

**Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board
Meeting Minutes for Wednesday, April 3rd, 2019**

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board held a meeting beginning at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, April 3rd, 2019 at 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, VT 05620, in the Dewey Building.

Members of the Board in Attendance: Tim Biebel (Board Chair), Brian Bailey, Johanna Laggis, Michael Bancroft, Wendy Butler, Dennis Mewes, David Fielding Jr., Bryan McCarthy, Bill Pickens, Jay Sweeny, Cheryl Frank Sullivan, and Michael Kolsun

Department of Fish and Wildlife Staff in Attendance: Louis Porter – Commissioner; Mark Scott – Director of Wildlife; Susan Warner – Director of Outreach; Col. Jason Batchelder – Director of Law Enforcement; Catherine Gjessing – General Counsel; Will Duane – Executive Assistant; David Sausville – Migratory Game Bird Project Leader; Chris Saunders – Project Coordinator.

Members of the Public in Attendance: Chris Gould.

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM by the Chair

1) Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion: Bill Pickens moved to approve and accept the March 20th, 2019 meeting minutes as drafted. Brian Bailey seconded the motion.

Vote: Unanimous voice vote to approve the minutes as drafted

2) Public Comments (Limited to 2 minutes per speaker)

There were no members of the public who wished to address the Board

3) Migratory Game Bird Season Recommendation—Board Procedure Vote

Wildlife Division Director Mark Scott described the feedback received at the two public hearings and the comments received by the Department. Scott introduced David Sausville, the Department’s Migratory Game Bird Project Leader, and provided a summary of his background and experience.

Sausville presented the Department’s 2019-2020 waterfowl seasons recommendation to the Board. Sausville and Scott explained to the Board the relationship between the individual states in the Atlantic Flyway and the US Fish and Wildlife Service on the establishment of annual seasons. Other topics covered in the presentation included the methodology for data collection across species of waterfowl, the prevalence of certain species in Vermont, breeding and migratory patterns, and the Department’s administration of the controlled hunting program at the Mud Creek and Dead Creek Wildlife Management Areas.

Sausville and Scott also explained to the Board why the Department’s recommendation does not include the new optional veterans-only early two-day season. This allowance was recently approved at the federal level after the Department had compiled its data for the 2019-2020 recommendation and received public input. At this time the Department recommends waiting in order to better decide how to manage this new hunting opportunity, receive public input, and to study how other states implement this new optional season.

Motion: Dennis Mewes moved to approve the Department’s recommendation as presented. Bryan McCarthy seconded the motion.

Vote: Unanimous roll call vote to approve the Department’s recommendation for the 2019-2020 Migratory Game Bird Season.

The 2019 Migratory Game Bird Recommendation is attached to these Minutes

Dinner Break from 6:05 to 6:30

4) Results of the 2018 Big Game Survey—Presentation

Mark Scott introduced the topic by explaining the purpose of the Department’s 10-Year Big Game plan. The Big Game Plan serves as a tentative agreement and framework among the Board, the various affected public, and the Department on how the state’s big game species will be managed in the next decade.

Scott introduced Chris Saunders, the Department’s Project Coordinator, and summarized his background and experience. Saunders presented on the results of the recently conducted 2018 Big Game Survey. Topics covered in the presentation included the methodology of the survey, social attitudes toward hunting, fishing, and trapping, hunter satisfaction and participation rates, and the public’s awareness of wildlife issues in VT. The survey results are intended to help guide the Board’s regulatory decision-making process.

5) Petition Acknowledgement

The Department received two petitions regarding coyote hunting in Vermont. The receipt of the petitions was acknowledged by the Board. The Board Chair requested that the Department study the petitions and provide the Board with a recommendation at a later meeting. The parties that submitted the petitions have been contacted and will be informed of the future meeting date when the Board will address the petitions.

6) Commissioner's Update

A couple was attacked by a coyote at their home in Salisbury, Vermont. The VT Department of Health confirmed that the coyote tested positive for rabies. The couple are recovering from their wounds and will undergo a rabies treatment schedule.

The Department has received reports of owls being found dead. This could be due to a harsh winter which may have impacted the birds' ability to feed on small mammals in dense snowpack.

The final of five spring deer hearings is scheduled for Thursday, April 4th in Springfield. The meetings have been well attended and feedback indicates that the new season recommendations have been well received. There will be additional meetings later this spring.

The next Board Meeting is April 24th. Meetings are also scheduled for May 22nd, and June 19th. The Department will set up a training for new Board Members. Older members are welcome to attend.

The Legislature has not advanced the Department's proposals for changes to the deer and moose statutes in Title 10. The Department is seeking changes to the parameters for youth deer hunting season and permit allocation requirements for moose hunting. It is possible for these changes to be instituted next year, however the Department would prefer to see them enacted in this first half of the legislative biennium.

The Vermont House passed a budget bill which provides additional general fund allocations and an increase in fees for the Department. This additional revenue will allow the Department to keep the Salisbury Fish Culture Station up and running. The Department may also receive some capital funds for improving water quality issues at the hatchery. The budget bill will now be taken up in the Vermont Senate.

The Meeting was Adjourned at 7:40 by the Chair

The mission of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is the conservation of all species of fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the people of Vermont.

2019-2020 WATERFOWL SEASONS RECOMMENDATIONS

APRIL 3, 2019



**Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3905**

Executive Summary

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department wishes to offer the following background information and recommendations for the 2019-2020 migratory game bird seasons. The recommendations are the same as those presented previously within the preview document supplied to the Board in February 2019. The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board has a wide range of dates to choose from to try and capture the desired hunting periods of the waterfowling community. The Board will be considering the following items:

1. Setting the 2019 duck, goose, merganser, coot, brant, woodcock and snipe seasons dates and daily bag limits.
2. Setting the 2019 youth waterfowl hunting weekend dates.
3. Setting the 2019 falconry regulations.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 - 2019 Lake Champlain Zone Duck, Merganser and Coot Seasons: That the 2019-2020 duck, mergansers, and coot seasons of the Lake Champlain zone run from October 10 to November 1 and November 23 to December 29, 2019. Within the chosen dates, we recommend the 60-day season with a daily bag limit of no more than 6 ducks (with species restrictions), 5 mergansers, and 15 coots.

Recommendation 2 – 2019 Interior Vermont Zone Duck, Merganser and Coot Seasons: That the 2019-2020 duck, mergansers, and coot seasons of the Interior Vermont zone run from October 10 to December 8, 2019. Within the chosen dates, we recommend the 60-day season with a daily bag limit of no more than 6 -ducks (with species restrictions), 5 mergansers, and 15 coots.

Recommendation 3 – 2019 September Resident Canada Goose Season: That the September resident Canada goose season run from September 1-25, 2019, with a daily bag limit of 8 birds per day and a possession limit of 24 birds within the Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont zones. New Hampshire plans to offer the same dates within the Connecticut River zone, but with a daily bag limit of 5 birds per day and a possession limit of 15 birds.

Recommendation 4 – 2019 Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont Zones Migrant Canada Goose Season: That the Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont zones be set for the migrant Canada goose season to run from October 10 to November 8, 2019, with a daily bag limit of 2 birds per day and a possession limit of 6 birds.

Recommendation 5 – 2019 Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont Zones Snow Goose Season: That the Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont zones be set for the snow goose season to run from October 1st to December 31, 2019 and February 25 to March 10, 2020, with a daily bag limit of 25 birds per day and no possession limit.

Recommendation 6 – 2019 Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont Zones Brant Season: That the Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont zones be set for the brant season to run from October 10 to November 8, 2019, with a daily bag limit of 2 birds per day and a possession limit of 6 birds.

Recommendation 7 - 2019 Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days: That the youth waterfowl hunting weekend occur on Saturday and Sunday, September 28 & 29, 2019, within all Vermont zones.

Recommendation 8- 2019 Falconry Season: A person possessing a valid falconry permit may take migratory game birds only during open seasons and within designated shooting times. The daily bag limit shall be a maximum of three legal migratory game birds, singly or in the aggregate, not to exceed restrictive daily bag limits for certain species as listed herein. Possession limit shall be equal to three times the daily limit.

Recommendation 9 – 2019 Woodcock Season: That the woodcock season run from October 1 to November 14, 2019, with a daily bag limit of 3 birds per day and a possession limit of 9 birds, statewide.

Recommendation 10 – 2019 Snipe Season: That the snipe season run from October 1 to November 14, 2019, with a daily bag limit of 8 birds per day and a possession limit of 24 birds, statewide.

Background

Vermont currently has three waterfowl hunting zones (Figure 1):

- Lake Champlain Zone that we share with New York. Vermont sets the dates for this zone.
- Interior Zone that is entirely within Vermont.
- Connecticut River Zone that we share with New Hampshire. New Hampshire sets the dates for this zone as an extension of their Inland Zone.

Under Vermont's three zones, Vermont can split any zone once to create two hunting segments. Vermont currently has sixty days to divide between the two duck hunting segments to accommodate the diverse desires of the variety of Vermont waterfowl hunters. Migrant Canada goose season currently only has 30-days to utilize. The zones were also set up to take into consideration the differences in the physiographic regions of the state and the climatic differences each has.

2019 Duck Season: If the Board decides to continue with the tradition of having one Saturday opening day followed by two Wednesday opening days, then 2019 will be a weekday opener. The Board has traditionally held the youth waterfowl weekend the last weekend in September. The Department has withheld any fishing tournament permits for that weekend to reduce conflicts between anglers and youth waterfowlers. The Department in 2019 would like to convert to a every other year opening day schedule in which we alternate a weekday and Saturdays as opening days.

2019 Goose, Brant, Mergansers, and Coots Seasons: Since 2015 the Board has opened the resident Canada goose season the first of September. Resident Canada geese have a 25-day season option. The migrant Canada goose season may not open prior to October 10th. Migrant Canada geese have a 30-day season option with a two-bird daily bag limit. Atlantic brant have a

30-day season option with a two-bird daily bag limit. The Board traditionally has run the merganser and coot seasons concurrently with the duck season.

2019 Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days: The Department may select two days per duck-hunting zone, designated as “Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days,” in addition to the regular duck seasons. The days must be held outside any regular duck season on a weekend, holiday, or other non-school days when youth hunters would have the maximum opportunity to participate. The days may be held up to 14 days before or after any regular duck-season frameworks or within any split of a regular duck season, or within any other open season on migratory birds. The daily bag limits may include ducks, geese, mergansers and coots, and would be the same as those allowed in the regular season.

The age of youth hunter eligibility was changed in 2016 at the federal level. That same year the Board changed the youth waterfowl hunter age to 17 years of age or younger. In addition, an adult at least 18 years of age must accompany the youth hunter into the field. This adult may not duck hunt but may participate in other seasons that are open on the special youth day. Youth hunters 16 years of age and older must possess a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (also known as Federal Duck Stamp). Vermont also requires all hunters 16 years of age and older to have a state duck stamp. All hunters regardless of age are required to have a HIP number. Within the Connecticut River Zone, youth must be 15 years of age or young to participate during the youth weekend.

Special Falconry Regulations: Falconry is a permitted means of taking migratory game birds in any State meeting Federal falconry standards in 50 CFR 21.29. These States may select an extended season for taking migratory game birds in accordance with the following:

Extended Seasons: For all hunting methods combined, the combined length of the extended season, regular season, and any special or experimental seasons must not exceed 107 days for any species or group of species in a geographical area. Each extended season may be divided into a maximum of 3 segments.

Daily Bag Limits: Falconry daily bag limits for all permitted migratory game birds must not exceed 3 birds, singly or in the aggregate, during extended falconry seasons, any special or experimental seasons, and regular hunting seasons in all States, including those that do not select an extended falconry season.

Regular Seasons: General hunting regulations, including seasons and hunting hours, apply to falconry in each State listed in 50 CFR 21.29. Regular season bag limits do not apply to falconry. The falconry bag limit is not in addition to gun limits.

Vermont has traditionally run the falconry season during any open migratory game bird season. Last year falconers had the opportunity to begin on September 1st with the resident Canada goose season and ended their season on December 31st when the snow goose season closed. The falconry season reopened on February 26, 2019. A three-bird daily bag limit was in effect.

Public Input and Outreach: The Department, in conjunction with the Board, held two public meetings in 2019. Meetings occurred on the evenings of March 12 and 14 and began at 6:30 pm, in Whitehall, New York and Winooski, Vermont. Comments received at the public meetings and the number of attendees is provided within the accompanying document. In addition to the public meetings and online comments the Department relied heavily on the results of the 2015 Statewide Waterfowl Hunter Survey results to set season dates and opening day preferences.

After the Board approves final season dates and bag limits, the Department will submit season selections to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by April 30th and the information will be sent to a printer for production of the 2019 syllabus of state and federal hunting regulations. The early decision deadlines will allow the Department to have the syllabus available to the public in print version by August a full month prior to any migratory bird hunting season. The seasons will be placed on the Department's website within days of approval.

Tally of Public Comments

The Department received a total of 14 emails containing comments on the proposed migratory game bird seasons. Sixty-one citizens attended the two public meetings hosted by the Board and Department. A number of meeting attendees were the individuals that submitted comments via email. Below are the main comments received from both sources with the number of individuals that commented.

1. Regulations need to be simplified. (2)
2. Lower bag limit on resident Canada geese. (2)
3. Wednesday start every other year. (3)
4. Alternate opening days between a weekday and Saturday. (3)
5. Lake Champlain Zone (LCZ) run in early October for 5-days, have a long split and start in early November and run to December 21, any later is a waste. (1)
6. LCZ, run from October 10 for five days maximum, have a two-week split and then run to the end of December. (5)
7. LCZ, shorter opening segment (1)
8. LCZ, run for five days in October and reopen in early November and keep open to just before Christmas. (3)
9. Unrealistic to have LCZ go so late, usually done by mid-December, iced out. (1)
10. Late season split for divers. (1)
11. Opening day on weekday or Saturday have no preference, will hunt either. (4)
12. Keep current opening day system of two Wednesday and a Saturday. (10)
13. Opening day always on a weekend. (1)
14. LCZ, dates that allow possible shooting of teal to divers as season progresses. (1)
15. Straight season is good for interior zone. (2)
16. LCZ, split the migrant goose season, run from 10/10-11/1 and 11/23-11/29. (1)
17. Have a 50-day goose season into December. (1)
18. Prefer to have days for Canada goose hunting into second segment. (1)
19. Prefer the recommended seasons for LCZ. (3)
20. Prefer October days for duck hunting, start as early as possible, first week of October. (3)
21. Do not close the split in the middle of the week, close it on a weekend. (1)

22. LCZ, 10/10-10/17 and 10/27-close. (1)
23. LCZ, 10/10-10/19 and 11/10-12/29. (3)
24. LCZ, 10/17-11/9 and 11/23-12/29. (1)
25. LCZ, 10/10-10/13 and 11/5-12/29. (1)
26. IZ, 10/3-12/1, also start LCZ on 10/3. (1)
27. LCZ, preferred 2017 season, (10/11-10/15 and 11/7-12/31). (1)

Figure 1.

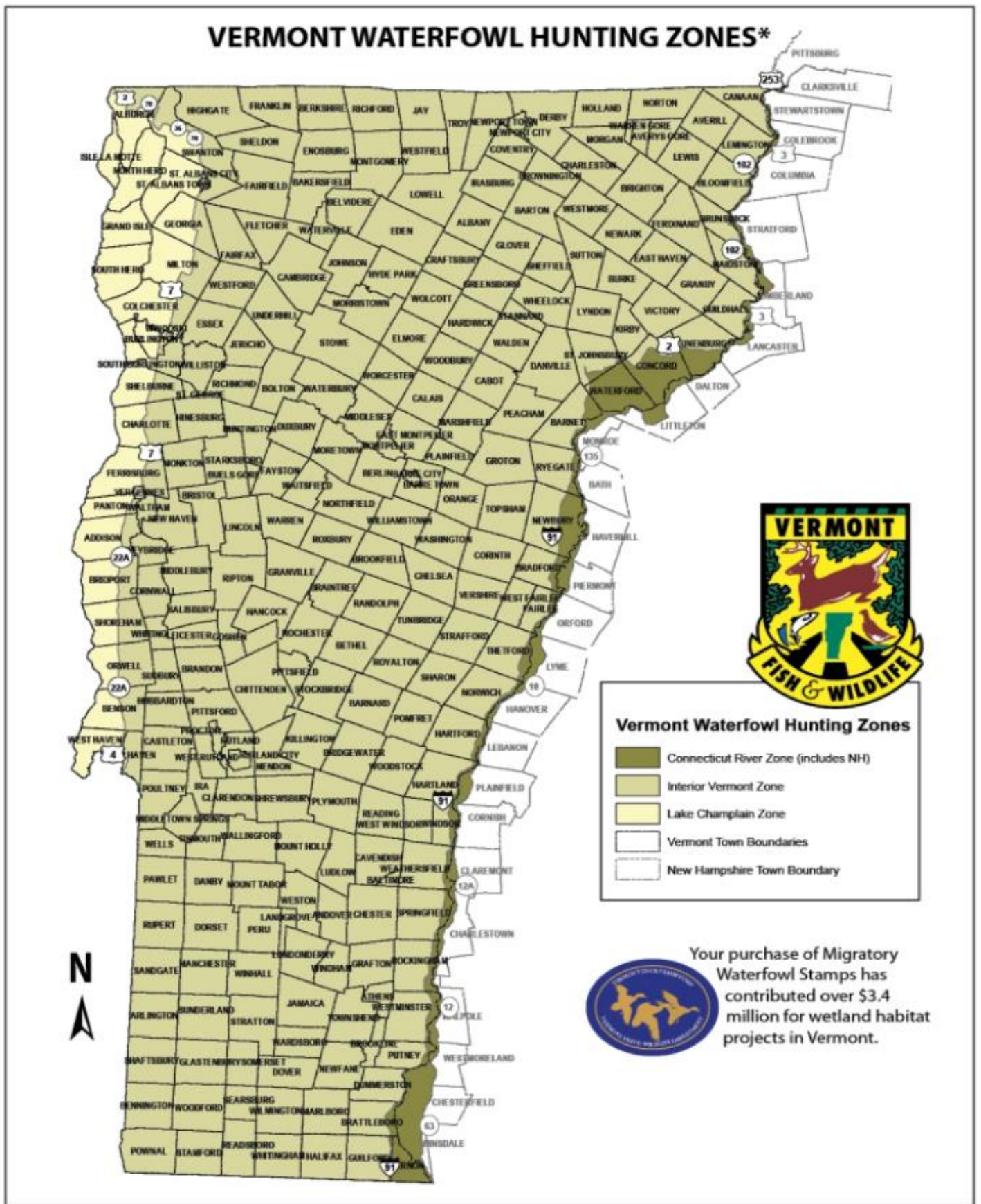


Figure 2.

2019 WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATION

LAKE CHAMPLAIN ZONE

	<u>SEASON TYPE</u>	<u>SEASON LENGTH</u>	<u>INCLUSIVE DATES</u>	<u>DAILY LIMIT</u>	<u>POSSESSION LIMIT</u>
DUCKS *	Split	60 Days	<u>Oct. 10 - Nov. 1</u> & <u>Nov. 23 - Dec. 29</u>	6	18
MERGANSERS *	Split	60 Days	<u>Oct. 10 - Nov. 1</u> & <u>Nov. 23 - Dec. 29</u>	5	15
COOTS	Split	60 Days	<u>Oct. 10 - Nov. 1</u> & <u>Nov. 23 - Dec. 29</u>	15	45
GEESE					
Canada Geese	Straight	25 Days	<u>Sept. 1 - Sept. 25</u>	8	24
	Straight	30 Days	<u>Oct. 10 - Nov. 8</u>	2	6
Snow Geese **	Split	107 Days	<u>Oct. 1 - Dec.31, 2019</u>	25	NONE
			<u>Feb. 25 - Mar. 10, 2020</u>	25	NONE
			(CO) <u>Mar. 11 - Apr. 24, 2020</u>	15	NONE
Brant	Straight	30 Days	<u>Oct. 10 - Nov. 8</u>	2	6

SHOOTING HOURS - All Waterfowl - All Days - ½ hour before sunrise to sunset

* Federal species restrictions apply.

** Includes blue geese also.

CO Conservation Order

Figure 3.

2019 WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATION

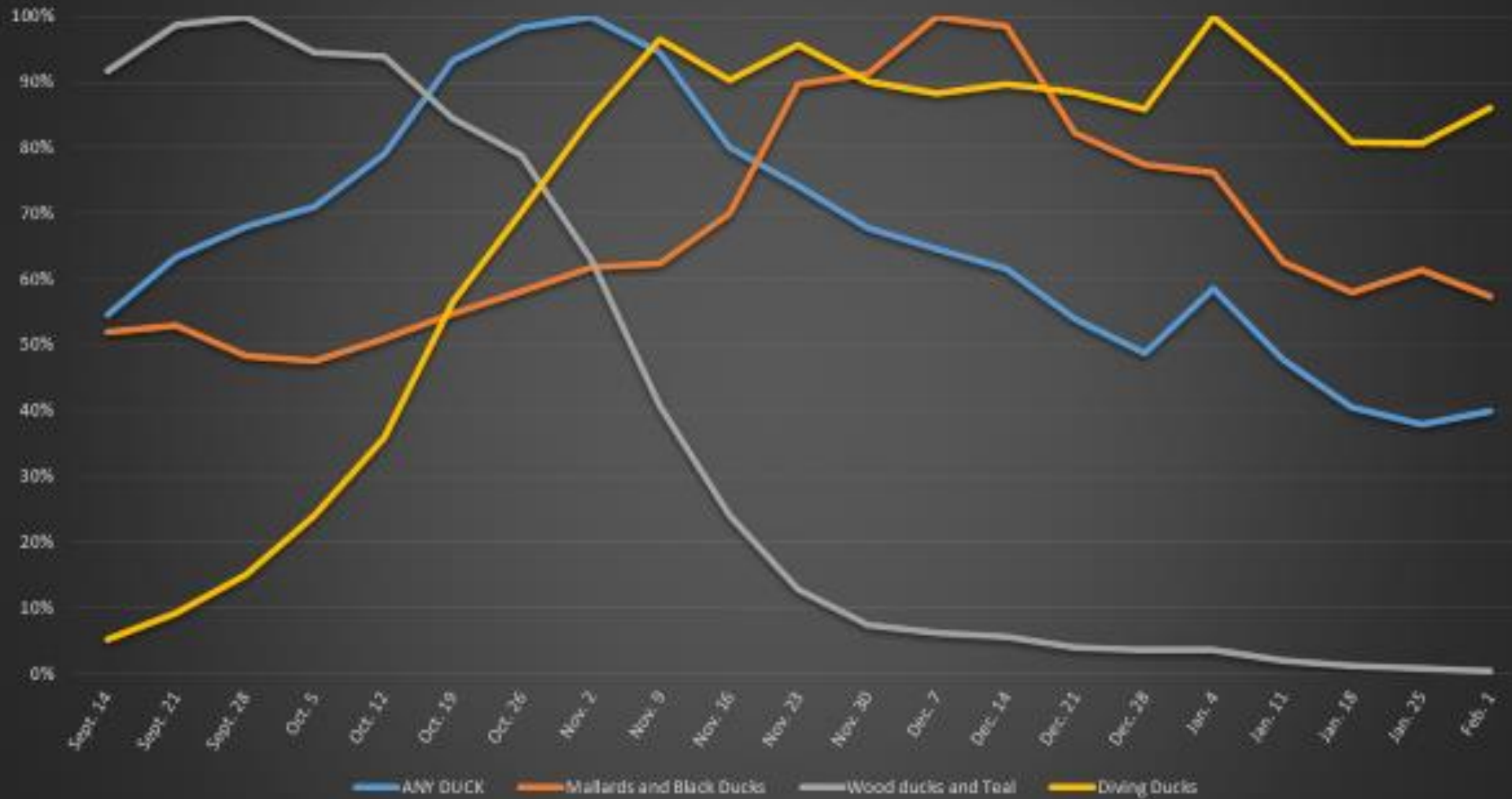
VERMONT INTERIOR ZONE

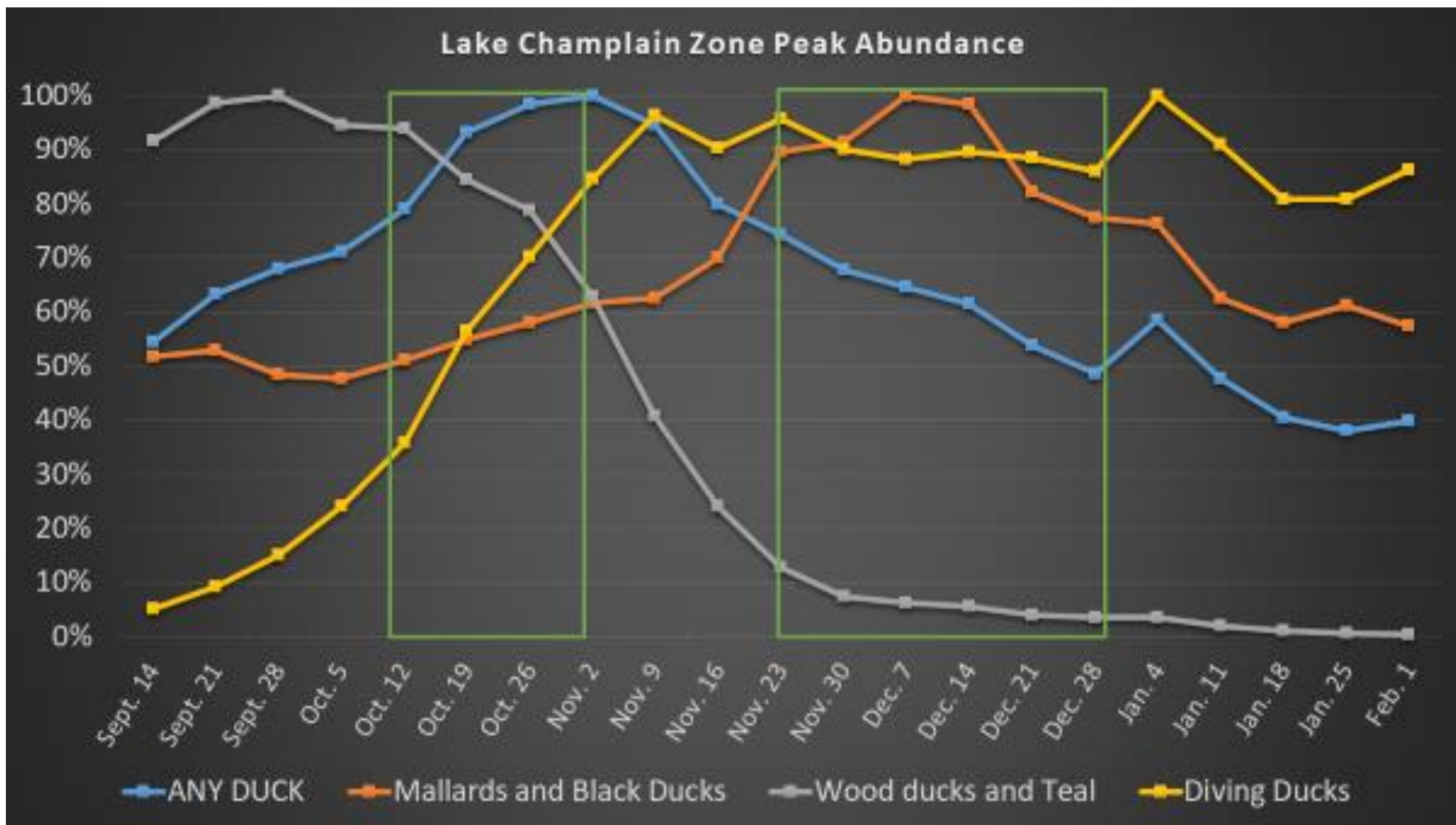
	<u>SEASON TYPE</u>	<u>SEASON LENGTH</u>	<u>INCLUSIVE DATES</u>	<u>DAILY LIMIT</u>	<u>POSSESSION LIMIT</u>
DUCKS *	Straight	60 Days	<u>Oct.10 - Dec.8</u>	6	18
MERGANSERS *	Straight	60 Days	<u>Oct.10 - Dec.8</u>	5	15
COOTS	Split	60 Days	<u>Oct.10 - Dec.8</u>	15	45
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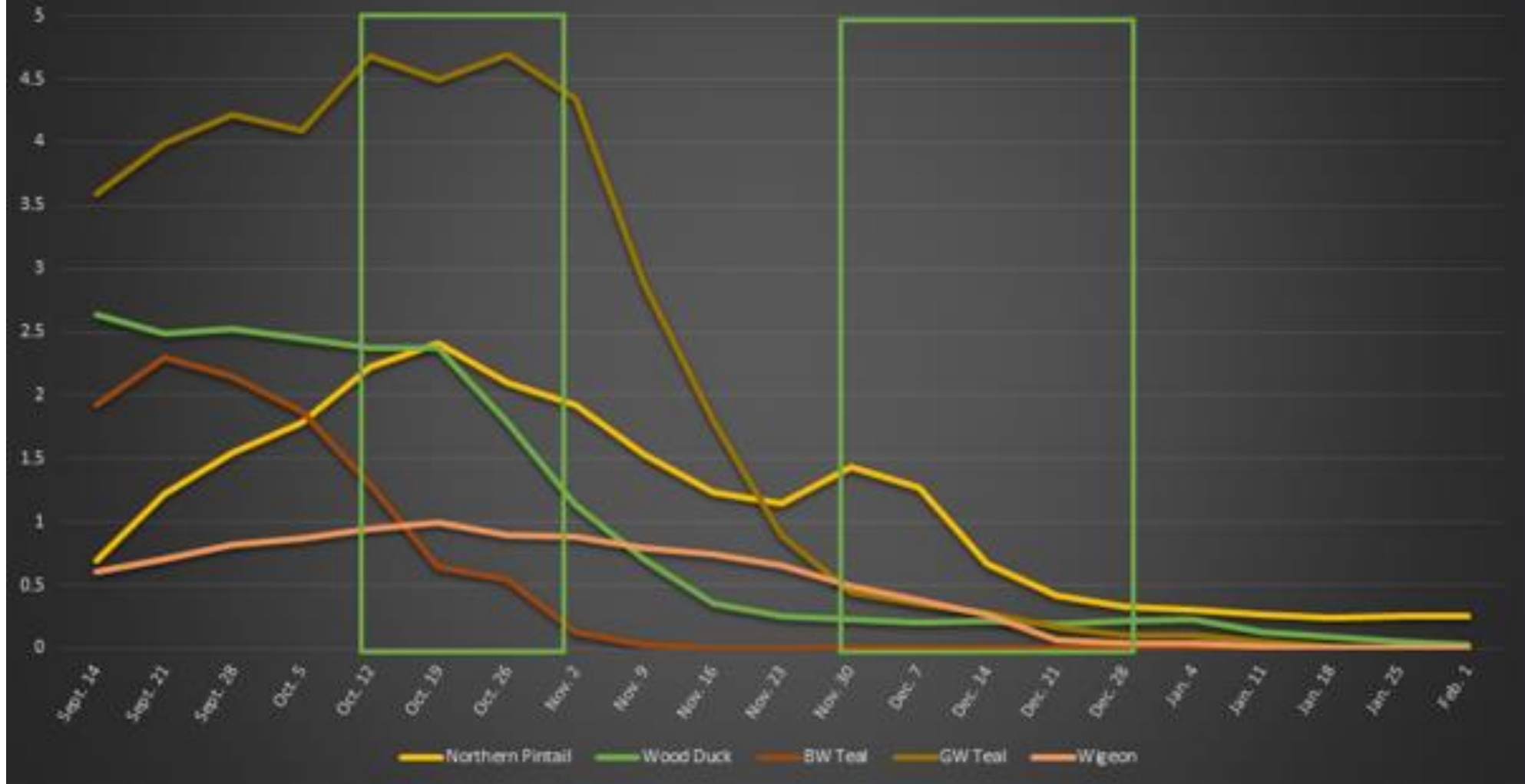
- CO** Conservation Order
- * Federal species restrictions apply.
- ** Includes blue geese also.

Lake Champlain Zone Peak Abundance

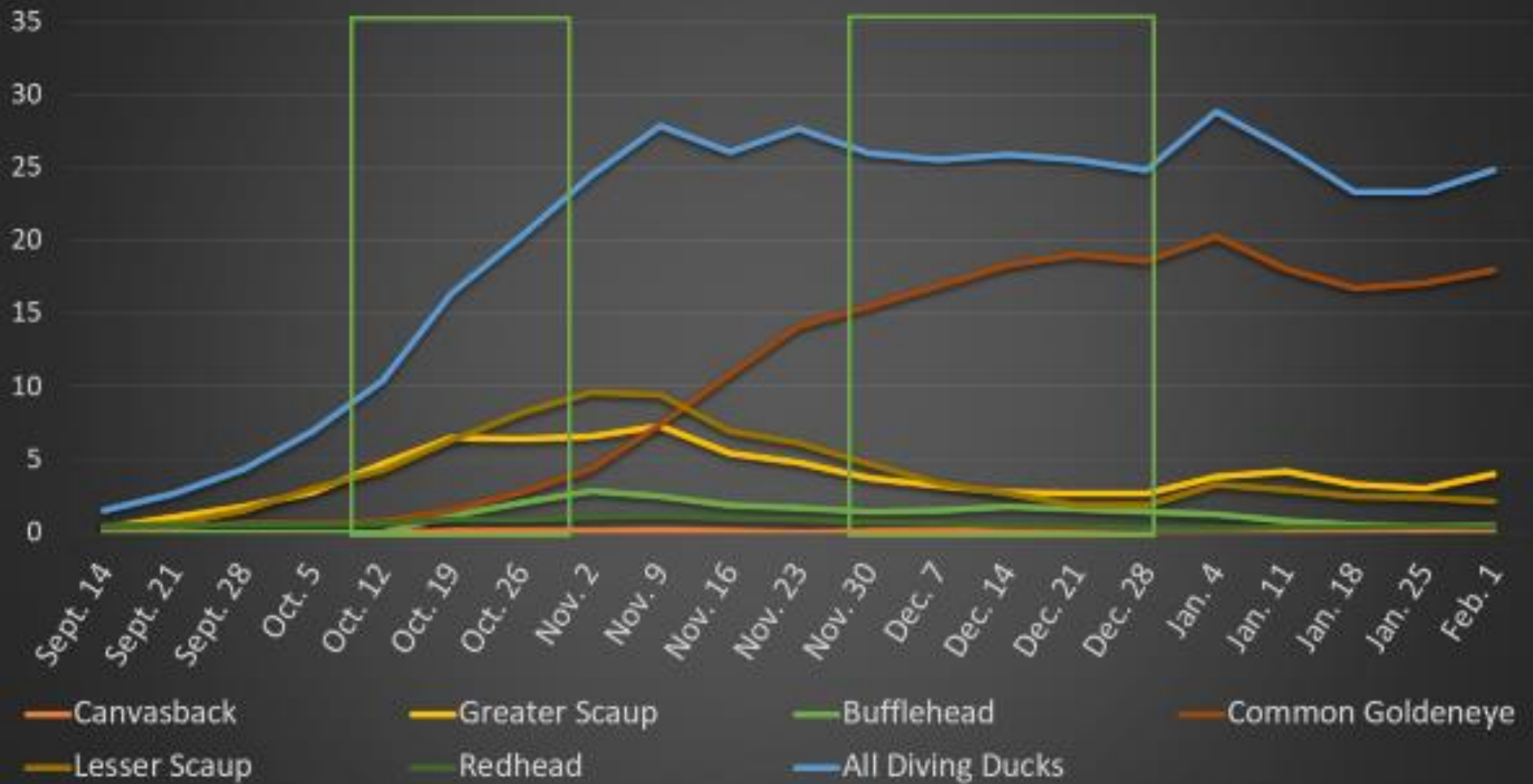




Lake Champlain Zone Peak Abundance - Early Migrating Species



Lake Champlain Zone Peak Abundance - Diving Ducks



Appendix B 2019 FALL CALENDAR

	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
SEPTEMBER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	29	30					
OCTOBER			1	2	3	4	5
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	27	28	29	30	31		
NOVEMBER						1	2
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
DECEMBER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	29	30	31				

 Proposed Lake Champlain Zone season
 Rifle deer season