



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Division of Migratory Bird Management
Branch of Assessment and Decision Support
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Chief, Branch of Assessment and Decision Support

FROM: Mark Seamans, Wildlife Biologist, Branch of Assessment and Decision Support, Division of Migratory Bird Management

DATE: 1 September 2026

SUBJECT: Mourning dove harvest strategy assessment

This memo provides results from the annual assessment of the status of mourning doves in support of the harvest regulation setting process. It does not, however, represent a regulatory recommendation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or Flyway Councils. Based on the harvest strategy, current data, and this assessment, the optimal derived regulatory alternative for all three management units during the 2026–27 hunting season is the Standard regulatory alternative. Specific details of the harvest strategy and assessment follow.

A new Mourning Dove Harvest Strategy was endorsed by the Flyway Councils and Service Regulations Committee in spring 2026, with implementation beginning in 2026 to inform the 2027–2028 season. This new adaptive harvest management strategy relies on annually updated population models and estimates of the system state to guide annual regulatory decisions. The objectives of dove harvest management remain unchanged:

- (1) *Promulgate harvest regulations that will maximize the expected harvest rate; and*
- (2) *Maintaining the desired population abundance*

These objectives will be met by making annual regulatory decisions that maximize the long-term harvest in each management unit.

Integrated population models (IPMs) were developed for each of the 3 dove management units. In each IPM a balance equation captures changes in abundance related to annual survival, recruitment, harvest, and density dependent responses to changes in abundance. The IPMs make use of data from national monitoring programs: Mourning Dove Banding Program, Parts Collection Program, Harvest Information Program, and the Breeding Bird Survey. The IPMs generally share the same structure for each of the 3 management units but can differ based on dove biology and harvest.

The possible packages (daily bag limit, number of season days) for regulatory decisions are the same as for the former strategy (Table 1). Stochastic dynamic programming was used to analyze how selecting a given harvest package (regulations) will affect population dynamics and harvest over the long term in each management unit. The analysis uses the population models from the IPMs to simulate which package choice in the current year is the optimal choice given the most recent estimate of population abundance and stated objectives. In other words, which package will most likely result in maximizing harvest over the long term while maintaining sustainable populations. The abundance estimate as of 1 September 2025 for each management unit is compared to the optimization output (i.e., the decision matrix) to recommend a regulatory package. The decision matrix will be updated every year with updated IPM demographic estimates.

This assessment uses the most current data available. Annual estimates of abundance for each management unit are presented in Figure 1. The most recent estimates of abundance for each management unit are: Eastern 82,499,600 (95% CI = 66,192,900 to 102,516,200), Central 200,486,000 (161,446,800 to 244,250,300), and Western. The derived decision matrix for each management unit is presented in Table 2. The optimal package for the 2027–28 season for each management unit is the Standard regulatory package.

Table 1. Mourning dove daily bag limit and total hunting season days associated with each regulatory alternative in the Eastern (EMU), Central (CMU), and Western (WMU) Management Units.

Management Unit	Regulatory alternative	Daily bag Limit	Days
EMU	Standard	15	90
	Restrictive	10	70
	Closed	0	0
CMU	Standard	15	90
	Restrictive	10	70
	Closed	0	0
WMU	Standard	15	60
	Restrictive	10	60
	Closed	0	0

Table 2. Harvest strategy policy decision matrices for each of the three mourning dove management units: Central (CMU), Eastern (EMU), and Western (WMU). Population size is in millions of birds. Numbers under the policy recommendation are bag limits, and colors are red for closed season, yellow for restrictive season, and green for standard season. The 2025 population estimate and optimal policy recommendation for each management unit for the 2027–28 season are enclosed by a box.

CMU	
Population	Policy
0	0
10	0
20	0
28	0
29	0
30	10
40	15
50	15
51	15
60	15
70	15
80	15
90	15
100	15
110	15
120	15
130	15
140	15
150	15
160	15
170	15
180	15
190	15
200	15
210	15

EMU	
Population	Policy
0	0
10	0
20	0
24	0
25	10
26	15
27	15
30	15
37	15
38	15
40	15
50	15
60	15
70	15
80	15
90	15
100	15

WMU	
Population	Policy
0	0
4	0
5	0
6	0
7	0
8	15
9	15
10	15
20	15
24	15
25	15
29	15
30	15
40	15
50	15
60	15
70	15

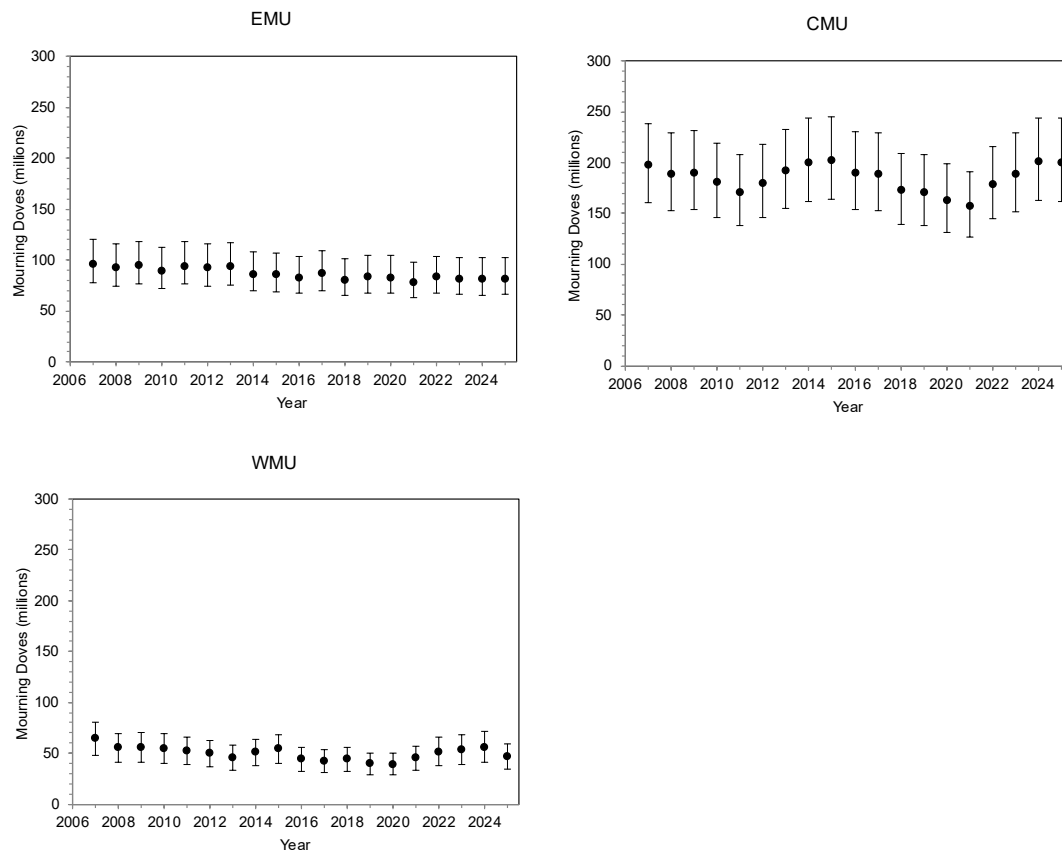


Figure 1. Estimated mourning dove abundance in the Eastern (EMU), Central (CMU), and Western (WMU) Management Units, 2007–2025. Error bars are 95% credible intervals.