

Hunter Attitudes Toward Duck Season in Louisiana

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Introduction

Duck hunter dissatisfaction with duck seasons is not an issue with Louisiana hunters alone. Duck hunters in states throughout the Mississippi flyways have made their concerns heard by their respective state agencies, as have hunters in the 3 other flyways. To better understand the origins of hunter concerns over duck seasons and harvest, researchers in several states in the Mississippi flyways conducted surveys of duck hunters following the 2004-05 season. Louisiana joined with Missouri, Michigan, and Minnesota in this effort, conducting a mail survey of duck hunters during the summer of 2005. In addition to studies undertaken with the flyway, coordination was also made with the nationwide study of duck hunters undertaken during the fall of 2005.

Hunter satisfaction is a complex issue that requires proper assessment to fully understand the concerns of different types of duck hunters. Individuals hunt ducks for a variety of reasons – social interaction with friends and family, to harvest ducks, work with a dog, etc. Given the different reasons to go duck hunting, different factors come into play to determine whether or not one has a satisfying trip. Hunters may express satisfaction with a single trip or for an entire season, and these expressions are based on past experience and expectations for the outcome of the trip or season. Factors such as number of ducks seen, days limiting out on ducks, and even money spent on a lease can influence hunter satisfaction.

This study was conducted to determine:

- the scope of satisfaction with duck hunting among Louisiana duck hunters
- perceived evaluation of number of ducks seen, shooting opportunities, and harvest for 2004-05 alone and compared with the previous 5 years
- Preferences for zones, seasons, and options for pintail and canvasback hunting
- characteristics of duck hunters that may influence hunter ratings of satisfaction

Methods

A sample of 6,500 Louisiana hunters was selected for a mail survey to examine duck hunter satisfaction. Each participant in the survey was mailed an 8-page questionnaire, cover letter, and stamped return envelope. A postcard reminder was mailed 14 days later to individuals who failed to return the questionnaire. After a second 14-day interval, a second questionnaire, cover letter, and return envelope was mailed to those hunters who had not responded to the first questionnaire mailing or reminder postcard. After a 14-day interval from the second questionnaire, a second and final postcard reminder was mailed to hunters who failed to respond to the previous mailings. A total of 2 mailings of questionnaires and postcard reminders were undertaken for this study.

Results

A total of 2,916 responses were received for a response rate of 56% (after removing 1,333 individuals for undeliverable addresses). Most hunters (76%) hunted ducks in Louisiana during the 2004-05 season. A majority of hunters (56%) harvested between 1 and 20 ducks, 12% reported they did not harvest any ducks (Figure 1). Most hunters (69%) hunted between 1 and 20 days during the season (Figure 2). December was the most active month for duck hunters, with 75% responding that they did most of their hunting during this month (Figure 3). Cameron Parish was hunted most often (9%), followed by Vermilion (8%), Terrebonne (6%), Plaquemines (5%), Avoyelles (4%) and Lafourche (4%). Slightly more than one-third (35%) of duck hunters hunted on leases, followed by 26% who hunted on property owned by someone else and 23% of hunters who hunted on public Wildlife Management Areas (Figure 4).

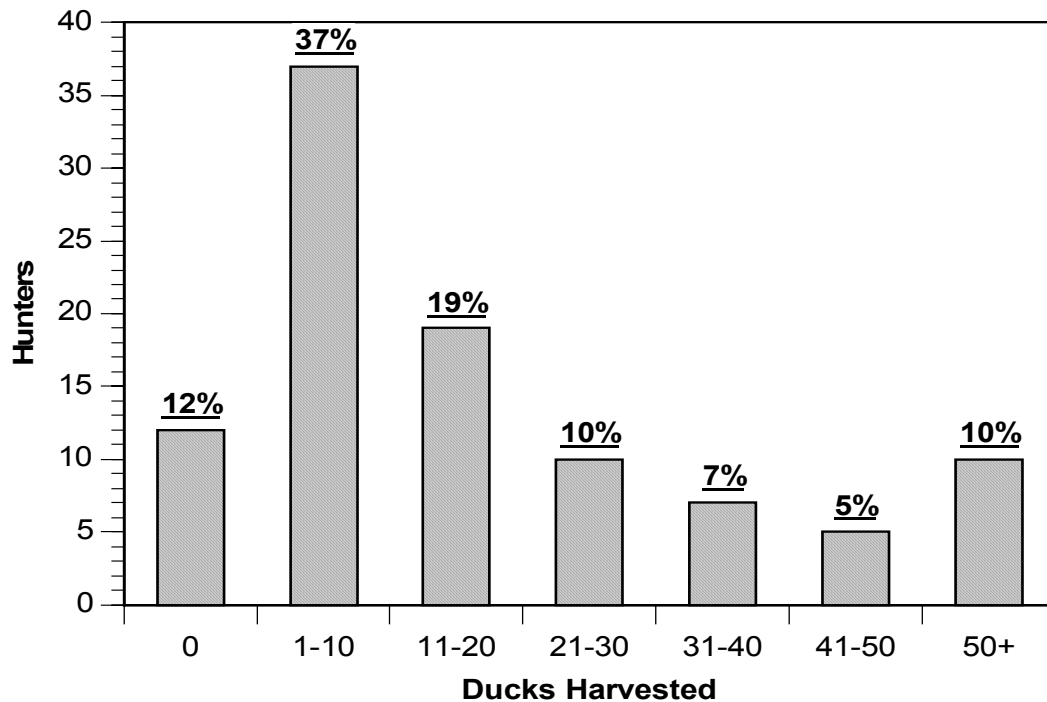


Figure 1. How many ducks did you harvest during the 2004-2005 season?

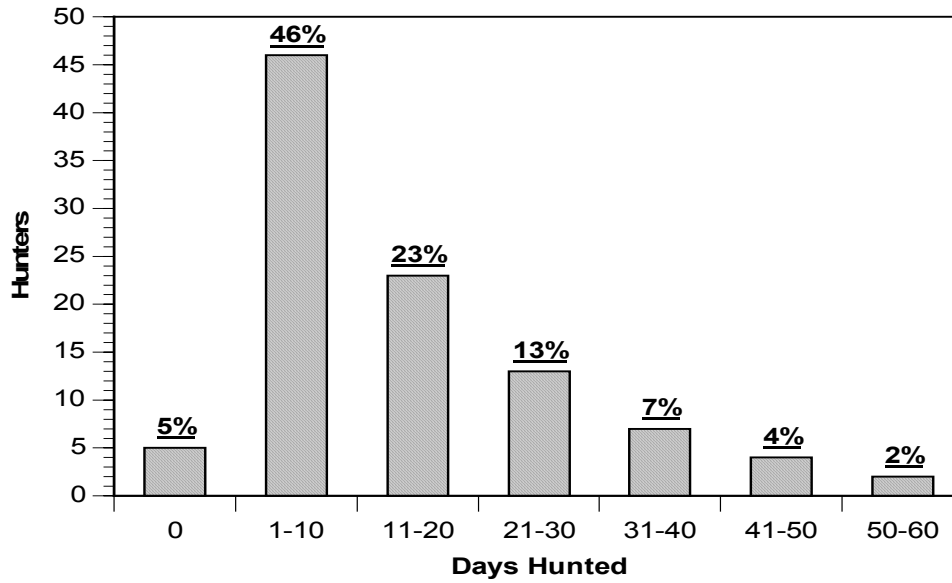


Figure 2. How many days did you hunt ducks during the 2004-2005 season

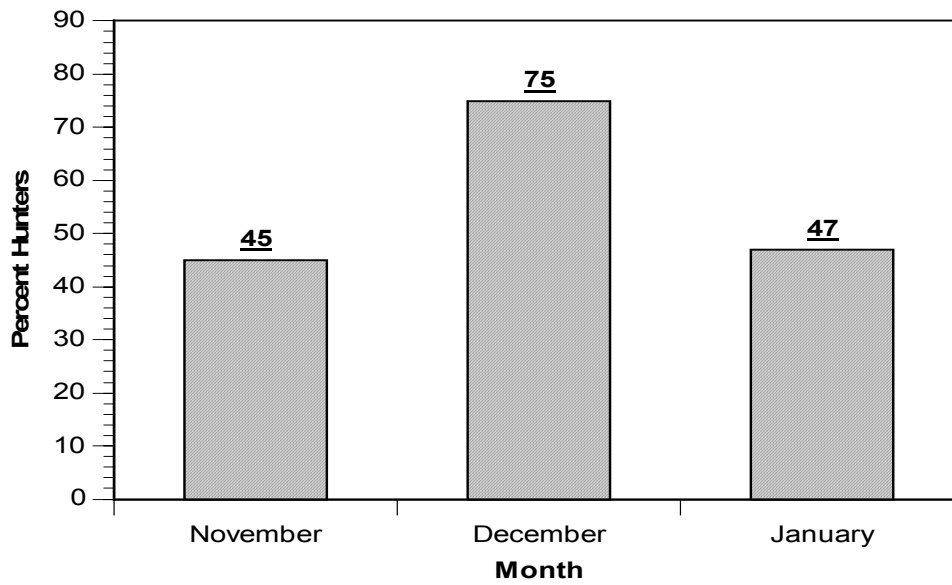


Figure 3. During which month did you do most of your duck hunting? If you hunted equally during more than one month, please check all that apply.

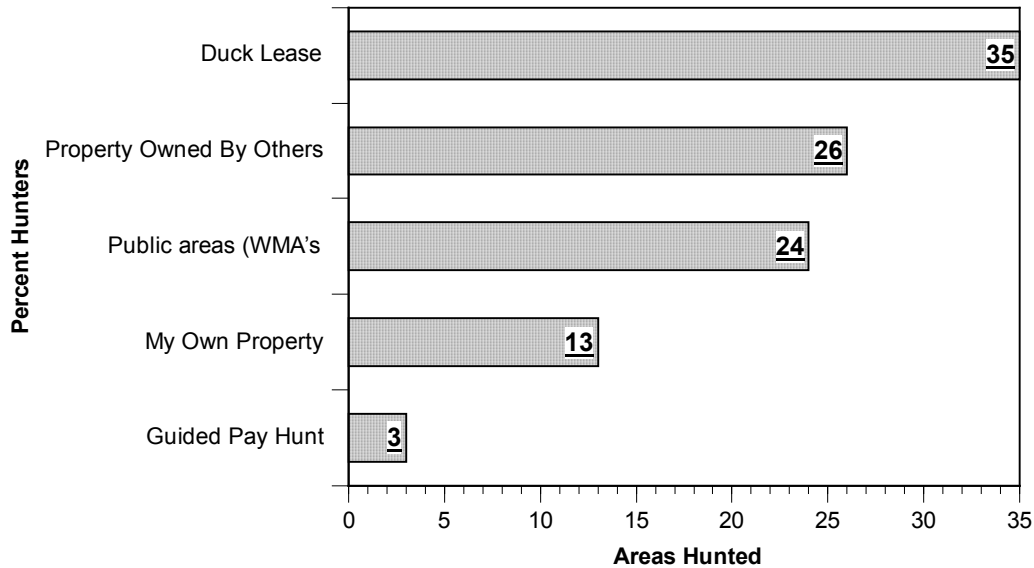


Figure 4. Where did you hunt ducks most often during 2004-2005?

Evaluations of the 2004-05 Duck Season

Most hunters (67%) rated the overall quality of duck hunting in Louisiana during the 2004-5 season as “Poor” to “Fair” (Figure 5). A large majority (80%) of hunters were dissatisfied with the number of ducks they saw during the 2004-05 season, 78% were dissatisfied with the number of ducks they harvested, 71% were dissatisfied with the number of shots they took, and 48% were dissatisfied with the number of days they hunted (Figure 6). When hunters compared the 2004-05 season with the 1999-2000 season, most (73%) were dissatisfied with the number of ducks they saw, 72% were dissatisfied with the number of ducks they harvested, 69% were dissatisfied with the number of shots they took, and 50% were dissatisfied with the number of days they hunted (Figure 7). The overall trend for duck hunting in Louisiana was rated by 88% of hunters as “Worse” to “Much worse” than 5 years ago (Figure 8). Hunters with more hunting experience were more likely to give lower ratings of quality than hunters with fewer years of hunting ducks in Louisiana (Figure 9).

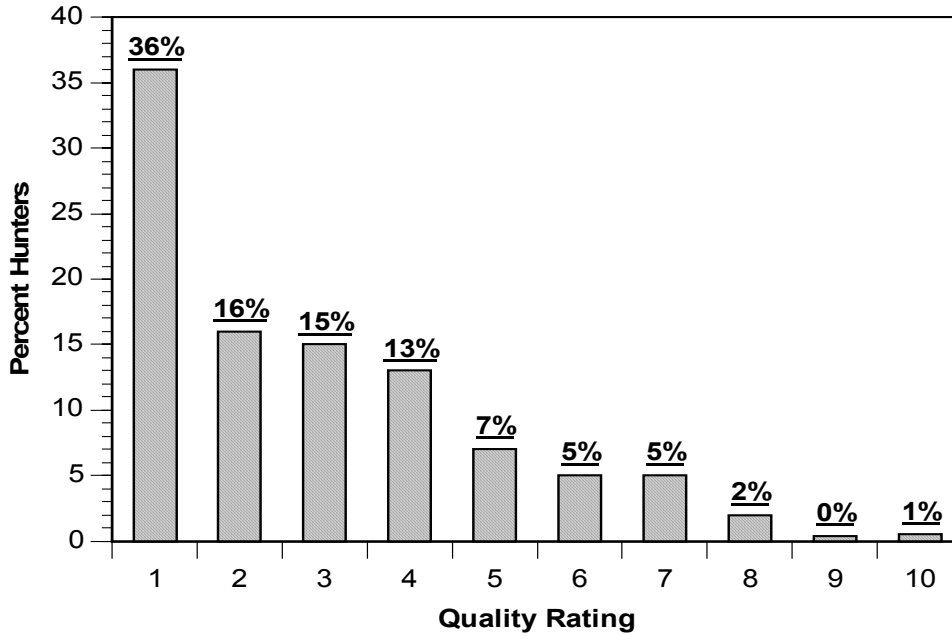


Figure 5. How would you rate the overall quality of your duck hunting in Louisiana during the 2004-2005 season?

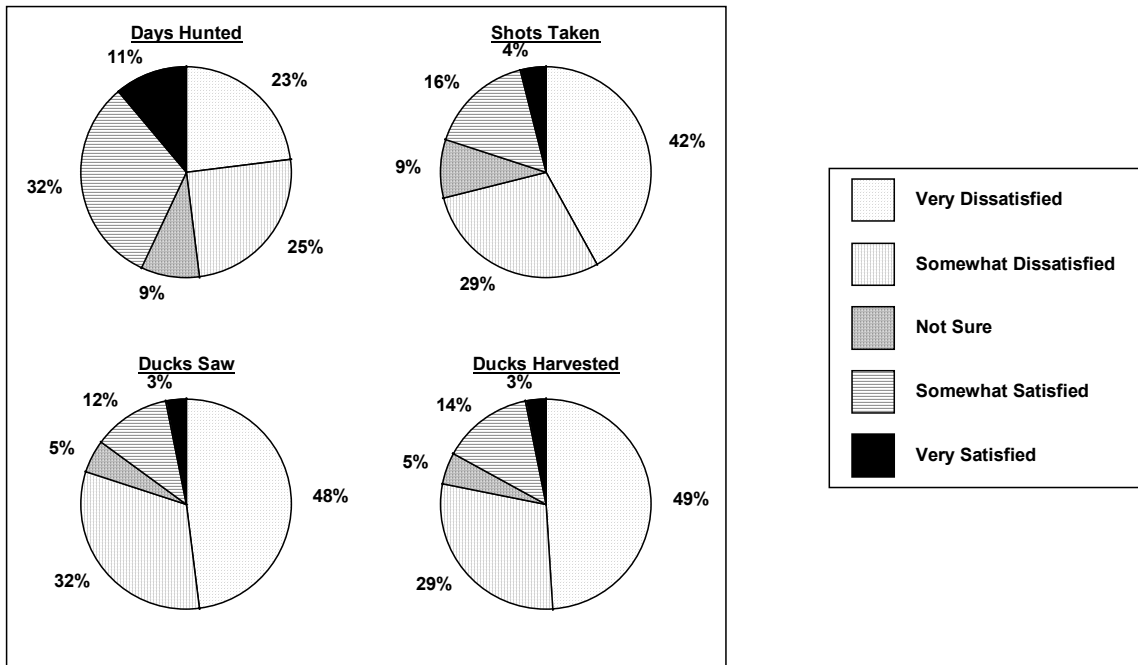


Figure 6. How satisfied were you with the following for the 2004-2005 duck season?

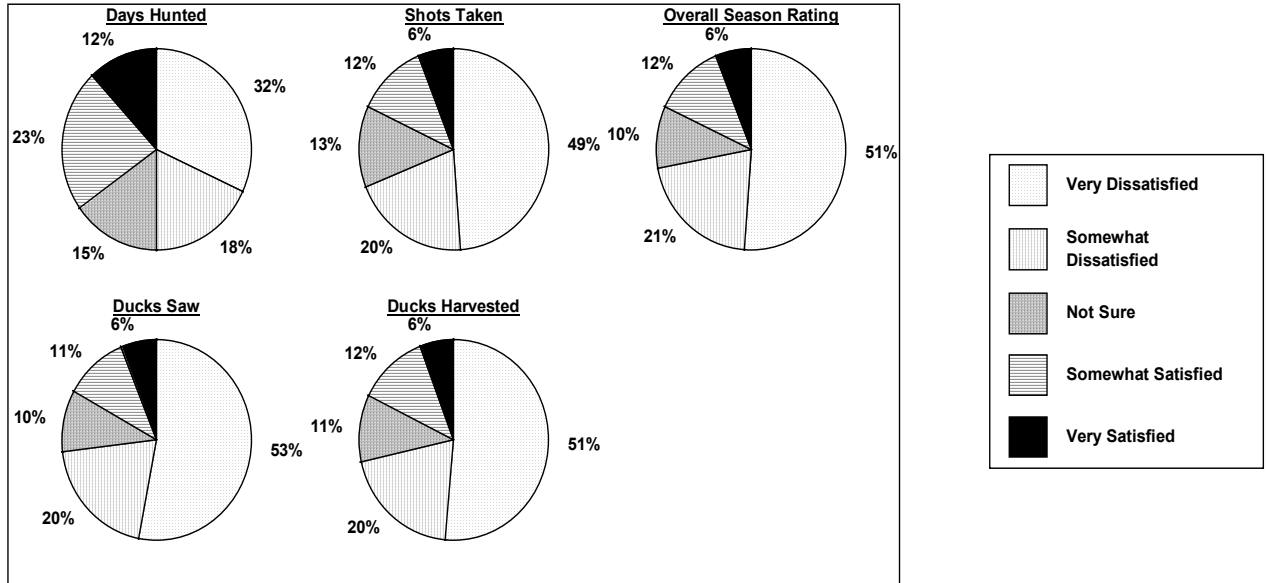


Figure 7. How satisfied were you with the following for the 2004-2005 duck season compared to 5 years ago (1999-2000 season)?

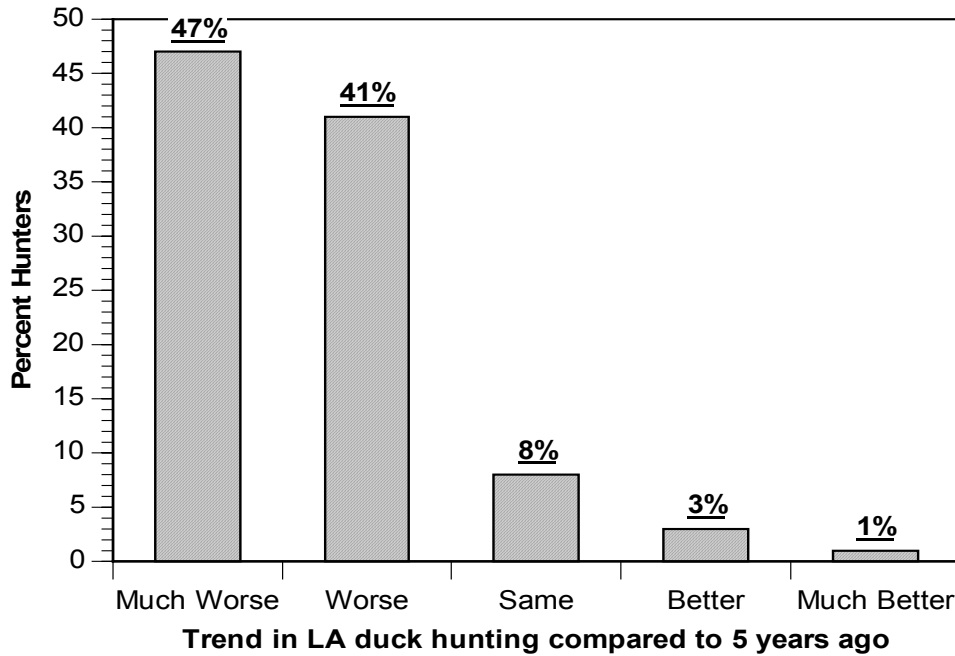


Figure 8. In your opinion, what is the trend in duck hunting in Louisiana compared to five years ago?

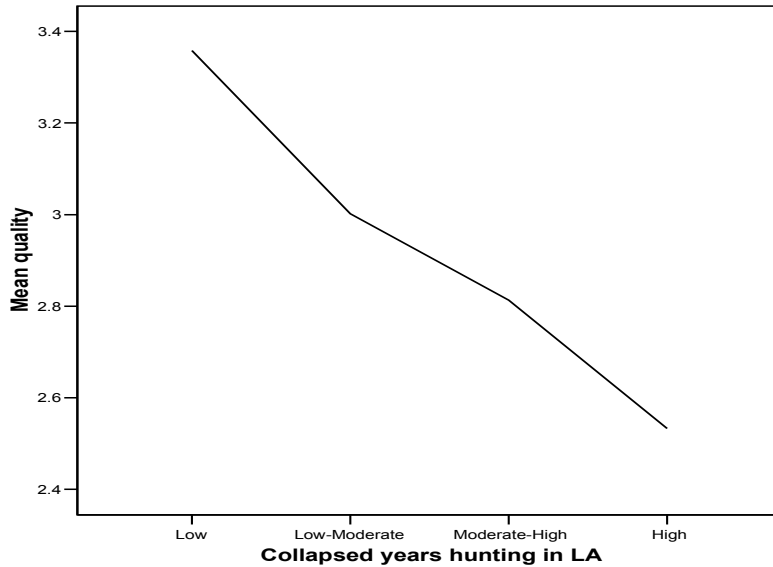


Figure 9. Comparison of years hunting ducks in Louisiana by quality rating.

Harvest

Slightly more than half (55%) of hunters did not bag their limit of ducks at least one day during the 2004-05 season, and 84% reported the days they bagged their limit during the 2004-05 season was lower than 5 years earlier (Figure 10). When asked for their opinions as to what issues most affected duck populations, 69% of hunters believe that farming practices are keeping ducks from migrating south, 61% cited warmer winters, and 50% thought too many ducks were holding on refuges (Table 1).

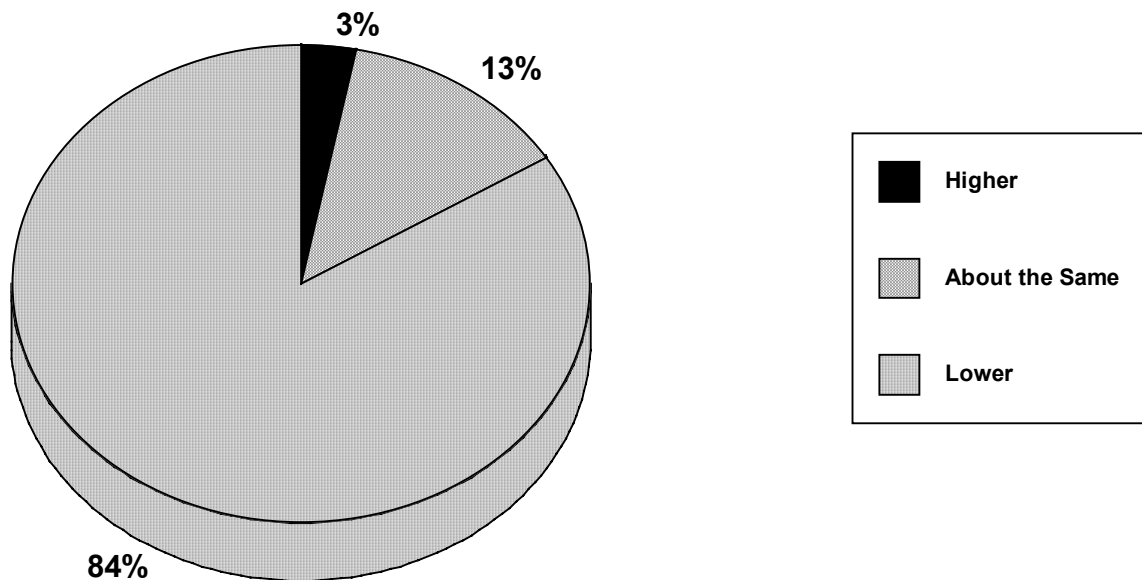


Figure 10. How did the number of days when you bagged your daily limit of ducks during the 2004-2005 season compare to seasons over the past 5 years?

Table 1. In your opinion, what are the most serious issues affecting duck populations in North America? Please check all that you feel are serious issues.

Most Serious	Percent of Hunters
Farming Practices	69%
Warmer Winters	61%
Holding on Refuges	50%
Loss of Wetlands Habitat	42%
Harvesting up North	36%
Spinning Wing Decoys	6%
High Bag Limits	3%
Season Too Long	3%

Hunter Preferences

Hunters were asked for their preference for the length of the duck season, even if season length negatively affected duck populations: 45% of hunters prefer a 60 day season, 23% preferred a 50-day season, 25% wanted a 45-day season, and 6% chose a 30-day season (Figure 11). When asked to give their choice for daily bag limit, even if harvest negatively affected duck populations, 38% of hunters preferred the present 6 duck limit, 26% would accept a 5 duck limit, 29% preferred a 4 duck limit, and 8% selected a daily limit of 3 ducks (Figure 12).

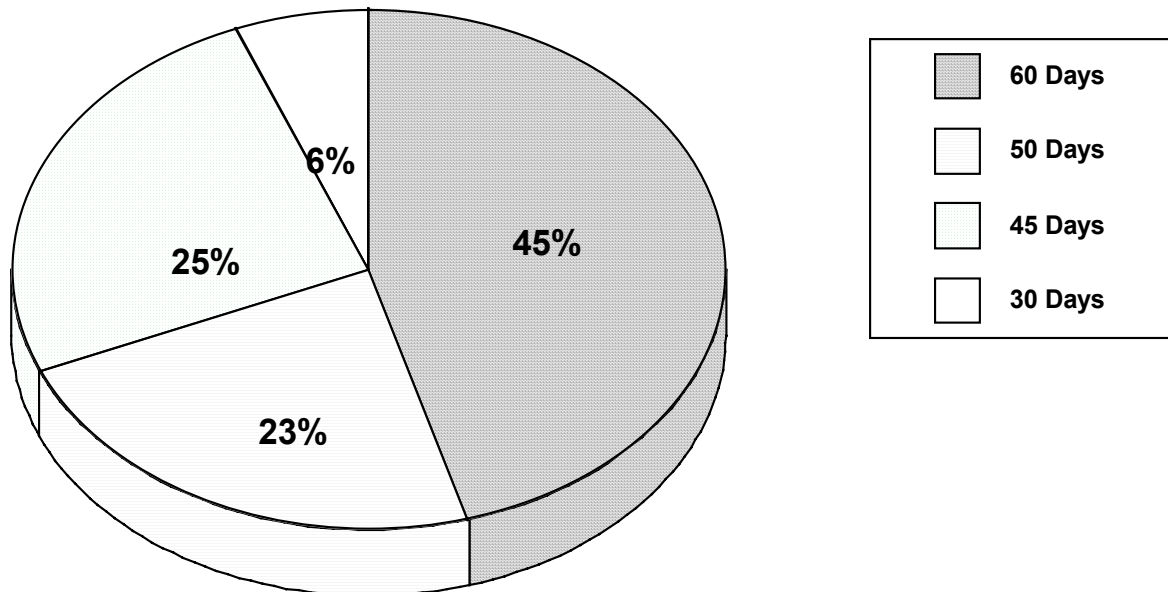


Figure 11. If it was shown that season length negatively affect duck populations, which of the following would you prefer for maximum season length?

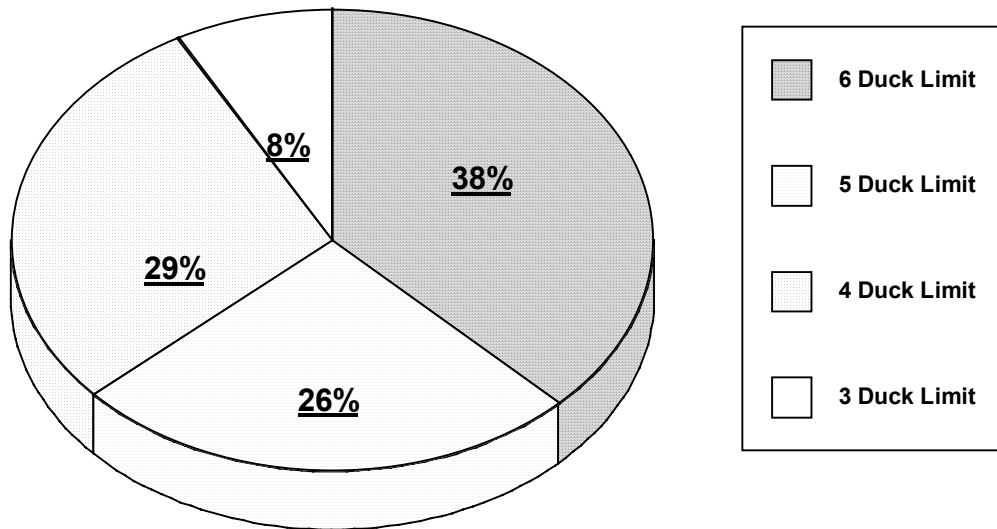


Figure 12. If it was shown that daily bag limit negatively affected duck populations, which of the following would you prefer for maximum daily bag limit?

In order to determine preference for canvasback and pintail duck seasons, hunters were asked for their preference for determining the season-within-a-season structure for canvasback and pintail ducks. Less than half (44%) of hunters wanted a short season for both at different times to match peak migration, 15% wanted both season held at the same time, and 41% had no opinion (Figure 13). When asked to indicate when they preferred the pintail season to be held, 42% of hunters wanted the pintail season held late in the season, 18% chose the middle of the season, and 11% selected early in the season, whereas 30% had no opinion about when the season should be held (Figure 14). Given a choice between the present split season structure for pintails and canvasbacks, a majority of hunters (60%) preferred a full season for all ducks that allows harvest of only one total per day of either a hen mallard, pintail, canvasback, or mottled duck (Figure 15).

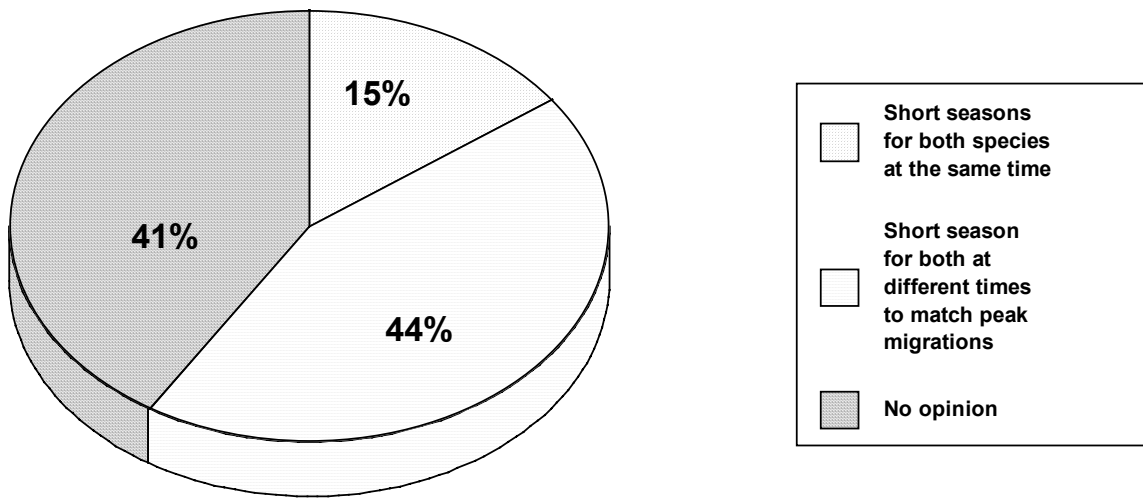


Figure 13. In recent years we have 30 day seasons for canvasback and pintails within the 60 day duck season. Different options for pintail and canvasback seasons are being considered. Which of the following options would you prefer?

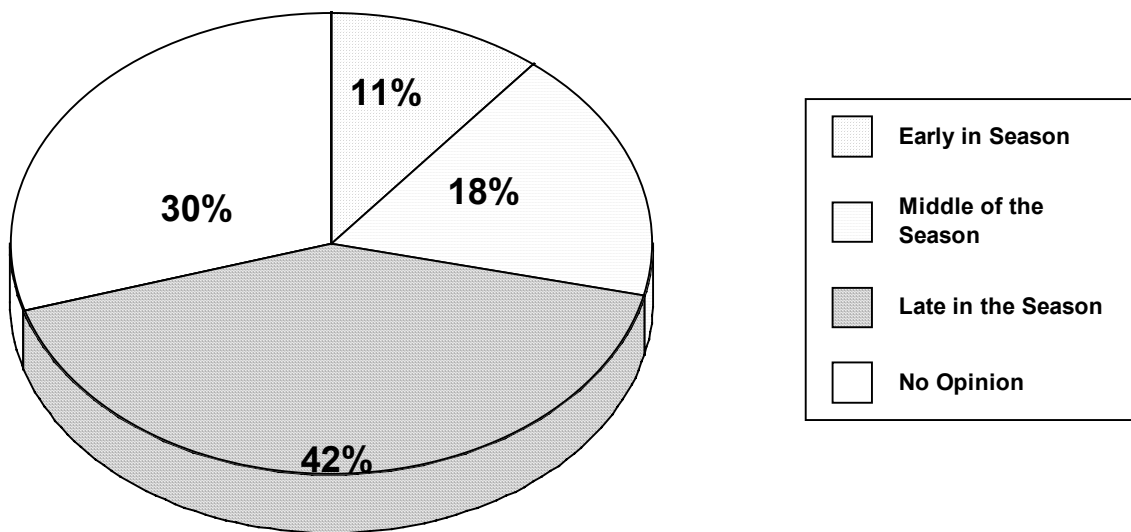


Figure 14. When would you prefer the season for pintails to be held?

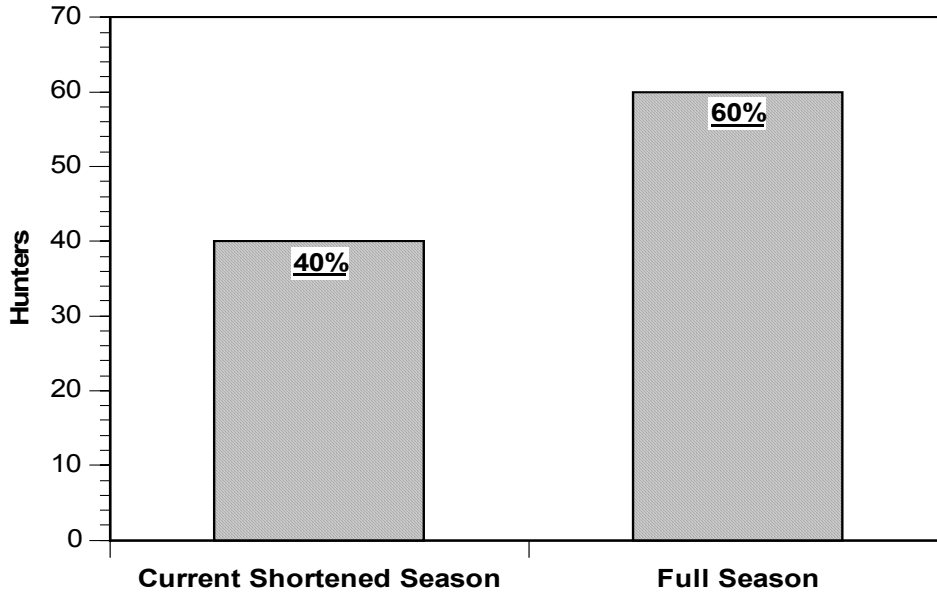


Figure 15. Which of the following would you prefer for pintails and canvasbacks?

Zones

Hunters were asked to indicate their choices for the structure of duck hunting zones in Louisiana. A majority of hunters (53%) preferred the current systems of 2 zones with split seasons, 41% chose 3 zones with no splits, and 6% preferred no zones with 3 splits (Figure 16).

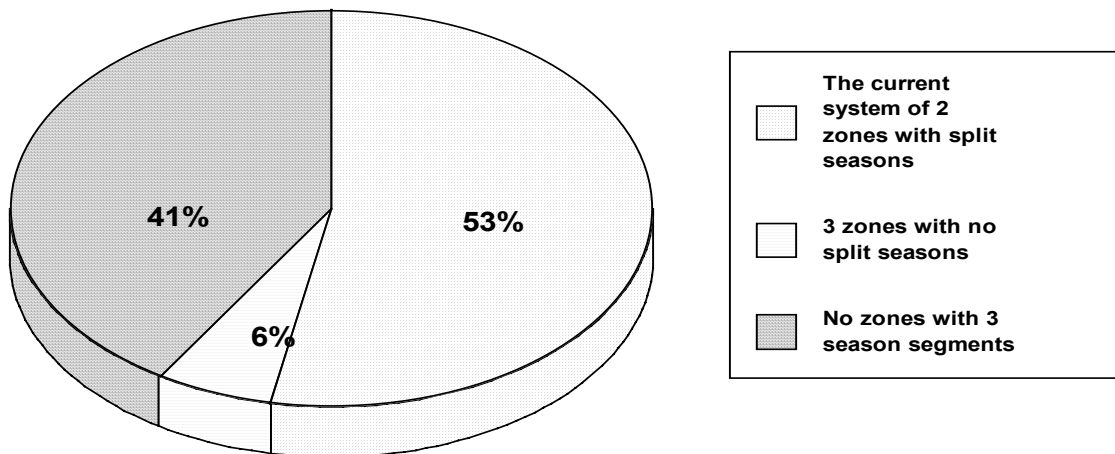


Figure 16. Louisiana currently has an East and West zone, each with split seasons (season closes for a period of time then reopens). Which of the following would you prefer for duck season?

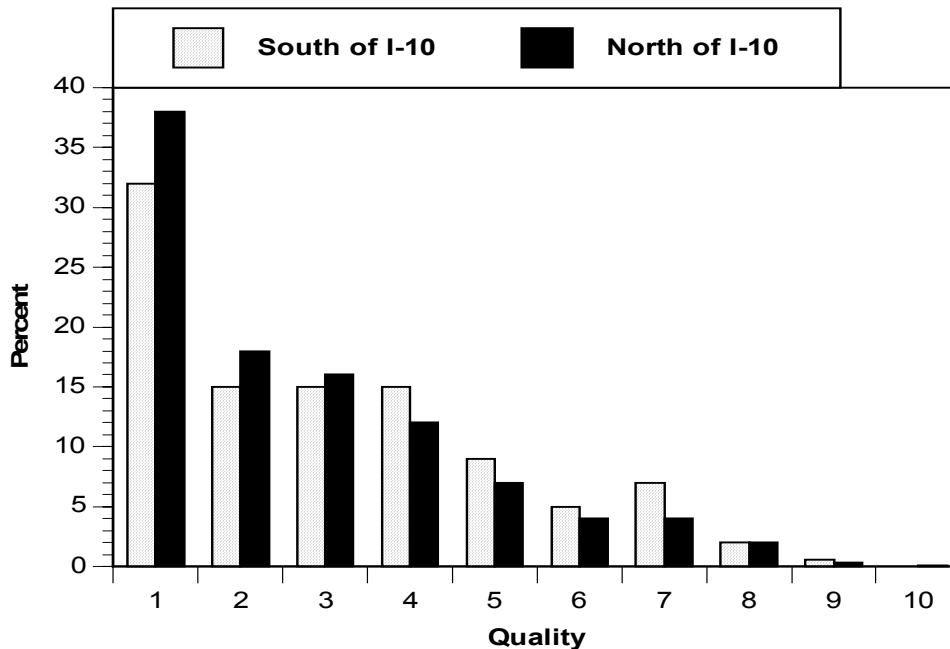


Figure 17. Quality Rating By Region

Conclusions

Dissatisfaction with duck hunting in Louisiana is widespread and not confined to one particular group or region. Although there is a slight tendency for hunters with more years of experience to view the 2004-05 season conditions in perspective of many years of hunting, most of them also give current conditions a low rating. Given their perceptions of hunting during the 2004-05 season, hunters saw trends in the quality of Louisiana duck hunting as worse or much worse than 5 years earlier. This perception of hunting quality is likely crossing over into their preference for other management options such as season length for pintails and perhaps even zone configurations, as hunters want to optimize harvest opportunities in light of lower duck harvest compared with past experiences.

It is important to put the results reported here into the context of hunter attitudes in other states within the Mississippi flyway, and to compare these results with those from the national survey. Hunters in Louisiana may not be experiencing seasons and harvests different from hunters in other states, but as Louisiana duck hunting has traditionally been of such high quality hunters have come to expect these conditions to remain constant year after year.

1. Did you hunt ducks in Louisiana during the **2004-2005 season**?

76% Yes 24% No (please go to **Section 3 question 1**)

2. How many ducks did you harvest during the **2004-05 season**? Please check one.

12% 0 37% 1-10 19% 11-20 10% 21-30

7% 31-40 5% 41-50 10% more than 50

3. How many days did you hunt ducks during the **2004-05 season**? Please check one.

5% 0 46% 1-10 23% 11-20 13% 21-30

7% 31-40 4% 41-50 2% 50-60

4. During which months did you do **most** of your duck hunting? If you hunted equally during more than one month, please check all that apply.

45% November 75% December 47% January

5. In which Parish did you hunt ducks **most often** during the **2004-05 season**?

9% Cameron

8% Vermilion

6% Terrebonne

5% Plaquemines

4% Avoyelles

4% Lafourche

6. Where did you hunt ducks **most often** during **2004-2005**? Please check one.

35% Duck lease

26% Property owned by someone (guest)

24% Public areas (WMA's, National Wildlife Refuge) etc

13% My own property

3% Guided pay hunt

7. How would you rate the **overall quality of your duck hunting in Louisiana during the 2004-2005 season**? Please circle the number that matches your answer.

Poor

Fair

Good

Excellent

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
1% 36% 16% 15% 13% 7% 5% 5% 2% 0.4%

8. How **satisfied** were you with the following for the 2004-2005 duck season? Please circle the number that matches your answer.

	Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Not Sure	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Number of days you hunted	<u>23%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>9%</u>	<u>32%</u>	<u>11%</u>
Number of ducks you saw	<u>48%</u>	<u>32%</u>	<u>5%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>3%</u>
Number of shots you took	<u>42%</u>	<u>29%</u>	<u>9%</u>	<u>16%</u>	<u>4%</u>
Number of ducks you harvested	<u>49%</u>	<u>29%</u>	<u>5%</u>	<u>14%</u>	<u>3%</u>

9. How **satisfied** were you with the following for the 2004-2005 duck season **compared to 5 years ago (1999-2000 season)**? Please circle the number that matches your answer.

	Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Not Sure	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Number of days you hunted	<u>32%</u>	<u>18%</u>	<u>15%</u>	<u>23%</u>	<u>12%</u>
Number of ducks you saw	<u>53%</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>10%</u>	<u>11%</u>	<u>6%</u>
Number of shots you took	<u>49%</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>13%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>6%</u>
Number of ducks you harvested	<u>52%</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>11%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>6%</u>
Overall rating of season	<u>51%</u>	<u>21%</u>	<u>10%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>6%</u>

10. In your opinion, what is the trend in duck hunting in Louisiana compared to 5 years ago? Please circle the number that matches your answer.

Much Worse	Worse	Same	Better	Much Better
<u>47%</u>	<u>41%</u>	<u>8%</u>	<u>3%</u>	<u>1%</u>

11. How many days did you bag your daily limit of ducks during the 2004-2005 season?
 55% 0 days

14% 1 day 11% 2 days

6% 3 days 3% 4 days
3% 5 days 5% 6 -10 days
1% 11-15 days 1% 16-20 days
1% more than 20 days

12. How did the number of days when you bagged your daily limit of ducks during the 2004-2005 season compare to seasons over the past 5 years? Please check one.

3% Higher 13% About the same 84% Lower

13. In your opinion, what are the **most serious issues affecting duck populations** in North America? Please check all that you feel are serious issues.

69 % farming practices that keep ducks from migrating south
61 % warmer winters
50% too many ducks holding on refuges
42% loss of wetland habitats
36% too many ducks harvested up north
6% use of spinning wing decoys
3% daily bag limits too high
3% season too long

14. If it was shown that season length negatively affected duck populations, which of the following would you prefer for maximum season length?

45% 60 day season 23% 50 day season 25 % 45 day season 6% 30 day season

15. If it was shown that daily bag limit negatively affected duck populations, which of the following would you prefer for maximum daily bag limit?

38 % 6 duck limit 26% 5 duck limit 29% 4 duck limit 8% 3 duck limit

16. In recent years we have 30 day seasons for canvasback and pintails within the 60 day duck season. Different options for pintail and canvasback seasons are being considered. Which of the following options would you prefer? Please choose one.

15% short seasons for both species at the same time

44% short season for both at different times to match peak migrations

41% no opinion

17. When would you prefer the season for pintails to be held? Please choose one.

11% early in the season **18%** middle of the season **42%** late in the season

30% no opinion

18. Which of the following would you prefer for pintails and canvasbacks? Please choose one.

40% the current shortened seasons for pintails and canvasbacks within the full duck season

60 % full season for all ducks that allows harvest of **ONLY ONE TOTAL** per day of the following: hen mallard, pintail, canvasback, OR mottled duck

19. Louisiana currently has an East and West zone, each with split seasons (season closes for a period of time then reopens). Which of the following would you prefer for duck season? Please choose one.

53% the current system of 2 zones with split seasons

6% 3 zones with no split seasons (this would require continuous seasons within each zone)

41% no zones (a statewide season) with 3 season segments (splits)

20. Some land managers and duck hunting clubs limit shooting to morning hunting only. Would you favor statewide shooting hours that would end at mid-day for everyone?

45% Yes

55% No

Appendix

Table 5. In which Parish did you hunt ducks most often during the 2004-2005 season?

Parish	N	Percent
Cameron	196	9.4
Vermilion	176	8.4
Terrebonne	134	6.4
Plaquemines	110	5.3
Avoyelles	84	4.0
Lafourche	73	3.5
Calcasieu	68	3.3
St. Bernard	65	3.1
St. Martin	65	3.1
Jefferson Davis	64	3.1
St. Mary	60	2.9
St. Landry	56	2.7
Acadia	50	2.4
Evangeline	49	2.3
Morehouse	49	2.3
Rapides	49	2.3
Bossier	44	2.1
Ouachita	38	1.8
Caddo	37	1.8
Catahoula	36	1.7
Jefferson	35	1.7
Concordia	34	1.6
La Salle	34	1.6
St. Charles	33	1.6
St. Tammany	31	1.5
Pointe Coupee	26	1.2
Iberia	25	1.2
Richland	25	1.2
Union	25	1.2
Caldwell	23	1.1
Tensas	22	1.1
Natchitoches	20	1.0
Iberville	18	0.9
Webster	14	0.7
Bienville	14	0.7
Grant	12	0.6
Madison	12	0.6
Sabine	12	0.6
East Carroll	11	0.53
Franklin	11	0.5
Red River	11	0.5

Winn	11	0.5
Ascension	10	0.5
Lafayette	9	0.4
Orleans	9	0.4
Bienville	9	0.4
De Soto	8	0.4
Claiborne	7	0.3
Jackson	7	0.3
Vernon	7	0.3
St. John the Baptist	6	0.3
Tangipahoa	6	0.3
West Feliciana	6	0.3
Beauregard	6	0.3
East Baton Rouge	5	0.2
St. James	5	0.2
West Baton Rouge	5	0.2
Livingston	4	0.2
Assumption	4	0.2
St. Helena	4	0.2
West Carroll	3	0.1
Lincoln	2	0.1
Washington	2	0.1
East Feliciana	1	0.05