



Minnesota Waterfowl Migration and Hunting Report, Sept. 20, 2018

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 2018. 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.

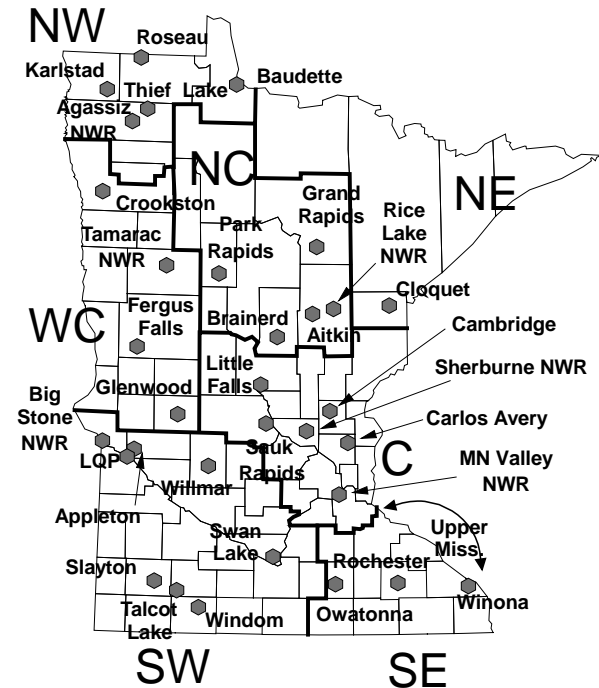
General: 20 September 2018

Duck hunters should expect to see good numbers of ducks present in most areas on opening weekend 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 should be more common in the north zone. Some migrant green-winged teal and ring-necked ducks have been noted this week.

The number of breeding ducks in Minnesota was 9% above last year's estimate and 12% above the long-term average. In the continental waterfowl surveys, total duck abundance was 13% lower than last year but 17% above the long-term average. Waterfowl production (number of young hatched) was thought to be good in Minnesota based on anecdotal field reports.

The early September goose season was poor to fair statewide. The late spring and April snowstorms negatively impacted nesting Canada geese so goose production was low. Some molt migrant geese have returned to the state over the past week which should improve goose hunting success. These are non-breeding and unsuccessful geese that migrate to Canada in early summer to molt (replace their flight feathers) and return to Minnesota in September.

Water levels are fairly dry in the northern portion of the state but good across most of the rest of the state so access should not be an issue for most hunters. With the heavy rains this week, many areas in southern Minnesota will have flooded areas in fields that should be very attractive to ducks. Wild rice production was fair this year, with poor rice production on lakes mainly in the NE. Small grain harvest is complete and some soybean harvest has started.



In recent years, about 90,000 state waterfowl stamps have been sold; based on waterfowl hunter surveys, about 50,000 hunters are expected to participate this weekend. Goose hunter numbers during the September season (23,000) were lower than last year (26,500) and the lowest on record.

Temperatures on opening day are expected to be near 60 in the north and mid-60s in the south with southerly winds. Below average temperatures are expected most of next week.

| Waterfowl season reminders | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | Duck season dates | Goose season dates |
| North Zone | Sept. 22-Nov. 20 | Sept. 22-Dec. 21 |
| Central Zone | Sept. 22-Sept. 30 and Oct. 6-Nov. 25 | Sept. 22-Sept. 30 and Oct. 6-Dec. 26 |
| South Zone | Sept. 22-Sept. 30 and Oct. 13-Dec. 2 | Sept. 22-Sept. 30 and Oct. 13-Jan. 2 |

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, 2 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. 5 and until sunset the remainder of the season. Motorized decoys are prohibited statewide through Saturday October 6th and on state wildlife management areas the entire season. The sandhill crane season is open through Oct. 21 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 2018 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 and Roseau Lake WMA | <p>Drought-like conditions persist. Roseau Lake as well as many small wetlands and streams are dry. The Roseau River is very low and can be waded across in most spots. Wild rice in Pool 3 is excellent, and rice in Pool 2 is good. Submersed aquatic plant growth is dense in most pools, where water levels are about 1 foot below full. Grain stubble is abundant in the local area.</p> | <p>The first significant influx of Canada geese and mallards occurred on 9/7, and there have been notable movements since then about every 2-4 days. Goose and mallard numbers are good, and wood duck, ringnecks, and teal numbers are decent in some places. Sandhill crane numbers peaked around Labor Day and appear to have diminished some over the past week. Highs should be in the 50s for opening weekend with a slight chance of rain and winds out of the north and east.</p> | <p>Access to hunting spots via watercraft on the river is expected to be difficult given the shallow water. Access on the pools should be good. Hunters should bring along a push pole to assist in navigating through the dense submersed vegetation and rice stands.</p> |
| Thief Lake WMA | <p>Dry conditions since early May have resulted in falling lake levels and we are currently 9" below target level. Most of the small wetlands and ditches in the area are dry and birds are concentrating on the lake.</p> <p>Small grain harvest is complete and approximately 60% of the beans have been harvested.</p> <p>The CHZ along the west and northwest sides of the lake have been mowed.</p> | <p>The first migrant Canadas were noticed arriving in the area September 7.</p> | <p>Nine vehicles were counted around the lake on Youth Waterfowl day, and the participating youths checked averaged 3.4 ducks per hunter. Blue-winged teal were most abundant in the bag, followed by mallards. Dabblers made up 70% of the bag.</p> |

| Area | Habitat conditions | Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions | Hunter Activity and Success |
|----------------------|---|---|--|
| Northeast | | | |
| Cloquet area | Water levels are considered average throughout Pine, Carlton, and Southern St. Louis Counties. Conservation partners in the Cloquet area fly an annual wild rice survey. The survey indicated that the rice crop is poor to fair throughout the area. | Local mallards, blue-winged teal, and wood ducks are common. Canada geese flocks are also common. No obvious migrant flocks have been observed at this time. Rain and high winds are expected Thursday into Friday morning. Perhaps this weather will move some birds. | Hunter's should expect good access throughout the area as water levels are average and wild rice is down. Hunter's should expect local ducks to make up the majority of what is harvested this weekend. Good Luck Hunters! |
| North central | | | |
| Grand Rapids | Good, Recent rains filled backwater ponds again, after drought period. Rice beds available. | Expected arrival of cold front mid-week should consolidate and move birds around. Wood ducks common followed by ringed necks and mallards at this time. | Early goose season rather slow in area, late goose hatch this year may have reduced numbers and kept birds spread out in smaller flocks. Young of the year geese late and just getting their new wing feathers. |
| Park Rapids | Water levels on area lakes and wetlands are generally below average but higher water can be found in parts of the work area where beavers have been active. The wild rice crop was generally very good in the area. Small grain harvest is complete, while edible bean and corn silage harvest is just getting started in some areas. | Temperatures for the weekend opener will remain cooler with highs in the 50s and low 60s with showers holding off until early Monday morning. Mallards, wood ducks, and some ring-necks are present, but duck reproduction and current numbers appear to be below average. Molt migrant Canada geese are starting to show up. Our locally bred flocks contributed to a fairly decent beginning to the early goose season this year. | Reports from the youth waterfowl hunt on Sept. 8 th were limited, but some had success finding geese and a few ducks in areas with wild rice. The early goose hunters had a successful season seeing and harvesting local birds the first week of the season. Hunting was a little slow the last week of early goose. |
| Mille Lacs WMA | Overall habitat conditions are good. Wild rice did not do well on area wetlands overall. Water levels are above average for this time of year. Access should be good. | Good number of local birds have been observed in area lakes and wetlands. Species include Blue-wing teal, Wood Ducks and Mallards. | The few numbers of young hunters observed out on September 8th had lots of opportunities. Harvested waterfowl was 1.5 ducks per hunter. |

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| Aitkin | Water levels are good throughout most of the area. Some forest roads and trails are still closed or difficult to navigate due to storm damage. Boat access will likely be easier this year because rice cover is greatly reduced. Wild rice production is much lower than last year due to stresses from summer storm events. We had total or near total failure on several shallow lakes. There is still duck rice on some shallow lakes but cover is light. | Light migration of ducks has been occurring for a couple weeks as weather conditions allow. Canada goose flocks are becoming more prevalent as we near opener. | Early goose hunting has been mixed, with field hunters having better success. Hunters during the Youth Waterfowl season reported teal and wood ducks in the bag. |
| West central | | | |
| Fergus Falls | Most wetlands are in good shape with timely rains throughout the summer. Small grains harvest is completed and soybean and corn harvest has begun. Wild rice is good this year in lakes and streams where it historically occurs. | Some molt migrant geese have returned but are still spread out. No migrations of new ducks, locals are in the area and concentrated in pockets. Traditional early season areas with good habitat are holding ducks. Some rain is expected mid-week, but the opener should be warm and dry. | Very few reports of early season geese or youth duck hunters. Those going for early season geese saw limited action. |
| Lake Christina | The lake is in fairly poor shape right now and trending downward. Some pockets of good submerged vegetation are present, but is mostly sparse throughout the lake. Once again, the bulrushes are in good shape providing cover for hunters. The lake is currently in drawdown, but only a few inches below normal. Without significant rains, the lake will continue to drop throughout the season in an effort to improve habitat conditions in coming seasons. Boats should have no problem accessing the lake early in the season, but later in the season it will be worth a scouting trip before trying to launch. Please remember that most of the lake east of the bulrushes is Migratory Waterfowl Feeding and Resting Area, and off limits to motorized boats. | Several thousand coots have begun staging on the lake, but no real numbers of ducks yet. This may change throughout the week prior to opener with more northerly winds. Some local mallards, blue-winged teal and wood ducks have been using the lake lately though. Some local swans and geese have also been hanging around. | No early season reports from Lake Christina thus far. |

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|---------------|--|---|---|
| Glenwood | Water levels are high on most of the wetlands creating poor habitat conditions, but easy access | I had been seeing a good number of Blue wing teal and Wood ducks moving around with in the last two weeks, along with what appears to be a good reproduction year based on the number of broods observed over the course of the summer. Geese had a poor reproduction year so have been for the most part scarce across the work area for the September goose hunt and this will also be the case for the duck opener. Weather conditions have been wet over the last couple of months recharging the wetlands after no runoff from the snow melt. The extended forecast is calling for a pretty good chance of rain for several days out of the next week. | Almost no goose hunting activity for the early season. A few youth hunters did get out but I have not heard much for reports on success. Good luck this weekend. |
| Detroit Lakes | Wild Rice crop this year was decent, most is fairly deteriorated already this year around Detroit Lakes. Wetland and lake water levels are low, many small basins are dry or have a fringe of mud; access will be more difficult this year. Small grain harvest is completed. Bean harvest is 20% complete and going strong, some corn is even coming out already. | The forecast for the opener is for low 60s, up from the coldest days of the fall which just arrived. We lost a fair amount of blue-winged teal during the cold snap on Labor Day. Still a fair amount of blue-wings around, and some green-winged teal moved in recently. Locally raised mallards, wood ducks and ring-necks are around but scattered. Overall, duck numbers are down compared to the last few years in the DL area. Canada goose numbers are low compared to the last few years, but some new migrants have not been noted. | The early September Goose Season was poor by local accounts, a cold April which hampered production being the main driver. Hunting should improve as migrants move back down. With some scouting, hunters that participated in youth waterfowl day had good opportunities to harvest birds. Seemed like most kids had numerous opportunities to harvest a few birds and a number of limits were seen. Expecting a decent opener this year; hunters should spend time scouting as many basins are lower than normal and ducks are concentrated in the wetlands with better food. |

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|-------------------------|--|--|--|
| Central | | | |
| Carlos Avery WMA | Habitat conditions are very good at Carlos Avery WMA. This area avoided the heavy rains and flooding which hit many parts of MN this summer. The relatively stable water levels produced a wild rice crop that was the best in many years. The acorn crop from white oaks and burr oaks was tremendous this year. Parts of Pools 6 and 26 were sprayed in 2017 to reduce cattail and promote more beneficial vegetation. | Most water levels are about normal or slightly below. Pools 6 and 26 are still low from last year's dam replacements. The low water produced some excellent vegetation response. Significant rainfall is predicted on Thursday and should raise water levels. | Hunters should be aware that the wild rice may be thicker than in previous years which may limit visibility. Hunters should always mark downed birds carefully and retrieve birds immediately. Last year's duck hunting opener was the best in recent years at Carlos Avery and this year looks promising as well. |
| Sauk Rapids | Wetlands and shallow lakes are at average water levels. Central MN had good nesting conditions this summer. We observed above average brood numbers on area wetlands. Pelican Lake (Wright Co.) is getting closer to full drawdown and attracting more waterfowl and other water birds. Soybean harvest is just beginning. Corn silage cutting is nearing completion. Corn harvest will begin soon with corn maturing early this year. | Early goose season was poor this year, probably due to low goose recruitment as a late spring disrupted nesting. Molt migrants have just started returning from Canada which should improve hunting. There has been a fairly high build-up of blue-winged teal on some waters in the last several weeks along with local mallards. Wood duck numbers seem a little lower this year in central MN. Rainfall has generally been normal to slightly higher this summer. We have not had a frost yet with none forecasted in the immediate future. Coot numbers are building on Pelican Lake which is normal for this time of the year. | Fairly good reports have come out from the early youth waterfowl season. Anecdotal information from waterfowl hunters scouting area waters indicate some localized build-ups of blue-winged teal and green-winged teal. Numbers of trumpeter swans continue to climb in central Minnesota, although production this year looks to be below average from recent years. Use caution during duck season and know your target. Remember to keep safety in your thought process this season. Be mindful of guns in close quarters and wear PFDs in duck boats along with other safety considerations. |
| Sherburne NWR | Water levels on Long Pool will be very favorable for hunters; the pool is near max water levels. Good water levels on the St. Francis river as well. Birds are spending a lot of time in areas with good Wild Rice stands. | Green-winged teal have moved into the area. No large Mallard flocks yet, local birds mostly. Widgeon, Shovelers, and Pintails observed earlier in the week. Small flocks of Blue-winged Teal around. Sunny skies forecasted for the weekend with highs in mid-60s and lows in the high 40s. S and SE winds expected. | Nothing to report |

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|--------------------|--|---|---|
| Southwest | | | |
| Appleton | We've been on the dry side. No sheet water at this point, but traditional sloughs and shallow lakes still holding plenty of water. Shallower basins coming down and looking good for dabblers. Bean harvest will be starting before too long. | Nothing to note for migrations, but we've had encouraging reports and observations of local ducks all summer. We also expect a push from non-breeder Canada's any day. While the string of strong south winds and warm temps aren't helping to bring the geese down, it's keeping the teal and woodies here! | Early goose season has been slow. Participation in the youth season was light, but most that hunted had great success. |
| Nicollet/Swan Lake | <p>Area wetlands are in good to excellent condition due to ongoing precipitation, should be no access issues due to low water.</p> <p>With heavy rains this week, seasonal wetlands within crop fields will likely be holding water and spread out waterfowl with less concentration on larger feeding and resting lakes.</p> <p>Small grain and silage harvest is complete with soybean & corn harvest just beginning late last week prior to the rain.</p> | <p>Excellent numbers of wood ducks and moderate numbers of blue-winged teal have been observed in the Nicollet Area. Mallards may be down a bit due to the late spring nesting season.</p> <p>As of Thursday morning the Nicollet area has seen 2-3" of rainfall with additional heavy rain on the way before clearing Friday. Temps for opening weekend return to average, with forecasts in the mid 60's Saturday and low 70's Sunday with overnight lows in the 40's. Forecast calls for seasonal temps continuing into next week.</p> | Expect moderate to good hunting success in the Nicollet Area due to available wetland habitat and for those putting time in to scout locations with bird activity. |
| Redwood Falls | Wetlands are full and after the heavy rain this week flooded cropland is again abundant. Soybean harvest had started in earnest before the recent rain, with perhaps 5% out of the field, but the rain will delay harvest for the foreseeable future. | Heavy rain this week with westerly/southwesterly winds will give way to strong northwest winds and temperatures in the mid-50s on Friday. This will likely move many blue winged teal out of the area. Locally produced mallards and blue-winged teal are more abundant in the area than they have been in over a decade, and wood duck production was average. | Early Canada goose season was poor with little participation due to low numbers of resident geese. Youth waterfowl opener was also lightly attended, perhaps in part to above average temperatures. |
| Marshall | Wetlands are full to overflowing and also flooded areas of fields are holding ducks since wet conditions have persisted all summer. Small grain and corn silage harvest is complete. Soybean harvest just underway and now on hold due to recent heavy rains that will result in additional flooding. Vehicle access to sloughs and fields will be difficult in some areas due to wet and muddy conditions. | Good local duck production this year, but geese had smaller brood sizes. Some coot already rafting up. Area received over 4" rain this week, but weekend weather looks to be sunny and clear with highs around 70 and southerly winds around 10 mph. Low near 40 on Friday night so will feel like hunting weather! | Anticipate a good duck opener. Youth hunters had good action on Sept 8. Some green-winged teal were in the bag along with mallards, wood ducks, blue-winged teal and assorted others. Early goose season was hit and miss. Those with permission in the limited number of harvested small grain fields did very well. |

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|-------------------|--|---|--|
| Willmar | Wetlands and lakes holding good water levels. Corn and beans mostly untouched. Few small grain stubble fields in the area. Some | The past weekend was extremely warm for this time of year, 90. So far this week temps. were near normal, with rain predicted through Thursday then clear on Friday and Saturday with temps. in the 60s. Winds predicted to be 10 mph from the SE. Large numbers of coots have shown up at their usual gathering places. Teal, wood ducks, and mallard numbers look fair to good. Fewer geese in the area than last several years. | <p>September goose hunt was not well attended by hunters. However, a few groups of hunters locked up small grain stubble fields and had some decent shooting for a couple days. As noted, goose numbers are well down from the last several years.</p> <p>The Special Youth Hunt also saw few hunters in the field. There were exceptions with some good, albeit spotty, success. The typical teal, mallard and wood duck in the bag.</p> |
| Slayton | Wetlands are in good to fair condition after several flooding events this summer. All wetlands are full. | No migration observed, only local ducks so far. We are forecasted to get 2-3+ in. of rain this week before duck opener, then turning cooler and dry for opening day. | N/A |
| Lac qui Parle WMA | Some corn and soybean harvest has started. Most Silage harvest is complete. 2-4 inches of rain are forecasted for 9/19-9/20 so some flooded fields and temporary and seasonal wetlands may be holding water by the weekend. Water levels on both Marsh lake and Lac qui Parle lake are currently normal. | <p>No major influx of new ducks this week. Local populations of Wood duck, BW teal, and Mallard are good across the unit. Some molt migrant geese started to show up late Monday 9/17, but numbers are still low overall.</p> <p>Weather this week is mainly rain 2-4 inches possible with temperatures in the low to mid 60's. Saturday is Mostly sunny with highs in the upper 60's with south southeast winds at 5-15 MPH.</p> | <p>Early goose season success was mixed. Some parties experience better hunts than others. Success came down to scouting and gaining permission for the few areas that had good numbers of birds.</p> <p>Youth waterfowl day seemed to be fair. Some parties had good success mainly teal and wood ducks.</p> <p>Waterfowl hunters please note that construction continues on the Marsh Lake Ecosystem Restoration Project. Access is restricted in some areas due to construction. Lac qui Parle County Road 47 (South Marsh Lake Dam Road) and Swift County Road 268 (Cabin Site Road) are closed to public travel.</p> |
| Southeast | | | |
| Rochester | Water levels good. Less than 5% of soybeans harvested with some corn silage completed. | Lots of wood ducks and geese in the area. Scattering of blue-winged teal and mallards. | |

Waterfowl Count Data, week of September 17, 2018

| 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 | 9/20 | 40 | 2,100 | NS | 1,800 | 10,000 | NS | 6,500 | 38% RN, 22% RED, 13% MAL, 8% PIN, 6% BWT, 4% WIG, 3% CAN, 3% GWT, 2% GAD, 1% SCP | 5,000 | |
| Sherburne NWR | 9/20 | 45 | 5,300 | NS | 900 | 13,000 | NS | 2,500 | 60% WD, 26% GWT, 9% MAL, 2% BWT, 2% RN | 100 | |
| Carlos Avery WMA | 9/18 | 5 | 10 | NS | 40 | 1,700 | NS | 1,300 | 35% BWT, 32% MAL, 22% WD, 12% GWT | 30 | |
| Murray/Lincoln county WMAs | 9/19 | 13 | 20 | NS | 30 | 400 | NS | 350 | 82% MAL, 18% BWT | 100 | |
| Lac qui Parle WMA | 9/19 | | 400 | NS | 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, 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.