

The line leading the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's waterfowl report issued Thursday morning is the one that deserves the most attention heading into this weekend's opening of waterfowl season. "Due to recent snow and ice storm hunters should use extra caution. With below-normal temperatures (way below!) I've just decided to call this the "late season come early." Go out there and have fun but be of a mind that you are using extra caution at every turn. Cold weather is when the serious accidents can become fatal accidents and it's when the dumb little things that can happen turn out to have serious outcomes. It's never fun to have a simple slip and fall on the ice put you out for the rest of the season with an injury. "Ol' Joe just hopped out of the truck on the boat ramp and next thing we all knew ..." Hunting around the ice is a time to be especially cautious with your water dog as well. You'll need confident control of your retriever (particularly when it is in pursuit of wounded game) to make sure the dog does not get itself into trouble. End-of-season like conditions means most water sources are frozen and birds are roosting or taking a drink during the day wherever they can find water. They will concentrate on agriculture fields to feed. It also means a majority of the birds still hanging around are mallards. I love hunting the final weeks of the season. Local guides Kelly Walker and Jack Morris both report plenty of birds in the area, but birds are indeed concentrated where you can find open water and plentiful agriculture food sources nearby. This is a great time to try to arrange a field hunt for mallards. Guide Brad Albeck reports similar conditions, and lots of birds, in south central Oklahoma as well. If you choose to get out on the water just be careful around that shelf ice out there. When loading/unloading at the boat ramp keep that first line in mind - be careful around boat ramps. Here is the report issued by the Wildlife Department Thursday: Duck season is currently open for Panhandle counties.

Zone 1 and Zone 2 opens December 14. For zone maps and complete waterfowl hunting regulations log on to wildlifedepartment.com. Due to recent snow and ice storm hunters should use extra caution. Some county and WMA roads maybe closed due to downed trees. NORTHEAST Copan - Zone 2: Water level is normal. Habitat conditions are good. Native plants on units are excellent; soybean fields on WMA are poor. Duck numbers are fair and goose numbers are low, mostly resident Canada's. No report on hunter activity or success with the season currently closed. Bird movement in the area continues increase in waterfowl numbers with every frontal passage. There is plenty of vegetation to hold birds when shallow water opens up from frozen conditions. Birds are being seen on the main body of the lake. Deep Fork NWR- Zone 2: Deep Fork NWR wetlands are currently at normal level, with adequate vegetation available for waterfowl. However, most wetlands became unavailable due to ice during the survey period. The Deep Fork River is currently at normal level, and few spots along the river were frozen during the recent cold front. Low numbers of ducks are being observed at Deep Fork NWR. Mallards and wood ducks are currently the most prevalent species on the refuge and observed along the river where the river where open water is available. For permits, regulations and information about hunting at the Deep Fork NWR individuals can pick up a hunting brochure at any of the Refuge parking lots, or the can contact the Refuge office at 918-652-0456. Eufaula - Zone 2: Water level is normal. Habitat conditions are poor. Farming activity in the area is light. Duck numbers are low. Goose numbers are low, with local resident birds present. No report on hunter activity or success with the season currently closed. No millet was planted due to summer lake elevations. Native vegetation is very limited due to higher lake elevation through the summer. Some birds have moved in with the recent cold front. Most all of the shallow water areas of the lake, sloughs and ponds have ice over them, which has forced the ducks mainly to big water or deeper water.

Fort Gibson - Zone 2: Water level is .74 feet above normal. Habitat conditions are fair. Duck and goose numbers are low. No report on hunter activity or success with the season currently closed. Hulah - Zone 2: Water level is normal. Habitat conditions are good. Native plants on units and soybean fields on WMA are being harvested/ Duck and goose numbers are low. No report on hunter activity or success with the season currently closed. There is plenty of vegetation to hold birds when shallow water opens up from frozen conditions. Birds are being seen on the main body of the lake. Kaw - Zone 2: Water level is 2 feet above normal. Habitat conditions poor; no millet was planted due to late season flooding and very little native forage is present. Duck numbers are very LOW, very few waterfowl on the WMA, this last cold front pushed nearly 100% of the birds out. Goose numbers are low, geese are staying close to Ponca City and north to Newkirk. No report on hunter activity or success with the season currently closed. All ponds are frozen, as well as the Arkansas River, Beaver Creek and the Arkansas River arm of Kaw Lake. Open water is present down stream of Bear Creek Boat Ramp and remains open to the dam. Keystone - Zone 2: Water level is .5 feet below normal. On a scale 1-10 habitat conditions are a 3. Almost all sloughs are holding water in the area, however due to recent cold front these waters are currently frozen. Cottonwood WDU is 50% full with good habitat conditions on the northern most part of the unit, however with the recent cold front the water is frozen. Duck and goose numbers are fair. No report on hunter activity or success with the season currently closed. Some birds arrived with recent cold front. Birds are using open water on the lake. Oologah - Zone 2: Water level is normal. Habitat conditions are good. Duck numbers are low and goose numbers are low. No report on hunter activity or success with the season currently closed. More birds are moving in with each passing cold front. Most ponds

and some coves on the lake are frozen. Some areas were inaccessible due to icy roads. Sequoyah NWR - Zone 2: Lake elevations at Kerr are stable. Water level on Sally Jones Lake are high. Wetland management units on huntable areas in Sandtown Bottoms are about $\frac{1}{2}$ full and rising. Harvested and un-harvested soybeans and winter wheat are present at the Sandtown Bottoms and Webbers Falls Management Units. Approximately 3,000 ducks are present on the Sandtown bottoms Management unit . Duck numbers on Kerr Reservoir are fair. Approximately 8,000 snow geese are present on the Sandtown Bottoms Management Unit. No report on hunter activity or success with the season currently closed. Cold weather has caused many birds to move to open-water on Kerr Reservoir. Snow and ice are covering most of the landscape. All wetlands are frozen. Sooner - Zone 2: Water level is normal. Habitat conditions on lake are fair. Winter wheat around the area is looking good this year. Duck numbers are good, mostly mallards. Goose numbers are fair. No report on hunter activity or success with the season currently closed. Major movement of waterfowl this past week. Ponds are iced up so waterfowl are concentrating on rivers and lakes, especially where there is good agriculture base as food source. Webbers Falls - Zone 2: Water level is 2.75 feet above normal. Habitat conditions are good with smartweed, barnyard grass, bidens, cut soybeans, corn, milo and winter wheat in the area. Duck and goose numbers are low. No report on hunter activity or success with the season currently closed. SOUTHEAST Hugo - Zone 2: Water level is normal. Habitat conditions are fair. Duck and goose numbers are low. No report on hunter activity or success with the season currently closed. A major ice storm hit Choctaw County over the weekend, trees have fallen across county and WMA roads making access impossible. With the amount of damage it may take a couple of weeks to get roads opened to the public. Red Slough - Zone 2: Some units are full, most have huntable water. Habitat conditions are good. Duck and goose number are low. No report on hunter activity or success with the

season currently closed. Duck numbers are down with recent cold front. Texoma - Zone 2: Water level is 7 feet below normal. Habitat conditions are poor at current lake level. The lake would have to rise 4 feet to get into good habitat. Duck and goose numbers are very low. No report on hunter activity or success with the season currently closed. Birds are not stopping due to poor habitat conditions. Wister - Zone 2: Water level is 1.5 feet above normal. Habitat conditions are good, with smartweed, sedges and acorns present. Duck numbers are moderate and goose numbers are low. No report on hunter activity or success with the season currently closed. Some bird movement occurred with last cold front. Due to recent ice storm road conditions are hazardous. NORTHWEST Canton - Zone 1: Water level is 13.1 feet below normal. Native vegetation is in good condition, but currently not flooded. Winter wheat around the area is mostly planted and in good condition. Duck numbers are fair. Goose numbers are good. No report on hunter activity or success with the season currently closed. Bird numbers have decreased due to the lack of open water. The northwest portion of the lake is dry, and the only usable boat ramp is at the Canadian Campground day use area. Ft. Supply - Zone 1: Water level is normal. Habitat conditions are fair; some native food is available around the lake. Local winter wheat is in mostly fair condition. Duck numbers are low and goose numbers are good. No report on hunter activity or success with the season currently closed. Duck movement has been low over the past week. Goose movement has increased. The lake is currently 99% frozen and all sloughs are frozen. All boat ramps are inaccessible due to ice. SOUTHWEST Ft. Cobb - Zone 2: Water level is 5.76 feet below normal. Habitat conditions poor due to the lake level. Local winter wheat is in fair condition and peanut, soybean and milo harvest is winding down. Duck numbers are high. Goose numbers are high. No report on hunter activity or success with the season currently closed. Walnut Slough WDU is 40% full. Hackberry -

Zone 2: Hackberry Flat reservoir and wetland units are dry. Habitat conditions are POOR.

Some native vegetation is present in wetland units. No ducks or geese are present.

No report on hunter activity or success with the season currently closed. Mtn. Park

- Zone 2: Water level is 13.07 feet below normal. There is some flooded

vegetation around the lake. Winter wheat is planted on WMA in most fields. Duck

numbers are low. Goose numbers are high. No report on hunter activity or success

with the season currently closed. 7 of the 11 units are flooded on the

WDU. Ducks were using the WDU units.