

Minnesota Waterfowl Migration and Hunting Report, Oct. 5, 2017

The following report is a compilation of state and federal wildlife manager reports and waterfowl surveys from across Minnesota. This is the 3rd report for 2017. 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: 5 October 2017

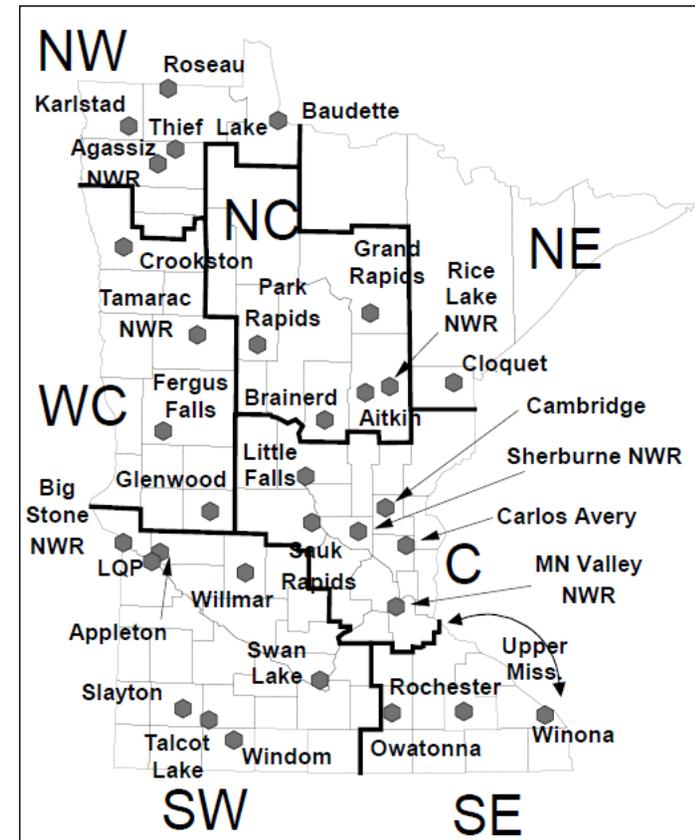
Waterfowl hunting remained fair in most areas last weekend but hunting pressure has declined considerably. At this point in the season, most hunters are waiting for some cold fronts to move additional migrant ducks into the state. The Central Zone reopens on Saturday and the South Zone remains closed until Oct. 14th.

Ring-necked duck numbers have improved in many locations. Wood ducks are still fairly common but blue-winged teal numbers have declined. Redheads have also increased in some areas and small numbers of other midseason migrants have been observed.

Canada goose numbers appear to be similar to last week across the state.

Most areas of the state received significant amounts of rain over the past week that has provided additional habitat for dabbling ducks, including some sheet water in unharvested agricultural fields. This should provide many additional foraging locations for dabbling ducks and those willing to scout and obtain permission should do well.

The weather forecast calls for seasonal high temperatures this weekend with highs in the 60s in the north and upper 60s in the south. Rain is expected Friday and Saturday in southern Minnesota. Temperatures are expected to remain seasonal through next week.



Waterfowl season reminders		
	Duck season dates	Goose season dates
North Zone	Sept. 23-Nov. 21	Sept. 23-Dec. 22
Central Zone	Sept. 23-Oct. 1 and Oct. 7-Nov. 26	Sept. 23-Oct. 1 and Oct. 7-Dec. 27
South Zone	Sept. 23-Oct. 1 and Oct. 14-Dec. 3	Sept. 23-Oct. 1 and Oct. 14-Jan. 3

Bag limits are 6 ducks/day, with no more than: 4 mallards (2 hens), 3 scaup, 3 wood duck, 2 redhead, 2 canvasback, 2 black duck, 1 pintail. 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. 6 and until sunset the remainder of the season. Motorized decoys are prohibited statewide through Saturday October 7th and on state wildlife management areas the entire season. The sandhill crane season is open through Oct. 22th 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 2017 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			
Roseau River WMA	<p><u>RRWMA</u>: Backwaters of the river are flooded. The pools remain at moderate levels. Excellent growth of submerged vegetation may be found in all pools, and good stands of wild rice are in Pools 2 and 3. An abundance of small grain stubble persists locally, and much of this stubble continues to hold shallow water.</p> <p><u>Roseau Lake</u>: There is sufficient shallow water available in the basin to be attractive to ducks and geese.</p>	<p>There was a significant migration of Canada and snow geese at the end of last week. Goose numbers were good on Friday and Saturday. Those numbers diminished noticeably by Sunday but have recovered some in the past couple of days. Many of our cranes left the area last week. Wood ducks are BWT are less abundant in the area than a week ago, whereas numbers of wigeon and ring-necks have increased. Mallards are scattered throughout the area with some concentration occurring in Roseau Lake.</p> <p>It will be breezy and seasonably warm this weekend with west winds dominating. Temperatures turn cooler early next week with winds from the northwest.</p>	<p>Access to river and pool hunting areas with boats is good.</p> <p>Hunting pressure last weekend was light; as with opening weekend, participation on Sunday was affected by rainy conditions. Hunters took 3.0 ducks/hunter on Saturday, but success plummeted to 1.0 ducks/hunter on Sunday. Teal and ring-necks dominated the bag with a good representation of mallards and wigeon taken as well. Hunters were few and far between after the weekend; those that were out reported limited success.</p>
Thief Lake WMA	<p>Rain over the last two weeks has brought the lake to target level. Access and cover are good.</p> <p>Wet conditions in the fields have stalled harvest and tillage, but drying conditions will start combines rolling again.</p>	<p>An aerial survey this week showed that redhead numbers have increased noticeably since the last report. Some cans, scaup and bufflehead were noted on the flight.</p> <p>The ground goose count was truncated due to fog, but it is perceived that goose numbers have declined since last week.</p>	<p>Bag checks have ranged from 2.0 to 3.2 ducks per hunter per day over the last week. Bags were heavy to ring-necks early, with a variety of species comprising the remainder of the bag including good numbers of teal. The most recent check has redheads number one in the bag followed by ring-necks.</p> <p>Reduced goose numbers are reflected in reduced use and success in the CHZ.</p>

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Northeast			
Cloquet	Water levels are well above average throughout Pine, Carlton and, Southern St. Louis Counties. Wild rice and other emergent vegetation remain in fair condition. Wild rice is relatively abundant.	Mallards and wood ducks remain in the area. Ring-neck ducks and common mergansers have also been observed but not in large numbers. Canada geese are abundant and numbers are increasing.	The majority of Carlton County was closed to waterfowl hunting this week (central zone). Hunting pressure was low throughout Northern Carlton County and Southern St. Louis County.
North central			
Grand Rapids	Very good, water everywhere, Wild rice abundant.	Wet period, No change from last week, More Ring necks slowly arriving. Many small goose flocks still in the area.	Rather slow activity, average harvest. Hunting pressure light during the week.
Brainerd	Lakes, ponds and rivers in the Brainerd Area remain well above average water levels due to the almost constant rain events. Wild rice is abundant in most locations. Many fields and otherwise dry potholes have water and are holding ducks. Small grain harvest is complete.	Canada geese are still abundant especially in the western portions of the area. Good numbers of Wood ducks and Mallards are still in the area. The Blue Winged Teal have mostly left.	Overall the hunting pressure in the area was very light. Hunters harvested good numbers of wood ducks and mallards but no limits were observed. Most admitted seeing good numbers.
Aitkin	<p>Because rainfall in the area has continued rivers and lakes are at above average levels. Sheet water is common in fields and vehicle access may be difficult on low maintenance roads and undeveloped parking areas. Try to reduce rutting.</p> <p>Wild rice levels were normal to exceptional on most suitable waterbodies and the stands are still holding together.</p>	<p>Ring-necked duck presence has increased and we heard reports of a few scaup and redheads in the bag. Blue-winged teal numbers sound like they have dropped. Mallards, wood ducks and green-winged teal still most common. Canada Goose numbers are normal.</p> <p>Good numbers of birds have been observed using flooded fields and rice paddies.</p>	Hunter reports have generally been positive. It sounded like most areas had a similar or slightly higher number of hunters last weekend after a warm and rainy opener

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Park Rapids	Area water levels have come up with the recent heavy rains with some flooding in the southern part of the area. The wild rice is still standing providing good food and cover. Harvest progress has slowed in area fields with all the rain, but some soybean harvest has started.	We have seen a break in the recent wet pattern and a return to more seasonal temperatures. This weekend is forecasted to have highs around 60 degrees and lows around 40. With no major cold fronts, we haven't seen many new birds move into the area, except for a small buildup of coots and ring-necks.	Reports from the first couple weekends indicated average success with mostly teal and wood ducks in the bag. Participation has been hampered by rain and storms lately. Area goose hunters continue to have success in the fields.
Rice Lake NWR	Lots of standing wild rice	Large numbers of mallards and ring-necked ducks present	No waterfowl hunting allowed at Rice Lake NWR
West central			
Crookston	All small ponds are maintaining good water levels. Bean Harvest has continued again as fields have dried out. Tillage on the small grain fields have continued and is about 60% complete.	<p>Migration for ducks is slowly picking up with decent wood duck and teal numbers in the area. Ring-necks continue to be seen using some of the lakes. There are still scattered mallards and gadwalls being reported.</p> <p>The geese continue to migrate in and are increasing in numbers in the area. There should be plenty of opportunity to harvest a goose.</p> <p>The weather is expected to be warm and mild this weekend with a cooling trend early next week. Highs are expected in the 60's with lows in the upper 30's and lower 40's. With no rain expected in the near future.</p>	Hunter activity is pretty slow with mixed results. Majority of the bags were gadwalls, teal and some mallards.
Glenwood	With most of the work area seeing more than 3.5 inches of rain this week water levels have continued to rise with most wetland water levels now outside of the full pool mark. Some sheet water opportunities might be developing with private lands having the best opportunities.	Some early migrants are still hanging on with the lack of disturbance with the season being closed this week. I am not seeing any large push of new ducks but have seen a slight increase in goose numbers. It has been wet and cool pushing some of the local early migrants out but with the lack of disturbance again I think some have stuck around.	Season opens back up this weekend and I expect that we will see some success as the local ducks have had the week off from disturbance.

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Detroit Lakes	<p>Wetland conditions remain good. 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, only 10% complete. Corn harvest has yet to begin.</p>	<p>Three inches of rain fell over the weekend, most has soaked in but we are starting to see some standing water in the fields. The forecast for this weekend is for partly sunny skies, south/west winds, and highs of 60.</p> <p>No significant migrations of birds have been noted this week except for continued coot build up on area lakes, a few redheads moving in, and a trickling of Canada geese. A few blue-winged teal remain, but most have headed south or will have by the weekend. Mallards, wood ducks, and ring-necks remain the most common species in the area. Some early season migrators; widgeon and gadwall are also present in small numbers.</p>	<p>Second weekend success was fair across the work area. Local, gun shy mallards, blue-winged teal, and wood ducks were around in small numbers, but the lack of shooting indicated most have found safe places to hang out after daybreak. Overall success was ~1 duck/hunter the second weekend. Goose numbers remain low in the area.</p>
Central			
Carlos Avery WMA	2.5 to 4 inches of rain this week has raised water levels in most pools.	Generally warm weather has kept the birds in the area. A minor cold front went through after the rain stopped on Tuesday. No survey this week, but blue-winged teal were still present on Tuesday.	Hunting continued to be good through the first week of the season for teal, wood ducks, and mallards.
Cambridge	Soybean harvest is just starting and corn silage is also being cut. Wetlands, shallow lakes and rivers are well above average with the rainfall this week.	Nearly 5" rain fell in a 2 day period. Large flocks of geese continue to reside in the area along with good numbers of blue winged teal and wood ducks.	Cambridge Area is in the central zone with waterfowl hunting closed until October 7.

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Sherburne NWR	With over 4.5 inches of rain falling on the refuge in the last week, water levels have increased significantly on the St. Francis River and surrounding wetlands. Ducks were seen taking advantage of the fuller (water) than usual small wetlands.	There has been an increase in Ring-necked Duck and Mallard numbers. Wood Duck numbers are similar to last week. The weekend forecast shows rain Friday night into early Saturday afternoon with clear skies on Sunday. Daytime temps will average in the high-50s with overnight lows in the mid-40s.	No report on hunter success or activity.
Mille Lacs WMA	Recent rains have significantly raised water levels and river flows. Access should not be a problem. Rice is stilling standing in most wetlands but most seeds have dropped	Local duck numbers remain about the same but hunting pressure has educated them. The majority of birds observed have been wood ducks and mallards. Some BWT remain in the area. No new influx of birds has been observed.	Pressure was moderate last weekend with most groups seeing some action.
Sauk Rapids	3-5 inches of rain fell from 10/2-3. Wetlands are full to overflowing. Crop harvest is at a standstill for some time.	Teal and wood ducks are fewer in number. There has been a noticeable increase in coots on larger shallow lakes. Some ring-necks observed in last few days on Pelican Lake.	<p>Hunters that are scouting continue to have good success. Canada goose hunters are having a very good year.</p> <p>Flooded crop fields are in the picture this year. Expect to see waterfowl response.</p>

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Southwest			
Lac qui Parle WMA	<p>Lots of water moving through the reservoirs as a result of recent rains. The water level at Marsh Lake is about 3 feet above normal (for early Oct) and predicted to crest very soon at 941.5 feet. Upper Lac qui Parle Lake is nearly 5 feet above normal/winter pool (= 934 feet) at present and still rising. Level there is predicted to crest at 941 feet next week.</p> <p>Bean harvest, which had just started, is being delayed by wet field conditions. No corn harvesting activity yet.</p>	<p>A minor influx of ducks and geese was noted since the last report. Many local ducks have dispersed to flooded ag field sites. Congregations of ducks can still be found, however, on wetlands with adequate food sources.</p> <p>More rain is forecast for Friday (6 Oct) and Friday night. But for the upcoming weekend, expect sunny skies, westerly winds and max temps in the mid to high 60s. Expect gusty winds on Saturday – and light winds on Sunday.</p>	<p>Compared to opening weekend, hunting activity in the Marsh Lake area dropped off noticeably during the second weekend. Hunting success, based on a few hunting reports and a small bag check sample, was lower than observed on the opening weekend and probably best described as moderate. Hunters were taking primarily dabbling ducks and especially mallards and teal. A few parties were getting mixed bags of ducks and geese.</p>
Willmar	<p>Very wet conditions prevail with “new” wetlands showing up everywhere. Many flooded areas available in standing crop, hay and grass fields. Conditions for waterfowl use are excellent. Crop harvest of any kind is at a stand-still with more rain on the way.</p>	<p>A slight, minor movement of pintail, gadwall, and widgeon noted in parts of the area last Friday. A couple high flocks of CG also noted. Coot numbers have built to high numbers on a few lakes. Very few diving ducks at present. The weather forecast is calling for more rain beginning on Thursday of this week all the way into Saturday. Highs are to be in the 50s, with west winds as the next front passes through.</p>	<p>Last weekend was predictably much slower in hunter participation and success rates. Some scattered harvest of wood ducks, teal, and a few geese, but in general quite slow. It rained all day Sunday with a stiff SE wind, contributing to the slow activity. Hunters should be scouting for those newly flooded areas in fields as possible waterfowl hunting hot-spots.</p> <p>*This area is presently in a no-hunting split in the season. Season re-opens on Saturday morning.</p>

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Slayton	Received 3+ in. of rain since last report. Wetlands and rivers are high. Soybean harvest has started but has been delayed due to heavy rains.	Mostly local ducks.	Season closed. (season split)
Redwood Falls	Wetlands are full and numerous areas of flooded cropland are present. Virtually no soybean or corn harvest has taken place, and no tillage except on sweet corn and pea fields.	Birds quickly abandoned wetlands that were heavily hunted. Sheet water areas from recent heavy rainfall events are holding ducks currently, but permanent basins currently have very low numbers of ducks.	Hunting season is currently closed but will reopen October 14.

Waterfowl Count Data, week of October 2, 2017

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	10/4	50	NS	3,100	3,000	12,000	NS	15,000	56% RN, 34% RED, 5% CAN, 1% MAL, 1% SCP, 1% WIG	18,000	
Sherburne NWR	10/3	15	85	860	3,800	6,400	6,300	17,000	46% WD, 26% RN, 23% MAL, 2% GAD, 1% BWT, 1% HOOD	20	
Rice Lake NWR	10/5	165	1,900	NS	50	217,000	NS	13,000	93% RN, 7% MAL	2,100	
Murray/Lincoln county WMAs	10/5	2	60	50	170	100	100	50	94% BWT, 6% MAL	300	
Lac qui Parle WMA	10/5		500	300	300						

^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.