

**Fish and Wildlife Board**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Wednesday, April 1, 2020**

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board held a meeting at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, April 1, 2020 via Zoom video conference.

**Board Members in Attendance:** Tim Biebel (Board Chair), Brian Bailey, Wendy Butler, Mike Kolsun, Marty Van Buren, Johanna Laggis, Bill Pickens, Dennis Mewes, Cheryl Frank Sullivan, Bryan McCarthy, Mike Bancroft, Jay Sweeny, David Robillard, and David Fielding.

**Department Staff in Attendance:** Louis Porter, Commissioner; Mark Scott Wildlife Director; Col. Jason Batchelder, Law Enforcement Director; Catherine Gjessing, General Counsel; Will Duane, Executive Assistant; Adam Miller, Big Game Project Leader; David Sausville, Migratory Game Bird Project Leader; Lil Lumbra, Outreach Coordinator; Ali Thomas, Education Manager; and Chris Ingram, Information Specialist.

**Members of the Public:** A conference line call-in number was made available to members of the public to listen to the meeting and offer comments. No one on the call identified themselves or chose to address the Board.

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**The Meeting was Called to Order by the Chair at 5:05 PM**

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**Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (February 19, 2020)**

Board Member Wendy Butler offered a typographical correction to the February meeting minutes on page 2. The error will be corrected in the final approved minutes.

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## **Public Comments (Limited to 2 minutes per speaker)**

No members of the public chose to address the Board

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### **Migratory Game Bird 2020 Season Vote**

Wildlife Director Mark Scott recapped the process for the Board thus far in setting the 2020 migratory game bird seasons and bag limits. The Department presented the Board with its proposed recommendation at the February 19, 2020 Board meeting. Public comments on the Department's initial recommendation were received at public hearings and via email. The recommendation consists of a suite of proposals for individual species, seasons, and bag limits. Following the final vote of the Board, the season and bag limits will be sent to the USFWS via Commissioner Porter.

Migratory Game Bird Project Leader David Sausville presented an updated version of that original recommendation. The individual components of the recommendation were explained including a change to proposed Scaup season and bag limit. The recommendation for Scaup has changed from a 60-day one-bird limit to a hybrid season on scaup that allows for a 20-day segment with a two-bird daily bag limit and a 40-day segment that allows for a one-bird daily bag limit. The 20-day and two-bird daily limit should be placed on October 10 through October 29 within the Lake Champlain and Interior Zones of Vermont.

All remaining days of the seasons will be a one bird daily limit. The change to the Scaup season was the only change from the Department's original recommended proposal. The updated proposal as approved by the Board is attached to these minutes.

**Motion:** Wendy Butler moved that the Board adopt the Department's 2020 Migratory Game Bird Proposal as presented with the noted change to the Scaup season. Brian Bailey seconded the motion.

**Discussion:** Jay Sweeny asked if there had been consideration of a split migratory Canada Goose season. David Sausville explained that it had been considered and noted that band returns and satellite transmitter data showed that these birds were migrating through in October and into November. Though some may be

congregation on the larger bodies of water in December, the Department recommends a straight season starting October 10<sup>th</sup>, when the bulk of the birds are migrating through the region.

Wendy Butler asked how often the migratory waterfowl hunter surveys occur. David Sausville explained that they are conducted every ten years but are funding dependent. Mark Scott explained that Vermont has approximately 70,000 deer hunters who are surveyed every five years, whereas there are about 6,000-7,000 waterfowl hunters.

**Note:** There was a unanimous roll-call vote to approve each of the 11 recommendations including the suggested changes to the final section of the recommendation regarding Scaup.

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### **Commissioner's Update**

- The Department's biggest focus right now is continuing operations and fulfilling its mission in the face of the current pandemic and the closures. Field seasons have largely been cancelled, fish stocking and the hatcheries work is continuing. Warden work and wildlife disease response work is continuing as well. Other than those items, all staff are working from home.
- The current pandemic response is providing the Department with an opportunity to reevaluate some of its practices and may help to identify efficiencies.
- There have been some pranks on Facebook claiming that fishing and hunting in VT have been cancelled. This is not true and is frustrating for staff.
- The Department is working with other state agencies wherever possible to supply resources that the Department might have to help combat the spread of the disease.
- There has been a significant but short-lived uptick in license sales for the month of March due to the corona virus.
- The Department appreciates the support of the Governor and the administration in supporting outdoor recreation in during the stay at home order.

- The Department is working on establishing on-line turkey reporting for the upcoming spring season. There will be more information on this topic later.

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The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 PM

*The mission of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is the conservation of all species of fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the people of Vermont.*

**2020-2021 MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SEASONS  
RECOMMENDATIONS  
APRIL 1, 2020**



**Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department  
Agency of Natural Resources  
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2  
Montpelier, VT 05620-3905**

## **Executive Summary**

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department wishes to offer the following background information and recommendations for the 2020-2021 migratory game bird seasons. The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board has a wide range of dates to choose from to try and capture the desired hunting periods of the waterfowling community. The Department made no changes from the recommendations presented to the Board on 2.19.20 except a recommended change to the scaup season was made based on unanimous public support. For information on this recommended change please refer to Recommendation #11 below. The Board will be considering the following items:

1. Setting the 2020 duck, goose, merganser, coot, brant, woodcock and snipe seasons dates and daily bag limits.
2. Setting the 2020 youth waterfowl hunting weekend dates.
3. Setting the 2020 falconry regulations.
4. Whether to institute a hybrid or straight scaup season.

## **Recommendations**

*Recommendation 1 - 2020 Lake Champlain Zone Duck, Merganser and Coot Seasons:* That the 2020-2021 duck, mergansers, and coot seasons of the Lake Champlain zone run from October 10 to November 1 and November 21 to December 27, 2020. Within the chosen dates, we recommend the 60-day season with a daily bag limit of no more than 6 ducks (with species restrictions), 5 mergansers, and 15 coots.

*Recommendation 2 – 2020 Interior Vermont Zone Duck, Merganser and Coot Seasons:* That the 2020-2021 duck, mergansers, and coot seasons of the Interior Vermont zone run from October 10 to December 8, 2020. Within the chosen dates, we recommend the 60-day season with a daily bag limit of no more than 6 -ducks (with species restrictions), 5 mergansers, and 15 coots.

*Recommendation 3 – 2020 September Resident Canada Goose Season:* That the September resident Canada goose season run from September 1-25, 2020, with a daily bag limit of 8 birds per day and a possession limit of 24 birds within the Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont zones. New Hampshire plans to offer the same dates within the Connecticut River zone, but with a daily bag limit of 5 birds per day and a possession limit of 15 birds.

*Recommendation 4 – 2020 Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont Zones Migrant Canada Goose Season:* That the Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont zones be set for the migrant Canada goose season to run from October 10 to November 8, 2020, with a daily bag limit of 2 birds per day and a possession limit of 6 birds.

*Recommendation 5 – 2020 Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont Zones Snow Goose Season:* That the Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont zones be set for the snow goose season to run from October 1<sup>st</sup> to December 31, 2020 and February 24 to March 10, 2021, with a daily bag limit of 25 birds per day and no possession limit.

*Recommendation 6 – 2020 Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont Zones Brant Season:* That the Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont zones be set for the brant season to run from October 10 to November 28, 2020, with a daily bag limit of 2 birds per day and a possession limit of 6 birds.

*Recommendation 7 - 2020 Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days:* That the youth waterfowl hunting weekend occur on Saturday and Sunday, September 26 & 27, 2020, within all Vermont zones.

*Recommendation 8- 2020 Falconry Season:* A person possessing a valid falconry permit may take migratory game birds only during open seasons and within designated shooting times. The daily bag limit shall be a maximum of three legal migratory game birds, singly or in the aggregate, not to exceed restrictive daily bag limits for certain species as listed herein. Possession limit shall be equal to three times the daily limit.

*Recommendation 9 – 2020 Woodcock Season:* That the woodcock season run from October 1 to November 14, 2020, with a daily bag limit of 3 birds per day and a possession limit of 9 birds, statewide.

*Recommendation 10 – 2020 Snipe Season:* That the snipe season run from October 1 to November 14, 2020, with a daily bag limit of 8 birds per day and a possession limit of 24 birds, statewide.

*Recommendation 11 – Hybrid Scaup Season:* Provide a hybrid season on scaup that allows for a 20-day segment with a two-bird daily bag limit and a 40-day segment that allows for a one bird daily bag limit. The 20-day and two bird daily limit should be placed on October 10 through October 29 within the Lake Champlain and Interior Zones of Vermont. All remaining days of the seasons will be a one bird daily limit.

## **Background**

Vermont currently has three waterfowl hunting zones (Figure 1):

- Lake Champlain Zone that we share with New York. Vermont sets the dates for this zone.
- Interior Zone that is entirely within Vermont.
- Connecticut River Zone that we share with New Hampshire. New Hampshire sets the dates for this zone as an extension of their Inland Zone.

Under Vermont's three zones, Vermont can split any zone once to create two hunting segments. Vermont currently has sixty days to divide between the two duck hunting segments to accommodate the diverse desires of the variety of Vermont waterfowl hunters. Migrant Canada goose season currently only has 30-days to utilize. The zones were also set up to take into consideration the differences in the physiographic regions of the state and the climatic differences each has.

*2020 Duck Season:* The Board has traditionally held the youth waterfowl weekend the last weekend in September. The Department has withheld any fishing tournament permits for that weekend to reduce conflicts between anglers and youth waterfowlers. The Department in 2020

would like to convert to a every other year opening day schedule in which we alternate a weekday and Saturdays as opening days.

*2020 Goose, Brant, Mergansers, and Coots Seasons:* Resident Canada geese have a 25-day season option and may run from September 1<sup>st</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup>. The migrant Canada goose season may not open prior to October 10<sup>th</sup>. Migrant Canada geese have a 30-day season option with a two-bird daily bag limit. Atlantic brant have a 50-day season option with a two-bird daily bag limit. The Board traditionally has run the merganser and coot seasons concurrently with the duck season.

*2020 Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days:* The Department may select two days per duck-hunting zone, designated as “Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days,” in addition to the regular duck seasons. The days must be held outside any regular duck season on a weekend, holiday, or other non-school days when youth hunters would have the maximum opportunity to participate. The days may be held up to 14 days before or after any regular duck-season frameworks or within any split of a regular duck season, or within any other open season on migratory birds. The daily bag limits may include ducks, geese, mergansers and coots, and would be the same as those allowed in the regular season.

The age of youth hunter eligibility was changed in 2016 at the federal level. That same year the Board changed the youth waterfowl hunter age to 17 years of age or younger. In addition, an adult at least 18 years of age must accompany the youth hunter into the field. This adult may not duck hunt but may participate in other seasons that are open on the special youth day. Youth hunters 16 years of age and older must possess a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (also known as Federal Duck Stamp). Vermont also requires all hunters 16 years of age and older to have a state duck stamp. All hunters regardless of age are required to have a HIP number. Within the Connecticut River Zone, youth must be 15 years of age or younger to participate during the youth weekend.

*Special Falconry Regulations:* Falconry is a permitted means of taking migratory game birds in any State meeting Federal falconry standards in 50 CFR 21.29. These States may select an extended season for taking migratory game birds in accordance with the following:

**Extended Seasons:** For all hunting methods combined, the combined length of the extended season, regular season, and any special or experimental seasons must not exceed 107 days for any species or group of species in a geographical area. Each extended season may be divided into a maximum of 3 segments.

**Daily Bag Limits:** Falconry daily bag limits for all permitted migratory game birds must not exceed 3 birds, singly or in the aggregate, during extended falconry seasons, any special or experimental seasons, and regular hunting seasons in all States, including those that do not select an extended falconry season.

**Regular Seasons:** General hunting regulations, including seasons and hunting hours, apply to falconry in each State listed in 50 CFR 21.29. Regular season bag limits do not apply to falconry. The falconry bag limit is not in addition to gun limits.



Vermont has traditionally run the falconry season during any open migratory game bird season. Last year falconers had the opportunity to begin on September 1<sup>st</sup> with the resident Canada goose season and ended their season on December 31<sup>st</sup> when the snow goose season closed. The falconry season reopened on February 24, 2020. A three-bird daily bag limit was in effect.

*Public Input and Outreach:* The Department, in conjunction with the Board, held two public meetings in 2020. Meetings occurred on the evenings of March 10 and 12 and began at 6:30 pm, in Whitehall, New York and Winooski, Vermont. Comments received at the public meetings and the number of attendees is provided within the accompanying document. In addition to the public meetings and online comments the Department relied heavily on the results of the 2015 Statewide Waterfowl Hunter Survey results to set season dates and opening day preferences. For the first time in 2020 the Winooski meeting was live streamed on Facebook to allow additional access to the meeting.

After the Board approves final season dates and bag limits, the Department will submit season selections to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by April 30<sup>th</sup> and the information will be sent to a printer for production of the 2020 syllabus of state and federal hunting regulations. The early decision deadlines will allow the Department to have the syllabus available to the public in print version by August a full month prior to any migratory bird hunting season. The seasons will be placed on the Department's website within days of approval.

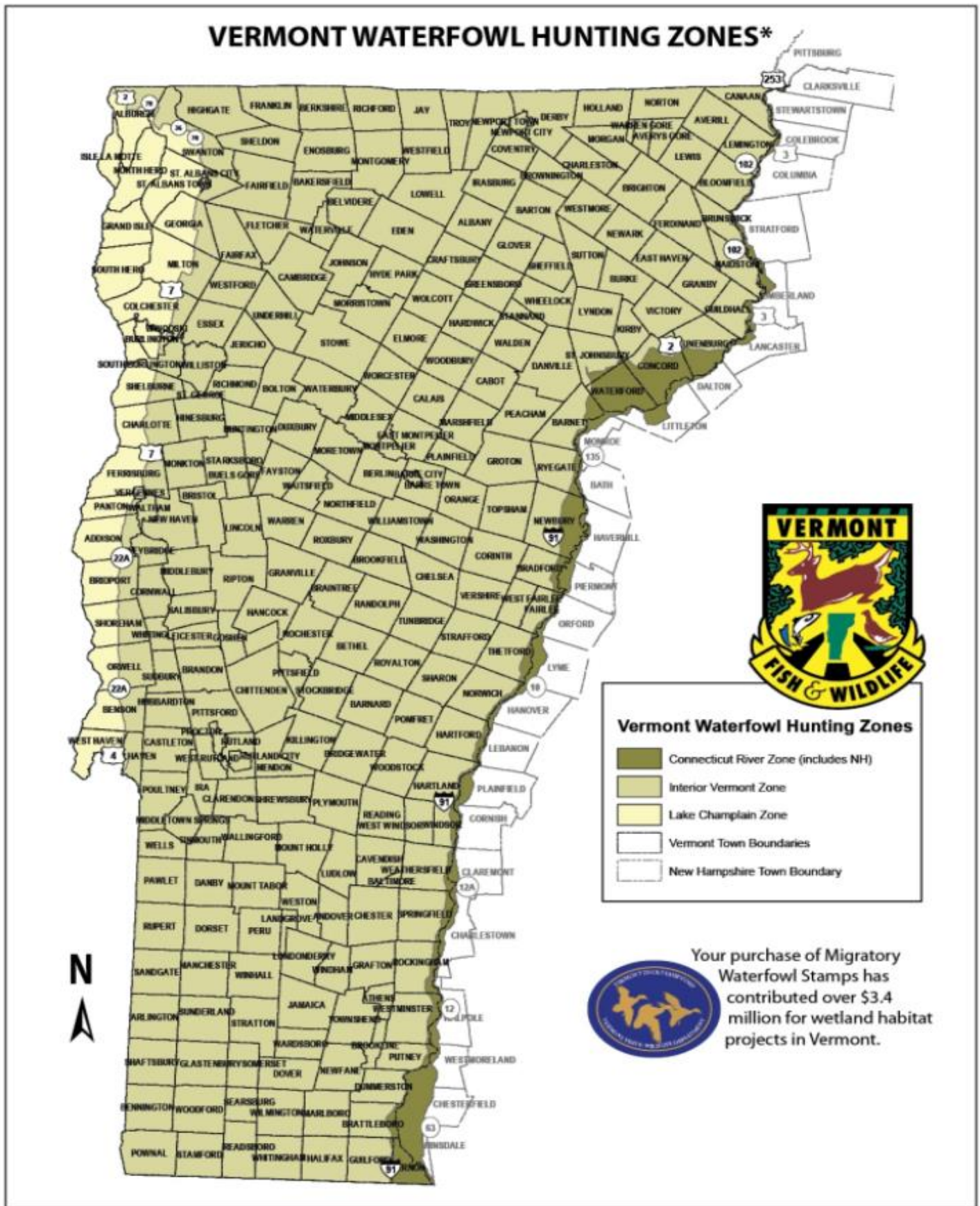
### **Tally of Public Comments**

The Department received a total of nine emails containing comments on the proposed migratory game bird seasons. Forty-four citizens attended the two public meetings hosted by the Board and Department. We averaged a total of 30 viewers throughout the Facebook live stream and peaked at around 50 viewers during the breakout session. Below are the main comments received from all sources with the number of individuals that commented.

1. Prefer the scaup season be 60-days and one bird per day. (2)
2. Sixty days and one scaup easier for law enforcement.
3. Make a hybrid scaup season.
4. Duck numbers were down.
5. Lake Champlain Zone (LCZ) season, 10/3-10/13 and 11/14-12/24, (2).
6. LCZ 10/17-11/8 and 11/21-12/27 (3)
7. LCZ 10/10-11/23
8. LCZ 10/3-11/1 and 11/21-12/20, (2).
9. LCZ 10/7-10/12, 10/17-11/2, 11/14-to end. This proposal gives deer hunters and duck hunters good opportunities, (2).
10. 2008-2010 seasons looked good.
11. Do not modify zones or splits, (14).
12. I have large amounts of birds in my region compared to the rest of LCZ.
13. Saw fewer mallards and more black ducks, (2).
14. Wood duck population seems steady and teal are fewer.
15. The season dates last year were perfect.

16. Front load the scaup with two birds for first 20-days, (5).
17. Back load the scaup with two birds for last 20-days, (6)
18. Place the 20-days for scaup 2-bird bag from 10/21-11/10.
19. Place the 2 bird scaup limit on the first 20 days of the second segment in LCZ, (2).
20. Maintain the 2/day limit and, if it has to be reduced from last year, that the shortened period fall during the second split.
21. Wish the season started earlier on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Move last seven days of season to front of season for LCZ.
22. Let us hunt mid-November during peak migration.
23. Not a fan of the small group format. I liked the group show of hands method.
24. LCZ, prefer a 5-day first segment with a 10-12 day split and we need to finish before Christmas, (2).
25. Two duck limit of any combination.
26. Two duck limit of any combination of mallards or American black duck.
27. Prefer two splits in a season.
28. Average to above average bird numbers last year.
29. I like current splits proposed in 2020 for LCZ.
30. Split last year on LCZ was too long, (2).
31. In LCZ have one less week in October and add it to the start of the second segment.
32. Would like to understand mallard health and numbers and what is being done to fix problem.
33. Keep last day of season as a date, not last Sunday of month.
34. Open and use active military/veteran's days, during closed split.
35. Get away from CT-River zone, move to two zones only, (3).
36. Make zones split state going east-west instead of up and down state, (2).
37. Start the interior zone early, not at the same time as LCZ.
38. Make the area north of the West Swanton Bridge part of LCZ again.
39. Preferred the 2018 Canada goose season over the 2019 dates because the 2019 dates limited their opportunity to hunt.
40. I hunt the interior zone and found that we have migratory birds a lot longer than normal closing of December 8<sup>th</sup>.
41. What is the Department planning to do to help mallards and we need to see more of the new research during the public meetings.
42. Allow the first segment of LCZ to run for two weeks at the very most. Ideally the first split would go back to being five days long. Allow the second split to start earlier in November.
43. The resident goose season should start much earlier than last year's dates. Most of the resident geese had left the area prior to the resident season opening in the interior zone.
44. Run goose season later in November, we are still shooting tons of local geese on the 8<sup>th</sup>, (2).
45. Open duck season later so we can shoot full plumage birds.
46. Resident goose limit is too high.
47. Would an early teal season ever be considered?

Figure 1.



**Table 1.**

**2020 WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATION**

**LAKE CHAMPLAIN ZONE**

	<u>SEASON TYPE</u>	<u>SEASON LENGTH</u>	<u>INCLUSIVE DATES</u>	<u>DAILY LIMIT</u>	<u>POSSESSION LIMIT</u>
DUCKS *	Split	60 Days	<u>Oct. 10 - Nov. 1</u> & <u>Nov. 21 - Dec. 27</u>	6	18
MERGANSERS *	Split	60 Days	<u>Oct. 10 - Nov. 1</u> & <u>Nov. 21 - Dec. 27</u>	5	15
Scaup*	Split	20 Days	Oct. 10 – Oct. 29	2	6
	Hybrid	40 Days	Oct. 30-Nov. 1 – Nov. 21 – Dec. 27	1	3
COOTS	Split	60 Days	<u>Oct. 10 - Nov. 1</u> & <u>Nov. 21 - Dec. 27</u>	15	45
<b>GEESE</b>					
Canada Geese	Straight	25 Days	<u>Sept. 1 - Sept. 25</u>	8	24
	Straight	30 Days	<u>Oct. 10 – Nov. 8</u>	2	6
Snow Geese **	Straight	107 Days	<u>Oct. 1 - Dec.31, 2020</u>	25	NONE
			<u>Feb. 24 – Mar. 10, 2021</u>	25	NONE
			<b>(CO)</b> <u>Mar. 11 - Apr. 23, 2021</u>	15	NONE
Brant	Straight	50 Days	<u>Oct. 10 – Nov. 28</u>	2	6

SHOOTING HOURS - All Waterfowl - All Days - ½ hour before sunrise to sunset

\* Federal species restrictions apply.

\*\* Includes blue geese also.

**(CO)** Conservation Order

Table 2.

**2020 WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATION**

**VERMONT INTERIOR ZONE**

	<u>SEASON TYPE</u>	<u>SEASON LENGTH</u>	<u>INCLUSIVE DATES</u>	<u>DAILY LIMIT</u>	<u>POSSESSION LIMIT</u>
DUCKS *	Straight	60 Days	<u>Oct.10 - Dec.8</u>	6	18
MERGANSERS *	Straight	60 Days	<u>Oct.10 - Dec.8</u>	5	15
SCAUP*	Split	20 Days	Oct. 10 – Oct. 29	2	6
	Hybrid	40 Days	Oct. 30 – Dec. 27	1	3
COOTS	Split	60 Days	<u>Oct.10 - Dec.8</u>	15	45
GEESE					
Canada Geese	Straight	25 Days	<u>Sept. 1 - Sept. 25</u>	8	24
	Straight	30 Days	<u>Oct. 10 – Nov. 8</u>	2	6
Snow Geese **	Straight	107 Days	<u>Oct. 1 - Dec.31, 2020</u>	25	NONE
			<u>Feb. 24 – Mar. 10, 2021</u>	25	NONE
			<b>(CO)</b> <u>Mar. 11 - Apr. 23, 2021</u>	15	NONE
Brant	Straight	50 Days	<u>Oct. 10 – Nov. 28</u>	2	6

SHOOTING HOURS - All Waterfowl - All Days - ½ hour before sunrise to sunset

- (CO)** Conservation Order
- \* Federal species restrictions apply.
- \*\* Includes blue geese also.

Figure 2.

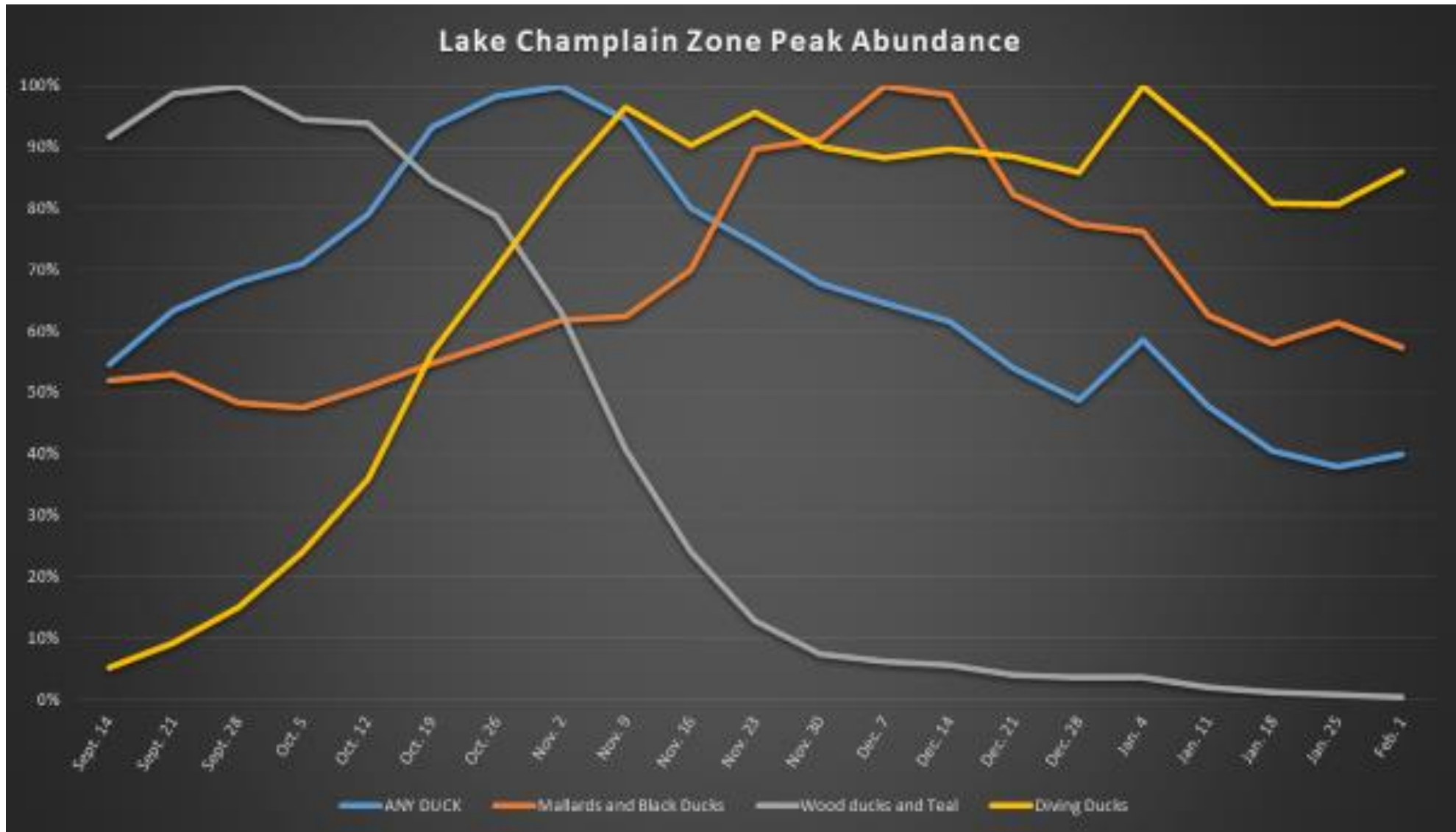




Figure 3.

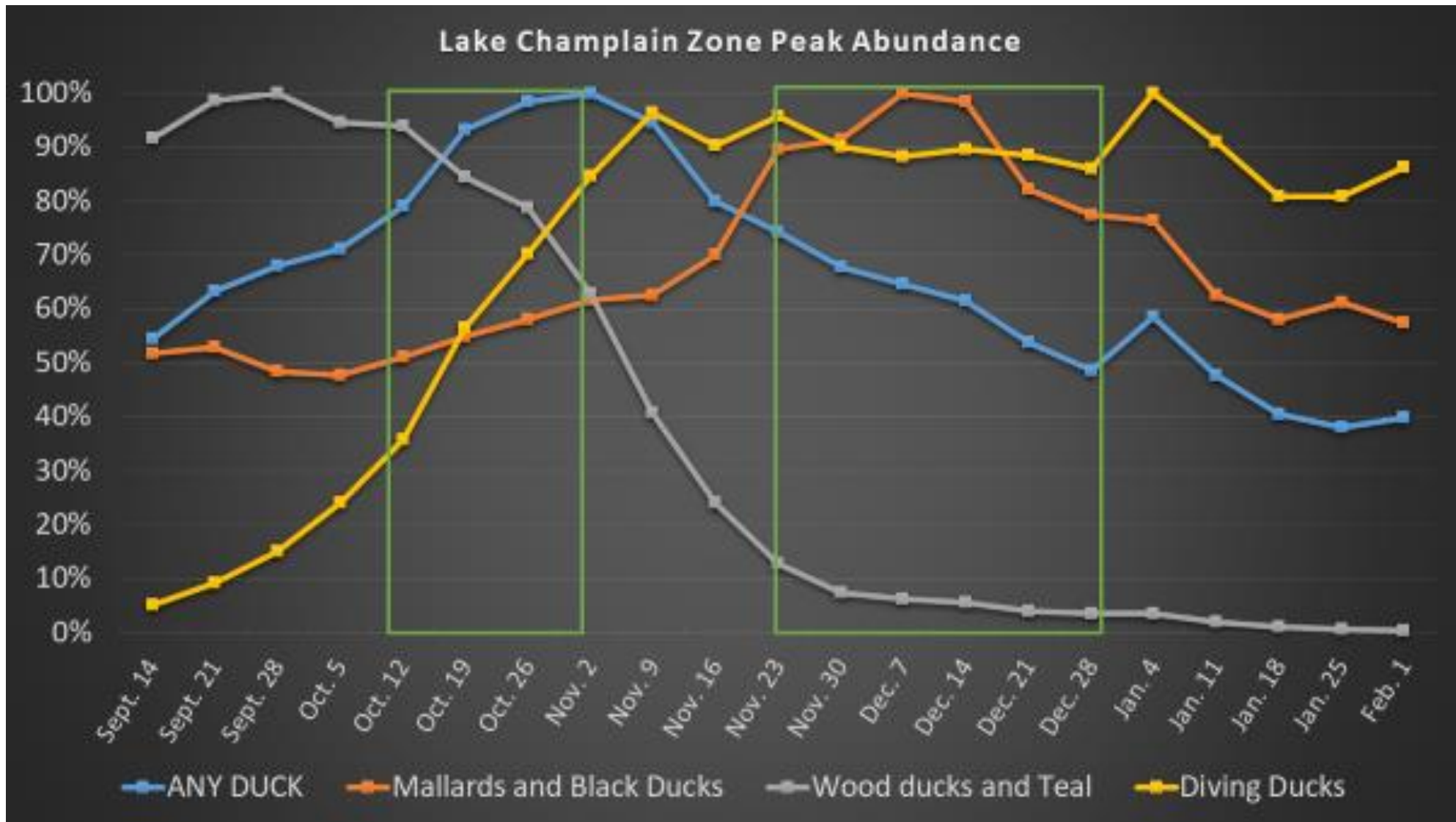


Figure 4.

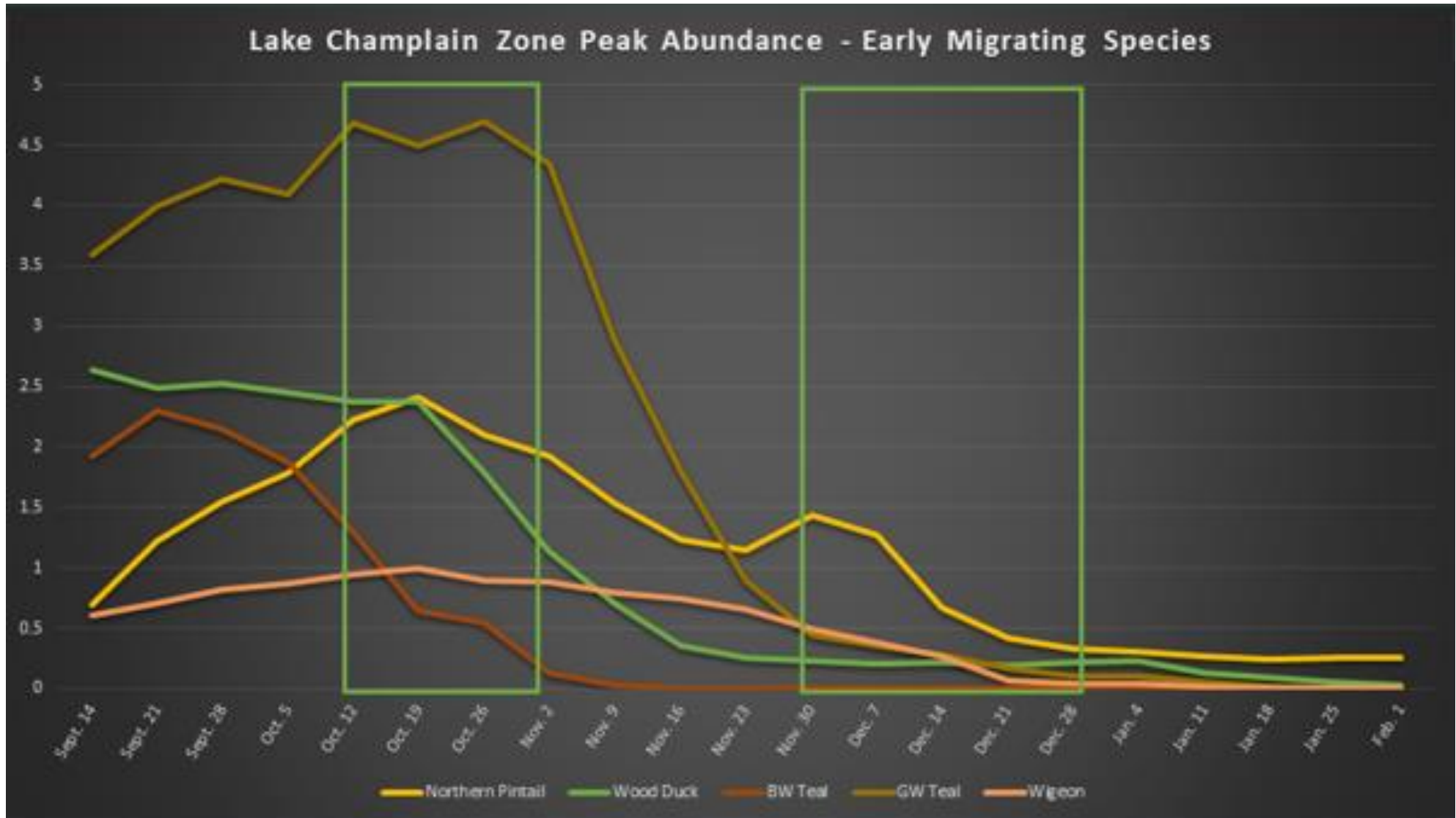




Figure 5.

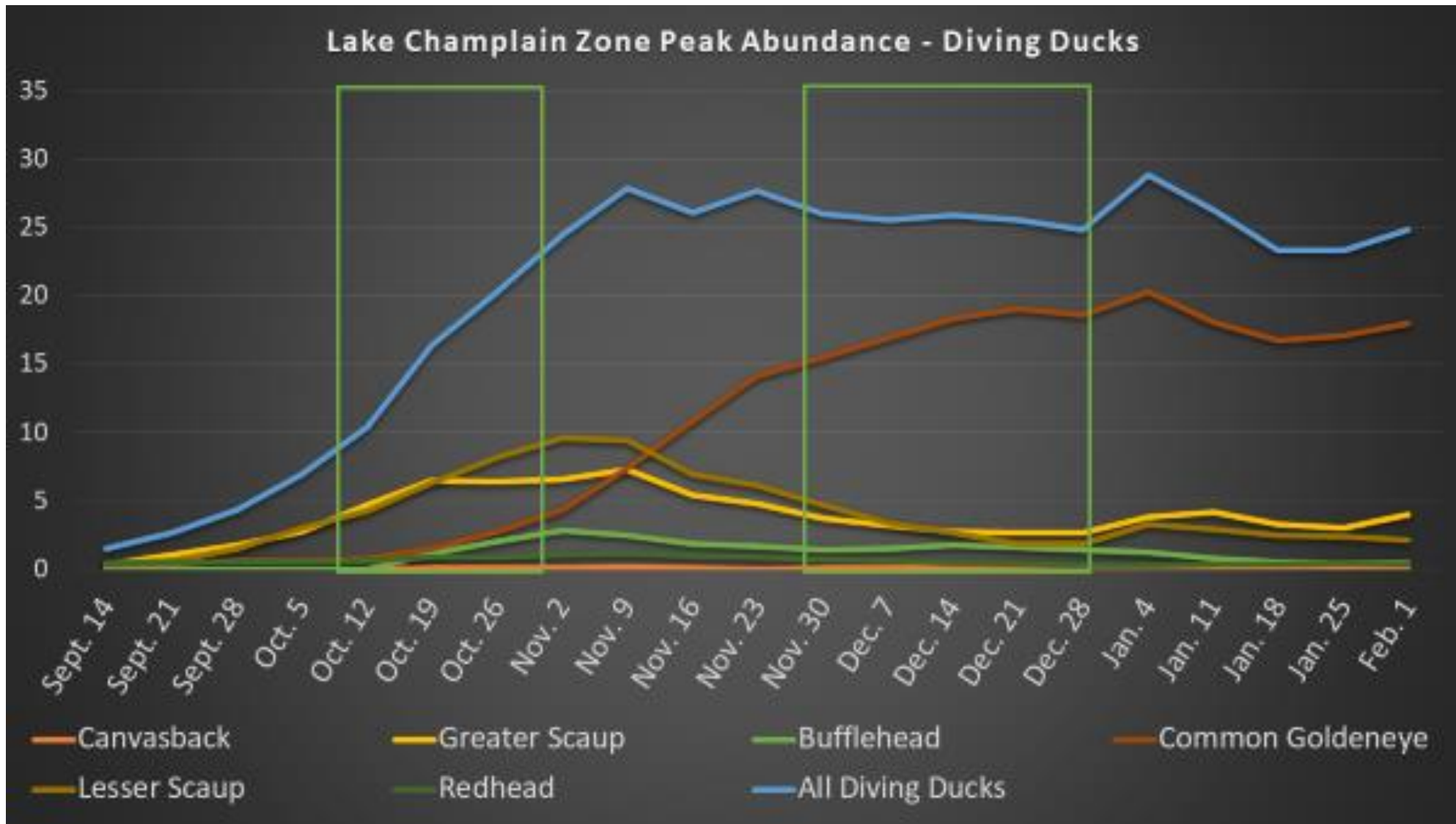


Figure 6.

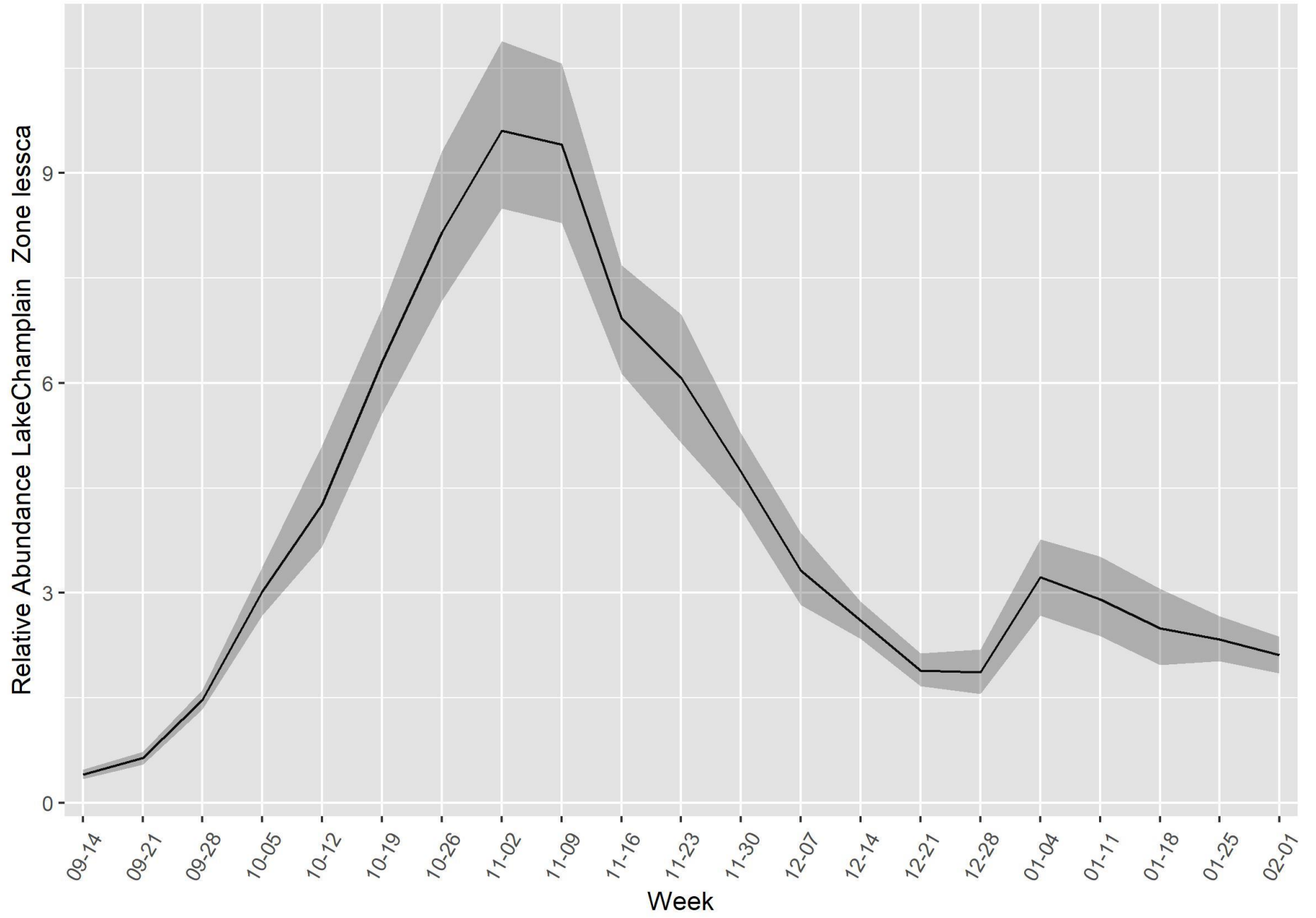
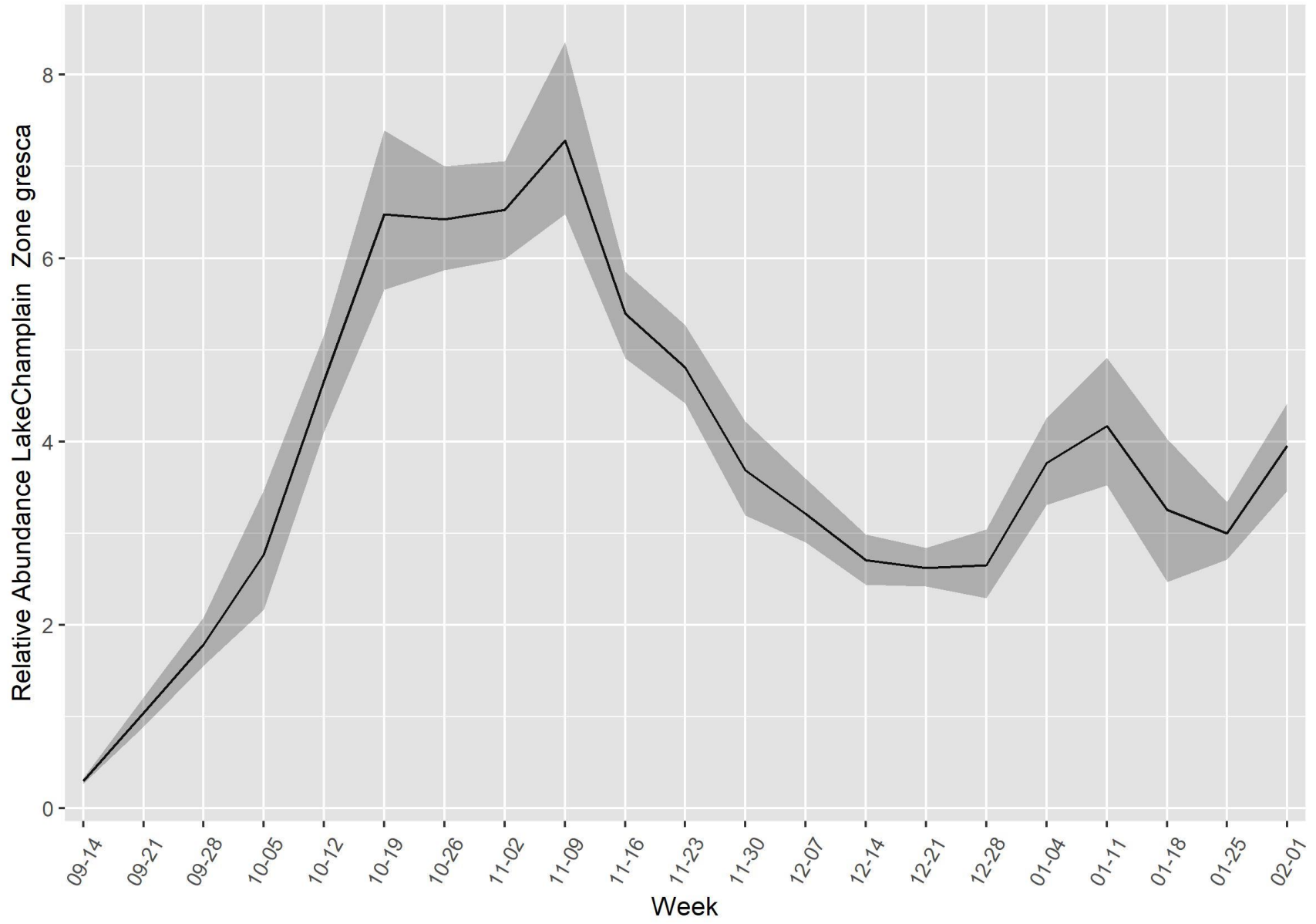


Figure 7.



## Appendix A 2020 FALL CALENDAR

	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>			1	2	3	4	5
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	27	28	29	30			
<b>OCTOBER</b>					1	2	3
	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
<b>NOVEMBER</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	29	30					
<b>DECEMBER</b>			1	2	3	4	5
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	27	28	29	30	31		

 Proposed Lake Champlain Zone season  
 Rifle deer season

## **Justifications for Recommendations Heavily Discussed through Public Input Sources**

*Recommendation 1 - 2020 Lake Champlain Zone Duck, Merganser and Coot Seasons:* That the 2020-2021 duck, mergansers, and coot seasons of the Lake Champlain zone run from October 10 to November 1 and November 21 to December 27, 2020.

- Recommended dates are targeted to find a balance between early season/marsh hunters and late season lake hunters. All hunters do not have access to larger boats and ice-free launch sites. Hunters have been frozen out of many areas in early November in the last few years.
- We opened the second segment on the second weekend of deer season to allow hunters an opportunity to participate in as many seasons as possible and eliminate the conflict with the first week of the rifle deer season.
- We tried to capture season days that provide opportunity for a variety of hunted duck and goose species during their greatest relative abundance within the LCZ.
- Even with a 60-day season we cannot meet all requests including; allowing hunting until the end of the calendar year, hunting during peak migration for early and late migrants, and hunting in November during peak migration of scaup. The majority of hunters have to choose what they are willing to give up.
- We have tried to provide hunting days during unfrozen conditions for both marsh and big lake hunters, realizing we cannot predict weather conditions. We are only working with the trends in weather patterns we currently have.

*Recommendation 11 – Hybrid Scaup Season:* Provide a hybrid season on scaup that allows for a 20-day segment with a two-bird daily bag limit and a 40-day segment that allows for a one bird daily bag limit. The 20-day and two bird daily limit should be placed on October 10 through October 29 within the Lake Champlain and Interior Zones of Vermont. All remaining days of the seasons will be a one bird daily limit.

- Hybrid season is proposed to provide maximum opportunity to hunt a species that requires blinds or specialized boats and large layouts of decoys.
- Hunters have worked with hybrid seasons in the past and are used to annual adjustments in species bag limits.
- This will complicate law enforcement slightly. Hunters and Wardens should look at this hybrid season similar to our fishing regulations that change with the time of year and sometimes stream segments and waterbodies. Hunters must know dates and seasons for all activities. Wardens always have field discretion.
- Population and harvest estimates allow for the hybrid season and maintains a viable scaup population.
- The majority of hunters that commented wanted some form of a hybrid season to maximize opportunity.