

## Point System

The point system was adopted by all states in the Central Flyway, except North Dakota, and most states in the Mississippi Flyway during the 1970's and most of the 1980's. It was designed to increase hunting opportunity, especially for those hunters who learned to identify ducks in flight, while providing protection to those species and sexes that needed extra protection. The point system daily bag limit was a big change from the conventional bag limit it replaced during this time period. It assigned point values to various species or sexes of ducks. During the 1970 duck hunting season, the first year that duck hunters in South Dakota used the point system, the point values were: 90 – hen mallard, wood duck, redhead, canvasback, hooded merganser, and black duck; 20 – drake mallard, hen pintail, and ring-neck duck; and 10 – all other ducks and mergansers. Under the point system the daily bag limit is reached when the point value of the last duck taken, when added to the sum of the point values of the other ducks already taken that day reaches or exceeds 100 points. For example, in 1970, a hunter could shoot 9 blue-winged teal (10 point duck) and then finish it with a hen mallard (90 point duck):  $90 + 10 = 100$  points. Being the hen mallard was the last duck taken that day this constituted a legal bag. However, if this same hunter took the hen mallard first, then his duck hunting would be finished when the next duck was taken.

And therein is the problem that eventually caused the demise of the point system - something called reordering. State conservation officers as well as federal agents learned through experience that some hunters did in fact do a considerable amount of reordering. I worked as a conservation officer during the point system days and can recall doing compliance checks of individuals or groups of hunters. I'd lay out the 10 point ducks in a pile and then proceed to lay out the higher point ducks in other piles. In many cases the only way these hunters were legal was when all the lower point value ducks were shot first and the higher value ducks at the end. I always had to give them the benefit of doubt, unless I was able to observe each duck shot in the proper order – a very tough task. It was pretty easy for a hunter to reorder his bag. Many hunters did abide by the letter of the law but law enforcement officers generally took a dim view of the point system and this was a factor in the demise of the point system.

In summary, if there were no reordering, the point system would be a very good duck harvest strategy. It provides protection for those species or sexes of ducks needing protection and allows ample harvest opportunity on ducks that can stand higher harvest pressure. The final year the point system was in effect in South Dakota was in 1987. Point values in 1987 were: 100 – hen mallard; 70 – wood duck, redhead, hooded merganser; 35 – drake mallard, pintail, ring-neck duck, bufflehead, goldeneye, ruddy duck, and all other ducks not assigned a point value; 20 – all teal, scaup, gadwall, wigeon, shoveler, and common and red breasted merganser. The canvasback season was closed statewide in 1987. Shoot a hen mallard as your first duck in 1987 and you were done duck hunting for the day – if you were a law abiding duck hunter.