

ANNUAL HUNTING SEASON REPORT

DISTRICT: Saginaw Bay Management Unit
NAME OF AREA: Shiawassee River State Game Area
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SEASON: 2008

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

The Shiawassee River State Game Area (SRSGA) is 9,758 acres of lowland hardwoods, diked cropland, upland cropland, riverine marsh, and diked managed marsh, located about 10 miles southwest of Saginaw.

2. **AREA GOALS AND MANAGEMENT EMPHASIS**

The primary goals for the SRSGA are to provide essential habitats for migratory and resident game and non-game wildlife species and to provide recreational opportunities for hunting, trapping and viewing.

3. **WILDLIFE PRODUCTION AND USE ESTIMATES**

	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>
1. Number of breeding ducks	75 pairs	80 pairs
Number of young ducks produced	150 ducklings	200 ducklings
2. Number of breeding geese	100 pairs	75 pairs
Number of young geese produced	100 goslings'	75 goslings
3. Size of September 1 deer herd	1300	1400
4. Size of pheasant flock on Sept. 1	80	50
5. Unique Wildlife Species	A. Bald Eagles	2 nesting pairs
	B. Common Egrets	
	Great Blue Herons	30 pairs combined
	C. Bobwhite Quail	5-10 birds
	D. Black Terns	Approx. 10-15
	E. American Bitterns	3-5 pairs
	F. River Otters	6-8
	G. Sandhill Cranes	4-5 Nesting Pairs*

*Their presence is being noted more frequently and larger numbers on the area.

4. **HABITAT MANAGEMENT**

Providing food and cover on the upland units remains to be one of our management objectives for the state game area.

This year, again, we planted 30 acres of food plots to provide food and cover on the upland areas. These food plots ranged in size from 2 to 10 acres and were planted along woodlot and field edges throughout the area.

The planting season for 2008 started off well with planting starting in the 6-14 field on the 28th of April. Planting by sharecroppers was completed by the 16th of June.

Again this year with the help of Jim Mason and the Shiawassee Flats Citizens and Hunters Association, we were able to do a limited amount of spraying for the control of willow and cottonwood on the dikes. Jim coordinated efforts with Dow AgroSciences for the donation of 20 gallons of Garlon 3A; a letter from the Shiawassee Flats Citizens and Hunters Association also accompanied this request. This enabled us to treat approximately 4 miles of dikes and 30 acres of grassland, for the control of woody vegetation. The Shiawassee Flats Citizens and Hunters Association also conducted work days on the area to help cut trees out of the 1-5 field. This group also cut brush and willow in numerous other sites on the game area.

5. **LAND ACQUISITION**

There was no new land acquired.

6. **AREA MAINTENANCE**

There were no major floods that caused excessive dike damage this year.

Rock placement was completed on the north 1-5 dike in the area where the Swan Creek is directly against the dike.

Installed new tube in southwest refuge marsh to Prior Rd. sump, this will allow better control of water levels in this unit.

Replaced tube from 9-14 to Wahl Rd. sump. Reinstalled old gates.

Replaced tube from 6-8 to Wahl Rd. sump. Reinstalled old gates.

Replaced tube from Wahl Rd. marsh to Wahl Rd. sump. Reinstalled old gates.

Replaces tube and gate from the Wahl Rd. marsh to zone B.

Replaced gearbox on the north radial gate.

- Mowed approximately 30 miles of dikes
- Mowed approximately 40 acres of openings
- Repairs to equipment
- Maintain water levels for planting, hunting and marsh management
- Parking lot maintenance of 8 lots including trash removal and grading
- Distributed gravel to areas of dikes where wash outs, bad spots, or holes on dike tops were.
- Sprayed approximately 220 acres of buckwheat ground with roundup for weed control.

7. **EQUIPMENT**

This year the department purchased a new 20 ton equipment trailer, new 10 yard dump truck and a new 7330 John Deere tractor.

8. **SPECIAL PROJECTS**

The Tagget and Dietrich restorations were completed this year by Ducks Unlimited.

After completing an application and paying a fee, a local beekeeper was again allowed to place beehives throughout the area to help with the pollination of crops.

Staff worked in the northwest corner of 1-5 to remove and level spoils from previous project. This will provide for better drainage of the field as well providing for an additional 5 acres of field area.

9. **RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES**

ACTIVITY	USER TRIPS					HARVEST				
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Waterfowl	6052	6773	7429	7697	6818	6216	8730	11776	10379	8833
Deer Hunting	6698	5512	4876	4415	4527	231	150	174	137	160
Small Game	529	619	681	na	na					
Pheasant						25	28	39	na	na
Coyote						1	7	14	na	na
Rabbit						126	96	72	na	na
Squirrel						208	212	228	na	na
Woodchuck						45	38	12	na	na
Raccoon						33	57	62	na	na
Quail						0	0	0	na	na
Trapping										
Muskrat						872	1384	5167	4647	3744
Beaver						22	56	35	22	12
Raccoon						33	54	59	96	80
Fox						0	1	0	1	0
Mink						15	8	20	18	23
Opossum						1	0	9	14	7
Otter						0	0	2	2	1
Coyote						0	0	0	1	0

10. **CROPLAND, MARSHLAND AND WATER LEVEL MANAGEMENT**

The growing season on the Shiawassee River State Game Area went very well here. The temperatures in early spring were below average but we picked up growing degree days throughout the summer. Timely rains provided good moisture for crops throughout the summer.

The buckwheat crop was planted in late June and there was good moisture to allow for immediate germination of the crop. We decreased the amount of seed planted per acre from 50 lbs. to 40 lbs. per acre. This practice along with the spraying after disking to control unwanted vegetation has proven to produce an excellent and strong stand of buckwheat. In 2008 we did convert the west end of field 61-66 into buckwheat; this was well received by the hunting public.

Approximately 220 acres of buckwheat planting was done by Department personnel on the area. These units were sprayed with Roundup in late May to help control velvet leaf and other weeds. The buckwheat developed well and provided for a good food source.

The flooded woods unit (zones 77-117 and area D) continues to provide excellent hunting opportunities. This year the hatch of the loostrike beetles was very poor. The radial gates were closed on the 29th of August.

Water levels were up in the river system most of the year on the game area, resulting in better access to the public using the river.

Field 1-5 was put back in production this year. Sharecropper John Oakes was the farmer chosen to work this unit. This was done in order to meet our goals for the area and reduce the work load of local staff.

11. WATERFOWL HUNTING SEASON

a) Introduction

In 2008 there were a total of 6,818 hunter trips for waterfowl hunting. Hunters were again allowed to drop off permits in the drop tubes or at the check station. There were still 80 outstanding waterfowl permits for the season (there were 61 in 2007). Outstanding permits and late permits are still a problem here. This year to assist in the check station operations, four non-career wildlife assistants were brought on to help with the check station duties. The only full time staff assigned to check station was Victor Weigold, Wildlife Technician. Barry Sova, Wildlife Technician at Crow Island, worked two days a week until the first week of November. During the waterfowl season, check station hours were from 4:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. seven days a week. After waterfowl season, the check station hours were from 8 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays through January 15th. Due to ice up, the check station went to self service on the 1st of December. There were no reported problems with people unable to get permits because of check station hours. During the late waterfowl hunt on January 3rd and January 4th the check station was not open and permits were available on a self serve basis. During the late waterfowl hunt there were 8 hunters that participated with 0 ducks harvested and 16 geese harvested.

b) Weather and Habitat Conditions

During the 60 day waterfowl season, temperatures ranged from a low of 7 degrees on December 1st (7 degrees in 2007) to a high of 90 degrees on October 8th (90 degrees in 2007). Overall temperatures were above average for the early part of the waterfowl season with average temperatures for the month of November. Late season cold weather resulted in freeze-up prior to the end of the season.

Listed below is a summary of temperatures for the waterfowl season.

High Temperatures

Days above 50 degrees	26 days (36 days in 2007)
Days 40 to 49 degrees	10 days (14 days in 2007)
Days 32 to 39 degrees	13 days (8 days in 2007)
Days below 32 degrees	11 days (2 days in 2007)

Low Temperatures

Days above 50 degrees	4 days (48 days in 2007)
Days 40 to 49 degrees	9 days (14 days in 2007)
Days 32-39 degrees	16 days (23 days in 2007)
Days below 32 degrees	31 days (15 days in 2007)

Overall precipitation was average for the season. For the month of October, temperatures were above normal and precipitation was average. For the month of November, temperatures were average and precipitation was above average.

c. Migration and Waterfowl Numbers

Weekly refuge counts were completed on the Prior Road refuge. The survey practices were consistent with previous years. Water levels were optimal for waterfowl use for the entire time period that surveys were accomplished.

The east half of the flooded woods were again designated as a waterfowl refuge, but archery hunters were allowed access for deer hunting. Due to the lack of accessibility, there were no refuge counts done for the east half of the flooded woods. As flooding progressed for the waterfowl season, so did the number of waterfowl using the area. It is estimated that probably 5,000 waterfowl were using the area just prior to the opening day.

Table 1. Weekly Prior Rd. refuge counts on Shiawassee River State Game Area, 2008

DATE	GEESE	DUCKS
10/04/08	50	3,000
10/11/08	300	3,000
10/18/08	300	1,500
10/25/08	650	8,105
11/01/08	500	7,300
11/08/08	325	10,360
11/15/08	250	10,670
11/22/08	1000	13,050
11/27/08	0	0
12/04/08	0	0

The number of ducks in the refuge peaked at 13,050 during the week of November 22nd. The refuge counts only report the number of birds in the Prior Rd. refuge units; at times birds using the entire area probably peaked between 20,000 and 30,000 birds. Canada goose numbers were average for the waterfowl season.

d). Season Dates and Regulations

The youth waterfowl hunt was held the 20th and 21st of September and 67 hunters participated in the hunt. The regular waterfowl season was again a 60-day season. The southern zone opened on October 11th and ran until December 7th. There was a two day late hunt on January 3rd and 4th, 2009. 8 hunters participated in the two day late hunt and harvested 0 ducks.

The bag limit for the regular waterfowl season was six ducks which could include four mallards (no more than one of which can be a female), three wood ducks, scaup daily limit changed from 1-2 depending on zone and season dates, two redheads, one pintail and 1 black duck. Hunters could also take 5 mergansers, only 2 of which may be a hooded merganser.

The September 1-10 early goose season was open again this year for our area with a 5-bird limit. Self-registration of hunters was again used. Permits were placed outside of the check station and it was the responsibility of the individual hunter to fill out the registration card and pick up a permit. The permits were valid for the entire early season and allowed access to the entire area excluding the Wildlife Refuge. There were 91 hunters who harvested 102 geese during the early goose season.

The dates for the regular goose season for the Saginaw County GMU were October 11th through November 13th, there was a two bird limit with no quota. There were 1,143 geese shot for the game area. Hunters were allowed to hunt everyday both morning and afternoon hunts for the season.

AI sampling was done again this year on the Shiawassee River State Game Area.

e) Hunting Season Results

1) Pre-registration

For the first two days of the regular waterfowl season all hunt periods were pre-registered with a maximum of 65 parties same as last year. The p.m. hunt period for opening day was a youth priority hunt, a practice that has been followed for sometime now. A standby drawing was held for all hunt periods to fill any leftover spots to the maximum of 65 parties for the game area.

Table 2. Pre-registered hunt attendance for the Shiawassee River State Game Area

DATE	PERMITS AVAILABLE		ACTUAL PARTICIPATION	
	2006	2007	2007	2008
October 11th am	65	65	56	38
October 11th pm	65	65	43	34
October 12th am	65	65	53	36
October 12th pm	65	65	34	37

2) Harvest and Hunter Use

Harvest for the area was 7,572 ducks and 1,261 geese. The regular waterfowl season was good here. Despite the slow flooding of the field 1-5 harvest numbers were above average. Flooding conditions progressed well throughout the season and food supplies lasted throughout the season. There were approximately 14 days lost to freeze up.

Table 3. Shiawassee River State Game Area Harvest Data, 2003-2008

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	5-Year Average	2008
Hunter Trips	132/8066(a)	144/5908(a)	160/6613(a)	144/7312(a)	126/7571(a)	7235	91/6727
Ducks	9878	5561	7480	10594	9466	8596	7572
Geese	111/781(b)	89/566(b)	291/959(b)	177/1005(b)	83/830(b)	978	102/1159
Cripples	1224	796	942	1310	1310	1116	1087
% Cripples	10.2(c)	11.4(c)	9.7(c)	10.0(c)	11.2(c)	10.5	11
Ducks/Hunter Trip	1.22	0.94	1.13	1.44	1.23	1.19	1.13
Total Birds/Hunter Trip	1.31	1.03	1.29	1.57	1.35	1.31	1.3

- a. Early goose season/general waterfowl season & youth waterfowl season
- b. General waterfowl and youth waterfowl
- c. % cripples = #cripples/all birds knocked down

The hunting conditions here were good. The water levels were good for the entire season. We have had numerous hunters tell us that this was overall a good season. We feel that new management techniques at the federal refuge as well as the fact that the Prior Rd refuge is coming to its full potential are two factors making large contributions to the waterfowl harvest here.

Table 4. Shiawassee River State Game Area harvest by area, 2004-2008

ZONE	DUCKS					GEESE					HUNTER TRIPS				
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
1-4B (1-5)	199	687	402	704	315	40	166	58	30	43	244	579	388	561	330
5-12A (6-14)	911	1054	1253	1210	771	125	215	106	200	190	940	1047	822	1133	938
13-19 (15-20)	90	79	152	97	158	28	35	29	25	39	240	120	212	144	271
A-E (21-22)	16	31	24	9	21	1	5	4	2	9	43	37	24	5	35
F-K (23-28)	436	238	553	343	225	67	46	95	37	62	501	189	422	256	242
20-20A (29)	20	9	86	117	36	0	2	3	4	0	32	16	66	48	53
21-28 (30-38)	440	1009	1211	934	1298	35	210	45	142	210	403	752	715	609	819
29-38 (39-48)	991	829	2063	1536	1727	141	138	307	97	263	1101	788	1100	1038	1139
39-44 (49-52)	67	20	42	23	85	10	6	3	5	7	59	45	40	26	60
45-46 (53-54)	16	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	2
47-51 (55-60)	290	1177	1741	1505	763	20	64	220	190	182	481	983	1178	1267	911
52-56 (61-66)	442	1065	1358	1216	1177	26	37	78	40	94	351	879	979	1083	866
102-111 (67-76)	45	28	27	54	48	2	1	11	2	1	97	63	62	71	62
112-171 (77-117)	1106	897	1089	1563	789	24	9	17	27	14	1058	810	833	1088	776
172-185 (137-150)	462	320	428	119	106	42	24	25	25	13	303	236	292	176	153
A1/A11 (A)	30	28	76	24	52	5	1	4	4	16	28	36	63	46	62

The kill chart was posted weekly again this year in an attempt to increase permit return rate and improve data. Zones as drawn were also posted after every draw to assist hunters. Late or outstanding permits are still an issue with 80 permits outstanding at this time.

3) Participation in Drawings

Draws for the 2008 season were down slightly compared to 2007. We contribute this to the fact that all of the managed areas in the Saginaw Bay Management Unit were flooded this year and had good crops, contrary to 2007. The lowest number of parties in a drawing was on November 6th p.m. draw with two parties and the largest number of parties in a draw was on October 25th a.m. with 79 parties participating in the draw.

Hunter's using SRSGA come from a vast geographical area. The majority of our hunters (228) came from Saginaw County. Genesee County ranked second with 115 hunters and Oakland County third with 57 hunters. Waterfowl hunters from North Carolina, Ohio, Montana, South Carolina, Wisconsin, West Virginia, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland and Tennessee hunted this area during the 2008 waterfowl season.

4) Daily and Seasonal Permits Income

This year we again sold daily and annual permits at the check station. Hunters appreciated this very much.

Table 5. Fees Collected at the Shiawassee River SGA, 2004-2008

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
\$4,316	\$7,200	\$8,650	\$7,668	\$5,980

12. **DEER SEASON RESULTS**

1) Season Lengths and Regulations

The 2008 deer season regulations were very similar to 2007. Statewide rules and regulations applied to deer hunting on the game area. Bonus antlerless permits were distributed for the last two shotgun hunt periods (15%) and all three muzzleloader hunt periods (100%). We held a pre-registered drawing for the September 20th and 21st youth deer hunt this year with 30 permits available. See the attached Deer Hunt Information sheet for hunt periods, number of permits and deadlines for applying.

2) Participation in Drawings

Again this year, hunters applying for pre-registered deer hunts were allowed to apply for one hunt period on the SRSGA and one hunt period on the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge. There were 1535 applicants for SRSGA. The applications were submitted by postcard and the random drawing was conducted by department staff from the St. Charles field office.

There were three open archery hunt periods for the 2008 hunting season. (See attached deer information sheet). Hunter participation as well as hunter harvest were down this year. (See attached deer hunt information sheet).

3) Hunter Success

There were 160 deer reported harvested in 2008 (95 bucks, 52 does and 13 button bucks). The harvest numbers were below our goal of 200 deer to harvest (85 antlerless and 52 antlered deer). There were a total of 1613 hunters with 94 days hunted. The aerial deer survey was flown on January 20, 2009 and 601 deer were observed (87 on the west side of the Miller drain and 514 on the east side of the Miller drain). A major factor in the distribution of deer on this survey is the fact that around the 20th of December the entire area experienced a thaw that caused severe flooding. The two weeks following the thaw we experienced very cold temperatures which caused flood waters to freeze therefore driving the wildlife to higher ground.

Weather did play a factor in the deer hunting season here. With record snowfall amount and the December flood the roads to the game area were inaccessible from early December to the end of the hunting season.

13. **INFLUENCE GROUPS**

The following group helped us to reach some of our management goals and their generous donations of both time and money are greatly appreciated.

1. Shiawassee Flats Hunters and Citizens Association

- Posting of the river blinds.
- Mowing of willows in various locations.
- Continuation of NAWCA commitments.
- Funded fuel for pumping in zones 23-28
- Funded rental of no-till grain drill.
- Purchased post hole auger for use on area.

14. **PROBLEMS OR OPPORTUNITIES**

Staffing is the biggest hurdle for us to overcome for the game area. The Wildlife Assistant 9 (Mark Winn) retired in January. The Wildlife Biologist (Barbara Avers) took a promotion mid summer to the Waterfowl Specialist in Lansing. The Wildlife Assistant 8 (Charlie Dittenber) retired at the end of September. There are plans to fill these positions but thus far no personnel have been added to the staff here. The only full time positions now occupied at Shiawassee River State Game area are the Wildlife Technician (Victor Weigold) and the secretary (Connie Fulara).

This year we were allowed to hire one STW 4's for the summer. This employee's responsibility was to keep the office clean, mow the grass and maintenance around the office area. This person also assisted staff in installing tubes and gates.

The heavy equipment used on the game area is all over 20 years old. We need to get on a replacement schedule to update equipment or change the way we do business.

The infrastructure on the Shiawassee River State game area is crumbling around us. We need to make a commitment to replace pumping stations and the headquarters building that is crumbling down around us. After some inspections on the Prior Rd. pump house we have discovered it is in desperate need of repairs. We have the siphon tube project and radial gates project in the early stages of development but funding is not yet secured for either project.

In late March we were contacted by MIOSHA for a facility inspection. After inspection we were cited for two violations. One for a guard on the Prior Rd. pump station and the other for a fan guard on the John Deere Tractor. Both pieces of equipment had guards on them but they weren't adequate. Personnel here fixed both violations and they passed inspection. This inspection gave us insight on safety issues as related to our line of work.

15. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Install electricity to 30's pump station reducing pumping costs and man hours
- Replace Miller Rd. Hay Bridge to provide hunter access to the north end of the area.
- Continue to allow for fall tillage in the bottomlands in a manner with minimal top soil disturbance, no fall tillage of any kind allowed in the decoy openings areas of the fields.
- Replace siphon tube from woods to Prior rd areas.
- Replace pump stations on area.
- Install new pump station for the 40's field
- Replace backhoe.
- Replace excavator.

16 **STAFFING**

Issues were addressed in problems section of report