



December 27, 2022 Weekly Waterfowl Report

Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks

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The following report is a compilation of public and private land reports and habitat assessments during the week ending December 25, 2022.

Jackson, MS – Winter weather certainly arrived in Mississippi last week. The week started with relatively normal temperatures, increased during the midweek, and then an arctic blast brought high north winds and temperatures well below freezing through the weekend. Many field reports indicated that waterfowl numbers increased immediately before and during this sharp turn in weather. However, hunting conditions quickly became challenging due to icy conditions on shallow, managed wetlands across the state. Many successful hunters reported finding concentrations of birds on deep water habitats like lakes, brakes, and sloughs or flowing waters like creeks and rivers. Others hunted where birds or flowing groundwater wells had kept small areas of shallow water open, and some were successful in breaking ice to create open pockets for hunting.

The national weather outlook predicts another weather change this week, but this time in the direction of warm and rainy. While these conditions are not ideal for late December waterfowl hunting, hunters may experience sustained success as ice-covered wetlands thaw and birds return to shallow water to find abundant food resources. Ducks and geese that have had limited high-quality foraging opportunities over the past few days will likely respond quickly when these areas once again become available in the next couple of days. As rainfall continues to add water to the landscape and temperatures increase through the weekend, hunting success could decline as birds distribute across newly flooded areas.

A significant increase in proportion of mallard harvest was apparent from public and private land hunting reports last week. Snow, blue, Ross's, and white-fronted goose numbers have continued to increase across the Mississippi Delta. Availability of quality wetland habitat and weather conditions will continue to influence waterfowl harvest as winter continues along.

The December aerial waterfowl survey report is now available on MDWFP's website and social media platforms. The early January survey is scheduled for next week, but the current weather outlook may result in delays yet again. A little over half of Mississippi's waterfowl hunting season remains, and January typically brings peak duck numbers to the Magnolia State. 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 web page lists links to hunting regulations, migration reports, and habitat information for specific WMAs and other public lands throughout the state.

Table 1: Waterfowl harvest and WMA visits reported over the past week for Wildlife Management Areas where harvest of at least one bird was reported. Note: this data does not necessarily represent the total number of hunters and harvest for each WMA. Hunters are reminded of the requirement to check in prior to hunting and to check out upon leaving the WMA. Waterfowl hunters are also reminded to review all regulations and any applicable draw hunt procedures for any WMA they plan to hunt.

WMA	WMA Visits	Harvest	Avg. Harvest/Day
Bienville	20	9	0.45
Canal Section	80	171	2.14
Caney Creek	7	6	0.86
Charlie Capps	32	37	1.16
Divide Section	10	7	0.70
Howard Miller	137	231	1.69
John Bell Williams	2	3	1.50
Lake George	19	14	0.74
Leroy Percy	2	1	0.50
Mahannah	215	421	1.96
Malmaison	98	184	1.88
Muscadine Farms	50	51	1.02
Nanih Waiya	62	45	0.73
Okatibbee	108	36	0.33
O'Keefe	65	33	0.51
Old River	18	8	0.44
Pascagoula River	78	26	0.33
Pearl River	38	29	0.76
Phil Bryant	32	28	0.88
Shipland	23	27	1.17
Sky Lake	11	13	1.18
Sunflower	135	69	0.51
Tallahala	8	4	0.50
Tuscumbia	67	59	0.88
Twin Oaks	2	2	1.00
Upper Sardis	13	2	0.15
Ward Bayou	46	34	0.74
William C. Billy Deviney	71	116	1.63

Sunflower WMA Flooding for 2022-23 Waterfowl Season

Water control structures in the Long Bayou and Dowling Bayou green-tree reservoirs (GTRs) will be closed to capture water for the 2022-23 hunting season on Sunflower WMA. 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. Other GTRs may also eventually flood from winter rainfall and backwater. A map of Sunflower WMA wetland areas can be found here:

<http://www.mdwfp.com/media/256111/sunflower-wma-gtrs-and-slough-areas.pdf>