

McPherson Valley Wetlands Update:

Drought conditions continue to plague the wetlands. With hunting season rapidly approaching, currently only two pools contain any water.

Brent Theede, Public Lands Manager
 Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism



Area Habitat and Water Conditions

As of publication time for this newsletter, area habitat and water conditions looked fair to poor from a general, area-wide perspective. Prolonged drought conditions on the area, and in this region of the state, have had drastic effects on any water that area staff tried to hold onto from last waterfowl season. With virtually no water available in the surrounding area, the 2011 duck season opportunities could be severely limited.

However, drought is a natural and critical part of the prairie wetland system (although to us hunters it is very unwelcome when it happens). These conditions have allowed staff to work on some problem areas. Cattails and spike rush stands are usually the most difficult areas to get in and work, due to the very habitat they grow in that tends to stay wet the longest. At publication, staff had disked approximately 175 acres of wetland units with such problems. Buckwheat and Japanese millet has and/or will be planted in many of these disked areas.

With the extreme dry conditions, multiple significant rain events will be needed to supply huntable water. Ground absorption will take a huge portion of any moisture before standing water will be visible.

However, we haven't closed the book yet, and a couple good gully washers would definitely help improve the conditions.

Even though the above is the reality of the situation, and it is true that only pools 8 and 15 in the Big Basin are holding any water, habitat and food is still in fair condition. Early disked pools and many pools managed with moist soil management techniques have fair to good vegetation present. Most vegetation is short and has not produced huge amounts of seed, but will provide some feed for the ducks if we get the rain. Pumping activities are already limited, and significant pumping from our two ground water wells will need to occur just to soak up the dry soil, and begin to get us to the point of making "huntable water". Some water will be pumped in the Big Basin marshes, specifically around the headquarters and Kubin marshes and at the Farland Lake unit. However, we will try and ration our water out as to not pump all of our allocation for early teal season and leave us nothing for the regular season. Hopefully, a good rain or two will occur between now and then and this won't be an issue. *(Continued on page 2)*

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Area Habitat and Water Conditions, cont.

Area staff encourages area users to contact the area office for up to date conditions. Pre-hunt scouting is also highly recommended. Water levels and waterfowl numbers can change on a daily basis. The answering machine at the area headquarters will be updated at least weekly, or as changes in conditions or opportunity occur.

Spring and Summer Management Activities

Since the conclusion of last waterfowl season, area staff has been busy with many management activities. These activities include burning, disking, spraying, and planting all aimed to improve conditions for wildlife, and provide opportunity come this fall.

Burning:

Approximately 1,370 total acres were burned this spring on the area, including 830 acres in the Big Basin unit, 320 acres in the Chain of Lakes unit, and 220 acres at the Farland Lake unit. Many of these native grass stands were becoming heavily thatched with reduced productivity, thus making use by young pheasants and other upland species difficult. By burning and removing this thatch layer, annual forb response has been good, and has increased quality upland habitat across the area

Wetland Disking:

Efforts to control spike rush, cattails, rushes, and trees through disking have been on-going since March. Currently, 175 acres have been disked in various pools across the area. In the Big Basin, pools 1, 4, 5, 7, and 9 have been completely or partially disked. At Chain of Lakes, pool 3 was disked early, however the cattails came back making this pool a top candidate for fall disking. At the Farland Lake unit, pools, 10, 11, and 12 have been disked. Most of these pools were disked later in the summer and have had little time to re-grow beneficial plants, therefore buckwheat or Japanese millet will be planted to provide waterfowl and other species a supplemental food source this fall.



Wetland Disking – Big Basin Pool 7



Wetland Disking – Farland Lake Pool 10

Upland Disk Strips:

In a continued effort to increase brood rearing habitat and provide additional annual plant communities in native cool and warm season grasses, area staff has disked strips in most grass tracts in the Big Basin and Chain of Lakes units. These disk strips have produced very good responses of annual sunflower, pigweed, maximillian’s sunflower, curly dock, and other beneficial “weeds”. Historically, staff has conducted these disking efforts in the spring. However, as outlined in the “planned fall management activities” section, future plans to shift some of this effort to the fall will be implemented this season.



Upland Disk Strip



Partially Disked Dense Cattails – Farland Lake Pool 12

Farland Lake Now Officially in the Low-Plains Early Duck Zone.

As discussed in the last issue of this newsletter, staff at MPWL has been exploring the possibility of moving the Farland Lake unit, southeast of Inman, into the low-plains early duck zone. Reasons supporting the decision to do this were outlined, but the main reasons for this change include:

1. More opportunity for hunters
2. Have the whole area available during the early part of the season when we traditionally have the most ducks
3. Simplify area regulations

The central flyway council has approved this suggestion and starting this waterfowl season, all of MPWL will be located in the low-plains early duck zone.

Planned Fall Management Activities

If conditions at MPWL continue to stay dry throughout the fall, staff plans to take advantage of the situation and try and get ahead of some on-going problems across the area. The area continues to be plagued by perennial and invasive plant communities in the wetland units and also upland areas. Wetland units that are predominately spike rush and cattails will be disked and additional strip disking will occur in unproductive native grass tracts.

Currently staff has worked ground in some of the “worst” wetland units, and has decided to delay disking efforts in hopes that precipitation will come before duck season. If these pools are worked under now, little food resources will have time to establish and produce food prior to the migration. However, if we get well into season, and we have still not been blessed with any rain, staff will begin these activities.

Research has shown that soil disturbances in the fall will produce more diverse stands of annual weeds the following spring in both upland and wetland units. Therefore, fall strip disking will be started this year in an effort to increase annual plants and brood rearing habitat in some of our upland areas.



Phragmites – Farland Lake Pool 12

USFWS 2011 Pond Count and Breeding Duck Survey

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service have released the mid-continent breeding duck and habitat report that is conducted in May. Surveys report a total duck population of over 45 million ducks. This is a 35% increase over the long term average. Habitat conditions were also excellent across much of prairie Canada and the northern United States resulting in a 62% increase in the number of May ponds compared to the long term average. See the chart below for individual species numbers.

Species	2010*	2011*	% change from 2010	% change from long-term avg.
May Ponds (US & Canada)	6,665	8,132	+22	+62
Total Ducks	40,894	45,554	+11	+35
Mallard	8,430	9,183	+9	+22
Gadwall	2,977	3,257	+9	+80
American wigeon	2,425	2,084	-14	-20
Green-winged teal	3,476	2,900	-17	+47
Blue-winged teal	6,329	8,948	+41	+91
Northern shoveler	4,057	4,641	+14	+98
Northern pintail	3,509	4,429	+26	+10
Redhead	1,064	1,356	+27	+106
Canvasback	585	692	+18	+21
Scaup	4,244	4,319	+2	-15

(*In thousands)

Dove Banding – 2011

Again this year, area staff participated in a flyway wide effort to catch and band mourning doves. Staff was able to capture 200 doves in a little less than 2 weeks. Please be sure to check any doves you harvest this fall for the presence of leg bands. Dove bands are pretty small and can be missed if you are not looking for them.

Dove / Sunflower Field

Again this year, MPWL will have a dove management field located 1 mile north of 11th and Arapahoe in the Farland Lake unit southeast of Inman. This field is open to all hunters, however hunters must use steel shot when hunting doves at MPWL. A hunting license and HIP stamp are also required to hunt doves. Due to drought conditions, most of the sunflowers this year did not reach plant potential in terms of plant height

and head size. However, a lot of opportunity still exists, and due to some changes in management and chemical application, the field is cleaner than the past two years. Bare ground is crucial to dove use and has been a management goal since this field was created a couple years ago. It will also make finding down doves a little easier. As in the past, staff will mow a percentage of this field and 75% will be harvested by the agricultural tenant. Hunters interested in participating in dove hunting at MPWL are encouraged to check the MPWL webpage “area news” link for more information about this field. Please remember that other hunters will be in this field, some closer to you than you would like. Please use good judgment when taking shots. Eye protection is also recommended. We want everyone to have a good enjoyable hunt while staying safe.



Waterfowl Trivia

In the 2011 MPWL spring newsletter, we included this section to test our readers' waterfowl identification skills, and to show this interesting natural occurrence. Many people mistake immature or molt birds that have not yet developed good plumage for hybrids, however true hybrids do exist. If you shoot something that doesn't look quite right, and you can't positively identify it, bring it to the headquarters and we will try and help.

The real question is, if it is a mallard / gadwall hybrid, does it count as a mallard or a gadwall in your daily bag limit?

Below are the answers to last spring's trivia:



Canada goose x domestic goose



Mallard x Gadwall
(Also known as a Brewer's Duck)



Mallard x Black Duck



Mallard x Pintail

Marion Wildlife Area Japanese Millet Aerial Seeding Project

-By Bryan Sorensen, KDWPT Wildlife Biologist Tech

With this year's high temperatures and low rainfall amounts, much of the upper end of Marion Reservoir has become dry and exposed. This can have a negative impact in regards to boating and recreational use at the reservoir, but it can be good when it comes to the ability to plant crops to increase waterfowl usage. With the reservoir sitting at 2.5ft below conservation level, this summer has turned out to be an excellent time

to plant crops on the over 120 acres of exposed mudflats present.

Jap Millet is an annual that grows 2 to 4 feet tall. It will tolerate wet and muddy soil conditions and can be slightly flooded while growing, as long as the leaves remain above water. Seeding rates can vary from 15-40 lbs/acre depending on planting type and density desired. The seed will mature on the stalk in 45-60 days and waterfowl go crazy over it once it becomes inundated. Planting millet can be done by drilling or broadcasting. In this case, where we cannot get a tractor into the area, the millet is planted by an airplane that contains a broadcast seeder that spreads the seed while in flight. Hillsboro Municipal Airport was used as a meeting location between the pilot and the area manager to coordinate seeding locations, refuel and load seed. The airplane was loaded with 600 lbs of seed per flight and could cover up to 40 acres of mudflats per load. Flying time took approximately one hour per trip before landing at the airport for reloading. A total of 4 loads were flown with 2400 lbs of seed being planted in the reservoir.



2011 Bullfrog Hatch – Big Basin Pool 8



Ring-necked Pheasant – Big Basin



Young Turkey Vultures – Big Basin South Refuge



Japanese Millet

Seeding was done in late July and early August, so with a little help from Mother Nature, there should be plenty of feed out there for migrating waterfowl this winter. **Marion Wildlife Area is located in the low plains late duck zone**, so check the regulations on season dates before hunting in different areas.

MPWL Summer Photo Gallery

Starting this newsletter, we will begin showcasing some of the “sights” we capture during our normal working activities. We hope everyone enjoys!



White-tailed Deer – Big Basin Slough North Refuge



“Limit of Frogs” (+ a few) – Big Basin South Refuge



Mourning Doves – Big Basin South Refuge



White-tailed Fawn – Big Basin South Refuge



Pheasant Brood – Farland Lake Pool 8



Effects of the Drought – Farland Lake Big Sinkhole

Photo Request

Everyone has a camera these days, most of us even have one in our cell phones. Staff at the wetlands would love to see some of your outdoor outings pictures, especially those taken at the wetlands. If anyone has any pictures they are willing to share, please email them to me at the address at the end of the newsletter. Accompanying stories are also appreciated. We would like to make the photo gallery a permanent part of the newsletter, and would like to share anyone's success stories with others.

Staff Notes

September 1 will be here before we know it, along with it the opener of dove season and other hunting seasons to follow. Exact waterfowl season dates, limits, and other regulations will be set at the August 11 KDWP commission meeting to be held at the Wetlands Education Center (Cheyenne Bottoms), 592 NE K-156 Hwy, Great Bend, KS starting at 1:30 pm. These waterfowl regulations are dependent on the federal frameworks however, and with preliminary population estimates higher than ever from the breeding grounds high, we are expecting liberal seasons and bag limit frameworks again. Please be sure to check the McPherson Valley Wetlands webpage and waterfowl reports for more up-to-date information. Updates to these information portals will begin after August 1, 2010. Feel free to call or visit our office anytime with questions or concerns. Staff at the McPherson Valley Wetlands hopes that everyone has a safe and successful hunting season this coming fall. Below is all the available contact information for the area manager.

Be Safe!

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Link to the McPherson Valley Wetlands webpage:

<http://kdwp.state.ks.us/news/KDWP-Info/Locations/Wildlife-Areas/Region-4/McPherson-Valley-Wetlands>



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