

# Wisconsin Youth Waterfowl Hunt 2015

By Taylor Finger, Jessica Kitchell, and Kent Van Horn

## **Abstract**

We surveyed Wisconsin youth waterfowl hunters to determine the level of participation and estimate the harvest of ducks and geese during the 2015 Youth Waterfowl Hunt. An estimated 3,455 youth participated in the hunt statewide, harvesting a total of 8,292 ducks and 449 geese. Participation and harvest estimates were not adjusted for reporting bias of non-respondents. We believe that the level of participation and harvest did not impact duck and goose hunting opportunities during the regular seasons that followed.

## **Introduction**

Nationally, waterfowl managers have been concerned about the decline in the number of waterfowl hunters from a peak during the 1970's. Wisconsin has been fortunate in maintaining relatively stable waterfowl hunter numbers. During the early 1990's, individual states began initiating special youth hunting days for resident game and approached the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) about the possibility of a Youth Waterfowl Hunt Day that could be held outside the normal season. In 1996, the USFWS granted states the authority to offer a youth waterfowl hunt day when duck seasons were normally closed. The basic criteria were: 1) states may select 1 day per duck hunting season, designated as "Youth Waterfowl Hunting Day," in addition to their regular duck season; 2) the day must be held outside any regular duck season on either a weekend, holiday, or other non-school day when youth hunters would have the maximum opportunity to participate; 3) the day could be held within 14 days before or after any regular duck season frameworks or within any split during a regular duck season; 4) the daily bag limit may include ducks, geese, mergansers, coots, moorhens and gallinules and would be the same as that allowed during the regular season; 5) youth hunters must be 15 years of age or younger and 6) an adult (mentor) at least 18 years of age must accompany the youth hunter. This adult could not hunt ducks, but may participate in other open seasons. In 1999, USFWS expanded the hunt to 2 consecutive days.

Wisconsin waived the general license requirements for youth hunters who participated in this hunt but required the youth to complete a certified hunter education course (unless participating under the new mentored hunting law). In addition, the youth were required to register under the federal Harvest Information Program (HIP) and a Canada goose hunting permit was required if they desired to hunt Canada geese. Also, each adult mentor could accompany only 2 youth hunters.

All hunters are required to register under HIP in each state where they may hunt migratory game birds. Wisconsin began participation in the HIP program in 1998. This gave us a database from which to sample youth hunters.

In 2015, a 2-day youth hunt was held on the Saturday and Sunday (Sept 19 & 20) one week prior to the regular duck season opener in the northern duck zone and two weeks prior to opener in the southern zone. A special Youth Waterfowl Hunt survey was conducted after the hunt. The objectives of the survey were to determine: 1) level of participation, 2) success rates and demographics of participants, and 3) comparisons between the special hunt harvest and regular season harvest.

We are unaware of a published analysis of the level of participation or estimates of harvest by youth for this special hunt, and thus report our findings for the 2015 Youth Hunt.

## **Methods**

Surveys were mailed to 6,264 youth hunters registered with HIP, on September 29, 2015. The survey consisted of 11 questions regarding their participation in both the Special Youth Waterfowl Hunt and the regular waterfowl season.

Youth Waterfowl Hunt Canada goose harvest estimates were compared to the 2015 Wisconsin DNR Canada goose harvest estimates (Van Horn et. al. 2016).

## **Results**

The response rate (those who returned either the initial or second mailing) was 39% (2,448) for the 2015 youth waterfowl survey. Approximately 87% of the responses came from males (Table 1, Question 1). Of those that responded to the questionnaire, 80.7% said that they knew about the Youth Waterfowl Hunt this year, and of those, 55.1% said they participated in the 2015 Special Youth Waterfowl Hunt (Table 1, Questions 2 and 2a). Fourteen percent of respondents said that the Youth Waterfowl Hunt was their first hunting experience (Table 1, Question 3).

The number of participants (frequency) shown by county they hunted in represents the responses from the youth that returned the questionnaire (Table 1, Question 4).

Fifty-seven percent of the mail survey respondents said they hunted both days (Sept 19 & 20) (Table 1, Question 5), while 27% hunted Saturday only and 16% hunted Sunday only. Those that responded to the mail survey reported harvesting a total of 3,173 ducks, 2.4 ducks per hunter (Table 1, Question 6). Assuming that 55% (3,455) of HIP registered youth (6,282) did hunt and that the average duck bag for both days combined was 2.4; the estimated statewide total duck harvest for the Youth Hunt is 8,292. Those that responded to the mail survey reported harvesting 175 Canada geese (Table 1, Question 7). Expanding this as described above, we estimate that statewide 449 Canada geese were harvested during the Youth Hunt. That number comprises only 0.8% of the 2015 statewide Canada goose harvest of 54,494 (Early September and Regular season combined).

Beginning in 2008, adjusted estimates of participation and harvest, calculated by expanding results from a phone survey of non-respondents in 1999-2000, were omitted. Participation and harvest estimates are probably biased slightly higher since 2008 because hunters who participated and/or were successful may have been more likely to return the survey. Goose estimates did not seem to exhibit this potential bias.

Of the youth that participated in the special hunt, a parent accompanied 74.5% of them, while a friend or neighbor accompanied 12.5% (Table 1, Question 8). Fourteen percent of participating youth have participated in a learn to hunt program for waterfowl or other introduction to waterfowl hunting program (Table 1, Question 9).

Ninety-one percent of the Special Youth Waterfowl Hunt participants said that they intended to hunt during the regular season (Table 1, Question 10).

Of the youth that participated in the 2015 special hunt, 43.0%, 30.7%, 17.3% and 9.1% of them participated in the special hunt in 2014, 2013, 2012 and 2011, respectively (Table 1, Question 11).

## **Discussion**

There has been concern from some adult hunters that the pressure from the Youth Waterfowl Hunt was scaring ducks out of the area or that the kids were taking too many birds. Some adult hunters felt that this special hunt substantially reduced the number of birds in their area before the start of the regular season. Youth waterfowl survey results serve to disprove those ideas. Typically, about 1/3 of Wisconsin's duck harvest occurs during opening weekend. If the youth hunt resulted in all the ducks being chased off the marshes prior to the regular opener, one would assume that the regular opening weekend (having a harvest several orders of magnitude greater) would result in no ducks left in our marshes. Therefore, if the ducks are not negatively affected by the regular duck season opener, we do not believe the hunting pressure generated by the youth hunt is substantial enough to significantly affect the regular opener.

A few individuals have complained that kids were chasing the ducks off of their private ponds. Landowners have the option of not allowing the youth to hunt on their property. Others felt that kids put too much pressure on public lands. We question whether a total of 3,455 youth hunting both private and public lands, statewide for two days in 2015, exerted that type of pressure.

Overall, we feel the Youth Waterfowl Hunt was a success and youth harvest is not negatively impacting the regular duck season or Canada goose harvest. Overwhelmingly, comments received from adults and youth participating in the youth hunt were positive.

Our survey indicated that 12.5% of the youth hunters were able to participate because a family friend or neighbor cared enough to mentor a youth that might not have otherwise had the opportunity to go (Table 1, Question 8). About 9% of the youth that participated in the hunt told us that they did not hunt or plan to hunt during the regular season (Table 1, Question 9).

If the hunt had any drawbacks, it was the fact that we (adult waterfowl hunters) collectively did not provide more youth with the opportunity to experience waterfowl hunting. We feel that increasing hunting opportunities to those without hunters in their immediate families is our collective challenge for the future. We encourage waterfowl hunters around the state to expose neighborhood youth to the tradition of waterfowl hunting during the Youth Waterfowl Hunt.

## **Literature Cited**

Van Horn, K., T. Finger, and B. Dhuey. 2016. 2015 Wisconsin Canada Goose Harvest Report. Wisconsin Wildlife Surveys. Vol.22, Issue 3. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

**Table 1. Survey Responses to the 2015 Youth Migratory Game Bird Questionnaire.**

Question 1. Your gender?

| Gender | Percent | No. of Responses |
|--------|---------|------------------|
| Female | 13.3%   | 326              |
| Male   | 86.7%   | 2,116            |

Question 2. Did you know about the special Youth Waterfowl Hunt?

| Answer | Percent | No. of Responses |
|--------|---------|------------------|
| Yes    | 80.7%   | 1,954            |
| No     | 19.3%   | 467              |

Question 2a. If yes, did you participate in the Youth Waterfowl hunt this year?

| Answer | Percent | No. of Responses |
|--------|---------|------------------|
| Yes    | 55.1%   | 1,349            |
| No     | 44.9%   | 1,099            |

Question 3. Is this your first hunting experience?

| Answer | Percent | No. of Responses |
|--------|---------|------------------|
| Yes    | 13.9%   | 215              |
| No     | 86.1%   | 1,334            |

Question 4. Please tell me what County you hunted in this year.

| County      | Frequency | Percent | County    | Frequency | Percent | County      | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------|-----------|---------|-----------|-----------|---------|-------------|-----------|---------|
| Adams       | 11        | 0.85    | Iowa      | 5         | 0.38    | Polk        | 18        | 1.39    |
| Ashland     | --        | --      | Iron      | 1         | 0.08    | Portage     | 24        | 1.85    |
| Barron      | 8         | 0.62    | Jackson   | 4         | 0.31    | Price       | 12        | 0.92    |
| Bayfield    | 7         | 0.54    | Jefferson | 45        | 3.46    | Racine      | 13        | 1.00    |
| Brown       | 46        | 3.54    | Juneau    | 13        | 1.00    | Richland    | 7         | 0.54    |
| Buffalo     | 33        | 2.54    | Kenosha   | 10        | 0.77    | Rock        | 16        | 1.23    |
| Burnett     | 18        | 1.39    | Kewaunee  | 7         | 0.54    | Rusk        | 5         | 0.38    |
| Calumet     | 10        | 0.77    | La Crosse | 50        | 3.85    | St. Croix   | 14        | 1.08    |
| Chippewa    | 7         | 0.54    | Lafayette | 2         | 0.15    | Sauk        | 15        | 1.15    |
| Clark       | 2         | 0.15    | Langlade  | 8         | 0.62    | Sawyer      | 8         | 0.62    |
| Columbia    | 55        | 4.23    | Lincoln   | 12        | 0.92    | Shawano     | 14        | 1.08    |
| Crawford    | 32        | 2.46    | Manitowoc | 35        | 2.69    | Sheboygan   | 35        | 2.69    |
| Dane        | 43        | 3.31    | Marathon  | 29        | 2.23    | Taylor      | 5         | 0.38    |
| Dodge       | 74        | 5.70    | Marinette | 12        | 0.92    | Trempealeau | 13        | 1.00    |
| Door        | 3         | 0.23    | Marquette | 17        | 1.31    | Vernon      | 26        | 2.00    |
| Douglas     | 9         | 0.69    | Menominee | 1         | 0.08    | Vilas       | 29        | 2.23    |
| Dunn        | 12        | 0.92    | Milwaukee | --        | --      | Walworth    | 26        | 2.00    |
| Eau Claire  | 6         | 0.46    | Monroe    | 2         | 0.15    | Washburn    | 5         | 0.38    |
| Florence    | 3         | 0.23    | Oconto    | 24        | 1.85    | Washington  | 21        | 1.62    |
| Fond du Lac | 37        | 2.85    | Oneida    | 24        | 1.85    | Waukesha    | 48        | 3.70    |
| Forest      | 6         | 0.46    | Outagamie | 36        | 2.77    | Waupaca     | 35        | 2.69    |
| Grant       | 11        | 0.85    | Ozaukee   | 6         | 0.46    | Waushara    | 15        | 1.15    |
| Green       | 5         | 0.38    | Pepin     | 1         | 0.08    | Winnebago   | 61        | 4.70    |
| Green Lake  | 21        | 1.62    | Pierce    | 10        | 0.77    | Wood        | 21        | 1.62    |

Question 5. Please check the appropriate boxes for the days you hunted.

| Day           | Percent | No. of Responses |
|---------------|---------|------------------|
| Both Days     | 57.1%   | 764              |
| Saturday Only | 26.8%   | 358              |
| Sunday Only   | 16.1%   | 216              |

No response from 11 returns

Question 6. How many ducks did you harvest during this special hunt?

| Duck Species      | Mean | Reported Harvest |
|-------------------|------|------------------|
| Mallard           | 1.85 | 764              |
| Blue-winged Teal  | 2.10 | 746              |
| Green-winged Teal | 1.57 | 240              |
| Wood Duck         | 2.30 | 1,423            |

Question 7. How many Canada geese did you harvest during this special hunt?

|       | Mean | Reported Harvest |
|-------|------|------------------|
| Geese | 1.29 | 175              |

Question 8. What relation to you was your chaperone for the youth hunt?

| Answer          | Percent | No. of Responses |
|-----------------|---------|------------------|
| Parent          | 74.5%   | 1,077            |
| Brother/Sister  | 2.3%    | 33               |
| Friend/Neighbor | 12.5%   | 180              |
| Grandparent     | 3.0%    | 44               |
| Other Relative  | 7.7%    | 111              |

Question 9. Have you participated in a 'learn to hunt' program for waterfowl or other introduction to waterfowl hunting program?

| Answer | Percent | No. Reported |
|--------|---------|--------------|
| Yes    | 14.4%   | 343          |
| No     | 85.7%   | 2,047        |

Question 10. Have you or do you expect to hunt ducks or geese during the regular season this year?

| Answer | Percent | No. Reported |
|--------|---------|--------------|
| Yes    | 90.9%   | 1,217        |
| No     | 9.1%    | 122          |

Question 11. If you participated in the Special Youth Waterfowl hunt in past years, please check all the years that you hunted:

| Answer | Percent | No. of Responses |
|--------|---------|------------------|
| 2011   | 9.1%    | 221              |
| 2012   | 17.3%   | 423              |
| 2013   | 30.6%   | 746              |
| 2014   | 43.0%   | 1,050            |

Dear Youth Migratory Game Bird Hunter:

I am pleased to see that you have registered for the Harvest Information Program and intend to hunt Migratory Game Birds in Wisconsin this year. Since 1996, we have offered youth waterfowl hunters a special hunt before the opening of the regular duck season in hopes of providing more opportunity to participate and learn about waterfowl hunting. Completion of this form is voluntary.

Your participation in this survey will help us plan for similar hunts in future years and better manage our migratory game birds. If you have any specific comments or questions, please don't hesitate to add those at the end of the questionnaire.

Thank you!

*Kent Van Horn*

Kent Van Horn  
Migratory Game Bird Ecologist  
Bureau of Wildlife Management

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1. Your gender:  Female  Male

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2. Did you know about the special Youth Waterfowl Hunt?  Yes  No

2a. If yes, did you participate in the Youth Waterfowl hunt this year?

Yes (If Yes, go to question #3)  No (If No, go to questions #9-11)

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3. Is this your first hunting experience?  Yes  No

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4. Please tell me what County you hunted in this year: \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Please check the appropriate boxes for the days you hunted.

September 19  September 20

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6. How many ducks did you harvest during this special hunt? (Please list your harvest by species)

Mallard \_\_\_\_\_ Blue-winged teal \_\_\_\_\_ Green-winged teal \_\_\_\_\_ Wood duck \_\_\_\_\_

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7. How many Canada geese did you harvest during this special hunt? \_\_\_\_\_

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8. What relation to you was your chaperone for the youth hunt?

Parent  Brother/Sister  Friend or Neighbor  Grandparent  Other Relative \_\_\_\_\_

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9. Have you participated in a 'learn to hunt' program for waterfowl or other introduction to waterfowl hunting program?

Yes  No

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10. Have you or do you expect to hunt ducks or geese during the regular season this year?  Yes  No

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11. If you participated in the Special Youth Waterfowl hunt in the past years, please check all the years that you hunted:

2011  2012  2013  2014

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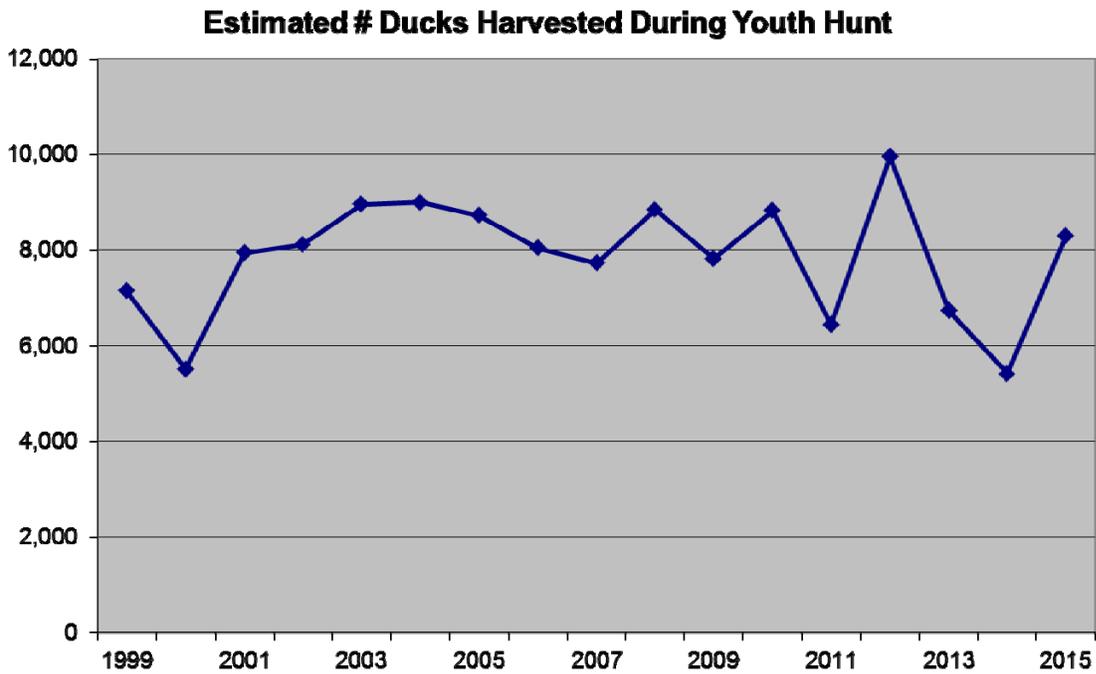
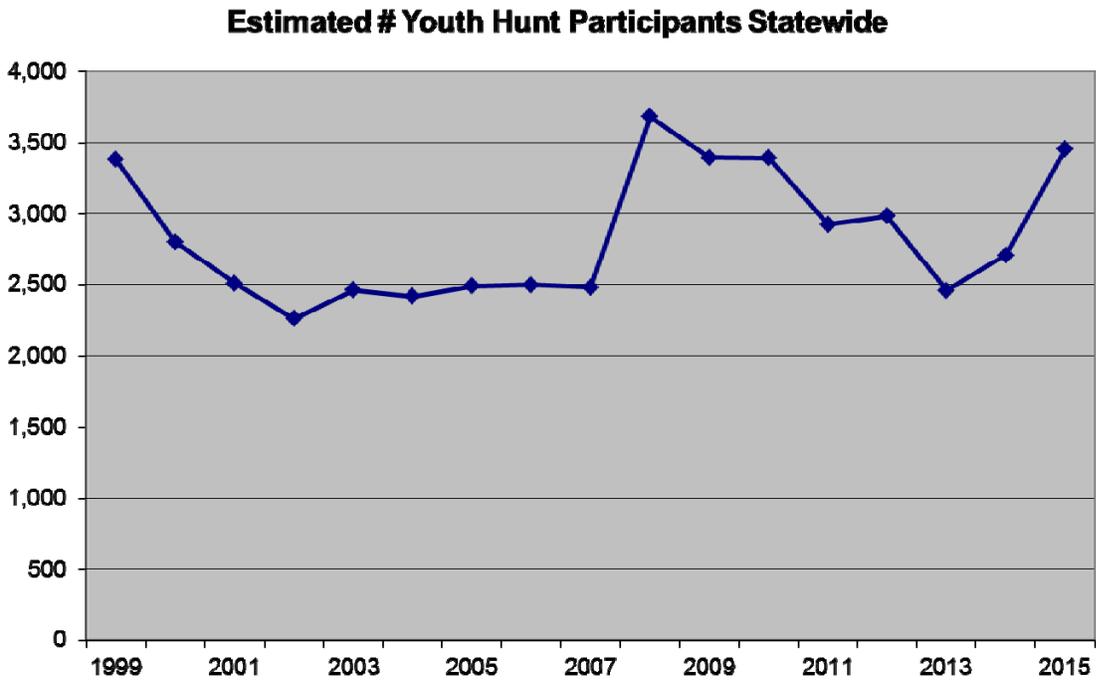
If you wish to provide additional comments, please do so here:

**Figure 1.** 2015 Youth Migratory Game Bird Questionnaire.

**Table 2. Wisconsin youth waterfowl hunt.**

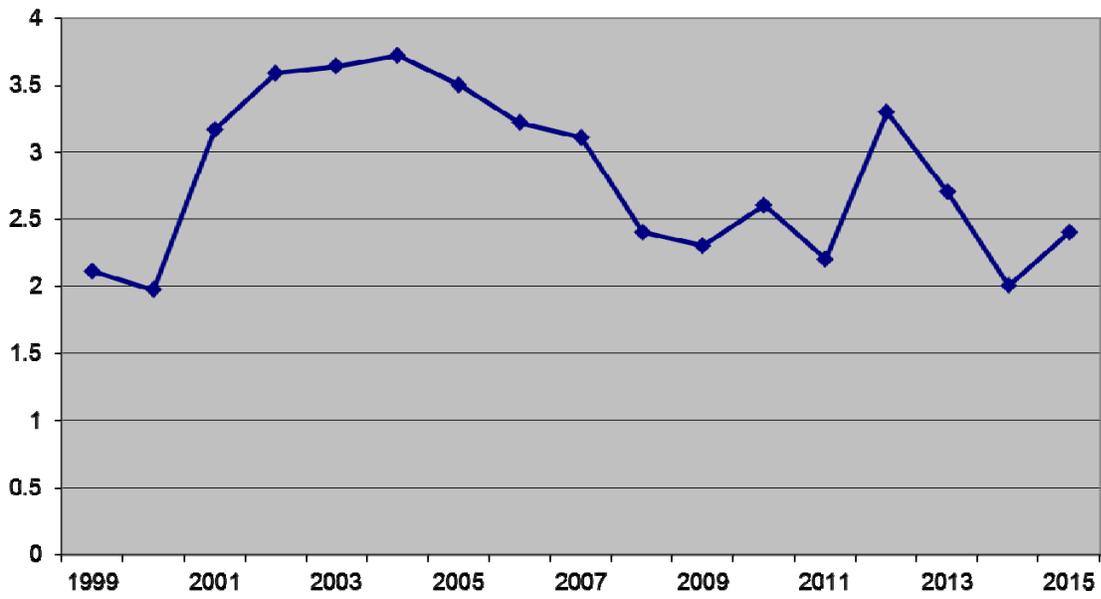
|      | # Days  | Estimated # Youth Hunters | # Ducks Harvested | Estimated # Ducks per Hunter | # Geese Harvested | Estimated # Geese per Hunter |
|------|---------|---------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| 1996 | No data | No data                   | No data           | No data                      | No data           | No data                      |
| 1997 | No data | No data                   | No data           | No data                      | No data           | No data                      |
| 1998 | 1       | no est.                   | 2,700*            | No data                      | 57*               | No data                      |
| 1999 | 1       | 3,379                     | 7,146             | 2.11                         | 148               | 0.04                         |
| 2000 | 2       | 2,802                     | 5,510             | 1.97                         | 418               | 0.15                         |
| 2001 | 2       | 2,506                     | 7,938             | 3.17                         | 241               | 0.1                          |
| 2002 | 2       | 2,259                     | 8,108             | 3.59                         | 309               | 0.14                         |
| 2003 | 2       | 2,459                     | 8,944             | 3.64                         | 480               | 0.2                          |
| 2004 | 2       | 2,416                     | 8,993             | 3.72                         | 324               | 0.13                         |
| 2005 | 2       | 2,487                     | 8,713             | 3.5                          | 255               | 0.1                          |
| 2006 | 2       | 2,495                     | 8,033             | 3.22                         | 257               | 0.1                          |
| 2007 | 2       | 2,478                     | 7,718             | 3.11                         | 386               | 0.16                         |
| 2008 | 2       | 3,682                     | 8,837             | 2.4                          | 405               | 0.11                         |
| 2009 | 2       | 3,395                     | 7,809             | 2.3                          | 272               | 0.08                         |
| 2010 | 2       | 3,391                     | 8,817             | 2.6                          | 339               | 0.4                          |
| 2011 | 2       | 2,925                     | 6,435             | 2.2                          | 428               | 0.15                         |
| 2012 | 2       | 2,985                     | 9,940             | 3.3                          | 507               | 0.17                         |
| 2013 | 2       | 2,456                     | 6,729             | 2.7                          | 270               | 0.11                         |
| 2014 | 2       | 2,707                     | 5,414             | 2.0                          | 341               | 0.13                         |
| 2015 | 2       | 3,455                     | 8,292             | 2.4                          | 449               | 0.13                         |

\*data not expanded



**Figure 2.** *Estimated Wisconsin youth waterfowl hunt figures.*

**Estimated Duck Harvest per Youth Hunter  
(successful and non-successful)**



**Estimated # of Canada Geese Harvested During Youth Hunt**

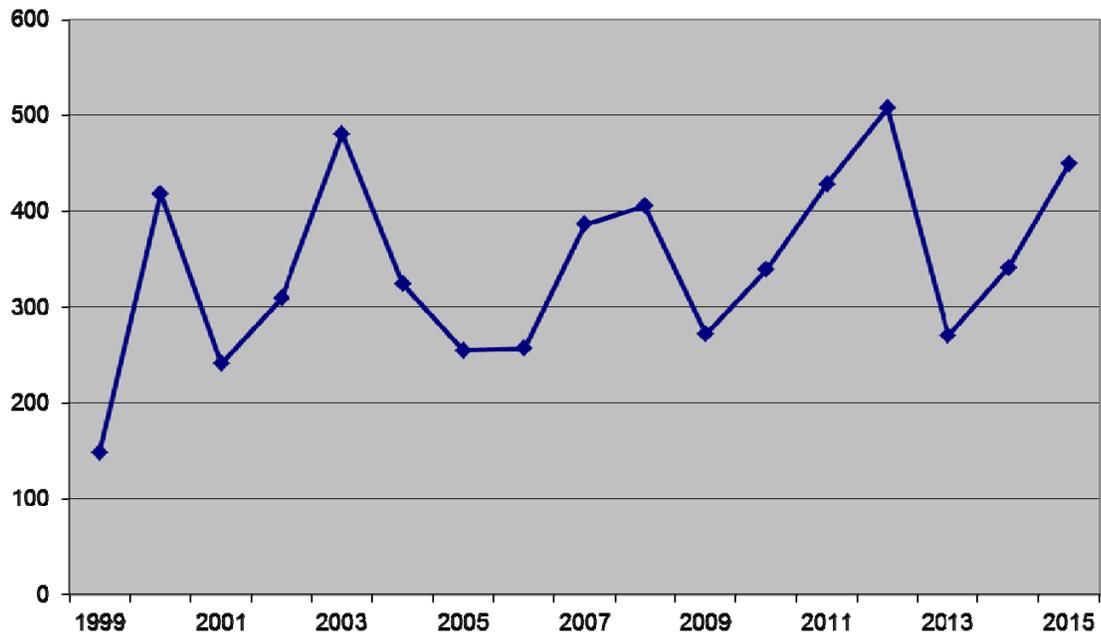


Figure 2. Continued.

**Estimated Canada Goose Harvest per Youth Hunter  
(successful and non-successful)**

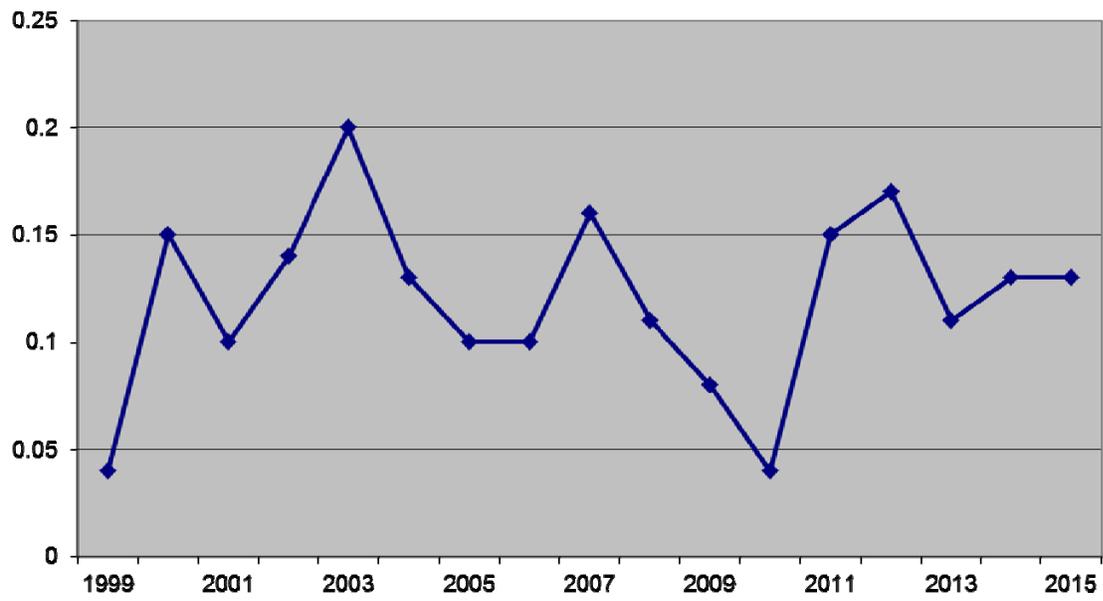


Figure 2. *Continued.*