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Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks

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The following report is a compilation of public and private land waterfowl hunting reports and wetland habitat assessments during the week ending December 29, 2019.

Jackson, MS – Keeping with the previous trend of fall and winter of 2019, last week's temperatures gradually increased, leading to stormy weather over the weekend. Due to seemingly weekly rainfall, wetland habitat availability has remained ahead of "normal" levels for this time of year across much of Mississippi. The Mississippi River is currently holding steady, but another rise is forecasted in the coming days. River levels are still currently sufficient to provide quality waterfowl habitat and hunting opportunities. Water levels in Steele Bayou have risen over the last two days and the current water level for the Steele Bayou (landside) gauge is 81.96 feet as of 2:00 pm on December 31. When the water level in Steele Bayou is at or above 82 feet, waterfowl hunting on the Ten Point and Goose Lake units of Phil Bryant Wildlife Management Area will be allowed daily. For most of Mississippi, the extended forecast predicts a brief warm-up along with rain on Thursday and Friday, followed by sunshine and more seasonable temperatures. Weather severity index models predict little to no large-scale weather-induced southward movements of dabbling ducks in the coming week.

Similar to last week, hunting reports from state WMAs and private lands across the Mississippi Delta were not as good as early season reports, but quality hunting opportunities still remain in some areas. Green-winged teal, northern shovelers, and gadwall made up a large portion of waterfowl harvest reports. High numbers of snow, blue, Ross's, and white-fronted geese are still being observed across the Delta region. Changes in water levels and distribution of wetland habitat can impact where birds choose to congregate. Hunters are encouraged to keep an eye out for newly flooded wetland habitat after rain events like the one predicted for this Thursday. Mississippi typically attracts peak abundances of waterfowl during the month of January, and biologists and wetland managers are optimistic that the abundant quality habitat across the state will soon be heavily used by newly arriving ducks and geese.

The mid-December aerial waterfowl survey has been completed, and the results and distribution maps are now posted on MDWFP's Waterfowl Program web page. The early January waterfowl survey is planned for next week. The fifth and final round of WMA waterfowl draw hunt applications is currently open online at <https://xnet2.mdwfp.com/drawings/public/WmaDrawingsV3.aspx>. Hunters are encouraged to apply for any WMAs and dates they may be interested in hunting. 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 hunting regulations, migration reports, and habitat information for specific WMAs and other public lands throughout the state.

Table 1: Average waterfowl harvest per man-day reported over the last week for selected Wildlife Management Areas.

WMA	Avg. Birds/Hunter/Day
Canal Section	0.87
Charlie Capps	1.00
Howard Miller	1.29
William "Billy" C. Deviney	0.51
Mahannah	1.85
Malmaison	1.39
Muscadine Farms	0.83
Okatibbee	0.50
O'Keefe	1.14
Old River	0
Pascagoula	0.22
Pearl River	0.67
Phil Bryant	2.31
Shipland	1.31
Trim Cane	0.75
Tuscumbia	0.22
Twin Oaks	2.45

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>