



# The Importance of the Southeast Region to Waterfowl Populations

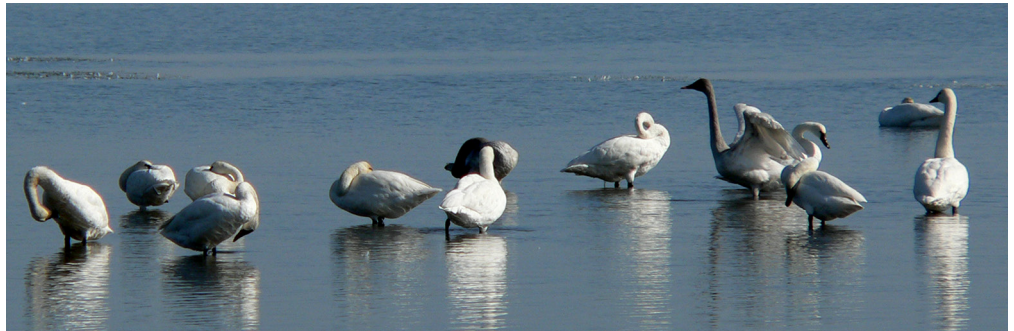
*Migration and winter can be physically and energetically demanding periods for waterfowl due to harsh weather conditions, physiological requirements, long-distance movements, and mortality risk during hunting seasons. Thus, habitat management must ensure not only sufficient food resources to allow waterfowl to survive the winter and return to their breeding grounds in good physical condition but also suitable conditions for pair bonding and other important life-history events.*

National wildlife refuges (NWR) in the Southeast contribute to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) by providing foraging habitat and sanctuary for millions of waterfowl that migrate through and winter in North America.

- Approximately 70% (nine million) of waterfowl counted during the Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey in the Mississippi and Atlantic Flyways occur in the Southeast Region.
- The Southeast supports a large portion of continental wood duck populations, up to 60% of the eastern population of tundra swans, and most of the continental mottled duck population.
- More than 40% of the black duck population in the Mississippi Flyway winters in Tennessee, with most using Tennessee and Cross Creeks NWRs.

More than half of the 130 NWRs in the Southeast host significant numbers of waterfowl and contribute to the NAWMP objectives.

- Peak counts of waterfowl range from 100,000 to 500,000 on more than a dozen NWRs in the Southeast.



credit: John Stanton



credit: Michelle Horath

- A handful of NWRs in central Arkansas host more than one million waterfowl in most winters.
- North Carolina NWRs host approximately 60–80% of the Atlantic Flyway's wintering northern pintail.

While limited research has been conducted to quantify the contribution of NWRs in the Southeast to waterfowl populations, NWRs have a history of providing high-quality habitat for waterfowl in order to:

- Bolster or maintain minimum annual survival rates for some species during hunting season
- Maintain breeding stock when population levels are low
- Increase body condition of individuals before spring migration resulting in greater breeding propensity and success
- Disperse waterfowl throughout the landscape for the benefit of local communities

- Act as field laboratories to determine the most efficient and effective means of managing habitat.

NWRs support local economies and contribute to a billion-dollar waterfowl hunting industry by providing hunting opportunities and habitat for waterfowl harvested on nearby private and other public land.

- Approximately one-third of waterfowl harvested in the United States are taken in the ten Southeastern states.
- The number of active waterfowl hunters in the Southeast exceeds 260,000, which is nearly one third of active hunters in the United States.

## For more information, contact

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