

**Hunter Performance during the 2015 Special September Teal Season in Iowa, Michigan and Wisconsin:**

A report of second-year results to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Mississippi Flyway Council



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## **Introduction**

Blue-winged teal (*Anas discors*) are one of the most abundant ducks in the Mississippi Flyway that in recent years have reached all-time high population indices. Due to their early migration chronology, the majority of blue-wings pass through many states prior to regular duck seasons. The early migration of teal is a primary reason special early teal seasons were adopted by many Mississippi Flyway states; however, since 1969 the production states of Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin have been excluded from September teal seasons that were offered to the rest of the flyway. For important reasons presented in the Mississippi Flyway's recent recommendations (Appendices A and B), the production states requested opportunities to participate in special early teal seasons several times over the last decade.

There has long been interest from the production states to develop a more equitable distribution of opportunities for September blue-winged teal harvest. The recent record high continental population levels of blue-winged teal in conjunction with the release of a harvest assessment documenting additional harvest potential on blue-winged teal provided impetus for expanding September teal seasons (Appendix A). In 2014 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) offered the production states of the Mississippi Flyway the opportunity to participate in an experimental special September teal season. Production states opting to participate in the experiment were offered the same season as non-production states and were required to collect data on hunter performance and harvest during the experimental season using similar methods that states with operational teal seasons used when they held experimental seasons.

## **Methods**

Michigan and Wisconsin both held 7 day September teal seasons from September 1-7, 2015. Iowa held a 16 day season September 5-20, 2015. Each state used various methods (e.g., press releases, internet-based education, and public meetings) to announce the season to the public, explain the experimental status and provide duck identification tools.

The USFWS required that the upper 90% confidence interval on the estimate of non-target (non-teal) attempt rates for the 3 participating states combined be less than 0.25; similarly, the upper 67% confidence interval for the estimated non-target attempt rate at the state scale must be below 0.25. Based on historic attempt rates and numbers of non-target flocks observed per hunt party, states set a target of observing 40 parties/state during 2014 September seasons; this minimum desired party sample size was used again in 2015. In addition, the USFWS specified a maximum non-target kill rate of 0.10 for the 3 states combined. The USFWS and participating states agreed that a minimum of 180 of hunting parties should be observed over all three years of the experiment in all three states combined.

Each state held training sessions for observers during which the geographic distribution of observations, data collection procedures, duck identification, law enforcement, and safety considerations were discussed. States conducted hunter performance surveys of parties hunting during the September teal season. The species, number of birds in each flock, whether the flock was shot at, and the number of birds hit was recorded. From these observations a non-target attempt rate was estimated based on

non-target flocks observed during legal shooting hours and determined by the observers to be in range; the non-target attempt rate is the ratio of flocks shot at one or more times to the total number of non-target flocks. The non-target kill rate was estimated as the ratio of non-target ducks that fell directly or sailed after being shot at to the total number of ducks (teal plus non-target ducks) that fell directly or sailed after being shot.

## **Results**

Trained observers (Table 1) conducted hunter performance surveys resulting in 151 hunting parties observed during 2015 (64 parties in Iowa, 47 parties in Michigan, and 40 parties in Wisconsin).

Across the 3 states a total of 453 non-target flocks came within range of hunting parties during legal shooting hours, 29 flocks were shot at resulting in a non-target attempt rate of 6.4% (Upper 90% CI = 10.4%); non-target attempt rates by state were: 5.9% (Upper 67% CI = 7.8%) for Iowa, 9.6% (Upper 67% CI = 12.2%) for Michigan, and 0.0% (Upper 67% CI = 1.7%) for Wisconsin.

A total of 367 ducks were observed killed (birds that fell directly or glided before falling), 17 of which were species other than teal, resulting in a non-target kill rate of 4.6%.

## **Discussion**

September 2015 was the second year of what is intended to be a 3 year experiment. Similar to 2014 the 2015 experimental effort was highly successful with all 3 states exceeding the target sample size. This was the direct result of a significant investment of personnel time from each state. Observers from the Iowa DNR worked approximately 270 hours, while observers in Michigan worked approximately 310 hours to complete observations and observers in Wisconsin worked 211 hours. Observer efficiency (non-target flocks recorded per party observation) has been greater than assumed and after two years of work 311 parties have been observed, well above the agreed to minimum 180 hunting parties.

Hunter performance during the second year was within the criteria established by the USFWS for both non-target attempt rates and non-target kill. All three states are continuing their education efforts to inform hunters of the additional regulations and help improve their species identification skills.

Estimates of teal harvest during the 2014 special September season from the USFWS Harvest Information Program mail surveys were 48,780 in Iowa, 9,690 in Michigan, and 15,707 in Wisconsin. Among 26 U.S. states reporting early teal harvest, Iowa ranked number 3, Wisconsin 9 and Michigan 12 in early teal harvest. Estimates of harvest during the 2015 season should be available in summer 2016.

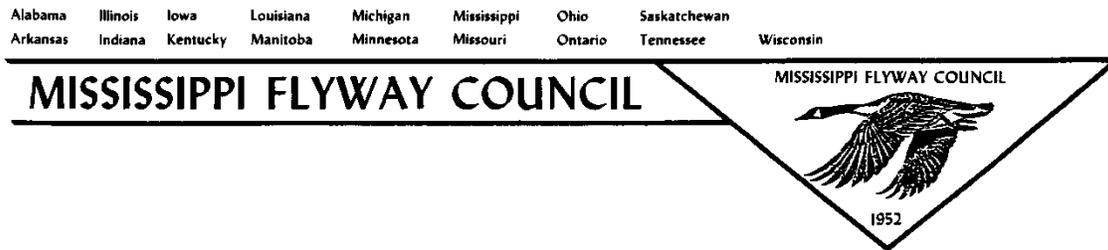
## **Acknowledgements**

Many state and federal personnel assisted with the observation effort and deserve recognition (Table 1). We would also like to thank Barb Avers (MI DNR), Corey Lucas (MI DNR), Taylor Finger (WI DNR), Jim Kelley (USFWS), Kathy Fleming (USFWS), and Al Hancock (IA DNR) for their assistance with this project.

**Table 1. Participants conducting hunter performance surveys during the 2014 and 2015 experimental teal season in Iowa, Michigan and Wisconsin.**

<b>Iowa</b>	<b>Michigan</b>	<b>Wisconsin</b>
N. Dirks	D. Arsnoe	A. Paulios
V. Evelsizer	D. Avers	B. Herzfeldt
F. Fromm	B. Barlow	B. Mott
H. Fry	B. Berger	B. Peterson
K. Goodrich	P. Brickel	B. Braden
S. Griebel	R. Cardenas	B. Peters
M. Griffin	Z. Cooley	C. Cold
A. Hancock	J. Darling	H. Bauman
D. Hoffman	C. Fedewa	J. Robaidek
O. Jones	K. Fisher	J. Hopp
A. Keil	D. Gast	J. Bahls
D. Nelson	G. Goulette	J. Pritzl
B. Ohde	R. Hamilton	J. Wirth
Z. Ripperger	J. Heise	J. Loining
A. Robbins	R. Hobkirk	K. Van Horn
B. Schlader	J. Imber	K. Johansen
T. Smith	D. Jentoft	K. Drake
H. Van Waus	B. Johnson	M. Rasmussen
M. Washburn	D. Jones	M. Johnson
G. Zenner	P. Kailing	N. Ackerman
	N. Kalejs	N. Nice
	M. Kish	P. Nell
	M. Knee	P. Petersen
	C. Krumnauer	R. Nerva
	D. Luukkonen	R. Haffele
	T. Maples	T. Finger
	B. Majdecki	T. Babros
	T. Mcfadden	T. Strelow
	J. Miller	
	M. Mills	
	M. Monfils	
	M. Mshar	
	J. Owens	
	B. Piccolo	
	D. Poppe	
	D. Prince	
	J. Rabbers	
	S. Rhodea	
	M. Richardson	
	J. Robison	
	R. Roeske	
	B. Scullon	
	D. Shaw	
	H. Singer	
	G. Soulliere	
	B. Sova	
	R. Sting	
	N. Torsky	

## Appendix A



**MFCTS ITEM NUMBER: 5**

**ORIGIN:** Dabbling Duck Committee

**DIRECTED TO:** Mississippi Flyway Council and USFWS

**SUBJECT:** Special Teal Seasons in the Mississippi Flyway

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

If the teal harvest assessment concludes that teal populations can sustain harvests beyond the harvest incurred during regular duck seasons and the USFWS offers states special teal harvest opportunities outside the regular duck seasons, then Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin should be offered the same special teal harvest opportunities that are offered to other states in the Mississippi Flyway.

### **JUSTIFICATION:**

Four northern states in the Mississippi Flyway, i.e., Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Iowa, have been denied the opportunity to open special teal seasons for 40 years, a special hunting opportunity that is now 16-days long in the other 10 states in the Flyway. This situation developed as a result of two primary decisions. First, a political decision was made outside the USFWS to make special teal seasons operational in the Mississippi and Central Flyways in 1969. Second, because of concerns about the take of non-teal ducks during special teal seasons and the greater numbers of non-teal ducks that hunters might encounter in the northern areas of the flyways, the Service separated the states into "production" (northern) and "non-production" (southern) states and only offered September teal seasons to "non-production" states. Production states were given the option to add two "bonus" teal to their regular bag limit during their regular duck seasons. However, as a result of the hunting regulations reviews for the revision of the Environmental Impact Statement on sport hunting of migratory birds during 1987-88, the bonus teal option was eliminated. Special teal seasons, however, were allowed to continue. These regulations reviews and subsequent additional analyses also indicated that take attempt rates at non-teal species during September teal seasons did not differ between production and non-production states. Nevertheless, "production" states continued to be denied the opportunity to open special teal seasons. The net effect of this series of decisions is that hunters in the 10 "non-production" states in the Mississippi Flyway have had 408 more days of waterfowl hunting opportunity since 1973 than hunters in the 4 "production" states in the Flyway. The Mississippi Flyway Council believes that this inequity should be corrected and that if teal populations can sustain harvest beyond the regular duck season that the production states of Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan be added to the states who have an opportunity to implement special teal seasons.

**TECHNICAL SECTION ACTION: Approved 7/21/12**

**COUNCIL ACTION:** Approved 7/22/12

## Appendix B



**MFCGBTS ITEM NUMBER:** URR 4 & LRR 2

**ORIGIN:** Upper and Lower Regions Regulations Committees

**DIRECTED TO:** Mississippi Flyway Council and USFWS

**SUBJECT:** Experimental Special September Teal Seasons for IA, MI, WI, MN

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

That IA, MI, WI, and MN be granted special September teal hunting seasons for an experimental 3-year period beginning in September 2014; the framework for these seasons would follow the established teal harvest strategy (i.e., 9 or 16 days with up to 6 bird daily limits) with sunrise to sunset shooting hours. Further, the USFWS work with these states to develop a mutually acceptable evaluation plan prior to June 2014. In the event that this does not pass or Iowa declines the opportunity for an early teal season, then we recommend that Iowa retain their early September duck season.

### **JUSTIFICATION:**

Four northern states in the Mississippi Flyway (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Iowa) have been denied the opportunity to open special September teal seasons for 40 years, a special hunting opportunity that is now 16-days long in the other 10 states in the Flyway. This situation developed as a result of two primary decisions. First, a political decision was made outside the USFWS to make special teal seasons operational in the Mississippi and Central Flyways in 1969. Second, because of concerns about the take of non-teal ducks during special teal seasons and the greater numbers of non-teal ducks that hunters might encounter in the northern areas of the flyways, the Service separated the states into “production” (northern) and “non-production” (southern) states and only offered September teal seasons to “non-production” states. Production states were given the option to add two “bonus” teal to their regular bag limit during their regular duck seasons. However, as a result of the hunting regulations reviews for the revision of the Environmental Impact Statement on sport hunting of migratory birds during 1987-88, the bonus teal option was eliminated. Special teal seasons (9 days, 4 teal/day), however, were allowed to continue. These regulation reviews and subsequent additional analyses also indicated that take attempt rates at non-teal species during September teal seasons did not differ between production and non-production states. Nevertheless, “production” states continued to be denied the opportunity to open special teal seasons. The net effect of this series of decisions is that hunters in the 10 “non-production” states in the Mississippi Flyway have had 440 more days of waterfowl hunting opportunity since 1973 than hunters in the 4 “production” states in the Flyway. The Mississippi Flyway Council is resolved that this inequity be corrected and that if any states in the Mississippi Flyway have an opportunity to implement special teal seasons after the teal harvest assessment is completed, then ALL states in the Flyway must have this opportunity, however that opportunity is defined.

**MFCGBTS:** Approved by Upper and Lower Region Regulations Committees: 02/26/14

**COUNCIL ACTION:** Approved by Upper and Lower Region Regulations Committees: 03/11/14