



The Michigan Waterfowler

Publication of the Michigan Duck Hunters Association

Volume 28, Issue 4

www.midha.org

Fall 2011

Lake Effect Chapter of Michigan Duck Hunters Youth Day Event

The Lake Effect Chapter of the Michigan Duck Hunters Association teamed up with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to hold their 4th annual Youth Day event at Snug Harbor on Muskegon Lake on Saturday, August 27, 2011. Education and conservation of our habitat is a goal for the Michigan Duck Hunters Association, as well as the Lake Effect Chapter, which is at the forefront in this area. Over 80 kids and their parents were treated to a fun day, with every youth receiving a new duck call, a t-shirt and a duck decoy. The Lake Effect Chapter also provided a free lunch to all in attendance.

The event had something for every young outdoor enthusiast, including duck calling demonstrations by several champion callers, wood duck box building, sporting dog demonstrations, hunting tactics and tip seminars, and duck identification taught by Michigan DNR staff. On display were ducks boats, decoy spreads, hunting dogs, hand-made decoys, duck and goose calls, wild bird carvings, and predator trapping with furs.

A special treat for everyone was the presentation by the Braveheart Raptor Rehabilitation Center, including their live Red Tail Hawk and Barred Owl, plus an assortment of educational items for hands on teaching, feathers, talons, owl pellets and more. The youth were

invited to see more birds at the Braveheart Center on Sweeter Road in Twin Lake on one of their open house days to learn more about wildlife.

Prizes were drawn from the attendees, with a grand prize of a fully guided and outfitted hunt for one lucky young hunter. The day was an overwhelming success, with lots of smiling faces, and hopefully some new outdoor enthusiasts in our ranks. A huge thanks to the Lake Effect Chapter of the Michigan Duck Hunters Association for organizing this outstanding event!



Shiawassee Flats Citizens and Hunters Association Youth Event

On Saturday, September 17th, the Shiawassee Flats Citizens and Hunters Association (SFCHA) held their 3rd annual youth waterfowl activity day at the DNR office at Shiawassee River State Game Area in St. Charles. Activities included basic waterfowl identification, basic duck calling, hunting dog retriever demonstrations, decoy layout demonstrations, and a barbecue lunch provided by the SFCHA. Prizes were also distributed to the kids that attended the events. Groups or individuals who donated time or merchandise included:

- Avery Outdoors
- GK Calls
- MacDonald's of Chesaning
- Michigan DNR
- Michigan Duck Hunters Association
- Michigan Hunting Retriever Club
- Nixon's Market in Brant
- Shiawassee Flats Citizens and Hunters Association



Approximately 75 youths and adults attended this year's event under mostly sunny skies. Congratulations to all who volunteered their time or

contributed in some fashion for the benefit of our youth.



Annual Saginaw Bay Waterfowl Festival once again a huge success!

The 16th annual Saginaw Bay Waterfowl Festival, sponsored by the Michigan Duck Hunters Association, was held August 6th and 7th at the Bay City State Recreation Area on Saginaw Bay. Despite partly cloudy skies, cooler than normal temperatures and on and off rainshowers throughout the entire weekend, attendance was good once again. Thanks to the sponsors and volunteers who helped make this a successful event.



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Michigan Waterfowler invites letters from readers. All letters must include the authors name, complete address and phone number and/or email address (only name and city/town will be printed in the publication). Letters should be limited to 250 words or less. Form letters will not be printed. The Michigan Waterfowler reserves the right to edit all submissions.

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All letters to the editor, inquiries and correspondence regarding submission of copy, advertising and classifieds should be addressed to the editor at:

Dan Dykstra
10344 Williams Road
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Email: justducky@dishmail.net
Phone: (517)331-0412

Saginaw Bay Chapter of MDHA clean-up day

The Saginaw Bay Chapter of MDHA held a work day at Nayanquing Point State Game Area on Saturday, August 20, 2011. Despite some thunderstorms and ugly weather early in the day, which produced some marble sized hail, the volunteers were able to construct two blinds using donated funds and materials, and place them in managed area hunting zones. The volunteers also placed zone signs, and cut boat access swaths in the corn from the access ditches to the decoy areas. Thanks to all the volunteers who donated their time, money or effort to this work.



From The Duck Blind

Dan Dykstra, Editor



Another hunting season is upon us, and as usual I'm not prepared. My decoys and assorted gear were right where I left them in the pole barn in December, and by the time you read this, they'll be cleaned up and ready...I hope!

My summer seemed to be lost in doing various chores and errands, with a few fishing trips mixed in. I'm hoping my hunting season is a lot more productive than my summer fishing was.

The youth waterfowl weekend on September 17th and 18th brought seasonable weather to much of Lower Michigan, providing the adult chaperones another great opportunity for mentoring our youth. I was once again glad to be involved in organizing the event at the Shiawassee River State Game Areas on behalf of the Shiawassee Flats Citizens and Hunters Association (see separate story). I know there were several similar events held around the state with various groups involved, such as the youth event by our newest MDHA chapter, the Lake Effect Chapter (see separate article). Thank you and congratulations to all groups around the state who were involved in youth events, as well as those who volunteered to "guide" a youth on this special hunt. Hopefully it will mean we've gained a few future waterfowlers.

Speaking of youths, don't forget the youth priority hunts at the various managed waterfowl areas during the regular season, which offer another opportunity to encourage our youngsters to get involved, or stay involved, in our sport. Per the DNRE waterfowl guide, this year's dates are:

Allegan Highbanks and Fennville Farm – Nov. 12 (am) & Dec 10 (pm)
Fish Point – Opening day (pm) & Oct. 29 (pm)
Muskegon County Wastewater – Oct. 29 (am & pm)
Nayanquing Point – Opening day (pm) & Oct. 22 (pm)
Pointe Mouillee – Opening day (pm) & Nov. 13 (am)
Shiawassee River – Opening day (pm) and Nov. 5 (pm)
Harsens Island – Opening day (pm) and Nov. 11 (pm)

On the news front, I attended the August meeting of the Citizen's Waterfowl Advisory Committee in Bay City, and as usual, a lot of pertinent and timely information was exchanged. One thing that stood out for me was the comments from DNR Wildlife Chief Russ Mason, who told the group in no uncertain terms that we are in dire straights with respect to declining numbers of hunters, and declining budgets. I especially liked his comment that "deer and turkey take care of themselves", but he pointed out that small game hunters in particular are declining at a startling rate, including waterfowl hunters. He asked everyone in attendance to commit to taking a new person hunting this year, and to help the DNR by providing ideas and input on how to stem this tide. He also told the group that the emphasis of his division will be southern Lower Michigan, "not that we don't like the UP or northern Michigan" he said, but the southern lower peninsula is where the people are, and where the efforts must be centered.

DNR Waterfowl and Wetland Specialist Barb Avers told the group that the department will be soliciting input throughout the fall regarding the possibility of revising the waterfowl zones in Michigan. She went on to say that one of the main topics of discussion at the March 2012 CWAC meeting will be whether or not the zones should be revised, or if we should consider a four zone option instead of three? So I would encourage each of you to discuss this with your peers, and if you have input, get in touch with either a member of CWAC, contact one of the many waterfowl organizations (such as MDHA), or contact the DNR directly prior to the March CWAC meeting. They truly are interested in our ideas.

Barb also discussed the status of the Great Lakes Mallard (glm) population, and the fact that we continue to see a decline in mallard numbers here in Michigan. According to their data, about 75 percent of the mallards taken by Michigan hunters come from the Great Lakes states. For a number of years, our Michigan mallard population has been on a slow decline. Mallards are still the primary duck in the bags of Michigan duck hunters, but their percentage in the bag has been falling, from 47 to 48 percent in 2009 to 36 percent in 2010. Michigan's mallard count this year is down about 34 percent from last year, Avers said, so hunters can expect to see and shoot fewer greenheads.

She said reasons for this are unclear, and several studies are taking place on this issue, including a new study headed up by the DNR's avian researcher, David Luukonen, which they hope may shed some light on the decline of our Great Lakes mallards. She discussed the fact that the Fish and Wildlife Service recognizes mid-continent, western and eastern mallard stock. We are currently in the mid-continent classification. One of the objectives of the study is to look at whether the Great Lakes states belong in this model, or do we have a mallard stock that's different from the others? The DNR study comes on the heels of Ducks Unlimited research in recent years that looked at mallard production and survival in Michigan and two other Great Lakes states. That study showed that mallards do well during the nesting period but may be lacking adequate habitat once broods have hatched. The DNR plans to communicate more on this subject in the near future.

However, there are still reasons to be optimistic about the season, including the fact that Michigan produces a good number of wood ducks. This is the second year that hunters may take three wood ducks after being allowed two in the bag for many years. Our wood ducks are holding stable, and we saw an increased harvest last season, which was expected with the higher bag limit last fall. But there are good numbers across the state, and we may be starting to see wood ducks take over a little bit for the fewer mallards harvested.

I was once again invited to attend the DNR's monthly "Breakfast with the Director" meeting in Lansing in August on behalf of the MDHA. These meetings typically offer a lot of good exchange between conservation organizations and the leadership of all divisions within the DNR. Director Stokes reiterated his strong commitment to hunter recruitment, and echoing the comments of Wildlife Chief Mason, he's specifically interested in finding solutions to the problem of declining numbers of small game hunters. He asked for input and suggestions from organizations around the state. The Director also threw out some ideas for revamping the hunting licenses that we're used to seeing, possibly including an "all species" type of license, and discussed the new "apprentice and mentoring" license options. It was clear from the discussion that the DNR realizes the importance of declining participation, and is trying to be flexible and adjust to a changing customer base. Director Stokes also expressed his interest in increasing stakeholder involvement in decision-making within the department. Case in point, he mentioned the department's current recruitment of a Chief Deputy Director, and that he may want the candidates to meet with some of the stakeholder organizations as part of the interview process. I was impressed by his candor, and the fact that he considers you and I partners in the success of the DNR.

I'm compelled to pass along one additional thought from Director Stokes' at his August breakfast meeting. He mentioned a church group he is part of, most of whom had lived in Michigan their entire lives, but had never seen in person even one of the great lakes. He said they recently took the group to Lake Michigan for the first time, and they were completely awestruck. So when you head out hunting this fall, think about this...think about those people who have lived in Michigan their whole lives, but have never been outdoors. Think about those who have never witnessed a beautiful sunrise, or a marsh come alive with life. Think about those who have never heard the whistling of wings overhead in the pre-dawn mist. Think about introducing someone to your sport. And not just kids...think about adults too. There are a lot of adults who would love to learn to hunt as well but just don't know where to begin. This is a great chance to give back to your sport, and help recruit new members to our ranks.

As we all gear up for a busy fall of hunting, I wish you all the best of luck this hunting season, and as I've often said, be safe on the water...wear your PFD's! See you in the marsh!

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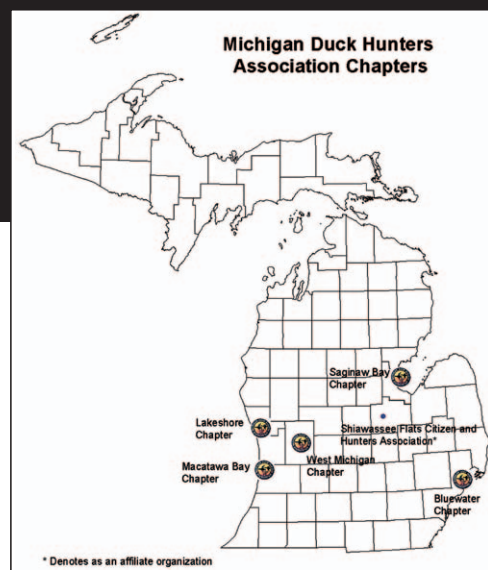


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Maple River State Game Area Undergoes a Facelift

September 22, 2011 Reprinted with permission of MDNR

Maple River State Game area is probably best known by Michigan sportsmen as a waterfowl hunting area. But as the 9,000-acre management area gets some much-needed maintenance, the Wildlife Division of the Department of Natural Resources has given Maple River another important role: It will serve as a demonstration area for the DNR's highly anticipated pheasant restoration initiative.

As soon as the planning for the wetlands upgrades began in 2010, DNR staffers began working on the uplands, too, mowing fields to set back brush succession and create better nesting habitat. Then, this spring, the DNR kicked off the pheasant restoration project with a press event that included converting an upland site into more pheasant-friendly habitat. "We have partnered with local chapters of Pheasants Forever to create a 100-acre demonstration area to help landowners better understand how to manage for pheasants," said DNR wildlife biologist Dan Kennedy. "It was planted this spring and summer with DNR staff and Pheasants Forever volunteers in an equal partnership. "We have planted a mix of cool-season grasses, native grasses, switch grass and a 10-acre food plot," Kennedy said. "These grasses will provide nesting cover and winter cover for pheasants and other grassland wildlife. The food plot will help wildlife survive the winter." The DNR believes the habitat will begin holding pheasants almost immediately and should begin producing birds next nesting season. But Kennedy thinks the bigger benefit will accrue to private property owners who take time to visit the site to learn how they might improve their own land. "We are greatly appreciative of Pheasants Forever's efforts," he said. "Without them, we wouldn't have been able to get so much accomplished so quickly."

Still, it is the wetlands complexes along the Maple River that will benefit from the bulk of the work to the longest stretch of contiguous wetlands in central Michigan. Work began in 2010 with an inventory of the dikes, which proved to need extensive repair, and the drawdown of one of the permanent pools. Unit A, the pool to the west of and adjoining US-127, was drained and has been kept in moist soils this summer, too. Moist soil management promotes growth of native seed-producing wetland plants, providing an important food source for migrating ducks during the fall.

"Two years in row of a drawdown is producing results," Kennedy said. "We've had good growth of smart weed last year and again this year. It's an excellent food source for waterfowl. And we're seeing other emergent vegetation, such as cattails and sedges, as well. That's our ultimate goal -- to start managing these wetlands as functional emergent wetlands."

Dike maintenance and repairs have proceeded on schedule. "We've been working on all of the dikes, but primarily those in Unit A this summer," Kennedy said. "The drawdown really makes it easier for us to get the heavy equipment in and make the necessary repairs. "We had lots of holes, from muskrats and groundhogs, making it unsafe to even walk them. And the integrity of the dike could be compromised if we had holes going all the way through the dikes." Heavy equipment crews have been working on 7,400 feet of dike in Unit A - filling all the holes and stabilize the dikes by adding rip-rap to a 2,000-foot stretch from the parking lot to the water-control structure. Once the Unit A project is complete, the crew will repair 8,000 feet of dike in Unit B. Kennedy said there's another 7,500 feet of dike in Unit C that he hopes construction crews can attend to this year.

"One of the important keys to this whole project is the construction crews are from our Parks and Recreation Division," Kennedy said. "They're providing the labor and expertise while we're paying for their time and costs."

Part of the improvement plan calls for refurbishing the handicap-accessible blind in Unit B. The roof and doors need work, Kennedy said.

The DNR established a refuge area in Unit C and Unit D in hopes of holding more waterfowl on the game area throughout the season. "We planted 50 acres of buckwheat in the refuge for a food source for waterfowl," Kennedy said. "We anticipate the buckwheat to provide a food source in the fall that will hold birds in the area longer and provide more waterfowl hunting opportunities. "In a nutshell, we're just trying to upgrade our waterfowl management at Maple River."

Work will begin next year to replace the pump station that services Units A and B and construct a new pump station that will improve management capacity in Units C and D. The DNR has partnered with Ducks Unlimited for these two projects. DU has received about \$265,000 in federal grants to construct the pump stations. "With both of these new pumps in place, we will be able to greatly enhance our ability to manage water levels and improve waterfowl habitat," Kennedy said.

The DNR is optimistic that the work scheduled for 2011 can be accomplished by this duck season. "We will hold and maintain water in Unit B and hope to have Unit A back to full pool by the end of September," Kennedy said. "We want to make sure the smartweed goes to seed before we flood it so it provides a food source, but, at the same time, we want to get water in there so ducks are using it by mid-September. "The timing's a little bit tricky."

The DNR is hopeful Maple River will produce both waterfowl and upland bird-hunting opportunities this year and for many years in the future. "We realize there has been some short-term sacrifice by waterfowl hunters at Maple River," said Barb Avers, the DNR's waterfowl and wetlands coordinator. "But in the long run, we expect Maple River State Game Area will hold more waterfowl for longer periods of time and will provide more and better waterfowl hunting opportunities."

For more information about the DNR's partnership efforts to restore Michigan's pheasant populations, visit www.michigan.gov/pheasant.





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