



Minnesota Waterfowl Migration and Hunting Report, Sept. 27, 2018

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 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: 27 September 2018

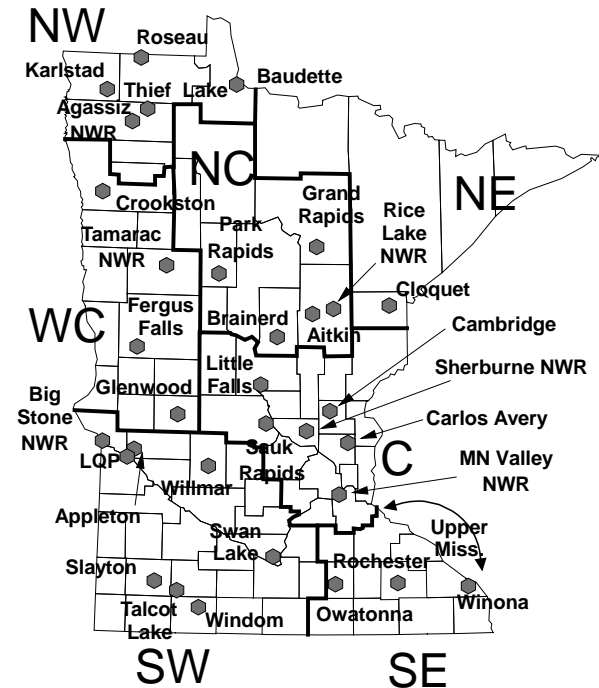
Duck hunters had a good opening weekend across the state. Blue-winged teal, wood ducks, and mallards were most common birds in hunters' bags in most areas; ring-necked ducks and green-winged teal were also common on some lakes.

The number of ducks/hunter at different locations across the state on opening day in 2018 compared to 2017 was: Lac qui Parle WMA (2.6 vs. 2.6); Swan Lake (Nicollet county) (2.0 vs. 2.0); Thief Lake WMA (3.3 vs. 3.5); Big Rice (Remer) (1.8 vs. 1.4); Big White Oak (2.1 vs. 1.9); Mud Goose WMA (2.7 vs. 2.2); Roseau WMA (2.0 vs. 2.4); Carlos Avery WMA (2.4 vs. 2.6); Canosia WMA (0.8 vs. 1.0). Both Thief Lake WMA and Carlos Avery WMA recorded their 2nd highest ducks/hunter on opening day on record while most other areas were above their long-term averages.

The number of state waterfowl stamps sold through opening weekend was 62,177, which was 4% lower than last year's total of 64,576 and the lowest number on record.

Water levels remain fairly dry in the northern portion of the state but good to excellent across most of the rest of the state. Many areas in southern Minnesota still have flooded areas in fields from the rains last week that should continue to be attractive to ducks. Small grain harvest is complete and some corn and soybean harvest has started.

Hunters should see increased species diversity this week as more migrant ducks move into the state. Green-winged teal, wigeon, gadwall, and redheads should become more common and larger numbers of ring-necked ducks should be present by next week.



The weather outlook for this weekend calls for highs in the 40s in northern Minnesota with lows near freezing. In southern Minnesota, highs should be in the mid 50s with lows in the 40s. The long-term forecast calls for daytime high temperatures to remain 5-10 degrees below average with considerable rain next week and some chance for snow in northern areas.

The waterfowl season in the Central and South zones closes on Sunday.

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	Conditions remain dry. Grain stubble is abundant locally. The wild rice in Pools 2 and 3 is attracting birds. Water levels in most pools are on the shallow side, thus making for dense growth of submerged vegetation. The Roseau River remains very low.	<p>Duck and goose numbers change almost daily given the cool, unsettled weather. Canada goose numbers peaked opening weekend, but have diminished some as of this writing. There are still strong numbers of wood ducks and blue-winged teal in the area, and ringnecks, gadwalls, and wigeon picked up recently.</p> <p>Only isolated flocks of sandhill cranes remain. The first snow geese appeared last Sunday; few stayed.</p> <p>Highs in the 40s are forecast for the next few days with frost possible overnight. Gusty NW winds on Thursday and Friday will likely move some birds.</p>	<p>Access on the river remains difficult, but access in all of the pools is good.</p> <p>Hunters took 2.0 ducks/hunter on opening day followed by 2.8 ducks/day on Sunday. Mixed bags are common with teal, mallards, ringnecks, wigeon, and wood ducks common in the bag.</p> <p>The Canada goose take was 0.5 birds/hunter on opening weekend.</p>
Thief Lake WMA	We have not received much precipitation over the last week and the lake level is currently 8.5" below target level.	<p>There are an estimated 2750 Canada geese using the lake.</p> <p>Winds will switch from the NW to the SW as we enter the weekend.</p>	<p>Car counts opening weekend were up from last year. Hunters averaged 2.6 ducks per hunter per day for opening weekend. Ringnecks were number one in the bag, followed by green-winged teal and mallards. Hunters on Monday averaged 1.9 ducks per hunter. Approximately 70% of the ducks harvested have been dabblers.</p>

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North central			
Grand Rapids	Very good	Arrival and concentrations of new and local birds into the area. Good numbers of Mallards present, wood ducks and teal still around. Additional ring-necks are trickling in. Mixed bag currently available to hunters. Cool temps, good weather for hunting.	Opening day bag checks at Big Rice, Mud Goose and Big White Oak, averaged 1.8, 2.7, and 2.1 ducks/hunter, respectively. This was a small increase from last year on all areas. Mallard, Blue winged teal, and Ring-Necks were top three birds in the bag. Reports of limits of wood ducks in backwater areas, and Mallards in larger rice waters.
Mille Lacs WMA	Habitat conditions remain good. Most rice seed has fallen and stands are beginning to thin. Access remains good across the area.	Weather has been cool with scattered pockets of rain. No influx of birds has been observed. Some teal have likely begun moving south.	Opener reports were mixed and ranged from very good to very poor on area wetlands. Primary species in the bag were Blue-winged teal with some ringers, mallards and wood ducks as well.
Rice Lake NWR	Wild rice is all out of the heads.	Larger numbers of mallards and ring-necked ducks this week.	No waterfowl hunting allowed on Rice Lake NWR.
Park Rapids	Area water levels have come up slightly in some areas with the recent rains. The wild rice is still standing providing good food and cover. Harvest progress has slowed in some portions of the work area with the recent rains, but some soybean harvest has started.	We might see a break in the recent wet pattern over the weekend before it starts up again early Monday morning. This weekend is forecasted to have highs in the upper 40s and lows near or below freezing. We haven't seen many new birds move into the area, but that may change this coming week.	Reports from the first couple weekends indicated average to below average success with mostly teal and wood ducks in the bag. Participation has been hampered by rain this week. Area goose hunters continue to have some success in the fields.
West central			
Fergus Falls	Wetlands generally in good condition in terms of access, only small grain harvest complete so limited field hunting opportunities	Weather was comfortable for hunting. Noted recent influx of green winged teal.	Conservation Officers from Clay and Otter Tail counties reported good opener with mainly blue-winged teal and mallards in bag. Some green-winged teal and wood ducks also taken. Hunter numbers similar to recent years.

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Crookston	<p>Dry conditions prevailed later in the summer, but timely fall rains have filled up the smaller ponds with sufficient water. Larger lakes have plenty of water.</p> <p>Small grain harvest has been complete for a few weeks now. Soybean harvest is well underway and is about 60% complete. Corn harvest has just begun this past week.</p>	<p>Migration for ducks has been slow. Mostly wood ducks and teal can be found. There are scattered pockets of locally raised mallards and divers. Goose migration has increased lately and will give hunters plenty of opportunities.</p> <p>Weather this week will remain cool with highs in the upper 40's and lows in the lower 30's. Chances of rain almost every day will continue. There is even a small chance of snow Friday evening.</p>	<p>Opening weekend brought a mixed bag of results. There were some reports of limits of teal and mallards being harvested.</p>
Detroit Lakes	<p>Wetlands remain in good shape. Two inches of rain fell early this week, which was welcomed. Rice beds are still in good shape, but less dense than the past couple of years.</p> <p>Small grain harvest and tillage is complete. Soybean harvest has stalled at 25% with recent rains. Corn harvest began with only 5% harvested.</p>	<p>Temperatures are below normal for this time of year. First frost is expected Friday night with temps staying in the low 50s through the weekend.</p> <p>Some new birds have arrived in the area, mainly widgeon, gadwall, and ringnecks. Coot are starting to stage on area lakes and Canada goose numbers are building. Blue-winged teal are largely gone with green wings taking their place. Reports of scaup and goldeneye in opening weekend bags which is unusual. I expect a good influx of birds with the incoming front but so far we haven't seen much.</p>	<p>Opener success was better than expected here in the Detroit Lakes Area. Most public areas had numerous parties of hunters utilizing them. Talked to numerous parties that had their limits of birds, and everyone seemed to have gotten some shooting. Mallards, green-winged teal, wood ducks, and blue-winged teal were most prevalent in the bag, but also saw decent numbers of ringnecks and gadwall. Some hunters also found a few geese.</p> <p>Overall, hunters did well on opener here in the DL area.</p>
Central			
Carlos Avery WMA	<p>Recent rains have increased water levels making access and navigation in many of the rice pools easier. Food remains abundant</p>	<p>Cold fronts have moved some teal out but have also moved some new Canada geese into the area. Continued cool weather is forecasted going into the weekend.</p>	<p>Hunting activity was high again this opener and has remained high all week. Bag checks show 2.4 birds per hunter opening weekend with teal and mallards making up the majority of the harvest.</p>

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Cambridge	Most small grains have been harvested in the area. Wetlands and shallow lakes are at average to above average levels going into the hunting season. Wild Rice associated with a river system was flooded and thus set back limiting stands in the back waters. Wild Rice in shallow bodies of water in Cambridge Area are poor because of heavy rain. Bumper crop of soybeans and corn – no harvest has taken place.	Decent flocks of Canada Geese have been observed throughout the Cambridge area feeding in cut small grain fields and roosting in adjacent wetlands. All be it lower numbers of local geese because of the limited nesting areas of deep spring snow. Local wood ducks, mallards, and teal are abundant.	Opening day we had decent weather with a good turnout of hunters with wood ducks and teal being the main species in the bag. This coming weekend looks to be another good weekend weather wise. Good Luck!
Sauk Rapids	Wetlands are at average water levels. Bean harvest underway with corn just starting.	Ring-necks and redheads starting to show up in higher numbers. Teal and wood ducks are still in the area. More coots building. Witnessed a very large flock on Lake Minnewaska feeding in sago beds which is always a good sign for future diver use. More molt migrant Canada geese filtering in which has improved field hunting. We may see our first frost this Friday night. Cooler weather is forecasted through the weekend.	Opening weekend success was generally good with numerous reports of 2-4 ducks/hunter. Teal, mallards and wood ducks were reported most often. The weather was not exactly “ducky”, but it was good for family hunting groups with more young folks in the marshes. Pelican Lake (Wright Co) was especially good again this year for blue-winged teal with some mallards and wood ducks mixed in. More diver duck species have been observed in last few days. Reminder that the Central Zone season closes for 5 days starting October 1.

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Sherburne NWR	Water levels remain favorable on Long Pool and the St. Francis River. Waterfowl are utilizing a variety of different wetlands – especially those with a good wild rice crop.	Mallard and Ring-neck numbers have increased. Mixed bag of puddlers still seen as well as a good number of Wood Ducks. A mix of sun and clouds forecasted for the weekend. Widespread frost for the area expected Friday night. Lows in the 30s and highs in the low to mid-50s with a slight chance of rain on Sat and Sun afternoons.	Hunters reporting that they are seeing birds. No limits reported.
Southwest			
Appleton	It rained a bit, but not enough to change conditions other than to slow down bean harvest.	Chilly evenings likely moved some teal out, but we also had an influx of Canada geese. Cool, clouds and light rain ahead for the weekend.	Typical heavy hunting pressure on opening weekend that dropped off to nearly nothing come Monday. By most accounts, it was very good opener with success on mixed bags of birds, but mostly dabblers.
Marshall	Wetlands are full and numerous other flooded areas in fields which will delay crop harvest. Soybean harvest had just started before the heavy rain last week. Vehicle access to sloughs and fields will continue to be difficult in some areas due to wet and muddy conditions.	Most of our area had 5.5” rain leading up to the opener so birds were more widely dispersed to flooded fields and seasonal wetlands. Some mallard flocks and molt migrant geese were observed. Still good numbers and diversity of ducks in the area. Good opener weather without mosquitoes this year. Mostly NW winds this week and cool temps. Widespread frost expected Sat. morning and chance of showers with light winds through the weekend.	Good participation and mixed success. Scouting was key as birds moved as result of heavy rains that provided flooded areas right before the opener. Some reports of limits while others were disappointed. Birds in the bag were mostly teal, wood ducks and mallards, but also gadwall, shoveler, redheads, pintail and a few geese taken.

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Nicollet/Swan Lake	<p>Area lakes and wetlands continue to have excess water due to heavy rains last week. Seasonal wetlands and flooded crop fields continue to hold some water but starting to dry out. River flows have increased since opening weekend, with the MN River in Henderson at minor flood stage forecasted through Saturday.</p> <p>Crop harvest is in full swing this week with many farmers switching to corn over beans which may not be sufficiently dry. Estimate 10-15% of corn harvested and 5% of beans.</p>	<p>No significant migration activity to report other than a notable increase in geese by opening weekend, presumably molt migrants returning to the area.</p> <p>Good numbers of blue-winged teal, wood ducks, and geese can still be found across the area and should continue to provide hunter opportunity. Scouting will be key as local birds will be spread out using newly-flooded areas and harvested crop fields.</p> <p>Forecast calls for continued cooler (seasonal) temps into next week with daytime highs in the mid 50's and lows in the 40's. Next week appears wet again with showers moving in by Sunday.</p>	<p>Opening weekend success was about average across the area. A good number of hunters were out and found a nice change from the typical 80-degree opener, with sunrise temps on Saturday in the low 40's. Reports indicate those hunting river bottoms and backwaters such as the MN River seemed to have the highest success rates overall.</p> <p>Swan Lake opening Saturday bag checks found an average of 1.99 ducks/hunter, down slightly but essentially unchanged from last year's 2.0 duck average. Per usual, Blue-winged teal made up the largest proportion of bag checks (55%), followed by wood ducks (15%), mallards (14%), redheads (9%), green-winged teal (5%), and ring-necks (2%). The Redhead proportion was a notable change as that species was absent in last year's bag checks.</p>

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Willmar	Water levels in area wetlands are excellent. A small amount of corn and soybeans have been harvested. Overall habitat conditions are good.	Weather for duck hunting over the opening weekend was great. Cool in the mornings, nice the rest of the day(s) with some wind to direct aerial traffic. Forecast calls for a cooling trend through the next several days with WNW winds and highs in the 50s. Slight chance of precipitation. Little in the way of migration noted except for a few more geese the last couple days. Some more movement should be expected with the NW wind.	Opening day of the duck season was well attended by hunters. A lot of shooting noted by COs and hunters. Hunter success was good with most hunters taking some birds. Some limits. Mostly the typical teal, mallards, and wood ducks in the bag with a smattering of other species. Goose action was slow in general, but there were some exceptions for those hunting the right spot. Most hunters were pleased with Day 1. Sunday, the action and success really dropped off. Fewer hunters as well. Activity will be slow now until some “new” birds show up.
Lac qui Parle WMA	Corn and soybean harvest has slowed due to rain received the last couple days. Silage harvest is complete. Most temporary and seasonal wetlands are holding water and wetlands and impoundments are full. Water levels on both Marsh Lake and Lac qui Parle lake are currently normal.	<p>No major movements of birds this week. BW teal and wood ducks were still present early this week. GW teal numbers starting to increase. Fair number of local Canada Geese in the area.</p> <p>Weather for this week is sunny to partly sunny with temps in the low 60’s and upper 50’s. Winds are generally from the northwest from 5-15 mph. The forecast for Saturday is calling for high near 53 with rain/snow chance. Wind out of the south becoming north northwest in the afternoon.</p>	<p>Opening day bag checks had 87 vehicles and 48 hunters were checked. Hunters had 2.63 ducks/hunter with BWT, GWT, Mallards, and Wood ducks being the most common in the bag. Overall impressions of duck opener were good. Most parties experienced good hunting with plenty of opportunities to harvest some ducks. Scouting as always plays an important role in success.</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>

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Southeast			
Rochester	Water levels good. Not much more field harvesting.	No new waterfowl moving in at this time. Plenty of Canada Geese present.	Bag harvest of 2-3 birds per hunter, with half teal and wood ducks in the bag. Scattering of mallards and pintails in bag limits.

Waterfowl Count Data, week of September 24, 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	9/26		2,800	2,100	3,100	NS	10,000				Ground count
Sherburne NWR	9/26	16	3,100	5,300	875	10,000	13,000	6,300	51% WD, 19% MAL, 12% RN, 6% GWT, 6% BWT, 2% WIG	300	
Rice Lake NWR	9/26	215	300	NS	NS	34,000	NS	NS	61% RN, 36% MAL, 2% WD	1,500	
Carlos Avery WMA	9/26	2	30	10	70	1,100	1,700	1,100	57% MAL, 19% WD, 10% BWT, 7% GWT, 7% RN	30	
Lac qui Parle WMA	9/26		400	400	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.