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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 January 19, 2020.

Jackson, MS – Although Mississippi's weather was once again dominated by warm and wet conditions last week, a much-needed return of colder temperatures and sunshine developed over the weekend. Forecasted rain for this Thursday will likely add to or at least maintain an already high level of wetland habitat across the state. Many creeks and rivers have expanded past their natural banks and have sustained natural flooding. The lower Mississippi River is still rising and has exceeded flood stage for multiple locations. Water levels in Steele Bayou have continued to rise over the last week and the current water level for the Steele Bayou (landside) gauge is 91.66 feet as of 11:00 am on January 21. Due to these high-water conditions, several Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) and other public lands will be open for waterfowl hunting only until further notice. However, water levels will limit access to these areas. Hunters are reminded to check for updated information prior to hunting public lands during times of high water. The current weather pattern with cold temperatures and north winds is forecasted continue into the weekend. Weather severity index models predict this week's weather to cause a southward migration of dabbling ducks, which would be welcomed as southern states enter the final stretch of waterfowl seasons.

Hunting reports from state WMAs and private lands across the Mississippi Delta improved once again over the last week, particularly during the weekend. Gadwall and mallards made up a large portion of waterfowl harvest reports. Hunting reports indicate that mallards are favoring flooded forests as many low-lying forested areas are flooded from nearby creeks or rivers. Very large flocks of snow, blue, Ross's, and white-fronted geese are still abundant across the Delta region and distributions appear to be expanding more into the central and southern portions of the Delta. The availability of quality waterfowl habitat and weather conditions will continue to influence harvest in the coming weeks. Hunters are encouraged to search for ducks in newly flooded areas as water levels continue to rise in many areas.

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. The early January aerial waterfowl survey results and distribution maps are now posted on MDWFP's Waterfowl Program web page. The final aerial survey for the season is currently underway, and a report is expected to be available by early next week. Mississippi typically observes peak waterfowl numbers during the month of January, and biologists are optimistic that the current weather conditions will help this trend to continue.

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

WMA	Avg. Birds/Hunter/Day
Canal Section	0.41
Charlie Capps	2.00
Howard Miller	1.08
William "Billy" C. Deviney	0.78
Mahannah	2.50
Malmaison	1.32
Muscadine Farms	1.30
Okatibbee	0.42
O'Keefe	1.48
Old River	0.40
Pascagoula	0.48
Pearl River	0.43
Phil Bryant	0.93
Shipland	0.20
Trim Cane	Currently Closed
Tuscumbia	0.00
Twin Oaks	1.87

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>