

LOUISIANA OUTDOORS

Duck biologists say agricultural practices up north not hurting Louisiana's winter population

Updated Jan 31, 2014;
Posted Jan 31, 2014

flooded field

Although
some
hunters up
north are
planting
crops
exclusively
to attract
waterfowl,
the
practice is



too
expensive
to be
widespread,
according
to
Louisiana's
lead
waterfowl
biologist.
(DU)

0

9
shares

By Todd Masson, tmasson@nola.com,
NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune

Larry Reynolds, waterfowl study leader for the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, doesn't know what he's talking about.

Or at least that's the opinion of some vocal waterfowlers who disagree with Reynolds' take on why Louisiana's recently completed duck season was such a tough one.



Reynolds told NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune last week that there are at least a couple possibilities of why the season was such a letdown, including an overestimation of the number of ducks on the continent as well as greatly improved habitat north of Louisiana.

But Reynolds has been excoriated in some Internet chat rooms as well as emails sent to NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune by hunters who believe conservation groups are manipulating crops and wetlands across the Midwest and Plains to "short-stop" ducks.

"Your article on Jan. 26 was good and informative," one hunter emailed. "(But) is anyone addressing the issue of flooded crop fields north of us? It seems everyone is avoiding this question. Ducks Unlimited will not address this issue as they are afraid of losing money and members in these areas. I asked a regional DU rep at a meeting, and he passed it on for me to ask the federal management.

"Maybe you have been north of us hunting. I have. People are growing crops with no intent to harvest and then flood the fields. They're even moving water so it does not freeze.





180 Day Risk-Free Money Back Guarantee. Free Shipping to the lower 48 United States.

"Roll Up & Stow - Unroll & Go" 16ft inflatable fishing skiff. Fits in a car ready to go!

[AD](#) Family Owned SeaEagle.com

"Has Larry Reynolds addressed this?"

Reynolds has -- numerous times. As have other waterfowl managers, and yet the issue still arises year after year, particularly after slow duck seasons.

Many hunters even claim that DU is engaging in illegal activities like baiting to hold ducks in areas that benefit big-money donors. The rumors have spread like wildfire over the past decade, and they've proven remarkably challenging to tamp down, according to Mike Carloss, manager of conservation programs for DU.

"It's amazing that hunters still believe DU is dumping corn, heating ponds, etc.," he said. "Sunday evening while at a funeral home in Abbeville and talking with a friend I hunt with near Kaplan, we were discussing my job at DU. His older, college-educated brother came over and joined the conversation."



"He brought up how he's not a DU member any longer due to these perceived issues he believes to be true. I think I convinced him otherwise and maybe even into renewing his membership.

"Wow, it's almost inconceivable."

Waterfowl managers also find it inconceivable that hunters believe unharvested crop lands to the north are holding hundreds of thousands of the ducks that should be in Louisiana.

Ad



Planting crops for the sole purpose of attracting ducks does indeed happen, Reynolds said, but not at such a level to cause even a blip in Louisiana's season.



"It is not illegal to grow crops and flood them without harvesting," he said. "You can legally hunt those fields as long as the crops are not manipulated."

Manipulation would include practices like buffaloing, mowing, burning and disking.

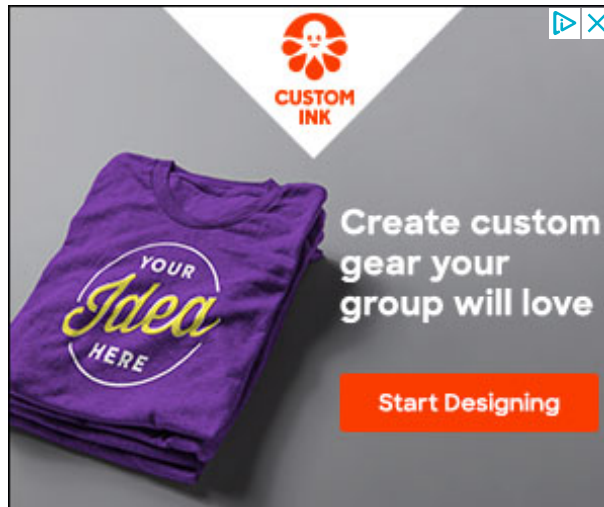
"I regularly see hunting videos where some of the action is over flooded, unharvested grain," Reynolds said. "It is expensive, but it is perfectly legal. It is expensive enough that it is not a prevalent habitat-management technique in any location up and down the flyway.

"It doesn't help that people see it depicted in hunting videos or YouTube videos, so disgruntled hunters can blame that management on why they aren't seeing the number of ducks they desire."

The practice actually occurs on a limited basis in Southwest Louisiana and has for decades, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Barry Wilson, who serves as the Gulf Coast Joint Venture coordinator. Rice farmers will frequently abandon a second crop of rice if they determine the anticipated yield makes it not worth harvesting.

They'll then flood the field and allow the unharvested rice to serve as waterfowl or crawfish forage, Wilson said.





Down in the Bayou State's fields, a variety of ducks feast on the rice, but up north, the limited practice of flooding unharvested fields mostly affects the hardiest of dabbling ducks, like mallards, according to Reynolds.

"Bluewings, gadwalls, ringnecks, scaup and other ducks important to Louisiana's harvest are not affected," he said.

Reynolds, who's an avid hunter as well, understands the frustration of waterfowlers. Most were expecting a strong season this year based on the summer's breeding count and the series of cold fronts that should have pushed clouds of ducks into Louisiana. That didn't happen, so hunters have been grasping at straws and pointing fingers. The blame game is in full swing.



"It's been as bad this year as any I can remember, and it's going to get worse," Reynolds said. "Spinning-wing decoys, habitat projects by DU or anyone north of us, earlier season closing dates than Missouri or Arkansas, ice-eaters, heated ponds and flooded unharvested grain are held responsible for either poor hunting success or our current reliance on 'trash ducks' to keep our harvest numbers high."

Todd Masson can be reached at tmasson@nola.com or 504.232.3054.

Follow @tmassonFISH

Tweet to @tmassonFISH

Core

Office

AD wor



Use of and/or registration on any portion of this site constitutes acceptance of our **User Agreement** (updated 5/25/18) and **Privacy Policy and Cookie Statement** (updated 5/25/18).

© 2018 Advance Local Media LLC. All rights reserved (**About Us**).

The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of Advance Local.

Community Rules apply to all content you upload or otherwise submit to this site.

Your California Privacy Rights

[▶ Ad Choices](#)

