

Minnesota Waterfowl Migration and Hunting Report, Oct. 21, 2021

The following report is a compilation of state and federal wildlife manager reports and waterfowl surveys from across Minnesota. This is the 5th report for 2021. Reports will be compiled weekly throughout the hunting season and should be available by Thursday afternoon each week. The Conservation Officer Report, available on the DNR web site, also contains information about waterfowl hunter success across the state.

General: 21 October 2021

Duck hunters had some success over the past week, but hunting seemed to be much better in the north zone than the central and south zones. There is very high species diversity this year with pintails, wigeon, gadwalls, redhead and buffleheads starting to show up in duck hunters' bags. That is likely related to drought conditions to the west and more of those species migrating through MN. Blue-winged teal and wood ducks are still present, especially in southern MN. Ring-necked duck numbers have been slowly increasing.

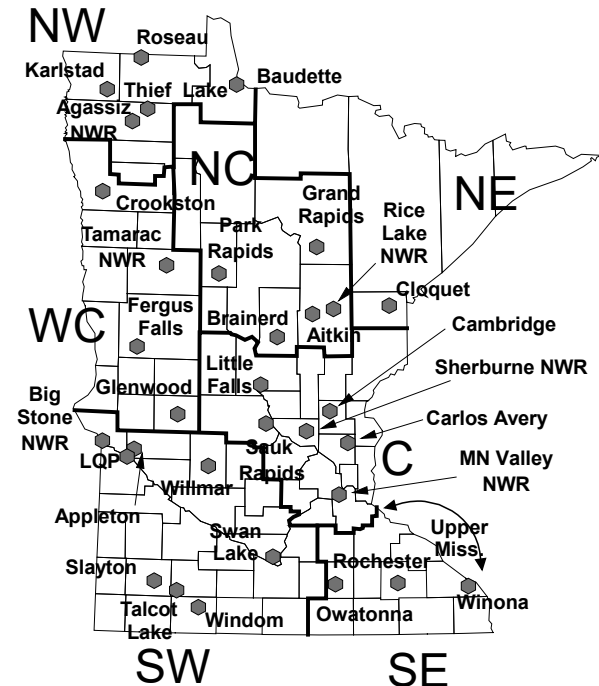
Crop harvest continues to progress at a rapid pace with corn harvest >50% complete and soybean harvest >90% complete, both ~2 weeks ahead of average.

Canada goose numbers have increased over the past week and numerous flocks of migrant geese were observed this morning. There have been fair numbers of white-fronted geese in the state this fall, mainly in western MN as well as a few snow geese.

Wetland conditions have improved throughout the state. The northern 1/3 of Minnesota is still very dry but the remainder of the state has better conditions. The low water conditions have created optimal waterfowl foraging habitat on many lakes. Hunter access to lakes remains a challenge and hunters should scout access areas prior to hunting.

At this time last year, we had significant snow and ice cover statewide that ended duck season for many hunters.

Temperatures are expected to be below average through the weekend with highs in the mid-40s in northern MN and lows in the mid to upper 20s. Highs should be near 50 in southern MN with lows in the low to mid 30s. The extended forecast calls for temperatures to be seasonal next week with highs in the 50s statewide. No major cold fronts are expected.



Waterfowl season reminders		
	Duck season dates	Goose season dates
North Zone	Sept. 25-Nov. 23	Sept. 25-Dec. 24
Central Zone	Sept. 25-Oct. 3 and Oct. 9-Nov. 28	Sept. 25-Oct. 3 and Oct. 9-Dec. 29
South Zone	Sept. 25-Oct. 3 and Oct. 9-Nov. 28	Sept. 25-Oct. 3 and Oct. 9-Dec. 29

Bag limits are 6 ducks/day, with no more than: 4 mallards (2 hens), 3 wood duck, 2 redhead, 2 canvasback, 2 black duck, 1 pintail. 1 scaup (bluebill) may be taken per day through Oct. 14 and 2/day the remainder of the season. Mergansers: 5 per day, no more than 2 may be hooded mergansers. Bag limits for geese are 5 dark geese/day.

Possession limits: 3 times the daily bag limit for all migratory birds.

Shooting hours begin ½ hour before sunrise until sunset the entire season. Motorized decoys are legal statewide for the entire season. Hunting geese overwater is legal statewide the entire season. The sandhill crane season is open Sept. 18 through Oct. 24 in the Northwest zone only. Bag limits are 2/day and a sandhill crane permit is required.

Open water hunting: On Lake Pepin, Lake of the Woods, Lake Mille Lacs, and Lake Superior, open water hunting is allowed as long as boats remain anchored. On the Mississippi River south of Hastings, hunting is allowed not more than 100 feet from any shoreline, including islands. Hunters should consult the 2021 Waterfowl Hunting regulations (available from license vendors or online at the [Minnesota Hunting and Trapping Regulations page](#) for additional details and regulations.

Safety Never Takes A Holiday: treat every gun as if it were loaded, be 100% certain of your target before pulling the trigger, wear your life vest, pay attention to other hunters and your hunting partners, and watch the weather

The following is a summary of waterfowl habitat and hunting conditions from various reporting stations across the state.

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Northwest			
Roseau River and Roseau Lake WMA	<p>Low water levels persist resulting in good habitat conditions on the pools. The Roseau River remains low with the only shallow water habitat within the main channel. Widespread tillage in fields continues.</p>	<p>Canada goose numbers are low. Duck numbers are low too with some exception in hard-to-reach areas of wild rice. No new migrants have arrived. Dabblers are the most common species, though ringnecks are showing up in decent numbers at times.</p> <p>The forecast is for cooler weather to persist through the weekend. The first killing frost of the season occurred this past week.</p>	<p>Hunter activity was light over the past week. Few geese were taken. Hunters took 2 ducks/hunter over the last week with mixed bags common. Mallards dominate the bag with ringnecks and GWT also common.</p> <p>Access is challenging area-wide for hunters due to low water levels and dense wild rice and submergent vegetation. Outboard motors can manage on Pool 1 West but are not recommended elsewhere on Roseau River WMA pools at this time.</p> <p>Pool 3 is 7" low with a navigable borrow ditch. Pool 2 is 30" low with dense aquatic plant growth in the borrow ditches; some mudflats have appeared. Pool 1 West is 12" below full pool. The borrow ditch is navigable but access is still less than ideal for outboards beyond that. The east ramp to Pool 1 West has improved. The Roseau River is unchanged.</p> <p>For more information on access, see Roseau River WMA's webpage</p>

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Thief Lake WMA	We are currently 15" below our fall target level. Access is improving but continues to be moderately challenging at the boat launches and canoes/kayaks are a good option.	<p>The number of geese and sandhill cranes on the lake has decreased over the last two weeks. More divers are beginning to show up.</p> <p>Temperatures will remain cool over the weekend with overnight lows below freezing. Winds will transition from the N to the ESE.</p>	Hunting pressure continues to be down due to access challenges. Hunters are averaging around 2 ducks per hunter and the bag is a mix of dabbling species (mainly mallard, wigeon and pintail) and ringer numbers in the bag have increased.
Thief River Falls	<p>Plenty of rain has fallen the last couple weeks and small wetlands are starting to hold decent water. Not necessarily seeing ducks using them yet, so the larger wetlands may still be the better bet.</p> <p>Still some standing corn out there.</p>	<p>No significant flights of ducks have been noted yet. Decent numbers of geese in the area.</p> <p>Forecast for the weekend is for highs in the low to mid 40's, lows in the low to mid 30's. Breezy on Sunday with a chance of rain.</p>	No reports received
North central			
Grand Rapids	Wild rice now fallen opening up open water areas	<p>Mild, stable weather this week.</p> <p>Fair duck numbers around but widely spread out. Ring necks in area now but most feed at night and leave to refuge areas before sunrise.</p>	Low hunting pressure

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West central			
Detroit Lakes	<p>Wetlands remain low with many still dry. Recent rains of 2-3" have recharged soil moisture. Rice stands are still holding up well.</p> <p>Crop harvest continues to be ahead of schedule. Soybean harvest is largely complete and corn harvest is about 90% complete. Fields are also being turned black quickly following harvest.</p>	<p>First hard freeze of the fall this morning with a low of 26. Weather forecast for MEA is light North winds and highs in the mid-40s. Winds will change to SE on Saturday and bring a chance of rain/snow into Sunday.</p> <p>Good push of geese into the area yesterday ahead of the cold front. Also have seen small pushes of new birds into the area recently, mainly mallards. Teal are mostly gone, other mid-season migrants have been slowly trickling through. Gadwalls, widgeon, and buffleheads were common over the weekend.</p>	<p>Success the 4th weekend was decent for those who ventured out. Hunter's bags showed a good variety of ducks with mallards, gadwalls, widgeon, pintail, and green-winged teal most common. Some divers are also being harvested, but besides ringnecks, numbers are low throughout the area currently. This past weekend was pheasant opener, and with the beautiful weather, most hunters were chasing them instead of ducks. Waterfowl hunter numbers continue to be down throughout the work area.</p> <p>Goose hunting has been slow but picked up into the week. Good numbers of geese are around and hunting should be good if you find the X.</p>

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Fergus Falls and Lake Christina	<p>We seem to be getting more usual rains, though wetlands remain low. Crops are nearly all out of the fields now, ready for ducks and geese to begin using them.</p> <p>Lake Christina water levels have gone up slightly over the past couple weeks.</p>	<p>We're finally seeing more fall-like temperatures, and the area got its first frost last weekend.</p> <p>North winds on Tuesday into Wednesday moved more divers into the area, including the season's first bluebills. Ducks seem to be concentrated in a few areas.</p> <p>Lake Christina is holding a number of ducks now, mostly divers, but puddle ducks are mixed in.</p>	<p>Changes in weather have correlated with better success for duck hunters. Most mid-season species are being found in hunters' bags, including gadwall, wigeon, and ring-necked ducks, but locals are still around, including wood ducks and blue-winged teal.</p> <p>Hunters are doing best at Lake Christina when conditions are favorable. Ducks are rafting in the middle of the lake during times with low winds, leading to low success.</p>
Central			
Sauk Rapids	<p>Bean and corn harvest is moving along quickly and the bulk should be completed in 2-3 weeks.</p>	<p>Redheads and cans are showing up on area lakes in better numbers. There have been some decent reports coming from Pelican Lake in Wright County as well.</p> <p>Weather has been seasonably mild with some nice windy days. Short range weather forecasts call for some cooler weather ahead.</p>	<p>There has been some improvement in duck hunting with more prairie duck species migrating through. As usual, windy days are usually better. Canada goose hunters continue to enjoy a good season as more and more corn is harvested.</p>
Cambridge	<p>Dry weather has continued in the Cambridge area. We have received very little rain the past week. Wetlands are dry. Lakes are low. Beans and corn are being harvested as the dry conditions persist.</p>	<p>Waterfowl observations have varied in the work area. Wood ducks and mallards are low in numbers, and we have not seen the push of divers yet. Hopefully with colder temps and strong winds ring necks and other divers will be migrating through.</p>	<p>Hunting pressure is lower than average.</p>

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Sherburne NWR	Water levels are unchanged. Rice stands are degraded on the refuge and waterfowl are concentrated in areas of good rice across the refuge's wetlands and on the river.	Over the last two weeks, we have seen a steady climb in mallard numbers. Green-winged teal continue to be present in great numbers. Ring-necked ducks have shown a major increase. Great variety of puddlers out there too. Expect cooler, more seasonal temps for the weekend. Highs at 50 with lows just below freezing. Friday and Saturday have lots of sunshine and north winds that will switch to the east on Sunday. A chance of showers on Sunday in the afternoon.	Hunters have not seen much for birds on Long Pool but have bagged ring-necks and green-winged teal.
Southwest			
Redwood Falls	Crop harvest is almost finished with essentially all soybeans harvested and 80-95% of the corn harvested depending on the location and what remains is disappearing rapidly. Tillage is 40-50% complete. Recent rains have wetlands as full as they have been all fall, but they are still below normal levels and some have mudflat rings separating the water from the shore.	Unseasonably warm weather is still slowing migration. Blue winged teal have thinned out considerably, but wood ducks remain common to abundant. Mallards are highly localized on or near refuge areas. Canada geese remain common, but are also largely confined to refuge areas.	Very little waterfowl hunting going on at the moment. Scouting will be vital when choosing productive places to hunt.
Marshall	The area received about 1.3" of rain on Wednesday that halted field operations but crop harvest is nearing completion with less than 25% of corn still standing. Much of the tillage is also done.	Flocks of whitefronts were observed flying south overhead this week and more coot are showing up on area lakes. Still good concentrations of Canada geese but duck numbers have dropped. Sat morning will start frosty but sunny and reach a high of 51. No frost expected on Sun morning but chance of rain and high of 51. Southeast winds 10-15 mph through the weekend.	Duck hunting activity has slowed considerably but those going out are still finding some success, but not as good as earlier in the season.
Appleton	Heavy rains added to water levels in wetlands and also created some sheet water in fields and difficult conditions for field access.	No major changes with waterfowl numbers or species since second week of October. That should change with forecasted cooler temperatures, include some upcoming nights expected to drop below freezing	Hunting has been mostly difficult, with birds highly concentrated in only a handful of locations, with very few in between. Pressure light, success poor. Best reports are on geese.

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<p>Swan Lake (Nicollet county)</p>	<p>No change in overall habitat conditions, low water levels remain on most local lakes and wetlands.</p> <p>Crop harvest continues with soybean harvest nearly complete; corn harvest also well underway with 50% or more completed, similar to last year but ~10 days ahead of the average. Tillage also rapidly occurring behind harvested acres.</p>	<p>Little to no duck migration activity noted, goose numbers remain stable if not increasing. Large concentrations of geese now observed on select feeding and roosting areas with flocks building.</p> <p>Warm and mild trend has continued overall; after a cold front moving through Wednesday night it appears the first widespread frost is forecast to occur Thursday and Friday nights this week on light north winds. Otherwise appears to stay relatively mild with daytime highs in the 50's into next week. 14-day outlook shows above-average temps likely continuing through Halloween.</p>	<p>Scattered reports of some good shooting over the weekend for those putting in the time/effort considering the warm weather and not pursuing pheasants; teal and woodies continue to make up the bulk of the harvest with a few mallards and pintails mixed in from the Swan Lake Area; otherwise fairly slow overall across the area with a significant decline in hunter activity. Remaining local birds are well-educated at this point; scouting is key to get on birds that have now moved away from traditional locations in response to hunting pressure.</p> <p>Access note: Swan Lake is still coming off drawdown which was enhanced by the ongoing drought conditions; recent rains have helped but expect low water conditions. Swan Lake level is still ~3 ft. below full pool making access difficult with traditional outboard motors.</p>

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Lac qui Parle WMA	<p>Water levels on Marsh Lake and Lac qui Parle Lake are currently at or above normal pool. The area received another 1-2 inches of rain this Wednesday so many flooded fields around the area. Water levels on natural wetlands and impoundments are still lower than normal on some basins but continue to rise. Corn and soybean harvest are progressing. Tillage on many fields is done.</p>	<p>The Canada goose count on the refuge is 450. Marsh Lake is still holding good numbers of puddle ducks. Mainly green-winged teal and Mallards, but there are a variety of other species present in good numbers as well.</p> <p>Saturday-Widespread frost before 10am. Otherwise, mostly sunny, with a high near 49. East southeast wind 5 to 15 mph.</p> <p>Saturday Night-A 30 percent chance of showers, mainly after 1am. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 37. East southeast wind around 10 mph.</p> <p>Sunday-A 50 percent chance of showers. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 48. East wind 10 to 15 mph.</p>	<p>Waterfowl hunters have been having good success on Marsh Lake. Many groups have reported limits of birds and seeing good numbers of birds.</p> <p>Waterfowl hunters please note that boat traffic on Marsh Lake is possible. Hunters should be ready for more than 3,000 acres of new emergent vegetation. Scouting ahead of time will be important. Remember the eastern half of the lake is feeding and resting area. No motors allowed.</p>
Southwest			
Owatonna	<p>Habitat conditions are variable across the area. Scouting is recommended as many ponds are dry or below normal. Periodic rains helped to stabilize water levels for a time, but many shallow basins have been receding again. Rice Lake (Steele and Dodge Counties), State Line Lake (Freeborn County) and Lower Elysian Lake (Waseca County) were drawn down for habitat purposes and are very low. Row crop harvest is nearly completed and where the combines pass fall tillage often follows.</p>	<p>The first hard frost of the season occurred on the 16th followed by a return to unseasonably warm conditions through the 20th when a slow moving front brought some rain to the area. More seasonal temperatures are predicted with a hard freeze in the forecast for the end of the week. Last weekend's cold front brought mid-season migrants including buffleheads, ring-necks, green-winged teal and a late migration of blue-winged teal. Most wood ducks have moved out. White-fronted geese were noted passing through on the 18th and canvasbacks were building in traditional areas on the Mississippi.</p>	<p>Hunter activity has been moderate on the weekends and light during the mid-week period. Bag reports have been variable, but hunters are have been finding success with new migrants. Green-winged teal (34%), blue-winged teal (32%) and wood ducks (13%) were the most common birds harvested with a variety of other ducks and Canada geese rounding out the take.</p>

Waterfowl Count Data, week of October 18, 2021

Area	Date	Swans this week	Canada geese			Ducks				Coot this week	Comments
			Number seen ^a :			Number seen:					
			This week	Last count	Last Year	This week	Last count	Last year	This weeks duck species - % composition ^b		
Thief Lake WMA	10/20	125	1,100	3,000	NS	6,100	11,000	NS	26% MAL, 17% RED, 17% RN, 14% PIN, 11% GAD, 9% WIG, 3% GWT, 1% CAN, 1% SCP, 1% BUF	1,700	
Sherburne NWR	10/20	82	4,300	3,800	2,300	22,000	23,300	22,000	31% RN, 26% WD, 21% MAL, 14% GWT, 2% GAD, 2% BWT	500	
Lac qui Parle WMA	10/21		450	300	1,500						

^a- Numbers seen during the current survey, last survey: the previous count from this year, last year: the number recorded during the same or nearby week last year.

^b- abbreviations: MAL = mallard, GAD = Gadwall, WIG = Am. wigeon, GWT = Am. green-winged teal, BWT = blue-winged teal, SHOV = Northern shoveler, PIN = Northern pintail, WD = Wood duck, RED = Redhead, CAN = Canvasback, SCP = Scaup, RN = Ring-necked duck, HOOD = Hooded merganser, NS = No survey.