

September 3rd, 2014 – Aerial Waterfowl Inventory Blog

The first teal flight for fall 2014 is in the books. Duck numbers for the Illinois River exceeded the 10-yr weekly average by 21% and totaled 32,910 total ducks. Blue-winged and American green-winged teal abundance (21,540) was similar to the 10-yr average (21,975). Total ducks on the Mississippi River were well below the 10-yr average and totaled 6,109 ducks. The September 4th weather forecast in North Dakota predicts strong northwest winds at sunset; maybe we will get a big push of teal out of the prairies before this weekend's teal season opener.

My early September estimate of wetland habitat conditions for waterfowl this fall ranks well below average for both the Illinois and Mississippi rivers. It has been a rainy summer and consequently the Illinois River has been elevated for most of the growing season. The last rise in water levels on August 23rd destroyed much of the waterfowl foods in the unprotected wetlands of the Illinois Valley. Most of the refuges and duck clubs along the Mississippi River had below average moist-soil plant growth as well. Some notable exceptions include Dardenne, Cuivre, and Port Louisa on the Mississippi River and Hennepin & Hopper, Douglas Lake, Banner Marsh, Emiquon, Cuba Island, Big Prairie, and Spunky Bottoms along the Illinois River. Other refuges, like Chautauqua NWR, were able to achieve a late-season drawdown so they will have some duck food; however, plant growth at many wetlands along both rivers was a bust this summer.

Stay tuned for more updates next week.....