



Merritt Island Hunt Impoundment Conditions

November 1, 2022

After three years of consistent rain and few storms, 2022 brought the return of erratic weather patterns and a major hurricane. The Refuge started 2022 with an abundance of fresh water in the impoundments and while the rains have not been as consistent as the past few years, there was enough water to produce an abundance of submerged aquatic vegetation for the coming waterfowl season. Hurricane Ian threw a wrench into what was looking like another productive season. While the storm did not breach any of the impoundment levees, many sustained substantial damage to the road surface making them impassable to vehicular travel. In addition, the storm raised the lagoon levels well above the height of the water control structures and in some cases the levees. This input of lagoon water raised the salinity of some impoundments above target levels despite the abundance of rain that the storm brought.

The following is a brief summary of habitat conditions within individual impoundments open to waterfowl hunting. Water levels and salinity for November 2021 are included for comparison. Repairs to the levees are on going and the Refuge is making every effort to provide access to hunt areas. Conditions for individual impoundments are described below as of November 1st. Check the Refuge website or Facebook site for updates on repairs and access.

- Biolab (T-27A) - Current water level = 2.2, salinity 12 ppt (1.9, 3ppt 11/2021). Conditions inside the impoundment look good as submerged aquatic plant production was good through the summer. Due to damage to the road surface from the storm, access from the Biolab Boat Ramp to the Max Hoeck Spur is currently unavailable. The Refuge is currently working to rebuild the road surface and will open access as soon as possible. The impoundment will be accessible from the south via the Beach Road to the Max Hoeck Spur or from the north by launching from the Biolab Boat Ramp and crossing over the levee.
- Max Hoeck Creek (T-27B) - Current water level = 2.2, salinity 10 ppt (1.9, 5 ppt 11/2021). Max Hoeck Creek is currently in good shape and should be a productive impoundment this year. Due to damage to the road surface from the storm, access from the Biolab Boat Ramp to the Max Hoeck Spur is currently unavailable. The Refuge is currently working to rebuild the road surface and will open access as soon as possible. The impoundment will be accessible from the south via the Beach Road to the Max Hoeck Spur.
- Eddy Creek Impoundment (T-38) - Current water level = 2.1, salinity 8 ppt (2.0, 8 ppt 11/2021). This impoundment has an abundance of low salinity water and quality waterfowl food. Its position along the beach should bring in some interesting ducks this year.

- East Gator Creek (T-24B) - Current water level = 1.7, salinity 10 ppt (1.8, 15 ppt 11/2021). There was good growth of wigeon grass before the storm and the salinity remains within the target range. Be aware of equipment accessing the Peacocks Pocket Construction Area. Hunter access will be one way with traffic entering East Gator Creek Road and exiting Gator Creek Road. Please make sure that you do not block construction vehicles when parking.
- Catfish Creek (T-24C) - Current water level = 1.8, salinity 20 ppt (1.5, 10 ppt 11/2021). Salinity in the impoundment is above the target range but growth of submerged aquatic vegetation earlier in the season was fair. The perimeter road along the levee that is usually accessible during the hunting season was damaged during the hurricane and is currently being repaired. Access to the impoundment will be limited to the eastern side of the impoundment along the Peacocks Pocket access road until repairs are complete. Check the Refuge website or Facebook site for updates on repairs and access.
- Peacock's Pocket (T-24D) - Current water level = 1.8, salinity 21 ppt (1.3, 10 ppt 11/2021). The rebuilding of the levee began earlier in the year and construction was nearing completion before Hurricane Ian set back the progress. Construction continues and we can see the light at the end of the tunnel, but it is not likely to be completed before the waterfowl season begins. Despite a lack of water control over the summer, the dry conditions produced some millet and pigweed in the higher sections of the impoundment. Water levels will fluctuate with the lagoon until the construction is complete. This will make access to the impoundment difficult but will provide good teal habitat for hunters willing to put in the extra effort. Both sides of the impoundment will be open for hunter access. Please be aware of construction traffic and make sure that you do not block construction vehicles when parking.
- Gator Creek - Current water level = 1.7, salinity 5 ppt (1.7, 7 ppt 11/2021). Conditions have been excellent all summer and into fall. The impoundment is currently full of good quality waterfowl food. Please be aware of construction traffic entering East Gator Creek Road and make sure that you do not block construction vehicles when parking.

- Shiloh 5 - Current water level = 1.8, salinity 8 ppt (1.9, 4 ppt 11/2021). Conditions have been good all summer and into fall. The impoundment is currently full of good quality waterfowl food.
- Shiloh 3 - Current water level = 1.7, salinity 10 ppt (1.8, 5 ppt 11/2021). Conditions have been good all summer and into fall. The impoundment is currently full of good quality waterfowl food.
- Shiloh 2 - Current water level = 1.7, salinity 10 ppt (1.8, 6 ppt 11/2021). Conditions have been good all summer and into fall. The impoundment is currently full of good quality waterfowl food.
- Shiloh 1 - Current water level = 1.9, salinity 10 ppt (1.8, 6 ppt, 11/2021). Shiloh 1 is currently in good shape.
- M Pond - Current water level = 2.0, salinity 5 ppt (1.8, 10 ppt 11/2021). Water levels and salinity has been on target all summer. Waterfowl food production has been good.
- L Pond - Current water level = 1.9, salinity 7 ppt (1.8, 15 ppt 11/2021). Water levels and salinity has been on target all summer. Waterfowl food production has been good.