

MDC announces changes to waterfowl reservations for fall hunting

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) announces changes to its reservation system for managed waterfowl hunts – starting this hunting season.

MDC offers managed waterfowl hunting on more than a dozen conservation areas specially managed with a focus on wetlands. Hunters can apply for a reservation or participate in a daily morning drawing for opportunities to hunt at these areas. MDC also offers waterfowl hunting on other conservation areas. In addition to MDC areas, Missouri offers waterfowl hunting opportunities at numerous other public and private locations around the state.

Changes to the waterfowl reservation system include offering 50 percent of daily hunting positions for the managed-hunt areas through online reservations. Of the 50 percent of spots through online reservations, half will be for pre-season applications and half will be allocated during a weekly in-season application period. The remaining 50 percent of spots will be held for hunters who participate in the daily morning drawing, called the “poor line.”

“Under the changes to the reservation system, if an area offers 20 daily hunting positions, five will be allocated through pre-season reservations and five through in-season reservations,” explained Lauren Hildreth, who coordinates managed waterfowl hunts for MDC. “The remaining 10 positions will be allocated to hunters from the poor line the morning of each hunt.”

The pre-season reservation period will run Sept. 1-18 with results posted Oct. 1. The in-season weekly drawings will take place on Monday afternoons with a seven-day application period that opens the Tuesday before and closes the Monday of the draw at 3 p.m. Successful hunters will be notified via email or text message after the draw with their hunt date, location, and pill assignment. “Pills” designate the order hunting parties select their hunting locations on the area. The lower the number, the sooner hunting parties get to select their hunting location.

Another change is that all applicants for waterfowl reservations must have their required permits to apply, and their Federal Duck Stamp to hunt.

Missouri residents and qualifying non-residents, such as students from out of state or members of the military stationed in Missouri, can apply online for a reservation to guarantee them an opportunity to hunt on a specific day on a specific area. Resident and nonresidents can also arrive at a managed waterfowl hunting area the morning they wish to hunt and wait in line for the possibility of getting a hunting spot through the poor line.

Residents and nonresidents can hunt with a reservation holder and hunting parties are limited to a maximum of four people.

Previously, reservation holders and individuals participating in the poor line had to draw a number the morning of the hunt to determine their place in line to select a hunting position. Reservation holders were guaranteed an opportunity to hunt and poor line participants had to draw a low enough number to claim a spot to have an opportunity to hunt.

Now, successful pre-season and in-season reservation applicants will be notified of their pill numbers after the weekly in-season draw for their hunt date. This change will let allow reservation holders to know before they leave their home if their randomly generated number will enable them to be one of the first, middle, or last parties to pick their hunting location.

One major change to the morning draw system is that only one member from each hunting party will be allowed to draw a number. In the past, several areas allowed each member of the party to draw a number. This approach favored larger parties and resulted in more hunter trips but was unpopular with most hunters.

“Every-member draw was one of the most contentious elements of Missouri’s waterfowl hunt program,” Hildreth noted. “This change will better accommodate hunter preferences and also cut down the amount of time it takes to complete the morning drawing at some of our most popular areas.”

MDC also notes that hunters with disabilities will now need to apply to use ADA hunting blinds through the online

reservation system during the same timeframe as the preseason application period.

According to MDC, the changes are based on feedback from waterfowl hunters and other research.

“These changes give waterfowl hunters the most flexibility for hunting on our intensively managed wetlands,” Hildreth said. “Some hunters want to plan their hunts well in advance, so the pre-season reservations are ideal for them. Some hunters want the flexibility of week-to-week planning, so the weekly in-season reservations are great for them. And many hunters want the flexibility to try their luck with the same-day morning poor line for each area.”

For more information, visit MDC online at mdc.mo.gov and search Waterfowl Reservations, visit huntfish.mdc.mo.gov/hunting-trapping/species/waterfowl/waterfowl-waterfowl-draws/waterfowl-reservations directly, or get a copy of MDC’s 2019-2020 Migratory Bird and Waterfowl Hunting Digest, available where permits are sold.