

## **FACT SHEET**

### **Summary of Bird and Hunter Use, 2006-08 Seasons**

#### **Nelson-Trevino/Big Lake Areas, Pool 4**

During public meetings on the Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) in 2005 and 2006, hunters raised questions about the level of waterfowl use in the Nelson-Trevino Closed Area. In the final CCP, we decided to postpone changes to the closed areas in Pool 4 for three years while we gathered more information on bird use numbers and patterns. Aerial transects were established and airboat and ground observers were used to count waterfowl for a three year period. Hunter surveys were also conducted. The findings are summarized below.

In 2006, during 35 ground observation periods, a peak number of 3,964 birds were seen leaving Nelson-Trevino in one evening. Six evening observation dates correlated with aerial flights and with one exception, these counts were within 500 birds of each other.

In 2007, two airboat counts were conducted during normal flow conditions the day following an aerial survey. In both cases, the airboat count produced twice-as-many birds as the aerial count.

In 2008, five airboat and two ground surveys were conducted immediately following the aerial survey. Changing water conditions made the airboat surveys difficult and both types of surveys found fewer birds than were observed from the air.

During 26 aerial surveys, with only two exceptions, there were more puddle ducks and geese observed in Nelson-Trevino than in the current open hunting area of Pool 4. The primary species observed in Nelson-Trevino were Canada geese (peak count 1,010), mallard (peak count 1,205), and wood duck (peak count 235).

It has been determined that regardless of leaf cover, aerial surveys are the most consistent, effective and least time-consuming method to count waterfowl in Nelson-Trevino. Ground surveys are inconsistent as they are subject to “double counting,” require multiple observers, and routes vary due to changing water conditions. They are also very time-consuming due to the terrain.

In addition to waterfowl surveys, bag checks at Nelson Dike landings were conducted on 561 hunters over 16 dates during the three-year period. Hunters were shown an aerial photo of the Nelson/Big Lake area and asked about their hunting location. The percentage of hunters using the area between the Wabasha-Nelson road/dike and the proposed Big Lake Closed Area (the area that will remain open to hunting) was 75% in 2006, 66% in 2007, and 64% in 2008. Diving ducks represented 6% of the bag in 2006, 8% in 2007 and 0.01% in 2008, indicating that hunters were pursuing puddle ducks from these locations.