

# New wardens learn waterfowl rules at ‘duck school’

**Trista Pruett Daily Citizen**

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HORICON – As hunters prepare for duck season to open, another group is preparing for the hunters.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is preparing newly hired wardens for the rules and nuances of the waterfowl hunting season.

Approximately 25 new wardens gathered at the Horicon Marsh this week to learn different parts of waterfowl enforcement, including waterfowl identification, management and hunting regulations.

The week wraps up today with a day full of example scenarios.

Todd Schaller, DNR recreation, enforcement and education section chief, is in charge of the waterfowl enforcement training, more informally referred to as “duck school.”

“The purpose is to train the recruit wardens on the various parts of waterfowl enforcement,” he said. “We end it with a full day of scenarios, where they actually go out and we have actors. They make contact. Then they try to find the violation, or if there’s a violation. We kind of mentor them or teach them based on that scenario.”

He said that Wisconsin is normally in the top three states for licensed waterfowl hunters, along with Texas and Minnesota.

“We have a lot of very good quality waterfowl hunting areas,” Schaller said. “So it’s going to be a common work activity for the wardens as they go through their career, and we want to make sure that they know and understand the rules; know and are able to identify the ducks.”

Schaller said the training occurs every year that the DNR hires a new class of recruits.

“It’s always in September. It’s always right prior to the duck season,” he said. “The opening of duck season is this weekend. So this weekend, a lot of them will be in the Dodge, Columbia areas. Others will go to different parts of the state, over by the Mississippi River and around some other areas.”

The recruits include Wisconsin conservation wardens and wardens from the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission. The class size is usually between 15 and 25 people.

The recruits will be doing regular enforcement during the duck hunting season, which could include addressing complaints or making contact with hunters to check licenses and bag limits.

The wardens, both experienced and new, will be out for almost the entire day on Saturday and Sunday.

Duck hunting officially opens at 9 a.m. on Saturday morning. After that, hunting is open from a half hour before sunrise until sunset.

Chris Hamerla is one of the new wardens this year. He was hired in March. He said one of the things he enjoyed about duck school was the wide variety of knowledge between the members of the class.

“It’s a really good opportunity for two types of people, one with a lot of experience and one with not as much, to get to interact and learn from each other,” Hamerla said. “No matter how much you know, there’s always more you can learn.”

Part of the training was a test of waterfowl identification, where students were asked to identify waterfowl using only photographs, wings, full bodies and muddy carcasses. Part of the wardens’ job is correctly identifying ducks so that they can then apply the correct rules based on the species.

Hamerla had the top score, correctly identifying 50 out of 50.

“We’ve had some really good training, great instructors, and again, the diversity of people that are here just helps you learn and see things differently than maybe you’re accustomed to.”

Schaller said hunting could be more tricky this year because of the drought-like conditions of the summer.

“With the low water levels, particularly locally, areas that traditionally hunters have been able to get to are going to be vastly different,” he said. “So they may want to make sure that areas that they thought they were going to boat or canoe or cut through have water levels that are going to allow them to do that.”