



Tundra Swan Harvest Management FAQ's

How is harvest management of tundra swans decided? Harvest management of tundra swans is guided by an Eastern Population Tundra Swan Management Plan developed and approved by all 4 flyway councils. Flyway councils are formal organizations that provide for collaboration among public wildlife agencies for the purpose of migratory bird conservation.

Is there a population goal? Yes. The population goal is to maintain the population at 80,000 birds as measured by the mid-winter survey in the Atlantic and Mississippi flyways.

What is population trend over the long-term? The population has trended upward since comprehensive mid-winter surveys have been conducted since the late 1950's.

What is population trend over the last 10-15 years? The population appears relatively stable or slightly increasing over much of this time period. However, the population trended down which is likely due to poor reproduction on the breeding grounds.

How many permits are issued and is there a harvest objective? Currently, the approved management plan recommends that the sport harvest rate remain at or below 5%. The harvest rate is the percentage of the population that is harvested. Over the last 3 years, the average sport harvest rate has been 4%. Currently, the plan allows 9,600 permits to be issued among the 6 states (MT, ND, SD, DE, VA, NC) that hunt tundra swans.

Is there a provision in the plan to increase the current number of permits allocated? Yes, the number of permits will be increased by 25% if the 3-year average of the mid-winter survey count exceeds 110,000 swans. After completion of the January 2016 survey, the 3-year average was 111,892, and the total number of available permits for swan hunting states increased from 9,600 to 12,000 permits for the 2017-18 season. The 3-year average remained above 110,000 until 2019, when it dropped to 107,907.

Is there a provision in the plan to decrease the number of permits? Yes, permits will be reduced by 25% if the 3-year average falls below 110,000 (i.e. a reduction from 12,000 to 9,600 permits) and will remain at reduced numbers until the population increases above 110,000. If the population falls below 80,000 another 25% reduction will occur. Further, the season will be closed if the 3-year average falls below 50,000 and will remain closed until it increases to 70,000. Currently, NC is allocated 4,721 permits for the season.

What impact would an increase in harvest have on the population? Based on 2 separate population modeling exercises, the current permit limit of 12,000 appears in line with what the current population can support. Given the population appears stable over much of the last 10-15 years and that population modeling suggests that current levels of harvest are appropriate, managers are comfortable with current harvest and permit levels.