December 19, 2017 Weekly Waterfowl Report

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The following report is a compilation of public and private land reports and habitat assessments during the week ending December 17, 2017.

Jackson, MS – Last week began with yet another warm start with south winds, but eventually experienced a short duration of below-freezing temperatures again by the weekend. Wetland habitat availability has remained relatively low for this time of year. However, the upcoming week's forecast includes strong chances of rain for some areas of the Mississippi Delta. Although temperatures will be warm during this time, if significant amounts of rainfall are received, habitat conditions could change dramatically across the state. Following the warm, rainy stretch, the national weather outlook predicts another push of cold weather for Mississippi heading into the Christmas holidays. If this weather pattern is sustained as long as predicted, it could produce strong migrations of waterfowl into the state from northern latitudes.

The December aerial waterfowl survey was completed last week, and the results and distribution maps are now posted on MDWFP's website at **www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl**. Total duck estimates were above the long-term average for December surveys, but mallard estimates were below the long-term average. However, early reports for this week indicate that mallard numbers may be increasing across the Mississippi Delta. Biologists and managers are hopeful that upcoming rainfall will help to add new wetland habitat on several areas soon. Waterfowl hunters should remember that as weather and habitat conditions change, bird concentrations and behaviors will most likely change as well. When newly flooded habitat becomes available, waterfowl will typically exploit newly flooded areas, and hunters may need to adjust hunting locations or tactics to keep success rates high. Also, during mild temperatures, waterfowl will not be forced to feed as heavily, which will often lead to a reduction in overall activity. Mild winter weather often leads to observations of waterfowl "loafing" and resting throughout the day since they no longer require high energy levels to maintain body heat and energy levels. These times of low activity can often be challenging for hunters. Many state Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) across the Mississippi Delta continue to experience hunting success, with very high numbers of green-winged teal remaining in the area. Light geese and white-fronted geese continue to build in number across much of the Delta region, with the northeastern portion of the Delta holding very large flocks of geese. As always, availability of quality wetland habitat and weather conditions will greatly influence early season waterfowl harvest on both private and public lands.

The fourth draw period for WMA waterfowl draw hunts is still open for applications. Hunters are encouraged to apply for any WMAs and dates they may be interested in hunting. The Waterfowl Program website (**www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl**) lists links to regulations and habitat information for specific WMAs and other public lands throughout the state, as well as other general waterfowl information as it becomes available.

Table 1: Water levels and total duck abundance ratings for selected Wildlife Management Areas.

WMA	Water Levels*	Duck Abundance
Charlie Capps	100%	Low
Howard Miller	100%	Medium-High
William C. “Billy” Deviney	100%	Med
Mahannah	80%	Low
Malmaison**	60%	Low
Muscadine Farms	90%	Medium
O'Keefe	100%	Medium
Twin Oaks	70%	Low
Trim Cane	10%	Low
Tuscumbia	10%	Low

*Indicates percentage of water coverage in managed impoundments. Most impoundments are intentionally allowed to gradually fill to capacity over the course of the winter.

**Malmaison WMA green-tree reservoir is being managed at a lower pumped water level than in past years to better manage the existing bottomland hardwoods in the area. Rainfall will also be captured to supplement pumping throughout the winter to gradually flood the area.

Sunflower WMA Green-tree Reservoir (GTR) Flooding for 2017-18 Waterfowl Season

The GTRs below will be prepared for flooding this season by placing boards in water control structures and closing valves to allow accumulation of rainfall. No pumps are operational on Sunflower WMA currently. Waterfowl habitat will be limited until adequate rainfall is received. Normally, mid to late December and January is when suitable water levels begin to appear.

Long Bayou #7 GTR
South GTR #8 GTR (southeast portion only)
Sunflower GTR (west and southeast portions only)

Additional Wetland Areas on Sunflower WMA:
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 to allow for flooding.

Table 2: Waterfowl harvest and man-days reported from December 9 – December 15, 2017 for selected Wildlife Management Areas.

WMA	Man-Days	Waterfowl Harvest	Avg. Birds/Hunter/Day
Charlie Capps	18	20	1.1
Howard Miller	239	645	2.7
William C. “Billy” Deviney	74	151	2.0
Mahannah	55	87	1.6
Malmaison**	133	84	0.6
Muscadine Farms	102	102	1.0
O'Keefe	138	48	0.3
Twin Oaks	11	9	0.8
Trim Cane*	0	0	0
Tuscumbia*	0	0	0

*Trim Cane and Tuscumbia have not yet received enough rainfall to flood impoundments, and have not yet been hunted for waterfowl.