



Alberta Fish & Game Association

6924 - 104 Street

Edmonton, AB T6K 1T8

Phone: (780) 437-2342 Fax: (780) 438-6872
email: office@afga.org Website: www.afga.org

AFGA Proposed Approach to Waterfowl Hunting and Outfitting In Alberta

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During recent annual conventions and meetings of the Alberta Fish and Game Association, a number of issues have been brought forward and discussed with regard to waterfowl hunting. The most recent resolution passed at the February Convention in 2003, indicated the following,

“W-18-2003

BE IT RESOLVED THAT ASRD look at the possibility of utilizing outfitting allotments to reduce the Non-Resident Aliens Harvest of Waterfowl to less than 10% of the total harvest waterfowl in Alberta; **CARRIED.**”

The AFGA expects that changes will be necessary to ensure that the resident hunting opportunities for waterfowl are maintained or extended. The objectives of this AFGA document are:

- (a) to identify the issues associated with waterfowl hunting and
- (b) to identify solutions to the issues or concerns.

The Issues

1. Access to Lands

The problems between resident and non-resident hunters are not the numbers of birds available, as geese are at historical highs, but rather access to properties. It has been noted by most residents that landowners who welcomed them onto their property have now restricted access. The properties are still hunted but not by residents.

2. Double Limits

There are also numerous complaints of non-resident hunters limiting out morning and evening. This is difficult to enforce and should be addressed.

3. Non-Resident Alien Guides and Outfitters

The presence of these non-resident alien guides and outfitters complicates and increases the conflicts for hunting access. This issue still appears to be unresolved and must be reviewed.

4. Waterfowl Outfitter Allocation Methods

The methods of assigning waterfowl outfitters an allocation are of concern to resident hunters. Particularly, concerns arise with regard to assigning lands or areas that establish tenure and lease-like rights. Such rights may increase conflicts for land access.

The density of non-resident and resident hunters in the same WMU is of concern. When does the density reach a point that non-residents are not permitted to hunt, due to access limitations? Such a carrying capacity needs to be addressed.

Assigning outfitter allocations on the basis of resident hunter densities may require some historic information as the current number of waterfowl hunters is in decline.

5. Sunday Hunting

This matter is still very closely contested in the AFGA. Opening Sunday hunting to resident hunters only may portray the resident hunters in a negative light and be detrimental to improving hunter access opportunities. The support of the outfitters on this matter may not reflect a point of united agreement. The AFGA is still questioning this action.

6. License Revenues

The AFGA is very concerned that license revenues are being directed away from government to the DAO's and to the commercial users. The ability of such groups to undertake programs and projects and advertising leaves resident hunters in a less equitable position when addressing allocation arguments or strategies. Such funding assignments are a major issue to the AFGA.

The Solutions

1. **A tagging system to insure over limiting is easier to enforce.**
Each non-resident alien license would come with 16 tags. These tags would be affixed to the wing in a similar manner that a tag is affixed to a big game animal. The tag would remain affixed until the bird was exported. When they are out of tags they are finished. This should encourage hunters to enjoy the hunt, taking the "body count" out of the picture. We may have to limit shooting by guides to insure these extra birds aren't added in. By doing this the daily limits will be filled in the morning thus the evening shoot will be unnecessary resulting in many freed up fields. One field would be utilized per day rather than 2.
2. **Season Closure**
The bird hunting season would run from September 1st to late December as it does now. It would be open to resident hunters for the entire time however it would be closed to non-resident aliens after a certain date. What should that date be?

Up in Peace River the geese leave the first big storm in late October. Up there AFGA suggests the non-resident alien season end **September 30th**.

In Central Alberta the geese also leave the first big storm in late October. Up there AFGA suggests the non-resident alien season end **September 30th**.

In southwestern Alberta hunter numbers aren't an issue. The wildlife officers have trouble finding hunters to shoot ducks on a damage permit. AFGA suggests a **November 30th closure**.

We must be careful that we don't force the northern outfitter down south bringing the problems with them. The idea of only hunting in four attached WMU would prevent this however they could get around it by having a second company.

3. **Allocations**

If we are generous with allocations but tight with the season we will force a lot of hunters into a tight area. A major outfitter we spoke with said limiting allocations isn't a problem because when anything is in short supply you can change more. They get the same amount of money with less effort.

We should also look at duck hunting. # 1 would obviously apply. Duck hunting seems to be less confrontational however I understand it has become a real problem in Manitoba. I suggest we stay the course here.

Currently the proposed allocations are WMU allocations, in that the plan is to allow a maximum of 4 allocations (meaning Outfitters) per WMU. This may bring the number of Waterfowl Outfitters down a small percentage in some WMU's and may not make a difference at all in other WMU's. This is not going to make a lot of difference in the amount of guided NRA's. The position we should possibly look at is allocating the NRA licenses so that each outfitter would be allowed so many allocated migratory game bird licenses. This would work much the same as big game allocations. This would work quite well in controlling the number of hunts that would be allowed.

4. **Non-Resident Alien Guides and Outfitters**

The other major thing that has to be stopped is the NRA Outfitters that are setting up hunts down south of the border, guiding and tying up fields up here in the fall and then returning south with their pockets full. At the same time they are having a large negative effect on resident hunting access.

Appropriate prohibitions and enforcement actions are recommended.

5. **Sunday Hunting**

We suggest that this will require some further discussion at an AFGA Executive meeting in August 2003.

6. **License Revenues**

The AFGA suggests that the matter of government license revenues be reviewed. The AFGA is concerned that the management capability of resident hunters will diminish. We do not support a transfer of such funds away from general revenue or funding programs of SRD.

Summary:

The concern that resident hunters would lose the early season doesn't apply. At worst things will stay like they are. There is no benefit to continue to restrict access after the season has ended, so things should improve for the resident hunter.

Allocations have to be distributed to ensure residents and non-residents alike have a chance for a quality experience. In some areas we may impact the outfitter and in others it will be a non-issue.

AFGA
June 22, 2003