

# Results of the 2023 New Jersey Waterfowl Hunter Survey



# Selecting Waterfowl Season Dates

## Selecting waterfowl season dates challenge:

- Migration chronology (green-winged teal vs. diving ducks)
  - Hunter traditions
  - Key holiday periods
  - Time spent pursuing additional quarry (ie: deer, fall striped bass)
  - Not surprising hunters have different opinions on season dates
- 
- Diversity of opinions can make selecting annual waterfowl season dates challenging and even contentious. Impossible to satisfy everyone.
  - To better serve state's hunters, NJFW conducted survey fall 2023 to measure hunters' preferences on suite of season dates and regulations

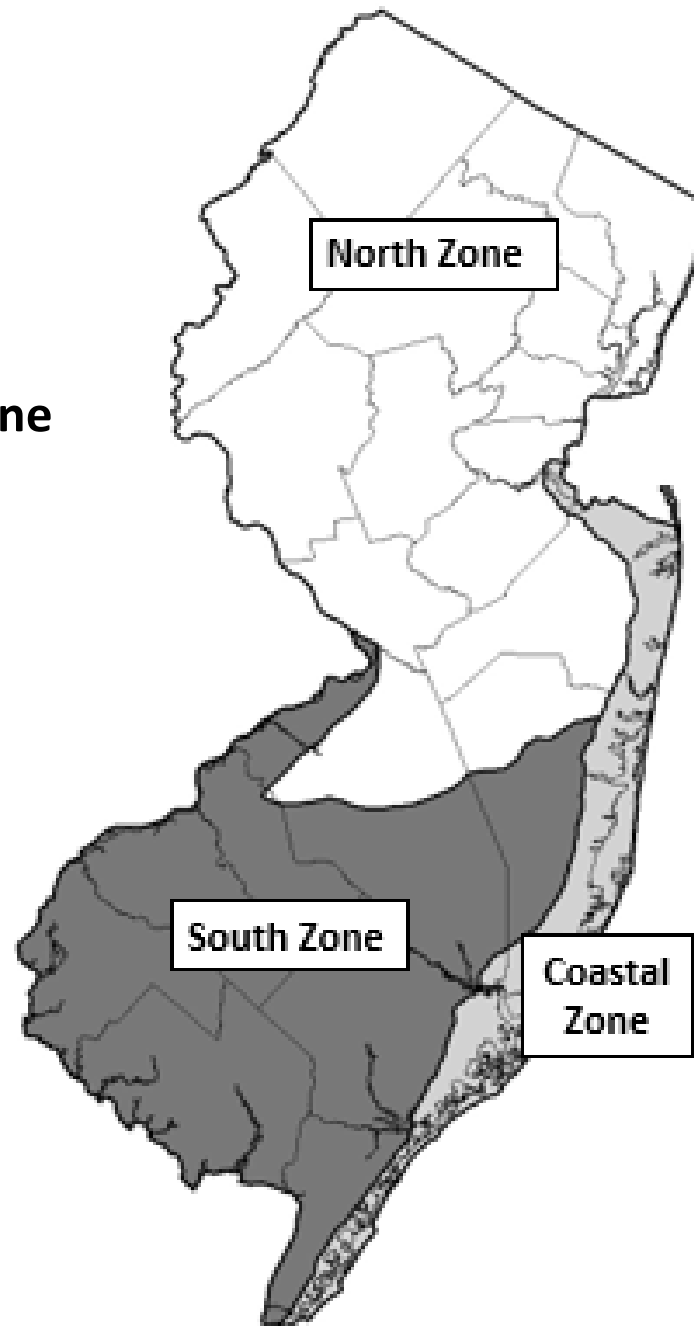


# Survey Methods

- ONLINE. Survey universe: NJ Duck Stamp  $\geq 1$  year 2020-2022 seasons ( $n \sim 20,000$ ) also e-mail address (87%)
- September 2023, intro message with survey link; 2 messages, 1 week apart, survey open >2 weeks
  - *Instrument: Survey Monkey*
- Also sent to Hunting listserv ( $n \sim +40,000$ ) and survey link posted on NJFW website
- “Convenience Survey” anyone could take it
- Required hunters to submit CID# (avoid ‘conspiracy theories’)
  - *Eliminate duplicate surveys*
  - *Screen out non-waterfowl hunters*

**3 zones**

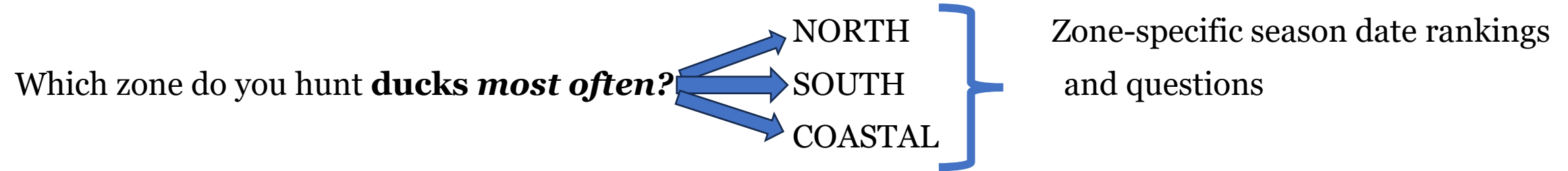
**2 season segments (“split”) in each zone**



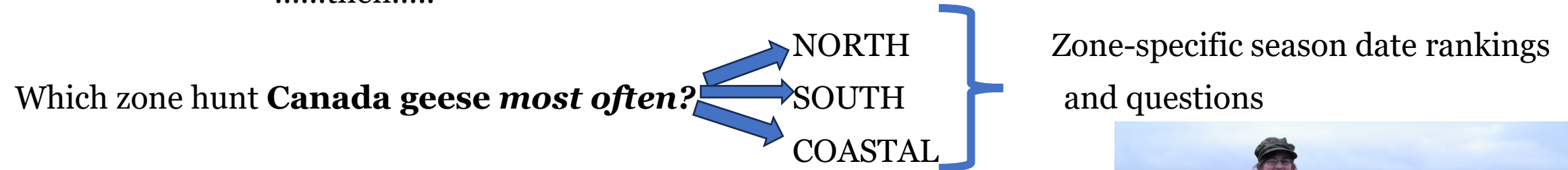


# Survey Design

Generic questions: all hunters answered



.....then.....

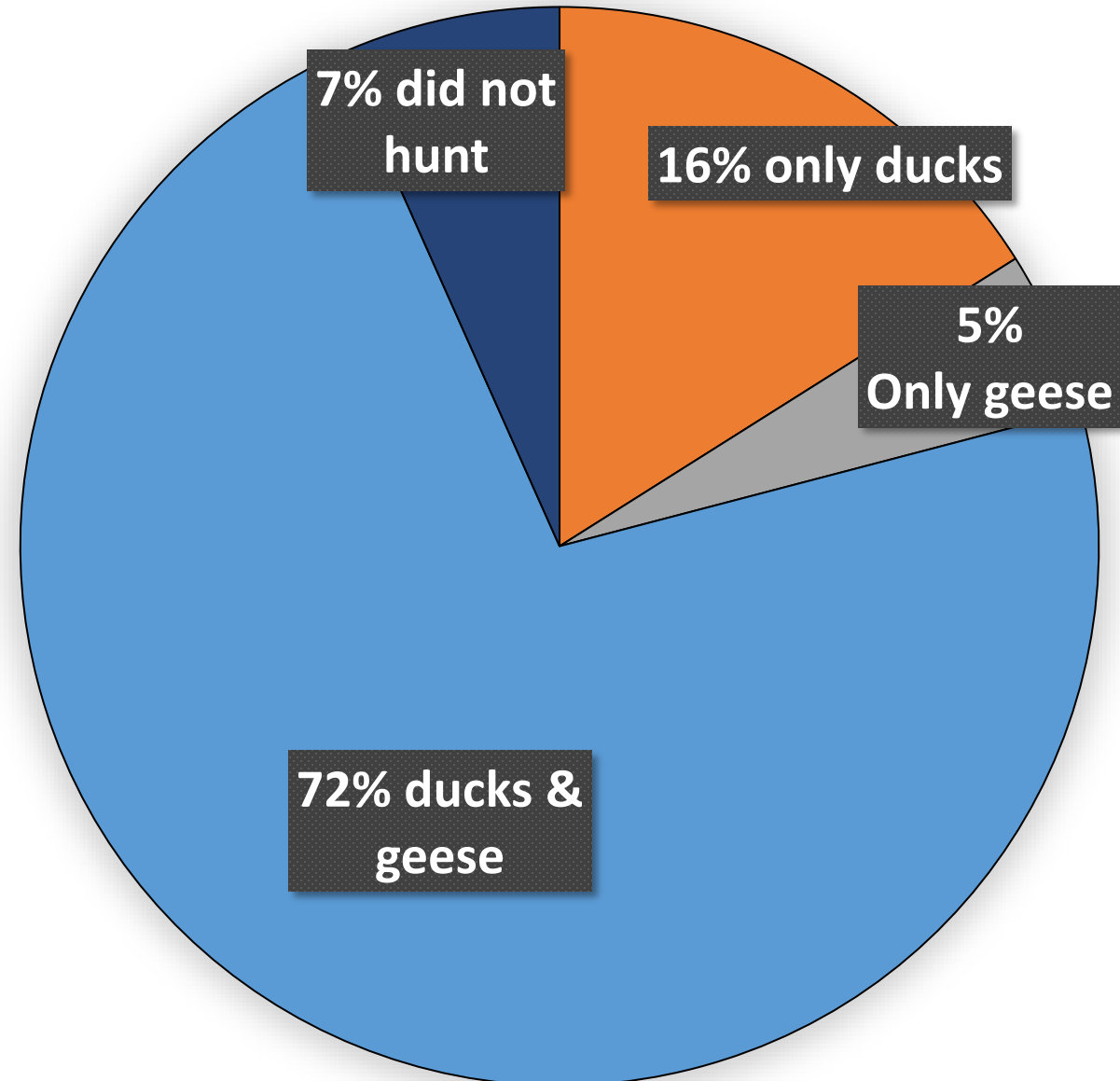


Many questions had dichotomy to different questions depending responses

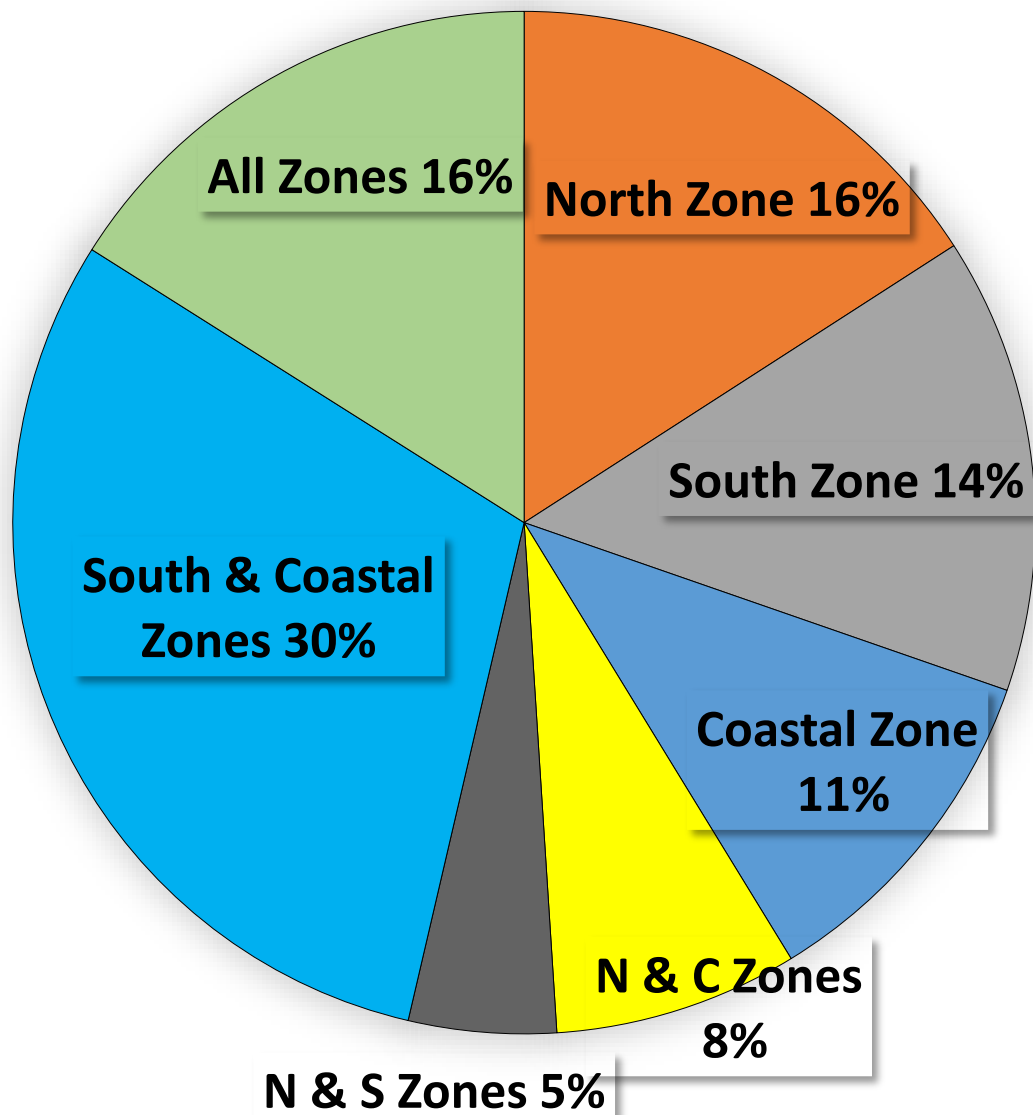
53 total questions, but most hunters had to answer ~35 questions



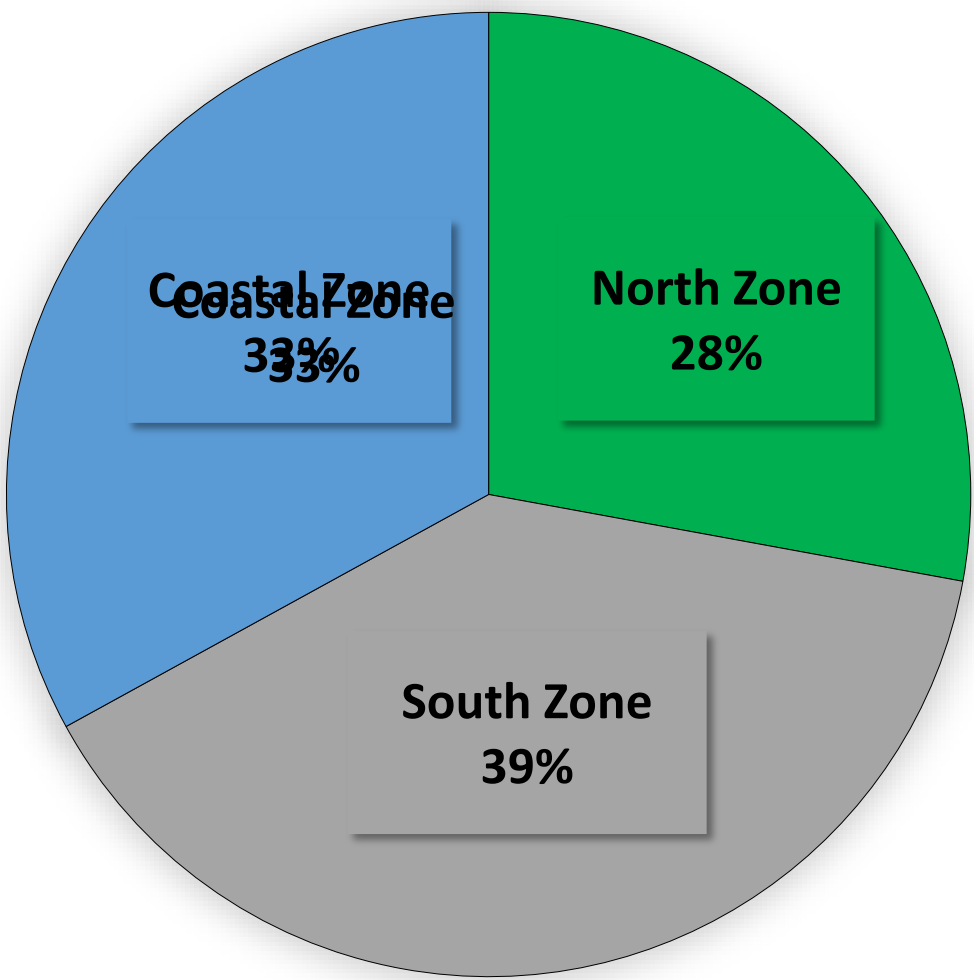
## Waterfowl hunting activity past 3 years



# NJ zones for **ducks** past 3 years



~40% 1 Zone



Most often for ducks

# North Zone October duck season split

## Duck season structure

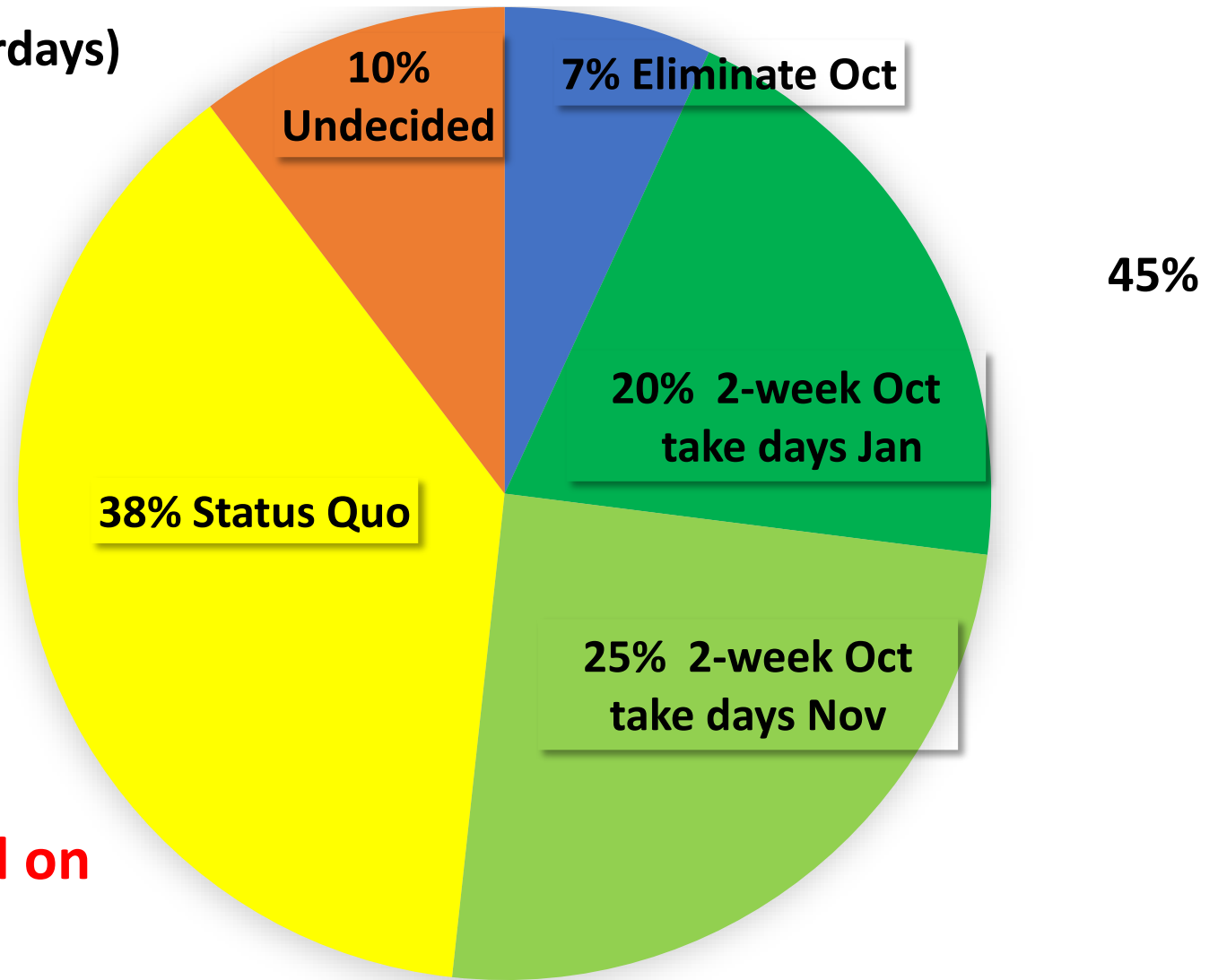
< 2016 first October split: 2-4 weeks ( $\geq 3$  Saturdays)

$\geq$  2016 first October split: 1 week (Sat-Sat)



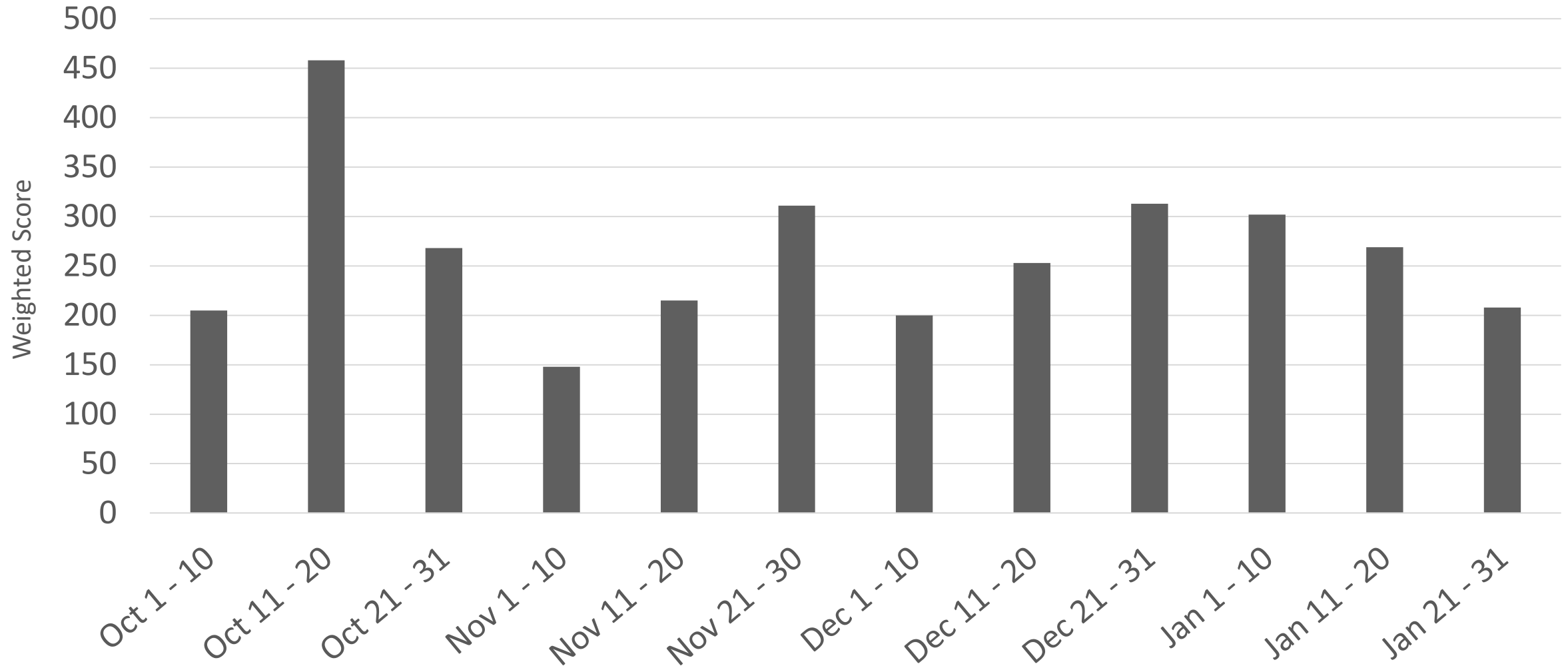
45%

**Hunters equally divided on  
length of October split!**

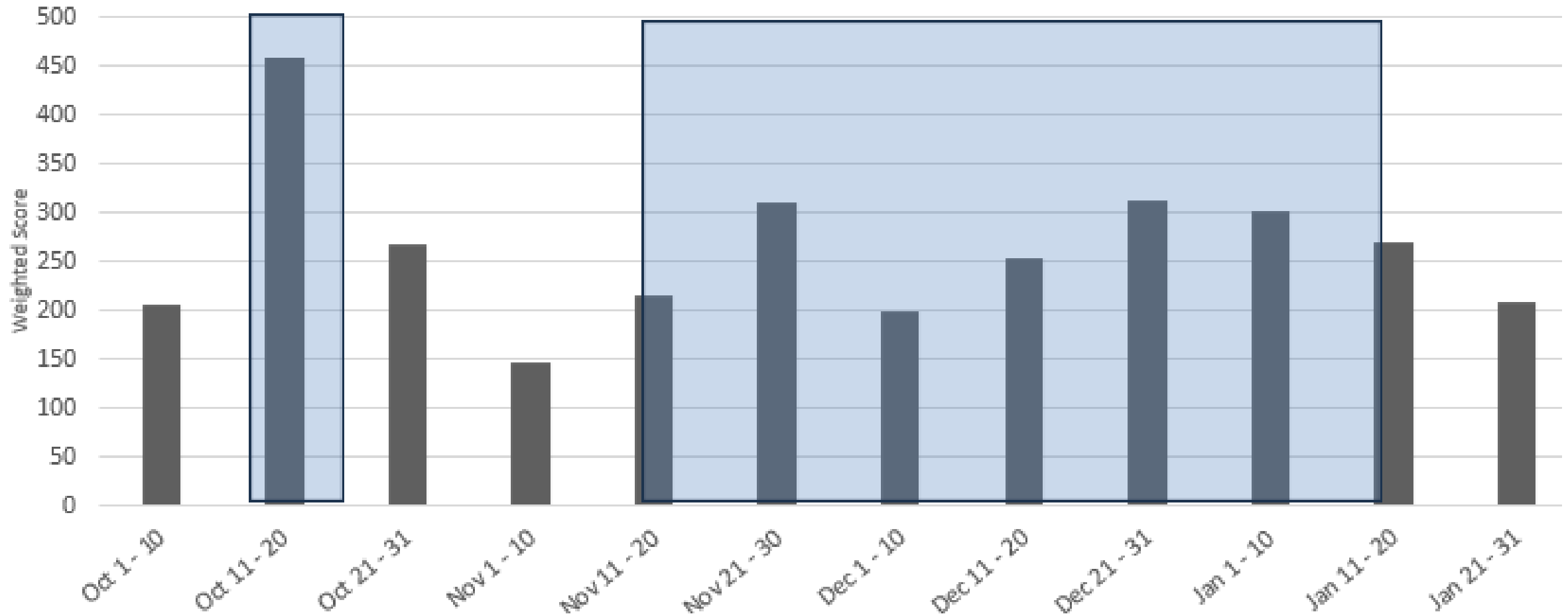




# Preferred DUCK season dates: North Zone



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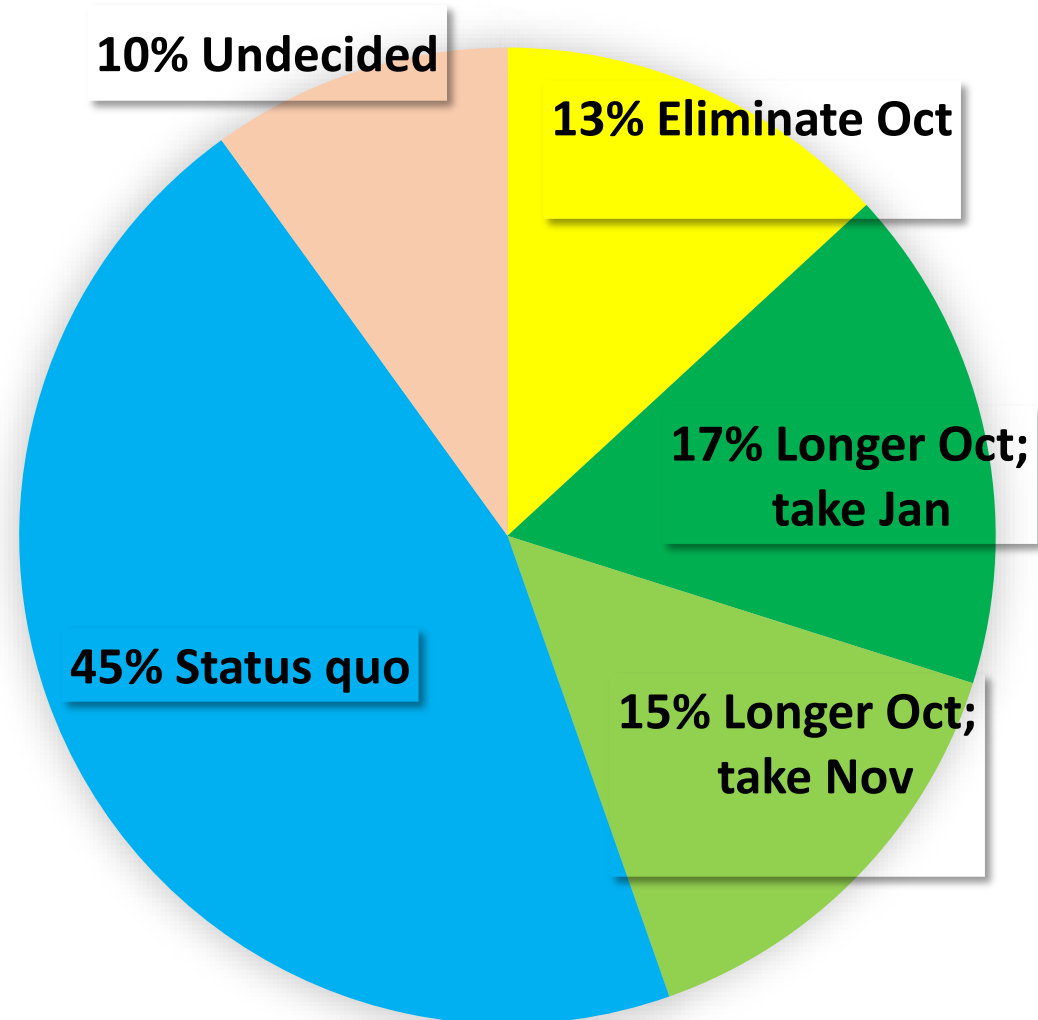


# South Zone October duck season split

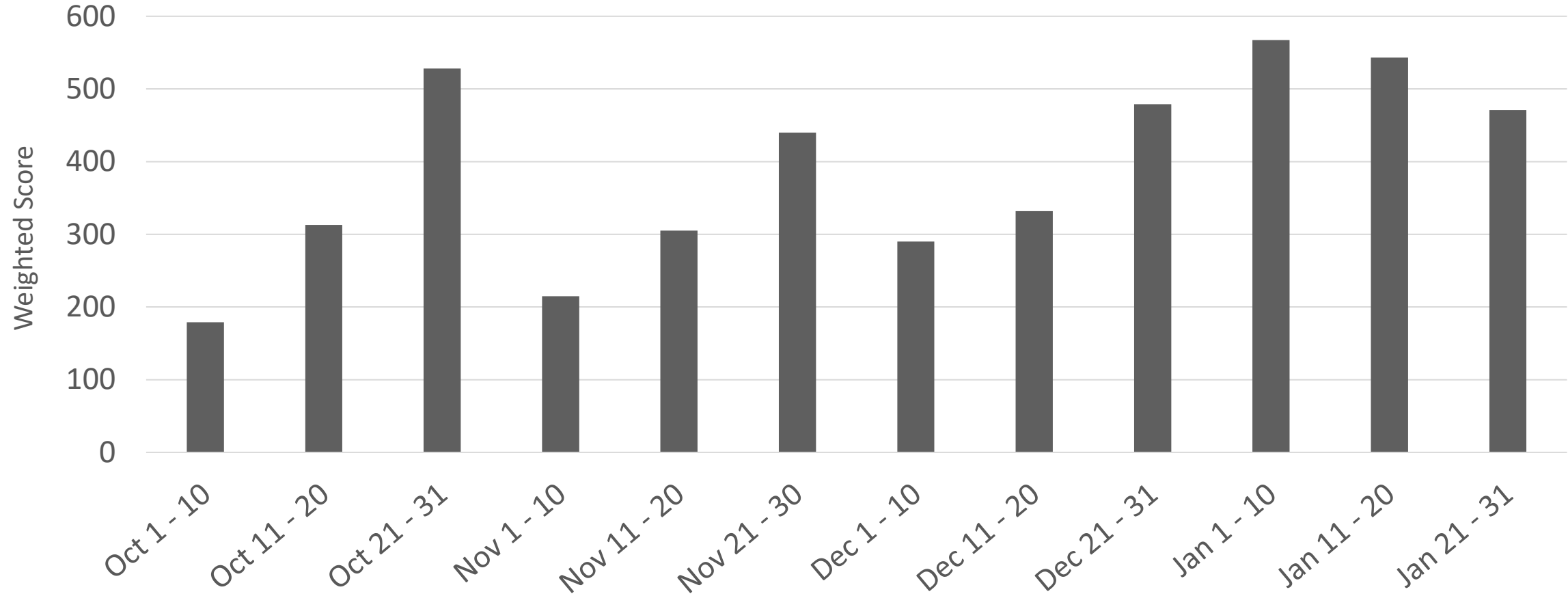
## Duck season structure

< 2013 first October split: 2 weeks (3 Saturdays)

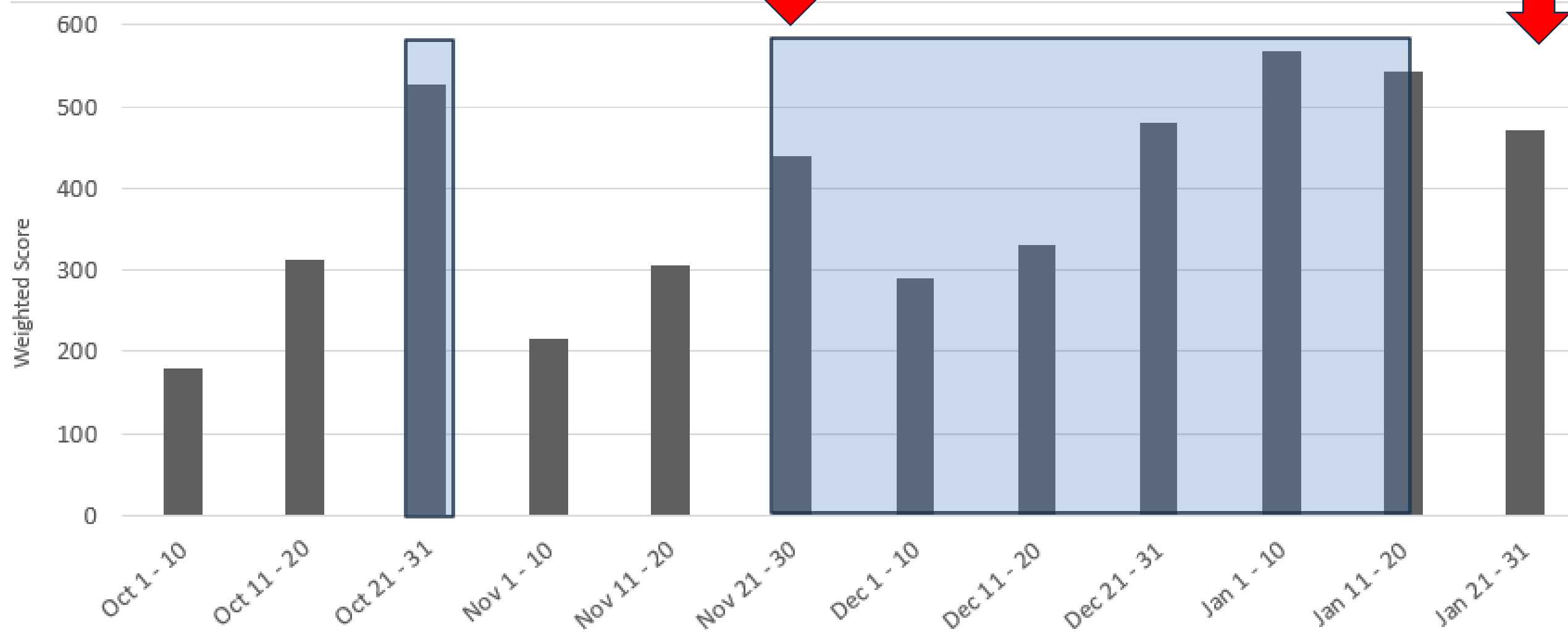
≥ 2013 first October split: 1 week (Sat-Sat)



# Preferred DUCK season dates: South Zone

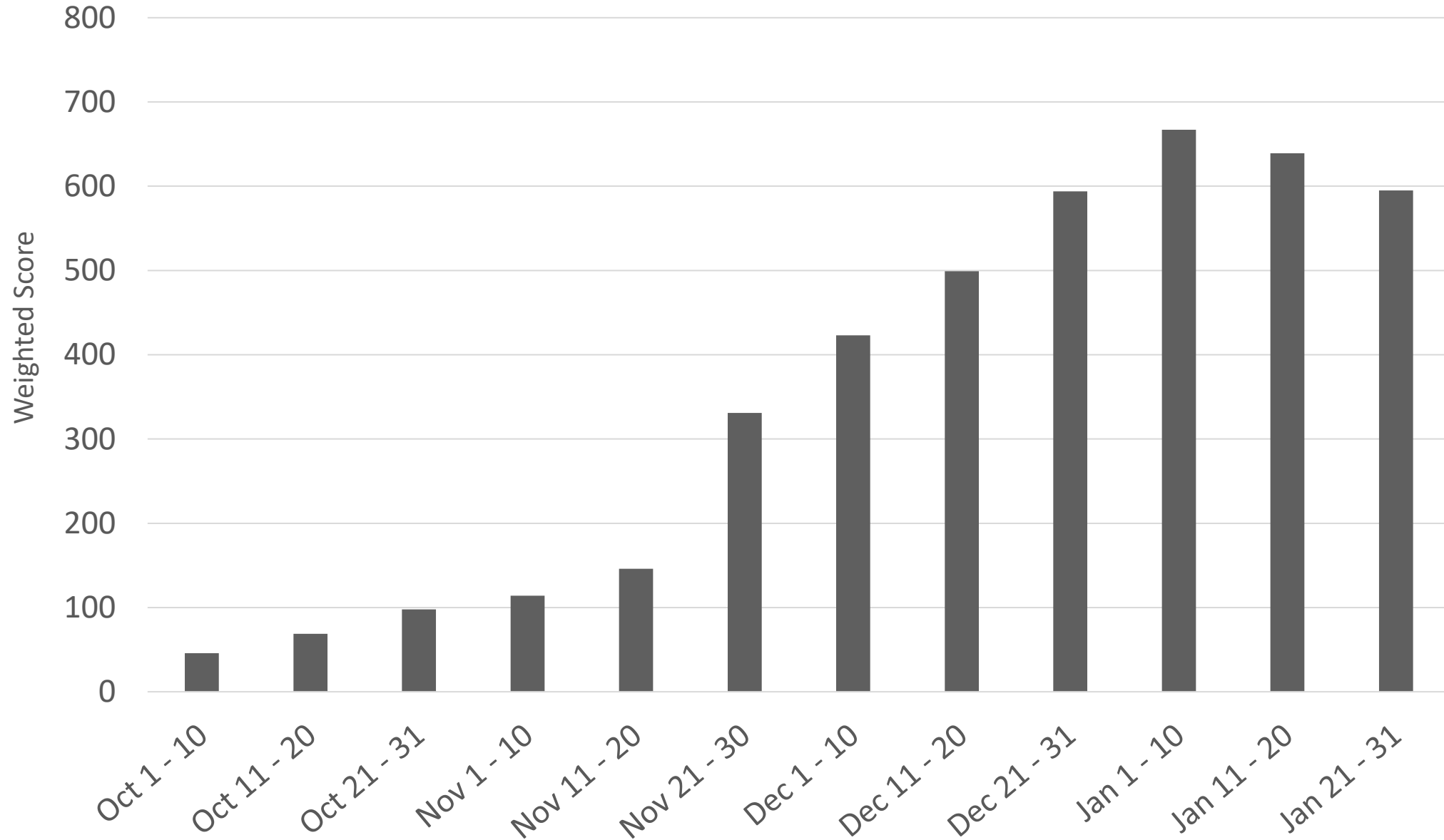


# Preferred DUCK season dates: South Zone

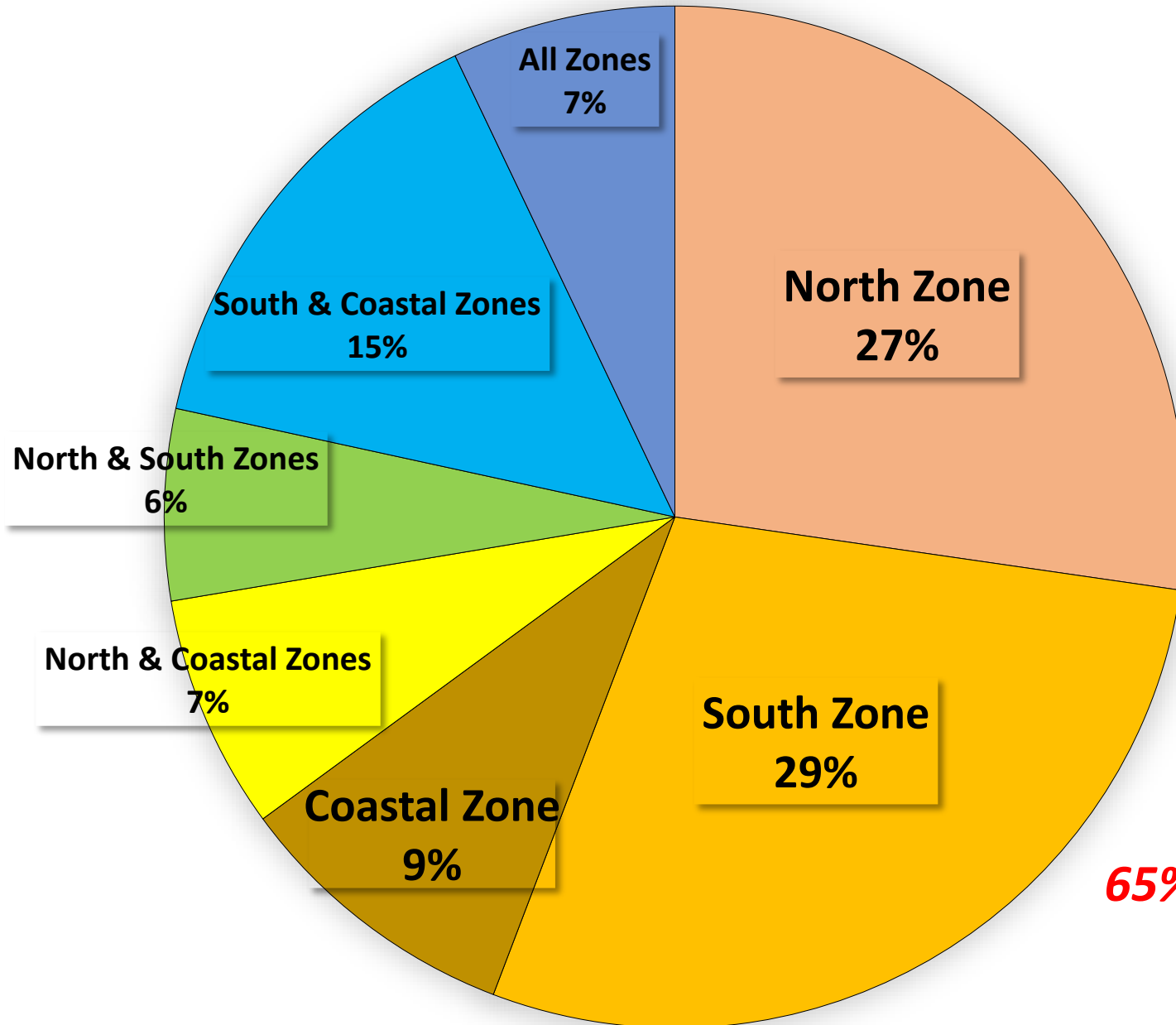




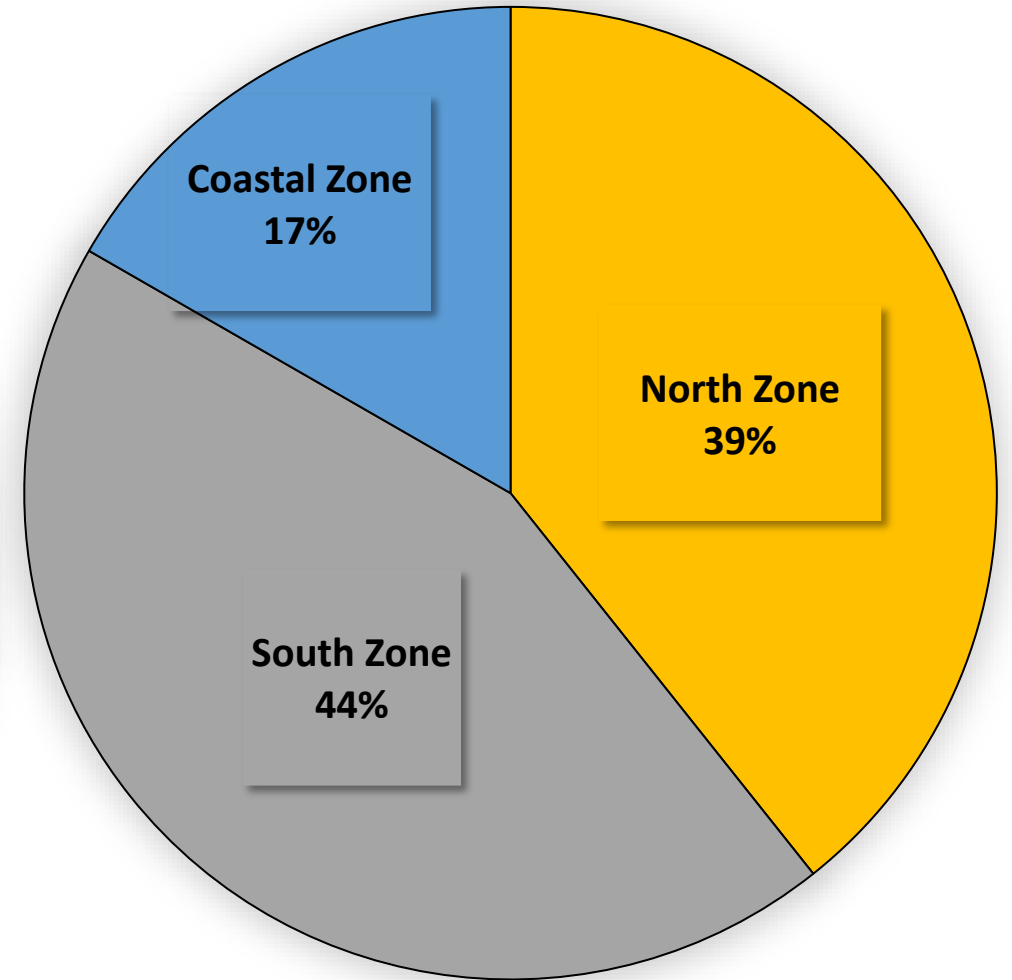
# Preferred DUCK season dates: Coastal Zone



# Zones hunted for **Canada geese** past 3 years

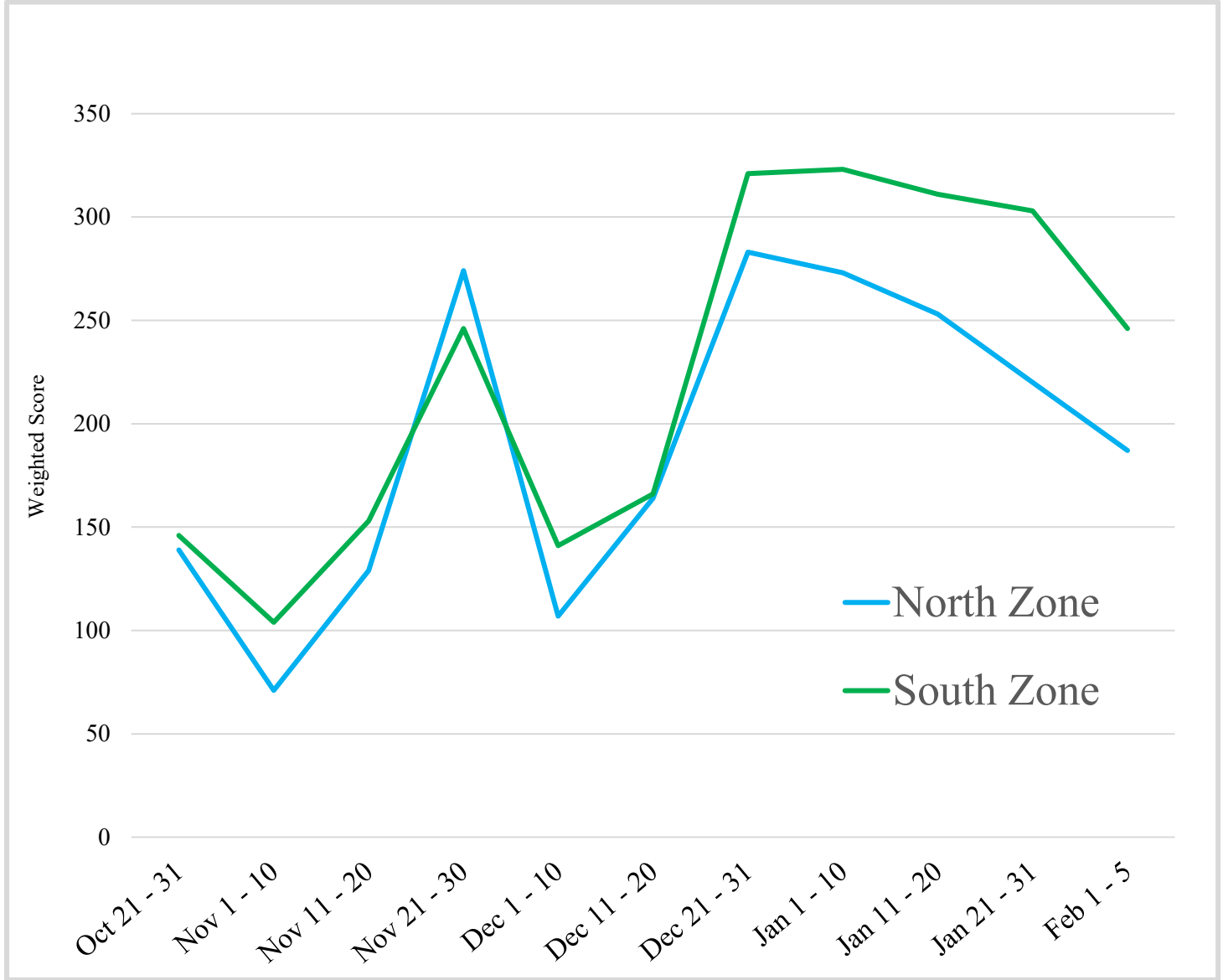


**65% 1 zone**



**Most often for Canada geese**

# Preferred CANADA GOOSE season dates



# 2026: State zone and split options in Federal Code

Zone/split choice opens every 5th year. **State must keep that option 5 years**

1) No more than 4 zones each with 1 segment per zone

2) No zones with up to 3 segments per zone

3) No more than 3 zones with up to 2 segments per zone (*NJ zoned >1980*)

4) A few states with “Grandfathered” zoning (PA, NY)

5) New (2021): 2 zones with 3 segments per zone

# Zone and split choice

**9%** undecided

**2023-24 Seasons**

## Option A Status Quo

### North Zone

Oct 14 – Oct 21

Nov 11 – Jan 11

**52%**

### South Zone

Oct 21 – Oct 28

Nov 18 – Jan 18

### Coastal Zone

Nov 9 – Nov 11

Nov 23 – Jan 27

## Option B "New alignment"

### Upper Zone

Oct 14 – Nov 4

Nov 18 – Dec 2

Dec 16 – Jan 17

**39%**

### Lower Zone

Oct 21 – Oct 28

Nov 23 – Dec 2

Dec 9 – Jan 29

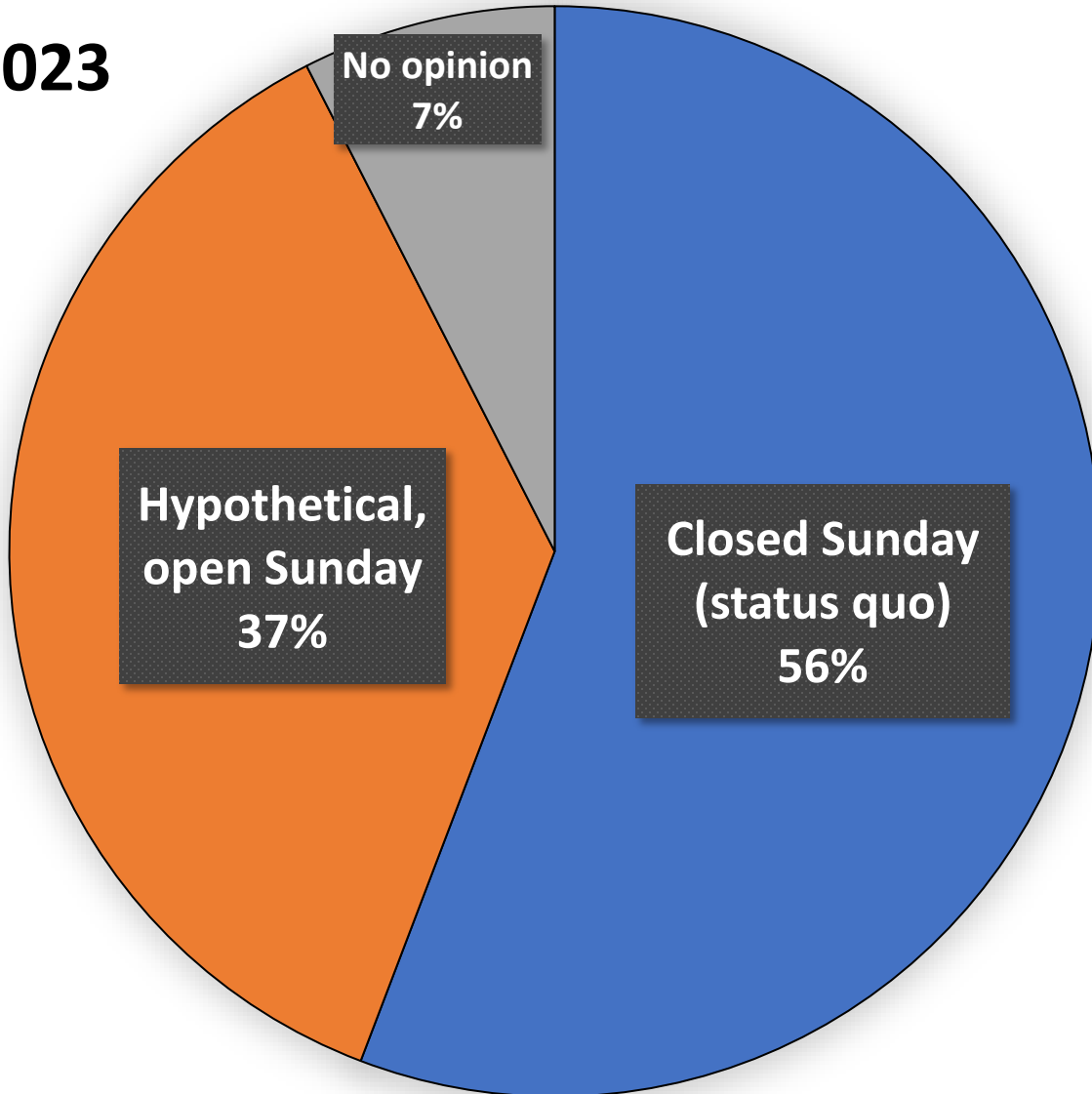


# Compensatory days for Sunday hunting closure – brief history

- ~1990s, 12 states Sundays closed to hunting by state statute
- All in Atlantic Flyway (13 original colonies)
- Federal policy was that Sundays counted toward allotment of set days
- Since 1970s Atlantic Flyway states argued this closure was unfair and beyond control of state F&W agencies
- Bob McDowell (Director NJFGW, 1991-2002) instrumental testimony at SRC
- 1996: States granted compensatory days for Sunday legislative closure

# Preferred choice for Sunday Hunting for ducks

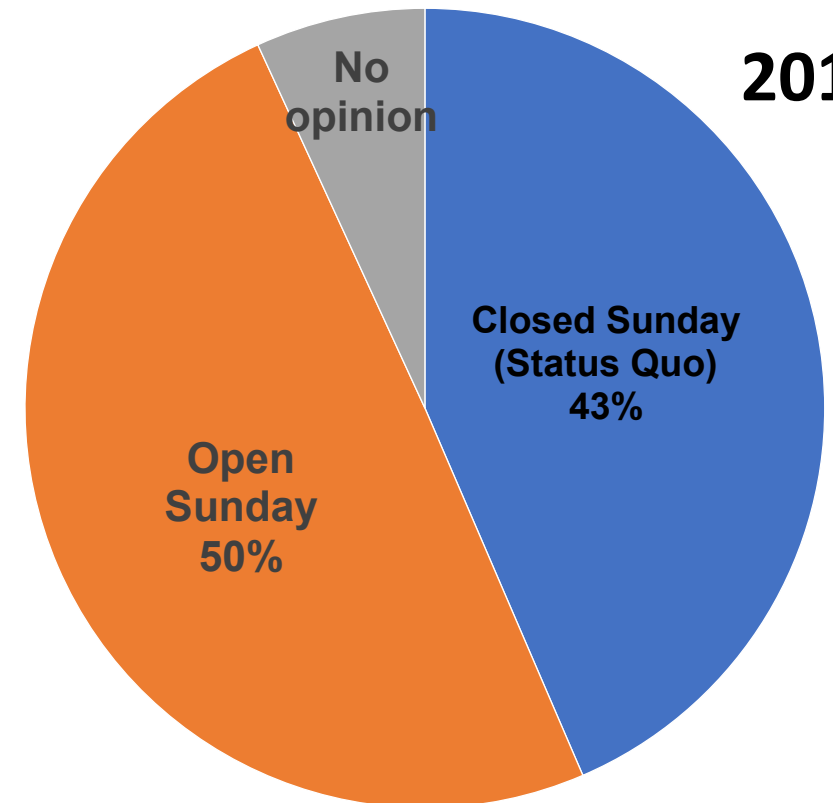
**2023**



**Status quo:** 60-days; 10 weeks, Sunday closed

**Hypothetical:** 60-days; 8.5 weeks, Sunday open

**2012**



# Waterfowl Guides in NJ

During past 5 years, 20% used guide

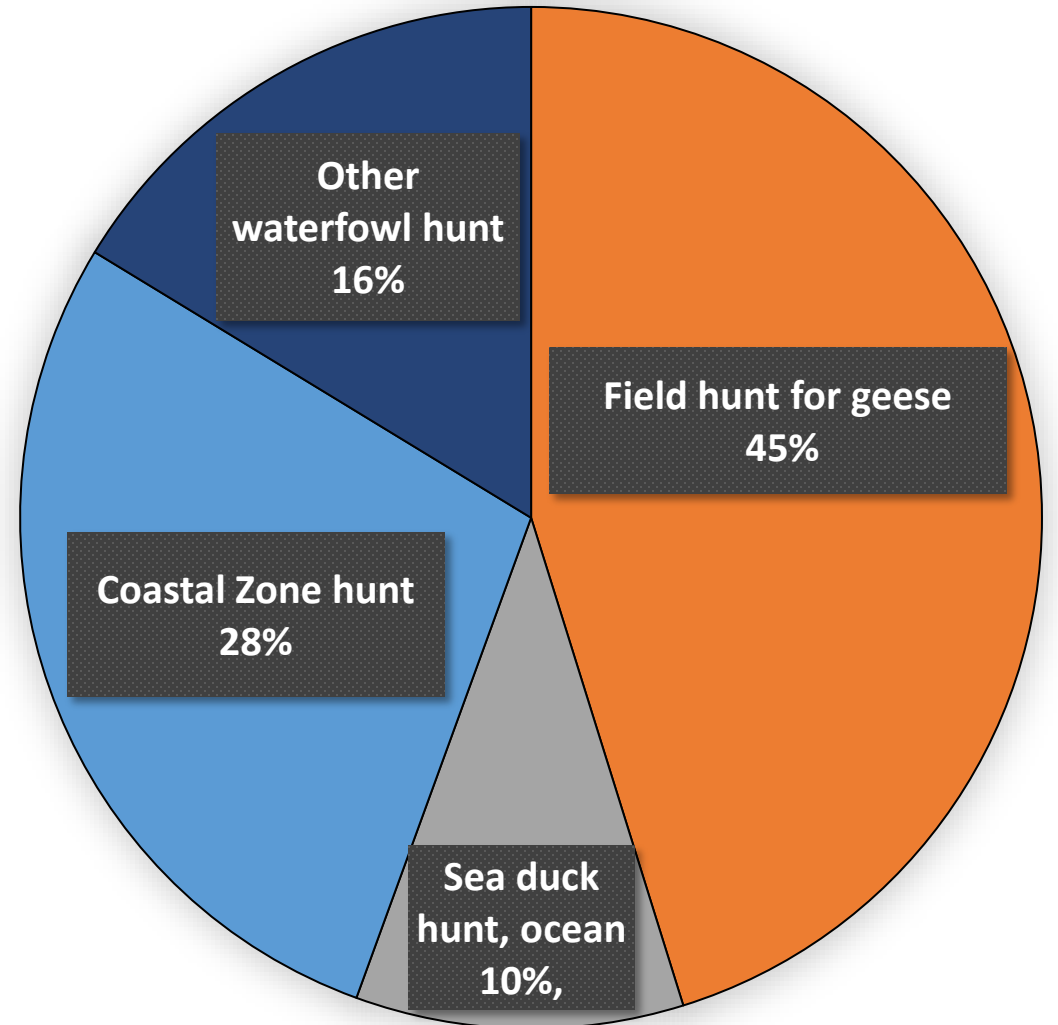
## Guiding Experience?

69%	Excellent/Good
19%	Mediocre
10%	Poor, but safe
0.7%	Unsafe

Which types of lands/waters should waterfowl guides be allowed to operate? (question posed to all hunters)

Private land (eg: goose fields)	65%
Ocean	45%
Tidal waters and marshes	39%
WMA lakes & fields	24%

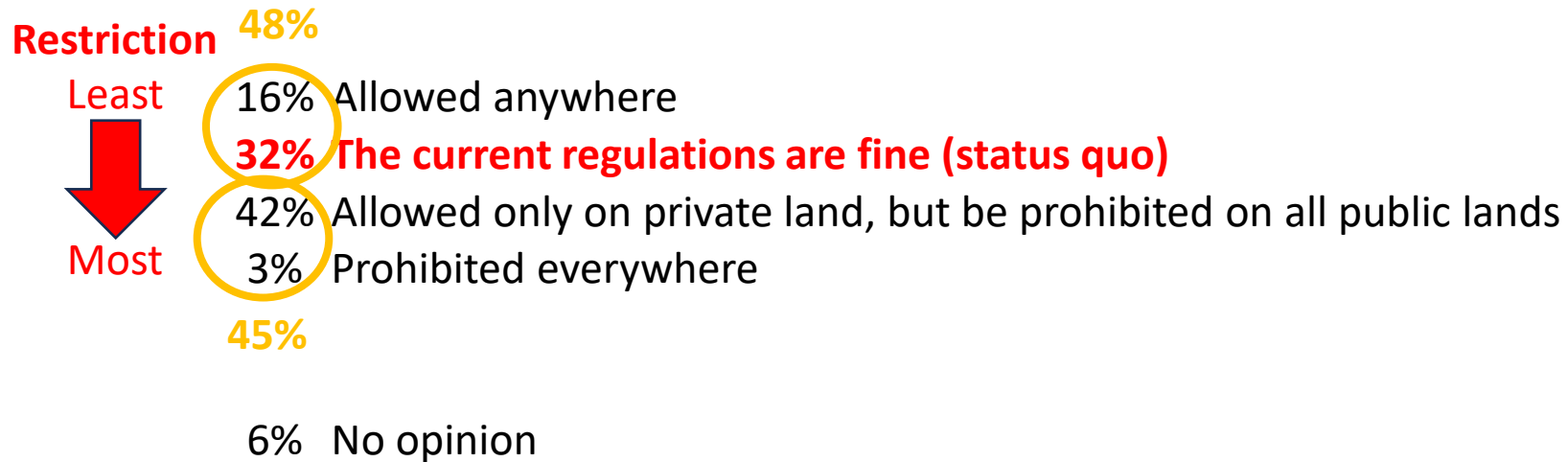
## Type of guided hunt



# Permanent waterfowl hunting blind regulations

NJ permanent waterfowl blind regulations; prohibited on:

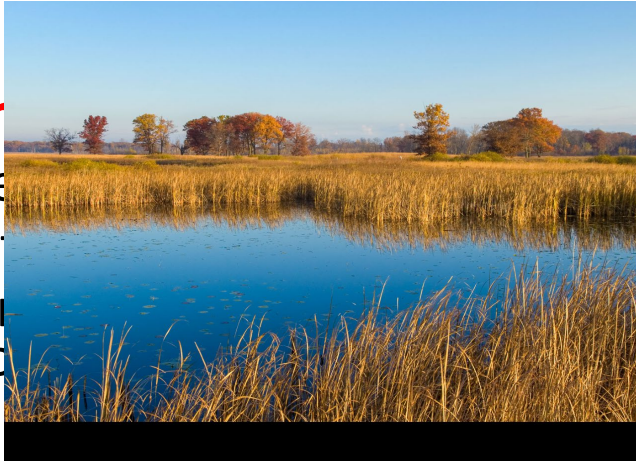
- 13 of 120 WMAs (~25% WMAs with 'good' duck hunting)
- all federal NWR



# How late in winter is too late to hold duck seasons?

## Avoidance

- Use
- Shi
- Hu
- “no



duck response

from diurnal  
more gunfire



turn to

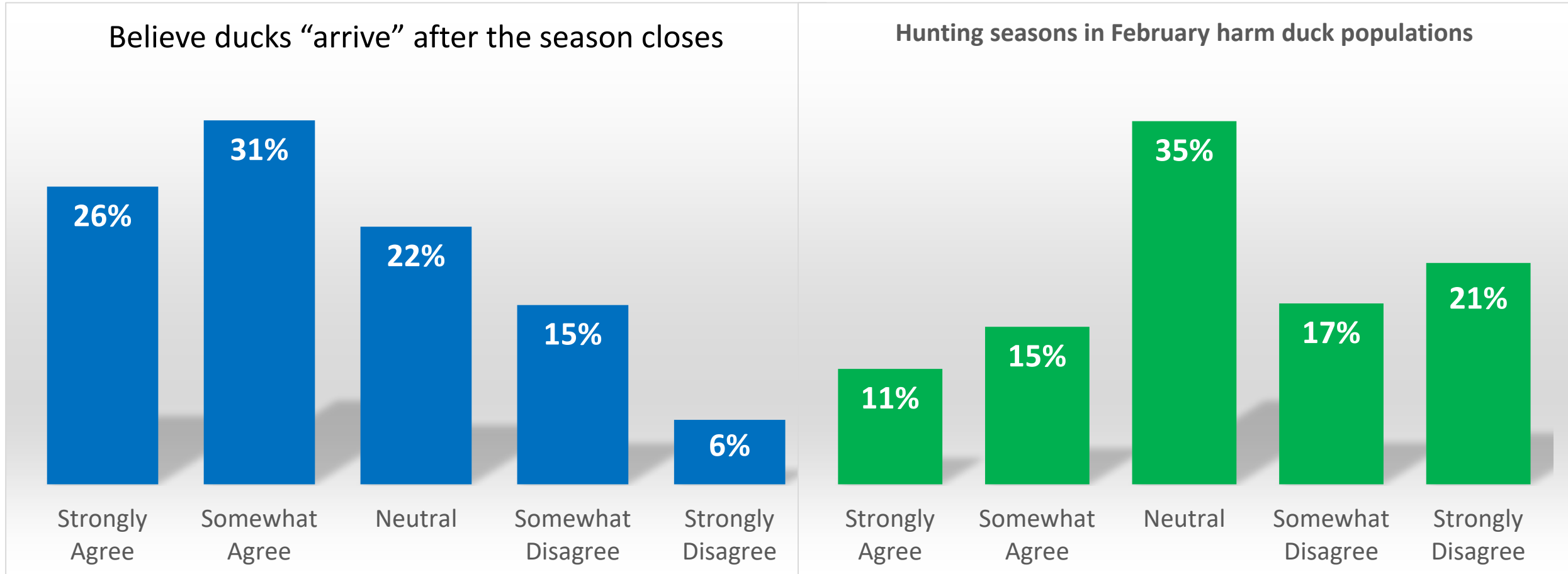
**Hunters perception 10-15 days after season closes:** *“The ducks just showed up from up north, a week after the season closed. The state wildlife agency is run by idiots who always close the hunting season too soon.”*

**Hunters’ desired management action:** Extend framework and hunt later. The “grass is always greener” mindset

**As winter transitions to spring:** Hens need time to feed and deposit fat to prepare for migration and egg laying. Need limited disturbance.



# Season timing and duck hunting impacts in late winter



# Waterfowl Hunting Barriers

Potential Barrier	Major Barrier	Minor Barrier	Not a Barrier	Not Sure
Public hunting areas too crowded	33%	46%	16%	8%
Finding hunting spots on private land	49%	25%	18%	11%
Unethical behavior other hunters	22%	40%	27%	13%
Local ordinances concerning firearm discharge	28%	32%	36%	14%
Not enough boat ramps	21%	34%	33%	4%
Finding areas to hunt on public land	22%	36%	39%	4%
Waterfowl populations too low	14%	34%	37%	3%
No free time or health problems	18%	30%	48%	2%
Hunting too expensive	7%	37%	54%	20%
Finding a mentor	6%	12%	62%	2%
Hunting regulations are too confusing	6%	30%	63%	3%
Trouble finding a hunting partner	5%	17%	75%	3%
I don't have a boat	7%	11%	79%	3%

# Response and demographics

**5% response; standard online, convenience surveys**

Studies show this response rate has similar results for rigorous, statistically designed surveys: ***OPINIONS***

## Age

Respondent mean = 48

Sample mean = 43

**Respondents *OLDER***

88% NJ residents

12% Nonresidents

**Spot on duck stamp sales**

## NJ Residence

Coastal counties = 33%

South “inland” counties = 33%

North counties = 34%

**Good representation across zones**

## Waterfowl hunting avidity

**82% Waterfowl most or one of most important hunting**

16% Waterfowl average importance

2% Waterfowl less important

## Years hunting waterfowl

1-5 years 16%

6-10 years 14%

**11-15 years 10%**

**16+ years 60%**

**Respondents *More Avid?***

# Conclusions

- NZ duck hunters divided over whether to maintain status quo season structure or reinstate more days in October at expense of days in second split
- SZ duck hunters generally satisfied with season dates
- CZ duck hunters want to hunt late, right to Jan 31 end of framework
- Canada goose hunters generally satisfied with *season date selections* in all zones
- Duck hunters prefer status quo (3 zone/2 split) zoning alignment over alternate 2 zone/3 split choice by 5:4 margin
- 20% hunters used a guide. ~90% reported an excellent to at least mediocre experience
- Survey may have bias towards more avid hunters

# Acknowledgements

- Lisa Clark, formerly with NJFW
- Migratory Bird Season Setting Committee
  - Reviewed survey draft; provided comment
  - Helped decide alternate zoning alignment and season dates



# QUESTIONS?

