

Conservation Congress Migratory Committee Meeting

Saturday July 30, 2011

Ramada Inn – Stevens Point

Meeting called to order by chairman Dick Koerner 9:00 AM

Secretary Mitch Fisher took the roll call - Those 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, Al Marotz, Guy McFarren, Tim Morgan, Allen Shook, Kurt Staab, Alan Suchla, Herbert Theisen, Jerry Merryfield, Andrew Limmer, Chuck Boley.

Absent: Brad Wagner

Excused: Jeff Scott

WDNR: Kent Van Horn, James Christopoulos, Todd Schaller

Chairman Koerner introduced new committee member Jerry Merryfield.

Koerner read the Migratory Committee mission statement.

Kent Van Horn presented his overview of this year's waterfowl outlook but before he began he introduced Jane Wiley here from the Natural Resources Board. Good news overall for the waterfowl survey. There is lots of good news this year nation wide, Wisconsin (WI) total duck numbers were up and 17% above average. Bottom line, lots of water equals lots of ducks; totally they were up 11%. Because of the good conditions, we have been offered the liberal 60 day season.

Wisconsin was number 3 in hunter numbers; we slipped one place from last year. Van Horn estimates there are between 1.2 and 1.5m duck hunters nationwide.

<b>State</b>	<b>2006-2010 aver.</b>
Texas	91,240
Minnesota	80,180
Wisconsin	77,500
Louisiana	71,900
Arkansas	57,320
California	54,860

WI conditions were good overall and wetter in the north. Overall, the duck counts were good with the exception of widgeon and green wing teal. Both are boreal ducks. When they flew the counts in Alaska, the ice was just going out so the count may have been down because of the conditions when the breeding survey was done. This was the highest count in 56 years of 45.6 million ducks

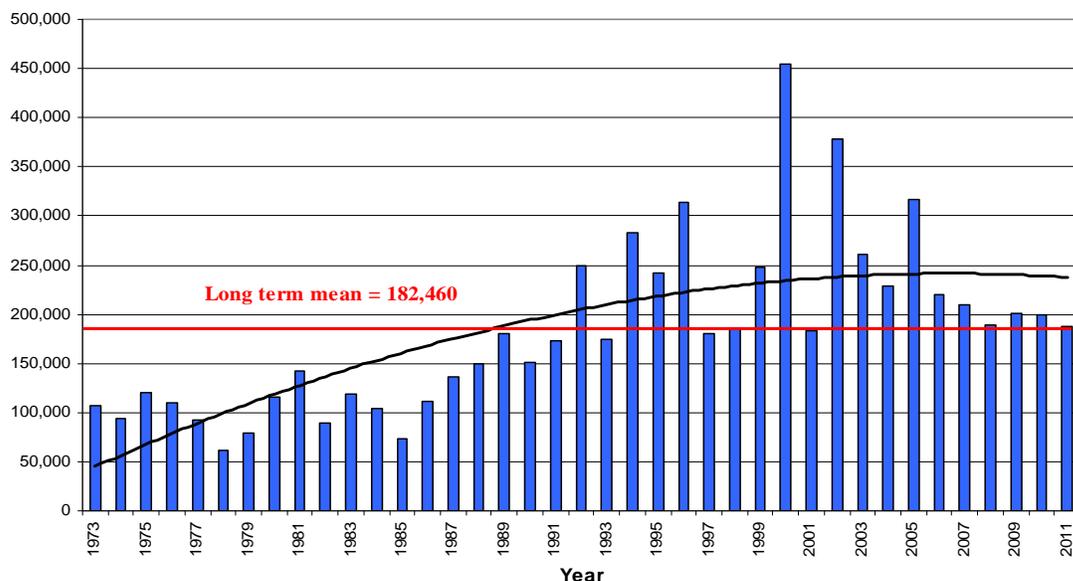
- Green-winged teal – 2.9 mil(+47% LTA)
- Blue-winged teal – 8.9 mil (+91% LTA)
- Pintail – 4.3 mil (= LTA)
- Canvasback – 700,000 (+21% LTA)
- Scaup – 4.3 million (-15% LTA)

Pintail counts are up. The wet potholes will really help the breeding and Kent Van Horn believes the counts will show it next year. Cans look good, the populations are stable. Scaup are relatively stable as well. We have lots of scaup and only 2 per day, he questions the logic as to why the USFWS allows 2 red heads per day when there are 1 million birds but there are 4.3m Scaup.

John Edelblute asked about the predation by sea gulls, he has heard that they are eating up the scaup eggs. Kent agreed there is evidence to show that large numbers of scaup eggs are eaten by the sea gulls on their nesting grounds.

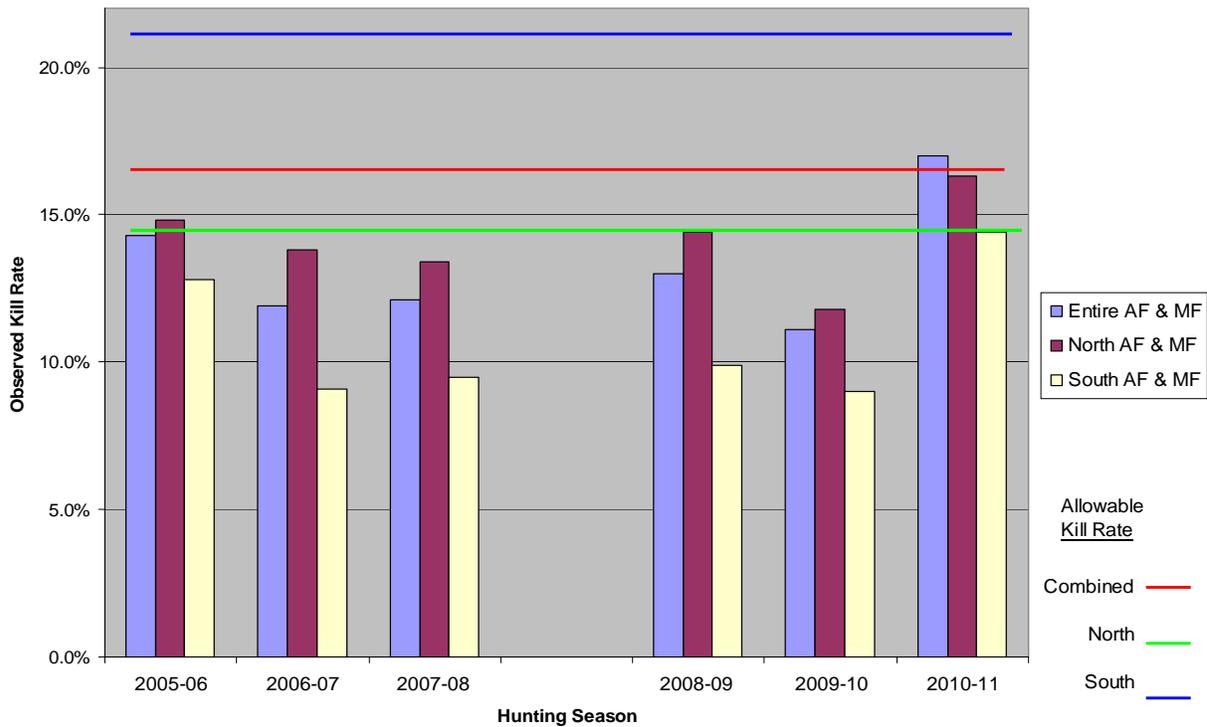
WI total duck breeding has been average.

**Wisconsin Mallard Breeding Population Estimates,  
1973-2011**



Blue wing teal survey showed they are up in WI but they are a hard duck to survey. Woodies are up again and are showing up in better numbers in the bag. This is our 3<sup>rd</sup> year with a 3 bag per day on woodies. The rate of harvest has been charted from banding returns. Kent is working with people in the two flyways to chart the data on wood duck harvest.

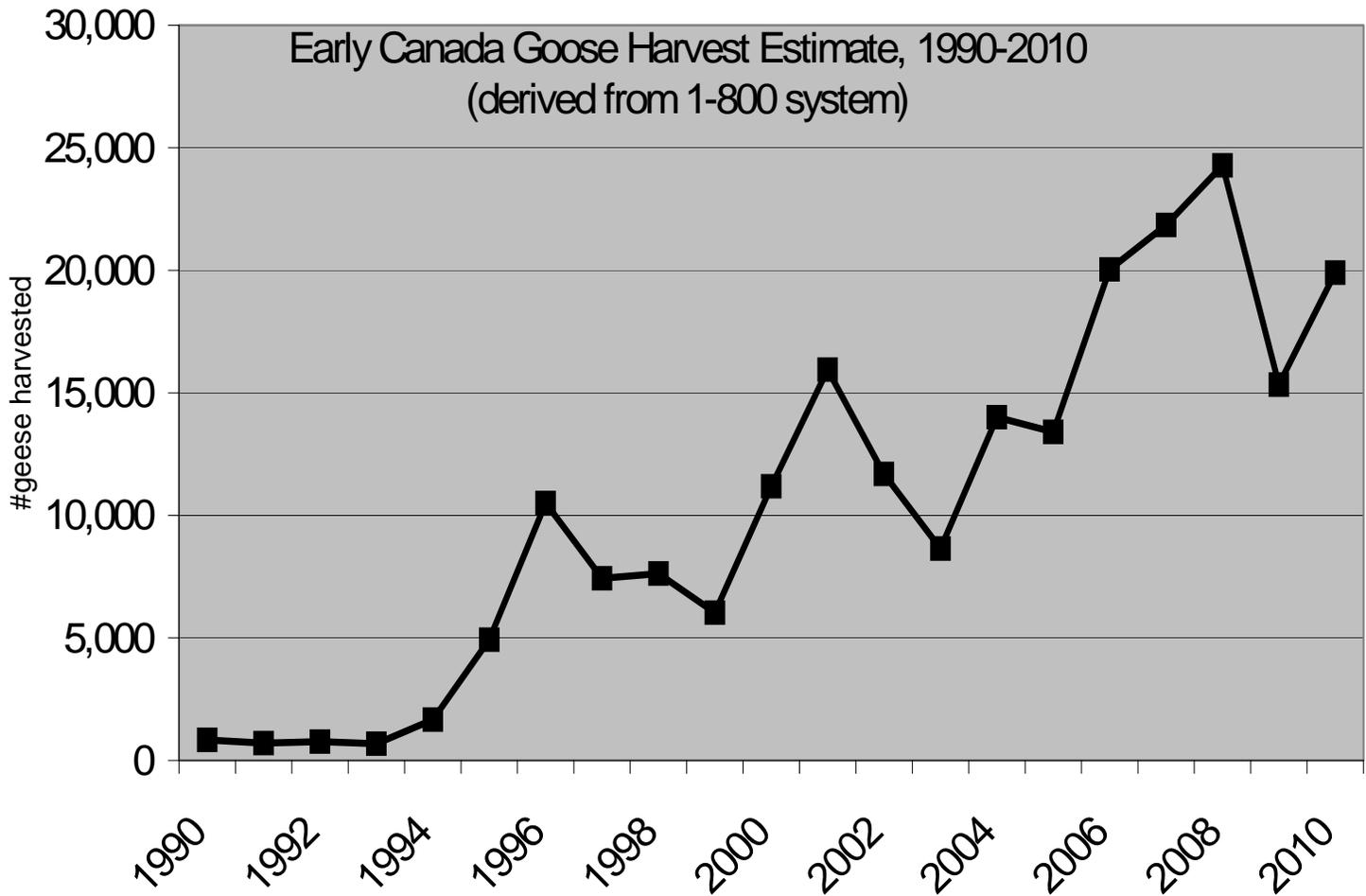
### Wood Duck Kill Rates in Miss. and Atl. Flyways



It is too early to determine if we are harvesting too many woodies, Kent wants to see a few more years of harvest data before they come to any kind of a conclusion. He wanted to know where we stand, this is a rate of harvest and not a total harvest. Each state that is in the survey receives the same amount or rate of bands and is required to fill a quota of banded birds.

### Geese

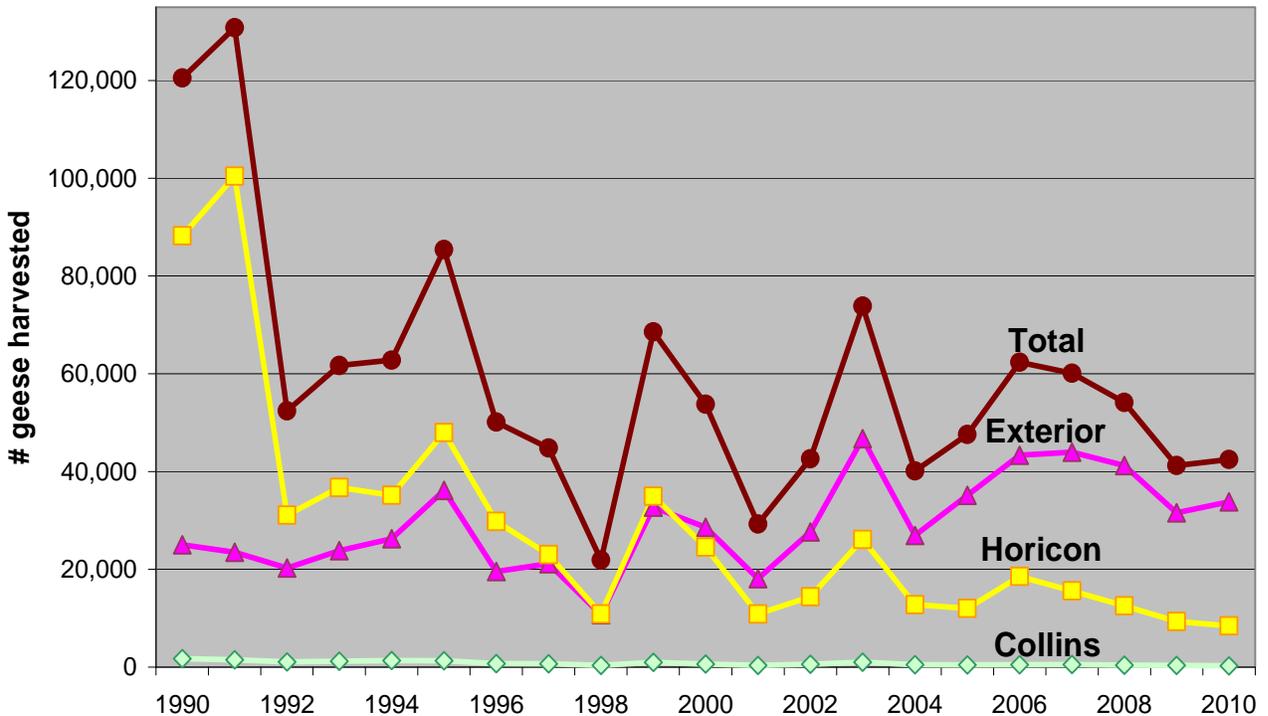
Geese are managed different than ducks; they are regulated by flyway and not overall total numbers. Wisconsin hosts migrating geese from the Mississippi Valley Population (MVP) Last year about one third of the total harvest came in the first two weeks of the Early goose season. Of those birds, about 90 percent are giant local birds. The 2010 early harvest was up quite a bit; probably because the 2009 season very hot with temps in the 80s.



The giant population is increasing while the MVP birds are mostly stable. We have been successful in keeping the harvest rate of MVP birds lower and the giant population harvest higher.

Season/ Zone	2010 Estimated Canada Goose Harvest
Early	19,900
Collins	233
Horicon	8,397
Exterior	33,818
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62,348</b>

## Canada Goose Harvest in All Regular Season Zones, 1990-2010



This is the last year of the 5 years stable season framework. Van Horn told the group to not look for a more liberal season after this year. Kent will meet with the feds this winter to discuss the 5 year program. The MVP is 25 percent below the long term average. WI giant population is up after about 3 years of stable levels.

### Morning Doves:

Wisconsin is still banding doves; their population is up slightly.

- 829 banded in WI 2010
- WI dove population trends:
  - 2001-2010 = 0.7% increase
  - 1966-2010 = 0.5% increase
- Moderate harvest prescription – 15 bird bag – 70 days.
- 10,000- 15,000 dove hunters in Wisconsin
- 99,400 (+/- 76%) harvested in 2010

Kent wanted to remind the committee that we should not overlook the dove season for the early goose season. Dove hunting is a great way to introduce new hunters into wing shooting.

Woodcock are in a long term decline about 1 percent per year. Long term (1968-2011) decline of about 1% per year

- Central and Eastern management units – no significant 10 year trend
- Wisconsin – no significant 10 year trend in SGS
- Wisconsin woodcock hunters – 14,200 (2nd in nation)
- Harvest of 36,000 (2nd in the nation)
- New harvest strategy implemented

Total banding effort last year:

- 4780 Geese
- 6363 Total Ducks
- 4207 Mallards
- 1930 Wood Ducks
- 1 Blue-winged teal
- 17 Green-winged teal
- 11 Pintail
- 6 Black Ducks

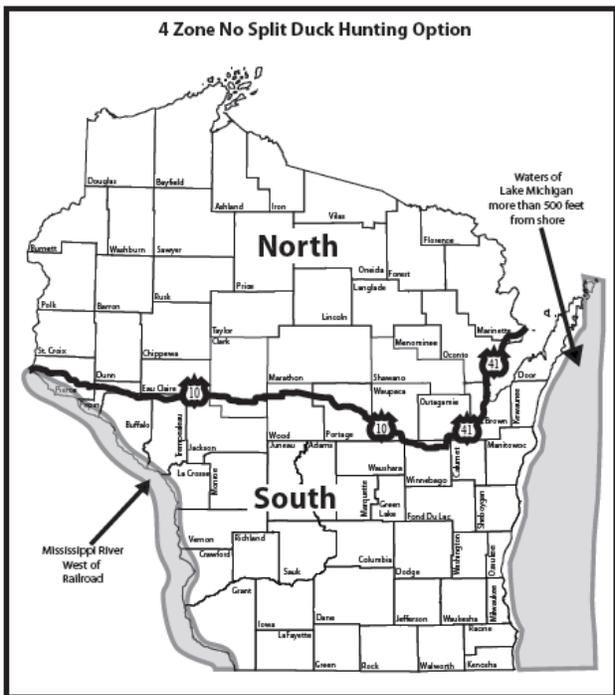
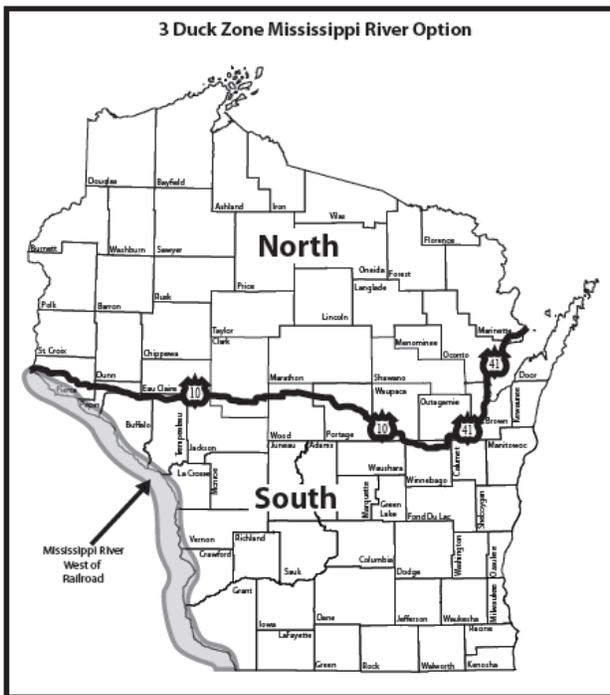
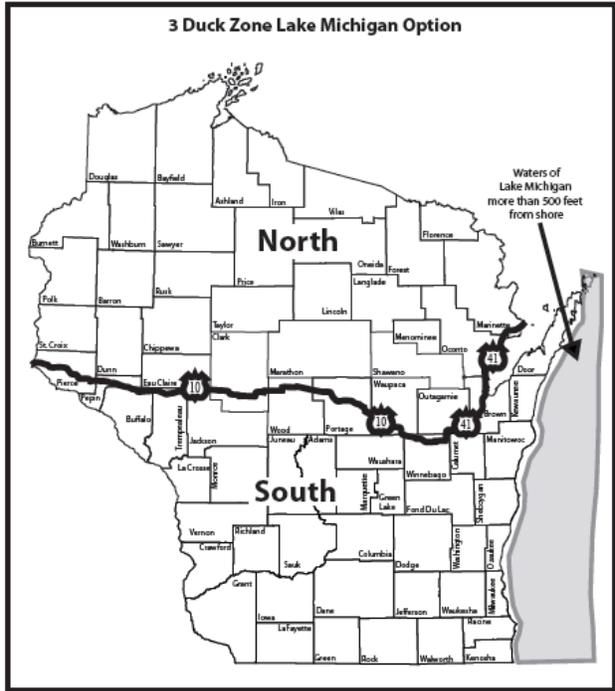
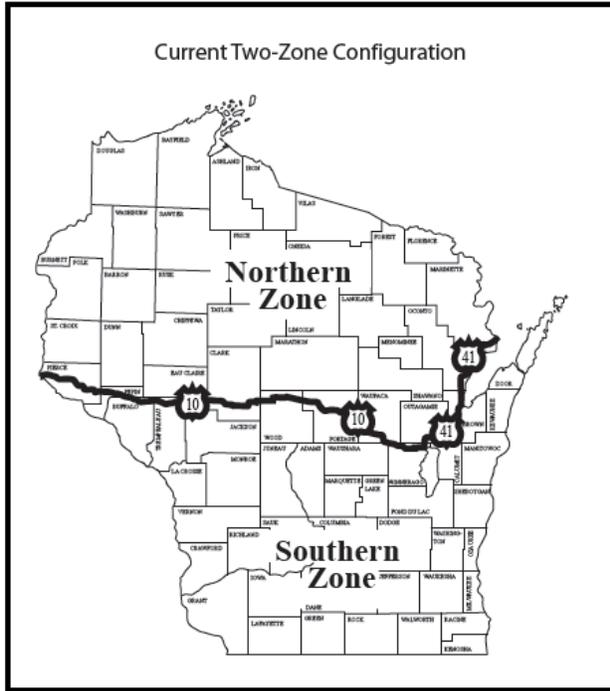
Mississippi flyway council meeting outcomes:

They added 2 more days to white geese seasons. Redheads in central flyway and upper Mississippi flyway recommended an increase of to 2 to 3 birds in the bags; we have had 2 reds in the bag for ever regardless of the population. The problem is that when you make a request, then you are asked to make a population model and then those things have to be reviewed annually; seems that it's better left alone.

The new duck zones were approved by the feds. Kent is pushing an effort to look at a national waterfowl hunter working group being formed in the USFW service. Look at hunter recruitment as well as duck numbers.

**Ducks Zones** – here we go!

Van Horn will make his presentation and the committee will discuss the options afterward. He asked that the committee not interrupt with questions at this time.



Kent is remaining neutral on the third zone issue, this is a tough issue.

The North duck zone will not see any change. Kent reminded the committee that from his survey data 2/3 of the hunters said that they are happy with the current zone set up.

Lake Michigan zone -

The design is for open water late season hunters. Oct. 15 to Dec 13, no split would be the most likely season.

South zone - if we go to four zones no split. With 3 zones, it would remain the same as all the rest. Over the last few years the duck hunters have told Kent they like the split in the south because they like the two season openers. Most hunters like the way the southern zone is working now.

Mississippi River Zone

“Why can’t we have a zone split with 4 zones,” Guy McFarren asked. Kent did not have a good answer from the feds. They said they don’t have a good idea of the impact on the kill if they have 4 zones. Kent responded to them that a few days one way or the other will not have a major impact on the kill. The feds say they disagree.

Mississippi River scenario:

- Potential scenarios are more complicated than other zones
- A Mississippi River zone is available under 2 of the 4 options
- Under the 3 zone Lake Michigan option the Mississippi River would remain in the southern duck zone
- Under the 4 zone option no season split is allowed

### **Under a 45 or 30 day season**

- North zone – Sept 24 or Oct 1 – No split
- Lake Michigan – Start late Oct – Early Nov
- South zone – Oct 1 or 8, probably a split if available
- Miss. River – Oct 8 or later with a long split (12 days or more) if available

Van Horn showed the committee an interesting graph of the importance of the harvest as the season progresses. The Mississippi river has increased harvest until the end of Nov. Then the Lake Michigan counties harvest increases in the first week of Dec. (the

last week of the season). However that is a very small number of ducks killed. Counties on the Mississippi River kill 21% of the ducks state harvest over the season. The data is from the counties along the river but safe to say that most of those ducks are killed on the Mississippi. The counties along Lake Michigan harvest 12% of the overall state harvest and that includes Green Bay. About 8% of the hunters survey said they use layout boats. However, about 16% of hunters say they hunt on the Mississippi river.

Public input 39 people surveyed said they favor the Mississippi River for the 3<sup>rd</sup> zone; 50 respondents say Lake Michigan for the third zone; 13 said leave it alone, they like what they've got.

Pros and cons for Mississippi River zone:

#### Pro

- History of requests
- Flexibility for early and late hunters (30, 45 day)
- Larger number hunters – 16% of total
- 9/24 open may reduce pressure on north zone
- Better teal/wood duck hunt if early

#### Con

- If open 9/24 – lose 9-12 days in October
- Later than ~ Dec 5 no longer desired - Frozen
- LCCA recommends River and South zone similar dates
- 64% of hunters in Miss River Co's want 2 zones over combo 3 zone option
- Nov Mallards is what makes river unique – already there

Pros and cons for Lake Michigan zone:

#### Pro

- Add days for WI duck hunting – Mid Dec
- Only 41% of hunters in Co's by Lake MI want 2 zones
- Distinct new opportunity – long tails, bufflehead, goldeneye – lay out boats
- Under a short (30,45 day) season this opportunity would be lost in south duck zone

#### Con

- Lower number of hunters 5-10%
- Gear/equipment beyond average duck hunter
- Weather more likely to limit season or create hazards

2 possible choices and the season dates:

**Miss River – 3 zone**

- North – Sept 24 - Nov 22
- South – Oct 1-9, Oct 15-Dec 4
- Miss River Sept 24-Oct 2, Oct 15 – Dec 4

**Lake MI – 3 zone**

- North – Sept 24 - Nov 22
- South – Oct 1-9, Oct 15-Dec 4
- Lake MI – Oct 15- Dec 13

Van Horn concluded his presentation and a motion was made by Al Shook to recess, seconded by Edelblute, to take a 15 minute break.

Meeting recessed at 10:25

Meeting resumed at 10:40

Chairman Koerner stated that is the most important meeting we've had, at least since he has been on the committee, and this is a difficult process.

The Vice chair opened the discussion for the 2 zone system. It was decided by the Chair and Vice Chair to discuss the zone choices first and then during the motion and voting process to suspend any more discussion.

**Lake Michigan zone 3 discussion:**

Al Shook restated that 2/3 of the hunters are already happy with the current 2 zones. One of the things that the governor asked that we try to simplify the rules. "Give strong consideration to not changing the way it is now. It's complicated enough now," he said.

John Edelblute said that we are not changing zone boundaries in the north or south.

Ray Heidel stated that the old battles in the Mississippi river area have been during the season openers.

Roger Hanson stated that the people he talked to are happy with it now, however, if offered we should take the opportunity.

Andrew Limmer from Milwaukee stated that the current seasons are not set up for late season bird hunting for black and white ducks. He would like the Lake Michigan zone for a later opener and a later end to the season. We could have as long as a 90 day season to hunt ducks across the state with an early northern zone opener and a late Lake Michigan zone.

Roger Hanson said that he is primarily an open water hunter and he is set up for the hunting style with the right equipment. He said that the first week in Dec. the lake holds hundreds of thousands of ducks. There are 50 some boat ramps on the lake Michigan side of the state and offers a great opportunity. Because of the season closes the way it does, few of the available ducks have been harvested.

Al Shook said the simplest thing for the rules would be to open the 3rd zone on Lake Michigan. If we must choose a 3<sup>rd</sup> zone we would be better served by taking the Lake Michigan option.

A committee member asked why we don't consider Lake Superior. Kent reminded us that the zones must be contiguous.

Andrew Limmer said that if we go to a 45 or 30 day season, the 3 zone would be meaningless.

Someone asked why Green Bay was not included in the 3<sup>rd</sup> zone. Hanson said that the longer split would lose days of hunting in October and that will really hurt the hunting. Layout hunters are killing divers on opening weekend on Green Bay. While some of the Green Bay area duct hunter may be hunting both Green Bay and Lake Michigan.

### **Mississippi River 3<sup>rd</sup> zone discussion:**

Ray Heidel said his local hunters have been asking and discussing this issue for 20 years or more. This zone change will be important if we go to a 45 or 30 day season. Those days were a disaster with no good hunting because the season opened before the ducks arrived and closed early before the divers showed up. He thinks the early opener to coincide with the north zone would pull some of that pressure away from the north zone. There is a ton of opportunities and access types along the Mississippi. He sees kids riding their bikes to the river to hunt. Heidel said If it were not for the Mississippi River hunters pushing this issue, we would not be here talking about adding this 3<sup>rd</sup> zone. They deserve the zone because of the work they have done and because of the opportunity to serve more hunters.

Chuck Boley echoes Rays words that there are more opportunities because they don't need all of the expensive equipment. It's easy for young hunters that can walk, canoe, skiff etc. and would serve many more hunters than it could on Lake Michigan. It's all free hunting on the river, it's all public property, and there are no boat launch fees.

Roger Hanson questioned Ray on the first season if it was closed on Dec.4. Then only 16% of the hunters in the state that claimed they hunt the Mississippi River could take advantage of a 3<sup>rd</sup> zone. The rest of the people in the state don't get any late hunting as they could if we had a Lake Michigan zone.

A committee member lamented that the four zones would make everybody happy and some members are frustrated that the feds will not give us the opportunity to go with it and been able to split.

All other comments regarding the 4 zone option were against the idea because it would limit our options during a restricted season of 30 or 45 days.

Rick Koenig was asking if we could compromise and have a 5 year Miss zone and then a 5 year Lake Michigan hunt.

Vice Chair John Edelblute set the rules for the vote we will take a motion for each choice and we can vote for any or all.

Edelblute motioned to stay with 2 zones, second by Al Shock.

Motion failed with only 1 yes, 22 no

Edelblute motioned for Lake Michigan 3<sup>rd</sup> zone, Limmer second

Motion failed, 8 yes, 13 no

John motion to add Mississippi as 3<sup>rd</sup> zone, Al Marotz second

Motion carried, 13 yes, 10 no

Edelblute motioned for the 4 zone option, second by Koerner,

Motion fails 1 yes, 22 no

Motion by Al Marotz to make the Mississippi the 3rd zone, Jerry Merryfield second

Motion carries by voice vote, hand vote was then called for 17 yes, 3 no

Therefore, the WCC Migratory Committee recommends that the Wisconsin duck hunting zone be awarded to the proposed Mississippi River Zone.

## **Seasons:**

Motion to accept the northern duck zone as proposed by the DNR with 9/24 to 11/22 with no split by Al Shook, Jerry Merryfield second

Motion carried by voice vote

Motion by Mitch Fisher to accept the DNR proposal for the southern zone with an Oct. 1 to Oct. 9, a five day split, reopen Oct. 15 and close Dec. 4, second by McFarren

Motion Carries by voice vote

Ray Heidel motions new Mississippi River zone to open 9/24 to 10/2, 12 day split and Oct. 15 to Dec. 4, second by Tim Morgan

Discussion:

Al Shock thinks the 12 day split is too long and there is too much lost opportunity to kill birds. Tim Morgan Vernon county said the early opportunity is good and the big migration comes in about the middle of the October.

Chuck Boley said the highest concentration on the river is usually the last week of October.

Motion carries 21 yes, 1 no and 1 abstain

Dailey motions to accept the daily bag limit as presented by DNR, second by Todd Cook

- 60 day Duck season (9/24 early start)
- 6 total ducks per day
- Of the 6 total ducks no more than 4 mallards, 3 wood ducks, 2 redheads, 2 scaup, 2 pintails, 1 canvasback, 1 black duck. All others up to 6 ducks.
- Wisconsin only differs by setting the mallard hen bag limit at 1 rather than 2

Motion carries by voice vote

### **Youth Hunt duck hunt:**

Fisher motion to accept as proposed for the weekend of Sept. 17-18, second by Earnest

No discussion

Motion carried by voice vote

### **Geese:**

Early season - Motion to accept the early season as proposed with a September 1 opening and closing on September 15, once again by Al Shook, second by Merryfield

Motion carries voice vote

Exterior - north zone: motion by Al Shook (what, again), Fisher second to accept DNR proposal for September 16 open, 85 days, no split, close Dec. 9, daily bag of 2 geese?

Motion carried voice vote

Exterior – south zone: Earnest motion to open goose season with southern duck zone on Oct. 1 to 9, 5 day split, reopen Oct. 15 and run until the 85 days are up Dec. 29, second by Limmer

Discussion:

Fisher stated that our goals are to kill local Wisconsin birds; we do that early in the season, the first two weeks. He reminded the committee the goal is to maintain the 2 day bag and the current quota from the feds. There are few hunters after geese during the late season he said and that we don't want to go back to the days of 1 bird per day for most of the season 2 geese bag limits after Nov. 1, he said.

The motion fails, 9 yes, 13 no

Fisher motion to open September 16 to Oct. 9 split to Dec.15, Todd Cook second

Discussion:

Kent Van Horn told the committee if we wanted to extend the season into late Dec. we could have 2 splits, we could close the season during the gun deer hunt. Discussion followed by various committee members to go for the second split during the gun deer season. Fisher was asked if he would like to amend his motion to allow a second split as discussed. Fisher declined to amend his motion, reiterating that the late December hunt would benefit only a handful of hunters. More hunters would lose opportunities, effectively giving up two weekends including the four day Thanksgiving holiday weekend.

Discussion continued:

Vice Chair Edelblute that in the past, that during the last weekend of the exterior goose season, reported goose harvest data shows that only one or two geese killed per day.

The motion carries, 12 yes, 9 no

Mississippi River sub-zone: Motion by Heidel to open geese with the Mississippi duck zone September 24 to Oct. 9, split for 12 days, then reopen on the Oct.15, and run to the end of 85 days, December 14, second by Merryfield

Motion carried by voice vote

Horicon zone: Motion to accept Gettelman, Dailey second to accept Horicon zone as presented by DNR - Daily Bag of 2. 6 Tags per hunter, 2 periods

- H1- Sept 16 – Oct 30
- H2- Oct 31 – Dec 16

Discussion:

Noel Dolde doesn't like the way the days fall, the second season opens on a weekday. Van Horn explained the season dates were designed around the teacher's convention when young hunters would be out of school. There was nothing he could do about the dates this year.

Motion carried by voice vote

Light geese - Dolde motion, Koenig second to accept as propose the light geese season

Light geese (Snow, Blue and Ross) and Brant: Seasons are the same as Canada goose zones and subzones. Daily Bag Limit: 1 brant and 20 light geese (Wisconsin hunters only harvest a few hundred light geese each year but they are overabundant in the US).

White-fronted geese: Season is the same for the Exterior zone.

Daily Bag Limit: 1 white-fronted goose. Within the Horicon zone, white-fronted geese cannot be harvested until September 20 but then the season is open until the close of the zone on December 16

Motion carried with voice vote

Motion by Koerner to adopt falconry season as proposed, Gettelman second

Falconry dates would be all the days migratory birds are open to gun hunting in the respective zones. They are allowed a late season from January 7-Feb. 20<sup>th</sup> 2012.

Motion carries with a voice vote

Opening day and shooting hours - Motion by Al Shook for opening day 9 am, thereafter ½ hour before sunrise, close at sunset, second Merryfield

Several members commented to open state wide ½ hour before sunrise. It has been noted that Minnesota intends to open ½ hour before sunrise on opening day. Others still want noon opener and sunrise for the rest of the season.

Motion carries by voice vote.

### **Member matters:**

Hunter-ed cook book looking for contributions. A committee member stated again that we need a sand hill crane season and a swan season. Kent was asked if there is a

proposal of having that opportunity for swans, there is a management plan but they are not on the books now.

Chairman Koerner briefed the committee on matters that will come up for our regular December meeting. He asked for a show of hands as to who wanted a Friday night meeting or who preferred a Saturday morning meeting. The Friday night meeting was preferred.

Friday Dec. 2 meeting will be the night for regular fall committee meeting; the location is TBD. This is one week earlier than the committee normally meets and this change was requested to allow more time for the WCC to write and prepare the resolutions that will be on the Spring Hearing ballot.

Koerner then thanked Ray Heidel for all his hard work, over all these years, to push for the third Mississippi duck zone.

Motion to adjourn by Dailey, Second by Cook

Motion carries by voice vote

Meeting adjourned at 12:26 PM

Respectfully submitted by Mitchell Fisher, secretary, WCC Migratory Committee

Attachment:

### **Migratory Study Committee Mission Statement**

*The mission of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress Migratory Committee is to represent the Stake Holders of Wisconsin by working with the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources to effectively manage Wisconsin's local ducks and geese, as well as migrating ducks, geese, swans, and other migratory birds for present and future generations to enjoy.*

