

# Wisconsin Youth Waterfowl Hunt Days 2007

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## **Abstract**

We surveyed Wisconsin youth waterfowl hunters to determine the level of participation and estimate the harvest of ducks and geese during the 2007 Youth Waterfowl Hunt Days. We estimated less than 2,478 youth participated in the hunt statewide, harvesting a total of 7,718 ducks and 386 geese. We believe that the level of participation and harvest did not impact duck and goose hunting opportunities during the regular seasons that followed.

## **Introduction**

Nationally, waterfowl managers have been concerned about the decline in the number of waterfowl hunters from a peak during the 1970's. Wisconsin has been fortunate in maintaining stable to slightly increasing waterfowl hunter numbers over the last 25 years. During the early 1990's, individual states began initiating special youth hunting days for resident game and approached the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) about the possibility of a Youth Waterfowl Hunt Day that could be held outside the normal season. In 1996, the USFWS granted states the authority to offer a youth waterfowl hunt day when duck seasons were normally closed. The basic criteria were: 1) states may select 1 day per duck hunting season, designated as "Youth Waterfowl Hunting Day," in addition to their regular duck season; 2) the day must be held outside any regular duck season on either a weekend, holiday, or other non-school day when youth hunters would have the maximum opportunity to participate; 3) the day could be held within 14 days before or after any regular duck season frameworks or within any split during a regular duck season; 4) the daily bag limit may include ducks, geese, mergansers, coots, moorhens and gallinules and would be the same as that allowed during the regular season; 5) youth hunters must be 15 years of age or younger and 6) an adult (mentor) at least 18 years of age must accompany the youth hunter. This adult could not hunt ducks, but may participate in other open seasons. In 1999, USFWS expanded the hunt to 2 consecutive days.

Wisconsin waived the general license requirements for youth hunters who participated in this hunt but required the youth to complete a certified hunter education course. In addition, the youth were required to register under Wisconsin's Harvest Information Program (HIP). A Canada goose hunting permit was required if the youth desired to hunt Canada geese. Also, each adult mentor could accompany only 2 youth hunters.

All migratory game bird hunters are required to register under HIP in each state that they hunt migratory game birds. Wisconsin entered HIP in 1998. This gave us a database from which to sample youth hunters.

In 2007, a 2-day youth hunt was held on the Saturday and Sunday (Sept 15 & 16) one week prior to the regular duck season opener in the northern duck zone and two weeks prior to the regular duck season opener in the southern duck zone. A Special Youth Waterfowl Hunt survey was conducted after the hunt. The objectives of the survey were to determine: 1) level of participation, 2) success rates and demographics of participants, and 3) comparisons between the special hunt harvest and regular season harvest.

We are unaware of a published analysis of the level of participation or estimates of harvest by youth for this special hunt, and thus report our findings for the 2007 Youth Hunt.

## **Methods**

Surveys were mailed to 6,303 youth hunters registered with HIP, by September 21, 2007. The survey consisted of 9 questions regarding their participation in both the Special Youth Waterfowl Hunt and the regular waterfowl season.

In 1999, we found that youth who actually participated in the hunt responded to the mail survey at a higher rate than youth that didn't participate in the hunt. To account for this bias, a phone survey was conducted on a randomly selected sample of the non-respondents in 1999 and 2000. In 1999, successful phone calls were made to 74 of the non-respondents and in 2000, successful phone calls were made to 100 (3.3%) of the non-respondents.

Duck harvest estimates for the 2007 youth waterfowl survey were compared to the 2007 duck season harvest estimates derived from USFWS (Richkus et. al. 2008). Youth Waterfowl Hunt Canada goose harvest estimates were compared to the 2007 Wisconsin DNR Canada goose harvest estimates (Van Horn et. al. 2008).

## **Results**

The response rate (returned either the initial or second mailing) was 38% (2,382) for the 2007 youth waterfowl survey. Approximately 86% of the responses came from males (Table 1, Question 1). Of those that responded to the questionnaire, 79.0% said that they knew about the Youth Waterfowl Hunt this year, and of those, 54.1% said they participated in the 2007 Special Youth Waterfowl Hunt (Table 1, Questions 2 and 2a).

The number of participants (frequency) shown by county they hunted in represents the responses from the youth that returned the questionnaire (Table 1, Question 3).

About 56% of the mail survey respondents said they hunted both days (Sept 15 & 16) (Table 1, Question 4), while 29% hunted Saturday only and 16% hunted Sunday only. Those that responded to the mail survey reported harvesting a total of 3,133 ducks, 2.4 ducks per hunter (Table 1, Question 5). Assuming that 51% (3,216) of HIP registered youth (6,305) did hunt and that the average duck bag for both days combined was 2.4; the statewide total duck harvest for the Youth Hunt would be 7,718. This represented 1.8% of the total Wisconsin duck harvest (431,200) in 2007. Those that responded to the mail survey reported harvesting 154 Canada geese (Table 1, Question 6). Expanding this as described above, we estimate that statewide 386 Canada geese were harvested during the Youth Hunt. That represents 0.4% of the 2007 statewide Canada goose harvest of 84,106 geese (Early September and Regular season combined).

Of the youth that participated in the special hunt, a parent accompanied 74.8% of them, while a friend or neighbor accompanied 12.7% (Table 1, Question 7). Ninety-four percent of the Special Youth Waterfowl Hunt participants said that they intended to hunt during the regular season (Table 1, Question 8).

Of the youth that participated in the 2007 special hunt, 59.0%, 31.0%, 9.4% and 0.7% of them participated in the special hunt in 2006, 2005, 2004 and 2003, respectively (Table 1, Question 9).

The final 2007 participation rate was derived by a 3-step process. The results of the youth that responded to the mail survey were expanded to (38% \* 6,305 youth hunters registered with HIP= 2,396) of the total potential youth hunters. The results of the phone survey were

expanded to the rest of the potential youth hunters (# HIP youth hunters 6,305– 2,395 = 3,910). We added the expanded results of the mail and phone survey together to get the final results.

For example: 2007 Youth Hunt Participants

There were 6,305 potential youth hunt participants based on 2007 HIP data. The mail survey was sent to 6,303 youth and 2,382 (38%) youth completed and returned the survey. The results from the completed surveys were then applied to 38% (2,396) of the potential youth hunters. There were 1,288 (54.1%) of the 2,382 youth that responded to the survey that said they participated in the hunt.

Of the youth interviewed during the phone surveys in 1999 and 2000, 50 of the 174 (28.7%) that were contacted said they participated in the hunt. Those results were applied to the rest of the potential youth hunters (3,910).

Corrected youth hunt participants =  $((.567 \times 2,396) + (.287 \times 3,910)) / 6,305 \times 100 = 39.3\%$  (2,478) of the potential youth hunters participated in the hunt.

We found that the youth that responded to the mail survey (successful and unsuccessful in bagging ducks) averaged 2.4 ducks for the 2-day hunt. We found from the phone survey of non-respondents (successful and unsuccessful in bagging ducks) averaged 1.43 ducks for the 2-day hunt. Our telephone survey showed that non-respondents to the mail survey averaged 36% fewer ducks for the hunt than did mail survey respondents. Thus, there was an obvious bias in our preliminary duck harvest estimate. Estimating the harvest by using the mail survey respondent information only and applying it to the entire number of active youth hunt participants resulted in an over estimation of the harvest.

For 2007, when we made adjustments for the differences in average harvests between mail survey respondents and non-respondents, we estimated that the youth harvest 7,718 ducks during this special hunt. This represents approximately 1.8% of the 2007 Wisconsin duck harvest (431,200). Likewise, mail survey respondents (successful and unsuccessful in bagging Canada geese) averaged 0.12 Canada geese for the hunt period while our phone survey showed mail survey non-respondents average 0.267 Canada geese for the 2-day hunt. We estimated the total Canada goose harvest for the 2-day hunt was 386. That represents 0.4% of the 2007 statewide Canada goose harvest of 84,106 geese.

We did not expand participation by county by the estimated total number of youth that participated in the hunt, as sample size for the phone survey was too small.

## **Discussion**

In the report for the 1999 Youth Hunt, we demonstrated that there was a reporting bias between mail survey respondents and non-respondents, especially as to numbers of waterfowl harvested and degree of participation in the hunt. Past year's phone surveys showed that youth who returned the mail survey were more likely to have participated in the hunt and been successful in harvesting birds than those who did not respond.

We feel that by conducting a follow-up phone survey we are more able to accurately estimate participation and success during the Special Youth Waterfowl Hunt.

There was concern from some adult hunters that the pressure from the Youth Waterfowl Hunt was scaring the ducks and Canada geese out of the area or that the kids were taking too many ducks and Canada geese. Some adult hunters felt that this special hunt substantially reduced the population prior to the start of the regular season. Youth waterfowl survey results disprove those ideas. Historically, approximately 21% of the state's duck harvest occurs on opening day and 33% of the season harvest occurs by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the duck season. If the youth hunt resulted in the ducks being chased off the marshes when the regular duck season opens, one would assume that a duck harvest 10 times that in a half a day should mean that there would be no ducks left in our marshes after the opening day. If the ducks were not chased out by the regular duck season opener, we do not think the hunting pressure generated by the youth hunt chased the ducks out for the regular opener.

A few individuals have complained that kids were chasing the ducks off of their private ponds. Landowners have the option of not allowing the youth to hunt on their property. A few others felt that kids put too much pressure on public lands. We question whether a total of 2,478 youth hunting both private and public lands, statewide for two days in 2007, exerted that type of pressure.

Overall, we feel the Youth Waterfowl Hunt was a success and youth harvest is not negatively impacting the regular duck season or Canada goose harvest. Most comments received from adults and youth participating in the youth hunt were positive.

Our survey indicated that 13% of the youth hunters were able to participate because a family friend or neighbor cared enough about waterfowl hunting to mentor a youth that might not have had the opportunity to go (Table 1, Question 7). About 6% of the youth that participated in the hunt told us that they did not hunt or plan to hunt during the regular season (Table 1, Question 8).

If the hunt had any drawbacks, it was the fact that we (adult waterfowl hunters) collectively did not provide more youth with the opportunity to experience waterfowl hunting. We feel that increasing hunting opportunities to those without hunters in their immediate families is our collective challenge for the future. We encourage waterfowl hunters around the state to expose neighborhood youth to the wonders of waterfowl hunting during Youth Waterfowl Hunts.

### **Literature Cited**

Van Horn, K., K. Benton and B. Dhuey. 2008. 2007 Wisconsin Canada Goose Harvest Report. Wisconsin Wildlife Surveys. Vol.17, Issue 3. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Richkus, K.D., K. A. Wilkins, R.V. Raftovich, S.S. Williams, and H.L. Spriggs. July 2008. Migratory Bird Hunting Activity and Harvest During the 2006 and 2007 Hunting Seasons, Preliminary Estimates. United States Fish and Wildlife Administrative Report. p21.

**Table 1.** Survey Responses to the 2007 Youth Migratory Game Bird Questionnaire.

Question 1. Your Gender?

Gender	Percent	Number of Responses
Female	13.6%	322
Male	86.4%	2,043

Question 2. Did you know about the special Youth Waterfowl Hunt?

Answer	Percent	Number of Responses
Yes	79.0%	1,865
No	21.0%	497

Question 2a. If yes, did you participate in the special Youth Waterfowl Hunt this year?

Answer	Percent	Number of Responses
Yes	54.1%	1,288
No	45.9%	1,094

Question 3. Please tell us what county you hunted in this year.

County	Frequency	Percent	County	Frequency	Percent	County	Frequency	Percent
Adams	9	0.72	Iowa	4	0.32	Polk	15	1.20
Ashland	6	0.48	Iron	2	0.16	Portage	15	1.20
Barron	10	0.80	Jackson	3	0.24	Price	5	0.40
Bayfield	3	0.24	Jefferson	34	2.72	Racine	22	1.76
Brown	36	2.88	Juneau	13	1.04	Richland	3	0.24
Buffalo	22	1.76	Kenosha	12	0.96	Rock	17	1.36
Burnett	16	1.28	Kewaunee	7	0.56	Rusk	8	0.64
Calumet	14	1.12	La Crosse	49	3.92	St. Croix	8	0.64
Chippewa	7	0.56	Lafayette	2	0.16	Sauk	10	0.80
Clark	2	0.16	Langlade	8	0.64	Sawyer	11	0.88
Columbia	39	3.12	Lincoln	13	1.04	Shawano	20	1.60
Crawford	20	1.60	Manitowoc	41	3.28	Sheboygan	27	2.16
Dane	36	2.88	Marathon	36	2.88	Taylor	8	0.64
Dodge	100	8.01	Marinette	28	2.24	Trempealeau	10	0.80
Door	3	0.24	Marquette	32	2.56	Vernon	8	0.64
Douglas	16	1.28	Menominee	--	--	Vilas	27	2.16
Dunn	8	0.64	Milwaukee	1	0.08	Walworth	20	1.60
Eau Claire	4	0.32	Monroe	1	0.08	Washburn	10	0.80
Florence	--	--	Oconto	22	1.76	Washington	19	1.52
Fond du Lac	37	2.96	Oneida	23	1.84	Waukesha	41	3.28
Forest	6	0.48	Outagamie	40	3.20	Waupaca	29	2.32
Grant	15	1.20	Ozaukee	4	0.32	Waushara	20	1.60
Green	4	0.32	Pepin	5	0.40	Winnebago	53	4.24
Green Lake	24	1.92	Pierce	4	0.32	Wood	22	1.76

Question 4. Please check the appropriate boxes for the days you hunted.

Day	Percent	Number of Responses
Both Days	55.8%	712
Saturday Only	28.5%	364
Sunday Only	15.7%	200

No response from 12 returns

Question 5. How many ducks did you kill during this special hunt? (Total of 1,288 responses hunted the early season; 71.0% of these killed a duck).

Duck Species	Mean	Reported Harvest
Mallard	1.89	830
Blue-winged Teal	2.23	876
Green-winged Teal	1.64	361
Wood Duck	1.75	903
Other Species	1.48	163

Other species mentioned were; American Black Duck, American Coot, American Wigeon, Common Merganser, Gadwall, Hooded Merganser, Lesser Scaup, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, and Ruddy Duck.

Question 6. How many Canada geese did you kill during this special hunt? (Total of 1,288 responses hunted the early season; 10.4% of these killed a goose).

	Mean	Reported Harvest
Geese	1.26	154

Question 7. What relation to you was your chaperone on this special hunt?

Answer	Percent	Number of Responses
Parent	74.8%	959
Brother/Sister	1.8%	23
Friend/Neighbor	12.7%	163
Grandparent	3.4%	43
Other Relative	7.4%	95

Question 8. Have you or do you expect to hunt ducks or geese during the regular season this year?

Answer	Percent	Number Reported
Yes	94.1%	1,193
No	5.9%	75

Question 9. If you participated in the Special Youth Waterfowl hunt in past years, please check all the years that you hunted?

Answer	Percent	Number of Responses
2003	0.7%	10
2004	9.4%	139
2005	31.0%	459
2006	59.0%	874

Dear Youth Migratory Game Bird Hunter:

I am pleased to see that you have registered for the Harvest Information Program and intend to hunt Migratory Game Birds in Wisconsin this year. Since 1996, we have offered youth waterfowl hunters a special hunt before the opening of the regular duck season. In 2001, we expanded the season to two days in hopes of providing you more opportunity to participate and learn about waterfowl hunting. This is again the case for the 2007 Youth Waterfowl season. Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions, reverse the address flap, tape the edge and return it to me. Completion of this form is voluntary.

Your participation in this survey will help us plan for similar hunts in future years and better manage our migratory game birds. If you have any specific comments or questions, please don't hesitate to add those at the end of the questionnaire.

Thanks!

*Kent Van Horn*

Kent Van Horn  
Migratory Game Bird Ecologist  
Bureau of Wildlife Management

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1. Your gender:       Female       Male
2. Did you know about the special Youth Waterfowl Hunt?       Yes       No
- 2a. If yes, did you participate in the Youth Waterfowl Hunt this year?
- Yes (If Yes, go to question #3)       No (If No, go to questions #8-9)
3. Please tell me what County you hunted in this year. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Please check the appropriate boxes for the days you hunted.
- September 15       September 16
5. How **many** ducks did you kill during this special hunt? (Please list your harvest by species)
- Mallard \_\_\_\_\_      Blue-winged teal \_\_\_\_\_      Green-winged teal \_\_\_\_\_      Wood Duck \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
6. How many Canada geese did you kill during this special hunt? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What relation to you was your chaperone for the youth hunt?
- Parent       Brother/Sister       Friend or Neighbor       Grandparent       Other Relative \_\_\_\_\_
8. Have you or do you expect to hunt ducks or geese during the regular season this year?       Yes       No
9. If you participated in the Special Youth Waterfowl hunt in past years, please check all the years that you hunted?
- 2003       2004       2005       2006

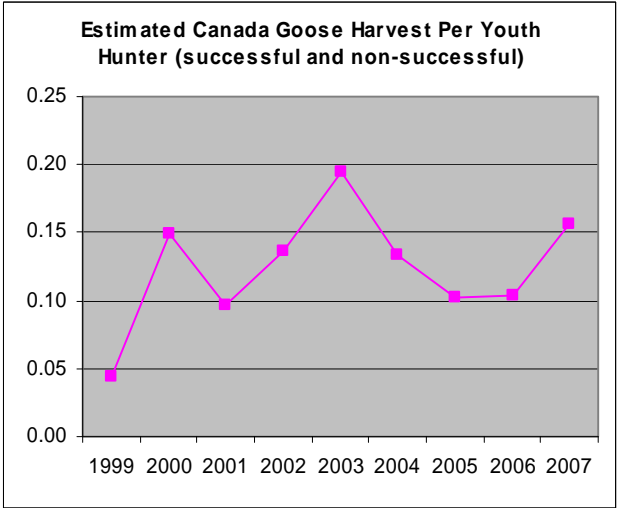
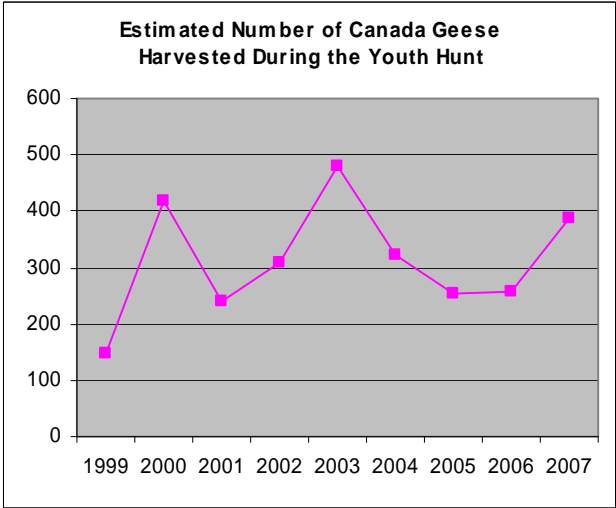
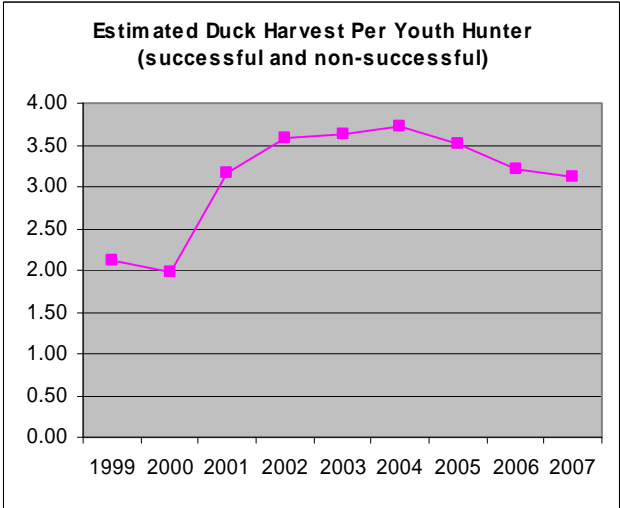
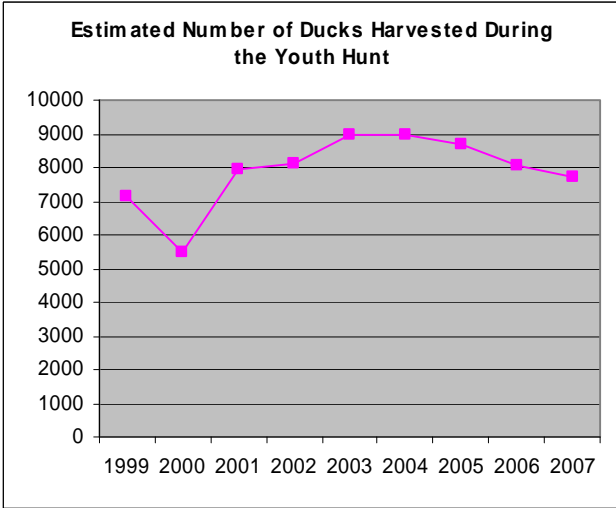
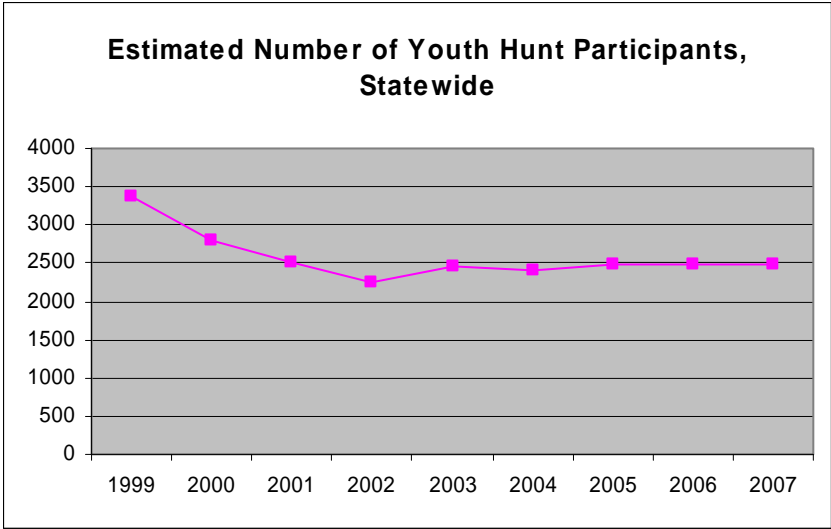
If you wish to provide additional comments, please do so here.

**Figure 1.** 2007 Youth Migratory Game Bird Questionnaire.

**Table 2.** *Wisconsin youth waterfowl hunt.*

Year	# Days	Estimated # Youth Hunters	# Ducks Harvested	Estimated # Ducks per Hunter	# Geese Harvested	Estimated # Geese per Hunter
1996	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
1997	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
1998	1	no est.	2,700*	No data	57*	No data
1999	1	3,379	7,146	2.11	148	0.04
2000	2	2,802	5,510	1.97	418	0.15
2001	2	2,506	7,938	3.17	241	0.10
2002	2	2,259	8,108	3.59	309	0.14
2003	2	2,459	8,944	3.64	480	0.20
2004	2	2,416	8,993	3.72	324	0.13
2005	2	2,487	8,713	3.50	255	0.10
2006	2	2,495	8,033	3.22	257	0.10
2007	2	2,478	7,718	3.11	386	0.16

\*data not expanded



**Figure 2.** *Estimated Wisconsin youth waterfowl hunt figures.*