

# FISH POINT WILDLIFE AREA ANNUAL HUNTING SEASON REPORT 2020



MANAGEMENT REGION: Southeast  
NAME OF AREA: Fish Point State Wildlife Area  
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SEASON: 2020

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Fish Point State Wildlife Area (FPSWA) is a 2,477-acre managed waterfowl area located 3 miles northwest of Unionville, adjacent to Saginaw Bay. Habitat composition consists of approximately 1,200 acres of diked wetland and meadow. About 720 acres of marshland is a seasonal refuge (September 1 - January 1.) Additionally, there is 1000 acres of impounded crops (corn, buckwheat, barley and moist soil) planted for food and winter cover on a yearly basis.

## AREA GOALS AND MANAGEMENT EMPHASIS

The operation of managed waterfowl areas is identified as a high priority action for the Wildlife Division and meet the following Guiding Principles and Strategies (GPS) goal and objectives:

**Goal 1:** Manage for healthy and sustainable populations of wildlife.

*Objective 1.1:* Develop, implement, and revise management plans and guidance for priority game species and species of greatest conservation need

**Goal 4:** Enhance sustainable wildlife-based recreation use and enjoyment

*Objective 4.2:* Increase the retention rate of hunting and trapping license purchasers

**Goal 5:** Improve and maintain public communication, strong relationships, and partnerships.

*Objective 5.3:* Foster positive relationships through collaborations and partnerships to implement Wildlife Division goals.

## WILDLIFE PRODUCTION AND USE ESTIMATES

Mallards, Canada geese, black ducks, blue-winged teal and wood ducks are the most common nesting ducks on the area. Small numbers of gadwalls, pintails, northern shovelers, and redheads also nest on the area. In any given year, a reasonable estimate of 150-200 breeding pairs likely produce 750-1200 ducklings. Brood surveys have been conducted on a 4-mile route within the refuge since 1991. Brood surveys were not conducted in 2020 due to not having approval to work on this specific activity due to COVID-19. Outside the refuge, mallard, wood duck and Canada goose production were similar to 2019.

Deer numbers fluctuate annually due to habitat conditions, hunting pressure and mortality from a variety of causes. The best way to gauge deer numbers on the area is by their impact on crops; particularly corn. Using this as an indicator, it appeared that increase deer harvest in 2019 helped to minimize crop damage significantly in 2020.

Pheasant brood sightings are recorded each year and generally range from 5-15 broods/year. Spring weather was favorable for pheasant reproduction in 2020. The end of April to early May temperatures were warmer than average with below average rainfall. In June, temperatures were warm with near average precipitation. Despite the ideal nesting conditions, only 8 pheasant broods were observed, which was down compared to 2019. Brood size ranged between 6 and 12 chicks/brood.

Interesting non-game wildlife on the area included great egret, sandhill crane, yellow-headed black bird, American bittern, tundra swan, snowy owl, bald eagle and black-crowned night heron. These species are present at different times of year as regular nesters (yellow-headed

black bird, American bittern, sandhill crane and bald eagle) or as migrants (tundra swan, snowy owl) passing through the area on their way to nesting or wintering areas.

## **SIGNIFICANT HABITAT MANAGEMENT**

- Applied herbicide to three miles of dikes and 330 acres of bottom lands to control phragmites and brush
- Reclaimed 24 acres of reed canary grass/brush and converted it back into small grains
- Mowed 250 acres of decoy openings

## **LAND ACQUISITION**

There were no new land acquisitions in 2020.

## **AREA MAINTENANCE**

- Mowed and spot sprayed for brush on 24.5 miles of dike tops
- Collected trash weekly in parking lots and nature trails
- Removed brush and woody vegetation in the roadside ditch at the intersection of Wildner and Thomas Road to install a new tube/gate structure with new rip-rap to control the water flow from Saginaw Bay
- Hunter access paths and parking areas were mowed and sprayed
- Placed rip-rap around the stop log structure in the refuge
- Repaired multiple dike breaches to improve and maintain water manipulation capabilities
- Approximately five miles of access road and fourteen parking lots were enhanced by grading
- Installed trash rack on the field side of the 9-13 pump

Due to COVID-19 and the stay-at-home orders and executive directives which severely restricted spending and hiring seasonal workers, we had to prioritize the basic maintenance needs at FPSWA. Listed below are a some of the major jobs that we were unable to get accomplished due to the COVID-19 restrictions:

- Installing trash racks on the Wiscoggin side of the 9-13 and Area D pumps
- Mowing all dike tops and sides of the dikes
- Installing water depth gauges around several of our pumps
- Aerial spraying 250 acres of phragmites at the FPSWA
- Planting native season grasses throughout the area
- Burning 400 acres of native vegetation
- Posting signs at many of our parking lots and property boundaries
- Rebuilding 3/4 mile of the center dike in the Refuge
- Dredging ditches on the east side of the center dike of the refuge, zone 4 and 6-8
- Improving roads and dikes with gravel that access many boat ramps and parking lots
- Mowing 233 acres of brush and phragmites that was sprayed in 2019

## **EQUIPMENT**

Tracks were added to our Kubota UTV in 2020.

## **SPECIAL PROJECTS**

MDNR employee removed sediment and riprap from the west side of the center refuge dike, leveled spoils and re-armored one quarter of the dike edge in 2019. In 2020, we were unable to complete the riprap portion of this project and begin to dredge the ditch on the east side of the center dike due to Covid-19. We plan to complete this project in 2021.

## **RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

Our annual spring migration tour, the fish and wildlife education day with USA schools and our 5<sup>th</sup> annual fall open house was cancelled in 2020 due to Covid-19.

Regardless of Covid-19, bird watching, fishing, and trapping continued to be a popular activity throughout the year at the Fish Point State Wildlife Area.

## **TRAPPING**

Six trappers harvested 87 muskrat, two raccoons and one otter

## **WATERFOWL BANDING**

Fish Point staff assisted with banding operations throughout the northern portion of the Southeast Region. There were no waterfowl banded at FPSWA in 2020.

## **MANAGED WATERFOWL AREA HUNTING SEASON REPORT 10/10/20 - 12/6/20**

### **Introduction**

The FPSWA is one of Michigan's seven managed waterfowl hunting areas. Permits are required for 79 hunting zones, including 51 standing corn strips. Five zones are in the area's three permanent marshes. Two additional areas are "scramble zones", with a capacity for 20 hunters. In 2020, the check station was open Tuesday through Sunday for AM drawings only to minimize the potential for transmission of COVID-19. Normal hours of operation are Monday-Sunday 5:00 am to 4:00 pm (during the regular duck season only). In 2020, further precautions were implemented to ensure staff and hunter safety. No hunters were allowed in the check station, party leaders were the only members of the party allowed to come pick their hunting zones, an FM transmitter was used to broadcast the daily announcements, leftover zones were not available after the drawings, and changing zones after the draw was not allowed.

Zones 70-77 and 38-44 were available for self-registration after the drawing to allow hunters that couldn't make the draw additional opportunities to hunt.

### **Weather and Habitat Conditions**

Spring was warm with near average rainfall amounts in May and June. Farming conditions were favorable at the beginning of May for planting, but Fish Point staff was laid off until the end of May. Corn planting began the second day we were back to work and was finished by the second week of June. The corn came on strong in most of the fields, except for zones 15 and 17 which had to be replanted due to Sandhill Crane damage. We utilized what was on hand at the office to fertilize corn and to spray small grains, which worked well in most areas. The north field was in desperate need of granular fertilizer but due to a spending freeze that was in place at the time of corn planting, we were unable to get an updated soil analysis completed for each zone to pinpoint what was exactly needed, nor purchase the granular fertilizer. This was the main reason the corn in the north field was marginal cover. The Fish Point Wildlife Association paid for a nitrogen side dress application to all our corn fields, this was our saving grace in many of the corn strips across the area. Small grains received moisture when needed and barley was sprayed at the ideal time to produce optimal yields.

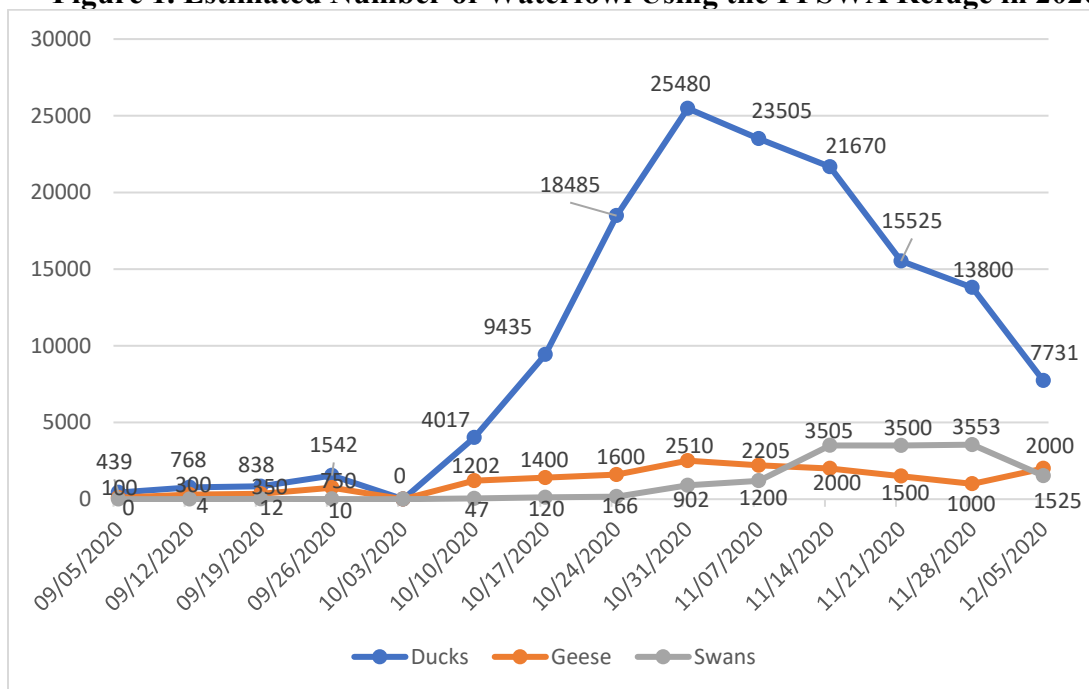
Water was readily available and allowed for more than adequate water level management in all zones. Hunting zones were flooded in 6-inch increments to maximize food availability. All hunting zones were at full pool by the last week of October.

Several moderate to strong weather fronts moved through the area in October and November, which increased harvest success on those days. Ice impeded hunters from pursuing waterfowl for the last week of season, but the hunters that broke ice were successful.

## Migration and Waterfowl Numbers

Weekly refuge duck counts increased steadily from September thru the end of October and peaked around November 1st (Figure 1). Duck numbers steadily declined after the first week of November. Total refuge duck counts increased by 27% over 2019. Weekly refuge goose counts climbed gradually through October, counts peaked around the 1st of November and declined slightly until the first week of December. Total refuge goose counts decreased by 20% compared to last year. Duck counts peaked two weeks prior to the peak of the tundra swan migration. This was the first year that large numbers of tundra swans were seen on the refuge counts, they seemed to hold up in the refuge later in the day before flying out to the winter wheat fields in the afternoons.

**Figure 1. Estimated Number of Waterfowl Using the FPSWA Refuge in 2020**



## Season Dates and Area Regulations

Ducks	Oct. 10 – Dec. 6, 2020 & Dec. 26-27, 2020
Goose	Sept. 1-30, 2020 & Oct. 10- Dec. 6, 2020 & Dec. 26-27, 2020 Jan. 23 - Feb. 8, 2020
Youth/ Veterans	Sept. 18 & 19, 2020

## Hunting Season Results

### A. Pre-Registration

On opening weekend (Oct. 10-11) there were 35 pre-registered hunts available for each of the morning and afternoon hunts. The PM hunt on opening day was a youth priority

drawing. Pre-registered hunters harvested 489 ducks and 34 geese on opening day (2.41 ducks/hunter trip).

*Youth Hunt/Veterans and Active-Duty U.S. Military Personal Hunt:*  
52 hunters harvested 10 ducks and 15 geese. Each hunter averaged 0.48 waterfowl/hunter.

**B. Harvest and Hunter Use**

Most years, hunter success and use begin high at the start of the season and steadily declined thereafter; but by minimizing hunting pressure to one hunt a day and only hunting 6 days/week, hunter success stayed high through the third week of the season (Table 1). Spikes in daily and weekly harvest coincided with weather fronts and the arrival of new birds. Total duck harvest is up by 3% compared to the 5-year average (Figure 2). Duck harvest increased by 14% compared to 2019. Hunter trips were higher than last year but 18% below the five-year average. Since we only held one drawing per day, the number of parties in each drawing seemed to be higher. Some of the hunters hunted morning or afternoon, and in some cases, hunted the first and last few hours of the day. It seemed that by spreading out the hunting pressure throughout the day, along with one rest day per week, the birds had the ability to go into zones that weren't always being hunted. This was a key component in having high duck/hunter trip averages through the third week of season. It also kept the majority of the waterfowl in the refuge and the surrounding areas feeding at FPSWA instead of utilizing the surrounding farm fields.

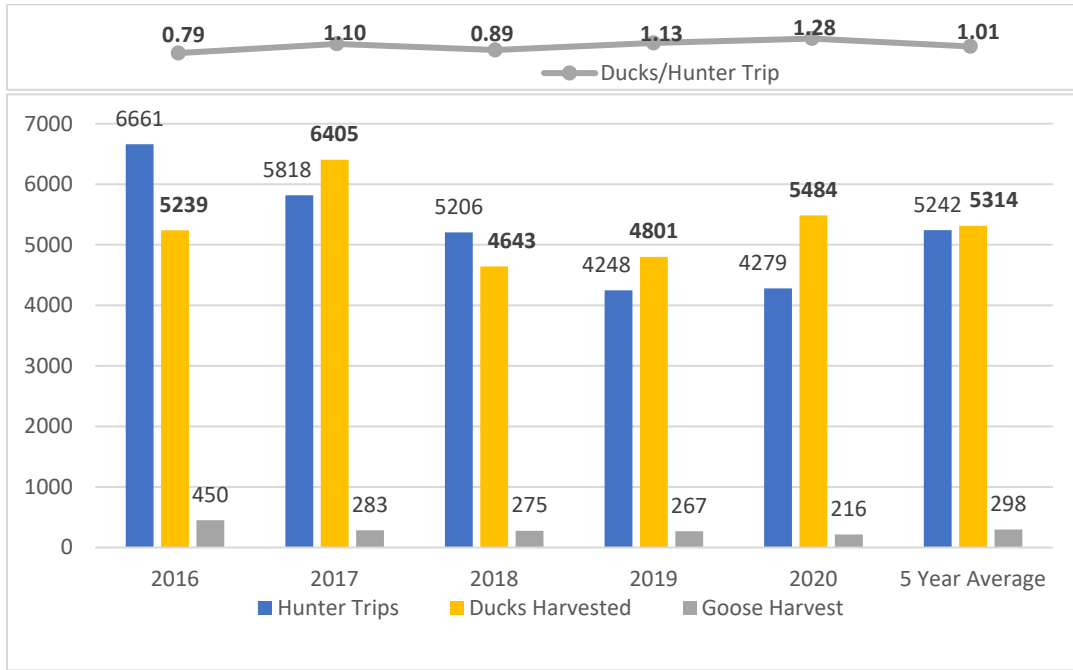
**Table 1. Harvest Summary by Week at FPSWA, 2020**

Date	Days	Hunter Trips	Hunters/Day	Ducks Harvested	Ducks/Day	Ducks/Hunter Trip	Cripples	Crips/Hunter Trip
Oct. 10-16	6	931	155	1587	265	1.70	204	0.22
Oct. 17-23	6	689	115	1160	193	1.68	121	0.18
Oct. 24-30	6	692	115	1131	189	1.63	105	0.15
Oct. 31-								
Nov. 6	6	442	74	431	72	0.98	57	0.13
Nov. 7-13	6	322	54	219	37	0.68	38	0.12
Nov. 14-20	6	403	67	497	83	1.23	64	0.16
Nov. 21-27	6	424	71	224	37	0.53	33	0.08
Nov. 28-								
Dec.4	6	275	46	187	31	0.68	21	0.08
Dec. 5-6	2	88	44	48	24	0.55	5	0.06
Dec. 26-27	2	13	7	0	0	0.00	0	0.00
Totals	52	4279		5484			648	



C. Hunter Days and Individual Hunter Numbers

**Figure 2. Hunter/Harvest Data for FPWA, 2016-2020 with 5-year Average of Ducks per per**



D. Permits and Harvest

In terms of total duck harvest, zones 1-2, 5, 10-13, 20 and 22 accounted for over a third of the total duck harvest on the area (Table 2). Other productive areas included zones 3, 6, 16, 18, 21, 25 and 45.

**Table 2. Harvest by Zone at FPWA, 2020**

<b>Zone</b>	<b># of Hunters</b>	<b>Goose Harvest</b>	<b>Duck Harvest</b>	<b>Zone</b>	<b>Number of Hunters</b>	<b>Goose Harvest</b>	<b>Duck Harvest</b>
<b>1</b>	126	4	201	<b>30</b>	41	0	12
<b>2</b>	126	2	242	<b>31</b>	27	0	11
<b>3</b>	127	8	169	<b>32</b>	50	0	13
<b>4</b>	123	6	68	<b>39-44</b>	33	8	24
<b>5</b>	144	26	192	<b>45</b>	67	5	161
<b>6</b>	141	8	141	<b>46</b>	75	6	117
<b>7</b>	117	4	92	<b>47</b>	50	0	51
<b>8</b>	107	3	17	<b>48</b>	56	0	65
<b>9</b>	98	4	108	<b>49</b>	79	1	41
<b>10</b>	111	9	212	<b>50</b>	30	0	27
<b>11</b>	139	19	290	<b>51</b>	40	0	52
<b>12</b>	125	12	241	<b>52</b>	66	1	77
<b>13</b>	156	28	213	<b>53</b>	79	2	111
<b>14</b>	86	5	81	<b>54</b>	55	0	54
<b>15</b>	92	0	125	<b>55</b>	53	0	52
<b>16</b>	97	12	177	<b>56</b>	35	0	5
<b>17</b>	86	2	141	<b>58</b>	88	3	107
<b>18</b>	90	6	158	<b>59</b>	63	7	46
<b>19</b>	68	5	123	<b>60</b>	93	3	129
<b>20</b>	65	22	183	<b>61</b>	85	6	117
<b>21</b>	81	6	178	<b>62</b>	85	1	110
<b>22</b>	115	15	183	<b>63</b>	49	1	19
<b>23</b>	105	3	55	<b>64</b>	60	0	62
<b>24</b>	61	6	93	<b>65</b>	51	0	46
<b>25</b>	66	1	155	<b>66</b>	107	7	109
<b>26</b>	80	6	108	<b>67</b>	79	0	28
<b>27</b>	56	0	29	<b>68</b>	96	4	124
<b>28</b>	59	0	25	<b>69</b>	78	8	79
<b>29</b>	65	0	41	<b>70-77</b>	84	16	54

## E. Species Harvest

Sex and age data were not collected from mallards and black ducks at the FPSWA during the 2020 waterfowl season, due to COVID-19.

Mallards were the bulk of the harvest, followed by Green-winged Teal, Redheads and Pintails. In 2020, overall waterfowl harvest increased, but Green-winged Teal (52%) and Redhead (65%) harvest, were two species that had the highest increase, yet Mallard (-6%) harvest decreased compared to 2019 (Table 3).

**Table 3. Harvest Data at FPSWA 2016-2020**

<b>Species</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
Mallard	2753 (47)	3639 (53)	2864 (57)	2780 (51)	2603 (44)
Am. Black Duck	146 (3)	214 (3)	214 (4)	220 (4)	191 (3)
Green-winged Teal	711 (12)	893 (13)	345 (7)	606 (11)	920 (16)
Blue-winged Teal	68 TR	80 TR	46 TR	130 TR	219 (4)
Wood Duck	509 (9)	309 (5)	312 (7)	142 (3)	338 (6)
Northern Shoveler	71 TR	92 TR	28 TR	76 TR	44 TR
Northern Pintail	258 (4)	397 (6)	186 (4)	179 (3)	344 (6)
Am. Wigeon	201 (3)	191 (3)	199 (4)	124 TR	119 (2)
Scaup Sp.	52 TR	48 TR	34 TR	52 TR	44 TR
Ring-necked	47 TR	52 TR	39 TR	55 TR	39 TR
Bufflehead	28 TR	38 TR	32 TR	48 TR	44 TR
Red Head	188 (3)	282 (4)	220 (4)	286 (5)	472 (8)
Merganser Sp.	45 TR	28 TR	35 TR	45 TR	56 TR
Gadwall	208 (3)	159 TR	146 (3)	132 TR	178 (3)
Other Unknown Duck	16 TR	12 TR	14 TR	10 TR	11 TR
Canvasback	6 TR	7 TR	3 TR	9 TR	10 TR
C. Goldeneye	1 TR	3 TR	3 TR	6 TR	5 TR
Ruddy Duck	4 TR	7 TR	5 TR	7 TR	6 TR
Canada geese	450 (8)	414 (6)	331 (7)	496 (9)	301 (5)
Snow geese	0 TR	1 TR	0 TR	0 TR	3 TR
<b>Total</b>	<b>5762</b>	<b>6866</b>	<b>5033</b>	<b>5403</b>	<b>5947</b>
<b>Hunter Trips</b>	6995	6297	5730	4690	4766
<b>Cripples</b>	728	791	563	532	553
<b>Waterfowl/Hunter Trip</b>	0.82	1.09	0.88	1.15	1.25

Number Harvested

(Percentage)

TR denotes < 2%

## **2. Cropland, Marshland, and Water Level Management**

Sharecroppers used a 98-day corn variety, which stood up well to weather and hunting use in most areas. Most of the corn on the area completed its life cycle by late-September which allowed harvest to occur within the timeframe specified in the sharecropping contracts. The corn varieties in 58-63 did not dry down enough to allow harvest to occur by the end of September, so a one-time exemption was granted allowing the farmer to come harvest the corn after the season was finished.

Fish Point staff planted and maintained 100 acres of corn. Three varieties of corn were used in the 2020 planting season: a 90-day Golden Harvest (40's), 96-day Beck's (Planted in the 20's) and a 101-day Cropland (1-3, 9-13 and 14-19). These varieties did well where tile was present and granular fertilizer had been spread in the last several years. The best corn on the area was in 1-3 and 9-13. Cropland seems to grow best in our soil types and hold up to hunters abuse better than other varieties planted in past years. We plan to use this variety on much of the area next year.

There were 150 acres of small grain crops (75 acres barley and 75 acres buckwheat) planted and all produced excellent yields. These small grains drew large numbers of waterfowl wherever they were planted.

Maintenance pumping on 520 acres of impounded wetlands also took place throughout the summer. Water levels were increased gradually during the hunting seasons. By the last week of October, the area was at or above full pool.

## **3. Volunteers and Partners**

The Fish Point Wildlife Association (FPWA) is the largest provider of financial and volunteer assistance. Fish Point staff has worked cooperatively with this organization for 19 years, however, 2020 was just slightly different. In 2020, FPWA volunteers were not able to volunteer time towards getting the area ready for the waterfowl season due to COVID-19. They purchased supplies and fertilizer to make sure these projects were completed:

- Bridge maintenance
- Dressing hunting blinds
- Sign posting
- Purchasing fertilizer to side dress Nitrogen into the corn hunting zones
- Purchased planter and chisel plow parts

Thank you to all the volunteers and association members that provided help to the FPSWA throughout the year, this area could not be what it is today without your help.

#### **4. Economic Benefits**

Below are businesses near the FPSWA directly benefitting from the economic activity of area users:

- The Lamplighter Restaurant, Sebewaing, 20% of total business
- Marathon Gas Station, Unionville, 15% of total business
- Sebewaing River Campground, Sebewaing, 13% of total business
- Sebewaing Harbor Marina, Sebewaing, 13% of total business
- Jahr's Sporting Goods, Sebewaing, 35% of total business