
Title: **Nuisance Goose Control Permit Policy**

Policy Number:

WRD-G-002

Effective Date:

Revision Date:

Authority:

Page:

03/01/2018

Division Director

Page 1 of 9

Purpose:

Historically, migratory Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*) passed through Georgia on their way to an important wintering area, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge in Florida. This particular population of geese is known as the “Southern James Bay Population.” Over time, habitat changes in the Great Lakes area and surrounding states changed the migratory patterns of these geese. At the same time the habitat changes were occurring, the breeding “Southern James Bay Population” of Canada geese declined in number. Because of these changes, fewer and fewer geese passed through Georgia each year. Today there are virtually no migratory geese present in Georgia during the winter.

In 1975, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources began a program to re-establish Canada geese in Georgia. During the restocking period of the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, thousands of wild geese were released on reservoirs and farm ponds across the state. Canada geese quickly adapted to the available habitats in Georgia, and our resident goose population began to grow and expand into new areas. In 2006, Georgia’s goose population was estimated at approximately 180,000 birds. Some of our resident geese have adapted so well to life in urban and suburban areas, that they cause problems in certain situations. Geese often use habitats such as golf courses, beaches, lawns, housing developments, and man-made ponds in subdivisions and apartment complexes. Goose-human interactions occur often in these settings.

Goose complaints usually fall into one of three categories: 1) Property damage – including crop damage, 2) general nuisance, and 3) health and safety. Property damage is a fairly common complaint, especially from golf courses where geese are damaging the greens. Damage complaints concerning crops are relatively few, but large flocks of geese can impact crops, especially in smaller fields. The most common complaint from the public occurs when geese are in areas where they are not wanted and have become a general nuisance. The geese may not be causing a problem per se, but the residents simply do not want large numbers of geese in their yard or pond, especially if the geese become aggressive towards people. In some cases, there may be potential health and safety concerns such as high fecal coliform levels in the water around public beaches that may prevent swimming, or concentrations of geese around airports that pose a threat to aircraft and passengers.

Responding to every complaint by catching and removing the geese is certainly not the answer. In some cases where geese are removed from preferred habitats, another flock moves into the same area and causes the same types of problems. In these situations, habitat modifications, not removal, may solve the problem. However, relocation can be effective in some instances. Relocated geese exhibit homing instincts and often attempt, sometimes successfully, to return to the area from where they were removed, unless the geese are wing-clipped and moved a significant distance. Personnel from USDA Wildlife Services have kept records, and have found a very low return rate when geese are wing-clipped and moved approximately 100 miles or more. Section IV of this protocol contains guidelines to consider before relocation nuisance geese.

State agency personnel, federal personnel, and members of the public must take a more responsible role in alleviating goose problems. State and federal personnel must try to educate the public about ways to prevent geese from causing problems, and the public must be willing to carry out the practices and techniques that are offered to them to solve their nuisance problems.

Consistent guidelines and policies on nuisance goose management and their implementation are key ingredients in the development of this new role. This Protocol for Handling Nuisance Canada Geese is designed to standardize the methods for handling goose complaints that are received by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division.

Policy:

A. Overview of Current Methods for Alleviating Goose Problems

When a nuisance goose complaint is received, providing useful information to the complainant is the critical first step. The attached leaflet, "Nuisance Goose Control: Legal and Effective Methods for Dealing with Nuisance Canada Geese," is available at all Game Management and Law Enforcement offices across the state and should be given to the public when they seek assistance of guidance on alleviating their nuisance goose problems:

1. Change the Food Sources
 - a. Do not feed geese.
 - b. Do not plant attractive cool season grasses in your lawn or near water.
 - c. Allow grass and other vegetation bordering the water to grow tall and rank.
 - d. Change the species of grass or crop that geese are feeding on.
2. Erect Physical Barriers to Keep Geese Out
 - a. Permanent – wooden fences, wire fences, rock walls, hedgerows, emergent vegetation, or rip-rap
 - b. Temporary – fences made from string or twine, mylar tape, electric fences, or grids of string erected over ponds.
3. Change Habitat to Reduce Attractiveness to Geese
 - a. Create hedgerows to prevent movement between ponds and lawns.
 - b. Remove islands and peninsulas that are preferred nesting sites from lakes and ponds where possible.
 - c. Remove artificial nesting structures.
4. Use Harassment of Scare Devices to Drive Them Away
 - a. Noisemakers - sirens, airhorns, whistles, scare pistols, propane cannons, etc.
 - b. Visual Devices - Scarecrows, flagging, mylar balloons, etc.
 - c. Other - trained dogs or radio-controlled aircraft
5. Use Chemical Repellents
 - a. "Goose Chase" (Methyl anthranilate) mix with water and spray the grass
6. Hunting During the Goose Season
 - a. Where feasible, hunting is an effective control technique.
7. Obtain Goose Control Permit

- a. From local DNR-WRD Game Management Office.
 - b. Permits from DNR-WRD under our “Special Canada Goose Permit” can be issued to landowners or land managers between March 11 and August 31.
 - c. Permits can be issued for goose capture and relocation, and for limited lethal control of geese.
8. Nest and Egg Destruction under the Federal Depredation Order
- a. Landowners and land managers can sign up via the internet at www.fws.gov/permits to destroy nests and eggs of resident Canada geese between March 1 and June 30. Egg oiling must be done with 100% corn oil.

Keep in mind that using more than one method at the same time will increase the chance of success. Geese that have grown accustomed to using a certain area for a long period of time will be much harder to discourage than geese that have recently moved into a new area.

B. Recommendations for Specific Scenarios

All recommendations should be prefaced with a brief explanation of goose behavior and natural history. The recommendations will then make more sense to the complainant, and will likely encourage innovative ideas.

1. Private residence on large reservoir:
 - a. Suggest a permanent solution. Physical barriers and habitat modification are the best choices.
 - b. Short-term tactics such as scare pistols or chemical repellents may be used to disperse the geese while a more permanent solution is being finalized.
 - c. Capture and removal is usually not a viable option because large reservoirs provide excellent goose habitat and often support large goose populations, removing geese from this situation only creates a temporary void and will simply lead to another flock moving into the same area and causing similar problems without implementation of permanent solutions.
2. Private residence in subdivision or an apartment complex with associated pond(s):
 - a. Suggest a permanent solution with the approval of the Homeowner’s Association, or managing authority. Techniques include physical barriers and habitat changes. Feeding should be strongly discouraged.
 - b. Short-term tactics such as scare pistols, or chemical repellents may be used to disperse the geese while a more permanent solution is being finalized.
 - c. If the subdivision or apartment complex is relatively isolated with limited goose habitat, capture and removal may be a viable alternative solution, with the approval of the Homeowner’s Association or managing authority assuming geese are on community property.
 - d. Nest and egg destruction – On private property and on community property, nest and egg destruction is allowed under the Depredation Order. Limiting reproduction may be effective at alleviating long-term problems.

- e. DNR-WRD Permits can be issued to individuals on their land or to Associations on community property for capture and removal or limited lethal take in conjunction with harassment techniques.
- 3. Golf Course:
 - a. A combination of tactics is usually the best solution for golf courses.
 - b. Permanent solutions include physical barriers or habitat modification.
 - c. Scare tactics include pyrotechnics and trained dogs.
 - d. If the golf course is relatively isolated with limited goose habitat, capture and removal may be a viable alternative.
 - e. Permits for lethal control can be issued in conjunction with scare tactics. The primary purpose of the lethal control is to reinforce the effectiveness of the scare tactics.
 - f. Nest and egg destruction can be allowed under the depredation order as means of reducing reproduction and inhibiting population growth.
- 4. Private residence in rural setting with farm pond, etc.:
 - a. Suggest hunting during the goose season. Rural farm ponds adjacent to agricultural fields are ideal goose habitat. Rural residents are normally much more tolerant of wildlife, and few complaints would be expected from this group.
 - b. Nest and egg destruction under the existing federal depredation order following internet sign-up at www.fws.gov/permits.
 - c. Issue DNR-WRD permits for lethal control in conjunction with scare tactics.
- 5. Agricultural crop damage:
 - a. Suggest hunting during the goose season.
 - b. Scare tactics such as propane cannons or other noisemakers can be used during the growing season as much as possible.
 - c. Nest and egg destruction under the existing federal depredation order following internet sign-up at www.fws.gov/permits.
 - d. DNR-WRD permits can be issued for limited lethal control as a means of reinforcing the effectiveness of scare tactics within the dates of March 11 to August 31. This is the preferred option for lethal control.
 - e. Federal Agricultural Depredation Order – This is the fall-back option. Farmers actively engaged in commercial agriculture can destroy nests and eggs as indicated above between March 1 and June 30, capture and relocate geese, or lethally control geese between May 1 and August 31 with a permit from DNR-WRD under the depredation order (With the understanding that the farmer must maintain records for three years).
- 6. Parks and Beaches or Other Areas where Human Health and Safety are a Concern:
 - a. Suggest hunting if possible in the off-season.
 - b. Suggest short-term solution during the summer months such as scare pistols or repellents on grassy areas.

- c. Feeding can be a problem in these areas and should be strongly discouraged.
 - d. Capture and relocation or lethal control may be necessary depending on public health implications as listed under the Public Health Depredation Order.
 - e. Nest and egg destruction under the existing federal depredation order following internet sign-up at www.fws.gov/permits.
7. Airports:
- a. Suggest using short-term solutions such as scare pistols, propane cannons, or other harassment methods as well as chemical repellents in feeding areas.
 - b. Under Federal Airport depredation order, airport managers can conduct nest and egg destruction between March 1 and June 30, and capture and relocate and/or lethally control geese between April 1 and September 15.

The scenarios listed above are the most common types of complaints received, but this is by no means a complete list of nuisance situations. Biologists and technicians dealing with nuisance situations should be able to gather information from the complainant and determine whether a short-term solution or a permanent solution is the best alternative, and then suggest some of the tactics listed above. Complainants should be advised of the possibility of contracting with nuisance agent trappers or the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Wildlife Services to remove the geese, for a fee, without DNR-WRD involvement.

C. Steps for Handling Nuisance Goose Complaints

The following steps should be taken by DNR-WRD personnel when nuisance goose complaints are received:

1. DNR personnel should provide the complainant with accurate information concerning goose life history, possible explanations for the nuisance behavior, and nuisance abatement techniques that can be used to resolve the problem.
2. The complainant should try at least two different scare/repellent/exclusion techniques to alleviate the problem. These techniques may solve the problem.
3. If complaints continue, personnel from WRD should verify that attempts have been made to alleviate the problem, the attempts have failed, and the geese are in fact creating a nuisance situation (site visit may or may not be necessary).
4. At this point, DNR-WRD personnel have three options to solve the problem depending on the type of goose problem involved and the time of year the complaints are occurring (Attachment 1):
 - a. Advise landowner of the availability of the Nest and Egg Depredation Order
 - i. Landowners can register online at www.fws.gov/permits and destroy nests and eggs of Canada geese or oil the eggs with 100% corn oil. No DNR permits are required, however, the landowner must report all activities to the USFWS by October 31 each year.

- b. Issue a Nuisance Canada Goose Control Permit for either the lethal control of adult geese in combination with harassment techniques, or the capture and relocation of geese as per the approved guidelines listed at the end of this document and include contact information for USDA-WS and nuisance agent trappers.
- c. Determine if either of the following federal depredation order can take effect:
 - i. Airport: Under Federal Jurisdiction and Control, this allows airports to manage goose populations through the following methods: nest and egg destruction or egg oiling with 100% corn oil between March 1 and June 30, or shooting with shotgun and nontoxic shot, lethal trapping, and/or trapping and relocating between April 1 and September 15.
 - ii. Agriculture: Under State Control (DNR-WRD issues a permit), allows landowners, operators, and tenants actively engaged in commercial agriculture to conduct activities such as nest and egg destruction or egg oiling with 100% corn oil between March 1 and June 30, or shooting with shotgun and nontoxic shot, lethal trapping, and/or trapping and relocating between May 1 and August 31. Control activities cannot include the use of decoys or calls. Permittees must maintain a log of their control activities for 3 years. State Agencies must report number and county of nests, eggs, and birds taken each year to the USFWS by Dec. 31.
 - iii. Public Health: Under State Control (DNR-WRD issues a permit), allows State Agencies to conduct control activities when a Federal, State, or local public health agency has determined that resident Canada geese are posing a specific, immediate human health threat by creating conditions conducive to the transmission of human or zoonotic pathogens. Activities can include nest and egg destruction or egg oiling with 100% corn oil between March 1 and June 30, or shooting with shotgun and nontoxic shot, lethal trapping, and/or trapping and relocating between April 1 and August 31. State Agencies must report number and county of nests, eggs, and birds taken each year to the USFWS by Dec. 31.

All geese that are captured and relocated by USDA Wildlife Services or by nuisance agent trappers should be moved at least 100 miles. The local Game Management office must be contacted prior to the release of nuisance geese.

D. Approved Guidelines for Issuing Goose Permits that do not fall under one of the above Depredation Orders

In March of 2002, the Wildlife Resources Division received a Special Canada Goose Permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service authorizing our personnel or our authorized agents (landowners or site managers) to lethally control geese or destroy nests. There are limitations on the permit that have been imposed by the USFWS and by the State Waterfowl Committee. Those limitations and guidance for issuing the permits are described below:

1. Permittee and subpermittees are authorized to conduct resident Canada goose management control activities through egg and nest manipulation, trapping, relocating, and killing of Canada geese in order to contribute to human health and safety, protection of personal or public property, and prevention of injury to people or property in accordance with all conditions specified in 50 CFR 21.26.
2. Permittee and subpermittees are authorized to lethally control on a statewide basis up to 1500 resident Canada geese each year. Game Management Regions have the following quotas by region: 1 and 2 – 500 per region, 3 and 4 – 150 per region, 5 and 6 – 100 per region, and 7 – 0 geese per year. There will be some flexibility with region quotas as long as the statewide quota is not exceeded.
3. Concurrent authority is granted to agency employees, contractors, and private individuals who have written authority from the State Agency and are authorized to conduct activities involving the control and management of resident Canada geese.
4. Permits for Canada goose egg addling and nest destruction can only be issued between March 11 and August 31 under our “Special Canada Goose Permit.” However, landowners can get nest and egg destruction permits directly from the FWS and www.fws.gov/permits without going through WRD.
5. Because USFWS guidelines say that “States should make a concerted effort to limit the take of adult birds to June, July, and August,” permits for lethal control of adult geese can only be issued between June 1 and August 31. Permits for lethal control issued during the molting period of June 16 – July 14 will be for trap and kill only, with euthanasia being done off-site.
6. At the discretion of the regions, additional restrictions can be placed on the techniques and number of geese to be controlled. For shooting, only shotguns with non-toxic shot will be allowed for Canada goose control.
7. Appropriate records must be kept so that an annual report of all Canada goose activities can be compiled and forwarded to the USFWS by Dec. 31 of each year.
8. Only Regional Supervisors, Wildlife Biologists, or Wildlife Technicians are allowed to issue Canada goose control permits.
9. The guidelines and steps outlined in the updated “Protocol for Handling Nuisance Geese” should be followed where appropriate.

Prepared by State Waterfowl Committee, 2000.

Approved by Committee March 21, 2000.

Amended by Committee March 20, 2002.

Amended by Committee March, 2005.

Amended by Committee Fall 2006.

Amended by Committee February, 2008.

Attachments

Attachment 1 – Nuisance Goose Permit Decision Matrix

Nuisance Goose Permit Decision Matrix

