



Minnesota Waterfowl Migration and Hunting Report, Sept. 29, 2016

The following report is a compilation of state and federal wildlife manager reports and waterfowl surveys from across Minnesota. This is the 2nd report for 2016. 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: 29 September 2016

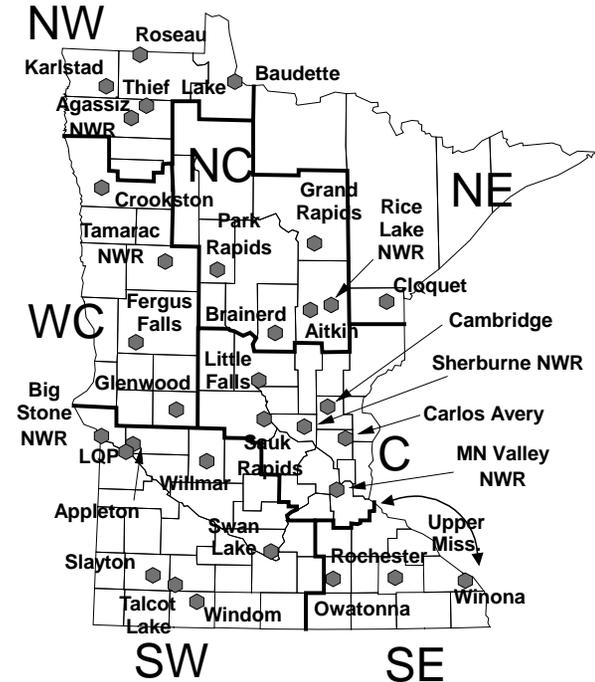
Duck hunters had a fair to good opening weekend across the state based on reports from state and federal wildlife managers. Blue-winged teal, wood ducks, mallards and ring-necked ducks were the most common species in hunters' bags.

Hunting success was variable across the state. The number of ducks/hunter at different locations on opening day in 2016 compared to 2015 was: Lac qui Parle WMA (1.7 vs. 3.6), Swan Lake (Nicollet county) (2.4 vs. 2.1), Thief Lake WMA (2.7 vs. 2.5), Big Rice by Remer (1.6 vs. 2.6), Big White Oak (1.6 vs. 3.0), Mud Goose WMA (1.6 vs. 1.8), Roseau WMA (3.2 vs. 2.1), and Carlos Avery WMA (1.4 vs. 1.0). Hunting success was much better on Saturday than Sunday at most locations.

Water levels remain high across most of the state for this time of the year so access should not be an issue for most hunters.

Hunter numbers, based on state waterfowl stamps sold through opening weekend, declined from last year (68,662 compared to 70,672) and were at their lowest level ever recorded.

Temperatures are expected to be mild into early next week with highs in the 60s to low 70s with south winds and no precipitation expected.



Waterfowl season reminders		
	Duck season dates	Goose season dates
North Zone	Sept. 24-Nov. 22	Sept. 24-Dec. 23
Central Zone	Sept. 24-Oct. 2 and Oct. 8-Nov. 27	Sept. 24-Oct. 2 and Oct. 8-Dec. 28
South Zone	Sept. 24-Oct. 2 and Oct. 15-Dec. 4	Sept. 24-Oct. 2 and Oct. 15-Jan. 4

Bag limits are 6 ducks/day, with no more than: 4 mallards (2 hens), 3 scaup, 3 wood duck, 2 pintail, 2 redhead, 2 canvasback, 1 black duck. Mergansers: 5 per day, no more than 2 may be hooded mergansers. Bag limits for geese are 3 dark geese/day.

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

Shooting hours begin ½ hour before sunrise until 4 p.m. through Friday, Oct. 7 and until sunset the remainder of the season. Motorized decoys are prohibited statewide through Saturday October 8th and on state wildlife management areas the entire season. The sandhill crane season is open through Oct. 16th in the Northwest zone only. Bag limits are 1/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 2016 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 pre-season 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			
<p>Roseau River WMA</p>	<p>Grains stubble is abundant in the vicinity of the 2 WMAs.</p> <p><u>Roseau River:</u> Water levels in all pools came up somewhat and are near full. The wild rice crop in Pool 3 is excellent and is attracting birds. Open water areas of the pools have a lush growth of sago and floating pondweeds, etc. Water levels on the Roseau River are relatively high, thus making for numerous acres of shallow, flooded backwaters.</p> <p><u>Roseau Lake:</u> Water levels have increased in the basin somewhat. Slush water is present on the perimeter of the basin.</p>	<p><u>Roseau River:</u> Goose numbers have diminished somewhat from opening weekend as a significant migration of geese occurred on 25 and 26 September. Good numbers of mallards continue to roost in Pool 1. Duck numbers are good on Pool 1, Pool 3, and along the river. Mallards, ring-necks, wood ducks, and teal are common. Waterfowl numbers are somewhat lower in Pool 2. Sandhill crane numbers have diminished over the past week..</p> <p><u>Roseau Lake:</u> Goose use of the basin picked up in recent days, but numbers are still modest. Dabbling duck use of the lake has been good; mallards dominate there.</p> <p>Moderate temperatures and winds out of the south are forecast for this weekend; no precipitation is forecast. The next rain is forecast for early next week. Temperatures will continue to be mild..</p>	<p>RRWMA hunters took 3.2 ducks/hunter on opening day and 0.8 ducks/hunter on Sunday. Ring-necked ducks and mallards made up half the opening weekend bag with lesser numbers of GWT, wigeon, and wood ducks in the bag. Goose hunters took only 0.4 geese/hunter for the weekend. Anecdotal reports suggest that Roseau Lake hunters did well on puddle ducks over the weekend.</p> <p>Navigability of the river and on the pools is good on Roseau River WMA. Access to places holding ducks on Roseau Lake WMA is limited largely to foot traffic.</p> <p><u>ACCESS ALERT FOR POOL 2 AND 3 HUNTERS:</u> Due to weather-related delays in construction on a major wetland development project on the west end of Roseau River WMA, the main route into the unit continues to be unreliable for travel on any given day. Hunters should call WMA headquarters at 218-463-1130 before arriving to discuss options for accessing the huntable portions of Pools 2 and 3.</p>

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Thief Lake WMA	<p>Lake level is currently 1.5" over target level, so access is good at all boat launches.</p> <p>Small grain harvest is complete, but wet conditions since harvest have precluded further work in some cases. Wet stubble fields are attractive to geese and dabblers and are holding some birds in fields rather than roosting on the lake, but access can be challenging.</p>	<p>Moderate to strong NW winds Sunday through Tuesday appeared to move some new birds into the area. Canada goose numbers are up from this time last year.</p> <p>Moderate SE winds are expected to stay with us through early next week which will reduce the number of new birds arriving in the area.</p>	<p>Hunters averaged 2.68 ducks per hunter on Saturday and 0.83 on Sunday. For the weekend as a whole, we averaged 1.81 ducks per hunter which is down slightly from last year. The top three birds in the bag were ring-necks, blue-winged teal and mallards- ring-necks made up 78% of the harvest. Monday saw an average of 1.25 ducks per hunter. Goose harvest was minimal on the lake with 0.01 geese taken per hunter.</p> <p>CHZ use has been light and just one goose was checked over the weekend. Several cranes were taken along the Agassiz boundary.</p>

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Northeast			
Cloquet area	Water levels remain above average in most areas throughout Carlton, Pine, and Southern St Louis Counties. Hunters found that rice stands were poor to fair throughout the Cloquet area because of significant rain and wind events throughout the growing season. Crop harvest has begun in Pine County.	The cold front earlier this week with strong north-west winds has motivated waterfowl to move. As a result, there has been an increase of Canada geese observed in the area. We anticipate that most blue-winged teal and a fair number of wood ducks have moved out of the Cloquet area at this time. Ring-necked duck numbers have increased.	Of hunters surveyed, most saw a fair to good amount of birds. Mallards, wood ducks, ring-necked ducks, and green-winged teal were the most common species harvested. Hunting pressure was slightly below average on opener. Hunters averaged 1.4 ducks per hunter.
North central			
Grand Rapids	Water levels are still stable.	No Migrations noted. There is a strong front moving through the area now that should move teal and wood ducks out of the area, and hopefully more ring necks and mallards into the area.	Area Opening Day Bag Checks: Average take per 113 hunters checked was 1.6 ducks per hunter down from a previous five year average of 2.3 ducks/hunter. Top three birds in the bag were wood ducks 26%, blue-winged teal 25% and ring-necked duck 25%. Lakes checked were Big rice lake by Remer, Mud and Big White oak lakes by Deer River.
Park Rapids	Water levels on area lakes and wetlands remain above normal with continued wet conditions. Some rivers are still quite high. Wild rice has begun to deteriorate on some of the larger lakes. Corn silage harvest in the area is nearing completion and bean harvest is well underway.	Seasonal temperatures with highs in the 60s and lows in the 40s will continue through the weekend with dry and clear conditions predominating. A strong NW wind Sunday and Monday likely moved some teal out of the area. Mallards, wood ducks, ring-necks, and good numbers of geese are present in the area.	Although reports were limited, a number of hunters were out opening weekend but their success was spotty. Those that were successful harvested a mixture on wood ducks, teal, mallards, and geese.

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Mille Lacs WMA	Water levels remain high. Flooding in adjoining shallow water provides lots of available habitat.	Not significant migrations observed. Birds are moving between water bodies. Decent numbers of birds observed in the area. Primary species are teal, mallards and wood ducks. Opening weekend weather was good for hunting: overcast, windy and wet.	Success was variable. Some groups did very well, others struggled to harvest birds. Location was key.
Bemidji	Excellent – excellent rice, water levels very good	Weather windy and cool all week. Some ring-necked ducks seem to have arrived	Opener fair. Hunters averaged just over a duck a day over the opening weekend. Almost exclusively wood ducks, but a few mallards, ring-necks, BWT and goldeneyes taken. Also some migrants including a couple pintails and shovelers.
Rice Lake NWR	No standing Wild Rice		No waterfowl hunting on Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge.
West central			
Fergus Falls	Bean harvest well underway, some corn down	Strong southerly winds and lots of mosquitoes for opener. Ducks, primarily teal with mallards, concentrated in few wetlands, noticeably fewer wood ducks around compared to recent years	Good reports from western and southern part of Otter Tail County with teal, mallards and a few wood ducks and ring-necked ducks making up bag. Hunter numbers appeared similar to last year.
Glenwood	Again wetlands are lower than expected considering the rain but this has not affected access. Bean harvest has gotten underway and should be in full swing later in the week and with no precipitation in the near future I expect a lot of fields to be down by this weekend.	I am surprised at the lack of ducks in the work area, I am not sure if the strong winds moved out the early migrants but the expected Blue wing Teal and Wood ducks have been for the most part hard to find, even on opening day. We did have strong winds and some precipitation early this week but from Thursday on it should be warm, calm and dry. We have had a few geese show up that would be worth setting up on.	Opening weekend saw its fair amount of pressure but with the overall lack of ducks a lot of parties were pulling out early Sunday. Pressure during the week was lower than I have ever seen it most likely due to the lack of ducks and strong winds. A reminder for this portion of the state (central zone) the season closes down Monday through Friday of next week (Oct 3-7 is closed)

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
<p>Detroit Lakes</p>	<p>Wetlands remain in good shape. Rice beds are still in decent shape but are starting to deteriorate.</p> <p>Small grain harvest and tillage is complete. Soybean harvest has stalled with cloudy and wet conditions the norm, only 10% complete. Corn harvest has yet to begin.</p>	<p>The forecast for this weekend is for sunny skies, south winds, and highs in the 60s. No frost in the forecast.</p> <p>Weather conditions at the beginning of the week brought strong NW winds, and new birds did move in. Canada goose numbers have increased in the area along with a noticeable buildup of coot on area lakes. Most blue-winged teal left with the strong NW winds Monday and Tuesday. Some early season divers have showed up, but overall waterfowl numbers are lower than the last few years.</p>	<p>Opener success was fair here in the Detroit Lakes Area. Limits were the exception on Saturday; hunter success averaged 2 birds/hunter and declined precipitously on Sunday. Mallards, blue-winged teal, green-winged teal, and wood ducks most prevalent in the bag. Strong winds and abundant hunters both days helped keep the birds on the move, but high water levels have the birds scattered. Scouting is the key.</p> <p>Conservation Officer reports throughout the area also indicated an average of 2-3 ducks/hunter on Saturday, with success uniform across the Prairie and Forest areas. Goose numbers and harvest were better than the previous few years.</p>

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Central			
<p>Carlos Avery WMA</p>	<p>The wild rice crop at Carlos Avery was fair this year. Water levels were generally low during the early parts of the summer, but many pools failed to produce much rice. Rice in 2015 was much better overall. Holding water levels low in the the Sunrise pools did produce better rice stands than the last two years of high water.</p> <p>The acorn crop at Carlos Avery WMA was almost a complete bust this year. While wood duck production looked good, they are less abundant this fall. They are also using different habitats, spending more time on bigger marshes and less time on small puddles among the oak trees.</p>	<p>Migrations were timely this early season. Some blue-winged teal arrived the day before youth waterfowl day. Another wave of blue-winged teal and ring-necks arrived a few days before the opener. Cool NW winds on 9/26 also brought some migrant ring-necks and coots to the area. Mild weather in the forecast should be good for holding these ducks in the area.</p>	<p>Perfect early season duck hunting weather greeted the opening day waterfowl hunters at Carlos Avery WMA. The cool cloudy weather kept hunters in the marsh longer and they bagged more ducks. Hunters averaged 1.4 ducks per hunter on opening day. An influx of blue-winged teal a few days before the opener provided abundant fast flying targets. Teal made up 60% of the bag, followed by wood ducks, mallards and ring-necks. Overall hunting pressure was similar to the last few years, with slightly more hunters on the Anoka side and fewer hunters on the Sunrise unit.</p>
<p>Sauk Rapids</p>	<p>Central MN has experienced very wet conditions. Lakes and wetlands have risen a foot or more. There are many areas of flooded crop fields. Crop harvest is at a standstill, but may get going by end of this week.</p>	<p>Molt migrant geese continue to return to central MN. Blue-winged teal were grouped up over the opening weekend in some areas.</p>	<p>Generally, the number of reports indicate that the duck opener was fair to good with some excellent comments sprinkled in the mix.</p> <p>Pelican Lake had, by far, its best opener in many years. Many limits of ducks were reported and the lake saw heavy pressure. Blue-winged teal numbers were very high.</p> <p>In many other areas, one or two ducks per person was the norm.</p>

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Cambridge	We received another 2" of rain that has saturated the crop fields and slowed harvest. Where combines can get in they are picking corn and beans. I may take a couple weeks of dry weather for marginal grounds to dry out. Wetlands are above average levels.	Good numbers of geese, wood ducks, mallards and blue wing teal are still in the area.	Opening day we had decent weather with a good turnout. Sunday rained majority of morning and that slowed waterfowl movement. Wood ducks and mallards are the main species in the bag.
Sherburne NWR	Habitat conditions are the same as the previous week.	Green-winged teal were observed during the weekly waterfowl census. Ring-necked ducks are also starting to trickle into the Refuge. Wood ducks have remained in the area after the waterfowl opener.	Duck hunters reported having a great day of waterfowl hunting on Long Pool Monday morning!
Little Falls	No change from previous week.	<p>Additional precipitation received this past week, including significant amounts the evening before opener. Temperatures have dropped some since last week, but still remain at or above average.</p> <p>Fair numbers of birds around during opener, but variable and spread across the landscape due to wet conditions. Similar numbers of waterfowl still around compared to last week.</p>	<p>Hunter numbers average to slightly below average compared to last year. Hunters and birds dispersed more across the area compared to normal. Hunting activity and success was spotty and more variable than normal.</p> <p>Good bird use and hunter success throughout much of northeastern Todd County, otherwise average to below average success during opening weekend.</p>

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Southwest			
Nicollet area	Area continues to be very wet with water levels still extremely high in lakes. Areas in fields continue to be flooded.	Good numbers of wood ducks and blue-winged teal have been observed in the Nicollet Area.	Around the Nicollet Wildlife area reports of 2-3 ducks per hunter were normal opening weekend. Bag check surveys were conducted on Swan Lake with 43 different hunting parties and found a total of 224 ducks were harvested, for an average of 2.4 ducks per hunter which is up from last year's 2.1 ducks per hunter.
Appleton	Flooded fields have been drying. Crop harvest underway.	No major movements in or out of area noted other than local birds shuffling around to find sanctuaries.	As expected, reports were mixed from opener. Seemed to be a lot of "all or none" which emphasizes the need to scout right now.
Lac qui Parle WMA	<p>The water level on Lac qui Parle Lake is being held above normal pool by a cofferdam (gates are being replaced on the Churchill dam). The upper (LQP) lake is now almost 3 feet above normal pool. The level at Marsh Lake, however, is pretty "normal" for late September.</p> <p>Bean harvest now underway where dry enough to combine – probably <20% completed. Corn harvest just beginning.</p>	<p>Mild weather continues - but no rain since last weekend and no rain predicted before next Tuesday. Expect partly/mostly sunny skies and southeasterly winds this coming weekend (Oct 1-2) - with overnight lows around 50° and daytime highs near 70°.</p> <p>Still no significant migration activity to report – but starting to see more ducks moving around on the major unit.</p>	Hunting pressure on the waterfowl opener, based on car counts, was below the average for the previous 10 years (2006-2015). Bag check data collected on the opener in the Marsh Lake area indicated an average success rate of 1.7 ducks/hunter (31 parties checked). The blue-winged teal was the top bird in the bag (46% of sample), followed by the wood duck, mallard and green-winged teal, in that order.

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Redwood Falls	Wetlands are full, areas streams and rivers are running bank full and fast, and flooded cropland is scattered everywhere in the three county area. Very minimal crop harvest has begun on corn and soybean fields. Some green cover crops are available providing green browse for geese.	Ducks and geese are widely scattered in the landscape and making good use of flooded cropland. Warm weekend weather gave way to cooler temperatures and northwest winds early in the week, but no notable movements are waterfowl have been noticed.	Those who hunted larger wetlands and sloughs had a disappointing opening weekend, with the exception of Willow Lake near Wanda that produced fair numbers of birds, mostly teal. But for those who had access to flooded cropland had excellent shooting, with numerous limits and near limits. Wood ducks, teal, mallards and even pintails were bagged on the flooded fields.
Willmar	Water levels remain at pool or above on all wetlands and low areas. Soybean and corn harvest in the area has, for the most part not yet begun. Some sweet corn and wheat stubble fields still available to waterfowl.	Opening day weather was cloudy, humid and mild with SE winds. Monday saw a weather change with strong WNW winds building through the day with gusts to 45 mph. Forecast from here through the coming weekend is for highs in the upper 60s, light E winds, and plenty of sunshine. More coots have moved in and there was a slight movement of "new" geese and teal with the wind on Monday. Few ducks around at present.	This area will be closed to waterfowl hunting from Oct. 3 – Oct. 7, resuming at ½ hour before sunrise on Oct. 8. Opening weekend of the regular waterfowl season was well attended by hunters but not so much by ducks and geese. Overall, most hunters did not have very good success as compared to recent years. Wood ducks, teal and mallards were the main birds in the bag, respectively. Sunday was much slower than Saturday. Very little activity by hunters since the weekend.

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Marshall	Wetlands are full and there are pockets of water for ducks in flooded fields. Small grains and corn silage have been harvested, but soybean harvest is just getting underway.	Not much for migration activity yet. Coot are rafted up on area lakes. A few green winged teal around along with local mallards, blue winged teal and wood ducks. Resident geese around but no large flocks observed. Weather continues to be mild with no frost in sight.	Duck opener had high participation but mixed results and generally was not as good as last year's opener. Due to wet conditions, the birds are widely dispersed. Birds in the bag included mostly mallards, blue winged teal and wood ducks.
Slayton	Water levels in area wetlands remain in good condition	Noticed some ducks have left area after a front passed thru last Sat. night. Pleasant weather for the upcoming week, no fronts expected.	Talked to a few hunters who said hunting was slow. Some success with geese. Had some reports of good success. Overall a slow opener.
Southeast			
Owatonna	Flooding conditions persist across much of the area. Water levels in rivers and ditches are receding with some of the smaller streams approaching more normal levels while larger rivers remaining very high. Lake levels are beginning to recede, but many shallow lakes are higher than has been observed in recent memory. Floods and high winds has devastated aquatic vegetation in some of our area lakes. Flooding is subsiding in croplands, but sheet water remains in many fields and shallow wetlands. Crop harvest stalled due to wet conditions.	Opening weekend was warm with periods of rain and showers, especially Sunday morning. A cold front accompanied by very strong northwesterly winds moved through Monday with the northwesterly winds continuing into the week. Coot numbers continue to build and a few migrant geese, redheads and blue-winged teal and other early migrant ducks filtering in. Ducks and geese are widely distributed and making use of flooded fields.	Hunting pressure varied, but was typically high to very high on traditional waterfowl lakes. Mid-week hunting activity has been moderate to low. Access has been difficult in some locations due to flooding. Hunting success was fair with few limits observed. Bag reports yielded 1.3 ducks per hunter with blue-winged teal (48%) and wood ducks (42%) most common. A variety of other waterfowl, including mallards, shovelers, widgeon, pintails and green-wing teal were reported. A few Canada geese were also taken.

Waterfowl Count Data, week of September 26, 2016

Area	Date	Swans this week	Canada geese			Ducks				Coot this week	Comments
			Number seen ^a :			Number seen:			This weeks duck species - % composition ^b		
			This week	Last count	Last year	This week	Last count	Last year			
Thief Lake WMA	9/28		2,100	1,825	950	NS	6,500				
Rice Lake NWR	9/28	383	60	NS	1,500	15,000	NS	17,000	75% RN, 22% MAL, 3% WD	7,500	
Carlos Avery WMA	9/28	12	60	NS	520	1,000	NS	3,500	35% RN, 31% WD, 22% MAL, 12% BWT	950	
Sherburne NWR	9/28	35	740	540	3,500	8,300	8,000	9,200	50% WD, 29% RN, 18% MAL, 2% GWT, 1% BWT	1,800	
Lac qui Parle WMA	9/29		300	300	400						
Murray/Lincoln county WMAs	9/29	20	30	75	200	150	400	150	67% MAL, 33% BWT	400	

^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, SHOVS = Northern shoveler, PIN = Northern pintail, WD = Wood duck, RED = Redhead, CAN = Canvasback, SCP = Scaup, RN = Ring-necked duck, HOOD = Hooded merganser, NS = No survey.