



Minnesota Waterfowl Migration and Hunting Report Sept. 24, 2015

The following report is a compilation of state and federal wildlife manager reports and waterfowl surveys from across Minnesota. This is the first report for 2015. 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: 24 September 2015

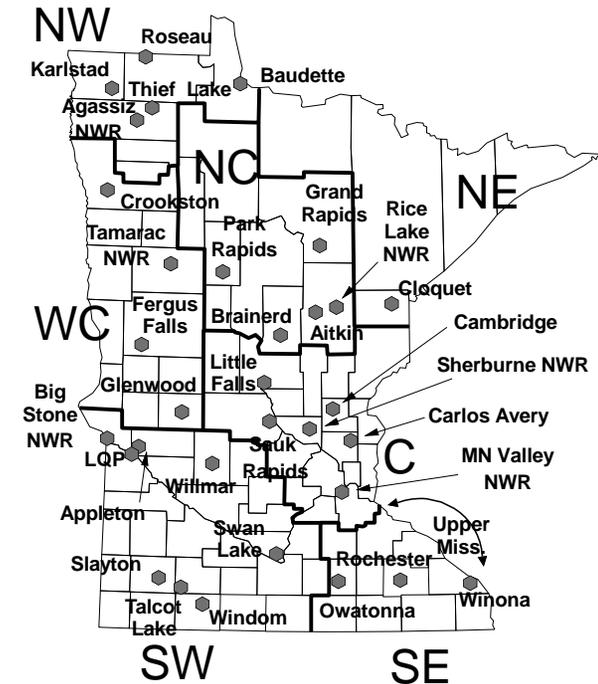
Duck hunters should have a good opening weekend across the state based on reports from state and federal wildlife managers. Blue-winged teal, wood ducks, and mallards should dominate hunters' bags in most areas; ring-necked ducks and green-winged teal should also be fairly common in many areas.

The number of breeding ducks in Minnesota this spring was similar to last year and slightly below the long-term average. The number of breeding ducks based on continental surveys was very high for most duck species and well above the long-term average. Waterfowl production (number of young hatched) was expected to be good in Minnesota and elsewhere with favorable wetland conditions reported from most areas this summer.

Water levels are near average across most of the state for this time of the year. Wild rice production was very good this year and should provide good waterfowl foraging habitat this fall.

The number of breeding Canada geese in the state remains high but similar to last year. Canada goose numbers have increased in many areas since early September as more molt migrant geese have returned to the state. Goose hunting success during the August and September seasons was fair. Goose hunter numbers during the early season this year were 27,100 based on goose permit sales, which was the lowest number on record.

Temperatures are expected to be above average on opening weekend with highs in the mid 70s in most of the state with south winds and no precipitation.



Waterfowl season reminders

	Duck season dates	Goose season dates
North Zone	Sept. 26-Nov. 24	Sept. 26-Dec. 23
Central Zone	Sept. 26-Oct. 4 and Oct. 10-Nov. 29	Sept. 26-Oct. 4 and Oct. 10-Dec. 28
South Zone	Sept. 26-Oct. 4 and Oct. 15-Dec. 4	Sept. 26-Oct. 4 and Oct. 15-Jan. 2

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. 9 and until sunset the remainder of the season. Motorized decoys are prohibited statewide through Saturday October 10th and on state wildlife management areas the entire season. The sandhill crane season is open through Oct. 18th 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 2015 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			
Thief Lake WMA	<p>Thief Lake is within an inch of target level, and access is good at all the boat launches. Cover on the lake is very good, with bulrush expanding into some areas not seen in the recent past.</p> <p>Small grain harvest is complete in the area, and fields are chisel plowed and provide for field feeding opportunities. Soybean harvest is occurring now.</p>	<p>The first migrant Canadas were observed on September 8, and we've seen periodic influxes since that time. Weather has been warm with lots of south wind lately.</p> <p>Good local production of ducks and geese in spite of late spring/early summer rains.</p>	<p>A total of 9 parties hunted the Youth Waterfowl Day, and hunters averaged 3.0 ducks per hunter. A variety of species were observed in the bag, with ring-necks, redheads and mallards most prevalent, along with a couple of geese. One group reported 7 separate flocks of geese coming into their decoys by noon.</p>
Thief River Falls	<p>Water is being released from Lost River Pool to refill Farmes Pool (Elm Lake WMA) following a drawdown. At this time the State owned side of Farmes Pool is nearly full and Lost River Pool is in drawdown. Both Eckvoll and Pembina WMAs have water, though they are below full pool.</p> <p>Small grains have all been harvested and most fields worked twice. Soybean harvest began a couple weeks ago and is going strong.</p>	<p>Small to medium sized flocks of geese have only recently begun to be observed in the area. Duck numbers remain low.</p> <p>Highs for the weekend will be about 80 on Sat, 72 on Sun, and 65 on Monday. Lows in the 50's and 60's. Winds will be strong late Saturday morning and throughout the afternoon, gusting from the south at 25 to 30 mph. Calmer on Sunday and Monday with winds about 10 mph. There is a chance of rain on Sunday and a slight chance on Monday.</p>	

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Roseau River WMA	<p>Grain stubble fields are abundant in the vicinity of the 2 WMAs.</p> <p><u>Roseau River:</u> Water levels in the pools are fairly shallow, which has contributed to a good wild rice crop. Open water areas of the pools have an abundance of sago and floating pondweed; these areas are attracting ducks as well. The Roseau River has receded from high levels; the mud flats that have resulted are attractive to Canada geese and dabbling ducks alike. <u>Roseau Lake:</u> Slush water is present in the center of the basin.</p>	<p>Local duck and goose production was only fair in 2015.</p> <p><u>Roseau River:</u> The first fall Canada geese arrived on 7 September. A couple thousand geese are roosting in Pool 1 and field feeding in neighboring stubble fields. Duck numbers have slowly built over the past week. A few thousand mallards were observed using the Pool 2 Sanctuary on 21 September. Teal and wood duck numbers are good. Diver ducks and sandhill cranes are scarce. <u>Roseau Lake:</u> Approximately a thousand sandhill cranes are roosting on Roseau Lake. Dabbling duck use of shallow water areas is good. Few Canada geese are using Roseau Lake thus far. The weather forecast for the area is for continued mild temperatures for the remainder of the week with a slight chance of mid-week showers.</p>	<p>Goose hunting success has been relatively good on and around Roseau River WMA. However, few hunters have taken advantage of the opportunities afforded during the September goose hunt. Some crane hunting in the Roseau Lake area has occurred. Success of these hunters has been limited. Hunter access for the regular season duck and goose opener ought to be good for all pools as well as the river on Roseau River WMA.</p>
North central			
Grand Rapids	<p>The wild rice crop is excellent this year in most water bodies that support it. Water levels on most wetlands are average to below average for this time of year.</p>	<p>There have been a couple weak cold fronts in the past week but no major migrations are noted. Blue-winged teal and wood ducks are in the area. A small group of pintails were also observed.</p>	
Park Rapids	<p>Area water levels appear normal to slightly below normal and lakes, wetlands and streams should be navigable. Wild rice is abundant in both lakes and rivers this year and should provide good early season food and cover. Some fields have been tilled and others have greened up since the small grain harvest was completed. Bean harvest is underway in area fields.</p>	<p>Temperatures this weekend will be above average with overall dry weather. Mallards, wood ducks, teal and ring-necks are present but in smaller numbers. Duck numbers appear to be below average in the work area this year. Canada goose numbers have increased in September as molt migrants and failed breeders move back into the area. Some large flocks of geese have been observed recently.</p>	<p>On the September 12th, youth waterfowl opener hunters harvested a mix of mallards, wood ducks, ring-necks and geese. Early goose hunters harvested small numbers of geese and encountered mostly weary molt migrants.</p>

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Mille Lacs WMA	Overall good water level conditions exist. Most pools are at normal levels. Rice crop overall is very good.	Pretty good number of teal & wood ducks observed prior to and during the youth waterfowl season. Recent localized bird movement has been increased. Good numbers of local birds should be present for the regular opener. Lots of Canada Geese have been seen in the area.	Not a lot of youth hunters out on the WMA but those that were saw some action. A fair bit of shooting was heard but only a few ducks bagged on the WMA and surrounding wetlands.
Rice Lake NWR	Lots of wild rice still standing	Good numbers of mallards present.	No hunting on the refuge.
West central			
Fergus Falls	Water levels in wetlands generally normal for this time of year so access should be good, small grain and about 50% of beans have been harvested	Temps have been mild, no frost reported in the area yet. Still fair numbers of teal around but numbers have declined some from early September. Ducks are concentrated in few areas with good shallow water habitat. Wood duck numbers appear lower this year. Goose numbers have increased in last couple of weeks likely do to return of molt migrants.	As usual, early goose hunting was very spotty, goose numbers appeared to be down from recent years although small grain harvest was pretty much complete allowing for more hunting opportunity.
Tamarac NWR	Wild rice production was very good throughout most of the refuge this year. Water levels are decreasing but still adequate for access.	Visibility of waterfowl is extremely difficult on most rice lakes this year due to dense stands of rice. Waterfowl numbers are likely much higher than what the survey indicates, particularly for mallards, wood ducks and blue-winged teal. Waterfowl numbers appear to be about normal for this time of year.	Opportunities were plentiful during the youth waterfowl day several weeks ago. Opportunities will likely be mixed during the regular opener based on location, but hunters should see good opportunities for blue-winged teal, wood ducks and some mallards.

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
<p>Detroit Lakes</p>	<p>Wetlands are in decent shape, water levels are lower than normal and lower than last year at this time. The wild rice crop this year is phenomenal, and emergent vegetation stands are also in good shape.</p> <p>Overall duckling production was lower this year than last in the DL Area. Early nesters like mallards found dry conditions upon arrival, but rains came in late May which benefitted latter nesting species like teal and ring-necks. Wood duck numbers also were down this year.</p> <p>Small grain harvest is complete with tillage 75%+ complete. Soybean harvest is progressing rapidly with 50% complete. Dry conditions will be encountered around the Detroit Lakes Area, with more moisture as you go North or South.</p>	<p>The forecast for the opener is for sunny skies and 70s. Weather conditions have been dry since July here in the DL Area, except for a 2" rain in late August.</p> <p>Blue-winged teal are fairly abundant, but have been declining since the beginning of September. A fair amount of green-winged teal have already moved into the area. Mallard, wood duck and ringneck numbers are lower than last year but should still provide good action.</p> <p>Canada goose numbers were low during the August and early September seasons but have been building as molt migrants have started returning in mid-September.</p>	<p>The August Goose Season was poorly attended and harvest was minimal in the Area. The early September Goose Season was fairly quite the first week but picked up with the cooler weather and an influx of molt migrants returning in mid-September.</p> <p>The Youth hunt was fairly quiet with an overall lack of kids out. The kids that participated had good opportunities to harvest birds; I have heard of numerous parties burning through multiple boxes of shells with some limits of teal, mallards and wood ducks being taken. Youth participating in the Hamden Slough NWR Youth Hunt averaged a bird/hunter.</p> <p>I expect a decent opener with locally raised mallards, wood ducks, teal and ring-necks comprising the majority of the bag. Green winged teal should also be well represented.</p> <p>The phenomenal wild rice crop this year should attract more waterfowl to the woods in the Eastern part of the work area. The rice might be the place to be this year.</p>
Central			
<p>Forest Lake/north Metro</p>	<p>The wild rice crop is doing well this year.</p>	<p>Geese, mallards, wood ducks and blue-winged teal have been observed in the area.</p>	

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Carlos Avery WMA	Water levels are normal to slightly above normal. Good wild rice production on most pools.	Weather has been mild. Blue wing teal and wood ducks seem to be gathering to form larger groups.	Light activity for youth waterfowl day. Youth that did get out had good opportunities. Good luck on the opener!
Little Falls	Excellent conditions in most areas; have had good precipitation and little flooding compared to recent years. Most wild rice basins experienced above average production this year. Water levels should be normal to slightly above normal in most areas by opening weekend.	Good push of teal in mid-August, and another good influx of birds during the week of Sept. 14 th . Early-season goose numbers have been better than the previous few years. Very good teal and wood duck use of many wetlands leading up to opening weekend, especially in areas with wild rice. Also a very good influx of coot over the past 7-10 days.	Very few youth participating in YWD, but those going out had average to good success. Not as many early goose hunters this year, but those spending the time to scout have done well.
Sauk Rapids	Excellent wetland water quantity and quality conditions exist in central MN this year. Soybean and corn harvest will be early which will improve conditions for waterfowl. Acorn production is very good and wild rice production is fair in central MN, but improves greatly in north central MN.	Molt migrant Canada geese are starting to move back into central MN. No other waterfowl migrations observed other than concentrating of local birds in better habitat. Local duck production was very good this year, maybe one of the best in the last 10 years or more.	Youth opener was fair to good, evaluated mostly in shots fired. Early September Canada goose season was very spotty and can be characterized as fair to poor.
Cambridge	Most small grains have been harvested in the area. Wetlands and shallow lakes are at average to slightly low levels going into the hunting season. The wild rice crop has been outstanding. Corn and soybeans are just starting to be harvested. Wood ducks are benefitting from a good acorn crop this year.	Large flocks of Canada Geese have been observed throughout the Cambridge area feeding in cut small grain fields and roosting in adjacent wetlands. Local wood ducks and mallards are abundant. Large flocks of blue-winged teal have been observed in Kanabec and Isanti Counties.	We anticipate that there will be a great early shoot for opener. Mild weather and warm temperatures may reduce duck activity beyond the early morning flight. Both youth hunters and early goose hunters reported successful hunts.

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Sherburne NWR	Long Pool, our traditional duck hunting water body, has normal water levels allowing boat access to all areas of this pool. Water levels are slightly above normal on the St. Francis River. Waterfowl hunters may not be able to wade the river in some areas of Area B. The wild rice crop on the river is good this year.	Good numbers of wood ducks, teal, and mallards were noted during the weekly waterfowl survey. Hunters can expect fairly good duck numbers during opening weekend.	This was the Refuge's second year of offering a youth mentored waterfowl hunt. The young hunters had plenty of opportunities to bag a wood duck, teal, or mallard on Long Pool and the river.
Southwest			
Swan Lake (Nicollet)	The year has been extremely wet. Wetlands continue to hold water due to ongoing precipitation. Smaller more seasonal wetlands within crop fields are currently flooded due to recent rains. This may spread out waterfowl with less concentration on larger feeding and resting migratory lakes. Wetlands appear to be in good condition.	Excellent numbers of wood ducks and moderate numbers of blue-winged teal have been observed in the Nicollet Area. Better numbers of mallards compared to last year. Some teal have moved out of the area recently with more wood ducks now moving in.	Expect average hunting success in the Nicollet Area due to reduced number of blue-winged teal.
Appleton	A bit drier than normal. Bean harvest underway. Small grain fields attracting ducks and geese.	No evidence of any early migrations other than perhaps a slight decline in Blue-winged teal numbers. Forecast call for above normal temps with little precipitation	Local population of mallards, teal and woodies look quite strong this year. Birds have concentrated in better habitats. We expect good success from those that do some scouting.

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Lac qui Parle WMA	<p>Water levels on Marsh Lake and upper Lac qui Parle Lake slightly above normal pool – backwater channels and impoundments on the major unit are holding water.</p> <p>Bean harvest is well underway – silage cutting is nearly completed – corn harvest is just beginning.</p>	<p>Weather has been seasonal overall – September so far has been mild with no hard freeze yet. Expect southerly winds and maximum temps in the low 80’s for the duck opener weekend.</p> <p>Little migration activity to report. Blue-winged teal and wood ducks still present in good numbers.</p>	<p>We expect a pretty good duck opener on the wildlife area with decent numbers of ducks. Ducks will be concentrated – seek shallow water areas.</p>
Redwood Falls	<p>Almost all wetlands contain water, although shallower basins are at lower than normal levels. Soybean harvest is just beginning in a major way and a few cornfields have been harvested for high moisture corn. Very little tillage is happening.</p>	<p>Weather conditions remain unseasonably warm, with temperatures in the high 70s to mid-80s forecast for this week. No signs of migration and low numbers of mallards, wood ducks, and resident Canada geese are present.</p>	<p>Early Canada goose season was poor within the area, with few birds being present. Youth waterfowl season had few hunters out. Outlook for opening weekend is poor.</p>
Willmar	<p>Water conditions look good, some beans and silage corn have been harvested opening fields for feeding birds.</p>	<p>Local produced mallards, wood ducks, teal and a few ring-necks are scattered in pockets throughout the better habitat of the work area with a few large concentrations. Canada geese are in short supply. Coots have moved into the area in big numbers over the last couple of weeks. No other migrations noted. Be aware of Trumpeter Swans in the area. Weather has been seasonably mild with above normal temperatures and sunny skies expected for opening weekend.</p>	<p>The August goose season saw some spotty but highly successful harvest by a few hunters. Sept. goose season has been very subdued with very light activity. Duck numbers seem to be good and it should translate into a good opener even with the warm temps. Having a good wind blowing on the opener would be nice.</p>
Slayton	<p>Wetlands are in good condition and are full after abundant rains in late summer. Soybean harvest has started as well as corn silage.</p>	<p>Most of the wetlands we observed have a mix of mallards and BW teal with some wood ducks. Mild weather forecasted for opener with temps in the mid 70s. Received approx. 1-1.5” rain this week.</p>	<p>Early goose season was slow not much to report.</p>

Waterfowl Count Data, week of September 21, 2015

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			
Rice Lake NWR	9/22	55	1,200	NS	300	5,000	NS	6,000	86% MAL, 7% RN, 6% WD, 1% BWT	2,100	
Tamarac NWR	9/24	120	170	NS	160	5,300	NS	6,000	60% RN, 20% MAL, 18% WD, 2% BWT	2,600	
Sherburne NWR	9/23	25	370	NS	830	11,400	NS	7,600	86% WD, 7% GWT, 4% MAL, 2% BWT	4,100	
Carlos Avery WMA	9/24	10	100	NS	50	600	NS	350	67% WD, 20% MAL, 13% BWT		
Rochester	9/23	0	1,500	NS	1,100	200	NS	175	100% MAL		
Murray/Lincoln county WMAs	9/24	7	145	NS	200	950	NS	1,400	34% BWT, 33% WD, 31% MAL, 2% SHO		

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