

Wild Perspective



The Overlooked Sport

I've often heard that if you flattened out West Virginia, it would be one of the largest states. We sure are blessed with beautiful hills in every direction and stately mountains in the eastern half of the state. What that means for our water resources is that the water throughout the state is almost always moving downstream, and that our landscape has a scarcity of wetlands. In regards to our wildlife resources, that hilly terrain translates into a low population of waterfowl.

We have two basic populations of waterfowl. First, we have resident Canada geese, wood ducks and mallards. And then we have migrant populations of various species of geese and ducks that pass through the state or spend part of the winter here.

Even though our state doesn't have many waterfowl compared to most states and despite the fact that waterfowl hunting doesn't provide much income, our agency still employs established techniques to wisely manage those resources. During the first few days of January every year our biologists conduct aerial surveys of waterfowl which enable them to detect long-term trends in populations. Our biologists actively participate in the Atlantic Flyway Council, providing input to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on setting the season dates and bag limits. Our personnel set out and monitor wood duck nest boxes annually. They also band Canada geese to monitor our resident goose population. All the information they gather aids in setting hunting seasons, ultimately resulting in sustainable populations of waterfowl which our children and grandchildren will enjoy.

Each year the USFWS sets the total number of days of waterfowl hunting and the earliest opening date and latest closing date. This year our biologists tweaked the seasons by eliminating zones and adding a six-day, third split season during November when some early migrants are passing through and the habitat has changed from the October season.

I encourage you to get outside and enjoy the sight of waterfowl flying overhead in formation or their brightly colored reflections on still water, or try your hand at the challenging sport of waterfowl hunting. It will awaken your senses and lift your spirits. Believe me, I know. It happens to me every year.

Frank Jezioro

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