

Is Imperial County on the verge of asking DFW to close or delay dove season opener?

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The Imperial County Board of Supervisors may be on the verge of working with state and federal agencies to halt the Sept. 1 dove opener because of COVID-19, keeping a huge influx of hunters from visiting the county. The county has experience a huge surge in infections and deaths in recent weeks.

However, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife notified the county this past week that it had already booked rooms for its contingent of extra game wardens that come to the region each year for the dove opener, and that it has not – at this point in time – made any plans to halt or delay the dove opener anywhere in the state..

On Tuesday, Aug. 4, the supervisors approved a letter requesting input on the upcoming Sept. 1 dove season hunting opener and OHV recreational activities that occur from October through April in desert region in the eastern part of the county, according to a story in the The Desert Review newspaper.

The letter was sent to the two state agencies, the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Department of Parks and Recreation, along with the federal Bureau of Land Management.

“Due to the number of cases that we are experiencing in Imperial County, the lack of plateau or decline in our cases, and the concern of reaching or exceeding hospital capacity, there is a sense of reluctance to encouraging additional visitors to our community,” said Tony Rouhotas, Imperial County CEO.

The letter said the County had adopted even stricter health orders than the state guidelines, but that it was not slowing the infection rate and added “we are still struggling in the battle against the virus.” The letter asked for each department’s intentions to help slow the spread of the virus with the upcoming influx of visitors to the county. The supervisors’ requested feedback from all three agencies.

Many Imperial County businesses are dependent



on the income generated during the first half of dove season from Sept. 1 to 15 and to one million-plus OHV visitors who visit the Im-

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perial Sand Dunes (Glamis) from Oct. through April each year.

Imperial County is well-known as having the best dove hunting in the state and attracts visitors from all over the southern half of California. It has been estimated over 10,000 hunters flood to Imperial County just on the Sept. 1 opening day, with as many as 5,000 using the 21 dove fields prepared just for hunters by Desert Wildlife Unlimited, an Imperial County conservation organization, to encourage hunters to come.

Many fear the supervisor’s knee-jerk concerns may close the dove opener in Imperial County. Ironically, the town of Yuma, just across the Colorado River in Arizona, is still throwing its doors open to dove hunters, recognizing the important of the event to many businesses. While many of that city’s dove opener “events,” like the annual dove barbecue, cook-off, shooting events, and Big Breast Contest (the hunter who weighs in the biggest dove breast wins a new shotgun) have been cancelled this year to reduce congregations, city officials are still encouraging hunters to come, but to practice safe social distancing and mask-wearing when in town and in congested areas with more people.

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