



# Mallard Candy

Is hunting flooded corn fair chase? Is it killing our sport? By David Hart

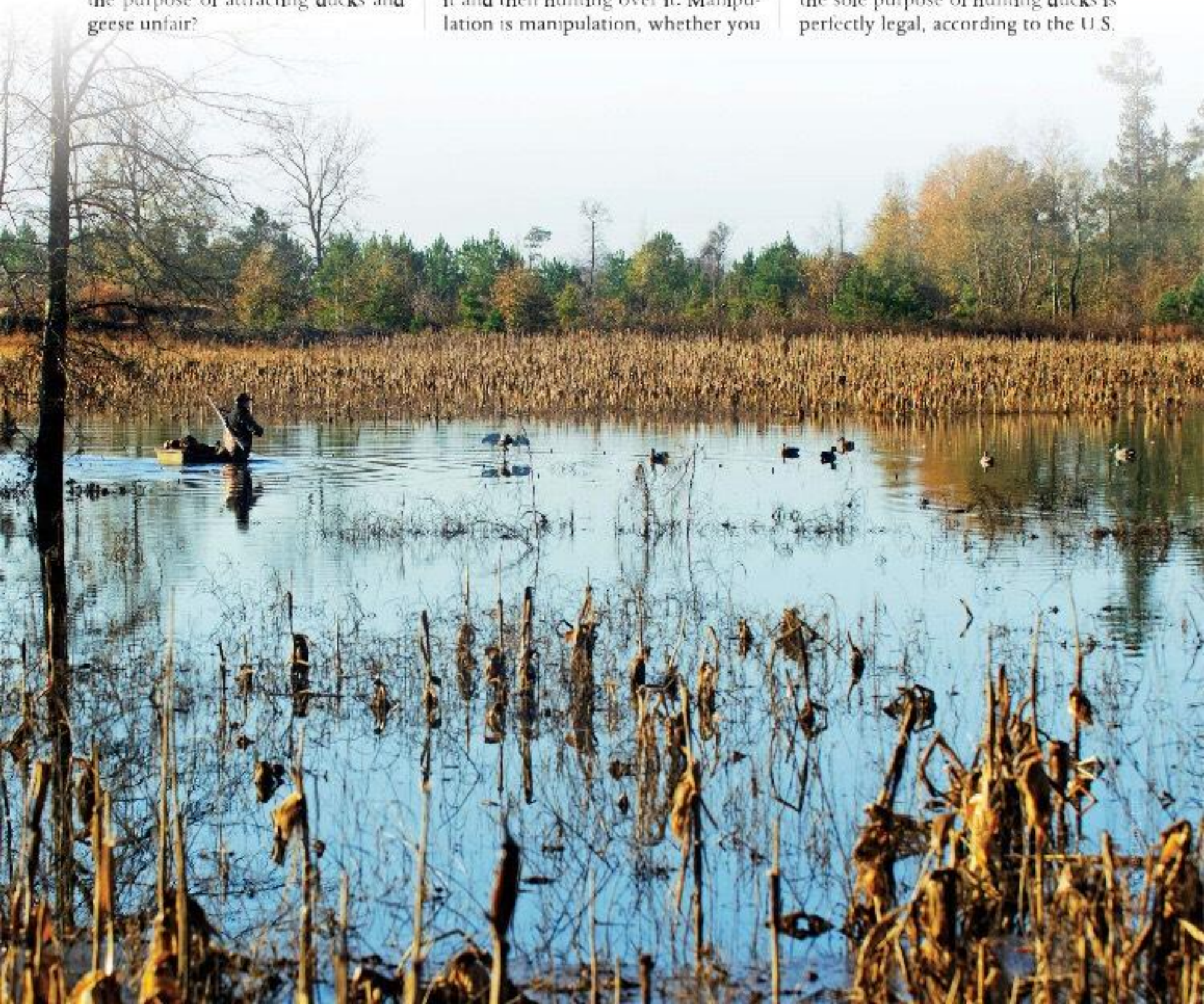
A BILL INTRODUCED in the Idaho legislature would have banned flooding corn and other crops for the purpose of hunting waterfowl. House Bill 528, introduced by Representative Mike Moyle, never made it out of the Natural Resources Committee, but it reignited a simmering debate among waterfowler: Is planting and then flooding corn for the purpose of attracting ducks and geese unfair?

It's not only unfair, says Louisiana hunter Josh Goins, it is little more than legalized baiting. The 38-year-old DeQuincy resident was stunned when he witnessed acre upon acre of flooded corn after traveling to Missouri and North Dakota to work a few years ago.

"I thought, there's no way this is legal. It's no different than mowing it and then hunting over it. Manipulation is manipulation, whether you

mow it or flood it," says Goins, executive director of Flyway Federation of Louisiana. "Look up the definition of 'normal farming practice.' You can't find anything about growing corn and then flooding it as a normal farming practice. It's legal baiting."

There's little doubt federal waterfowl baiting laws are ambiguous, but one thing isn't: Flooding corn for the sole purpose of hunting ducks is perfectly legal, according to the U.S.



Fish and Wildlife Service, which sets waterfowl hunting regulations.

Goins isn't alone in his contempt for flooded corn and those who manage and hunt it. Few topics generate as much debate among hunters as corn impoundments, their impact on hunter harvest, migration patterns and the ethics of hunting flooded crops.

"I think it's one reason we don't have nearly as many ducks in Louisiana as we used to. They don't need to fly south anymore," says Goins.

There isn't any specific research on the effect of corn impoundments on migrations, but Southern Illinois University-Carbondale wetlands ecology assistant professor Dr. Mike Eichholz thinks the impact is minimal. Despite the increase in crops managed and flooded for ducks over the past 20 years, their footprint is a tiny fraction of the overall landscape.

"There are so many factors that influence migrations, it would be difficult to determine if crops grown specifically for hunting play a role. It would also be difficult to even quantify how much is out there," he says.

Mississippi State University associate professor of wetlands and waterfowl ecology Dr. Brian Davis agrees.

"Snow coverage and temperatures influence mallard distribution more than anything. If they don't have access to food and open water, they'll fly south," he says. "The amount of

## PASS SHOTS | By David Hart

### GMOS BACK ON NWRS

The USFWS has lifted a 2014 ban on the use of genetically-modified crops and neonicotinoid pesticides on federal wildlife refuges. GMO crops have higher yields and can help refuge managers meet "duck energy day" goals by providing more food. Pesticide and GMO crops use on refuges will now be made on a case-by-case basis.

### WATERFOWL KILLS REMAIN HIGH

Harvest figures for the 2017 season revealed hunters shot 12.1 million ducks and 3.6 million geese, averaging about 10 ducks per season and a little more than three geese per season. Mallards were the most abundant duck harvested, followed by green-wing teal, wood ducks and gadwalls. California hunters shot the most birds, followed by Louisiana and Arkansas.

### GEESE DODGE HAIL BY LOOKING UP

A video posted on Twitter in August showed a flock of Canada geese tipping their heads upward during a Toronto hail storm. Scientists think the unusual behavior is an effort to avoid taking a direct hit. It's not a new phenomenon. Conservationist Aldo Leopold observed pintails doing the same thing in 1918. The birds are likely trying to reduce the profile of their heads and possibly trying to dodge hail stones as they fall.

corn grown specifically for agricultural purposes throughout the U.S. is in the neighborhood of 82 million acres. A study determined that the amount of waste grain alone would support something like 100 million

mallards. Not all of it is utilized by ducks, of course, but to suggest that flooded corn is disrupting migration patterns any more than all the other corn grown as a crop is just speculation."

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