



Results of the 2001 Off-Reservation Treaty Waterfowl Season

by
Peter F. David
Wildlife Biologist

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**Great Lakes Indian Fish
& Wildlife Commission**
Biological Services Division
P.O. Box 9



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SUMMARY OF THE 2001 OFF-RESERVATION TREATY WATERFOWL SEASON

INTRODUCTION

The fall of 2001 marked the 17th year of off-reservation treaty waterfowl hunting by GLIFWC member tribes on lands ceded in the treaties of 1837 and 1842 (Figure 1). Participating tribes included Bad River, Lac Courte Oreilles, Lac du Flambeau, Mole Lake, Red Cliff and St. Croix of Wisconsin, Keweenaw Bay and Lac Vieux Desert in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and the Mille Lacs Band of Minnesota. In addition, 2001 marked the 11th year of off-reservation treaty waterfowl hunting in the 1836 treaty area by the Bay Mills Indian Community in Upper Michigan.

Hunting regulations proposed by the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) as authorized by tribal governments were reviewed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) after consultation with GLIFWC and the Departments of Natural Resources of Wisconsin (WDNR), Michigan (MiDNR) and Minnesota (MnDNR), and published in the Federal Register for public comment. Final regulations approved by the USFWS are described below.

This survey summarized in this report was similar to ones conducted annually from 1985 to 1998. Due to the low harvest estimates generated from the previous surveys, this survey was scheduled to be done on a 3 year cycle beginning with the 2001 hunting season.

REGULATIONS

Season Dates, Bag Limits and Other Regulations

Season dates for zhiishiibag (ducks), aajigadeg (coots), manoominikeshiinh (rails), mergansers and snipe ran from September 15 - December 2 on all ceded lands. Goose seasons ran from September 1 to December 2 in all ceded lands, but also continued later in any area that was open to state-licensed hunters after December 2. Woodcock hunting was open from September 4 until December 2, and a mourning dove season ran from September 1 until October 30 in the 1837 and 1842 ceded territories.

In the Wisconsin and Minnesota portions of the ceded territory the daily bag limit for zhiishiibag (ducks) was 20, with additional limits on mallards (5 hens and 10 total), black ducks, redheads and pintails (4 each) and canvasbacks (2). In Michigan, the daily bag limit for ducks was 10 (2 hen mallards and 5 total, 2 black ducks, 2 redheads, 2 pintails and 1 canvasbacks). The bag limit for nikag (geese), all species combined, was 10 daily throughout the ceded territory. Other bag limits were: megansers 5, coot 20, rails 25, snipe 8, woodcock 5 and mourning dove 15.

Possession limits were twice the daily bag limit, but did not apply to birds cleaned, dressed, and at the hunter's primary residence. All federal and state closed areas and method restrictions were adopted, with the exception of state imposed open water hunting restrictions. Shooting hours were from ½ hour before sunrise to sunset.

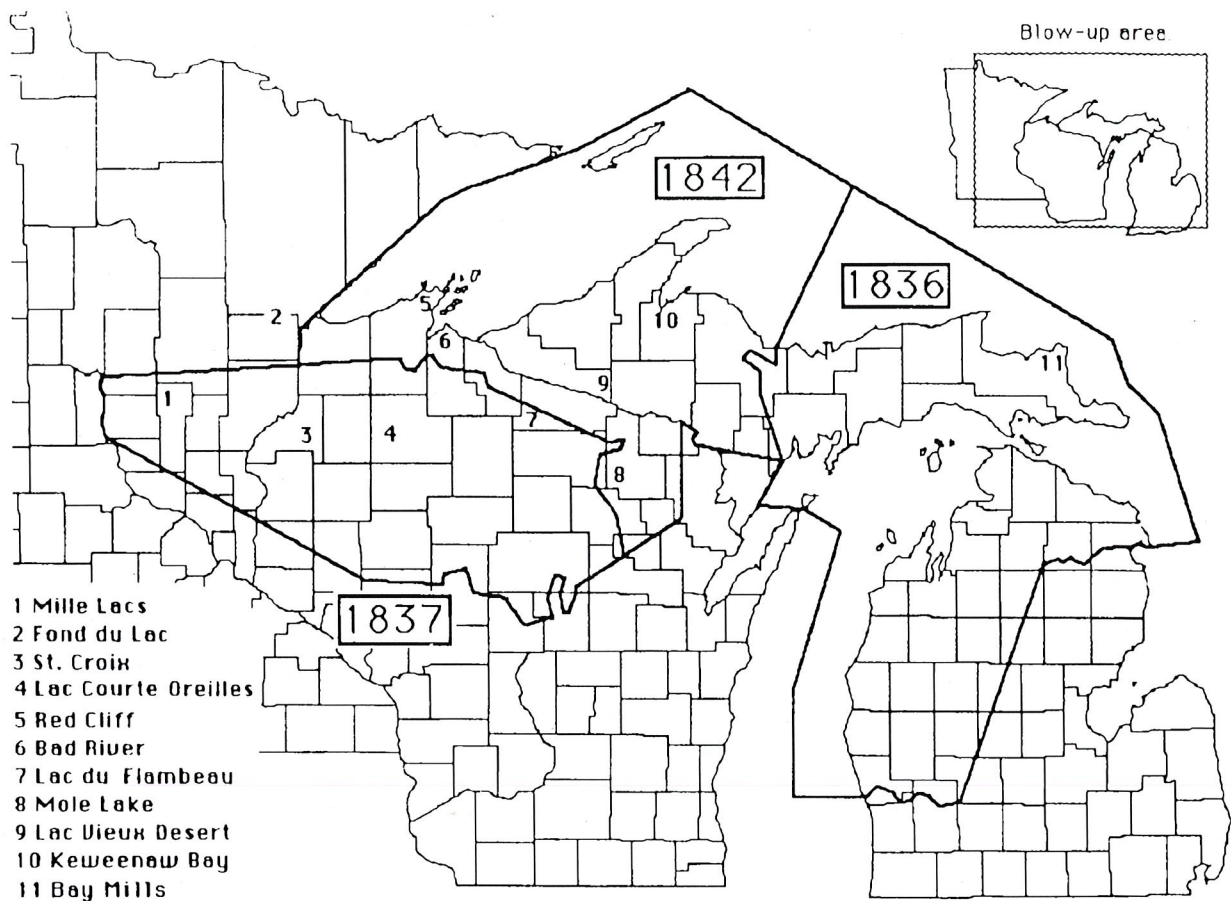


Figure 1. Map of the territories ceded in the treaties of 1836, 1837, and 1842 with reservation locations. (Ceded territory boundary depictions approximate.)

METHODS

Tribal waterfowl hunters were required to possess a natural resource harvesting permit validated for waterfowl hunting. When tribal members obtained their 2001 permit they were asked if they harvested waterfowl off-reservation in 2000. For survey purposes, individuals who indicated they had hunted the previous year were classified as “active” hunters, and those who indicated they hadn’t were classified as “inactive”. (Individuals who failed to provide this information were included in the “active” category.) Randomly selected individuals were surveyed by telephone until 36% of the “active” (160/446) and 10% of the “inactive” (115/1197) individuals were surveyed. Separate participation and harvest estimates were made for each group, and then pooled to estimate total harvest.

RESULTS

Although tribal harvesting permits were validated for waterfowl hunting by 1643 individuals in 2001, the proportion of permit holders who do not actually hunt waterfowl is high because the permit is free, and because waterfowl hunting is a simple check-off category on a general harvesting permit that is also required for harvesting other animals and plants.

Seventeen percent (27/160) of the “active” hunters and 0% (0/115) of the “inactive” hunters surveyed reported hunting waterfowl in 2001. Survey respondents reported harvesting 362 ducks, 52 coot and 29 Canada geese in 126 days of hunting, yielding expanded estimates of total harvest of 1014 ducks, 146 coot and 81 Canada geese in 353 hunting-days by 75 hunters. An estimated 252 of these hunting-days took place in Wisconsin, and 101 in Michigan. No hunting was reported for the Minnesota ceded territory, and no harvest was reported for woodcock, rails, snipe or mourning doves. Hunting tended to be concentrated in counties with reservations.

Comparing the 2001 harvest estimates to those made for 1996-1998 (the three previous years for which harvest estimates were available) suggests little change has occurred in tribal harvest (Table 1). Compared to the average harvest estimated for the 1996-1998 period, the 2001 harvest was up 5% for ducks, up 11% for coots, and down 44% for geese.

Table 1. Treaty waterfowl harvest : 1996, 1997, 1998 and 2001.

YEAR	ESTIMATED # OF HUNTERS	ESTIMATED # OF TRIPS	ESTIMATED HARVEST		
			DUCKS	GEESE	COOTS
2001	75	353	1014	81	146
1998	92	625	599	177	172
1997	151	951	1022	183	164
1996	125	572	1278	72	57

The composition of the tribal duck harvest in 2001 was very similar to the 1985-1998 average for mallards, wood ducks and blue-winged teal, all of which were within 2% of their contribution to the harvest over the longer time period (Figure 2). Scaup however, occurred in the 2001 harvest at a lower percentage (6% versus 20%) while “all other species” occurred at a much higher percentage than average (32% versus 15%). The low scaup harvest may reflect the decline in population status this species has experienced. The 2001 goose harvest was composed entirely of Canada geese.

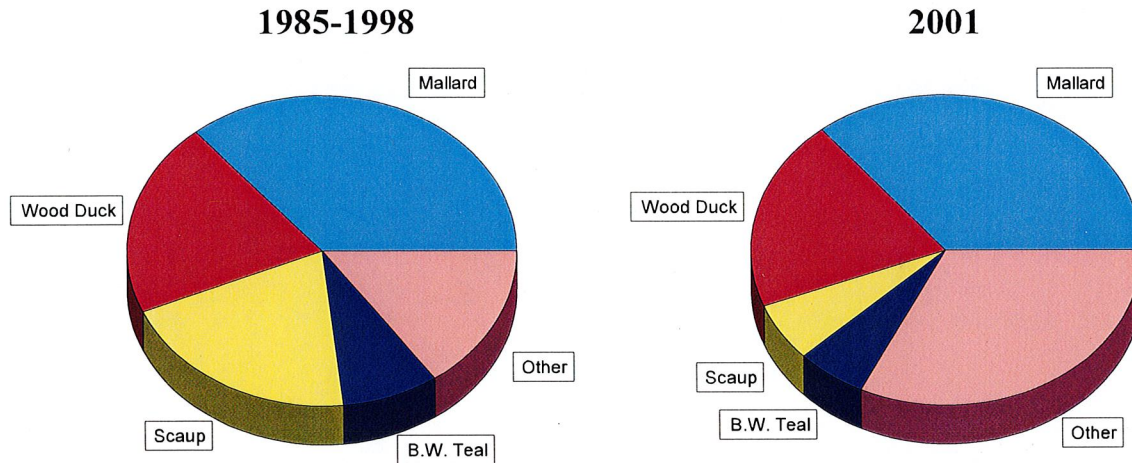


Figure 2. Species composition of the treaty duck harvest, 1985-1998 versus 2001.

Most tribal members hunted waterfowl near reservations, with approximately 94% of all hunting trips reportedly occurring in counties with reservations (including Menominee County in Wisconsin).

Approximately 85% of the survey respondents reported harvesting 6 ducks or less on their best day of hunting. About 7% reported getting 6-10 ducks on their best day, and another 7% reported harvesting between 11 and 15 ducks on their best day. Although total harvest has remained low even with a twenty-bird bag limit, the large bag is very important to tribal hunters, allowing those individuals who do locate ducks on a particular hunting trip a greater opportunity to meet their subsistence needs.

SUMMARY

A tribal waterfowl harvest survey was conducted for 2001 to allow comparisons to previous surveys conducted annually from 1985-1998. The 2001 survey showed no significant change in harvest levels compared to the three most recent years for which harvest estimates were available (1996-98). While the exercise of the treaty right to harvest waterfowl remains culturally significant to individual tribal members, the biological impact remains insignificant. Tribal waterfowl hunters will be surveyed next following the 2004 season.