



November 26, 2019 Weekly Waterfowl Report

Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks

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The following report is a compilation of public and private land reports and habitat assessments during the week ending November 24, 2019.

With the approach of duck season's opening day this Friday, November 29, wetland habitat availability is slightly ahead of "normal" levels for this time of year across much of Mississippi. However, much of the available water is currently found in natural wetlands like brakes and emergent marsh areas that have been flooded for most of the year. These habitat conditions should be attractive to waterfowl and other migratory birds as they continue to arrive in Mississippi through the fall and winter, and we expect to see an increase in shallow, managed water soon as the hunting season begins. The first aerial waterfowl survey of the season was completed recently, and the survey report will be posted online at www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl. Survey observations revealed that ducks are heavily using large, managed complexes of high-quality wetland habitat in the Mississippi Delta, which is typical to start the hunting season. Total duck numbers in the Mississippi Delta region are above average for this time of year, but mallard numbers are currently below average. The good news is that November mallard numbers for Mississippi have not historically been a good indicator of where we end up with peak mallard numbers later in the winter.

Wetland habitat is typically in low supply during the month of November, and increases as winter rainfall is collected and water is artificially pumped into impoundments. Areas that do not have surface water available yet are holding high ground moisture, which should allow for quicker flooding when adequate rainfall is received. Some landowners and managers with pumping capabilities are currently providing critical wetland habitat, and are expecting quality hunting opportunities early in the hunting season as a result. In the weeks leading up to the waterfowl hunting season, managers of many Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) across the state have been pumping water and collecting rainfall in waterfowl impoundments. Charlie Capps, William C. "Billy" Deviney, Malmaison, O'Keefe, Muscadine Farms, Mahannah, and Howard Miller WMAs are just a few of these areas providing quality early season wetland habitat. Recent field reports from several of these areas show that ducks have been using them for a couple of weeks. Above average numbers of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross') and greater white-fronted geese (commonly called specklebellies) have been observed so far.

Although Mississippi's weather for the upcoming weekend is forecasted to be mostly mild with some rain likely, the following week's weather looks better. The upper Midwest is predicted to receive more snowfall in the coming days, which should help provide some incentive for ducks to continue their journey southward. As always, the availability of quality wetland habitat, combined with weather conditions and hunting pressure, will greatly influence Mississippi's waterfowl harvest on both private and public lands.

Hunting reports from the youth and veteran/military waterfowl hunting day on November 16 were good overall, with high numbers of birds observed and several youth harvesting their first ducks. Green-winged teal and gadwall were the primary species reported as harvested. The regular duck season will begin Friday, November 29 and goose hunting seasons will resume Friday as well. The third round of WMA waterfowl draw hunt applications is currently open online at <https://xnet2.mdwfp.com/drawings/public/WmaDrawingsV3.aspx>. For more information regarding waterfowl in Mississippi, visit our website at www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl or call us at (601) 432-2199. The Waterfowl Program website lists links to regulations and habitat information for specific WMAs and other public lands throughout the state.

Sunflower WMA Flooding for 2019-20 Waterfowl Season

Due to prolonged backwater flooding throughout most of the spring and summer of 2019, water control structures in the green-tree reservoirs (GTRs) will not be closed to capture water for the 2019-20 hunting season on Sunflower WMA. However, hunters are reminded that there are approximately 5,200 acres of low-lying sloughs, lakes, and other wetlands scattered across Sunflower WMA. Most of these areas have water control structures in them and will be the first areas to flood on the WMA. These natural, low-lying areas often provide better habitat and hunting opportunities than the GTRs. A map of Sunflower WMA wetland areas can be found here:

<http://www.mdwfp.com/media/256111/sunflower-wma-gtrs-and-slough-areas.pdf>