

# WATERFOWL MANAGEMENT ISSUES AND CONCERNS

*Raised by Working Group March 23, 2006*

The Working Group had a number of questions and identified a number of issues and concerns it considered important when developing goals and objectives for management of waterfowl.

## **Barrow's Goldeneye**

- Is hunting numbers or habitat the problem?
- Barrow's Goldeneye Population – According to Mike, they are flat line stable, 4–5K – small % comes to Maine.
  - Need data! Hard to get G&Os without data.
  - Is it worth the investment?
  - Quebec is monitoring

## **Black Ducks**

- Black Duck Numbers
  - Where is trend going?
  - Are we gaining ground, or will we be back in reduced seasons?
- Black Duck Issues
  - Treated as 1 large population
  - Manage populations with few options
  - We'll be pooled with other states even though the black duck is secure in Maine
  - Looks like 1 bird a day/ 30 days in the future
  - Harvest rate is too high
  - Should Maine lead the way again in extra conservatism?
  - 30-day Black Duck Season will put pressure on other duck stocks
  - Huge concern: People will stop hunting
  - Provide opportunity when people are hunting / or will FWS say, "Reduce your harvest by x%"?
  - Will Mallards keep people hunting despite Black Duck restriction?

## **Canada Geese**

- How do we keep Resident goose populations in check?

## *Waterfowl Issues and Concerns*

- Build a model to estimate population growth rates.
- What level do we need to be at?
- Are hunters happy now? What population is optimal?
- What is the current level of the nuisance goose problem?
- Goals – Let's focus on the problem (not the population level) perhaps.
- Is there an issue (competitiveness) between ducks and geese? Even on a small body of water?
  - Answer: in a word, "no"
- Other states' goose nuisances – Can that happen here?
  - Most of Maine lacks refuges for geese, so they remain vulnerable and somewhat controllable.
- Are southern state's resident geese coming north?
- Maine does not have a good handle on the status of our resident goose population. We need this to manage the species.
- Transect surveys give us a guess of what our population is – and some data on harvest – but rough and we don't know its growth rate.
- Future – too many or too little geese. (Let's not get to these thresholds)
- What are the options to keep population in check?
  - Days, bag limits
  - Attained past goals and objectives
  - Is the population still increasing?
  - Can increase the number of days?
  - USFWS – expand into August
  - Sept. 1 – 25
  - What about a late season for Geese? (Feb.)

### **Wood Ducks**

- Maine's goals and objectives
  - What impact on Atlantic Flyway Wood Ducks?
  - Southern state's goals and objectives – what impact on Maine's wood ducks?

## *Waterfowl Issues and Concerns*

- How are Wood Ducks doing in Maine?
  - Not seeing as many broods in Millinocket area - Do the state's data support this?
  - Based nest bandings of hen Wood Ducks, are they declining?
- Hooded Mergansers vs. Wood Ducks competition
  - Mergansers: 1 / day bag limit; Wood ducks: 2 / day
  - Hooded Merganser arrive earlier and usurp nest boxes
- What is the Biologic rationale for lower bag limits for Maine (Federal framework: 6; Maine selects 4)?
  - Waterfowl Council – conservative because some species appear vulnerable with long seasons, extended seasons, liberal bag limits.
  - Issue – days is what hunters want in general, not as important as daily bag limit
  - Note: can shoot federal limit of 6 when 2 are teal
- Why is Maine not in plot survey?
  - Designed as a mallard survey in the 1980s; we didn't have many mallards then
- Wood Ducks – Harvest in 1<sup>st</sup> week of season
  - By Oct. 10<sup>th</sup>, wood ducks and teal are gone
  - We aren't doing the damage to the resource!
  - We're saving ducks for others to shoot down the flyway

### **Brood Surveys**

- Have surveys changed?
- Habitat has... Could this explain the trends?

### **Declining Hunting Numbers**

- Good or Bad? (Bad: \$ and the loss of the "hunting ethic")
- Harvest rates don't change because successful hunters (a core group) are still doing well
- Youth hunt is helping the sport
- Declining opportunity to hunt

## *Waterfowl Issues and Concerns*

- Others using sites (access) is becoming big issue...can't access places to hunt safely
- Maine Demographics
  - Oldest population in the nation; fewer youngsters

### **Crippling Loss**

- Should do more: teach higher ethical standards
- Role for Isaac Walton League, Professional Maine Guides, IFW, and DU
- To some, a crippled and non-retrieved duck is part of bag limit – ethical issue that should be addressed (Role of groups) – should be addressing these issues.
- Crippling / lead shot
- Part of hunter education, but difficult to get people to come and be educated.
- IFW – increase efforts on hunter ethics
- Will take time to see improvements
- High crippling rates with sea duck hunting
- Positive incentives needed

### **Hunting Zones**

- Is there still justification for 2 zones? (North and South)
  - Yes, an important tool for waterfowl managers to increase hunting opportunity and hunter satisfaction.
  - Opportunities exist to travel between zones.

### **Special Duck Issues**

- Need to address Wood Ducks, Black Ducks, Canada Geese, Mallards, Ring-necked Ducks, Common Goldeneyes, Bufflehead, Barrow's Goldeneyes, sea ducks, and others individually or in groups.
- What has happened to:

## *Waterfowl Issues and Concerns*

- Goldeneyes on Penobscot?
- Scoters – population status, and can we do anything? Not seeing as many
- Avian Flu
  - We'll (IF&W) be monitoring for this beginning in the summer (2006)
- Harlequin Duck – Are there habitat issues?