



# CRC REPORT



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## STATEWIDE ISSUES ON THE NOVEMBER GENERAL ELECTION BALLOT

### PROPOSAL 2006-03: A REFERENDUM ON MOURNING DOVE HUNTING

At the November 7, 2006, general election Michigan voters will be presented with a referendum on Public Act 160 of 2004. PA 160 was an amendment to Public Act 451 of 1994 that reclassified the Mourning Dove as a game bird and permitted Mourning Dove hunting in Michigan.

A yes vote on this proposal would approve enactment of PA 160, allowing Mourning Dove hunting by reclassifying Mourning Doves as a game bird. A no vote would return Mourning Dove's to the status of a nongame bird, as it was prior to enactment PA 160 of 2004, and continue the ban on Mourning Dove hunting in Michigan.

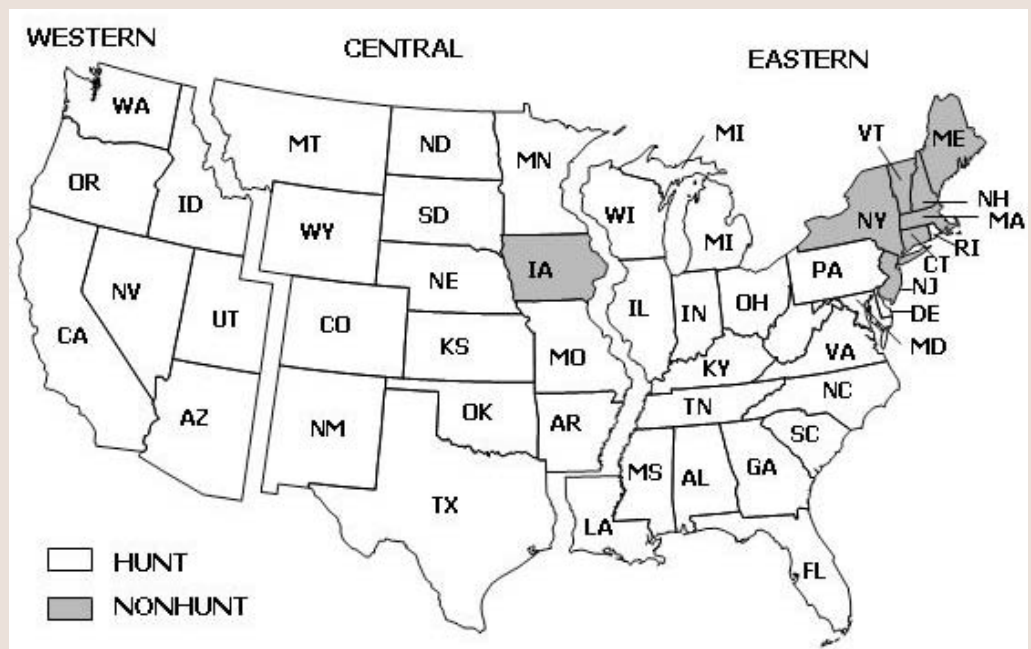
#### Mourning Dove Hunting

The Mourning Dove is a migratory bird hunted throughout most of the United States; Michigan was the 41<sup>st</sup> state to allow Mourning Dove hunting. The current continent-wide population was estimated at over 400 million in the fall migration. At a national level the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act allows managed hunting based on population surveys, if states establish hunting seasons within the federal framework. The federal government has broken down the country into three management units; Eastern, Central and Western (see Map 1). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior estimates that 6 percent of the Mourning Dove population, approximately 22.7 million

Mourning Doves, was harvested in 2005. Other Midwest states to hold Mourning Dove hunting season in 2004 were Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, and Ohio.

Map 1

Mourning Dove Management Units with 2004 Hunting and Non-Hunting States



Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mourning Dove Population Status, 2005, [www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/reports/reports.html](http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/reports/reports.html).



CITIZENS RESEARCH COUNCIL OF MICHIGAN

MAIN OFFICE 38777 West Six Mile Road, Suite 208 · Livonia, MI 48152-3974 · 734-542-8001 · Fax 734-542-8004

LANSING OFFICE 124 West Allegan, Suite 1502 · Lansing, MI 48933 · 517-485-9444 · Fax 517-485-0423

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## The 2004 Dove Hunting Season

Michigan's 2004 Mourning Dove season began on September 10 and ended October 30. It was intended to be the first of a three-year trial period. The 2005 and 2006 seasons were suspended when opponents collected sufficient signatures to call a referendum and place the issue on the 2006 ballot. Dove hunting was allowed in six counties along Michigan's southern border in 2004: Berrien, Branch, Cass, Hillsdale, St. Joseph, and Lenawee.

Mourning Doves are abundant in Michigan, especially south of a line from Bay City to Ludington. Some population surveys estimate that 4 million birds migrate from Michigan each fall. During the 2004 season hunters were allowed to harvest up to 15 birds per day with a possession limit of 30. A possession limit means that a person may have only 30 Mourning Doves total on their person or in their home at a time. For example a hunter reaching the 30 Mourning Dove limit then could eat 5, bringing the number of Mourning Doves in possession down to 25, and hunt 5 more.

The Natural Resources Commission is authorized to issue game-taking orders and establish the Mourning Dove season. In addition to a small game license, hunters must purchase a \$2 Mourning Dove stamp. The money collected for the stamp is split evenly between the Game and Fish Protection Fund and the Nongame Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund. The money deposited in the Game and Fish Protection Fund supports administrative costs to the Department of Natural Re-

sources (DNR) associated with conducting the Mourning Dove hunting season. Both of these funds can be used to match federal dollars designated for wildlife and natural resource management. In 2004, 4,981 Mourning Dove stamps were purchased yielding \$9,962 in stamp fees.

The DNR is required to include Mourning Dove hunting information in its annual hunting guide.

This information includes ways in which hunters can distinguish Mourning Doves from other birds; management practices for the propagation of Mourning Doves; the manner in which Mourning Dove hunting is conducted ethically, lawfully, and safely; and special opportunities Mourning Dove hunting would offer to youth, the elderly, and the disabled. In 2004, roughly 30 percent of hunters brought a youth with them. (A

## About the Mourning Dove

The Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) is the most common and widespread dove in most of North America, being found in all 48 contiguous states and occasionally Alaska. It is a member of the Genus *Streptopelia*, Old World Turtle Doves.

The Mourning Dove averages 12 inches in length and is identified by its slim body, tapered tail and the distinctive fluttering whistle made by its wings when it takes flight. Its head and underparts are an unmarked pinkish-brown. Upper parts are darker and grayish brown.

It derives its name from its mournful *oo-woo-woo-woo-woo* call.

The Mourning Dove prefers open areas, including rural and residential areas, avoiding thick forests. Mourning Dove nests are a loose collection of twigs and sticks at various levels above the ground.

The Mourning Dove is highly migratory, with birds breeding at the northern limit of the range wintering in Mexico. Those breeding farther south move less, with birds present all year in the southern part of its range, including Michigan.

Source: *National Geographic Complete Birds of North America*, ed. Jonathan Alder. National Geographic Society, Washington, D. C. 2006, p. 303.

Photo by A. Wilson



<http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/html/h3160pi.jpg>

person under the age of 16 qualifies as a youth.)

Federal and state regulations al-

low the use of lead shot when hunting Mourning Doves. Any Mourning Doves that are not retrieved or shots that miss their

mark would leave lead in the environment. Michigan has banned lead shot in water fowl hunting to address environmental concerns.

## Discussion

### Opposing the Ban, Supporting Dove Hunting

Those in opposition to the proposed ban argue that Mourning Dove hunting is a sport enjoyed by hunters in 80 percent of the states. While Mourning Dove hunting has previously been outlawed in many northern states, those bans are being overturned in many states. Wisconsin legalized Mourning Dove hunting in 2000 and held its first Mourning Dove hunting season in 2003. Minnesota legalized Mourning Dove hunting in 2004 and Ohio has been holding Mourning Dove hunting seasons since 1994. Many feel that the ban on Mourning Dove hunting is an attack on hunting rights. They argue banning hunting of specific animals is a way for animal rights and anti-hunting organizations to chip away at the sport, species by species.

Mourning Dove hunting creates special opportunities for new hunters because Mourning Doves are so abundant that the hunters will have better chances of success. The number of hunters has been on the decline and Mourning Dove hunting presents an opportunity to interest people that are not currently hunters. The elderly and the disabled will be able to hunt Mourning Doves with relative ease as opposed to pheasant, rabbit, and other small game that require the hunter to do much walking to pursue such prey. Also, Mourning Dove hunting does not

require the purchase of a great deal of equipment.

### Supporting the Ban, Opposing Dove Hunting

Supporters of the ban argue that Mourning Doves are popular backyard guests enjoyed by bird watchers. In 1998, the Mourning Dove was adopted as Michigan's official Bird of Peace. In the Midwest, the Mourning Dove reproductive cycle begins with egg laying in late April/early May, and continues until fledging ends in early September. Both parents take part in incubation and brood-rearing activities.

This breeding season would overlap with the hunting season in Michigan, as it does in other states. Those in support of the ban also argue Mourning Doves' body weight varies throughout the year and is at its lowest point during the fall hunting season. Consequently, it is not a significant source of food. Some argue that they are being hunted for the thrill of the kill only and are not retrieved. The DNR estimates as many as 4,000 were unable to be retrieved in the 2004 hunting season out of a total of an estimated 28,139 Mourning Doves.

## Michigan Game Animals

Hunting and trapping of Michigan game species is governed by the Department of Natural Resources. Those species include:

### Mammals

**Big Game.** Black Bear; Elk; White-tailed Deer.

**Small Game (Furbearers).** Badger; Beaver; Otter; Bobcat; Fisher; Marten; Fox; Coyote; Muskrat; Mink; Raccoon.

**Small Game (Other).** Rabbit; Varying Hare; Skunk; Squirrel; Woodchuck.

### Birds

**Upland Game Birds.** Ring-necked Pheasant; Bobwhite Quail; American Woodcock; Ruffed Grouse; Wild Turkey.

**Waterfowl (Ducks).** Mallard; Black Duck; Greater Scaup; Lesser Scaup; Pintail; Wood Duck; Redhead; Merganser.

**Waterfowl (Geese).** Canada Goose; Snow Goose; Brant; Ross' Goose; Blue Goose; White-fronted Goose.

**Waterfowl (Other).** Snipe; Sora Rail; Virginia Rail; Coot; Moorhen.

**Perching Birds.** American Crow; Mourning Dove (season suspended pending November vote)

Source: Michigan Department of Natural Resources

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## Citizens Research Council of Michigan

38777 West Six Mile Road, Suite 208  
Livonia, MI 48152-2660

## Conclusion

The proposed ban has essentially pitted birders against hunters. Those in support of the ban on hunting of Mourning Doves believe that they do not serve as a significant food source and so do not justify hunting. They do not wish to see Mourning Doves used essentially as live target practice. Furthermore, Mourning Doves are

Michigan's Official Bird of Peace, are enjoyed by bird enthusiasts, and are frequent visitors to backyard bird feeders.

However, 40 states around the country, most Midwest states, and the federal government do allow managed hunting of Mourning Doves. It is estimated that only 6

percent of the population is harvested each year and it is one of the most abundant species of birds in the United States. Revenue collected from the stamp required to hunt Mourning Doves is deposited in accounts that are eligible for matching funds from the federal government.

## The Statutory Referendum in Michigan

Article II, Section 9 of the 1963 Michigan Constitution reserves to the people the power to approve or reject laws enacted by the legislature, the referendum. A referendum is invoked when petitions signed by a number of registered electors equal to five percent of the total vote for all candidates for governor at the last preceding election at which a governor was elected are submitted to the Board of State Canvassers and approved.

The law in question is then suspended until it is voted on at the next general election, at which it must be approved by a majority of the electorate in order to become effective once again.