

Crow Island State Game Area Annual Report 2015



Crow Island Annual Hunting Season Report
 Management unit: South East Region
 NAME OF AREA: Crow Island State Game Area
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1. General Introduction

Crow Island State Game Area lies within the Saginaw Bay lake plain, formerly characterized by swamp forest, wet-mesic prairie and emergent marshes. It is presently a complex of emergent wetlands, managed wetland impoundments and agricultural uplands that provide habitat for a wide variety of migratory birds (both game and non-game) as well as associated invertebrate, reptiles and mammalian wildlife.

Crow Island SGA spans portions of Saginaw and Bay Counties along the lower Saginaw River in east-central Lower Michigan. There are presently 3,489 acres included in state ownership.

2. Area Goals and Management Emphasis

Crow Island SGA is managed to meet goals and objectives, and associated '[More bang for your buck](#)' criteria set forth in the Wildlife Division's [Guiding Principles and Strategies](#) (GPS) which are, primarily, to promote safe nesting, brood rearing and migration stop-over habitat for local and migratory waterfowl and shorebirds and to provide for myriad hunting and non-consumptive wildlife related recreational pursuits. Through habitat management efforts intended for these species, native mammals, herpetiles and a variety of game and non-game birds also benefit. In addition to providing for the habitat needs of various wildlife species, Crow Island is primarily managed to provide hunting, trapping and wildlife viewing opportunities to the public. Raccoon trapping was allowed on the area in the early part this year.

3. Wildlife Production and Use Estimates

Approximately 40–80 breeding pairs of ducks produced 150–400 ducklings on the area. Approximately 40–55 pairs of Canada geese produced 280–385 goslings. Breeding pairs were most easily observed in the Baldpate and Davis units while those using the East unit were often difficult to observe. Numbers of breeding ducks and Canada geese appeared to be lower than numbers observed in previous years. Waterfowl observed with young included Canada goose, Mallard, Wood Duck, American Coot, Pie-billed Grebe and Mute Swan. These observations likely do not represent all waterfowl species breeding at Crow Island. Probable breeders included Blue-Winged Teal, Green-Winged Teal, American Wigeon, Trumpeter swan and Common Gallinule. Other ducks observed on the area at various times included Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Ring-Necked Duck, Northern Pintail, Black Duck and Gadwall. Two pairs of Trumpeter swans were on the area and one pair had four young. A small number of White Pelicans used the area all summer long.

No ring-necked pheasant hens were observed with chicks this spring. More were likely on the area but not directly observed. Male pheasants were observed on the area on several occasions throughout the year.

Overall, the number of pheasants on the area appears to be similar to 2014. Crow Island continues to be an important wintering area for the local pheasant population because of the availability of high quality winter cover in the form of large cattail stands and the close proximity to food resources in nearby agricultural fields. Crow Island has historically wintered up to 50 pheasants, although less than 50 were observed wintering on the area this year. Wild turkeys were observed on several occasions, hens with two broods were seen this summer.

White-tailed deer were frequently encountered on the area throughout the spring and summer months. The size of the local herd is difficult to estimate because of their tendency to frequent dense cattail stands. The spring deer herd numbered 20–40 animals. Similar to previous years, deer were particularly numerous this spring in the Davis and Panko units. These animals tend to disperse late in spring once croplands to the east begin providing both food and cover.

Furbearer numbers increased in the East Unit and the Panko Unit this year due to the East unit being filled with water, which in turned helped with water levels in the Panko Unit. Muskrat populations have traditionally fluctuated in all of the units as water levels and cattail coverage change. Coyotes and foxes were observed on several occasions across the area. Woodchuck, raccoon, opossum and cotton-tailed rabbits were common on the area.

Other wildlife use and observations on the area included nesting Bald Eagles in the Plowdry Unit and the East Unit, and a nesting pair of Great Horned owls in the Plowdry Unit. Breeding numbers of yellow-headed blackbirds were lower this year compared to 2014. Early successional habitats across the area continue to provide significant foraging and nesting habitats for many species of migratory passerines. American Bitterns were heard calling this past spring and were seen flying over the area on several occasions. Black-crowned Night Herons were often seen on the area, as were Great Blue Heron, large numbers of Great Egret, Green Heron, Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, Black Terns (probable breeders) and a wide variety of shorebirds, particularly on the extensive mudflats in the Plowdry and Davis Units. Infrequently encountered species included Rough-legged Hawk and Northern Shrike.

4. Significant Habitat Management

Planting at Crow Island was completed on a timeframe similar to previous years. Overall, crops planted on state lands made it through the summer in good condition. Crops were harvested before the opening of the firearm deer season. Crops were planted on 111.4 acres in the Stork unit by two sharecroppers.

Water levels were high across the area throughout the spring, spring rain was good in the area; steady summer rainfall and cool temperatures made

water level management easier. High water levels in the Saginaw Bay and Saginaw River made adding water to impounded areas a much easier task. The entire game area had good water by the beginning of the duck season; water levels were high but the vegetation also was very abundant.

Beetles (*Galerucella* spp.) continue to have a significant impact on purple loosestrife in the East Unit. Some purple loosestrife could be found in flower within the original release site in the south end of the unit. The beetles have expanded their range and can now be found across the entire game area.

5. Land Acquisition

No land was acquired in 2015.

6. Area Maintenance

- a) The East Unit was sprayed for Phragmites and to create openings.
- b) Gravel and rock were added to the two boat ramps on east side of area.
- c) Dikes were mowed and holes were patched as needed.
- d) Parking lots were mowed, signs replaced, and gravel added where needed.
- e) Posting of the area was continued.
- f) Trees and snags were removed from channels to allow better boat access.
- g) Gravel was placed on the road along the nesting meadow.
- h) East Unit dikes were sprayed for woody vegetation.
- i) Fifteen acres were mowed using an ASV mower in the Stork Unit.
- j) Eleven acres of warm season grass was planted in the Stork Unit.

7. Equipment

A dump trailer was purchased.

8. Special Projects

An access crossing was put into the Plowdry Unit.

9. Recreational and Educational Activities

Table 1. Estimates of user trips and hunter harvest for 2015.

Activity	User Trips	Harvest	Harvest/User Trip
Waterfowl Hunting			
Sept. Goose	50	40	0.8
Regular Goose	150	100	0.9
Sept. Youth	10	35	3.5
Regular duck	1,300	1,125	0.865
Teal	45	125	2.77
Deer Hunting			
Archery	90	10	0.111
Firearm	120	10	0.083
Muzzleloader	10	2	0.2
Small Game	200	n/a	
Wildlife Viewing	4,000	n/a	
Fishing	0	n/a	
Tours	1	n/a	
Hiking/Biking	1,000	n/a	

The data listed above are rough estimates of use at Crow Island. Refer to the “Hunting Season Results” section for the derivation of this information. No facilities or staff are available on site to provide concrete numbers regarding user trips and harvest. Trappers are required to turn in their catch results, see below table for results.

Table 2. Furbearer harvest, Crow Island State Game Area, 2009-2015.

Year	# of Trappers						Fox	
	Muskrats	Beaver	Mink	Raccoons	Otters	Red/Grey	Opossum	
2014/15	21	1406	5	7	29	4	6	8
2013/14	29	878	14	5	14	0	1	6
2012/13	32	2119	10	13	34	0	1	19
2011/12	29	1999	9	14	44	0	1	1
2010/11	22	2124	29	23	9	0	5	4
2009/10	20	3225	18	16	9	0	3	3

10. Waterfowl Banding

444 mallards and 108 wood ducks were banded in the Panko and Baldpate Units using rocket nets. Rocket netting was the preferred capture method with breakdown of birds banded in Table 3.

Table 3. Species and number of waterfowl banded at Crow Island SGA during 2015.

Species	# Banded
Mallard	444
Wood duck	108
Other	2
Total	554

11. Waterfowl Hunting Season

a. Introduction

Crow Island provides marsh/wetland hunting opportunities in the Baldpate, Plowdry and Davis units on the west side of the Saginaw River, and in the East and Panko Units on the east side of the river. Waterfowl hunting opportunities also exist in harvested croplands in the Stork Unit. This year we included the Dredge Material Disposal Facility (DMDF) that is located next to the Baldpate Unit as part of our refuge counts. With this addition, the number of birds on the refuge counts were higher this year. With inclusion of the DMDF as part of the refuge count, we observed a larger number of divers as this area is open water and suited for divers.

b. Weather and Habitat Conditions

Temperatures on opening day of the general waterfowl season were in the mid 40's in the morning with a 10–15 mph wind. Temperatures then climbed into the lower 60's by noon. After the opening weekend, daytime high temperatures were in the 50's to 60's with lows in the upper 30's to 40's from October to mid-November. Temperatures remained above average for the first month of the waterfowl season. The first hard freeze occurred around the 22nd of November. The area then opened back up and remained ice free by the 26th of November.

c. Migration and Waterfowl Numbers

Teal numbers began to build in late August and peaked around the 3rd week of September. Wood duck numbers were good through mid-October with some birds in the bag in mid-November. Mallard numbers were fairly steady throughout the entire season with no major peak observed. There were good numbers of pintails and gadwall in early November. Overall, duck numbers peaked at approximately 1,500 the last week of October. Goose numbers peaked at approximately 1,380 around

November 12th. Table 4 summarizes estimated waterfowl numbers at Crow Island from September 1st to December 17th, 2015. The number of both ducks and geese shown in Table 4 represents only a portion of those present at the time of the observation. Both ducks and geese tended to congregate in the refuge in potholes concealed by dense vegetation, thus the number of birds present was likely greater than estimates. We also include the number of waterfowl that were present in the DMDF as part of the refuge numbers.

Table 4. Estimated waterfowl numbers at Crow Island, Sept. – Dec. 2015.

Date	Waterfowl Numbers		Total
	Ducks	Geese	Waterfowl
September			
03-Sep	385	200	585
10-Sep	515	275	790
17-Sep	720	300	1,020
24-Sep	865	300	1,165
October			
01-Oct	1,370	400	1,770
08-Oct	1,290	450	1,740
15-Oct	1,150	200	1,350
22-Oct	1,300	200	1,500
29-Oct	1500	900	
November			
05-Nov	1,430	1,200	2,630
12-Nov	1,000	1,380	2,380
19-Nov	n/a	n/a	
26-Nov	330	250	580
December			
03-Dec	670	645	1,315
10-Dec	655	475	1,130
17-Dec	770	420	1,190

d. Season Dates and Area Regulations/Bag Limits

See Michigan Waterfowl Digest.

Crow Island is open to waterfowl hunting without a permit. No permits are required for early goose season or youth waterfowl hunting. Hunters are not required to report the number of waterfowl or species taken. Hunters can pursue waterfowl anywhere on the area outside of the Greenhead Unit refuge.

e. Hunting Season Results

Because there are no facilities or personnel on site to record the numbers and species of waterfowl taken, any estimate of harvest is highly speculative and is based on observations only. The number of hunters using the area appeared to be similar to 2014. Past opening day bag checks showed that average kill per hunter contacted was 2.2 ducks. Based on that average, the estimated 252 hunters on the area opening day killed 555 ducks. Hunting success declines after opening day. Based on a post-opening day average of 0.8 ducks/hunter, an estimated 520 parties averaging 2.5 hunters/party killed 1,040 ducks. An estimated 10 parties for the youth hunt averaging two hunters per party killed an estimated 55 ducks. These numbers, added with the opening day harvest, yield an estimated kill of 1,650 ducks for the entire season. An estimated 100 goose hunters took 120 geese (1.2 geese/hunter) during the early and regular goose seasons.

f. Cropping and Water Level Management

Crops were in good condition at the start of waterfowl season. No crops were flooded on the area. Most crops were harvested by the first week of November.

Water levels were relatively high going into summer 2015. Water level management was not hard this year due to the increase of water in the Saginaw River. As water levels remained high during the summer, pumps were operated when needed, and we went into the season with good water.

g. Special Projects

Davis Unit dike was graveled and reseeded.

Greenhead pump was pulled and repaired.

h. Recommendations

- 1) Resume opening day bag checks. An additional staff member or volunteer should be assigned on opening day to cover the area more effectively. Personnel should be assigned to either the East or West Units to minimize travel and maximize hunter contacts.
- 2) Continue to improve dike system across the area. Much remains to be done.
- 3) Connect the Baldpate Unit to the Saginaw River for better water source and water control.

- 4) Continue the treatment of Phragmites.
- 5) Create openings in the East Unit
- 6) Have FRD do a burn in the grass fields of the Stork Unit.
- 7) Close areas to muskrat trapping with the goal of reducing dense cattail stands.

12. PROMINENT CLIENTELE/INFLUENCE GROUPS

ITC Transmission
Michigan Duck Hunters Association
Ducks Unlimited