

Minnesota Waterfowl Migration and Hunting Report, Oct. 19, 2023

The following report is a compilation of state and federal wildlife manager reports and waterfowl surveys from across Minnesota. This is the 5th report for 2023. 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.

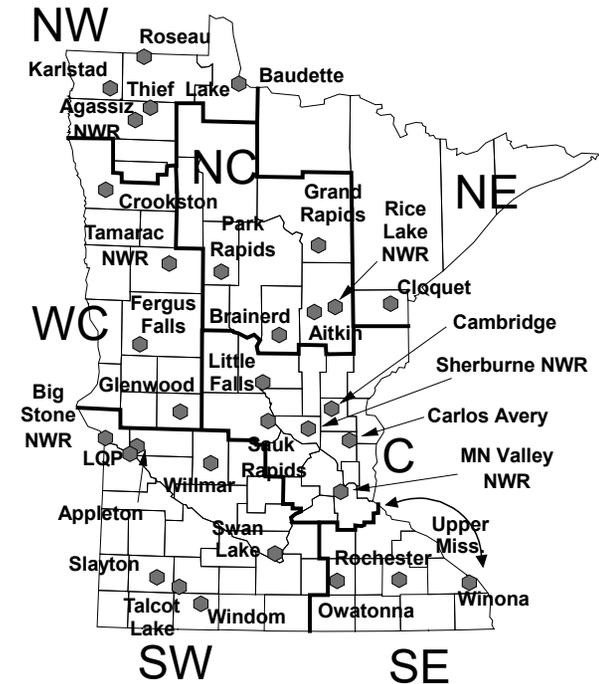
General: 19 October 2023

Duck hunting has been slow over the past week. Some migrant birds have moved into the state but scouting is paramount for hunter success.

Canada goose numbers have increased.

Wetland conditions have changed with recent rain events. Crop harvest is ahead of last year with more field hunting opportunities for hunters with access to private lands.

Temperatures are expected to be above average with highs near 60 statewide over the weekend. The extended forecast calls for a cold front 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. 7-Nov. 26	Sept. 23-Oct. 1 and Oct. 7-Dec. 27

Bag limits are 6 ducks/day, with no more than: 4 mallards (2 hens), 3 wood duck, 2 redhead, 2 canvasback, 2 black duck, 1 pintail. 1 scaup (bluebill) may be taken per day through Oct. 12 and 2/day the remainder of the season. Mergansers: 5 per day, no more than 2 may be hooded mergansers. Bag limits for geese are 5 dark geese/day.

Possession limits: 3 times the daily bag limit for all migratory birds.

Shooting hours begin ½ hour before sunrise until sunset the entire season. Motorized decoys are legal statewide for the entire season. Hunting geese overwater is legal statewide the entire season. The sandhill crane season is open Sept. 18 through Oct. 24 in the Northwest zone only. Bag limits are 2/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 2023 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			
<p>Roseau River and Roseau Lake WMA</p>	<p>Water levels remain low across the pools except Pool 1 West. Submergent vegetation remains dense but the wild rice is less formidable. The Roseau River is still extremely low and Roseau Lake is dry.</p> <p>Field foraging opportunities still exist and birds are taking advantage of them.</p>	<p>The past week has brought little change in weather or waterfowl numbers. Those using the WMA have found isolated pockets or the sanctuaries to rest and feed. Green-wing Teal, Mallards, and a mix if divers can be found along with a few modest flocks of Canada Geese and Snows.</p> <p>The forecast is calling for a continuation of mild temps but strong northwest winds Friday and Saturday switching to south Sunday.</p>	<p>Hunters averaged 1.9 ducks per hunter last weekend and only a handful of geese. Hunting pressure has been very light the last 7 days. Green-winged Teal made up the bulk of the harvest with a few Mallards and Ring-necked Ducks intermixed.</p> <p>Pool 1 West is full, whereas Pools 2 and 3 are 18-23 low. Pool 1 West's west launch has a cattail plug that efforts are underway to remove. It is passable. The navigation channel for pool 2 has a few obstructions but all are passable. Dense wild rice and/or shallow water hinders access in Pools 2 and 3; outboards are not recommended.</p> <p>The Roseau River is low; the river oxbows continue to hold shallow water and are limited to foot traffic.</p> <p>For more information on access, see Roseau River WMA's webpage.</p>

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Thief Lake WMA	<p>The lake is about 6” below target level. Access is somewhat difficult, especially on the south side of the lake. Even kayaks need to be walked out a bit from the boat ramps on the south side, but some people are using outboards there. Submerged weeds are thick throughout most of the lake and the bullrush cover is dense. Those with outboard motors are getting around.</p> <p>Please see the current state waterfowl hunting guide (available online) for current CHZ rules, as many have changed statewide. CHZ rules no longer apply to blinds 59-85 on the northeast side of the lake. Regular WMA rules now apply in that area.</p>	<p>Highs in the 60s are expected today and tomorrow, then it will start to cool down. Lows below freezing are expected starting Monday night, and highs in the 30s are predicted starting next Thursday. Ice is on the way! Northwest winds will pick up Friday evening into Saturday, but the temperatures won’t even drop down to average for this time of year until Monday. Most hunters report not seeing many birds. We seem to still be in a lull without a significant cold front yet this fall. There are ducks out there of all species, and if the current forecast holds we will be battling ice by next weekend.</p>	<p>Hunting pressure has been light, even during last Sunday’s bag check. Redheads were the top bird in the bag that day, but hunters averaged only 1.1 ducks each. 30 ducks of 12 species were taken by 27 hunters checked. I talked with 24 hunters yesterday, many of whom were camping and hunted both morning and evening. They bagged 44 ducks for an average of 1.83 apiece. Top birds were ringnecks, redheads, and wigeon. A few bluewings are still around and pintails remain in decent numbers. The goose count tripled this week to over 1,000 for the first time this year.</p>
Northeast			
Tower	<p>Water levels are still high and more rain is falling. Emergent vegetation has thinned out, fallen down, and is easy to see and navigate through.</p>	<p>Minimal bird numbers were observed during past week. Temps have cooled with again more overnight temps below freezing in some areas. Very little wind during the week kept bird activity down but there were some small flocks of mallards, ringers, woodies, and the occasional redhead, bufflehead, and goldeneye. Forecasts predict s*** falling from the sky in the next week.</p>	<p>Pretty slow hunting activity over the past week. Still seeing folks out though.</p>
Cloquet	<p>Recent rains have brought most basins to near normal water levels. Hunter access should be good. Rice is still standing and in good shape.</p>	<p>There are still plenty of teal and wood ducks around. Mid-season migrants are showing up like mallards, ringnecks and redheads. The cold front coming the end of the week should get some birds moving.</p>	<p>We haven’t had a lot of hunter reports coming in, but hunters willing to do some scouting are getting birds.</p>

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North central			
Grand Rapids	Water levels slowly dropping again. Rice stalks beginning to fall	Stable and fair weather pattern not driving any big movements of waterfowl into the area, however a trickle of new birds especially ringed necked ducks continue to arrive or pass through.	Hunting activity very slow, typical of late season. Hunters who put in the time, and scout are successful at shooting some birds.
West central			
Detroit Lakes	Crop Harvest is continuing in the area. Some tillage is occurring. Corn is being harvested as conditions allow. Rice stands are continuing to deteriorate.	Cooler temperatures are predicted for next week which should push new birds into the area. Some mallards are using the area while other species have come and gone. Late season migrants have not been noted to this point. Goose numbers have increased slightly over the past week and the they are using harvested fields.	With the pheasant opener last weekend fewer waterfowlers are hitting the marshes. For those hunters that were out a few birds were taken. With predicted cooler temperatures in the forecast hunting should improve over the next week.
Fergus Falls and Lake Christina	More rain has fallen, but little change in wetland levels has been noted. Crops continue to come off, but fall tillage is going well too. Lake Christina continues to come up a bit, but we will begin pumping ahead of winter to prolong the drawdown in the coming weeks. This is likely as high as the lake will be.	We're still waiting on that push of new ducks to come in with cold fronts, which seems unusual for this time of year. Still only one or two light frosts so far. More calendar ducks have pushed in though. Larger numbers of canvasbacks were noted on Lake Christina this week. Weather and hunters will be necessary to move them around. With MEA weekend coming, hunting pressure will likely be there, but no significant weather forecast for another week.	It's been slow duck hunting. Ducks seem to know where safety is since they've been around for a while now. With schools out the next couple days, the continuation of pheasant season, and the youth and special antlerless deer seasons, more hunters should be afield this weekend, and could keep the ducks moving.
Central			
Carlos Avery WMA	Water levels in the pools rose several inches with last Friday's rain. The wild rice crop is good to excellent in many pools, and the acorn crop is excellent this year.	Mild weather this week with 2.4 inches of rain accumulation. Pool water levels have improved, and we are seeing previously dry basins filling in. Mallards, wood ducks and green winged teal are still abundant, and we saw a slight bump in species diversity with new ducks moving into the area.	Hunting pressure has been moderate. Access to open water has improved this week.

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Mille Lacs WMA	Habitat conditions remain in great shape. Water levels have risen slightly with recent rains improving access in some areas.	The area received over 2” of rain in the last week. There are resident birds in the area but no noticeable influx of migrants.	Hunter success is about average for this time of year. Some hunters are locating birds and some are striking out. Scouting remains the key to success.
Sherburne NWR	Small wetlands have greatly improved water levels and are being used by some small groups of mallards and wood ducks. Long Pool is now only 1 foot below target for this time of the year.	Conditions are improving for birds across the area and there is a lot of movement on the refuge throughout the day. Ducks are really hitting the wild rice stands. Mallard, wood duck, and ring-neck numbers climbed from last week while the rest of the mixed bag has remained mostly unchanged. FORECAST: Southwest winds on Friday morning will be shifting to the north and northwest for Saturday and Sunday. Temperatures will remain mild reaching into the high 50s.	Nothing to report.

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Southwest			

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<p>Lac qui Parle WMA</p>	<p>The area received anywhere from 1-4 inches of rain this past week. The recent rains have slowed crop harvest a bit, but harvest of both soybean and corn is still moving along.</p> <p>The rains bumped up water levels on Marsh Lake and Lac qui Parle Lake a little bit, however levels are still below normal. Many seasonal wetlands and impoundment are still lower than normal.</p>	<p>Currently about 500 Canada geese are using the refuge with a handful of Mallards. Some new migrant ducks in the area. Mainly mallards, teal, and divers. Still some Wood ducks, and Blue winged teal hanging around. Have heard reports of decent numbers of mid-season migrant diver species in the 4-county area.</p> <p>Saturday-Mostly sunny, with a high near 58. Breezy, with a north-northwest wind 15 to 20 mph, with gusts as high as 25 mph.</p> <p>Sunday-Mostly sunny, with a high near 60. South southeast wind 5 to 15 mph.</p>	<p>The controlled hunt on Lac qui Parle Refuge starts today 10/19/23 and runs through the end of the goose season. Please see the 2023 Waterfowl hunting regulations booklet or look online for complete summary of rules and regulations regarding the controlled hunt.</p> <p>Not many reports from waterfowl hunters from the past week. Waterfowl hunting pressure was light this past weekend with more people chasing pheasant than ducks and geese. Reports from Pheasant opener ranged from fair to good with most people seeding good numbers of pheasants. Reminder the Lac qui Parle Refuge is closed to small game hunting including pheasants until December 1st.</p> <p>Waterfowl hunters please note that boat traffic on Marsh Lake is possible but need to scout areas in daylight to find best route for access. Mud motors or jack plates will make access easier. Hunters should be ready for more than 3,000 acres of new emergent vegetation. Scouting ahead of time will be important. Remember the eastern half of the lake is feeding and resting area. No motors allowed. Paths have been mowed to open water at Peterson access and the access below 490th street.</p>

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Marshall	Habitat conditions are generally good, but water levels remain below normal. Soybean harvest is nearing completion and corn harvest about 75% completed. Good field hunting opportunities are available.	Our area continues to have decent pockets of ducks around. More divers have been observed this week along with a good variety of puddle ducks. Strong NW winds are expected Friday night through Sat followed by light SE wind for Sun. No sign of ice as lows around 40 and highs of 60 with plenty of sunshine for the weekend.	Waterfowl hunting participation slowed this week but those going out have reported success on water and in corn stubble fields.
Appleton	Crop harvest continues to be slowed by the wet weather, with at least 50% of crops still standing. However, the rains have also created some attractive shallow/sheet water for ducks and hunters.	Nothing for weather to stimulate substantial movements. Forecast calling for gusty NW winds might help. We've seen a decline in goose for sure, and maybe even duck numbers recently. The ducks we have (mostly puddle ducks) are spread out and have settled in on the better hiding places created with the wetter conditions. Pheasant hunters likely kicked some of those birds around last weekend, but no notable influx of birds.	Waterfowl hunting pressure has been light with mixed success. Expect the normal uptick in pressure with MEA weekend and maybe some slightly better success as birds get bumped around with the increased activity and new birds potentially arrive with the N winds.
Windom	The work area received 4 plus inches of precipitation last weekend which significantly improved conditions for ducks and duck hunters. Soybean harvest is mostly complete and corn harvest is roughly 75%.	Duck numbers in the work area have increased with an influx of teal, mallards, gadwall and a few pintail.	Very few reports from last weekend. Pheasant hunters did well.
Marshall	Habitat conditions are generally good, but water levels remain below normal. Soybean harvest is nearing completion and corn harvest about 75% completed. Good field hunting opportunities are available.	Our area continues to have decent pockets of ducks around. More divers have been observed this week along with a good variety of puddle ducks. Strong NW winds are expected Friday night through Sat followed by light SE wind for Sun. No sign of ice as lows around 40 and highs of 60 with plenty of sunshine for the weekend.	Waterfowl hunting participation slowed this week but those going out have reported success on water and in corn stubble fields.

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Willmar	<p>Water levels increased slightly as we received about 3” of rain last Thursday and Friday. Wetlands are still below average depth, but there may be new potholes which now have a huntable amount of water in them. Continued scouting will be important to assess if water levels have changed in wetlands. The new water in areas that were dry earlier this fall can provide excellent hunting opportunities. These previously dry wetlands have abundant food sources and are attractive to waterfowl. Crop harvest is in full swing at this point with an estimated 80% Soybean harvest completed and 30% of corn fields harvested. Field hunting opportunities are best on the picked corn fields that have not yet been tilled.</p>	<p>Migrations increased over the past week as a weak cold front moved through the area. There has been a slight decrease of ducks in the area since this past weekend as hunters pursued ducks, urging them to move on. Canada Goose numbers were strong in the area and will likely remain so. We have also seen more mid-season migrants showing up in the bag, including: wigeon, gadwall, ring-neck ducks, redheads, and green-wing teal. Divers have started to trickle in. All is quiet on the weather front, but hunting conditions look fantastic this MEA weekend. There is an area of Low pressure expected to pass through Friday night that may bring some birds. We expect great hunting conditions and decent mid-season hunter success this weekend.</p>	<p>Hunters are still harvesting wood ducks, green-wing teal, some wigeon, gadwall, pintail, and mallards. Divers have arrived on the scene, but not in large quantities. Blue-winged teal were also reported in the bag but in limited numbers. Most blue-wing teal are long gone to the south. We expect diver numbers to continue to increase slowly as we work towards the big push. Canada Goose hunting improved as hunters reported being successful in picked corn fields. MEA weekend gets many waterfowl, deer, and pheasant hunters outdoors and this often benefits waterfowl hunters by way of people kicking up birds off isolated wetlands. The weather is fine, if you got the time, get out and enjoy the hunting!</p>

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Southeast			
Owatonna	<p>Heavy rains shifted most of the Owatonna area to moderate and severe drought categories with the remaining exceptional drought mostly confined to Mower County. Nevertheless, there was little recharge to shallow wetlands and marshes which remain very low or dry in many locations. River levels quickly returned to low levels as well. Water levels in shallow lakes are generally 1 – 2 feet below normal runout and boat access can be challenging. Habitat conditions are fair. Crop harvest slowed with wet conditions. Soybean harvest is about 80% complete and corn about 45% complete.</p>	<p>Temperatures have been seasonable. A slow-moving system brought widespread rain at the end of last week with rainfall totals of 1.5 to 4 inches common across the area. Most of the remaining blue-winged teal and wood ducks have moved out. Some new mid-season migrants, mallards and the first canvasbacks moved in with the cool front that followed the rain.</p>	<p>Waterfowl hunter activity has dropped off as some hunters have turned to pursuing pheasants. Success has been poor with most ducks and geese remaining in the area concentrated in areas of safety.</p>