LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & FISHERIES
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Waterfowl Population Estimates
in Louisiana's Coastal Zone Below
U.S. Highway 90 and on Catahoula Lake

Date: Coastal Zone: Sept. 6-8, 2011
Catahoula Lake: Sept. 8, 2011

September 9, 2011

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Estimates made from Aircraft

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD				0
MOTTLED	17,000	10,000	**	27,000
GADWALL			**	0
WIGEON				0
GW TEAL				0
BW TEAL	135,000	30,000	4,000	169,000
SHOVELER		3,000		3,000
PINTAIL			**	0
TOTAL DABBLERS	**152,000**	**43,000**	**4,000**	**199,000**
SCAUP				0
RINGNECKED				0
CANVASBACK				0
TOTAL DIVERS	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
TOTAL DUCKS	**152,000**	**43,000**	**4,000**	**199,000**
COOTS		**		0

**Less than 1,000

COMMENTS:

The 169,000 blue-winged teal estimated on this survey is 21% below last year's estimate of 215,000 and 32% below the long-term average of 248,000. The difference from 2010 is almost completely accounted for by the dramatic decline in birds counted at Catahoula Lake where 49,000 blue-wings were counted last year. The 135,000 estimated blue-wings in southwest Louisiana is 13% below last year's 155,000, substantially higher than the 99,000 estimated in 2009, but over 40% below the most

recent 5-year average of 240,000 which includes the huge estimate of 444,000 in 2008. The largest concentrations were seen in flooded rice fields north of Lacassine NWR over to southwest of Gueydan, with only scattered small flocks noted in the coastal marshes. The 30,000 estimated in southeast Louisiana is more than 4 times the 2010 estimate of just 7,000 but is 25% below the most recent 5-year average of 40,000. Furthermore, the only concentration of blue-wings seen on southeast Louisiana transects was on a flooded pasture just outside the city of Galliano.

The estimated 27,000 mottled ducks is down a third from the 40,000 last year and is the lowest September estimate since 2002 when it was only 20,000. The current estimate is 39% below the most recent 5-year average of 43,000. The 10,000 in southeast Louisiana is actually the second highest estimate from that region in the last 6 years, but the 17,000 estimated in southwestern Louisiana is the lowest since 2002.

Survey results may have been affected by tropical storm Lee, which brought 30-50 mph winds, storm surges of 4-5 feet, and 10-15 inches of rain to southeast Louisiana and varying rainfall totals across the southwest, central, and northeast portions of the state during September 2-5. Numbers of blue-winged teal reported at locations in coastal southeast Louisiana prior to the storm were not seen during the survey period. High water levels and evidence of vegetation damage from the storm surge were present in most southeast Louisiana habitats. Similarly at Catahoula Lake, thousands of teal reported by field biologists prior to the storm were not seen during the survey. The water level had increased nearly 2 feet, nearby agricultural fields were holding shallow water, and blue-wings may have dispersed into that un-surveyed habitat as evidenced by a few thousand seen on some shallow-flooded fields east of Catahoula Lake.

In southwest Louisiana, habitat conditions were much improved by the rainfall from tropical storm Lee but remain slightly below average. A higher than normal acreage of shallow flooded agricultural habitat was noted in addition to the managed water in crawfish ponds and rice fields, but it is not clear how much will remain until the major migrations of waterfowl begin in late October. In numerous locations large cracks in marsh soil were still visible through the water in recently-flooded coastal wetlands. Consequently, there is less submerged aquatic vegetation as in years past, and production of seed-producing annuals is also reduced from recent years probably due to the extended drought conditions since last fall.

In southeast Louisiana, the storm likely reduced habitat quality in coastal marshes, at least in the short term, through scouring of submerged aquatic vegetation in some areas and water levels above optimal for foraging waterfowl. Good SAV growth was reported across southeast Louisiana prior to the storm, and it was difficult to see the effect of the storm because of high water levels and extreme turbidity during the survey period. However in some locations along our transects with historically high waterfowl use such as the marshes around Delacroix and a freshwater marsh south of Lake Salvador, markedly reduced SAVs compared to the outstanding growth in 2010 was noted.