

## **WCC Migratory Committee Meeting**

**Plaza Hotel & Suites**

**Wausau, WI**

**Saturday August 1, 2009**

Meeting called to order at 9:03 am by Chairman Richard Koerner

Roll call - present: Dick Koerner, John Edelblute, Mitch Fisher, Richard Becker, Craig Conroy, Todd Cook, James Daily, Noel Dolde, Ron Earnest, Paul Gettelman, Roger Hanson, Ray Heidel, Rick Koenig, Jo Ann Kuharske, Al Marotz, Guy McFarren, Tim Morgan, Sandy Naas, Allen Shook, Kurt Staab, Alan Suchla, Herbert Theisen, Brad Wagner.

Excused: Martin Haas, Jeff Scott

Unexcused: Chuck Boley, Jerry Rowland

From the Wisconsin DNR: Kent Van Horn, Migratory Gamebird Ecologist and James Christopoulos Assistant Migratory Gamebird Ecologist, and Todd Schaller Warden

Guests: John Berquist former migratory bird ecologist for the WDNR, and Richard Kirchmeyer WCC Secretary

Chairman Koerner introduced Kent Van Horn who presented a PowerPoint presentation and overview of:

- Conditions in Wisconsin, for MVP geese in Ontario and Continental
- Survey results for Wisconsin, Ontario geese and Continental ducks
- Harvest for Canada geese and select ducks in 2008
- 2009 Preliminary recommendations and Regulatory Process

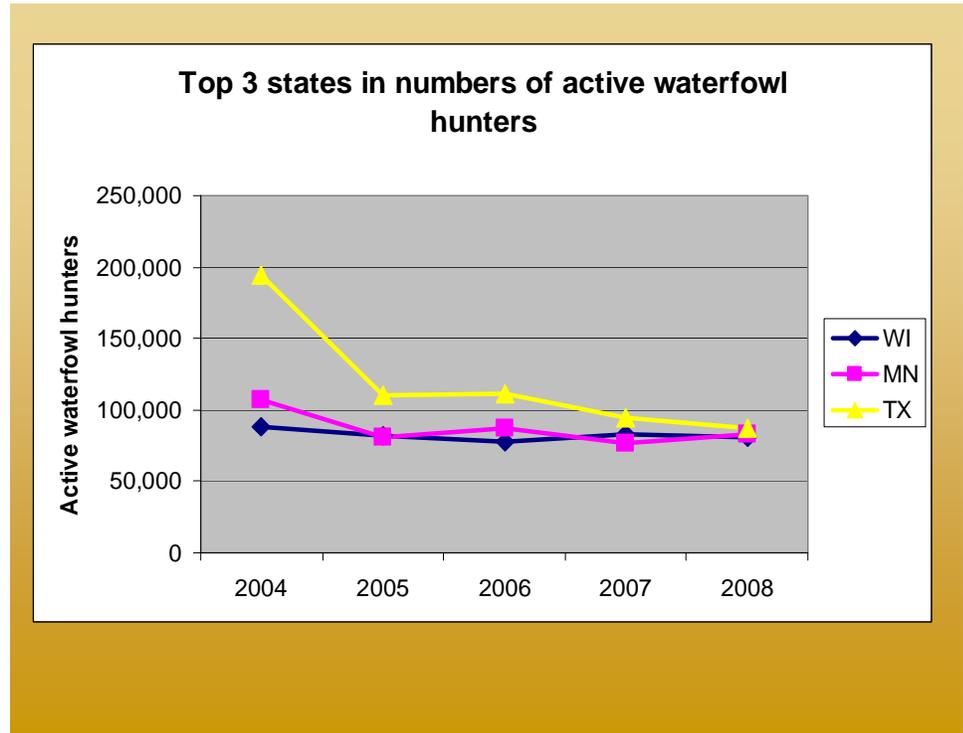
The top three states for active duck hunters are Texas, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Duck hunters in all of these states number right around 87,000 each. Wisconsin has been around that number for 20 years. Of note is the amount of active duck hunters that Texas has lost over the past 5 years. From a high of nearly 200,000 in 2004 down to just 87,000; less than half what it once was just a few years ago. (See chart on next page)

The Dakotas were very wet through June as well as the Canadian pot hole region. Wisconsin spring water conditions varied from normal in the Southeast to dry in the North. The USFWS flyover of the spring ponds showed very good breeding conditions in the Canadian and US prairie pot hole region. Water was up and the duck breeding was up.

In Wisconsin mallard numbers are up slightly while in Minnesota the mallard numbers were down because of their dry spring. Michigan conditions were wet and mallard numbers were up there as well.

Because of the good counts, the feds will offer liberal season, 60 days and 6 ducks. Specific species will have their own special bag. The 2009 over-all story is good news. "Ducks are mobile, they will go where there is water and anywhere in the Continent" Van Horn said.

The water was in the Dakotas and that's where the ducks were. Some places north of there, in Canada, there were dry areas but the ducks moved down there to the Dakotas. However, Wisconsin needs water now.



### Mallard Survey Results

- Wisconsin – 200,497 Up 6% 08, (+10% from Long term average – LTA)
- Minnesota – 236,000 Down 30% from 2008
- Michigan – 258,900, up 37% from 2008
- Traditional Survey area – 8.5 million – Up 10% from 2008, Up 13% LTA
- Mid continent mallards 8.7 million; Canada Ponds – Up 17% - 3.6 million ponds

### Other ducks:

- Green-winged teal – 3.4 mil(+79% LTA)
- Blue-winged teal – 7.4 mil (+60% LTA)
- Pintail – 3.2 mil (-20% LTA)
- Canvasback – 662,000 (+16% LTA)

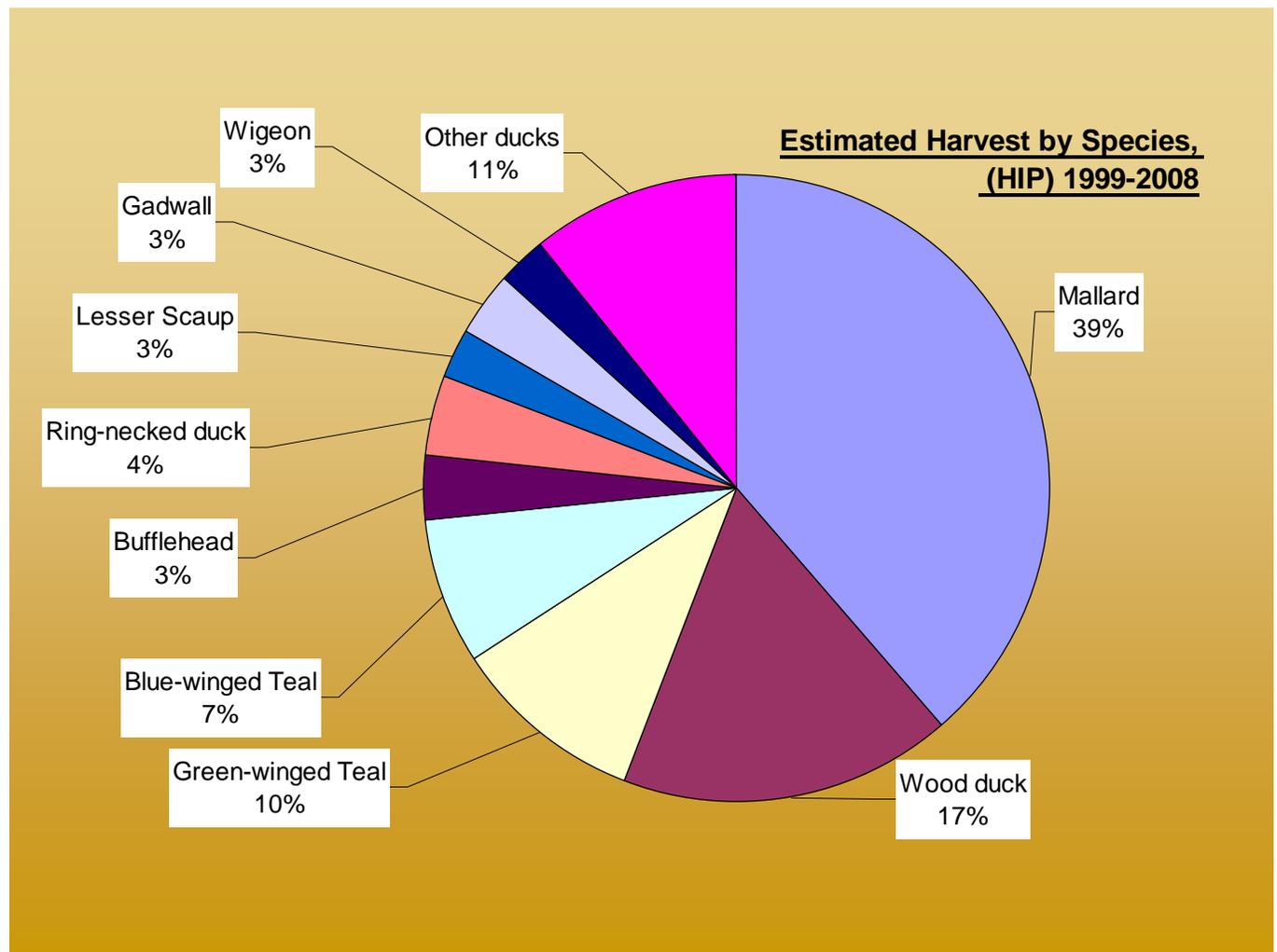
- Scaup – 4.2 million (-18% LTA)
- Pintail - 3.2 million (Down 20% LTA, Up 23% from 2008)

Canvasbacks were up 173,000 over last years count. They are in good shape, not much change. The count was down last year because the canvasback moved to areas where there was water. The Cans did not disappear; they just weren't where the count was.

Scaup still show a long term decline however they have stabilized over the last 7 to 8 years. In fact they are up over the past three years with a slow but steady increase. We should have a 60 and 2 per day bag per scaup.

Total duck breeding average is just slightly down. The data appears that the population of mallards has leveled off. Teal blue are on the upswing over the past few years. Wood duck populations are up over long term average but may be leveling off.

**Estimated Harvest by Species – From Hip Surveys 1999 to 2008**

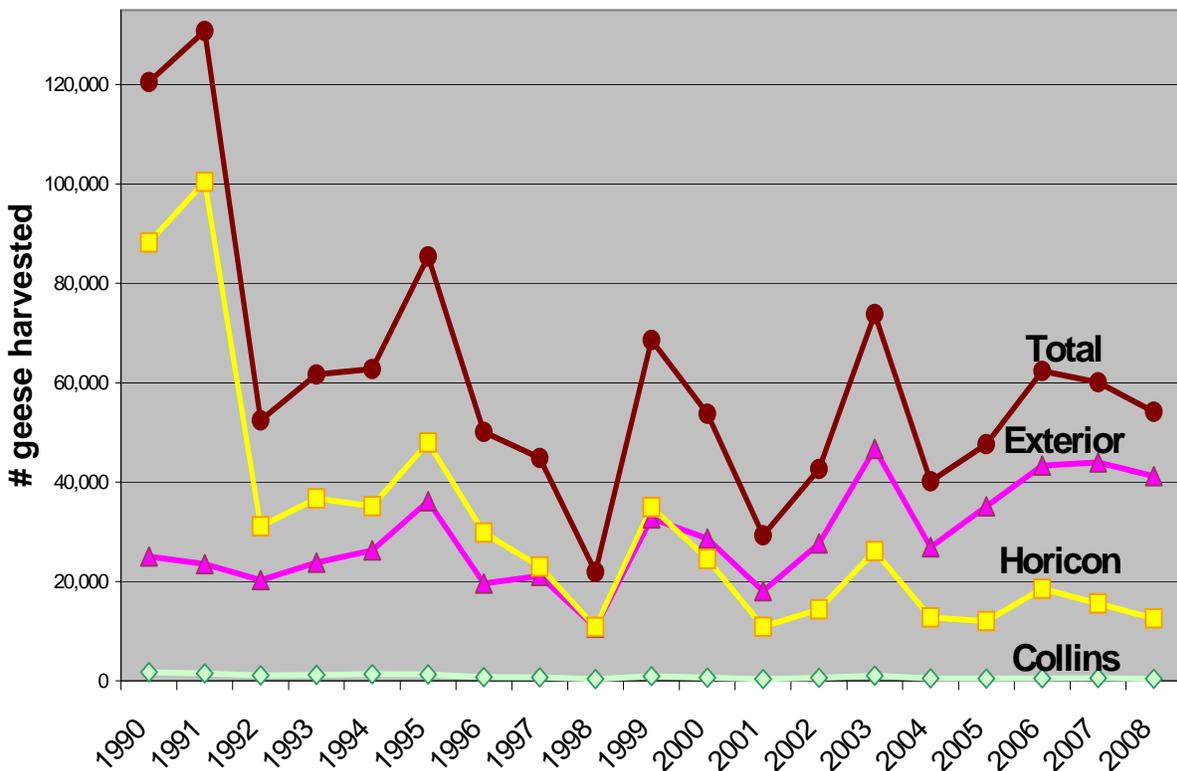


Mallards, wood ducks, blue wing, green wing are still the top 4 ducks in the bag. Scaup harvest last year, even with the restricted bag limits, went up 49% last year. This could be interperated a number of ways. The Mississippi river harvest of Scaup was up as well. But the US harvest did go down, but in the Mississippi flyway it was up and in Wisconsin the harvest went up.

The wood duck harvest went up over 2007 but that was a low year. That was only a 7% increase but it's only been one year since the bag went to 3 birds. Wisconsin had a greater share of that success than other areas of the country.

Early season goose up harvest; hunters bagged nearly 25,000 in 2008. MVP population harvest was down.

### Canada Goose Harvest in All Regular Season Zones, 1990-2008



MVP goose count was down, but the breeding areas where still frozen. The non-breeders were also down about 7%. This was a bad year for nesting. The Wisconsin population had a good spring for breeding.

Mourning doves: 680 banded in 2008. The trend is stable for the doves; moderate harvest prescription of 15 and 70 days season. It's estimated that there are 10 to 15 thousand dove hunters in Wisconsin.

The Woodcock population is stable in the great lake states. Slight 1% decline in Wisconsin but the harvest of 36,000 is second in nation. New woodcock habitat development is important and something needs to be done about the old and aging forest. New strategy under development to watch for a few years and if it doesn't change, the season will be shortened to 45 days.

Banding in Wisconsin: 4410 geese and 5984 total ducks

### **2009 Regulatory Issues**

- Flyway - 3rd year of five year stable regular Canada goose season
- Federal - Scaup restrictive season change, Two canvasback officially an option
- State – Concealment definition, refuge size changes at Mead, Dike 17, Vernon marsh, hunting hours at Mead and Lake Mills Wildlife Areas, Mead season closures.

### **Mentored hunt legislation - SB 167**

- Would allow hunting of youth who are at least 10 who have not completed a hunter safety course but who would be required to hunt with and be within arms reach of a mentor.
- Has passed in the legislature but has not been signed into law.
- Participation in the youth hunts is limited to 12 - 15 year olds by DNR rule.
- When SB 167 is enacted then DNR will need to update or amend the duck season rule to allow 10 - 11 year olds as the proposal intends.
- Final word on this legislation - August 13.

Mentored hunt legislation – SB 167 has been passed by state senate but not signed by the governor. WDNR would have to open approve it in time for the natural resources board meeting, but the governor does not intend to sign until after the NRB.

Clarify the definition of open water hunting for waterfowl 2009 passed by the NRB. The WCC voted it down at the annual 2009 convention but the NRB went against the WCC and passed the rule anyway.

### **Clarify the definition of “open water hunting” for waterfowl. (2009)**

- The minimum concealment that must be provided by natural vegetation must be 50% when viewed from at least one direction from a height of 3 feet,
- The vegetation must extend above the water's surface to a height at or above the sides of a boat, and
- The boat or blind must be within 3 feet of the vegetation providing the concealment.

- Relaxes the rules for most since concealment “within” vegetation is currently required, boat blinds would be legal in more situations.

The committee spent some time discussing the open water hunting and the definition of concealment. It appears that the language has been changed since it was passed at the 2009 Spring Hearing. Chairman Koerner cut off the discussion because the issue is not on the agenda.

Kent talked about some of the other issues that passed on the Spring Hearings.

**Special waterfowl hunting regulations at Mead WMA, Wood, Marathon, and Portage Counties (2010)**

- The 30,000 acre property is a premier waterfowl hunting destination of statewide significance with intense hunting pressure. Working with local waterfowl hunters, proposals were developed to improve the quality of the hunt by holding more ducks in the area for a longer period of time.
- Objective of Wisconsin’s 10 year strategic waterfowl mgt. plan to evaluate special regulations to improve hunting experience and satisfaction.

**38.** *Close hunting hours at 1:00 p.m. during the first 16 days of the duck season after opening weekend (this provision would sunset after three years).*

**Statewide Vote:**

- 51% Approving
- Passed in 36 Counties

**Wood/Portage/Marathon Counties:**

- 66% Approving

**39.** *Close the Mead Wildlife Management Area to all waterfowl hunting prior to the opening of the duck season, except that duck hunting would be allowed on the youth hunt weekend.*

**Statewide Vote:**

- 51% Approving
- Passed in 36 Counties

**Wood/Portage/Marathon Counties:**

- 64% Approving

**40.** *Increase the size of the Townline Reservoir/Berkhahn Flowage.*

**Statewide Vote:**

- 61% Approving
- Passed in 58 Counties

**Wood/Portage/Marathon Counties:**

- 64% Approving

**41.** *Increase the size of the Rice Lake/Pool 10 Flowage refuge at Mead Wildlife Management Area.*

**Statewide Vote:**

- 60% Approving
- Passed in 57 Counties

**Wood/Portage/Marathon Counties:**

- 65% Approving

**45.** *Eliminate the Nelson-Trevino Mississippi River closed area in Buffalo County. (2009)*

- The USFWS has proposed eliminating the 3,773 acre Nelson Trevino closed area on the federal Upper Mississippi River Fish & Wildlife Refuge after evaluation through the agency's Comprehensive Conservation Plan.
- Would make Wisconsin and federal regulations consistent by eliminating the same closed area in our state regulations.

**Statewide Vote:**

- 74% Approving
- Passed in 66 counties

**Buffalo County:**

- 80% Approving

**52.** *Reduce the size of Vernon Marsh waterfowl refuge because certain areas are no longer needed as goose refuge, Waukesha County. (2010)*

- Vernon Wildlife Area is a 4,655 acre property (4,154 acres owned, 501 acres leased) in Waukesha County. Includes 740 acres of refuge.
- Eliminates 395 acres of refuge on the north side of the property and open that area to all normal hunting activities.

**Statewide Vote:**

- 83% Approving
- Passed in 72 counties

**Waukesha County:**

- 94% Approving

**53.** *1:00 p.m. closure of migratory bird hunting, Zeloski Marsh Unit of Lake Mills Wildlife Area, Jefferson County. (2010).*

- Newly restored, popular, 2,300 acre property where there is an opportunity to evaluate special regulations to improve hunting quality.
- The 1:00 p.m. closure includes waterfowl and mourning doves beginning on Sept. 1 and continuing through the 16th day after the duck opener.
- Sunset after 3 years.
- Waterfowl mgt. plan objective

**Statewide Vote:**

- 50% Approving
- Passed in 39 counties

**Jefferson/Dane Counties:**

- 63% Approving

10:09 am Koerner called for a break.

Meeting called back to order at 10:21 am

Kent informed the committee that Chairman Koerner received the waterfowl heritage award at this year at the Mississippi Flyway meeting that Wisconsin hosted at Manitowoc this past week.

**2009 PROPOSAL SUMMARY**

***Early Goose September Season:*** *September 1-15 with a daily bag of 5 geese*

Motion by Al Shook, second by Dick Becker to accept as proposed - motion passed

***Youth Waterfowl Hunt:*** *September 19-20th*

Motion Noel Dolde, second by Ron Earnest - motion passed

***Ducks:*** 60 Day Season – Overall duck season length

- 6 ducks in total each day
- No more than 4 mallards, only 1 may be a hen (USFWS allows 2 but Wisconsin prefers 1 because we harvest mostly Wisconsin breeding mallards)
- 3 wood ducks
- 1 black duck
- 2 red heads
- 2 scaup 60 days
- 1 pintail 60 days
- 5 mergansers to include not more than two hooded mergansers
- Coot daily bag of 15
- Opening day hours begin at 9 am

Motion by accept by package, Al Shook, second Todd Cook - motion passed

***Northern Zone: September 26 to November 24***

A limited number of people in the northwest have asked for a split in the northern zone by areas that have open water later in the season are limited to the rivers.

Motion by Sandy Naas, second by Jim Daily - motion passed with one grunt for no.

Guy McFarren said a lot of people would love to hunt the Rivers in the late season.

***Southern Zone: October 3-11, closed October 12-16 (Monday-Friday)***

Kent tells us that many hunters in the south would like to see a September opening because the marshes are freezing up early in November

Motion to accept as proposed by Noel Dolde, second by Dick Becker

Ray says La Crosse County want October 3 to 7, 9 day split, open the 17 and go Dec 10<sup>th</sup>. The last freeze on the river offers great late season hunting.

Al Shook says to leave it as is because more people want the later opening. Tim Morgan of Vernon County agrees that this is a good compromise between the river counties and the rest of the state. Dick Koerner says every time we loose a weekend of hunting you piss off more people.

Motion passed with two no's, river rats strike again.

**Canada Goose Exterior Zone: Daily Bag of 2**

- North – Saturday September 19 – December 12
- South – Saturday September 19 - October 11, October 17 – December 17

Goal of the Department is to harvest more of our local birds. Last year showed us that we were down a little last year. Kent says he had feed back from last year that liked the break with the spilt over the duck split.

**Mississippi River Subzone: October 3 – 11 and October 17 – December 31<sup>st</sup>**

Motion to accept package as written by Mitch Fisher, Gettelman second

Discussion: Ron Earnest wants to add the Rock Prairie to the Miss. River zone. Kent Van Horn says he's trying to simplify things not make them more complicated.

Motion passes with three no's

**Horicon Zone:**

- Horicon Zone: H1 – September 16 – November 1
- Horicon Zone: H2 – November 2 – December 16
- Daily Bag of 2 – 6 tags per hunter

Motion to accept Todd Cook, Jo Ann Kuharske second

Todd asked why the zones can't overlap. The reason is that everyone can be there at the same time hunter conflict.

Motion passed

**Collins Zone: 3 Time Periods**

- September 16- November 20 (9/16-10/4, 10/5-10/25, 10/26-11/20)

Motion by Al Shook accept, second by Jo Ann Kuharske

No discussion, motion carried

**Light Geese and Brant: Limit 1 Brant, 20 Light Geese**

Motion by Brad Wagner, second by Ron earnest, passed

**Falconry:** All the days that ducks are open to gun hunting in the respective zones. And the last season would extend from January 8 – February 21

Second by Ray Heidel, Second by Sandy Naas, motion passed

## **Member Matters**

Ray Heidel went back at Todd Schaller with the open water language. Much discussion ensued on the 50% rule. Kent brought the committee back to the intent of the law which is to keep duck hunters on the edge of the water.

Roger Hanson, former warden, gave the committee an explanation of the trouble with the old rule. He talked about how difficult it was to process a complaint. He reiterated that the old law restricted hunters and the new law will actually increase opportunity.

Tim Morgan asked if the rule was modified in any way. Todd said that the rule passed by the natural resources board approved the rule as it was written and proposed at the spring hearing.

Dick Koerner chimed in that the old rule was confusing. The congress was going to have an Ad Hoc committee on this rule but it never happened. "If this rule was designed to make it easier for the wardens and the hunters, we should not throw it out. Let's try it and see if changes are needed we can always modify the rule" Koerner said.

John Edelblute said that there will be needed work by the wardens to educate the public.

The congress secretary Richard Kirchmeyer said the committee should move on, the issue is over with for now. The committee should move on.

The decision was made to move this issue to the committee's December meeting

Public Hearings for the State waterfowl meetings are next week. Written comments can be mailed in but need to come in before the time limit.

Waterfowl duck school will go on as scheduled.

Kent gave a brief over view of the Ad Hoc Open Water Duck hunting committee. The committee came up with 13 lakes to consider. The next step is to go out to the hunters, clubs and groups that this will affect. He will go back to the board natural resources next year. Best to start out slow because many people

December 11 will be the next meeting for the Migratory committee; Friday night, in Stevens Point.

Ray Heidel talked about the next meeting of the USFWS.

Al Shook said there are some problems of clarification in his county on the concealment language. He asked the warden in his county during the Spring Hearings and the officer said, "He would write the tickets and let the judge sort it out."

Tim said this is not going to fit in every issue. He doesn't think we have solved to the problem with this rule change.

Noel Dolde asked how the management plan is coming along for the Sand Hill Cranes. Kent said he has been asked to write the management plan for the sand hill crane. The eastern flock

of sandhills has no management plan. Eastern population has about 40,000 birds. The plan is written around the hunters, the watchers, the farmers. He is about 80% done with the plan. He should have the plan done next spring for the flyway counsel. After that a state would have to put together a plan that includes hunting. He said that Tennessee may be the first ones out of the gate to ask for a hunt. The birds have been using Tennessee as a staging area and over-winter home.

Because of the plan the feds may offer up some moneys to do more complete surveys.

Noel asked Kent when we will have to opportunity again for going to 3 zones – 2012.

Al Marotz asked if we have too many geese will we be able to hunt both Horicon and exterior.

Kent reiterated that the goal is to keep the state population in check and not over harvest the MVP birds. He said if we open hunting to both, we would over harvest MVP birds. That would limit the days and have emergency closures.

Rick Koenig asked if anybody would like to get together for a hunting party. The committee decided to table the idea until the December meeting.

Motion to adjourn by Al Shook, second by Todd cook – motion passed

Meeting Adjourn at 11:55 am

Respectfully Submitted by Mitchell Fisher