



Shiawassee River State Game Area Summer Report - 2020

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Growing Season Conditions

The growing season this year was severely impacted by heavy rains and subsequent dam failures in Midland County. Due to the nature of the floodplain system in which the game area lies, all of the water from Sandford and Wixom lakes flows to the Shiawassee Flats before flowing to Saginaw Bay. The area experienced severe and prolonged flooding as a result, along with some significant infrastructure damage. While the DNR was able to move water off the area as flood waters receded, sharecroppers did not plant the lowland fields.

On top of flooding, COVID-19 continues to have huge impacts on state budgets, which has limited the amount of infrastructure and planting work that could be completed. To ensure that the 2020 season was not a complete loss, the Shiawassee Flats Citizens and Hunters Association (SFCHA) was able to assist with major funding to facilitate corn planting in all hunting zones that were dry enough, small grain seed purchases for the entire area, and a portion of pumping and equipment repair costs to ensure DNR personnel could continue with infrastructure repair and pump station operation. A debt of gratitude and thanks from all area hunters is owed to SFCHA.

Planted Fields

Crops on the area, given the wet season, are in exceptional condition. All corn will be five to seven feet tall. Sorghum was planted as supplemental cover in all zones.

North Prior/Zones 55-60: Corn was planted in all zones and has matured well. The rest of the field is planted mostly with small grains (buckwheat and millet) with some acreage managed as moist-soil. Decoy openings will be mowed, and this field will be available for early goose season.

South Prior/Zones 61-66: Corn was planted in all zones and has matured well. This field is managed as a moist-soil unit and, after a broadleaf herbicide treatment, will produce substantial seed. Decoy openings will be mowed, and this field will be available for early goose season.

Zones 1-4: Corn planted in all zones and while the field has been fairly wet, it is maturing well. The majority of the field was planted to small grains with some acreage managed as moist-soil. One zone from the Zone 1-3 strip was removed to improve hunting quality in this field. Zones in this field were offset so that hunters would not be directly across from one another.

Zones 6-8: This field remained flooded much longer than others on the north end. As a result, no sorghum was planted that will turn into appreciable cover. This field will likely have blinds installed or require supplemental cover. The resultant acreage continues to be managed as moist-soil and has had a decent annual plant response post-drawdown.

Zones 9-14: Corn was planted in all zones and has matured well. This field has remained wet, so small grain

plantings are lagging behind in maturity. With plenty of growing season left, plants should mature to produce at least some seed.

Zones 30-38: Due to a pump failure in 2019, much of this field remained wet for the duration of the summer. DNR personnel operated a gator pump and tractor-powered crisafulli pump around the clock to dry the field. While corn was planted and is maturing, blinds and/or supplemental cover will be required in zones 30, 33, 36, and 37. Small grains were planted and are maturing but lagging due to late planting.

Zones 39-46: Water management in this field is also contingent on the pump that failed in 2019. This field was drawn down by draining to the flooded woods unit then through the 30s field to the gator and crisafulli pumps. Due to the de-watering delay, no corn was planted in this field. Sorghum was spread for cover and small grains broadcasted. Given the conditions, most plants are maturing well, but blinds and/or supplemental cover will be required.

Marsh Zones

Federal Marsh: For the second year in a row, the Federal Marsh has been held at full pool all year to encourage the establishment of marsh openings, a project that began in 2016 and 2017, with aerial herbicide applications and vegetation scarification occurring. The openings are progressing well and have been aided by high water.

Wahl Rd. Marsh: This marsh was held at full pool all year. The establishment of marsh openings is progressing well, aided by high water and flooding.

River Zones: The river hunting zones have opened substantially due to continued high Great Lakes water levels. Much of the historic vegetation has been replaced by open and deep water, which has made hunting the river more difficult compared to previous years. Hunters must check water levels prior to exiting their boat- the river is dynamic and prior shallow areas may no longer be shallow.

Triangle Marsh: This unit was partially drawn down this summer to encourage cattail regrowth. Herbicide treatments, followed by muskrat activity have drastically reduced the emergent vegetation in this unit, almost too successfully. Cattail regrowth is decent in the unit but hunters who wish to hunt the south end should bring supplemental cover. There is a blind in the north end that will be brushed prior to season.

Rookery Marsh: This unit is not able to have active water control in the summer, so is at the mercy of evapotranspiration. The unit was held at full pool to encourage marsh openings following aerial herbicide and scarification treatments.

Flooded Woods: This unit was drawn down as normal this year. The large logjam that existed in the south end of the unit was removed in 2019 but largely reformed due to the historic flooding event. Smartweed growth in the unit is similar to previous years and will offer ample early season food.

Area Projects

Post-flood infrastructure repair is ongoing. The DNR is pursuing federal funding for repairs through the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Due to historic flooding, COVID-19, and associated budget impacts, no major projects were completed in 2020.

Wetland Wonders

During the waterfowl season hunters can find information on waterfowl refuge counts, area conditions, and harvest information for the managed waterfowl hunt areas by visiting www.michigan.gov/wetlandwonders.