

HUNTING A RENEWABLE RESOURCE

Have you ever plodded through a wet marsh in the pre-dawn hours stumbling over debris and searching for a particular location hidden in the cattails where you can crouch for hours as the rain drips slowly off your cap and down your neck? Most of the 6,000 waterfowl hunters who will be afield on P.E.I. on October 6 have had such memorable experiences yet look forward each year to "opening day".

Normally, we hope for warm, sunny weather to usher in a special day but the same is not true for first day of the hunting season. Many hunters prefer to see an overcast windy day with occasional rain squalls but whatever the weather, most marshes on P.E.I. will be subjected to an invasion of gun-toting hopefuls. Long before dawn the first wave of invaders will awaken the marsh. Some will quietly secure their locations but others will tear up the ponds with outboards roaring. Exchanges between hunters will occasionally be friendly but more often than not some tainted vocabulary will drift through the predawn mist as problems arise or as strangers try to move into long established hunting sites.

Experienced hunters know that it is imperative to plan for a successive day - to build the blind early, to have the appropriate rig, to have proper clothing and equipment and to set up before the first idiot starts shooting at the stars. Naturally, there are game laws to curtail pre-dawn shooting sprees but a protection officer in his right mind would disturb hunters during the first couple of hours of the season. The concerned hunter patiently waits for the official opening and daylight so that silhouettes can be identified as ducks fly within range.

Hunting should be good again this year as the local waterfowl population

seems to be high. Of course, many of the ducks and practically all of the geese that are shot on P.E.I. breed elsewhere so the outcome of our hunting season depends on the breeding success further north. Have you ever wondered how we can invade the marshes every autumn and shoot thousands of birds and still have as many for subsequent years? The answer lies in wise management of the resource. Most important to waterfowl and indeed to all wildlife species is habitat - a place to live. If we jealously guard our wetland habitat to prevent draining, filling, pollution or other forms of destruction, we have taken a major step towards guaranteeing the future of our waterfowl resource. Of course our wildlife managers must also conduct waterfowl surveys, set the appropriate seasons and bag limits and see that the game laws are enforced. We are fortunate to have on P.E.I. a well-trained group of professionals in the Fish & Wildlife Division who have worked diligently to ensure that P.E.I. has not only good hunting but many other outdoor recreational pursuits as well. However, this will only continue if all Islanders work together to ensure a quality environment is retained.

How many of you have never hunted and vigorously reject the idea? Some non-hunters are content to let hunters enjoy their pursuit without interference while others would like to see hunting banned forever. This controversy has raged for decades and will continue, but it is well to remember that hunters would likely be the most disturbed if the autumn flocks declined. Both groups of people can enjoy the waterfowl resource for generations to come if they "pull together". It is the responsibility of both hunters and non-hunters to become familiar with waterfowl and their management so that the future will indeed be bright for this valued resource.

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