

ST. CLAIR FLATS WILDLIFE AREA 2008 MANAGEMENT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The St. Clair Flats State Wildlife Area (SCFWA) is located at the southern tip of St. Clair County. The SCFWA contains the Harsens Island unit (including bottomlands and marshes associated with this island complex), the St. Johns Marsh Unit, and Dickinson Island.

The marshlands and islands within SCFWA are a river delta formation resulting from St. Clair River flow into Lake St. Clair. Located between the St. Clair and Detroit Rivers, Lake St. Clair has a total area of 28,400 mi² and is a significant portion of the connecting waters between Lakes Huron and Erie. Approximately two-thirds of Lake St. Clair lies within Canadian boundaries. Waters of the Lake St. Clair / St. Clair River system are an annual ancestral migration route for thousands of ducks, geese, swans and various shore and wading birds.

SCFWA lands adjoining this river delta system provide habitat for numerous other terrestrial and aquatic species of wildlife. Healthy populations of white-tailed deer, ring-necked pheasants, raptors, coyotes, red foxes, squirrels, rabbits, muskrats, various amphibians and reptiles, and neo-tropical migrant songbirds are some of the wildlife species found within the SCFWA.

HARSEN ISLAND UNIT

Land purchase on Harsens Island (HI) began in 1950. Original development of the HI management unit began in the late 1950's and is a continuous operation. Currently, there are 10 diked agricultural units totaling 1150 acres; two diked marsh units, each approximately 800 acres; about 300 acres of marsh within the management unit on the Little Muscamoot bay shore (over which there is no water level control); and 305 acres of upland area.

ST. JOHNS MARSH UNIT

In 1976, the Michigan Natural Resources Commission approved and dedicated the 3,000-acre wetland/upland complex as the St. Johns Marsh Wildlife Area (SJMWA). It is located along the northeastern shoreline of Lake St. Clair (Anchor Bay), adjacent to Highway M-29 and four miles west of the city of Algonac.

The SJMWA has been recognized as an important ecological area, with many distinct habitat types. Upland areas support mixed stands of oak, hickory, white ash, aspen, cottonwood, and associated shrub species. Areas formerly under tillage support dense growths of old field succession-type shrubs and herbs. Areas subject to intermittent flooding have a cover of sedges, annual weeds, water tolerant grasses and lowland shrubs. A unique area of wet prairie-type vegetation exists along the southeast border of St. Johns Marsh.

Three units have been developed, and contain diked impoundments and a prairie-pothole wetland complex. The main marsh portions of this wetland are occupied by stands of narrow leaf cattail, interspersed with phragmites, bulrush, and buttonbush throughout. During wetter years submerged vegetation is abundant throughout the marsh and forms a continuous dense carpet in many areas.

SCFWA GOALS AND MANAGEMENT EMPHASIS

To improve and preserve wetland habitat for game and non-game species; provide a refuge and food supply for migrating waterfowl, shorebirds and wading birds; provide sportsmen/women with maximum hunting opportunities while maintaining quality hunting experiences; and generally help meet the Wildlife Division's goal of providing statewide wildlife recreational opportunities for the citizens of Michigan and visitors from other areas.

WEATHER, WATER, AND HABITAT CONDITIONS

WEATHER

Spring weather conditions were cooler and wetter than in 2007. The spring growing season was below average because of the cooler/wetter weather. Nesting success was below average, however, several late broods were observed. Mid summer weather was slightly cooler and wetter than in 2007, but growing conditions were still good. September through the first two weeks of October was a period of warmer and drier weather. Mid October through November 3rd was pretty average with more normal temperatures and precipitation. Cold fronts were recorded for this period on Oct. 19, 21, 27-29. The period from Oct. 27 through Nov. 2 was very cool and wet. November 3 through Nov. 8 was like a late Indian summer with warm (low 70's) and calm conditions. In general the remainder of November was a period of below average temperatures and above average precipitation. A minor cold front was recorded on November 9 (skim ice on November 11) with a major cold front recorded on November 15. Below average temperatures and above average precipitation persisted for the remainder of the waterfowl season. Snow and ice was prevalent from Nov. 17 through December 7th. Temperatures stayed cold after the regular waterfowl season ended with ice forming in several of the bays on Lake St. Clair.

WATER LEVELS

Lake Michigan-Huron continued its second longest period of continuous below average water levels since 1918. Both lakes however are above their 2007 water levels when they set or came close to setting new record lows.

Lakes St. Clair, Erie and Ontario rose sharply to start 2008. Lake St. Clair, bolstered by very wet weather in 2008, rose to near average water levels by February. The lake remained near average through April and then was a few inches below its long term average (LTA) from May through December.

Lake St. Clair levels started the year at 573.0 feet, about 7 inches above its January LTA. Levels peaked at its normal time in July, at 574.5 feet, about 4 inches below the July LTA. St. Clair's level ended the year at 573.5 feet; 5 inches below the December LTA. Lakes Superior, Michigan-Huron and St. Clair are forecasted to remain below their LTA through mid 2009

HABITAT

Due to low water conditions and the cooler wetter spring throughout the SCFWA, nesting conditions were fair to poor for waterfowl and other wetland dependent birds. The shallow conditions created by the continued low lake levels were good for macrophytic growth. The expansion of emergent vegetation and the littoral zone has been evidenced during these times of lower water. However, the down side to the continued lower lake levels is the expansion and stronghold of Phragmites. In many areas of the SCFWA, phragmites appears to be expanding at a faster rate than cattail/bulrush. Due to the increasing clarity of the water throughout Lake St. Clair, macrophyte growth continues to be good.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

The areas third NAWCA proposal was awarded in 2008, work to complete an east marsh enhancement project will begin in 2009. The NAWCA phase 2 - west marsh unit restoration project was completed in 2008..

Prescribe burns were successfully completed at two small remnant prairie sites and the Muscamoot marsh unit at Harsens Island.

Ongoing prairie restoration work continues at the SJMWA and Algonac State Park using NAWCA funds.

Control of phragmites continues to be a priority with app 300 acres treated between SJMWA and Harsens Island.

Donations from the St. Clair Flats Waterfowlers, Harsens Island Waterfowlers, and MDHA-Bluewater chapter groups helped on several habitat projects within the SCFWA.

LAND ACQUISITION

None

PROMINENT CLIENTELE GROUPS

The following is a list of groups that have given assistance in the past year to accomplish our management goals:

- Harsens Island Waterfowl Hunters Association
- St. Clair Flats Waterfowlers, Inc
- MDHA, Blue Water Chapter
- Ducks Unlimited
- Pheasants Forever
- St. Clair Flats Hunting and Retriever club
- MUCC District 8

HARSENS ISLAND UNIT STATISTICS AND ACTIVITIES

Wildlife production and use estimates

1. Number of breeding ducks = approximately 2100

Number of young produced = approximately 4200.

2. Number of breeding geese = approximately 245
Number of young produced = approximately 488.
3. Size of September 1st deer herd = approximately 400
4. Size of pheasant flock on September 1st = approximately 165.

Other game = rabbit, squirrel, quail, woodcock, jacksnipe, raccoon, fox, muskrat, coyote and mink. All small game species have remained the same.

5. Unique wildlife species = sandhill cranes, osprey, king rails, eastern fox snakes, American bittern, least bittern, cattle egret, green herons, black-crowned heron, loon, cormorant, short-eared owl, yellow spotted turtle and eastern bluebird. A pair of bald eagles was sighted throughout the summer.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT

Worked on prairie restoration projects at the St. Johns Marsh and Harsens Island units. Completed continuing level cropping program at both units. Continued control efforts on phragmites at both units. Completed west marsh unit NAWCA phase 2 project at Harsens Island. Conducted prescribed burns at Harsens Island and SJM. Awarded a NCWC grant to do further phragmites control at SJM and two other private sites within the Lake St. Clair watershed.

AREA MAINTENANCE

Annual maintenance of the area facilities was carried out as planned. Special projects involved the painting of roofs on the 50x100 feet metal storage buildings.

EQUIPMENT

Two (2) outboard motors	1977 6-bottom plow
10-yard dump truck	1982 5-bottom plow
1979 2-1/2 ton truck	1990 2555 tractor & loader
1982 TW20 tractor	8-row corn planter
1977 9600 tractor	6-row corn planter
1978 4630 John Deere tractor	16-ft. disc
1969 2444 tractor	12-ft. grain drill
D4 dozer	1978 Sprayer
1983 backblade	1952 14-ft. boat
1987 16-ft. boat	1990 batwing mower
2005 7320 J.D. tractor	6 ft. 3 pt. mower
2008 7430 John Deere tractor	637 John Deere disc

RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

<u>Activity</u>	<u>User Trips</u>	<u>Harvest</u>
Waterfowl hunting, regular duck season	7079	8765
Deer hunting	893	84
Small game hunting	140	45

Trapping	6 permits issued
Bird/wildlife viewing	3,200
Tournaments/special events	425
Educational tours	100

Fishermen numbers were not recorded. It would be impossible to estimate a guess.

GENERAL

The 2008 season was the 38th year of managed hunting on Harsens Island. The waterfowl season was 60 days in length for the 12th consecutive year. Again this year, there was a split season, with two days of the general season taking place on January 3 and 4. The regular duck season opened October 11 and closed December 7. The bag limit was a restricted 6 duck limit including no more than 4 mallards, only one of which could be a hen. The canvasback season was closed this year. Mallards accounted for 78% of the total harvest. greenwing teal 6%, black ducks for 6%, pintail 5% and wood ducks 2%. Muzzleloading season was again seventeen days. It started December 5. The pheasant season was open the entire month of December.

The cropping program this year produced above average cover and yields. Weather conditions were slightly cooler than normal the entire growing season, with above normal rainfall. Deer are above goal populations. They continue to cause crop damage. Breeding Canada Geese numbers have declined slightly but continue to cause significant crop and cover loss in the hunting areas.

MIGRATION AND WATERFOWL NUMBERS

Migrating waterfowl numbers continue to be lower than average. This year, mallards dominated the counts and hunter bags compared to last year.

	<u>Mallard</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>GWT</u>	<u>WD</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>Total Ducks</u>
September 15-20	1500		500	2000	150	4150
September 22-27	4250	100	1500	2000	200	8050
Sept 29- Oct 4	9500	250	2000	1250	50	13050
October 6-11	9000	250	1500	1000	300	12050
October 13-18	15000	1500	1800	750	1150	20200
October 20-25	23000	2000	1200	500	2200	28900
Oct 27- Nov 1	14000	2000	500	250	250	17000
November 3-8	15250	3000	300	250	300	19100
November 10-15	13150	3500	200	50	100	17000
November 17-22	4200	1200				5400
November 24-29	5500	1500				7000
December 1 -66	4500	1500				6000
December 8 -13	0					0
December 15 - 20	0					0
December 22-17	4000	500				4500
Dec 29 - Jan 3	2500	400				2900

HUNTING SEASON RESULTS

The following charts show hunter participation and duck harvest throughout the season.

WEEKLY STATISTICS

Date	No. of days	Hunter trips	Hunters/day	ducks	ducks/day	ducks/hunter trip
9/20 and 21	2	44	22	28	14	.64
10/11 - 17	7	1062	152	1301	186	1.22
10/18 - 24	7	1052	150	1610	230	1.53
10/25 - 31	7	1173	168	1620	231	1.38
11/1 - 7	7	867	124	703	100	0.81
11/8 - 14	7	1156	165	1191	171	1.04
11/15 - 21	7	690	99	868	124	1.25
11/22 - 11/28	7	341	48	400	57	1.19
11/29 - 12/7	9	694	77	1036	115	1.49

HUNTER FEES

This was the 23rd year hunter fees were collected. The daily fee was \$4.00, and the seasonal license was \$13.00. These fees, at this rate, have been collected since 1997. For the first eleven years, the fees charged were \$3.00 and \$10.00.

Year	Seasonal	Dailies	Total dollars	
1986	928	1,425	\$13,555	
1987	804	1,387	\$12,201	
1988	583	1,401	\$10,033	
1989	631	1,267	\$10,111	
1990	689	1,466	\$11,288	
1991	669	1,175	\$10,215	
1992	661	1,213	\$10,249	
1993	740	1,283	\$11,249	
1994	796	1,591	\$12,733	
1995	769	1,239	\$12,411	
1996	729	1,553	\$13,089	
1997	627	2,021	\$16,235	
1998	570	2,025	\$15,510	\$567 in other licenses
1999	535	2,069	\$15,101	\$739 in other licenses
2000	576	1,632	\$14,106	\$908 in other licenses
2001	501	834	\$15,445	\$1,584 in other licenses
2002	N/A	2,323	\$10,250	\$957 in other licenses
2003	N/A	2,436	\$10,962	\$1,218 in other licenses
2004	N/A	2,037	\$10,047	\$1749 in antlerless and other licenses
2005	122	1565	\$10,958	255 antlerless licenses at \$10.00 each and \$562 in other licenses
2006	173	1979	\$14,065	300 antlerless licenses at \$10.00 each and \$900 in other licenses
2007	233	1724	\$13,515	327 antlerless licenses

2008	275	1460	\$12,761	270	at \$10.00 each and \$393 in other licenses antlerless licenses at \$10.00 each and \$646 in other licenses
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DEER HUNTING PARTICIPATION

Youth Hunt	22	11
Bow	227	15
Firearm	310	27
Blackpowder	312	31
Dec. Bow	<u>22</u>	<u>0</u>
	893	84

GOOSE HUNTING

The regular goose season this year ran from Oct. 11 to Nov. 13 and Nov. 27 to Dec. 7. We received many positive comments from hunters because they were able to harvest geese during the regular waterfowl season. There were a total of 84 Canada geese and 2 snow geese bagged.

2008	SPECIES	TOTALS
Mallard	6786	Wood Duck 153
Black Ducks	535	Pintail 440
Greenwing	502	Gadwall 85
Bluewing	18	Widgeon 70
Shovelers	41	Redhead 7
Scaup	14	Hooded Merg 19
Bufflehead	11	Ruddy Duck 2
Canada Geese	84	Snow Geese 2

HARVEST AND HUNTER USE

Season Summary - 1977 - 2008

Season Length	Year	Start Date	First Ice	Limit Pt. System	Cropped Area			Marsh Area		Deer
					Total Kill	Total Ducks	Kill/Hunter	Total Kill	Kill/Hunter	
45	1977	10/12	11/14	25/15	8082	6081	1.44	2001	0.66	
50	1978	10/11		35/15	9299	7168	1.50	2131	0.70	
50	1979	10/09	11/12	25/10	12033	9379	1.96	2654	0.70	
50	1980	11/01	11/11	25/10	8817	6982	1.53	1833	0.59	
50	1981	10/12	11/22	25/10	10059	7233	1.50	2808	0.90	
50	1982	10/12	11/15		10323	7898	1.47	2422	0.70	
50	1983	10/08	11/13		8846	6800	1.28	2046	0.76	
50	1984	10/06	11/13	25/10	10980	7932	1.44	3048	0.98	
40	1985	10/05	11/19	35/20	8738	6579	1.40	2159	0.86	
40	1986	10/11	11/12	35/20	8156	6505	1.40	1651	0.80	10
40	1987	10/10	11/11	35/20	7762	6308	1.30	1451	0.70	10
30	1988	10/15	none	3 ducks	8160	6773	1.70	1387	0.90	22
30	1989	10/14	11/22	3 ducks	7417	6236	1.53	1181	0.86	27
30	1990	10/13	11/12	3 ducks	6892	5764	1.35	1128	0.71	36
30	1991	10/19	11/04	3 ducks	5540	4773	1.28	766	0.73	31
30	1992	10/17	none	3 ducks	5,629	5,023	1.18	546	0.53	55
30	1993	10/16	11/07	3 ducks	5,069	4,374	1.05	695	0.72	120
40	1994	10/08	11/09	3 ducks	5,742	4,759	0.96	954	0.65	119
50	1995	10/14	11/11	5 ducks	8,652	7,568	1.60	1,048	0.75	109
50	1996	10/12	11/12	5 ducks	10,973	9,805	1.80	1,093	.70	114
60	1997	10/09	11/17	6 ducks	12,335	11,225	1.62	1,100	.65	42
60	1998	10/10	11/16	6 ducks	10,643	9,188	1.28	1,332	.68	20
60	1999	10/09	11/17	6 ducks	14,479	11,966	1.60	2,512	1.02	39
60	2000	10/07	11/20	6 ducks	10,398	9,057	1.40	1,341	0.76	40
58	2001	10/06	none	6 ducks	13,177	10,870	1.55	2,307	0.9	53
58	2002	10/12	11/17	6 ducks	9,801	8,271	1.45	1,530	1.02	74
58	2003	10/11	10/10	6 ducks	10,106	9,109	1.44	997	0.65	101
58	2004	10/09	10/29	6 ducks	7,085	6,480	1.08	605	0.56	95
58	2005	10/15	11/17	6 ducks	8,385	7,577	1.5	657	0.68	138
58	2006	10/07	11/03	6 ducks	14,102	12,576	1.91	1520	1.05	125
58	2007	10/06	11/13	6 ducks	10,304	9,492	1.46	803	0.71	120
58	2008	10/11	11/11	6 ducks	8,765	7,969	1.43	797	0.76	84

2008 Season Results by Area

Cropped Fields

Area	Hunter Trips	Ducks	Cripples	Other
1	114	58	6	0
2	136	79	15	0
3	200	174	29	0
4	218	229	44	1ph
5	135	82	14	1cg,1ph
6	182	174	31	0
7	213	227	35	4cg
8	46	27	14	1sp
9	172	98	24	4cg
10	213	237	35	1cg
11	196	228	36	4cg
12	155	104	11	0
13	207	145	19	4cg
14	234	414	67	2cg
15	264	479	66	3cg
16	259	489	73	9cg
17	221	275	64	2cg
18	196	210	38	1cg
20	93	33	9	0
21	239	218	34	1cg
22	296	455	56	1cg,1sp
23	283	496	98	2cg,2sn
24	273	488	64	5cg
25	275	480	69	4cg
26	283	636	102	3cg
27	247	359	69	3cg,1ph
28	180	363	63	1cg
29	206	426	59	3cg
30	183	286	48	2cg
Total	5,919	7,969	1,292	60cg

East Marsh

Area	Hunter Trips	Ducks	Cripples	Other
31	85	106	29	7cg
32	5	2	2	0
33	50	36	11	0
34	11	2		0
35	52	31	4	0
36	69	47	12	2cg
37	33	29	2	1cg
38	17	10	6	0
39	49	46	8	0
40	2	0	1	0
41	8	2	2	0
42	11	0	1	0
43	0	0	0	0
44	2	2	0	0
45	0	0	0	0
46	14	3	0	0
47	16	4	2	0
Total	424	320	80	10cg

West Marsh

Area	Hunter Trips	Ducks	Cripples	Other
60	10	2	1	0
61	2	1	0	0
62	13	8	2	0
63	13	0	0	0
64	1	0	0	0
65	0	0	0	0
66	7	1	2	0
67	11	9	4	0
68	34	19	4	0
70	71	31	5	3cg
71	138	148	31	3cg
72	52	50	10	0
73	116	110	22	3cg
74	83	54	19	1cg
75	36	25	3	1cg
76	10	12	0	0
80	29	7	1	1cg
TOTAL	626	477	104	12cg

Upland Areas

Area	Hunter Trips	Ducks	Cripples	Other
90 - 93	6	0	0	1ph
95 - 97	48	9	0	2ph
98 - 100	2	0	0	1ph
102-104	3	0	0	0
TOTAL	59	9	0	4ph

**GRAND TOTAL 7,028 8,775 1,476 84cg
7ph**

2008 Daily Statistics

DATE	Parties in Draw	HUNTERS	Cumulative Season Total	DUCKS	Cumulative Season Total	CANADA GEESE	CRIPPLES
Sept.-20A	13	15	15	15	15		3
P	5	17	32	7	22		1
21-A	6	11	43	6	28		5
P	1	1	44	0	28		0
Oct.-11A	40/12	159	203	198	226	1	47
P	25/2/5	114	317	66	292		21
12A	40/7	141	458	150	442	1	30
P	36/2	97	555	53	495		9
13A	37	61	616	69	564	1	6
P	13	23	639	27	591		1
14A	29	55	694	76	667		11
P	24	45	739	45	712		12
15A	31	65	804	68	780	1	16
P	22	55	859	99	879	1	27
16A	38	62	921	93	972	4	37
P	23	54	975	131	1103		24
17A	42	74	1049	134	1237	1	19
P	26	57	1106	92	1329	3	18
18A	72	100	1206	101	1430	2	28
P	41	73	1279	138	1568		31
19A	72	104	1383	97	1665		17
P	53	85	1468	112	1777	1	17
20A	32	70	1538	84	1861	1	13
P	37	64	1602	163	2024	2	27
21A	57	78	1680	142	2166	3	22
P	40	85	1765	190	2356	3	34
22A	31	51	1816	76	2432	5	7

DATE	Parties in Draw	HUNTERS	Cumulative Season Total	DUCKS	Cumulative Season Total	CANADA GEESE	CRIPPLES
P	22	55	1871	117	2549		23
23A	37	67	1938	65	2614	3	16
P	27	72	2010	114	2728		28
24A	40	68	2078	66	2794		9
P	37	80	2158	145	2939	12	37
25A	116	129	2287	80	3019	1	9
P	84	102	2389	110	3129	1	23
26A	82	97	2486	93	3222	2	28
P	82	104	2590	93	3315		23
27A	63	77	2667	127	3442	7	17
P	68	87	2754	105	3547		16
28A	50	92	2846	103	3650		23
P	56	92	2938	217	3867	4	24
29A	52	80	3018	135	4002		18
P	52	82	3100	168	4170		13
30A	24	45	3145	81	4251		6
P	29	70	3215	119	4370		18
31A	32	64	3279	93	4463	1	12
P	23	52	3331	96	4559		18
Nov.-1A	55	83	3414	73	4632	5	11
P	37	81	3495	68	4700		7
2A	58	83	3598	67	4767		8
P	63	89	3667	79	4846	2-SN	17
3A	31	53	3720	81	4927	1	12
P	38	68	3788	20	4947		5
4A	33	56	3844	49	4996	1	10
P	25	57	3901	27	5023		6
5A	17	36	3937	26	5049		1
P	12	27	3964	11	5060		1
6A	16	36	4000	29	5089		7
P	14	32	4032	15	5104		12
7A	46	87	4119	77	5181		12
P	44	79	4198	81	5262	1	25
8A	98	95	4293	123	5385		27
P	91	113	4406	129	5514		23
9A	93	104	4510	85	5599	3	11
P	89	115	4625	93	5692	1	16
10A	38	56	4681	116	5808	2	19
P	49	91	4772	125	5933	1	30
11A	32	55	4827	40	5973		5
P	30	64	4891	87	6060		18
12A	34	64	4955	35	6095		3
P	36	71	5026	42	6137		4
13A	31	73	5099	91	6228		13
P	43	108	5207	34	6262		3
14A	51	74	5281	68	6330		8
P	49	73	5354	131	6461		33
15A	79	92	5446	117	6578		29
P	61	87	5533	164	6742		24
16A	52	74	5607	75	6817		16
P	65	97	5704	130	6947		24
17A	28	49	5753	54	7001		8
P	24	50	5803	104	7105		18
18A	18	35	5838	14	7119		0

DATE	Parties in Draw	HUNTERS	Cumulative Season Total	DUCKS	Cumulative Season Total	CANADA GEESE	CRIPPLES
P	28	46	5884	39	7158		2
19A	5	13	5897	3	7161		0
P	16	38	5935	54	7215		5
20A	8	16	5951	30	7245		3
P	21	39	5990	64	7309		3
21A	10	25	6015	9	7318		2
P	18	29	6044	11	7329		1
22A	4	5	6049	0	7329		0
P	8	19	6068	4	7333		1
23A	6	13	6081	1	7334		0
P	9	12	6093	15	7349		2
24A	1	1	6094	0	7349		0
P	10	15	6109	12	7361		0
25A	2	5	6114	4	7365		2
P	18	34	6148	63	7428		10
26A	13	233	6171	32	7460		5
P	25	51	6222	51	7511		5
27A	17	39	6261	33	7544		3
P	13	31	6292	38	7582		0
28A	17	31	6323	28	7610		7
P	47	62	6385	119	7729		13
29A	13	27	6412	8	7737		2
P	41	69	6481	83	7820		14
30A	10	24	6505	39	7859		5
P	52	80	6585	146	8005	1	19
Dec.-1A	10	23	6608	60	8065	3	2
P	33	67	6675	149	8214	1	30
2A	15	30	6705	53	8267		12
P	30	67	6772	189	8456		13
3A	17	32	6804	25	8481		1
P	52	85	6889	85	8566		10
4A	19	40	6929	51	8617		5
P	35	72	7001	120	8737		16
5A	6	11	7012	4	8741		0
P	17	36	7048	15	8756	3	1
6A	2	2	7050	0	8756		0
P	9	36	7076	9	8765		0
7A	0	0	7076	0	8765		0
P	2	3	7079	0	8765		0
TOTALS	3960		7079		8765	84	1504

ST. JOHN'S MARSH UNIT/LAKE ST. CLAIR STATISTICS AND ACTIVITIES

ST. JOHNS MARSH

WATERFOWL NUMBERS AND MIGRATION

The ninth consecutive year of low water levels have allowed almost all open areas to be filled in by emergents. Unfortunately a large percentage of the new growth is phragmites. Minimal shorebird and waterfowl usage was observed during the spring and early summer months due to the lack of water and encroached openings. Late spring and summer water levels were still below the LTAI leaving very little or no water in the encroached openings. A few small pockets with open water held birds in late summer – early fall period. The Unit 1 and Unit 2 cropped/moist-soil refuge sites and the WPA were the only areas where consistent waterfowl use was observed. Daily numbers ranged from a few hundred birds during early - mid September to several thousand during October on through mid November. Waterfowl usage was minimal from November 18 through the end of the waterfowl season due to ice conditions. Due to the lower lake levels flooding units was challenging, but better than in 2007. Unfortunately the unit 3 green tree reservoir was not flooded for the second year due to a control structure problem. All other units were maintained at optimal levels throughout the fall. As in past years, early in the season these sites were used primarily by wood ducks. Mallards and green-winged teal were the most frequently observed species that continued to utilize these flooded areas as the season progressed. The unit 2 managed marsh continues to attract good numbers of waterfowl throughout the season. Waterfowl numbers dropped toward the end of November through the remainder of the waterfowl season due to frozen conditions.

HUNTING SEASON RESULTS

Due to low water levels, no pre-registered permit was required to hunt opening weekend at St. Johns Marsh. All areas outside the refuge boundaries were open to hunting. The traditional refuge along M-29 was reposted to "Open to Hunting" and the newly acquired 445 acre Blue Water Isles tract was posted as seasonal refuge. In addition a portion of the impoundments in Units 1 and 2 were posted as refuge with signs reading "Wildlife Refuge - Do Not Enter, September 1 - End of Waterfowl Season". Because of the split waterfowl season, refuge areas were posted as reopened starting Dec. 8. Several cold spells starting in mid November successfully froze all shallow areas. Due to the more extreme weather throughout much of December the January 3-4 waterfowl season hunting was a non event at this area.

Because of extremely low water conditions, the opening day hunter participation survey was limited to the fringe and managed portions of the Wildlife Area. Travel to traditional hunting spots was very limited to impossible. (Table 1).

Table 1. Opening Day Hunting Statistics - 1988 through 2006 Seasons

<u>Year</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Car Count</u>	<u>Estimated Hunters</u>	<u>Hours Hunted</u>	<u>Avg. Kill/ Hunter</u>
1988	10/15	21	45	47	2.5
1989	10/14	21	60	75	2.8
1990	10/13	26	60	104	2.1
1991	10/19	37	100	119	2.0
1992	10/17	32	75	134	1.4
1993	10/16	34	70	74	1.7
1994	10/8	38	85	103	2.3
1995	10/14	45	105	N/A	2.2
1996	10/12	45	110	67	2.2
1997	10/11	46	115	104	1.7

1998	10/10	35	88	N/A	2.0
1999	10/9	23	60	77	2.7
2000	10/7	29	59	N/A	1.7
2001	No count conducted due to low water levels				
2002	No count conducted due to low water levels				
2003	No count conducted due to low water levels				
2004	No count conducted due to low water levels				
2005	No count conducted due to low water levels				
2006	No count conducted due to low water levels				
2007	No count conducted due to low water levels				
2008	No count conducted due to low water levels				

Hunting the waterfowl production area potholes continues to be popular and is somewhat crowded on opening weekend (similar to the past several years). After the opener, this area continued to receive steady hunting pressure throughout the season. This was the sixth year that a portion of the unit 1 impoundment was open to hunting. Unit 1 got steady hunter use throughout the season (similar to 2006 and 2007) with average success recorded. Desired water levels were reached by mid October in all managed units except unit 3 flooded timber area (not flooded in 2008). Waterfowl used these areas on a daily basis. Hunting pressure in these somewhat limited areas was light but steady; and it appeared that pressure was down slightly from 2007.

LAKE ST. CLAIR

WATERFOWL NUMBERS AND MIGRATION

Small numbers of divers were observed as early as late September (personal communications) on Canadian waters. The first real measurable push of migrants was observed around October 18 – 21. Another cold front with heavy winds occurred from October 27-29 moving good numbers of divers (mostly canvasback and scaup) into the lake. A major cold front the week of November 15 – 20 was a timeframe when the last major push of divers was observed. For reasons that are known (recreational traffic i.e. duck hunting, fishing etc.) and unknown rafting and flight activity in October and much of November on U.S. Lake St. Clair was very erratic and inconsistent. There were just a few periods during the season that larger concentrations of divers were present on U.S. Lake St. Clair. During those periods however most of the activity was in larger offshore rafts. Nearshore flight activity and rafting was very limited throughout the entire lake during the waterfowl season.

There really didn't appear to be any prolonged period of time that good numbers of divers were seen more consistently on U. S. waters. Between October 22 and 28 divers started establishing a bit of a pattern (mostly offshore) in Anchor Bay and in the southern part of the lake. A major wind/weather event on October 29 and unseasonably warm/calm weather the first week of November apparently was enough to break that pattern. Very few lake ducks used U.S. waters from approximately October 29 – November 10. Diver usage increased from November 11 to November 28, but was largely in the southern part of the lake and mostly offshore activity. It wasn't until the last week of the waterfowl season (December 1 -7) that more consistent nearshore activity was observed. However, very cold weather persisted during that timeframe. The southern end of Lake St. Clair was again overall the high use area of the lake for divers, but usage was down from past years.

Even though good numbers of divers were not seen on U.S. waters during much of the season, aerial survey observations indicated that a buildup of ducks was evidenced on Canadian waters during the first week in November. On November 5th an estimated 156,000 canvasbacks,

146,000 scaup, and 10,000 redheads were surveyed over Canadian Lake St. Clair. Waterfowl population numbers on U.S. waters were highest during the period from approximately November 18 – November 26.

Canvasback, redhead and scaup numbers on U.S. Lake St. Clair were all down from last year and the lowest in many years. Scaup like most of the other big lake ducks never really established a strong usage pattern and were observed in offshore rafts during periods in late October and through periods of November up until Thanksgiving weekend. Scaup numbers typically decline late in November. Redhead numbers were even worse with no established pattern throughout the entire season. Even though a large number of canvasbacks were recorded in early November on Canadian waters, no strong usage pattern was evident until late into November and more consistently after the waterfowl season. Very few canvasbacks were seen in the Anchor Bay region with offshore rafts more evident in the southern part of the lake in November. For the third straight year bufflehead migration appeared to be earlier than usual and excellent numbers (down slightly from 2007) were recorded from late October through Thanksgiving. Ruddy duck numbers were down from last year. Goldeneye and mergansers started showing up during the second week of November in scattered locations and in numbers consistent with past years.

Waterfowl aerial survey results for 2008 are as follows:

Waterfowl Aerial Survey Results - Lake St. Clair

<u>Date</u>	<u>Species Observed</u>	<u>Numbers</u>
10/27/08	Scaup	6,250
	Redhead	700
	Canvasback	550
	Canada Geese	200
	Mute Swan	650
	Bufflehead	50
	Total Waterfowl	8,400

<u>Date</u>	<u>Species Observed</u>	<u>Numbers</u>
11/05/08	Scaup	650
	Bufflehead	585
	Canada Geese	250
	Mute Swan	650

*156,000 canvasback, 146, 000 scaup, and 10,000 redheads on Canadian LSC

Total Waterfowl **56,950**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Species Observed</u>	<u>Numbers</u>
11/29/07	Canvasback	550
	Redhead	6,750
	Scaup	8,000
	Bufflehead	550
	Goldeneye	50
	Mergansers	200
	Total Ducks	16,100

LAKE ST. CLAIR – Hunting Season Results

Overall duck hunting success on Lake St. Clair was average – to below average. Diver distribution was even worse than in 2007, with very inconsistent usage on U.S. waters. Except for only a very few days in October and some short periods after November 10th divers were largely absent from the near shore waters of the Anchor Bay region and were also inconsistent in the southern portion of the Lake. Overall for the third consecutive year bluebill and redhead harvests (canvasback closed) were down. Redhead harvest was probably the lowest in recent times. Fortunately bufflehead showed up on the lake in good numbers by the last week in October and stayed abundant through the end of November. Bufflehead harvest was again a bright spot in 2008 (similar to 2006 and 2007) and was a large portion of hunter's bags. Bag limits of strictly bufflehead were reported by several hunters, especially during the month of November. There were some good hunting days for big divers reported by hunters after the 10th of November, however much of this timeframe was also very inconsistent. Goldeneyes were being harvested late in the season. Later in November scaup, canvasbacks, and very few redheads and were present in large numbers but situated in larger offshore rafts.

Open water lake hunting pressure on weekdays was light (even less than in 2007). Weekend pressure was also lighter than can be remembered in recent times. The decline in hunter interest could be attributed to the economy, lower duck populations, closure of canvasback season, lower scaup bag limit, and more confusing regulations.

There is a wide range and types of hunting rigs, i.e. layouts, sneak boats, marsh rig boats, sculling boats etc. and several different methods, i.e. shore blinds, boathouses, docks, etc. employed in pursuit of the wily divers.

Hunting throughout the bays and marshes of St. Clair Flats Wildlife Area on opening day was again reported as poor (similar to the last last three years). There were similar numbers of ducks on the area compared to last year, but still below average. Mallard numbers and green-winged teal were down slightly and wood duck numbers were similar to 2007. Low water levels have definitely had an impact on waterfowl distribution and hunter success. Very few good hunting days were reported by hunters and seemed to be limited to timing of waterfowl migration dates. The exception was a few days in late November when conditions became cold and froze the refuge on Harsens Island. Other than during those few periods, hunting was reported as being rather slow and spotty. Overall, hunting throughout the Lake St. Clair region was below average.

JANUARY DUCK HUNT SUMMARY (January 3 – January 4, 2008)

The majority of December was cold and snowy with shallow areas of lakes and wetlands frozen by the end of the first week of December. Temperatures did not moderate much as in the past few years, therefore ice was present along shorelines and most access sites. The major rivers and channels had open water. Temperatures during the two day hunt period were in the upper 30's. Canvasback, redhead and scaup numbers were much lower than in the past two years with birds situated into larger confined rafts. Five to eight thousand dabblers were present throughout the SCFWA and shallower parts of the lake. Smaller numbers of scaup (down from 2008) and other black and white divers were also present. The diver harvest was heavy to bufflehead, goldeneye and mergansers with a few scaup and redhead in the bag. Hunting success was much lower than last year with the first day being more productive for most hunters. Hunting pressure was reported as being concentrated and heavy in some locations and very light in other areas of the lake.

Throughout the SCFWA numbers of mallards and black ducks was average for this time of year (estimated at 5,000 - 10,000). Hunting pressure was down from last year. Dabbler harvest was down from 2008. Canada goose harvest was spotty. Hunter success varied from near bag limits to only a few birds harvested. Overall hunter success appeared to be lower than the past few seasons and markedly down from last year.