

## Special Snow Goose Harvest Opportunity in New York - Spring 2009

### Summary of Regulations:

- *Areas open:* Western, Northeastern, Lake Champlain and Southeastern Waterfowl Zones (link to <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/28497.html>)
- *Season dates:* March 11 - April 15, 2009
- *Shooting hours:* ½ hour before sunrise to sunset
- *Bag limits:* 15 snow geese per day, no possession limit
- *Special measures allowed:* electronic calls, unplugged shotguns (more than 3 shells)
- *Non-toxic shot:* required
- *Requirements to participate:* current small game hunting privileges, federal duck stamp and registration in New York's Harvest Information Program (link to [www.ny-hip.com](http://www.ny-hip.com)). NO special permit is required and harvest reporting is not mandatory; however, participants must provide harvest information if requested by DEC.

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### **Background**

Waterfowl hunters in New York will have a special opportunity to harvest snow geese in most areas of the state beginning in spring 2009. DEC has announced plans to implement a recently approved "Conservation Order" for snow geese. A Conservation Order is a special management action authorized by the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act to control certain wildlife populations when traditional management programs are unsuccessful in preventing overabundance. Federal and state regulations were amended in fall 2008 to allow this additional harvest of snow geese, in response to concerns about their growing numbers across North America (see links below).

### **Why is this special program being implemented by DEC?**

Populations of snow geese, also referred to as "light geese" because of their white plumage, have grown to historic highs. "The overabundance of light geese, which nest in far northern regions of North America, is harming their fragile arctic breeding habitat," according to H. Dale Hall, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "The damage to the habitat is, in turn, harming the health of the light geese and other bird species that depend on the tundra habitat. Returning the light goose population to sustainable levels is necessary to protect this delicate habitat, and every species dependent on it." Large numbers of snow geese feeding on natural vegetation can also destroy large areas of coastal marshland during migration and winter. Serious damage to agricultural crops, such as hay, winter wheat, barley and rye, occurs on migration and wintering areas as well.

### **Snow Goose Population and Harvest Trends**

The Atlantic Flyway population of light geese, composed mostly of "greater" snow geese, increased from approximately 50,000 birds in the mid 1960s to more than one million birds in recent years. Most of these birds pass through New York during spring and fall migrations and spend the winter in New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland. Managers concerned about the impacts of too many snow geese have recommended a population goal of 500,000 in the Atlantic Flyway.

The only practical way to reduce the population to that level is to increase hunter harvest, which in recent years has averaged between 30,000-40,000 birds in the flyway, including about 5,000-10,000 in New York.

New York has had a long hunting season for snow geese for many years, but until now, federal regulations did not allow the season to be open after March 10, when large numbers of snow geese begin migrating north from their wintering areas. From mid March to mid April, more than 100,000 snow geese may spend time in New York, fueling up for their return to the arctic breeding grounds in May. Even larger numbers of snow geese congregate along the St. Lawrence River in southern Quebec, where annual surveys have documented the dramatic growth of this population to approximately one million birds (see chart - Figure 1).

### **Why have snow goose populations increased so dramatically?**

First, the availability of waste grains on agricultural fields provided a vast new food supply for these birds. Second, continuation of restrictive hunting regulations during the 1970s and 1980s allowed the population to grow while hunter harvest rates declined. These two factors resulted in a higher reproductive rate, a higher adult survival rate, and offspring that were in much better condition to survive.

### **International Concern**

Concern about the overabundance of snow geese has been growing for years. An international "Arctic Goose Habitat Working Group" concluded in 1998 that action was needed to limit the greater snow goose population. A goal of 500,000 birds has since been established for the Atlantic Flyway. However, it took more than a decade to fully implement the recommendations of this group.

In November 2008, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service finalized rules establishing a Conservation Order and allowing the use of special hunting methods to increase the harvest of light geese across the country. Similar regulations have been in place in many Midwestern states and Canadian Provinces, including Quebec, since 1999. Harvest of light geese has more than doubled in those areas and the population growth rate has been reduced. Now, New York waterfowl hunters will be able to participate in this conservation effort.

### **Regulations for 2009**

Under the new regulations, any person who has migratory game bird hunting privileges in New York, including a valid Harvest Information Program ("HIP") confirmation number, may take snow geese and Ross' geese (a smaller but nearly identical species) in the Western, Northeastern, Southeastern, and Lake Champlain Waterfowl Hunting Zones from March 11 through April 15, in addition to the regular snow goose hunting seasons in each zone. Areas where large numbers of snow geese occur at this time of year include the Finger Lakes region and the upper Hudson and Champlain Valley regions. A special season was not implemented on Long Island, because relatively few snow geese occur in huntable areas there during the spring.

All migratory game bird hunting regulations and requirements apply to the taking of snow geese during this spring harvest period, except that use of recorded or electrically amplified calls or

sounds is allowed and use of shotguns capable of holding more than three shells is allowed.

### Permit and Reporting Requirements

Unlike some other states, no special permit is needed to participate in New York’s special snow goose harvest program. Harvest reporting is also not mandatory, but any person who participates must provide accurate and timely information on their activity and harvest if requested by the Department. DEC plans to survey a sample of program participants to estimate hunter activity and harvest, and the extent to which the special measures helped hunters take more birds. This is necessary for continuation of the program in future years.

### For more information:

To view the Arctic Goose Habitat Working Group report on greater snow geese, go to:

<http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/reports/snowgoose/gsg.pdf>.

To view the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Final Environmental Impact Statement on Light Goose Management, go to: <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/issues/snowgse/tblcont.html>.

To view the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Final Rule implementing the Conservation Order for Harvest of Light Goose Populations, go to:

<http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/fedreg/mgbhr.html>.

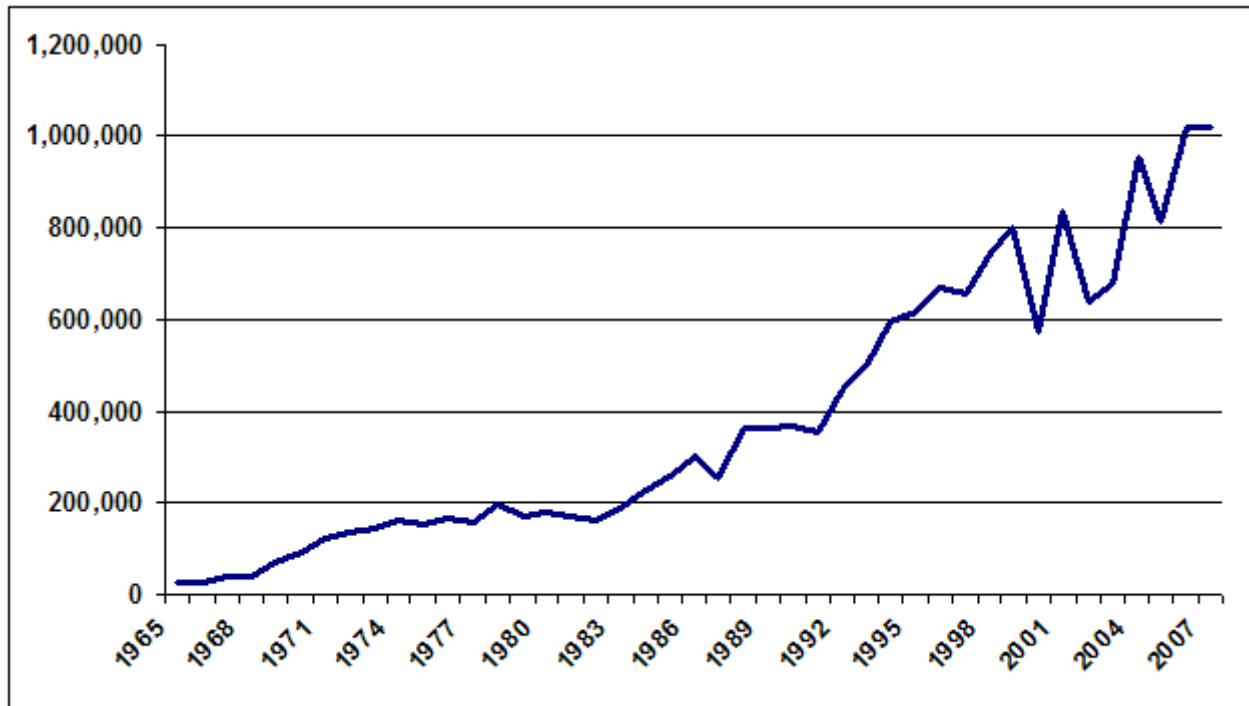


Figure 1. Greater snow goose population estimates from southern Quebec, 1965-2007, based on annual spring surveys.