

# **KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR WATERFOWL SEASON SETTING IN NEW YORK STATE'S WESTERN ZONE**

**25 March 2005**

Prepared By:

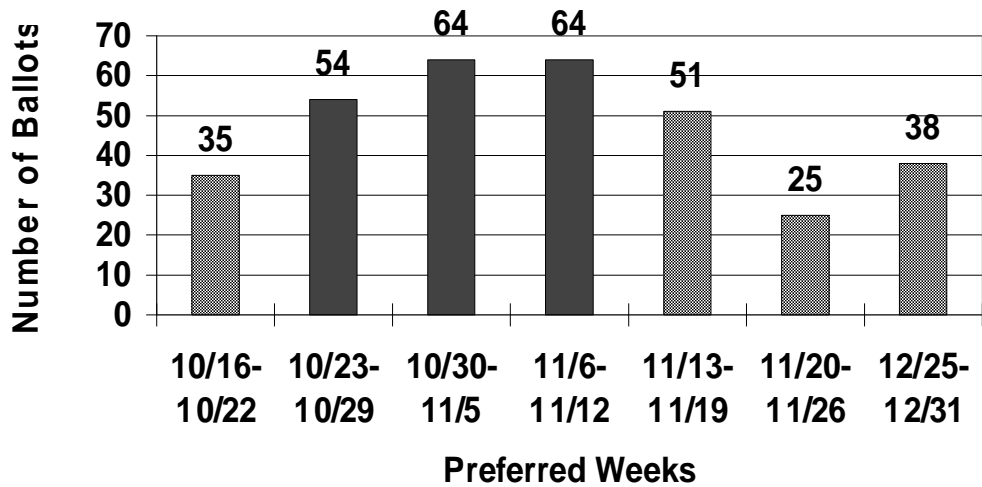
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Region 9 Representative  
Waterfowl Committee  
NYSCC

## **WESTERN ZONE WATERFOWLERS HAVE VARIED AND DIVERSE WANTS & NEEDS**

- Want early Oct opener - hunt wood ducks before 1st frost
- Don't want early Oct opener - no Woodies in my area
- Want all of Oct - Wood Duck peak, warm weather hunting
- Don't want mid-late Oct - minimizes 'dead zone'
- Want split season to harvest both divers and puddlers
- Don't want split season - don't/won't hunt divers
- Want long late split in Dec/ Jan - hunt big water divers/puddlers
- Don't want late split - lost days to weather
- Want all of November - peak of migration
- Don't want 15-30 Nov - interferes with deer season
- Want 26 Dec opener for late split - avoids Xmas holiday
- Want pre-Xmas opener for late split – less chance for freeze-up

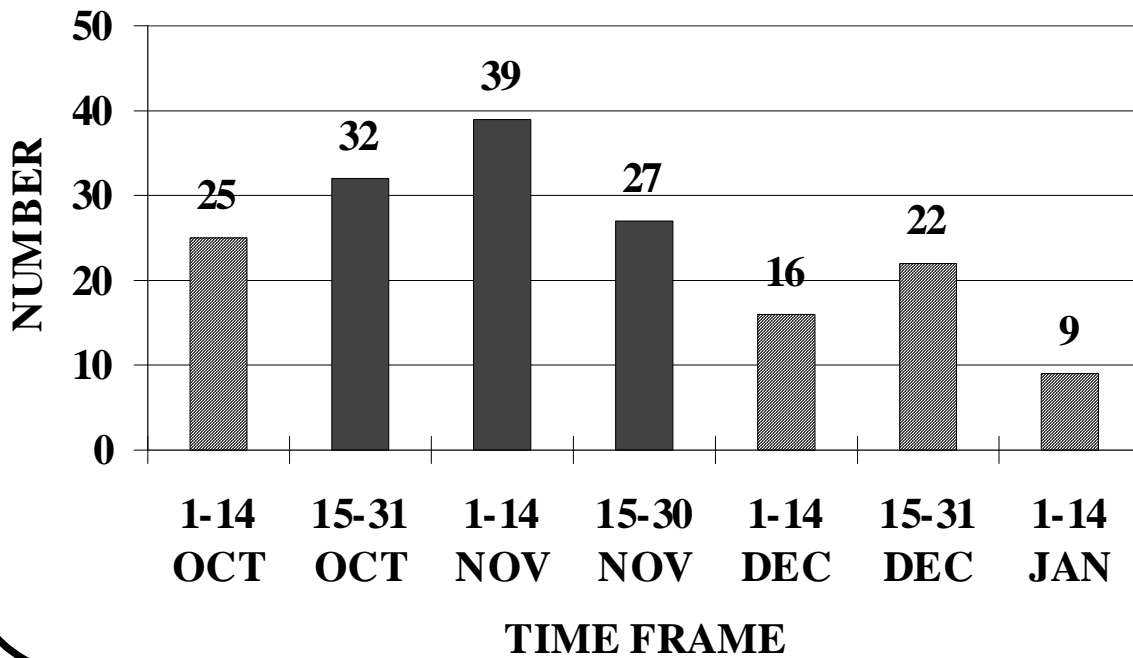
- This slide summarizes the many conflicting desires/needs/wants expressed to me by waterfowlers in New York State's Western Zone.
- It illustrates the many competing ideas and needs which makes season setting so contentious and challenging.
- The remaining slides do NOT present wants, needs, or emotions. They present **FACTUAL** information so that an informed decision can be made for input to the existing process.
- The data comes from a variety of sources:
  - USFWS and CWS harvest data
  - Iroquois and Montezuma NWR bird count and harvest data
  - Region 9 waterfowler surveys – 1998 and 1999
  - DEC surveys
- To the best of my knowledge, the accuracy of the factual data presented herein have never been questioned by DEC biologists.

**MOST PREFERRED DUCK SEASON  
WEEKS: 1995 FL&WNYWA SURVEY  
(BASED UPON 40-DAY SEASON)**



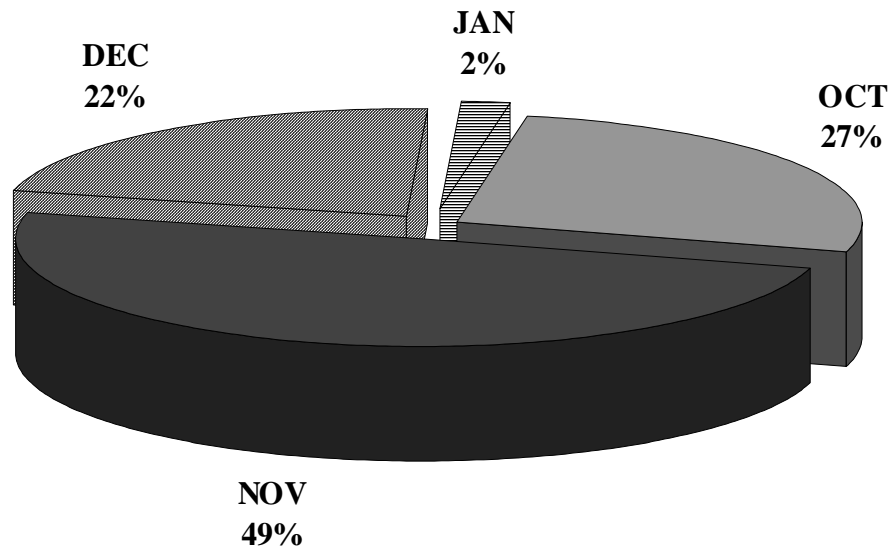
- 1995 FL&WNYWA SURVEY
- 3 most-preferred weeks in a 40-day season:
  - 4th week in October
  - first 2 weeks in November

**1998 REGION 9 WATERFOWLER SURVEY**  
**Q5: What Duck Season Time Frame Is Most Important to You ? (Top 3 Choices Only)**



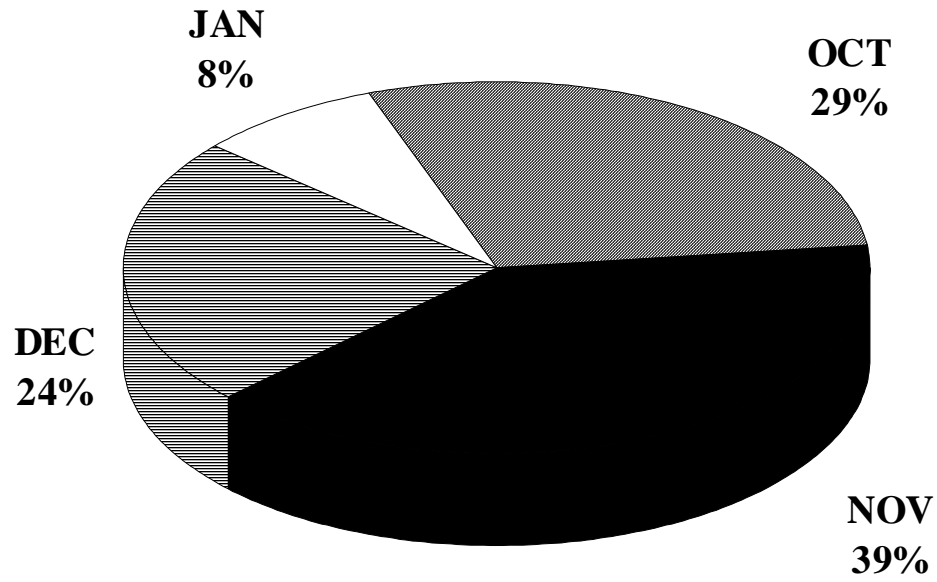
- 1998 Region 9 Survey
- **Most important duck hunting time frames**
  - **Last 2 weeks in October**
  - **All of November**

**1998 REGION 9 WATERFOWLER SURVEY**  
**Q2: What Month Is the Most Productive for**  
**Hunting Ducks ?**



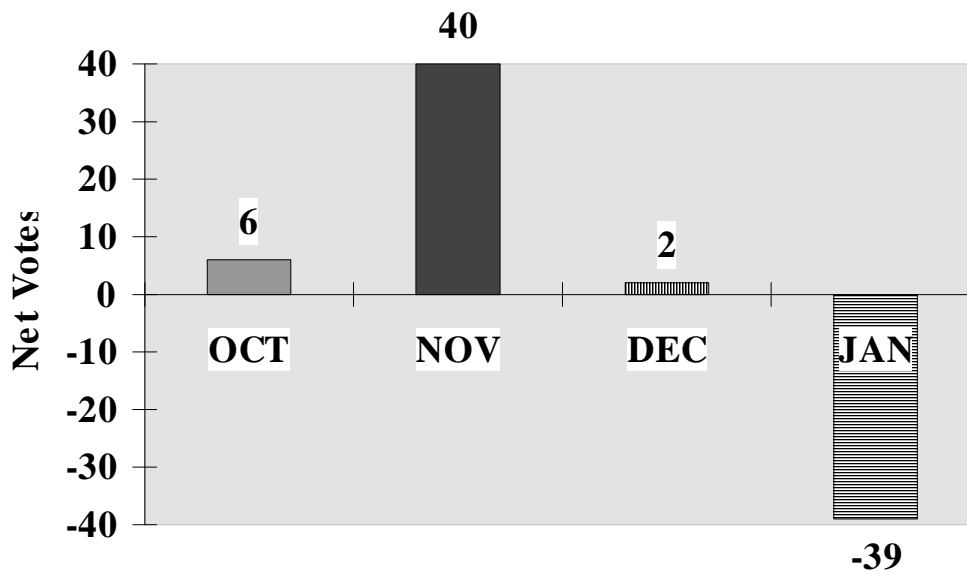
- 1998 Region 9 survey
- **Nearly 50% of respondents believe that the most productive month for duck hunting is NOVEMBER**
- 27% believe that OCTOBER is the most productive month

**Q2: Most Important Duck Hunting Month By  
Percentage of Respondents (Top 2 Choices Only)  
1999 Reg. 9 Survey**



- 1999 Region 9 survey
- **39% of those surveyed believe that NOVEMBER is the most important duck hunting month**
- 29% believe that OCTOBER is the most important duck hunting month

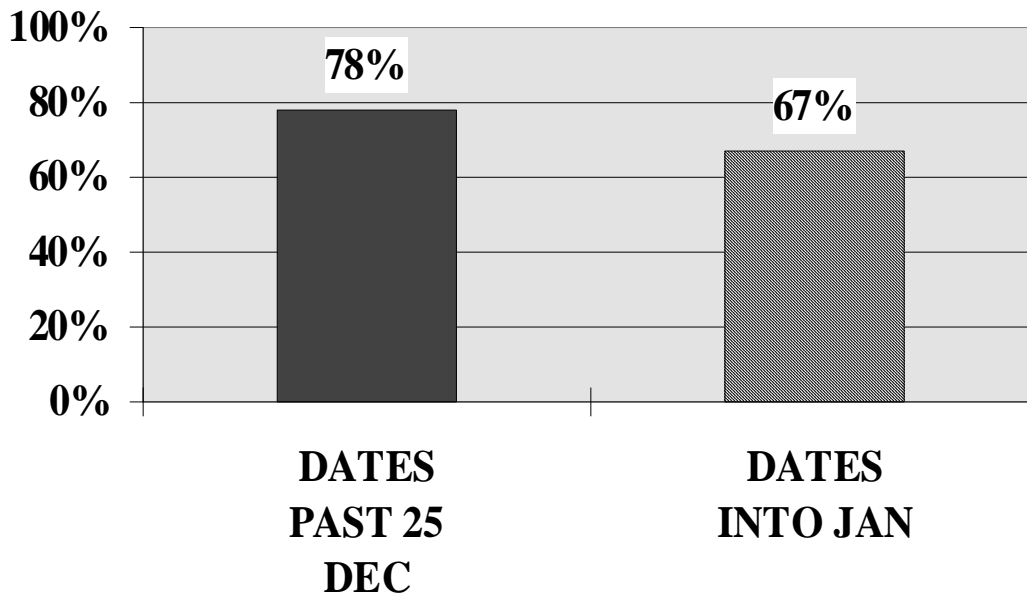
**Q2: Relative Importance of Oct-Jan for Duck Hunting (From Plus-Minus Analysis)  
1999 Reg. 9 Survey**



- 1999 Region 9 survey
- Used Plus-Minus Analysis to determine the MOST ACCEPTABLE answer
- Plus Minus is performed by adding up all the #1 and #2 votes for a month; then adding up all the #3 and #4 votes for a month; then subtracting the 2<sup>nd</sup> total from the 1st total
  - This technique will indicate what is MOST ACCEPTABLE and LEAST ACCEPTABLE to those surveyed
- **By far, November is most acceptable month**

## 1998 REGION 9 WATERFOWLER SURVEY

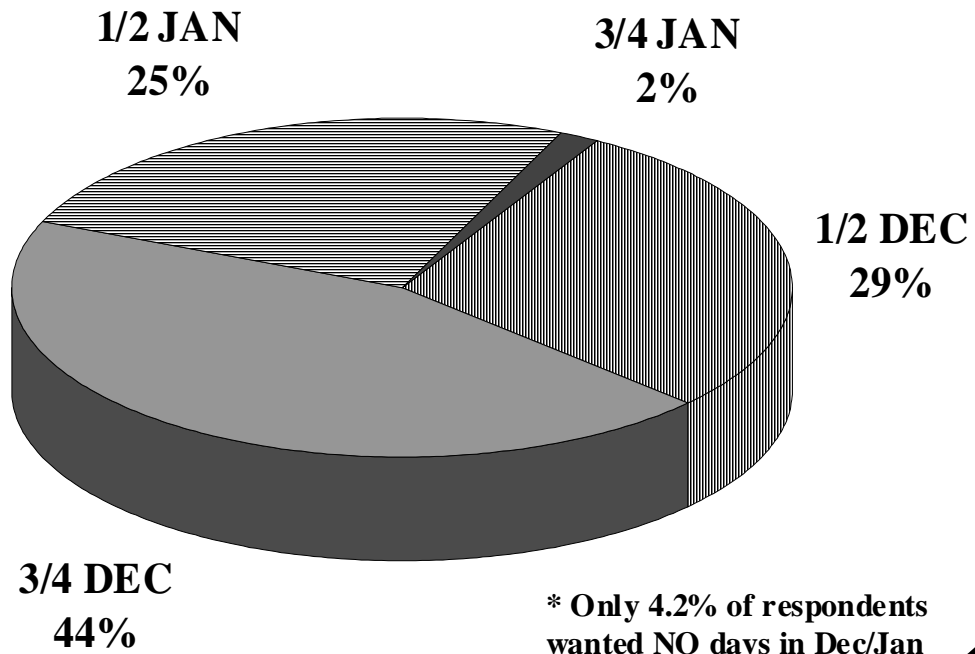
### Q6: Percentage of Waterfowlers Wanting Late Season Dates 60-Day Season



- 1998 Region 9 Survey
- More than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of respondents wanted duck season beyond XMAS
- $\frac{2}{3}$  of respondents wanted duck season days in the month of January

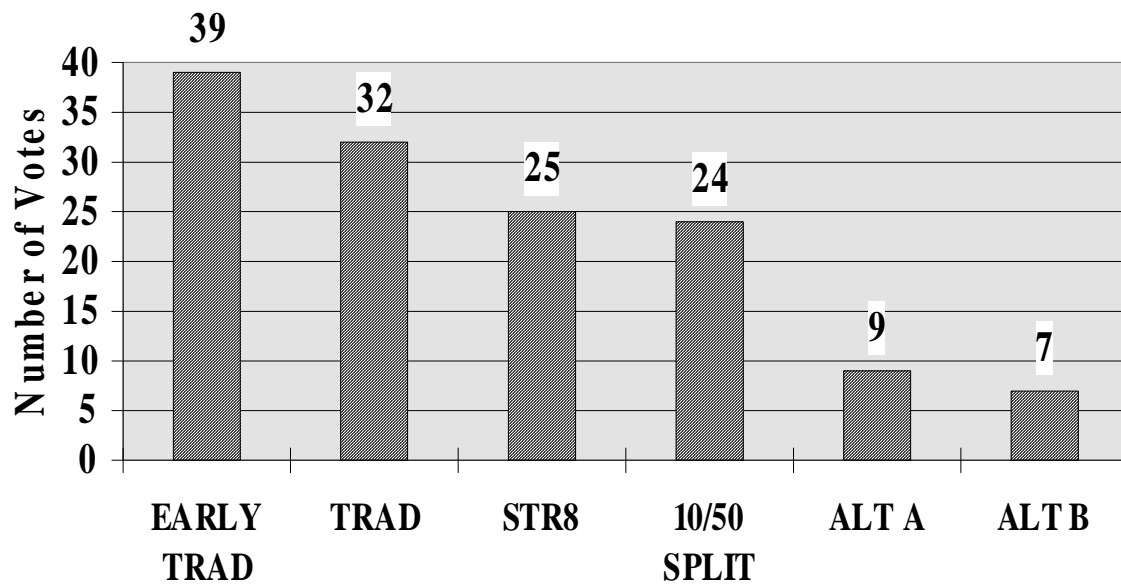


**Q5: Percentage of Votes Cast For Inclusion of Various 2-Week Intervals During the Late Split\*  
1999 Region 9 Survey**



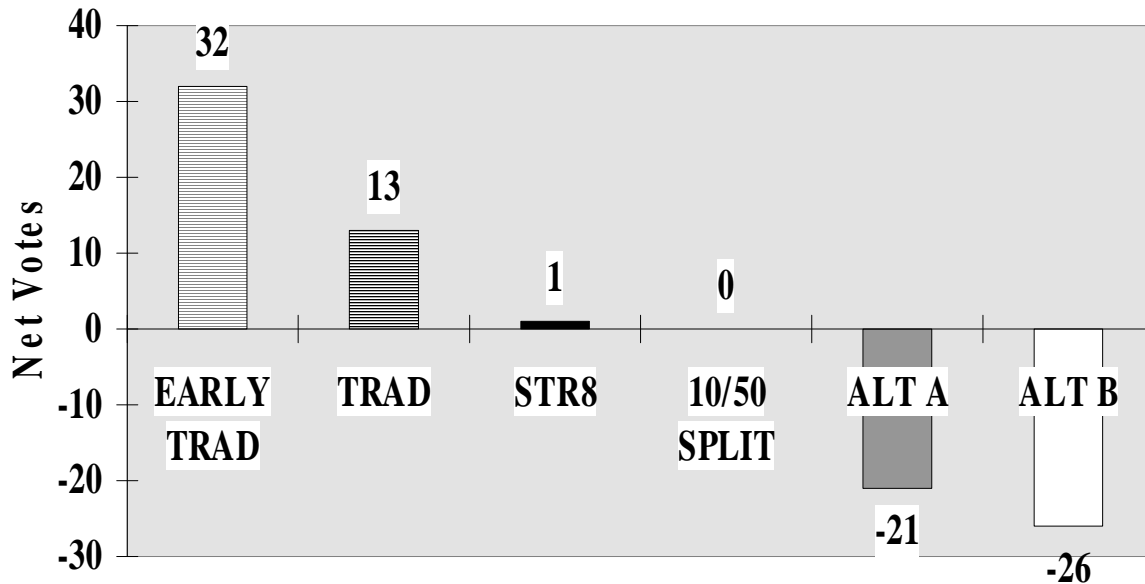
- 1999 Region 9 Survey
- Survey asked respondents where they would like late season days placed
- 44% wanted days in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> weeks of December. Next was the first 2 weeks in Dec.(29%), followed closely by the first 2 weeks in January (25%).

**Q7: Most Preferred Season Type  
(Top 2 Choices Only)  
1999 Reg. 9 Survey**



- 1999 Region 9 Survey
- More than ½ of the respondents wanted some form of the Traditional Season
- **Alternations were least acceptable seasons to Region 9 waterfowlers**

## Q7: Relative Acceptability of Duck Season Types (From Plus-Minus Analysis) 1999 Reg. 9 Survey



- 1999 Region 9 Survey – 71 respondents across all 6 counties

- **Least acceptable season type – an Alternation**

- **Most acceptable season**

- Early Traditional

- 48/12 split

- 10 Oct.-end Nov. & 20 Dec.- 31 Dec.

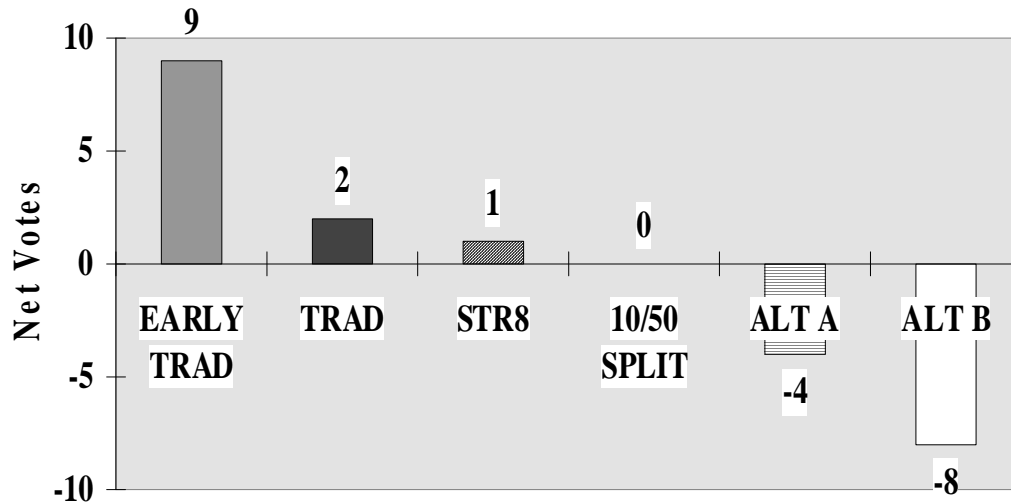
- Second most acceptable season

- Traditional

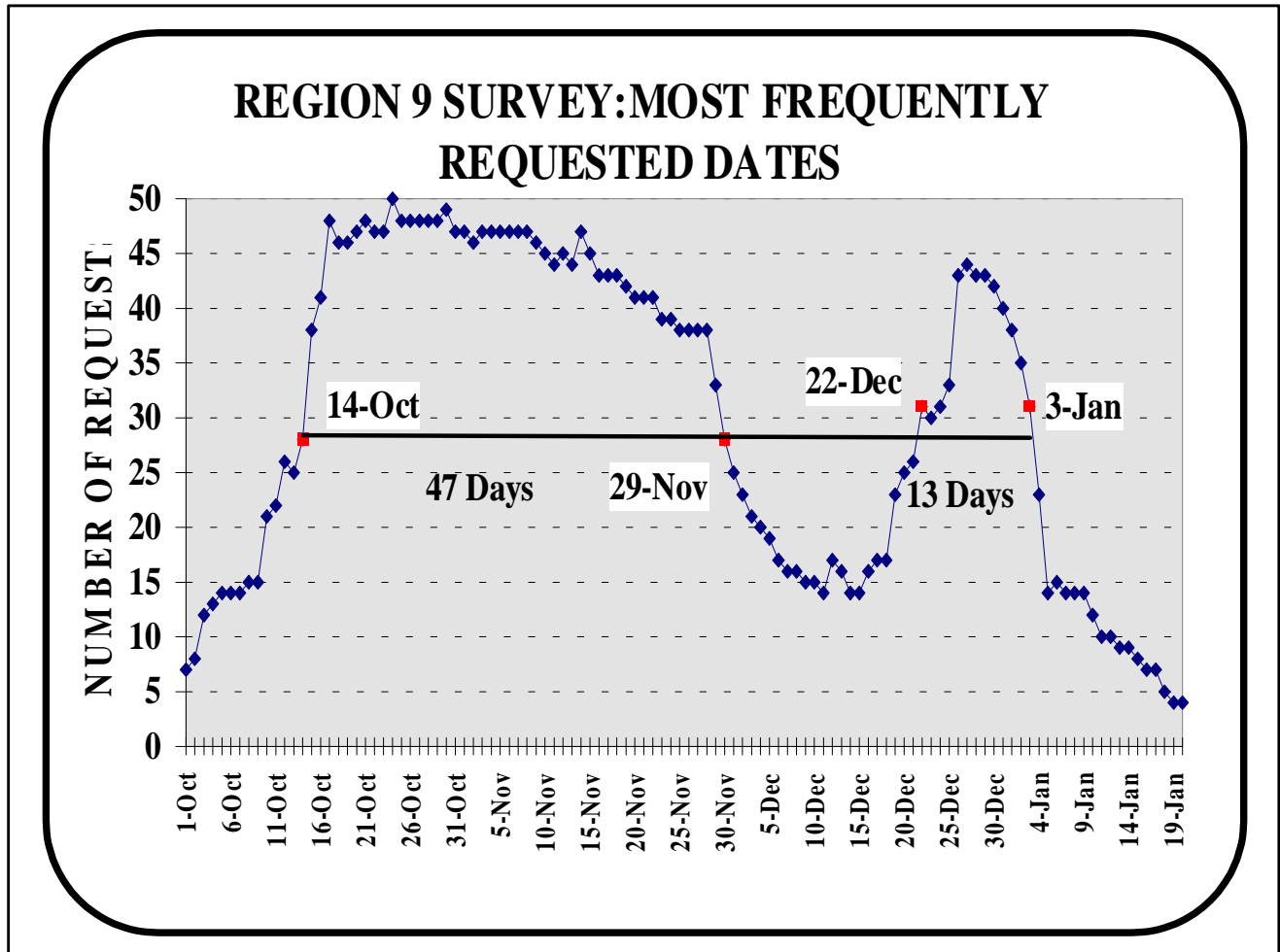
- 48/12 split

- 10 Oct.-end Nov. & 26 Dec.- 3 Jan.

**Q7: Relative Acceptability of Duck Season Types  
(From Plus-Minus Analysis) Niagara Co.  
Respondents Only – 1999 Reg. 9 Survey**

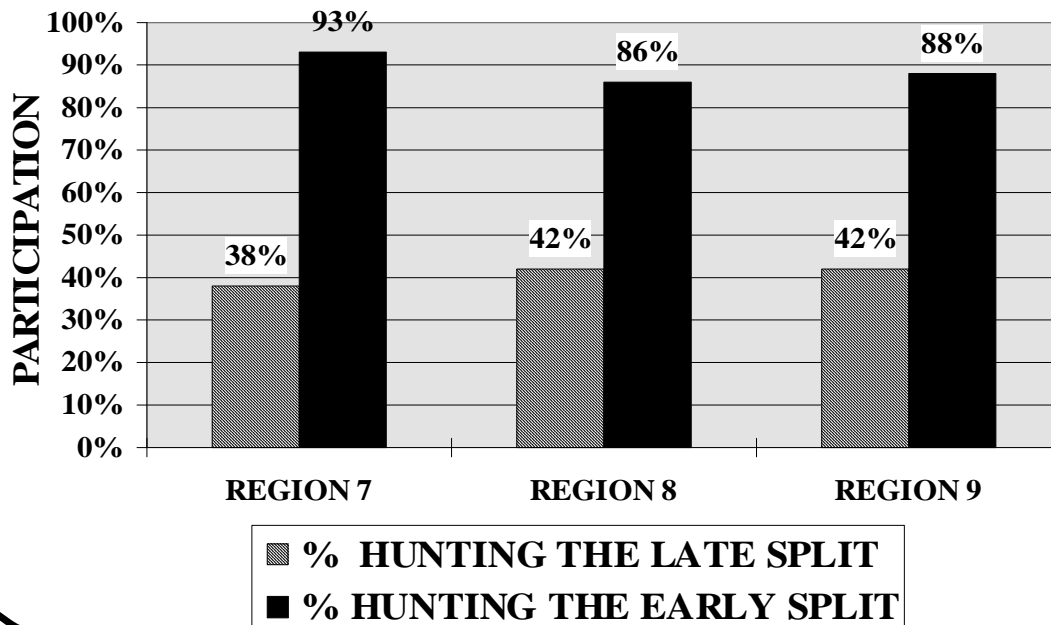


- 1999 Region 9 Survey – **Niagara County respondents only**
- Twelve Niagara County residents were surveyed
- Ranking of seasons is the same as in all of Region 9
  - Early Traditional followed by Traditional



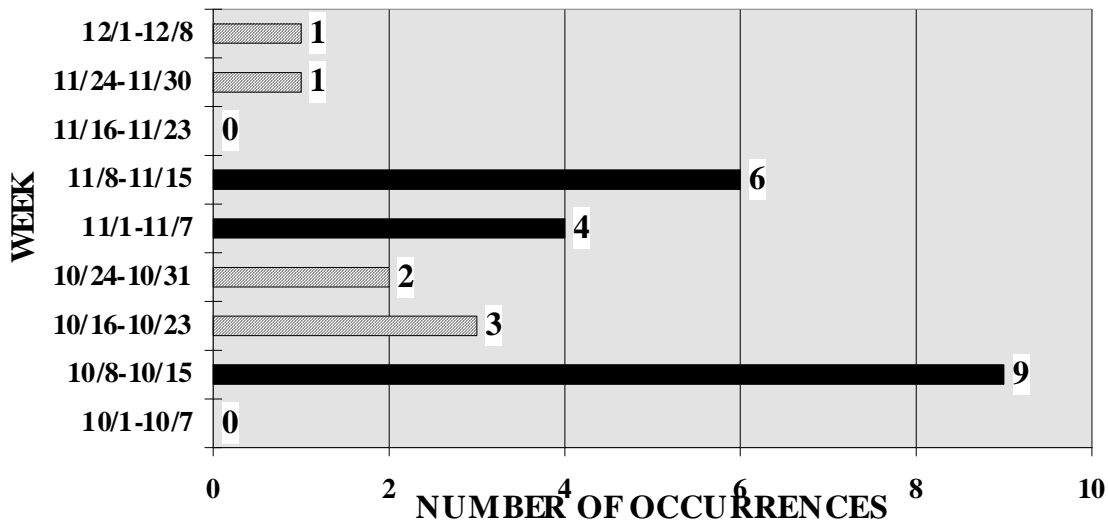
- 1998 Region 9 Survey
- Respondents picked season dates
- **In this survey, the season dates receiving the most votes were:**
  - **14 Oct-29 Nov**
  - **22 Dec-3 Jan**
  - **(47/13 split)**
- One vote was given for each date included in a person's season selection. All votes across all respondents were added to create this curve.
- Composite Season Dates were determined by scanning a 60-day window down the data until exactly 60 days were included. The corresponding season dates were then read off the curve.

## WESTERN ZONE WATERFOWLER PARTICIPATION IN EARLY/LATE SPLITS: DEC SURVEY, 1985



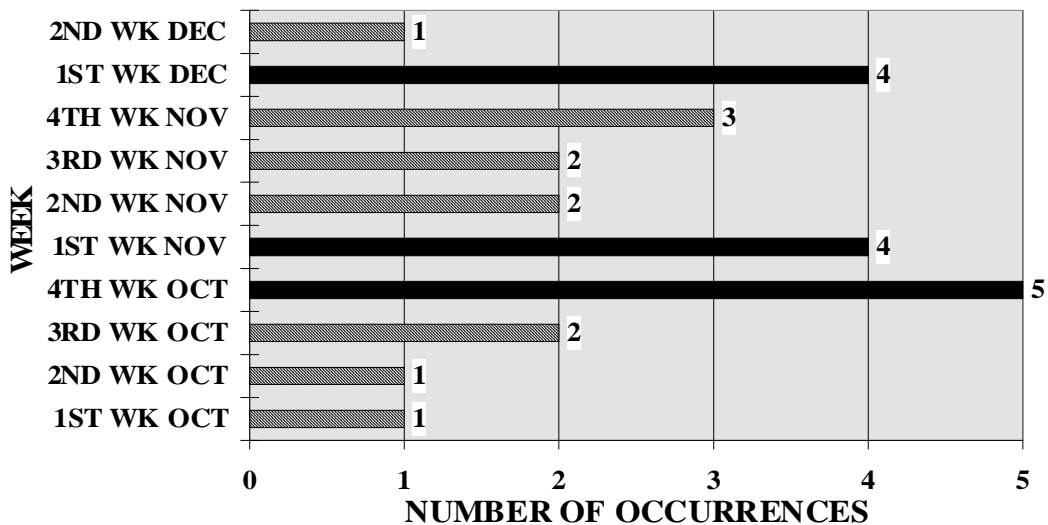
- 1985 DEC Survey by Region; hundreds of respondents
- Shows that 40% of waterfowlers hunt the late Xmas split, while 89% hunt the early split

## DISTRIBUTION OF PEAK MALLARD MIGRATION WEEKS AT IROQUOIS NWR, 1973-1998



- Weekly distribution of mallard count data @ Iroquois NWR over a 26 year period. Counts conducted by biologists/refuge personnel.
- Shows that first 2 weeks of November are the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> most important weeks for mallard migration.
- Peak week was the 2<sup>nd</sup> week in October
  - This is likely due to the buildup that occurs just prior to opening day

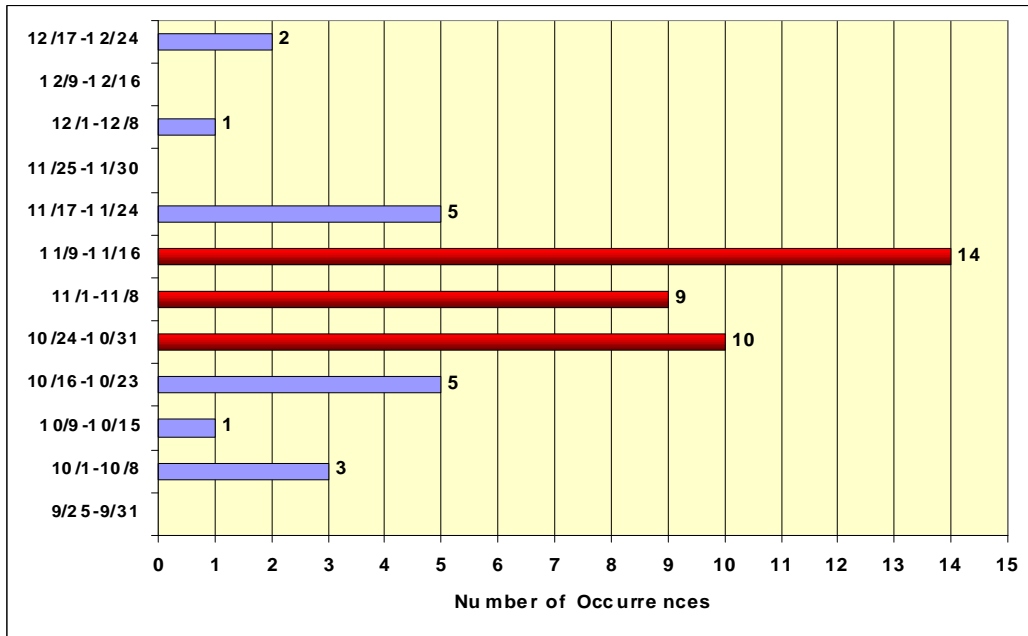
## DISTRIBUTION OF TOP 5 MALLARD MIGRATION WEEKS AT MONTEZUMA NWR, 1985-1989



- Top mallard count weeks at Montezuma NWR
- Only limited data available: 1985-1989
- **Top week is 4th week of October, followed by 1<sup>st</sup> week of November and the 1<sup>st</sup> week of December**



## Distribution Of Top 5 Harvest Dates at Long Point WMU, 1994-2003



- Harvest data for all ducks @ Long Pt. Canada, which is only 100 miles from Buffalo.

- **Banding data shows that birds banded in WNY are recovered at Long Point and vice versa. This shows that migration is the same for both areas.** Spot checks of harvest data at Iroquois NWR and personal log data for TWMA have confirmed that peak harvest dates tend to coincide across all 3 areas.

- The top 5 harvest dates every year were selected for each of the last 10 years. These dates were allocated to a week in the month, and the frequency of occurrence of the various weeks was plotted.

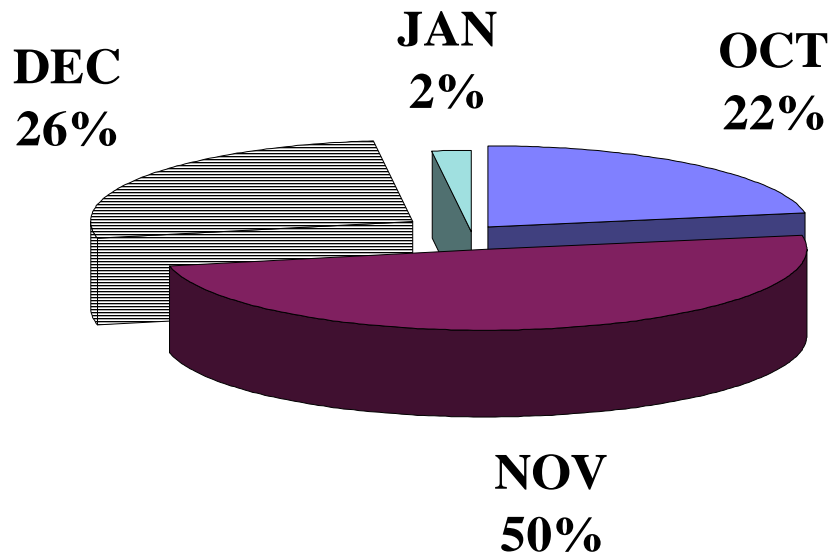
- **The data show that the top 3 harvest weeks are:**

- **The 2<sup>nd</sup> week of November**
- **The 1st week of November**
- **The 4th week of October**

- Because Long Pt. receives constant high hunting pressure throughout the season, it is safe to conclude these harvest peaks truly represent peaks of migration, not indications of hunting pressure.

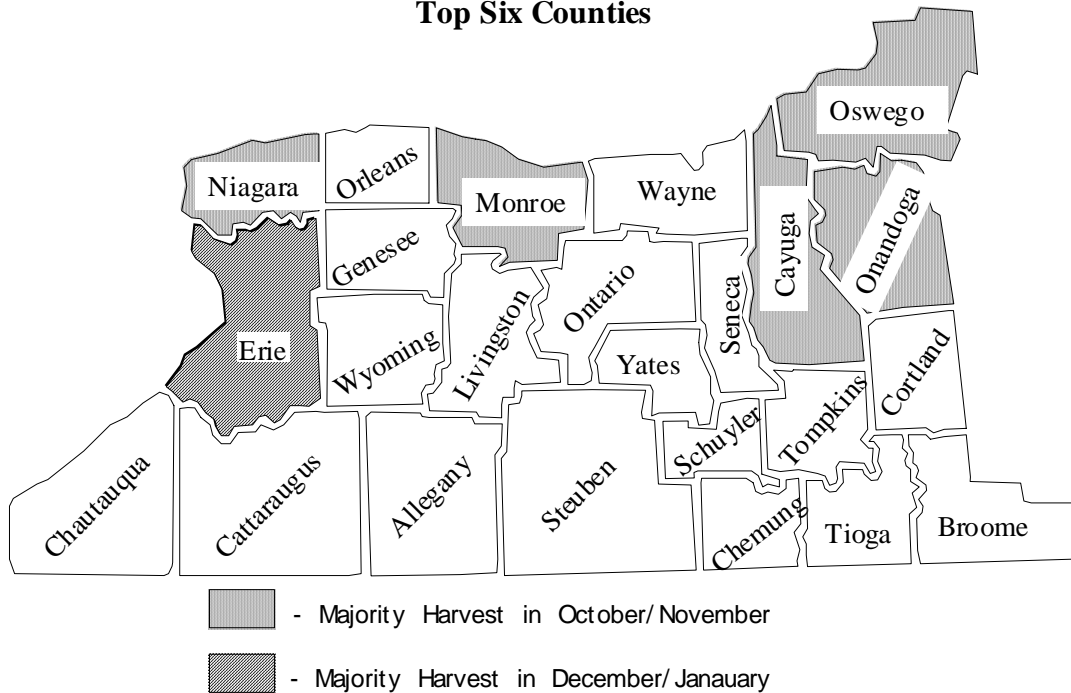
- The data show little evidence of major duck migration during the first two weeks of October

**PERCENTAGE SCAUP RECOVERIES BY  
MONTH IN NYS WESTERN ZONE, 1990-1996**



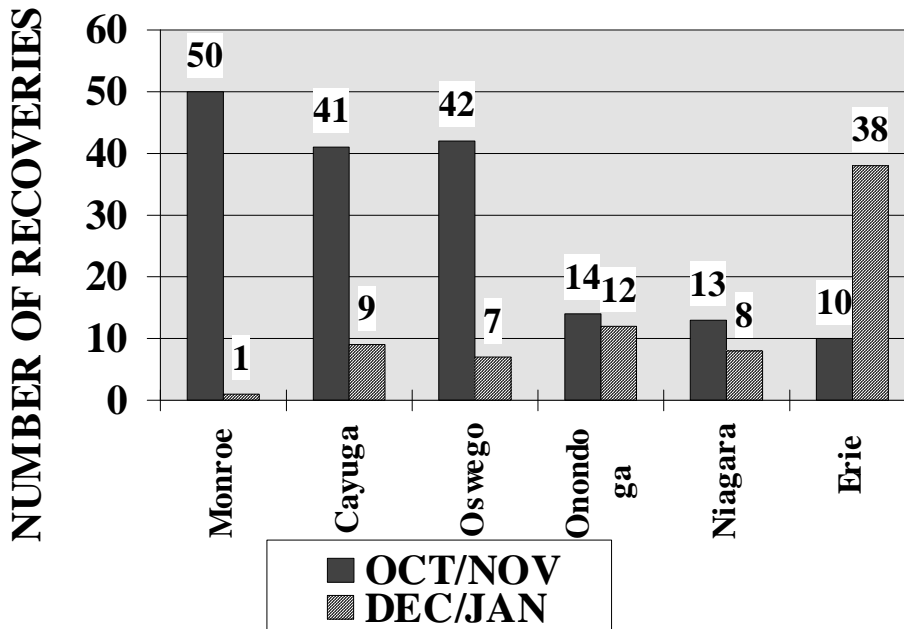
- These data are from USFWS harvest database for the Western Zone of NYS.
- **Contrary to common belief, most Scaup in WNY are taken in Oct/Nov (72%) NOT in Dec/Jan**

**Temporal / Geographic Distribution of Scaup Harvest  
in NYS Western Zone, 1990 - 1996  
Top Six Counties**



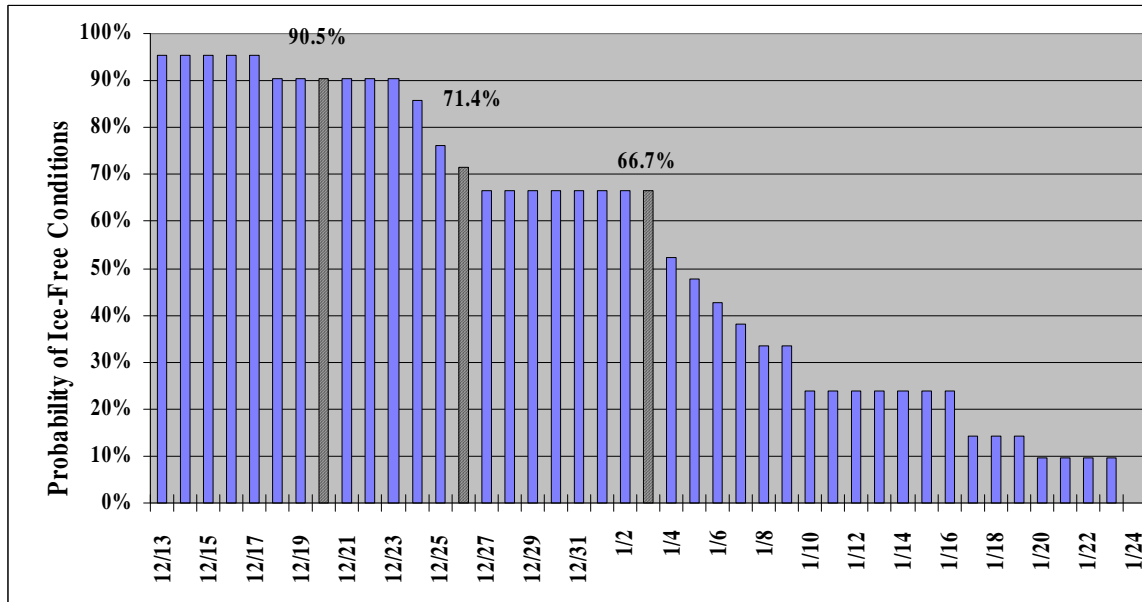
- This slide shows that most Scaup in the Western Zone are harvested in Oct/Nov.
- **However, Erie County is responsible for a major harvest in the Late Split.**

## SCAUP RECOVERIES VS COUNTY AND TIME FRAME IN NYS WESTERN ZONE, 1990-1996



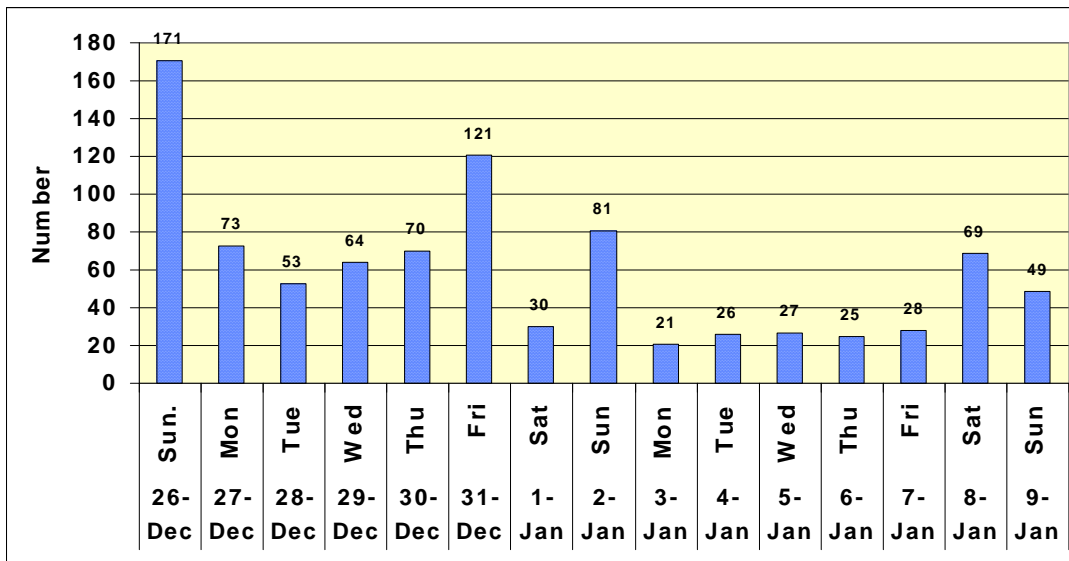
- Scaup recoveries by county AND timeframe in NYS Western Zone
- **Erie is the only county taking many birds in the traditional 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the season**
- Most birds are taken in Oct/Nov

## THE PROBABILITY OF ICE-FREE CONDITIONS ON THE NIAGARA RIVER, BY DATE, 1970-1997 (NSIDC DATA)



- This chart contains NOAA recorded data from 1970-1997 documenting the probability of ice-free conditions on the Niagara River.
- As can be seen, the probability of ice-free conditions DROPS nearly 20% from 20 Dec. until 26 Dec. It then stays fairly constant until 3 Jan. with the probability dropping only another 5%.
- **However, after 3 Jan. the probability of ice-free conditions plummets, dropping over 40% by 10 Jan.**

## Number of Hunters Per Day at Beaver Island Duck Draw, 1999-2000 Season



- Hunter participation in 1999/2000 Late Split at Beaver Island State Park blinds.
- Weekends show continued high interest, even into 2<sup>nd</sup> week of January