

Minnesota Waterfowl Migration and Hunting Report – 17 November 2011

The following report is a compilation of state and federal wildlife manager reports and waterfowl surveys from across Minnesota. This is the 9th and final report for 2011. 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.

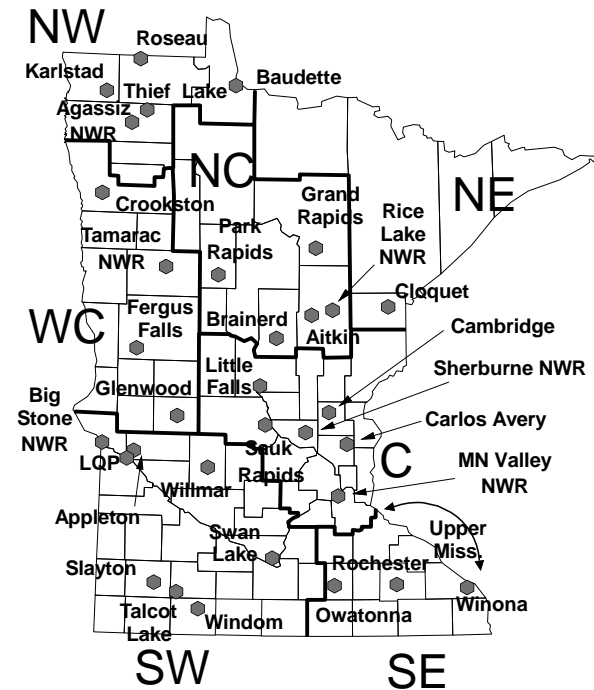
General: 17 November 2011, 3:00 p.m.

Duck hunting reports have been very limited the past week but the few die-hards that are still out have had some success. Most waterfowl surveys have concluded for the year.

Mallards and some of the late season species such as buffleheads, goldeneyes, and big mergansers are still present in some areas, but significant amount of ice are present. Most lakes in northern Minnesota are ice-covered and even some of the large lakes have enough shore-ice present that access is difficult. In southern Minnesota, significant ice is also present, but many of the lakes should open Friday, ice over by Monday, and could reopen again next week.

Canada goose hunting has been fair to good, but numbers are lower than expected in certain areas; goose numbers and goose hunting should still be good for the next few weeks in many areas, especially if snow accumulation is minimal this weekend.

Weather is expected to be mild on Friday, but below normal temperatures are expected this weekend with moderate snowfall expected Saturday. In northern Minnesota, highs are expected in the low 20s with lows around 10 this weekend. In southern Minnesota, highs are expected in the low 30s with lows around 20 this weekend. The extended forecast into next week and through Thanksgiving is calling for seasonal to slightly above average temperatures with no significant precipitation or frontal systems after Saturday.



Reminder:

Duck season ends next Tuesday, Nov. 22 in the North Duck Zone and Sunday, Nov. 27 in the South Duck Zone.

The Canada goose season runs until Dec. 17 in the North Duck Zone. In the South Duck Zone, the regular Canada goose season runs until Dec. 22. In the Rochester goose zone, the Canada goose season runs until Nov. 27, closes through Dec. 7 and reopens Dec. 8-Jan. 1. The bag limit is 3 Canada geese/day statewide for the entire season.

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			
Thief Lake WMA	Lake is 8" below target. Intermittent ice this last week. Lake froze over 11/15.	No flights this week. Ground counts showed perhaps 2000 Canadas and 100 snows. Observations on the lake indicate that birds have been moving, with some departure last Wednesday night and again on Saturday night. Intermittent ice this last week, and the lake froze over on Tuesday (11/15).	Those hunters that hit the marsh during deer season found birds moving, and hunting was good. Success overall for the period was over 3 ducks per hunter per day, with an emphasis on mallards.
Roseau River WMA	The Pools have frozen over and the Roseau River is still very low.	Ducks and geese that were utilizing the area early last week have continued their migration south. We've had some snow this week and there is more in the forecast through the weekend. Low temps in the teens this week with highs in the 20's.	Waterfowl hunter use throughout the firearm's deer season was light.
North central			
Brainerd	Many small ponds and small lakes have been freezing over during the night, causing most of our birds to migrate.	Most of the birds, including ring-necks, that were around appear to have left the area. Many flocks of Canada geese and swans (tundra) noted moving through the area. Temperatures: Highs 34-51° F Lows 19-33° F No moisture other than a few flurries.	A lot of hunting activity was noted in the mornings and evenings. Hunters were taking advantage of all the ring-necks and mallards moving through the area.
Aitkin	Smaller lakes have thin layer of ice	Colder temps and strong NW winds, with some measurable snow. Increase in geese and mallards. Few divers.	Few hunters out. No reports on harvest.
Grand Rapids	Shallow wetlands/lakes continue to freeze up. Deep lakes are open but protected/shallow access areas may be frozen in.	Nighttime temps will be in the teens the next couple of days. Lakes will continue to freeze up. Fair to good numbers of Mallards, Goldeneyes, Buffleheads, and scaup are in the area.	Few hunters are out but some are having good success.
Park Rapids	All small ponds, shallow lakes, and some larger lakes are ice covered. Rivers and large deep lakes are cooling rapidly and many have shelf ice near the banks and/or shoreline areas.	Overnight lows in the single digits on 11/17 locked up many basins with ice. Prior to this recent cold weather late season migrants were observed in the area but numbers have now decreased significantly. A large migration of Ducks and Geese was noted on 11/16. It is expected that some birds will remain in the area but scouting will be essential to find birds and open water throughout the rest of the season.	Hunting pressure has continued to decrease with very few hunters getting out.

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
West Central			
Tamarac NWR	All the small wetlands and many of the lakes are 90-100% frozen with the larger lakes about 10-50% froze. The shallow rice lakes are 100% froze.	There are essentially no ducks or geese remaining on the refuge this week with the cold front that pushed in. Large flocks of Canada geese flying south were noted on Wed.	Very little hunting pressure has been observed the last week.
Southeast			
Owatonna	Water levels are low due to continued drought. Some lake accesses are difficult. Fall tillage and manure application continues to eliminate waste grain food resources.	A cold front dropped temperatures on the 10 th and 11 th and resulted in sheet ice on some shallow lakes and marshes Friday morning. Seasonably mild temperatures returned for the weekend. A strong front arrived the afternoon of the 15 th with strong W and NW winds. Coots and most ducks migrated out with this wind. Modest numbers of mallards and a other late migrants trickled in. Lakes had significant ice formed on the morning of the 16 th and most shallow lakes were nearly completely iced over on the morning of the 17 th . A few hundredths of an inch of rain fell on the 13 th .	Moderate hunting activity continues on area lakes, especially with the cold fronts. Some hunters are having good success with some limits reported. Hunting activity dropped off with the return of warmer weather and strong winds. Ice made hunting access difficult on the 16 th and 17 th with few hunters attempting to break ice or finding open water to hunt.
Southwest			
Big Stone NWR	Water levels providing good habitat conditions, however, some wetlands have sheet ice leaving less habitat for waterfowl.	Influx in Canada goose numbers this week. Still 114 tundra swans using East Pool on the refuge. Trending toward diver species as most dabbling species heading south. Temps in the 20s and possible snow 2-4 inches on Friday/Saturday will freeze most of the wetlands on the Refuge.	Big Stone NWR is closed to waterfowl hunting, however adjacent private land may be accessible to hunters.
Swan Lake (Nicollet)	Same report as 11/7 with additional small basins being noted dry compared to last year when we held high water levels. Because of low water levels ice has begun to appear.	Weather continues cool and mild with increased NW wind and colder temperatures but still mostly clear with little to no precipitation. Some larger flocks of Wood Ducks, and Canada Geese are still persisting within the Nicollet area. Increased numbers of Mallards, Ring-necked Ducks, Green Winged Teal, and Gadwall have begun to show up within the area and on Swan Lake. Ice has begun to form on the edges of some larger lakes and the cold front with strong wind is pushing through today which will cause ducks to move.	Hunter consistently seems to be hunting Swan Lake but not much is known about their limits. Ducks, especially mallards are prevalent on small lakes around the area with little hunting pressure at this time. Hunting pressure is expected to increase and so should duck migration with deer hunting ending and new cold fronts moving through.

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Slayton	Water levels in area wetlands remain unchanged from last report. More ice this week than last week.	<p>A few northern mallards have shown up along with a small influx of geese. Most ducks don't seem to stay long.</p> <p>Temps have cooled this week with highs in the low 40s to upper 30s, lows in the teens to mid 20s. Most marshes have been frozen over in the mornings along with some lakes. Expecting around 2 inches snow for the weekend with gusty NW winds.</p>	Duck hunting activity has been slowed considerably due to marshes being frozen in the mornings. Not a lot of hunter reports.
Talcot Lake WMA	No change from last week.	The weather the past week has been windy and mild. Had an overnight low last night of 12 degrees and there's ice on the ponds. No noticeable increase in goose numbers.	Hunter activity has been low.
Windom	Crop harvest and tillage complete. Water levels continue to drop. Shallow, small wetland areas freezing over some nights. North Heron was 70% ice covered Wed morning (11/16) but opening with wind & rising temps.	The no precipitation pattern continues. Cold nights, down to 14 degrees Wed morning (11/16), with highs in 30s & 40s. Some hunters indicating low numbers ducks moving thru over the last couple of weeks, with no buildups in numbers.	Limited hunting activity and success, though a few hunters have reported occasional fair hunting on ducks and geese.
Appleton	Lot of hard water 11/17.	Some divers and mallards have moved into the area, but surprisingly few. More geese than anything. Forecast looks promising, but not sure if it will move birds in, or just push them straight through.	Not much has changed – light pressure and success limited to those lucky enough to find the birds and access.
Willmar	After last night, only the big, deeper lakes remain open. The countryside remains black and dry. The wetlands, streams, ditches, ect. were very low or dry going in to this freeze-up.	The morning of the 10 th was another day of good migration of mallards, swans, and a few other species through the area. Nothing stayed, just moved on through. Very little migration has been noted since even with strong W-NW winds on 15 th and 16 th . Temp. dropped to 9 degrees last night (16 th) and this has brought an unofficial end to duck hunting in the area. A winter storm (snow) is expected in the area on Sat. (19 th).	Following the last mallard push on the 10 th , duck hunter activity and success has dropped to almost nothing. There may yet be some limited diver action on the big fish lakes in days to come.

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
<p>Lac qui Parle WMA</p>	<p>First significant ice of the season – low of 14 degrees this morning with calm winds (17 Nov).</p> <p>Marsh Lake completely ice covered but river channel should be open. Marsh may reopen on Friday with temps in the mid-40s.</p> <p>Main portion of Lac qui Parle Lake (State Game Refuge) still ice free; Watson Sag portion has ice but should reopen with temps and wind.</p>	<p>A few more geese arrived into the refuge with strong NW winds yesterday but what I would call a “minor” push. Official goose count is at 40,000 Canada geese but the range is 35,000 to 45,000.</p> <p>Mallard count on the refuge is low at approximately 5,000.</p>	<p>Light goose hunting pressure on the refuge and low success most days. Plenty of geese but leaving the perimeter high. Hunters on private land who are scouting and putting “birds to bed” are doing much better. Goose hunting could be very good this weekend if we don’t get too much snow in the local area. Goose numbers should continue to build.</p> <p>The duck situation is more dynamic. Marsh Lake froze over but may partially reopen tomorrow. Before ice cover overall mallard numbers were low for this time period. However, Marsh Lake can turn “red hot” for mallards very quickly with the right weather pattern. Saturday could be interesting but unless we have significant winds Saturday night expect 100% ice cover again Sunday morning.</p>

Waterfowl Count Data, week of November 14, 2011

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			
NORTHWEST											
Thief Lake WMA	11/14		2,000	5,300	4,000						Ground count
Brainerd/Wadena area	11/14	7	100	250	500	400	500	400	40% MAL 30% SCP 25% HOOD, 5% RN		
WEST CENTRAL											
Tamarac NWR	11/16	250	0	100	0	20	2,000	0	100% HOOD		Little open water remaining
SOUTHWEST											
Big Stone NWR	11/16	115	11,000	8,000	10,000	2,600	7,000	6,000	78% MAL, 6% SCP, 5% RN, 4% HOOD, 2% GAD, 2% GWT		
Murray Co. lakes & wetlands	11/16	6	1,500	600	3,500	600	500	700	94% MAL, 6% SHOVS		
Lac qui Parle WMA	11/16	0	40,000	35,000	30,000	4,000	4,000		100% MAL		
Talcot Lake WMA	11/16	12	900	1,100	1,000	5,000	5,000	1,200	100% MAL		
SOUTHEAST											
Upper Miss. River NWR	11/16	78,000	23,000	20,000	14,000	550,000	1.1 million	240,000	61% CAN, 14% MAL, 9% SCP, 6% RN, 6% GAD, 1% WIG, 1% PIN, 1% BUFF	140,000	Pools 4-14

^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.