

DNR Migratory Gamebird Committee Meeting November 4, 2015

Attendance:

Kent Van Horn (WDNR), Pete Engman (WDNR - NOD), Jim Holzwart (WDNR- NED), Bill Hirt (WDNR- WCD), Tyler Strelow (WDNR - LE), James Christopoulos (WDNR - SOD), Brenda Kelly (WDNR), Peter David (GLIFWC), Steve Bertjens (NRCS), Don Kirby (WI Waterfowl Association), John Wetzel (WI Wildlife Federation), Jeff Nass (Hunters Rights Coalition), Todd Cook (WI Conservation Congress), Taylor Finger (WDNR)

Not in Attendance:

Jason Fleener (WDNR), Linda Olver (WDNR – Customer Service), Ron Gatti (WDNR- Science Services), Sumner Matteson (WDNR – Natural Heritage Conservation) Brian Glenzinski (Ducks Unlimited), Kurt Waterstradt (USFWS), Joel Brice (Delta Waterfowl)

Update on Waterfowl Season and Numbers

- **Todd Cook** – A lot of birds on the federal end of Horicon but relatively few on the state end, geese are down and for the first time he noticed people camping at Horicon the night before the season because of the change to a ½ hour before sunrise beginning of shooting hours.
- **Tyler Strelow** – ½ hour opener was a non-issue, he checked with all the regional wardens and that was the feedback he got, he didn't hear of any conflicts and people were happy, especially on the Miss. River. The teal season had low participation and it was hot. Regular season quality is low to average, the second opener was better, people had more success and there were more birds. Only had one group that wasn't in compliance on the 2nd weekend closure. Heard from a lot of folks that this year's season structure on the Mississippi River was great and would like to see it similar in the future.
- **Brenda Kelly** – Received similar comments regarding how many people liked the this year's Mississippi River season structure and would like to see it remain the same. Divers have arrived on the river but hunters have not really gotten into them yet. Strongly endorse opening the River and the South Zone on the same date.
- **John Wetzel** – Great wood duck numbers on back water of the Mississippi River.
- **Peter David** – Diver numbers are increasing in the Chequamegon Bay, hunting pressure was heavy early and has since tapered off.
- **Don Kirby** – Northern 1/3rd of the state was really good early and there are a lot of Divers on Green Bay. People are doing really well in layout boats but if you are hunting from shore or boat blinds it has been difficult. From observations very few northern birds have moved in and some if not most of the locals have pushed out. Because of the warm weather and slow hunting conditions he is starting to hear people saying that the migration will occur after the season has closed.

- **Jeff Nass** – He had asked some people about the teal season. People supported the season and would likely try it in the future if we still have it but they are somewhat hesitant right now to try it. Finding very little discussion or strong support from other hunting groups to push for a Sandhill Crane hunting season in Wisconsin. They will keep trying to find that support. Kent shared the status of other states in the flyway regarding sandhill crane hunting.
- **Pete Engman** – Good water and production in his area. The early teal season was basically a non-event as it was warm and there weren't many teal around. The early and exterior Canada Goose season has been good and people have been getting into birds. Bag checks on opening day were on the low side of average and were primarily Mallards and Wood ducks. Divers have started to filter in and duck hunting pressure has been average. Woodcock migration is in full swing and it was a good year for production. Questioned whether or not we could move season later because season has been closed the last couple of years and the birds moved in. Kent noted that the length of the woodcock season is limited by federal law. He also provided feedback on woodcock status in relation to the Wildlife Action Plan.
- **Jim Holzwart** – Similar reports to what the rest of the managers have been stating, good on the first week and locals pushed out and not many birds have moved back in.
- **Bill Hirt** – The buildup of ducks through Sept. was great and had some of the highest duck numbers he has seen since he started. Production was great and wood ducks were everywhere. Again for the second year in a row Wood ducks were the # 1 bird in the bag on opening weekend (45% wood ducks, 29% mallards, 12% green-winged teal, and 7% blue-winged teal). Opening weekend numbers were the highest ever and a 30% increase from last year. This year there were 629 hunters and 308 cars compared to last year's 461 hunters. Water conditions on Mead and surrounding properties were average. Ducks/hunter on opening weekend was 1.46 which is pretty good. They have had more geese this year, especially the smaller migrants and has been a great season around the Mead. Bird numbers have gradually gone down, and very few new fresh birds have moved in, little to no divers around. Based on their hunter surveys they received 79% of people are in favor of the current 16 day 1pm closure compared to 20% opposing it. Staff heard of a few complaints of people staying out all night in the marsh now that the shooting hours were changed to begin at ½ before sunrise.

Update on Early Teal Season and Results

- Kent provided background information on the teal season timing
- Description of the seasons accepted by WI, MI, and IA
 - o WI – 7 day season, 6 teal/day
 - Shooting hours for opening day were 9am – 7pm, Sept. 2-7 sunrise – 7pm
 - o MI – 7 day season, 6 teal/day, shooting hours sunrise to sunset
 - o IA – 16 day season, 6 teal/day, shooting hours sunrise to sunset
- Overview of the teal season and preliminary results

- A team of wildlife and LE staff was recruited and trained to observe hunters around the state.
- 40 hunting parties observed, 100% of the parties were in compliance, meaning that they did not shoot at any non-teal ducks
- Results show that fewer birds were observed and fewer hunters were out during the teal season likely because of the warm temperature.
- Reminded people that this was a 3 year process so conclusions will come when the 3 year experiment is complete.
- USFWS criteria for approval are based on pooled data from MI, WI and IA

Comments –

- **Peter David** – Questioned the protocol and wondered if the way the observations are designed that we are biasing our information because we didn't pick up the violators when clearly there was violations occurring
- **Kent Van Horn** – responded to Peter's question describing how the protocol is set up and the same design has been used for every state looking to obtain an operational teal season over the last 50 years so all states are on the same evaluation level.
- **Don Kirby** – Feels that only the really serious duck hunters were actually out in 2015 because of the heat and could have been why we saw an increase in compliance.
- **Group Consensus** – Less people out during the season and those out this year were likely more avid waterfowl hunters and the casual hunter likely didn't partake in the season because of the weather conditions.
- The Wisconsin Waterfowl Association and some staff noted that hunters commented that they really like our new "early season" brochure that put the early goose, early teal and dove season in one publication. We produced this in response to hunter requests to reduce confusion on different shooting hours and they were thankful for our responsiveness and believe it helped for provide clarification.
- **Peter David** - noted that he received several complaints that early season waterfowl hunters (teal mostly) caused damage to some rice beds. There were no direct conflicts between ricers and hunters but the ricers thought that the hunters damaged the rice crop in some areas. The Committee discussed additional ways to raise awareness of this issue with duck hunters. To date we focused on alerting duck hunters and ricers to avoid conflict with one another rather than to be careful not to damage the rice beds.

Update on Duck Zone Change and Process

- Kent provided information on how the zones could be structured under federal options
 - Four zones with no season split options, 3 zones with one season split option, 2 zones with option of one season split, and no zone with option of 2 splits.

- Kent provided the duck zone public input process and timing for when the final recommendation would need to be submitted.
- Kent provided the purpose of the Duck Zone Ad Hoc Committee meeting and the goals of that meeting as well as the products that come from that meeting.
 - o Update the Hwy 10 zone line if Hwy 10 remains as the North/South Zone line.
 - o Presented the 3 zone options that will go into the random waterfowl hunter mail survey.

Comments –

- **Don Kirby** – He attended the Green Bay Duck Hunter’s recent meeting with 32 members in attendance and wanted us to know that all 32 were in favor of remaining in the southern duck zone and believe that the current date structure is perfect for their hunting needs.
- **Overall** – Migratory Game Bird Committee members were comfortable with the decision process for evaluating duck hunting zones and believed that the current structure will not likely not change.

Update Conservation Congress Resolutions and Legislative Issues

- Kent presented information regarding a citizen resolution that came from a county which was to abolish the 16 day 1:00 pm closure in mead wildlife area for duck hunting. He presented the information we presented the congress migratory committee showing that there has and continues to be majority support for the 16 day closure contrary to the information the citizen presented.
- Mead Wildlife Areas is doing a windshield survey on the harvest and opinion on current 1 pm closure. They have provided Kent the cards so he is aware of this interaction. The committee discussed that the Migratory Committee of the Conservation Congress forwarded a question to the Executive committee to repeal the 1 pm closure of shooting hours for the 1st 16 days on the Mead WA despite majority local support for this management tool.
- Kent provided information on a citizen resolution that would request that all waterfowl blinds on public property be removed at the end of the day. This would require a legislative change.
- The committee discussed the upcoming WCC spring hearing advisory question to change state statute that currently allows people to construct duck blinds of timber etc on public lands and waters for the waterfowl season. The committee cited numerous problems with creating conflict, and degrading the public resource with structures and debris as a result of this practice. The committee believes the statute should be changed to not allow this practice.
- Kent provided brief history on open water hunting and concealment rules. He presented the current rule wording and then presented the new wording that will be implemented in 2016.
- Kent provided background information on a law that is being discussed in legislation regarding leaving unattended decoys on private water. He provided why this is a difficult issue because most waters have an inlet or outlet and are therefore public ally accessible. The conservation congress has voted on it in the last two spring hearings

Comments –

- **Don Kirby** – Surprised that the unattended decoy rule is getting as much traction as it has considering how few people it will impact
- **Tyler Strelow** – There will be a lot of violations and tickets because of the unattended decoy rule if it were to move forward because people believe it impacts more waters than it would.
- **Jeff Nass** – Feels that the backing for the unattended decoy rule is more about property rights and not so much about duck hunting.

Update on Canada Goose Management in Wisconsin and Flyway

- Kent presented harvest data for early season and for exterior season for 2015
- Kent presented slide laying out how we have simplified and liberalized goose regulations over the past 10 years
- Kent presented information and data regarding the future of the Horicon Zone
 - o Dodge and Fond du Lac are still ranked in the top 5 counties for goose harvest and make up 12% of total regular season goose harvest despite restrictive regulations.
 - o Data shows that majority of harvest and hunters takes place in H1 and drops off sharply during H2
- The committee discussed the continue simplification and liberalization of Canada goose hunting regulations that we have been implemented over the last decade and supported eliminating the H1 and H2 time periods in the Horicon Zone for 2016 so that hunters who receive a Horicon tag can hunt the entire 92 days in the Horicon zone. Hunter numbers and harvest have declined to levels that crowding issues were not considered significant any longer.
- Kent presented map describing history on how we used to manage the different populations of Canada Geese and that WI has migrating geese that pass through the state from nesting areas in northern Ontario. Described the management of the increasing Local Temperate Breeding geese. Also informed committee of the percentages of what types of geese are shot in several states in the flyway and the flyway as a whole.
 - o Temperate Breeding Geese make up 70-80% of flyway harvest
 - o WI 40% temperate and 60% Ontario breeders (Regular season)
- Kent described the new management philosophy that the flyway seems to be heading in, toward less data collection and simplified management. Some states or provinces want to manage all Canada Geese as one and not have separate populations, reason for doing this is less cost to fly surveys and monitor Canada breeding geese. This may, however place too heavy a harvest on the Ontario breeding Canada geese with a negative impact to WI hunting opportunity.
- Kent presented population trend graphs indicating the Ontario nesting goose population is declining and WI and Miss. Flyway Giant goose population seems to be leveling out. He also presented graph showing how harvest would change if the daily bag limit increased to 3 birds/day and how that would impact the Ontario population.
- Kent provided information on how other states within the flyway view this issue and the likelihood of an increased bag limit may be coming.

Comments –

- **John Wetzel/Brenda Kelly** – Both expressed concern that this would mean that they wouldn't manage temperate geese and Canada nesting geese separately?
- **Brenda Kelly** – How do you (Kent) feel about this and is Wisconsin going to see an increased bag limit?
- **Kent Van Horn** – Going to argue for continued monitoring of the MVP population so we can assess how any new management strategy affects the MVP population as well as quality of goose hunting in Wisconsin. Wisconsin is in a unique situation compared to other states. May be difficult to maintain what we have without support from other states.
- **John Wetzel/Brenda Kelly** – How will the decreased surveying in Canada correlate with the new management technique and how will we measure the change
- **Kent Van Horn** – There is a declining hunting population in Canada and government feels that the current level of monitoring is no longer needed. There will be fewer transects and fewer flights conducted and data will be used to measure changes and trends rather than population estimates.
- **James Christopoulos** – How will new flyway management strategy affect the Horicon Zone and some staff's desire to remove the zone.
- **John Wetzel** – Suggest being very wary of removing the zone until we better understand how the new goose harvest strategy will impact the Ontario nesting goose population.

Update on Waterfowl Regulation Schedule Changing According to USFWS Changes

- Kent provided an updated timeline in regards to the waterfowl season setting process and also provided what the likely 2016 season structure will be.