



## **Wildlife Management Report**

*January 2018*

As the area's only youth-focused wildlife management area, Gardner Camp staff work hard to prepare the site for successful youth hunting and outdoor education. Managing our site for wildlife and youth is a process and takes work throughout the entire year, even in the off-season. In fact, with waterfowl and deer season wrapping up, we are working on preparing the property for next season—draining the lakes, drying out the flooded areas and preparing the soil for planting season. Waterfowl, deer and dove are wildlife species in which we focus at Gardner Camp. In order for youth to be successful in hunting at GC, the location of food plots, construction and placement of blinds and timely management practices like mowing, burning, planting food sources, removal of invasive species and pumping water must be well thought out.

### **WATERFOWL**

All wildlife need food, water, shelter and space. We manage our acreage by providing these habitat components for all three types of animals. Our main management focus, due to our location in the Mississippi River Valley and the Gardner family history, is waterfowl. We have enhanced the site to restore the natural wetland areas and processes that existed years ago. Over a mile of canals and two miles of levees have been constructed to move water about the property. We pair this with three well pumps and almost 20 water control structures enabling us to raise and lower the water levels in our 8 wetland management units. This restoration is not only good for waterfowl but also provides breeding, nesting and feeding habitat for amphibians, shorebirds and aquatic mammals. We practice moist soil management in our natural lakes, providing conditions that encourage growth of seed-producing native vegetation like wild millet and smartweed and cover species like American Lotus. A summary of our waterfowl management practices:

- **Food Plots**—flooded corn fields we leave unharvested through duck season
- **Moist Soil Management**—within the lakes that occur naturally, we adjust water levels to maximize growth of nutrient-rich native plants like millet, smartweed and lotus.
- **Pumps**—allows for the addition of water in dry seasons to regulate and maintain water levels; daily inspection is needed to ensure correct water levels at the right times of the year.
- **Levees & Maintenance**—allows areas to be flooded or drained; need daily inspection of levees to look for leaks, damage by wildlife
- **Water Control Structures & Maintenance**—allows for control of the depth of water which controls the type and amount of aquatic wetland vegetation. Also, need daily inspection to look for blocked or leaking culverts

- **Population Monitoring and Banding**—IDNR bands approximately 200 wood ducks per year at GC
- **Control Hunting Pressure**—we only hunt on weekends, control our activity on the property and provide a refuge lake
- **Nesting Structures**--Provide wood duck and goose nesting structures

## DOVE

For our dove field, we choose acreage that is adjacent to woodland cover and plant linear strips of food plots--wheat and sunflowers. We construct small brush blinds in our 7-acre plot and orient them toward our replica powerlines for maximum flyover. Added to this, we provide dead tree perches and motion decoys so that the doves can't resist coming in. These elements provided successful hunting this past Fall. Wildlife management practices we use are:

- **Food Plots**—linear food plots of wheat and sunflowers planted adjacent to wooded cover and water sources; small area for youth safety
- **Burning**--used to expose seeds prior to hunting
- **Limit Hunting Pressure**—we only hunt dove 2 days per week to keep populations from leaving

## DEER

When managing for deer, we provide a healthy mix of food, bedding sites and woodland cover for the herd. About 15 acres are planted in a variety of corn, soybeans, turnips, radishes and winter wheat. During the year, our staff scout areas where deer travel, clear shooting lanes, mow access paths and place blinds in locations with the highest potential for youth to see deer. We also set aside bedding areas and work on controlling invasive species with spot spraying and prescribed fire.

- **Food Plots**—small patches of a variety of energy-producing food like corn and wheat along with patches of leafy greens like turnips and radishes. Soybeans provide nutrients (protein) in the leaves in the summer and then an energy source (beans) in the winter. These small plots are strategically placed in isolated spots near woodland edges and cover areas.
- **Limit Hunting Pressure**—we provide refuge and cover areas, limit the number of hunters to 3 and only allow hunting on weekends. We also try to limit our disturbance of the property.
- **Trail Camera Monitoring**—we continuously check our trail cameras to find out the health of the herd and where/when activity is happening
- **Invasive Species Management**—Reed Canary Grass-burn and spray

In the end our goal is to keep wildlife on our site to allow for youth to experience and learn about hunting at GC and to go home eager to hunt on their own.