



# OCTOBER 2025

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## BEST LAID PLANS

In one of my previous careers, in the military, I was, what was called then, a Production Supervisor. This person was basically in charge of all aircraft maintenance activities on the flight line. Aircraft almost always came back from flight with some sort of maintenance issue(s) which could impact the next days flying schedule. It was this person's job to formulate a plan in order to meet that schedule. In some cases, it was not so easy. You have to take in estimates and time schedules to make sure you have enough time to get the aircraft ready. You have to take into considerations if the aircraft is configured for what the schedule calls for and if not, do you have enough time to reconfigure the aircraft to meet that schedule. This person, often times, has to come up with several plans to meet the next days schedule. If plan A does not work, the aircraft does not get fixed in time, you fall back to plan B and so forth until you run out of options. There were times, on the aircraft that I have worked on, that that was not an option. Meaning, the flight was a Higher Headquarters mission and could not be missed, and that was an entirely different situation.

Waterfowling or the art of waterfowling is very similar. You have to plan in order to be successful. Granted, you do get lucky some-times, plodding out in the middle of the marsh after shooting time, have no idea of where to go, you decide on a location less than ideal, throw out a few raggedy decoys and shoot a limit in 30 minutes. I know, I have done that, but the best hunts I have been on were through planning.

So, you have a spot to hunt, or an idea of an area to hunt, be it the river, a public lake, sweat line at an MDC area or even if you have a coveted reservation, did you scout it? With todays online tools, there is no reason why you cannot scout an area. Either drive to the location to see what it looks like, what the birds are doing or even by Google Earth, topo maps, just to get the lay of the land. MDC has tools where you can search a given area and see what pools of that given area are doing better than others (if you can believe the info), scouting is paramount!

You have scouted, you have figured out where to go, what if someone beats you to your spot? Or if on an MDC area, what is some other party takes your spot. You need to have a fall back plan, plan B and even a plan C. Make sure you have everything with you for all of your plans. Each situation and location to hunt can be different. In some areas you need a boat, in others it is a wade and shoot. For every hunt, consider it a Higher Headquarters Mission, one that cannot be missed.

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**SELL  
 THOSE  
 MEAT  
 TICKETS!!!**

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**MEMBERS MEETING**

This month's meeting we will be meeting at Jay Henges Conservation area for our annual MDC waterfowl forecast.

**We will be meeting at 7 PM** instead of our normal time of 7:30 PM. Please do not be late.

We also ask the members to hold off all questions till the end of the presentation so he can get through all of his material.

**LAST MONTHS MEETING**

At our last member's meeting we had Kevin Tod from Denny Dennis, who is the Purchaser for the store to give us an update of what is going on at Denny Dennis. It was a very interesting discussion and some notes that I took to pass onto you:

1. They are asking for feedback on what you would like the store to carry for Waterfowling. Email them with your ideas at guns@dennydennis.com
2. They do consignments for 20%
3. They do trade in for guns
4. 10% discount (except for guns) for MVDHA members, see Kevin for this.
5. Military discount 10% on all items except for guns you get 5%
6. There will be a new website being release later on this year.

**WATERFOWL CLINIC**

Just received word, that due to lack of interest, the Youth Waterfowl Clinic that we were going to be having on 11 October has been cancelled. We will try again on a future date. Last check, only five people signed up.

**FUND RAISER UPDATE**

Once again we will be having our popular fund raising event of the

Kenrick's meat certificates. This is for a gift certificate of \$300 towards a meat package of your choice from Kenrick's Meats at 4324 Weber Rd, St. Louis, MO 63123. Tickets will be \$5 each **OR 5 TICKETS FOR \$20** and the winner of the certificate will be drawn at this years Holiday party in December. Contact any board member for tickets or contact Jerry for tickets to sell at 314-603-6548 and he will get them to you. Re-member, this is for your MVDHA Club.

**BRING YOUR TICKETS AND MONEY TO THE WATERFOWL FORCAST SO WE WILL HAVE THEM FOR THE HOLIDAY PARTY OR GET THEM TO JERRY BEFORE THE HOLIDAY PARTY.**

**PRESEASON DRAW**

Draw results are available Oct 01.  
Did you get drawn?

**DU BANQUET**

Ladies Dinner or Banquet  
Two Rivers Suzies Ladies Event  
Corks for Conservation - A ladies event. Great food, wine, friends, raffles, and auctions!  
Lake St. Louis, MO  
Sat. • 6:00 PM CST

Heritage of Hawks Ridge

This is a ladies only event.

Contact Jane Bell at 314-570-1040

**STRATEGIES**

From the DU website:

**5 Strategies for Freelancers**

When waterfowlers talk about freelancing, they are usually discussing a mobile style of hunting that occurs outside the confines of a permanent

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blind. Although it can include some private land scenarios (knocking on farmhouse doors on the prairies, for example), freelancing is mostly a public land endeavor, where you're free to scout and hunt in a manner that suits you, and where success depends on your skill in putting together a strategy after considering a host of conditions and variables. Freelancing is rarely easy, but it's far and away my favorite way to hunt.

From the big rivers of the East to the flooded timber of the South to the sprawling marshes of the Great Salt Lake, savvy freelance hunters depend on some common strategies. We asked three hunters who excel at this style of waterfowling to share their secrets for success.

### 1. Avoid Heavily Hunted Areas

Fred Zink, co-host of DU TV and founder of Zink Calls, often hunts the windswept waters and sprawling marshes bordering Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair. These big waters hold a lot of ducks, but they attract a lot of hunters too. Zink says the birds quickly learn to avoid the spots that receive regular hunting pressure.

"You can hunt those traditional areas and see plenty of birds, but it's difficult to be effective once the ducks have been pressured," Zink says. "The biggest key to success when hunting public water is to hunt the spot that the ducks have just moved into. Say it gets cold and they move out of a marsh and into more open water. Even if they are the same birds that have been around all season, when they move to that new spot it's just like they've migrated to a new area, at least for a short time. They don't know where the

bogeyman is, and this can make even stale ducks easier to hunt."

**Freelancer's Tip | Hide That Layout:** Layout blinds are essential gear for setting up on big-river sandbars and islands, but they don't make you invisible. Look for areas with some sort of overhead cover, like a leaning treetop or deadfall, and consider bringing a folding shovel to dig a slight depression to help lower your blind's profile.

### 2. Follow the Water

If a shift in wind direction calls for knocking off work one afternoon, a rising river can be cause for a full-on vacation. Matt Harrison, DU's digital communications manager, has been hunting public land in southeast Arkansas with his brother, Michael, for years. He says there is still outstanding freelance hunting to be had in this area for those who are willing to put in the work. "We love hunting public ground, where everyone else has the same chance that we do," Harrison says. "And there's nothing like mallards in green timber. If we have the choice of shooting a few birds in the woods or a lot of birds in a field, we'll take the woods every time."

For timber hunting, Harrison depends heavily on the onX Hunt app. By dropping GPS pins and using saved offline maps, he can quickly find his spots in the dark. And if one spot is taken, he can easily move to a different one. After years of mapping and pinning his favorite areas, while also watching river levels, Harrison has learned exactly when these spots will have just the right amount of water for a good hunt.

"New water is the key to finding ducks in the timber," Harrison says. "If we know the water is just beginning to spill into an area, that's where we're going to go.

You can find birds in spots with only three to six inches of new water. The apps and online data that are available today make it simple to check all of that in real time."

**Freelancer's Tip | Call as a Team:** Good calling strategies are an asset in flooded timber. "We might have five guys blowing cut-down calls," Matt Harrison says, "because we set up in high-traffic areas where aggressive calling works. Once we break a group down, we have a lead caller who finishes them."

### 3. Scout More Than You Hunt

Rafe Nielsen, director of marketing for Browning firearms, has hunted the expansive marshes and flats of Utah's Great Salt Lake his entire life. When he was younger, he and his buddies used to hike to their spots carrying feed sacks full of decoys over their shoulders. These days, he accesses his hunting spots by boat and mud motor, even though some walking is usually required as well.

Despite his years of experience in the area, Nielsen says he still usually needs two days—one to scout and one to hunt—to be successful. "Without that day of scouting, it's usually a struggle," he says. "But if you do your homework, the hunting here can be pretty good."

Nielsen does most of his scouting with binoculars and a spotting scope. He parks at vantage points that allow him to see a long way and looks for concentrations of feeding ducks. Ideally, he wants to see ducks on the water as well as traffic in the air to give him a good idea of how birds are working a particular spot. When he's out hunting, Nielsen keeps his binoculars handy, always on the lookout for

something promising for the next day.

**Freelancer's Tip | Mind the Sun:** When considering where to set up, Browning's Rafe Nielsen is more worried about the sun than the wind direction. "A lack of shadows makes it exponentially more difficult to hide," he says. "In a marsh, I can usually work around the wind. In fact, I like to decoy birds in a crosswind, and I don't mind them quartering over the top of me if the setup is good. But almost none of it works if they see you shining in the sun."

#### 4. Make Magic with Motion

Most freelancers are very particular about their decoys. On the Great Salt Lake, Nielsen likes a mixed spread of mallards, gadwalls, and teal, along with a handful of goose floaters. In the Arkansas timber, Harrison and his crew typically deploy two dozen hyper-realistic mallards. Zink likes big spreads on Lake Erie when migration flights are on, but he downsizes to a smaller spread of his most realistic decoys when local birds become stale. Without exception, though, all the hunters we talked to stressed the importance of motion.

"I don't use spinning-wing decoys that much, but I love jerk cords and motorized feeders," Nielsen says. "Anything to make a ripple seems to really help, especially in the smaller marsh areas where I like to hunt."

Harrison adds, "Where it's legal, we'll have a spinning-wing decoy out 99 percent of the time. Also, pulsators are great to have, and we love jerk strings. I've never seen a raft of ducks where the water wasn't moving, so add as much motion as you

can. In the timber, you can kick the water too."

"On public water, you're typically hunting educated ducks," Zink notes. "If it's been warm with no new birds, I don't suggest running a spinner. But if there's some migration or inclement weather, a spinner will help. Probably six out of 10 birds will still flare from it, but you will attract some birds that will finish right over it. In most cases, the more ducks you can attract with the flash, the better off you'll be, even if many birds in the area are wise to it."

**Freelancer's Tip | Call with Caution:** Nielsen thinks that calling can actually hurt more than it helps in the open marshes where he hunts and where pressure is high. "I almost never call out there," he says. "The competition is just hammering on calls all day, so I keep quiet. I depend on good scouting to get me in the right spot, a lifelike spread, and being perfectly hidden."

#### 5. Hunt Overlooked Spots

Duck hunters love pretty spots. Big marshes, flooded green timber, and rolling grainfields can captivate our imagination and, at times, monopolize all of our scouting effort. But good freelancers know that some of the best spots are overlooked and in some cases not all that aesthetically attractive.

To this day, one of the best duck hunts I've ever had was over a 20-yard-wide three-inch-deep mud hole in the middle of a North Dakota crop field. The ducks were roosting on a nearby lake and dry-feeding in the field. My buddies and I set up next to that mud hole with layout blinds and just two dozen full-body decoys and two spinners. All morning,

we enjoyed steady shooting as small bunches of mallards and pintails broke off from the field and dropped right into our spread.

Zink says areas just like that are choice spots for prairie freelancers these days, especially in Canada. "It's more difficult than it used to be to get permission on the big, obvious fields that are full of feeding birds," Zink says. "But it's still easy to get permission to hunt the small loafing ponds, because you can't hide 10 guys around them. The key is to understand the difference between a true roost pond, where ducks spend the night, and a loafing or watering pond, which is often near the field where the birds are feeding."

In flooded timber, hunters often gravitate toward the big, open holes near the boat lanes. But Harrison and his hunting partners usually end up hiking a mile or more to their best timber spots—some of which are scarcely more than a bit of extra sunshine in the tree canopy. "One of our favorite spots is a tiny hole where a single big tree blew over," he says. "My brother and I hiked in there one time and shot our four mallards each in less than 30 minutes. Especially late in the season, ducks like to get into the thicker cover and sit where they're not bothered."

**Freelancer's Tip | Don't Sweat It:** Even in cold weather, you can expect to start sweating as you haul decoys and other gear on foot. Dress lightly on the front end of the hunt and carry extra layers with you in a backpack. Also, consider trading your blind bag for a shell vest or sling pack.

### MDC SETS SEASONS

#### MDC sets upcoming migratory game bird and waterfowl seasons

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – The Missouri Conservation Commission approved recommendations from the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) at its April 4 meeting for upcoming 2025 migratory-game-bird-hunting seasons and 2025-2026 waterfowl-hunting seasons.

#### 2025-2026 WATERFOWL HUNTING

**Ducks Season:**

**North Zone:** Nov. 1 — Dec. 30

**Middle Zone:** Nov. 1 - 9 and Nov. 15 through Jan. 4, 2026

**South Zone:** Nov. 27 – 30 and Dec. 7 through Jan. 31, 2026

Bag Limit: 6 ducks daily with species restrictions of:

4 mallards (no more than 2 females) 3 wood ducks 2 redheads 2 hooded mergansers

2 canvasbacks 2 black ducks

**3 pintail** 2 scaup for first 45 days and 1 scaup for last 15 days

1 mottled duck

**Snow Geese (White and Blue Phases) and Ross's Geese**

Season: Nov. 11 through Feb. 6, 2026

#### White-Fronted Geese

Season: Nov. 11 — Feb. 6, 2026

#### Canada Geese and Brant

Season: Oct. 4 - 12 and Nov. 11 – Feb. 6, 2026

#### Light Goose Conservation

Season: Feb. 7 — April 30, 2026

#### YOUTH HUNTING DAYS

North Zone: Oct. 25 and 26

Middle Zone: Oct. 25 and 26

South Zone: Nov. 22 and 23

#### Up Coming Events

**Oct 8 : Waterfowl Forecast**

**Nov 12 : NO MEETING**

**Dec 10 : Holiday Party**



### 2025 WATERFOWL BREEDING POPULATION AND HABITAT SURVEY

SPECIES	2025	2024	% CHANGE FROM 2024	% CHANGE FROM LTA
MALLARD	6.55	6.61	▼ 1	▼ 17
GADWALL	2.41	2.28	▲ 6	▲ 17
AMERICAN WIGEON	3.19	2.92	▲ 9	▲ 22
GREEN-WINGED TEAL	2.55	3.01	▼ 15	▲ 16
BLUE-WINGED TEAL	4.43	4.60	▼ 4	▼ 13
NORTHERN PINTAIL	2.24	1.98	▲ 13	▼ 41
NORTHERN SHOVELER	2.76	2.65	▲ 4	▲ 4
REDHEAD	0.92	0.78	▲ 17	▲ 25
CANVASBACK	0.69	0.57	▲ 22	▲ 17
SCAUP	3.68	4.07	▼ 10	▼ 25
<b>TOTAL DUCKS</b>	<b>33.98</b>	<b>33.99</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>▼ 4</b>

NUMBERS IN MILLIONS, LTA (LONG-TERM AVERAGE)

### General Information

This newsletter is distributed to our active members. For non-active members check the website for the current newsletter. We have our general meeting the second Wednesday of every month at 7:30 PM and our Board of Directors' Meeting every fourth Monday at 7 PM. Members meetings are held at Borgettis Bar & Grill 1667 South Old Hwy 141 Fenton MO. Board Meetings are also held at Borgettis Bar & Grill 1667 South Old Hwy 141 Fenton MO. In case of bad weather call Ken Liebel at 314-822-8030 or Jerry Mercurio at 314-603-6548.

Visit YOUR web site at <https://mvdha.com> to get the most recent news, events and updates. There you will find this newsletter and other helpful information concerning conservation and the great outdoors that we love. If you would like to be added to the email listing of important news and updates you can do that through the web site through the contact us link, fill out the form and make sure you add your email address.

Any comments or suggestions concerning the newsletter or the website can be sent to [mvdha@mvdha.com](mailto:mvdha@mvdha.com). I am always looking forwards to suggestions concerning content and what you would like to see or be presented in these publications.

**Next members meeting: October 8, 2025 (Jay Henges 7 PM)**

**Next Board Meeting: October 27, 2025**

**Members are invited to the Board Meeting**

**Member's meeting start at 7:30, Board meeting starts at 7:00**

## MISSISSIPPI VALLEY DUCK HUNTERS ASSN. INC.

*"A Nonprofit Association of, by, and for the Duck Hunters"*

"ST. LOUIS' NONPROFIT ASSOCIATION"

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