

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & FISHERIES
POST OFFICE BOX 98000
BATON ROUGE, LA 70898-9000

Waterfowl Population Estimates
in Louisiana's Coastal Zone Below
U.S. Highway 90 and on Catahoula Lake

Date: NW LA: Dec. 8, 2010
NE LA & Catahoula Lake: Dec. 9-10, 2010
Coastal Zone: Dec. 10 & 13-15, 2010

December 17, 2010

Reported By: L. Reynolds, J. Olszak, S. Smith,
C. Winslow, D. Breithaupt, J. Butcher,
and J. Hughes

Pilot: B. Dorsa

Estimates made from Aircraft

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	70,000	13,000	19,000	102,000
MOTTLED	22,000	41,000		63,000
GADWALL	448,000	330,000	15,000	793,000
WIGEON	14,000	2,000	**	16,000
GW TEAL	206,000	170,000	12,000	388,000
BW TEAL	54,000	21,000		75,000
SHOVELER	109,000	9,000	**	118,000
PINTAIL	39,000	17,000	109,000	165,000
TOTAL DABLERS	962,000	603,000	155,000	1,720,000
SCAUP	34,000	34,000	5,000	73,000
RINGNECKED	89,000	158,000	55,000	302,000
CANVASBACK	5,000	4,000	67,000	76,000
TOTAL DIVERS	128,000	196,000	127,000	451,000
TOTAL DUCKS	1,090,000	799,000	282,000	2,171,000
COOTS	231,000	911,000		1,142,000

**Less than 1,000

COMMENTS:

The estimate of 2.17 million ducks on this survey is 34% higher than the 1.62 million estimated in November and similar to the most recent 5-year average of 2.25 million, but remains 22% below the long-term average of 2.82 million. The total estimated ducks on this survey is the same as the 2.16 estimated in December

2009. Blue-winged teal declined sharply from 466,000 in November to only 75,000 on this survey while diving ducks increased from 40,000 to 451,000. Indeed, the estimate for bluewings is below the long-term December average of 117,000, but those for scaup, ringnecks, and canvasbacks are above long-term averages of 63,000, 145,000, and 45,000 respectively. Estimates for pintails and mottled ducks were about the same, but all other species increased from November. However, estimates for all dabbling duck species were still below long-term averages.

Similar to November, the distribution of ducks in coastal Louisiana is skewed toward the southwest portion of the state, but the biggest changes from last year were seen in southeast Louisiana and at Catahoula Lake. The 799,000 ducks estimated in southeast Louisiana, up 63% from last month, is much higher than the 555,000 estimated last December. Despite very low water levels in tidal marshes during this survey resulting from strong north winds associated with the passing cold front, habitat conditions remain excellent over much of surveyed area in southeast Louisiana. Large concentrations of ducks were noted in the Caernarvon and Delacroix areas where teal continue to be the most abundant species, near the mouth of the Mississippi river where large numbers of gadwalls and pintails were seen, and in the upper Terrebonne marshes where large numbers of ring-necked ducks were counted along our transect line. Although not surveyed, large numbers of mallards, pintails, and teal were noted on the Wax Lake Delta of Atchafalaya Delta WMA. In contrast, the 1.09 million ducks estimated in southwest Louisiana is only 19% higher than last month, and is substantially less than the 1.54 million seen in December 2009. Large numbers of mostly gadwall were noted in the marshes between Johnson's Bayou to west of Sabine NWR and on Rockefeller Refuge, and large numbers of greenwings were counted near White Lake. Although not counted on this survey, large flocks of snow and white-fronted geese were encountered in agricultural fields north of White Lake, south of Kaplan, and south of Rayne.

Again similar to November, the 282,000 ducks counted at Catahoula Lake is the highest since 1999 when 505,000 ducks were counted. Last December only 69,000 ducks, 65,000 of which were diving ducks, were counted at Catahoula Lake primarily due to very high water levels providing poor habitat for dabblers. At this point, water levels remain near management target levels, and combined with drought conditions elsewhere in central and northeastern Louisiana, Catahoula Lake is holding far more ducks than in recent years.

An additional 108,000 ducks and 86,000 geese (80% snow and 20% white-fronts) were counted in selected habitats of northeast Louisiana. That is slightly lower than the 119,000 ducks counted in November and is 40% lower than the 179,000 counted in December 2009. Although up from the 56,000 geese counted in November, the total of 86,000 geese on this survey is 42% lower than the 148,000 counted last December. Mallards, pintails, and green-winged teal were the most abundant duck species, and large concentrations were noted between Bunkie and Grand Cote NWR, at Delta Farms east of Catahoula Lake, and in Concordia Parish southwest of Vidalia. Despite additional flooding from pumped agricultural fields, habitat conditions remain very dry in this portion of the state with little flooding in backwaters of major river systems or in forested wetlands.

We counted another 10,600 ducks in northwest Louisiana, primarily on the locks, lakes, oxbows, and fields along the Red River and Upper Toledo Bend reservoir. That is very similar to the 10,200 counted in November but is substantially fewer than the 14,000 counted in December 2009. Habitat conditions remain dry in this portion of the state as well, and the largest concentration of ducks was seen on managed moist-soil impoundments near Loggy Bayou. Mallard and gadwall were the most abundant species, accounting for over 50% of the total ducks, with shovelers, scaup, ringnecks commonly seen.

Like much of this report, habitat conditions across the state are similar to November. Despite average precipitation in November, annual rainfall totals across the state remain below average, from 8 inches below in southeast Louisiana to 22 inches below average in the northeast portion of the state. Managed shallow flooding in agricultural fields increased from last month but is still less than in recent years. Low water levels in major river systems in northeast Louisiana and in some marsh areas of southwest Louisiana are providing suboptimal habitat. Still, we have near average number of ducks in the state, and the survey may under-represent current waterfowl populations. Northeast, northwest and a large part of the southwest Louisiana surveys were completed prior to the recent cold front, and new migrant ducks arriving in those

areas have been reported. With extensive ice cover on wetland habitats in Illinois and Missouri reported earlier this week, we might expect additional birds moving into southern states.