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Early Teal Season Set, Outlook Bright

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*Article Submitted to
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Missouri - The outlook is bright for Missouri's early teal hunting season, but state officials say some hunters will need to make different arrangements than in years past to buy federal duck stamps.

The length of the early teal season depends on the number of blue-winged teal (BWT) counted in early-summer breeding bird surveys. If the BWT breeding population index is below 3.3 million, the season is closed. If the BWT breeding population index is at least 3.3 million but less than 4.7 million, the season is nine days long. If the BWT breeding population index is 4.7 million or greater, the season is 16 days long.

This year's surveys showed 8.5 million BWT, triggering a 16-day season from Sept. 6 through 21 for BTW, green-winged teal (GWT) and cinnamon teal. Bag limits remain the same as last year, six BWT, GWT and cinnamon teal in the aggregate daily and 18 in possession.

Missouri will have a 16-day early teal season again this year thanks to a third consecutive year of high duck numbers. Population surveys of North American breeding waterfowl show high numbers for the third year in a row, meaning Missouri hunters will enjoy another 16-day early teal season.

With teal numbers near record levels, 2014 could be an excellent year for the early teal hunting. Whether that potential is realized will depend on weather conditions during teal season. Teal are early migrators, and the passage of cool fronts between Sept. 6 and 21 would increase the number of teal available to hunters. Conversely, stable, warm weather during the early teal season could limit hunting action.

The Missouri Department of Conservation wants to alert teal hunters and other waterfowl hunters to changes in federal policy regarding where and how duck stamps (technically called Federal Waterfowl Conservation Stamps) are sold. In the past, paper duck stamps were sold at U.S. Post Offices, Conservation Department offices and some retail permit vendors, such as hunting equipment retailers. This year, paper stamps will still be available from post offices and Conservation Department offices, but not from other permit vendors.

However, duck stamps will be sold online for the first time this year, giving hunters and retail vendors an alternative to buying/selling paper duck stamps. Starting on Aug. 1, hunters can buy the stamps at mo.wildlifelicense.com. Retail vendors will be able to process the transaction for hunters. An electronic stamp, or e-Stamp, will be issued at the time of purchase, and a paper duck stamp will be sent through the mail. Hunters can use their e-Stamps immediately and for 45 days following purchase. After 45 days, they must carry the paper duck stamp. The e-Stamp will have a \$2.50 convenience fee for handling and mailing in addition to the \$15 purchase price.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service recently selected Missouri, along with Louisiana, Michigan, North Carolina, and Virginia, to provide duck stamps through its new federal e-Stamp option. The decision not to sell paper duck stamps through retail vendors came from federal officials after printing of the 2014 Early Migratory Bird Hunting Digest was complete. As a result, the digest says hunters can buy duck stamps from some retail vendors, without mentioning details of purchasing e-Stamps.

The North American population of mallards, the mainstay species for Missouri waterfowl hunters, is estimated at 10.9 million this year. That is up 5 percent from 2013 and 42 percent above the long-term average (LTA). Mallard numbers have exceeded this year's figure only once in the past 56 years – in 1958.

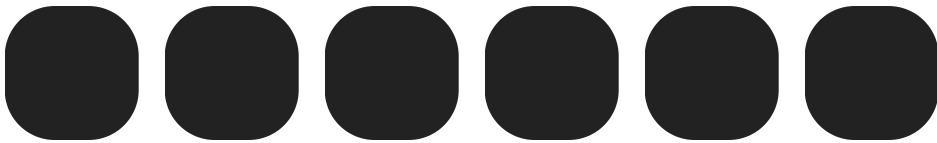
Other duck species breeding populations recorded in the 2014 survey include:

- Gadwall, 3.8 million, 14 percent more than last year and 102 percent above LTA.
- Pintail, 3.2 million, 3 percent below 2013 and 20 percent below LTA.
- Green-winged teal, 3.4 million, up 13 percent from 2013 and 69 percent above LTA.
- Wigeon, 3.1 million, up 18 percent from 2013 and 20 percent above LTA.
- Scaup, 4.6 million, up 11 percent from 2013 and 8 percent below LTA
- Shoveler, 5.3 million, 11 percent more than 2013 and 114 percent above LTA.
- Redhead, 1.3 million, up 6 percent from 2013 and 85 percent above LTA.
- Canvasback, 685,000, down 13 percent from 2013 and 18 percent above LTA.

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