

Fennville Farm Unit Manager's Updates 2012 Season

Week of January 7:

Weather We've continued to get on and off snowfall, mostly due to lake effect, but very little accumulation. The colder weather has frozen area ponds some local lakes which has probably pushed birds onto the Farm Unit. Warming weather this week may have an impact on the hunt the birds will hopefully stick around instead of deciding they can move out.

Waterfowl abundance Goose numbers have remained stable through today at around 8,500. As far as I can see, duck numbers have remained relatively constant.

Hunting conditions The corn is in poor shape in some strips so bring your layout blind just in case. With the warming weather this week we may see soft conditions so be sure to stay on the trail with your vehicles.

Hunter numbers Hunter numbers have been stronger than during the previous seasons we are averaging about 20 parties per day. Afternoon hunts have been busier than morning hunts.

Waterfowl harvest The goose harvest has still been low it seems that the geese we have are well-educated. The afternoon hunts were more productive than the morning hunts last week. (harvested 16 birds on Tuesday and 13 birds on Thursday).

Weekly Waterfowl Count

Week of December 31:

Weather We've continued to get on and off snowfall, mostly due to lake effect, but very little accumulation. The colder weather has frozen area ponds some local lakes which has probably pushed birds onto the Farm Unit. We expect some snowfall and winds this week which should help out the hunting.

Waterfowl abundance Goose numbers have increased over the past week ? again, probably due to the colder weather. We've picked up to about 8000 geese on the Farm Unit and that total should continue to increase with the continued cold. As far as I can see, duck numbers have remained relatively constant.

Hunting conditions The corn in the strips continues to worsen. Hunters are encouraged to bring layout blinds as they will be needed in some of the areas where the corn didn't grow well due to the drought or has blown over in the wind. Hunters should take care to preserve the corn where possible.

Hunter numbers We have seen increased party numbers over the beginning of our final hunting period. In total, 174 parties have been through the draw between Dec. 29 and Jan. 1st. The Dec. 29th Youth Hunt welcomed 17 parties (26 youth hunters). Macatawa Bay Waterfowlers provided a hotdog lunch for the hunters and Breaking Dawn Taxidermy out of Martin, MI donated a duck or goose mount to one lucky youth (now he just has to harvest a bird!).

Waterfowl harvest 53 geese and 14 ducks were harvested between Dec. 29 and Jan. 1st so hunter success has been less than desired but still better than the earlier December season.

Week of December 3:

Weather We've had some precipitation over the weekend continuing into today (Monday) and it seems that this might continue into the week. The weather over the weekend was drizzly but without significant snowfall.

Waterfowl abundance Goose numbers have remained constant over the past week. They have not been as visible over the past week because they've been spread across the goose management unit or loafing out of view inside the refuge (as they were when I conducted the latest waterfowl survey). Duck numbers have remained relatively stable as well.

Hunting conditions Corn in the hunting strips is relatively short this year due to the drought. Some of the sharecroppers have chopped some corn fields and are beginning to harvest high-moisture corn. Sharecroppers have begun harvesting beans and planting rye in the harvested fields. The fall-planted rye is coming along nicely and the birds are feeding in some of the fields in the refuge.

Some of the corn has blown over due to weak stalks caused by the drought.

Overall, the weather has been ok and harvest should pick up when we get some fresh birds.

Hunter numbers We had 60 parties on Saturday and 32 parties Sunday so drawings have been around what was expected. We should see lower party numbers over the week.

Waterfowl harvest 26 geese have been harvested so far during this segment of the season (Saturday and Sunday).

What to expect this week No real updates here, hunters should expect to have between 10 ? 20 parties for the drawings.

Week of November 26:

Weather The weather over the past week has been mild for the most part. Cold mornings warming up to the 40's and 50's in the afternoon. Not much for precipitation but more is expected through the weekend into next week.

Waterfowl abundance Goose numbers have increased over the past week. They have been congregating along 118th mostly in the rye fields inside the refuge. Along with the Canada's you can see the Ross', blue phase Snow, and a White-fronted goose that have been reported on the birding forums. Mallard numbers appear to have increased over the past 2 weeks and should hold steady through the week. Colder weather should bring some more in to the Farm.

Hunting conditions Corn in the hunting strips is relatively short this year due to the drought. Some of the sharecroppers have chopped some corn fields and are beginning to harvest high-moisture corn. Sharecroppers have begun harvesting beans and planting rye in the harvested fields. The fall-planted rye is coming along nicely and the birds are feeding in some of the fields in the refuge.

With new rainfall the water levels in the area wetlands have increased. Zone 7A has some water and the refuge impoundment is filling up so the ducks can finally get access to the smartweed and beggar's tick that seeded out this fall.

With the end of duck season we will not have any waterfowl hunting on the Farm until this Saturday, December 8th when the GMU season and managed hunt resume.

Hunter numbers Hunter numbers remained relatively low throughout the week of Thanksgiving but picked up over the holiday weekend. We hosted a hunt put on by Operation Injured Soldier on Sunday, November 25th ? 3 injured veterans were present for the hunt. As promised, they were awarded 1st draw. Their service to our Country is appreciated and they were met with applause from all the hunters in attendance. They selected 8N and harvested a pair of geese and a couple ducks, I believe.

Waterfowl harvest We have picked up some new birds and are looking forward to the re-opening of the managed hunt this Saturday, December 8th.

What to expect this week The hunt will resume this Saturday, December 8th.

Week of November 12:

Weather The weather has been really mild and clear this week. Cool mornings, warm afternoon with clear skies. Needless to say, not ideal for waterfowl hunting.

Waterfowl abundance Goose numbers may be down a bit ? or I missed some birds that were off the Farm when I counted. Duck numbers have increased slightly with many birds roosting at the Farm and Highbanks.

Hunting conditions Corn in the hunting strips is relatively short this year due to the drought. Some of the sharecroppers have chopped some corn fields and are beginning to harvest high-moisture corn. Sharecroppers have begun harvesting beans and planting rye in the harvested fields. The fall-planted rye is coming along nicely and the birds are feeding in some of the fields in the refuge.

The corn harvest has been completed. This week hunters will see some lime being spread on fields in the refuge.

With new rainfall the water levels in the area wetlands have increased. Zone 7A has some water and the refuge impoundment is filling up so the ducks can finally get access to the smartweed and beggar's tick that seeded out this fall.

Hunter numbers We have had low numbers of parties all week due to the weather and start of firearm deer season. We have been running fewer than 20 parties per day with one day having only 4 parties. As the weather picks up we should see an increase in hunter success that will translate into higher party numbers. So, if you want to draw early for once, come on Tuesday and Wednesday!

Waterfowl harvest The waterfowl hunting has been slow so far but with any weather fronts that move through we should see more success. We have harvested 87 geese thus far and have 7 geese so far today so we've seen a bump in success.

What to expect this week

The hunt will continue all week with 11:00 am drawings on Tuesday and Thursday and 5:30am drawings the rest of the week.

We will be open on Thursday and Friday for Thanksgiving and Black Friday so forget about getting up at 4 AM to shop and come hunting instead.

Sunday, November 25th we will be hosting an Operation Injured Soldier hunt ? come out to show them your appreciation and thank them in person. We do not know how many soldiers have signed up yet. We will be giving them 1st pick through the draw in honor of their sacrifice.

Upcoming Events Sunday, November 25th: Operation Injured Soldier hunt (we will be hosting a hunt for injured soldiers ? our plan is to show them our collective appreciation by allowing them 1st draw at the hunt)

Week of November 5:

Weather No major weather events.

Waterfowl abundance Goose and mallard numbers appear to be stable with the expectation that more will arrive as the weather cools off.

Hunting conditions Corn in the hunting strips is relatively short this year due to the drought. Some of the sharecroppers have chopped some corn fields and are beginning to harvest high-moisture corn. Sharecroppers have begun harvesting beans and planting rye in the harvested fields. The fall-planted rye is coming along nicely and the birds are feeding in some of the fields in the refuge.

The corn harvest has been completed. This week hunters will see some lime being spread on fields in the refuge.

With new rainfall the water levels in the area wetlands have increased. Zone 7A has some water and the refuge impoundment is filling up so the ducks can finally get access to the smartweed and beggar's tick that seeded out this fall.

Hunter numbers We had 23 youth hunting parties on Saturday, November 10th and 54 parties at the Sunday hunt. 13 parties showed up for the hunt on Monday morning.

Waterfowl harvest The waterfowl hunting has been slow so far but with any weather fronts that move through we should see more success. Mallard hunting in the storm on Monday afternoon was hot according to some reports.

What to expect this week The hunt will continue all week with 11:00 am drawings on Tuesday and Thursday and 5:30am drawings the rest of the week.

Upcoming Events Sunday, November 25th: Operation Injured Soldier hunt (we will be hosting a hunt for injured soldiers ? our plan is to show them our collective appreciation by allowing them 1st draw at the hunt).

Week of October 29:

Weather The weather last week was characterized by high winds, cloud cover, and sporadic showers thanks to Sandy. We had some very good duck hunting days (I sat out once in the big blow and saw a lot of birds, heard a lot of shooting, but didn't pull the trigger).

Waterfowl abundance Goose numbers have increased with another new influx of birds. The snow geese that were on the Farm last week were harvested over the weekend. Mallard numbers have also increased while wood duck numbers have decreased. I think the woodies took the quick flight out of the area on Sandy's north winds. More ring-necked ducks have arrived. Usually, they don't leave the refuge but they can be observed in the lower pool from M-89 west of Fennville.

Hunting conditions Corn in the hunting strips is relatively short this year due to the drought. Some of the sharecroppers have chopped some corn fields and are beginning to harvest high-moisture corn. Sharecroppers have begun harvesting beans and planting rye in the harvested fields. The fall-planted rye is coming along nicely and the birds are feeding in some of the fields in the refuge.

The combines have been picking corn in the refuge over the past week ? the geese have been keying in on these fields.

With new rainfall the water levels in the area wetlands have increased. Zone 7A has some water and the refuge impoundment is filling up so the ducks can finally get access to the smartweed and beggar's tick that seeded out this fall.

Hunter numbers hunters are currently using the Zones and reporting good harvests of mallards. Usually, there's 8-15 trucks each morning.

Waterfowl harvest The mallard harvest is coming along ? I have no numbers to report but the hunters have been reporting successful trips. The private land on the south and west side of the Farm Unit has been

hunted regularly with great success. I have no reports from other areas: Ottawa Marsh, Highbanks, or Bravo.

What to expect this week The managed hunt on the Farm Unit resumes this Saturday, November 10th, with our annual Youth Hunt. Sunday is the opener for the adults. We encourage those who can to bring a youth hunting on the Farm this Saturday ? each of us should do our part to share our interests and passions with the next generation.

Ducks may be hunted on a first-come, first served basis through Friday.

Upcoming Events

Saturday, November 10th: Youth Hunt (only youths may hunt)

Sunday, November 25th: Operation Injured Soldier hunt (we will be hosting a hunt for injured soldiers ? our plan is to show them our collective appreciation by allowing them 1st draw at the hunt)

Week of October 22:

The unit is not yet hunting through the managed hunt, and there is no update to report.

Week of October 15:

Weather: The weather this week has continued to be variable with cool and cloudy as the norm. We had significant rainfall this week, as well, so the water levels in the Farm Unit impoundments have inched upwards.

Waterfowl abundance: Goose numbers have increased to 3400 with a new influx of birds. A couple snow geese have shown up, as well, and seem to be attracting some extra attention from bird watchers along 118th Ave. Mallard numbers have also increased while wood duck numbers seem to have dipped to 400, they have possibly shifted out of the Highbanks where they are most visible during surveys. The ring-necked ducks have returned to the Highbanks, as well. Usually, they don't leave the refuge but they can be observed in the lower pool from M-89 west of Fennville.

Hunting conditions: Corn in the hunting strips is relatively short this year due to the drought. Some of the sharecroppers have chopped some corn fields and are beginning to harvest high-moisture corn. Sharecroppers have begun harvesting beans and planting rye in the harvested fields. The fall-planted rye is coming along nicely and the birds are feeding in some of the fields in the refuge. The combines have been picking corn in the refuge over the past week ?geese have been keying in on these fields.

Hunter numbers: Duck hunters are currently using the Zones and reporting good harvests of mallards. Usually, there are 4-8 trucks each morning.

Waterfowl harvest: The mallard harvest is coming along ? I have no numbers to report but the hunters have been reporting successful trips. The private land on the south and west side of the Farm Unit has been hunted regularly with great success. Reports heard through the grapevine indicate limits on geese and many ducks harvested for large parties that have gained permission to hunt. I have no reports from the following areas: Ottawa Marsh, Highbanks, or Bravo.

What to expect this week: The managed hunt on the Farm Unit is now closed while all other areas inside the Goose Management Unit are open. Hunters may still hunt ducks on the Farm Unit on a first-come, first-served basis.

Upcoming Events: Sharecroppers will continue to be working in the fields throughout October and November. Pheasant season has begun and you can expect to see some hunter orange in the fields this week.

Week of October 8:

Weather: We had relatively good waterfowling weather (overcast, some drizzle) over the opening weekend, October 6th & 7th. The weather for the rest of the week was more fair with highs in the upper 50's and low 60's with quite a bit of sun and wind. The geese did continue to move fairly well throughout the season.

Waterfowl abundance: Goose numbers have increased by a few hundred inside the GMU - we are currently running around 2400. Mallard numbers have remained stable at 500 and wood duck numbers have stayed around the 500, which we've seen over the past few weeks (mostly in the Highbanks).

Hunting conditions: Corn in the hunting strips is relatively short this year due to the drought. Some of the sharecroppers have chopped some corn fields and are beginning to harvest high-moisture corn. Sharecroppers have begun harvesting beans and planting rye in the harvested fields. The fall-planted rye is coming along nicely and the birds are feeding in some of the fields in the refuge.

Hunter numbers: 86 parties - 174 hunter trips - hunted during the October season on the Farm Unit.

Waterfowl harvest: Success so far has been average: 58 geese and 22 ducks were harvested. Wood ducks and mallards have been harvested.

What to expect this week: The managed hunt on the Farm Unit is now closed while all other areas inside the Goose Management Unit are open. Hunters may still hunt ducks on the Farm Unit on a first-come, first-served basis.

Upcoming Events: Sharecroppers will continue to be working in the fields throughout October and November.

Week of October 1:

Weather: The weather through the end of last week and over the weekend cooled significantly. We had good waterfowling weather at the Farm Unit for opening day with clouds and occasional drizzles.

Waterfowl abundance: We saw an influx of Canada geese over the past week. Mallard and wood duck numbers have remained stable.

Hunting conditions: Corn in the hunting strips is relatively short this year due to the drought. Some of the sharecroppers have chopped some corn fields and are beginning to harvest high-moisture corn. The fall-planted rye is coming along nicely and the birds are feeding in some of the fields in the refuge.

Hunter numbers: We had 27 parties on opening day and 20 on Sunday.

Waterfowl harvest: Success has been good so far with 46 geese and 19 ducks harvested over Saturday and Sunday. Wood ducks and mallards have been harvested.

What to expect this week: Last season we picked up around 3000 geese during the second week of October so if that pattern holds we may see new birds in the area soon. The weather forecast indicates lows in the 40's and highs in the 50's and low 60's with partial clouds. Showers are expected Tuesday and Wednesday.

Upcoming Events: Sharecroppers will continue to be working in the fields throughout October and November.

Week of September 17: Weather: Rain started toward the end of the week - about ½ inch fell as of Friday. Cool weather.

Waterfowl abundance: Saw some geese arrive during the north wind. No real accumulation of geese or ducks to date.

Hunting conditions: Not hunting yet.

Hunter numbers: Not hunting yet

Waterfowl harvest: Not hunting yet

What to expect this week: Stable numbers with very little influx

Week of September 24:

Weather: Rained over 1.75" over the weekend which should help with flooding the Farm impoundments (which are currently dry). Cold Monday morning.

Waterfowl abundance: Same as last week

Hunting conditions: Not hunting yet

Hunter numbers: Not hunting yet

Waterfowl harvest: Not hunting yet

What to expect this week: Stable numbers with very little influx