

The Dove Hunting Debate: Questions and Answers

Several times in the last three decades, legislative bills have been introduced and debated in Minnesota to establish a mourning dove hunting season. Minnesota last held a dove hunting season in 1946. This past session, a proposal to allow mourning dove hunting passed in the House, representing the most progress dove hunting has reached in the past 30 years. However, the provision allowing dove hunting did not emerge from the 2003 conference committee discussions.

Wisconsin is the latest state to enact a dove hunting season, which began this fall.

Several basic questions continually come up when mourning dove hunting is debated here. This short subject identifies these questions and attempts to answer them.

What is happening with dove hunting in Wisconsin?

Wisconsin's dove hunting season was authorized in 2001, first by its Natural Resources Board—a citizen board that can authorize hunting seasons—and then by its legislature. Before the Natural Resources Board authorization, the state conducted public hearings on the issue in every Wisconsin county, and the season had broad public support.

An animal rights group in the state filed suit to stop the hunting season from starting, which was upheld in circuit court. However, the decision was reversed by the Wisconsin Court of Appeals in March 2003. The Wisconsin Supreme Court is going to hear the case in October, with a decision expected in the spring of 2004.

The mourning dove season opened on September 1 and will run through October 30.

As in most states with a season, the bag limit is 15 birds per day and the possession limit is 30.

Wisconsin is the 39th state to authorize a mourning dove season. Wisconsin DNR officials predict that up to 30,000 hunters may hunt doves, with an annual harvest of five doves per hunter, and between 100,000 and 150,000 total doves harvested this fall.

What is the “bird of peace”?

Opinions vary greatly on this, depending on who is being asked. There are many species of doves. The turtledove, which is mostly white in color and is found in Europe and the Mediterranean, is more commonly called the bird of peace. Turtledoves are not found in the United States, and mourning doves are mostly brownish and grayish in color.

In Wisconsin, which just authorized the latest hunting season on mourning doves, the same dove also is the official state symbol of peace. Additionally, in Minnesota, there is another type of dove—Eurasian collared, an exotic species. They currently are found in 17 counties and appear very similar to mourning

doves. The DNR may allow them to be hunted if a mourning dove season is enacted.

Does hunting doves decimate their population?

Not according to published information. The mourning dove is one of the most abundant birds in the United States, with an estimated fall population of 500 million birds. The Minnesota population is estimated at 12 million doves, which is three times the fall duck flight through the state.

Mourning doves are prolific breeders, raising between four to ten young doves per year. The natural mortality rate is high; approximately six out of ten doves do not survive from one year to the next. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has studied and regulated mourning doves for 40 years, and data has shown that a hunting season on them has virtually no impact on their population.

According to the Humane Society of the United States, there is an unacceptably high wounding rate in dove hunting. Studies indicate a wounding rate that exceeds 20 percent in hunted areas, which means one in five doves is wounded and not retrieved after being shot.

What would a dove hunting season mean in Minnesota?

The following statements about dove hunting were made on behalf of the 2003 legislation proposing a season:

- According to the Minnesota DNR, a mourning dove season here would be similar to Wisconsin's in the number of hunters initially (30,000), the bag limits (15 per day, 30 in possession), the season length (60 days), and average harvest per hunter (five doves).
- The House bill called for a \$5 dove stamp, in addition to the small game license. This would raise an additional \$150,000 for DNR wildlife habitat activities. Over time, the DNR said there could be 50,000 Minnesota dove hunters, thus increasing the additional revenue stream.
- Additional sales and sale taxes will occur with new dove hunters in the form of hunting equipment, including shotgun ammunition, gas, food, and lodging. The range in sales is anywhere from \$1,750,000 to \$2,750,000 annually, according to dove hunting proponents.

Which other states do not permit dove hunting?

With Wisconsin becoming the 39th state to authorize a season, the Midwest states that do not permit dove hunting are Minnesota, Michigan, and Iowa (Iowa did approve legislation in 2002 for a season, but it was vetoed by the governor). The eight other states that do not allow dove hunting are in the northeast, including all of the New England states, New York, and New Jersey.

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