travel. The benefits of zoning increases under restrictive season length frameworks, as were in place from 1988 through 1992 (39-day total season length).

If no changes are adopted, the zones will continue as they have been for the 2011-2015 waterfowl seasons. If a state cannot meet the Dec. 1, 2015 deadline (due to incomplete feedback from sportsmen, etc.) but still wishes to change its configuration during the next open season, the second deadline will be May 1, 2016. HOWEVER, if this is the date of submission, the state may not implement the new configuration until the 2017-2018 seasons.

Duck Zones Historical Timeline

- 1972 Kansas was split into High Plains Low Plains
- 1996 Low Plains split into Early Zone and Late Zone
- 2011 Low Plains split into Early Zone, Late Zone and Southeast Zone

Figure 1. Current Duck Zone Boundaries

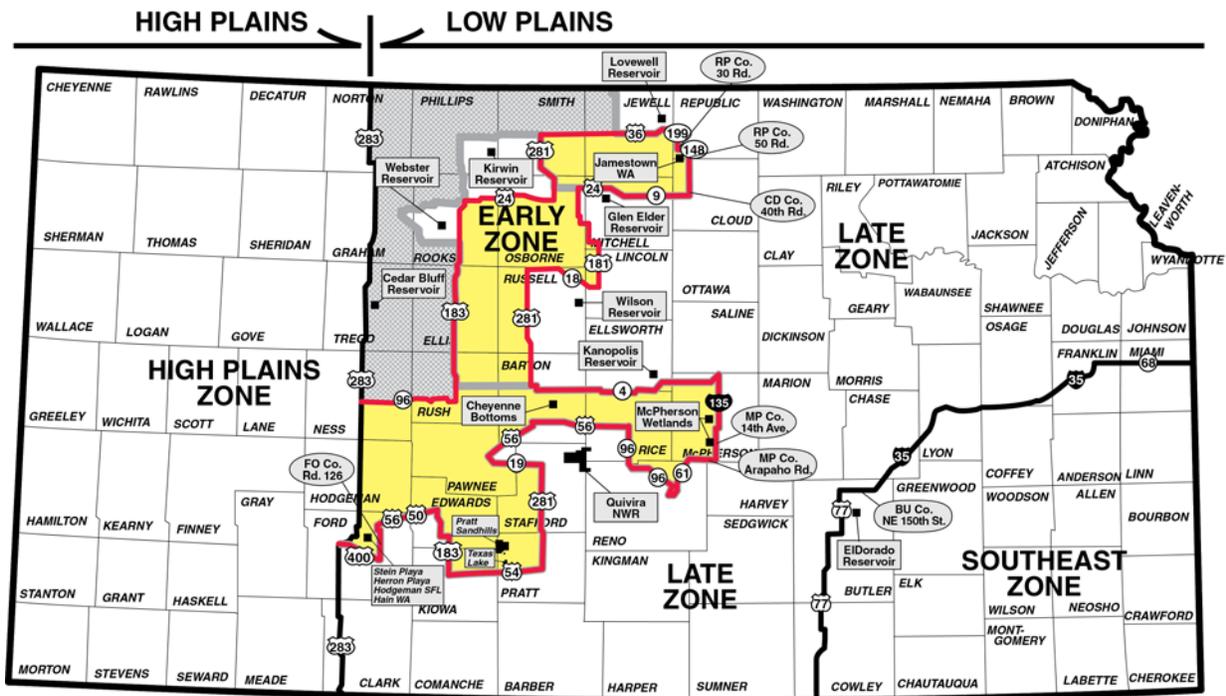


STAFF RECOMMENDATION

To remain with three zones with the option for two-way (two-segment) split seasons in Kansas Low Plains Unit.

Low Plains Early & Late Zone Boundary

See Map Below: Area highlighted in yellow indicates PROPOSED Low Plains Early Zone. Area shaded in grey is area of change from Low Plains Early to Low Plains Late Zone.



Low Plains Late & Southeast Zone Boundary

NO CHANGE