2021-2022 Category I Waterfowl Hunter Survey Report

Submitted by:

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Introduction

The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) provides public hunting opportunities on lands managed intensively for wildlife through the Public Lottery Hunts Program. The first waterfowl lottery hunts were offered at Bear Island during the 1958-1959 season, where an average of 1.4 ducks harvested per hunter was reported. Over the last 60 years, the Public Lottery Hunts Program has experienced growth in sites offered, species, and applicants, especially in the waterfowl lottery.

Category I waterfowl areas are only available to selected hunters through the annual waterfowl lottery. SCDNR lottery hunts are a random, computerized drawing based on preference points. An applicant may apply individually for the waterfowl lottery or with a team consisting of 2 to 4 individuals. For hunt parties, the team's preference points are determined by the individual with the lowest number of preference points in the lottery. Applicants, or teams, are assigned a random number each time a lottery is run. The computer then ranks all applicants by highest preference point and lowest random number. Then it selects the applicants with the highest preference points and lowest random number, then places that applicant into their first choice. The computer then cycles to the next applicant and repeats the procedure. When a site and date is full, it will then look at the applicant's next highest choice and place them in the next open slot and continue to look at the applicant's other choices if that choice was full. After cycling through all the applicant's choices and looking for an open slot, if there are no remaining slots available for that applicant's site choices, it will move to the next applicant. This repeats until all sites and dates are full. Unsuccessful applicants are awarded a preference point for the lottery applied for.

During the 2021-2022 waterfowl season, SCDNR held waterfowl lottery hunts on 13 Category I Waterfowl sites (Fig 1). A total of 31 youth hunts were hosted on 10 category I waterfowl sites (Bear Island, Beaverdam, Bonneau Ferry, Broad River, Clemson, Donnelley, Sandy Beach, Santee Coastal Reserve – Murphy Island, Santee Coastal Reserve – The Cape, and Wateree River Heritage Preserve). Seventy-seven adult waterfowl hunts were held on 10 Category 1 waterfowl sites (Bear Island East, Bear Island West, Bear Island Springfield, Beaverdam, Broad River, Sandy Beach, Santee Coastal Reserve – Cedar Island, Santee Coastal Reserve – Murphy Island, Santee Coastal Reserve – The Cape, and Wateree River Heritage Preserve).

Often, hunter feedback on lottery hunts is received by agency staff on or soon after the hunt date. In addition, social media platforms provide another outlet for hunter feedback, though at times the validity of the comments cannot be verified as posts are often anonymous. Generally, comments from lottery participants are received only when the hunter has had either an exceptional experience or a terrible one. Rarely do hunters comment otherwise.

In 2020, to better understand opinions and why individuals apply for SCDNR waterfowl lottery hunts, the Department conducted an online survey by email of all individuals that had been selected for a Category I Waterfowl Lottery Hunt during the 2019-2020 season. The survey consisted of a series of questions developed by SCDNR staff containing multiple choice answers or open questions that allowed applicants to write their own responses. Nearly 5,000 applicants applied for the 2019-2020 waterfowl lottery hunts and 1,073 were selected. Not all applicants

had corresponding email address, thus surveys were sent out to 904 of the 1,073 selected hunters (84.2%). Responses were received from 57.6% of the individuals that received the survey (n=521), and responses were very positive, with the most common criticism on the time to be selected.

To follow the 2020 online survey and to better document waterfowl lottery applicant's perspective on Category I Waterfowl Lottery hunts, SCDNR administered a second survey to hunters selected for a 2021-2022 Category I Waterfowl Lottery Hunt. This survey was conducted on-site on the day of the hunt in an effort to obtain immediate feedback after the hunt was over. Results of this survey provide valuable feedback to the Department that is used in the management and administration of the Lottery Hunt Program.

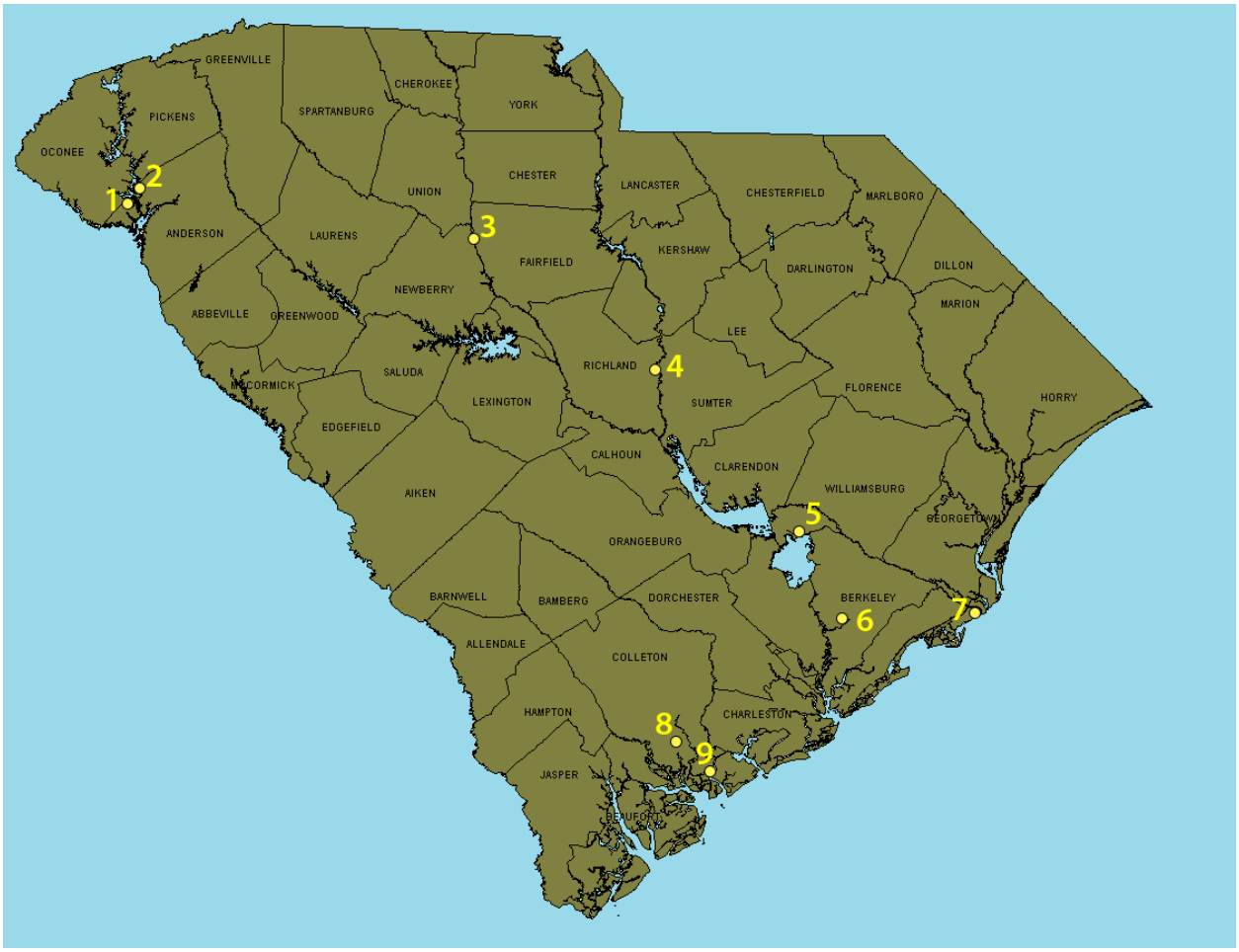


Figure 1. Category 1 Waterfowl Areas for the 2021-2022 Waterfowl Season: 1. Beaverdam, 2. Clemson (youth only), 3. Broad River, 4. Wateree, 5. Sandy Beach, 6. Bonneau Ferry (youth only), 7. Santee Coastal Reserve (Cedar Island, Murphy Island, The Cape), 8. Donnelley (youth only), 9. Bear Island (East, West, Springfield/The Cut).

Methods

Over 5,200 individuals applied for the 2021-2022 adult Category I Waterfowl Lottery, with 871 individuals being selected for a hunt. The youth Category I Waterfowl Lottery had 465 applicants, with 135 being selected. A combined total of 1,006 individuals were selected for a SCDNR waterfowl lottery hunt during the 2021-2022 season. Successful applicants for the 2021-2022 waterfowl lotteries (adult and youth) received a small survey card after their hunt containing questions about their experience on their SCDNR Category I Waterfowl Lottery Hunt. Participation in the survey was voluntary. Survey cards were provided at the conclusion of the lottery hunt, in hopes of capturing their hunting experience, impressions, and opinions while fresh on their mind. The survey card (Appendix A) consisted of six questions where an answer could be selected and additional space was provided on the back of the card for participants to write comments. All questions presented on the survey card are below and include available responses.

Survey Questions

1. Have you participated in a SCDNR lottery waterfowl hunt before today?

   Answer choices: Yes, No

2. Would you apply for a SCDNR waterfowl lottery hunt again?

   Answer choices: Yes, No

3. Would you apply to return to this WMA waterfowl hunt site again?

   Answer choices: Yes, No

4. Rate the professionalism and conduct of the SCDNR staff at your hunt.

   Answer choices: Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, Very Poor

5. How many ducks did you harvest on this lottery hunt?

   Answer choices: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

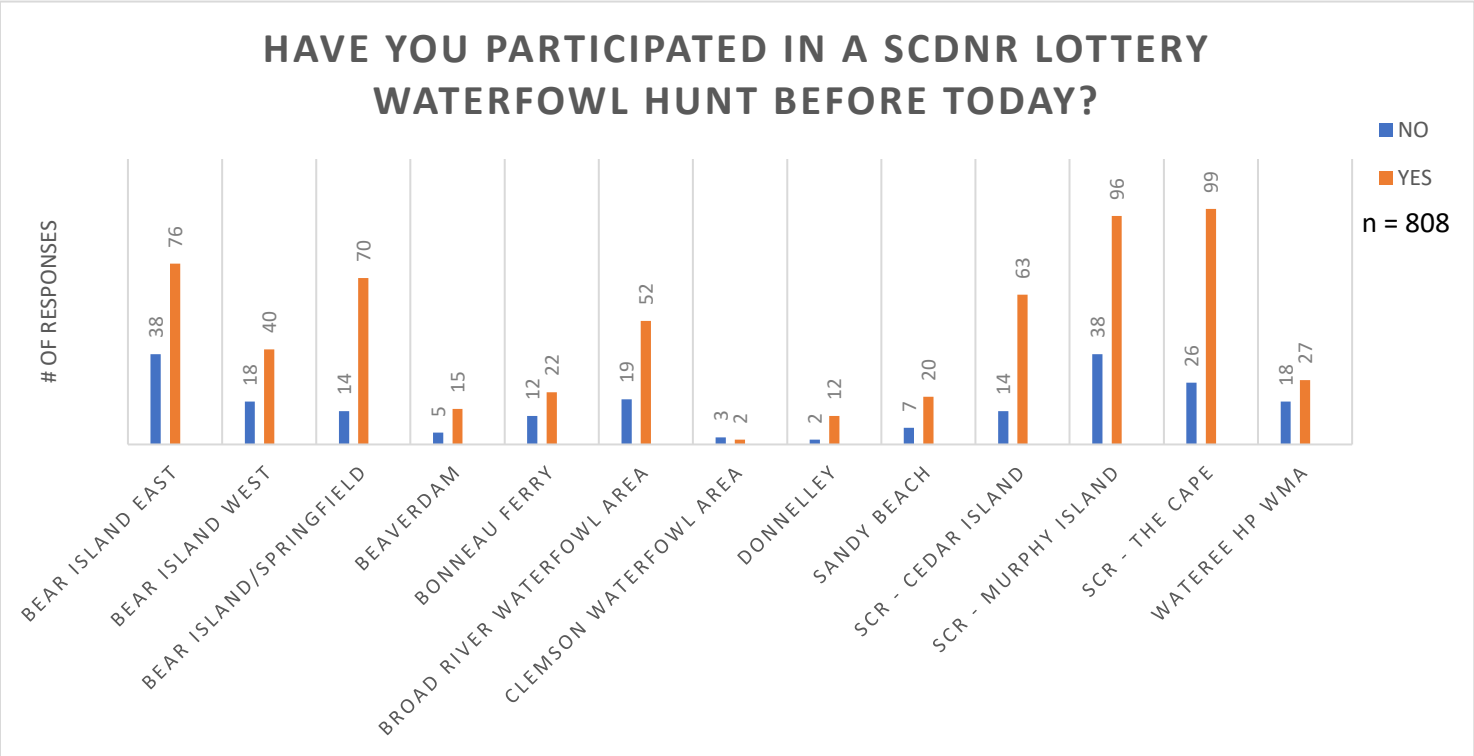
6. Rate your overall satisfaction with your hunt.

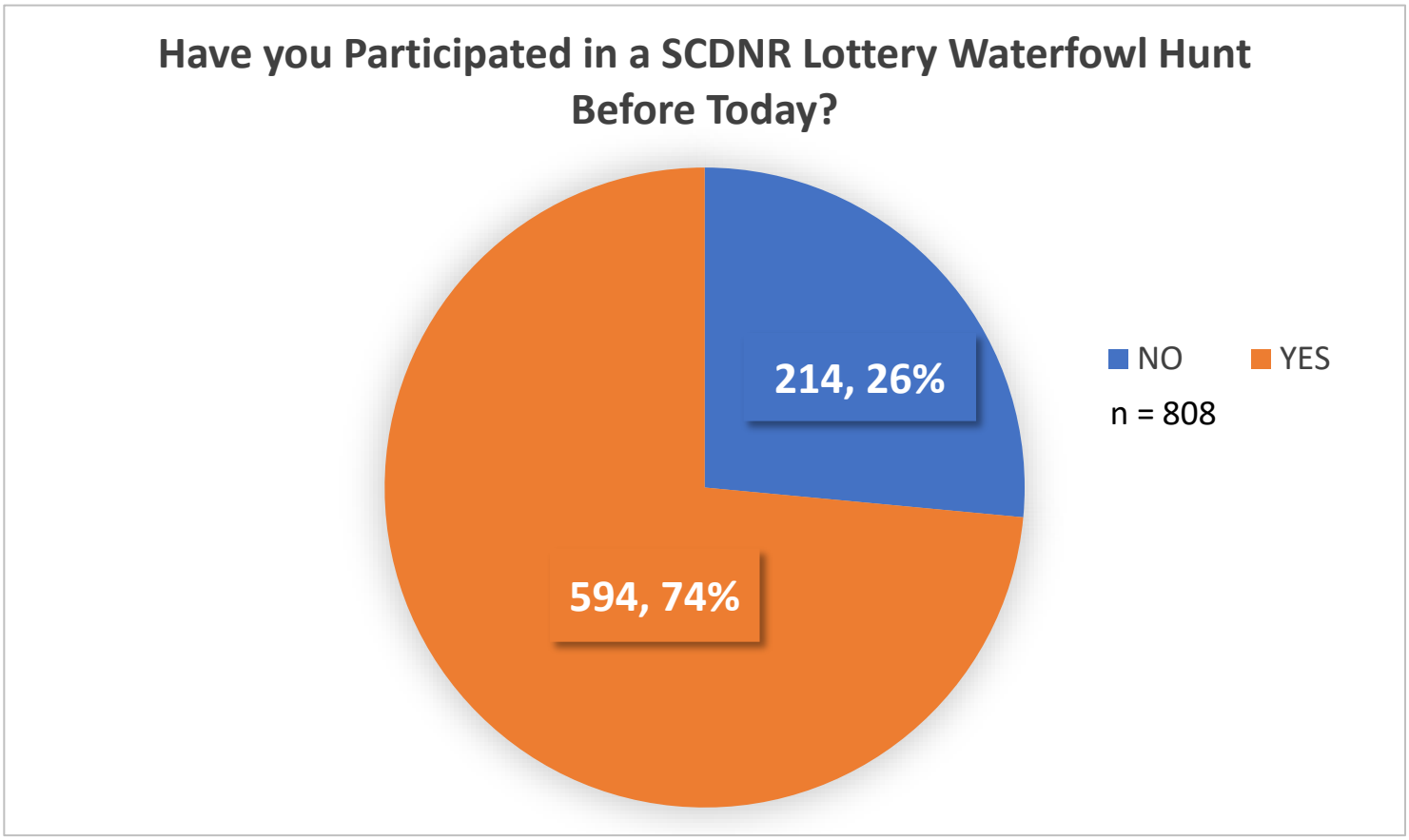
   Answer choices: Very Satisfied, Satisfied, Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Very Dissatisfied

Results

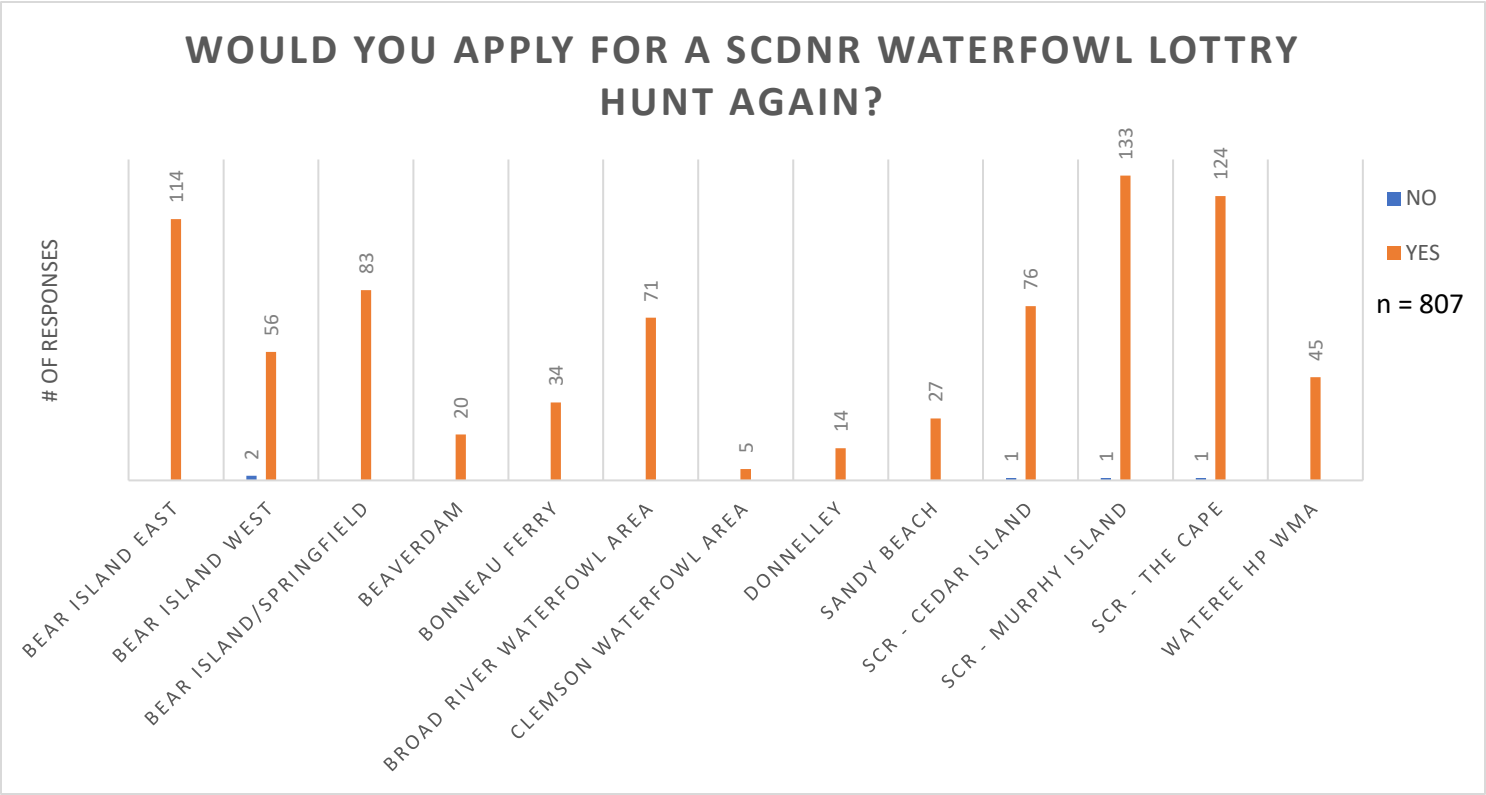
SCDNR received 810 survey card responses out of the 1,006 individuals selected for the 2021-2022 waterfowl lottery hunt, an 80.5% response rate. This is a 22.9% higher response rate then the 2019-2020 email survey. Though 810 survey cards were received, not all survey cards were complete. The survey was voluntary, and participants were able to skip any question. Most survey cards were received from adult waterfowl lottery participants. Graphical and numerical data for each question follow. Over 150 written comments were received from the survey cards and are provided in full in Appendix B. Comments were categorized as positive, negative, or neutral.

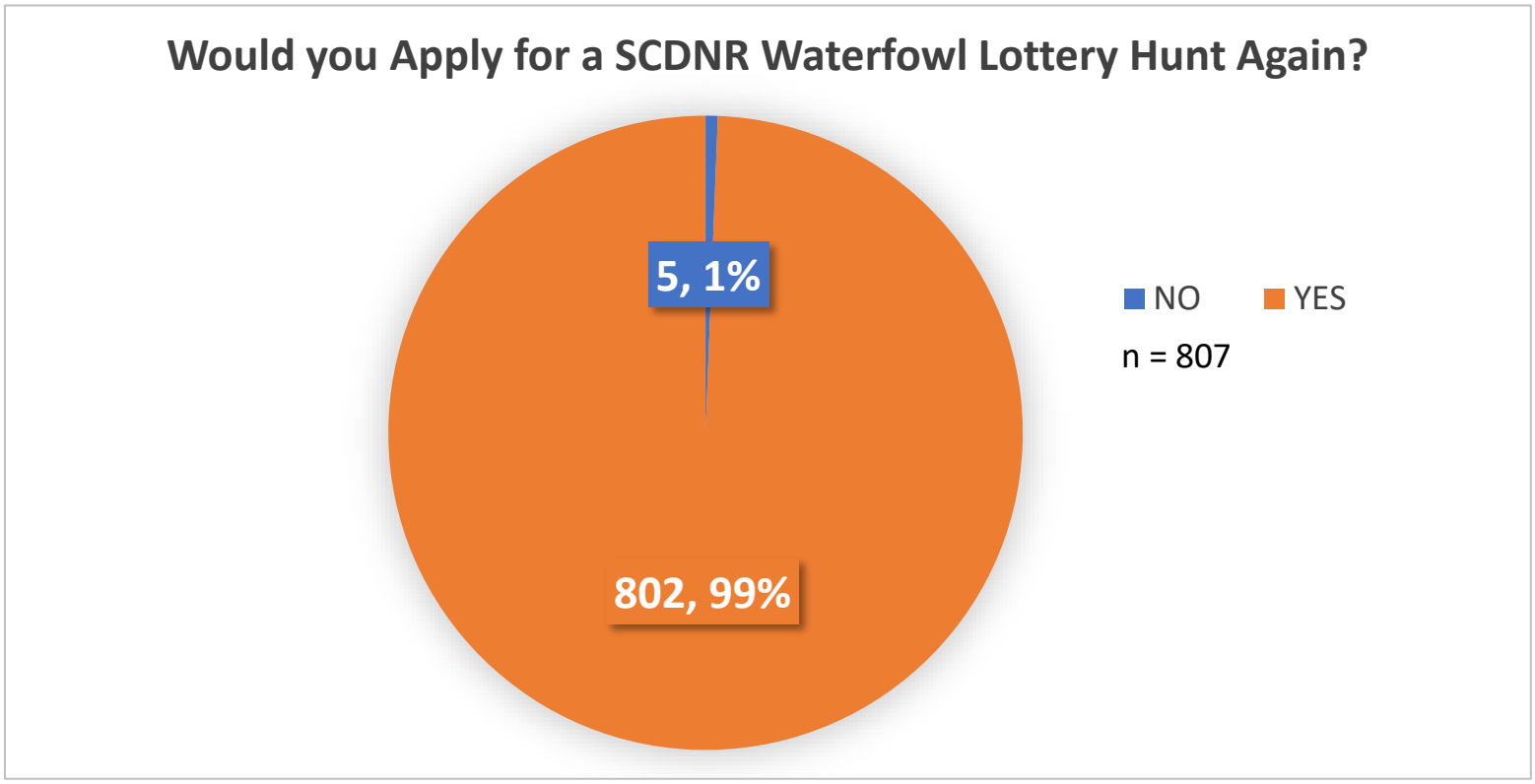
Question 1


HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN A SCDNR LOTTERY WATERFOWL HUNT BEFORE TODAY?
OF RESPONSES
NO
YES
n = 808
BEAR ISLAND EAST 38 76
BEAR ISLAND WEST 18 40
BEAR ISLAND/SPRINGFIELD 14 70
BEAVERDAM 5 15
BONNEAU FERRY 12 22
BROAD RIVER WATERFOWL AREA 19 52
CLEMSON WATERFOWL AREA 3 2
DONNELLEY 2 12
SANDY BEACH 7 20
SCR - CEDAR ISLAND 14 63
SCR - MURPHY ISLAND 38 96
SCR - THE CAPE 26 99
WATEREE HP WMA 18 27

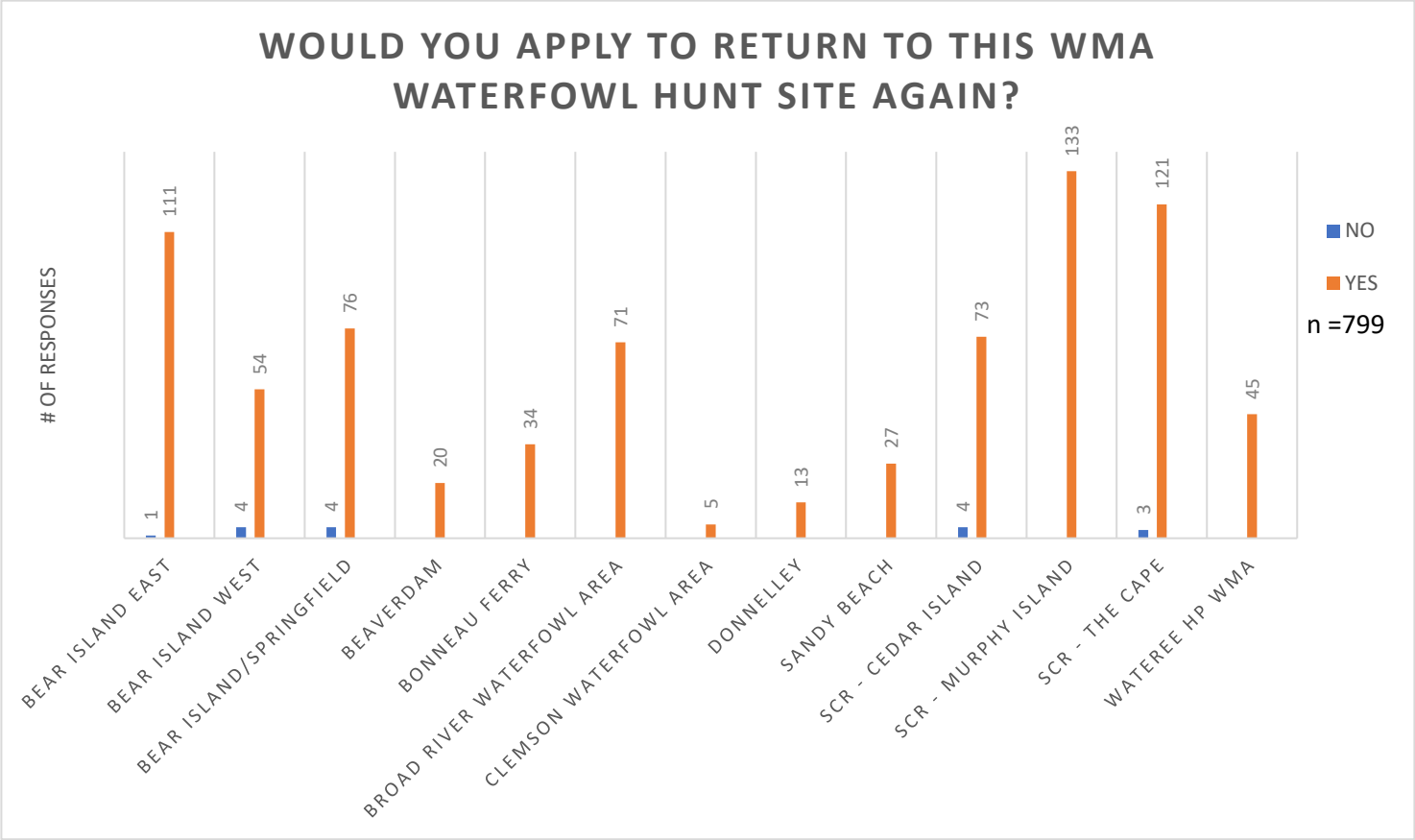

Have you Participated in a SCDNR Lottery Waterfowl Hunt Before Today?
214, 26%
594, 74%
NO
YES
n = 808

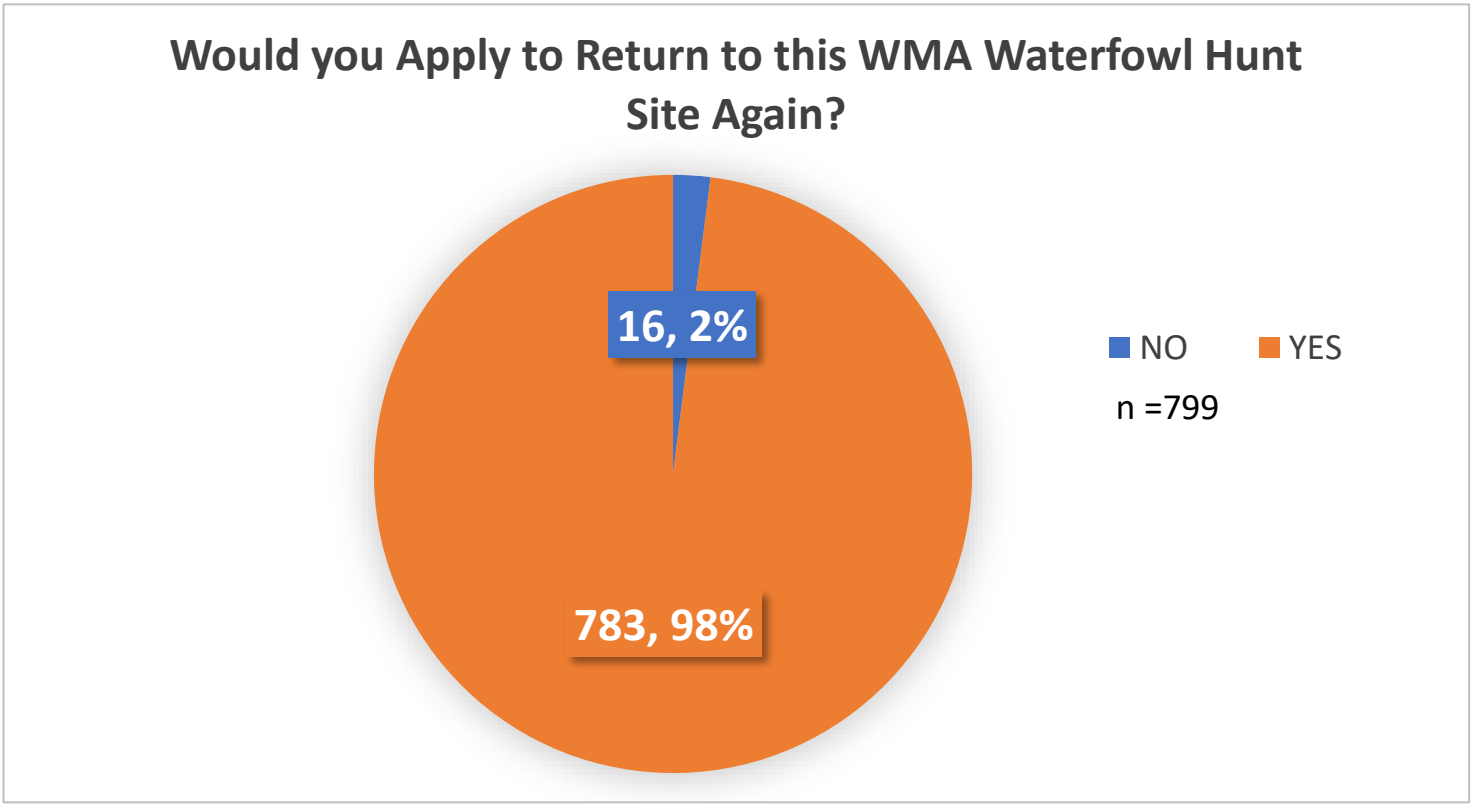
Question 2


WOULD YOU APPLY FOR A SCDNR WATERFOWL LOTTRY HUNT AGAIN?
OF RESPONSES
114
2
56
83
20
34
71
5
14
27
1
76
1
133
1
124
45
BEAR ISLAND EAST
BEAR ISLAND WEST
BEAR ISLAND/SPRINGFIELD
BEAVERDAM
BONNEAU FERRY
BROAD RIVER WATERFOWL AREA
CLEMSON WATERFOWL AREA
DONNELLEY
SANDY BEACH
SCR - CEDAR ISLAND
SCR - MURPHY ISLAND
SCR - THE CAPE
WATEREE HP WMA
NO
YES
n = 807


Would you Apply for a SCDNR Waterfowl Lottery Hunt Again?
5, 1%
802, 99%
NO
YES
n = 807

Question 3

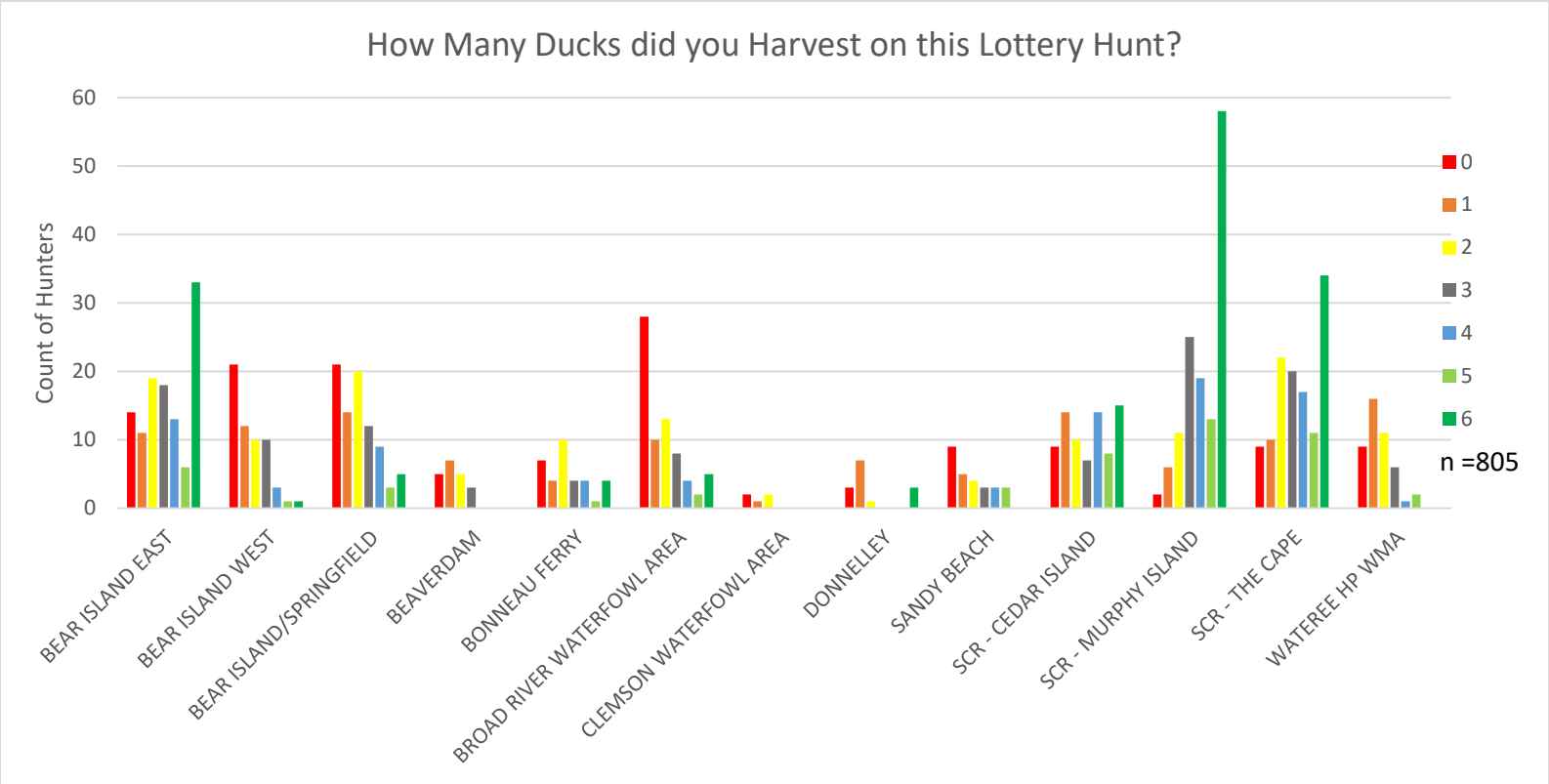

WOULD YOU APPLY TO RETURN TO THIS WMA WATERFOWL HUNT SITE AGAIN?
OF RESPONSES
NO
YES
n =799
BEAR ISLAND EAST 1 111
BEAR ISLAND WEST 4 54
BEAR ISLAND/SPRINGFIELD 4 76
BEAVERDAM 20
BONNEAU FERRY 34
BROAD RIVER WATERFOWL AREA 71
CLEMSON WATERFOWL AREA 5
DONNELLEY 13
SANDY BEACH 27
SCR - CEDAR ISLAND 4 73
SCR - MURPHY ISLAND 133
SCR - THE CAPE 3 121
WATEREE HP WMA 45


Would you Apply to Return to this WMA Waterfowl Hunt Site Again?
16, 2%
783, 98%
NO
YES
n =799

Question 4

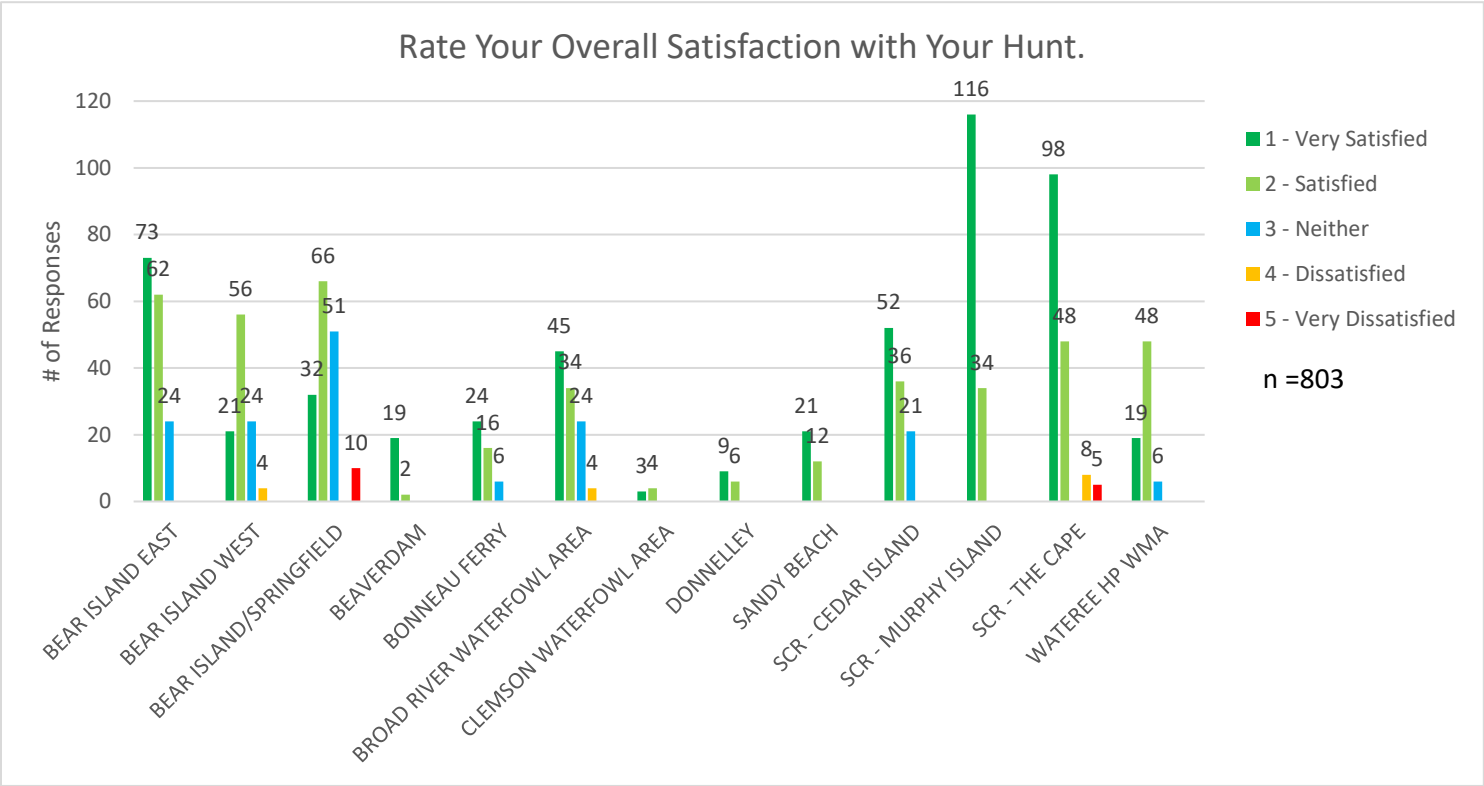
Overall Professionalism Rating	Percentage	Total Response (n=804)
Excellent	93.4%	751
Good	5.9%	47
Fair	0.5%	4
Poor	0.1%	1
Very Poor	0.1%	1

Question 5



Category I Waterfowl Site	Average Ducks Harvested
CLEMSON WATERFOWL AREA	1.0
BEAVERDAM	1.3
BEAR ISLAND WEST	1.5
WATEREE HP WMA	1.6
BROAD RIVER WATERFOWL AREA	1.7
SANDY BEACH	1.8
DONNELLEY	1.9
BEAR ISLAND/SPRINGFIELD	2.0
BONNEAU FERRY	2.4
SCR - CEDAR ISLAND	3.1
BEAR ISLAND EAST	3.4
SCR - THE CAPE	3.6
SCR - MURPHY ISLAND	4.4
TOTAL AVERAGE	**2.8**

Question 6



Overall Satisfaction	Percentage	Total Response (n=803)
Very Satisfied	66.3%	532
Satisfied	26.4%	212
Neither	6.5%	52
Dissatisfied	0.5%	4
Very Dissatisfied	0%	3

Conclusion

SCDNR strives to maintain high quality hunts through the Public Lottery Hunts Program, and feedback from participants is beneficial in administering the program. Providing a survey to selected waterfowl lottery applicants allows for the hunters to voice their thoughts and opinions and helps SCDNR staff maintain and improve the lottery hunt experience. Results from the 2021-2022 Category I Waterfowl Survey are very similar to results published in the 2019-2020 Category I Waterfowl Survey. Overall, the majority of hunters report positive experiences on SCDNR waterfowl lottery hunts and were either satisfied or very satisfied with their hunt. Nearly all applicants indicate that they would apply for the waterfowl lottery again and indicate they would apply for the same site they hunted this season again in the future.

SCDNR received an 80.5% response rate for the 2021-2022 waterfowl lottery participant survey. This is a 22.9% higher response rate compared to the online survey emailed to lottery applicants after the 2019-2020 waterfowl season (57.6% response rate). Survey participation was likely higher in the 2021-2022 survey because the survey was immediately available to complete at the conclusion of the lottery hunt, rather than the conclusion of the season. Waterfowl lottery hunt parties can vary from 1 to 4 individuals. Though survey cards were intended for individual response, an individual may have completed a survey as a response for their entire hunt group, lowering the overall response rate.

Majority of the respondents (74.0%) indicated that they had participated in a waterfowl lottery hunt prior this season, highlighting the importance and satisfaction with this program. The popularity of the waterfowl lottery hunts have increased over the years, and in turn has lengthened wait times to be selected, especially at popular sites. For the 2021-2022 adult waterfowl lottery, selected applicants averaged 3 points to be selected. This represents a four-year wait between Category I Waterfowl hunting opportunities. Selected applicants continue to apply knowing it will be another few years before they have the opportunity to hunt again on a waterfowl lottery hunt. When asked if you would apply again for a waterfowl lottery hunt, only 5 responses out of 807, less than 1%, said no.

The average number of ducks harvested during the 2021-2022 season on category 1 sites was 2.8 per hunter. Santee Coastal Reserve – Murphy Island had the highest duck harvest (4.4 ducks/hunter) out of all the Category I Waterfowl sites, followed by Santee Coastal Reserve – The Cape (3.5 ducks/hunter). Clemson Waterfowl Area had the lowest average with 1 duck per hunter.

Over 90% of respondents indicated they were either satisfied or very satisfied with their hunt. This indicates that applicants value other aspects of these hunts, not just harvest. Almost all hunters (98.0%) responded they would return to same waterfowl hunt site again. All respondents for Clemson waterfowl area said they would return to the property again, even though the harvest rate was the lowest for all category I waterfowl areas (1 duck/man).

Nearly all responses (93.4%) stated that SCDNR staff provided excellent professionalism and conduct at their hunt. Out of 804 responses, one response indicated poor professionalism and one specified very poor, less than 1%. Additional comments provided by hunters were very positive,

complimenting a variety of things about the property, equipment, staff, and experience. We attempted to classify comments as positive, negative, or neutral. Almost seventy-one percent provided positive comments on the process, 4.4% negative, and 25.3% neutral. Several comments mentioned the long wait times, but some of these same commenters also mentioned it was worth the wait. Duck hunting can by physically demanding and some negative responses indicated hunters were not prepared for site conditions, particularly the challenge of pluff mud.

Overall, survey results are extremely positive and indicate that the SCDNR Category 1 Waterfowl Lottery is an important and valuable hunting opportunity for participants. Most applicants are satisfied and will continue to apply annually, knowing it takes several years to get selected. Conversely, the most frequent criticism the Category I Waterfowl Lottery hunts receive is regarding extended wait times. The quality and popularity of these hunts keeps previous applicants applying and attracts new applicants each year. SCDNR plans to continue periodic Waterfowl Lottery surveys in the future to elicit hunter feedback to maintain and improve aspects of the Category I Waterfowl Lottery experience from the application process to the hunt itself.

Appendix A – Survey Card

Waterfowl Participant Survey

Hunt Site _____ Date _____

Please circle answers after each question and provide any additional comments you would like to make on the back of the card.

1. Have you participated in a SCDNR lottery waterfowl hunt before today? **Yes** **No**
2. Would you apply for a SCDNR waterfowl lottery hunt again? **Yes** **No**
3. Would you apply to return to this WMA waterfowl hunt site again? **Yes** **No**
4. Rate the professionalism and conduct of the SCDNR staff at your hunt.
   Excellent **Good** **Fair** **Poor** **Very Poor**
5. How many ducks did you harvest on this lottery hunt? **0** **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** **6**
6. Rate your overall satisfaction with your hunt.
   Very Satisfied **Satisfied** **Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied** **Dissatisfied** **Very Dissatisfied**

Please provide any additional comments on the back of the card.
Deposit your completed survey card in the receptacle provided.

Thank you for your assistance!

Additional Comments:

_____

21-13099

Appendix B – Comments Received

1. Blinds set up well. Easy in and out for youth.
2. Lots of ducks.
3. Nice blinds and lots of ducks.
4. Great time. Great Fellas.
5. Very professional, Top notch!
6. Great people
7. Thank you really enjoyed it.
8. Wonderful hunt
9. Very Pleased
10. Crew was great, enjoyed it
11. Let the staff have a hunt day!
12. Best hunt ever!
13. Best staff!! Best Hunt ever!!
14. DNR knows how to manage for ducks! You can't go on a better guided hunt!! Perfection!!
15. Give these guys a raise! Worth the wait!
16. Let the staff hunt!
17. Let the staff hunt!
18. It was great!
19. Great Hunt!
20. Hunt to remember!
21. Best staff, keep up the good work!
22. Great boat driver!
23. Awesome hunt!
24. Awesome time!!
25. Thanks for all the hard work!
26. More ducks than I have ever seen!
27. Amazing!!
28. Treated like it was a paid hunt!!
29. Yall are pros!!
30. Awesome staff!!
31. Hunt to remember!
32. Staff went over and beyond! Looking forward to coming back!
33. Fantastic!!
34. Love the DNR hunts
35. AWESOME hunt and crew!
36. Awesome hunt and staff!
37. Awesome guide!
38. Crew was awesome!
39. Top of the line facilities and staff
40. very nice and helpful staff

41. Great Hunt!
42. best hunt and staff by far
43. DNR are rock stars!!
44. excellent staff
45. Boats leak a little
46. AWESOME
47. Very well ran operation
48. Staff was excellent
49. Really good hunt and people
50. Thanks for all the hard work!
51. Awesome time!!
52. very good crew
53. overall great experience
54. Awesome hunt!!
55. would have liked to scout the day before.
56. it would be helpful to scout the night before.
57. Excellent hunt!
58. Great Hunt!
59. A big thanks to Mrs Tammy Waldrop and Chris Gravely for their efforts. This is a great site has been for years look forward to next trip
60. great experience
61. Awesome staff!!
62. well managed
63. best looking fields I have seen in a long time and good hospitality
64. great job planting!! Much better than previous years
65. staff did a great job
66. fields looked great. Liked having two other groups in the same field.
67. awesome hunt
68. Great time.
69. looking forward to coming back
70. set up nice
71. fantastic property
72. great conditions
73. GPS coordinates for the blind assigned
74. Great service! Very organized
75. Great hunt! Awesome experience.
76. Awesome hunt on blind #12 thanks!
77. Extremely well run operation.
78. Great hunt and great staff!
79. ***** A+
80. Great. Thank You.

81. Thank you!
82. Need food!
83. Lots of ducks and habitat!
84. Great Day! Staff should be able to hunt at least one day a year
85. DNR Agents should get to hunt Cedar Island on youth days
86. Staff was great!
87. 1st duck hunt, best ever
88. Grade A operation
89. Great hunt! Great staff!
90. Great people just not enough ducks did enjoy hunt
91. 4th year in lottery Thank you for maintaining!
92. Awesome fun!
93. Thanks for all the hard work. Much appreciated.
94. Thank you had the best time ever!
95. Aerial photos to help show hunters the layout would help.
96. Very appreciative of what SCDNR provides. Thanks
97. Great hunt! I'm out of shape!
98. Great WF mgt tons of widgeon grass
99. Staff was great. Pond looked good too. Had anticipated some pintails and few more big ducks. Not much widgeon grass in the spot we hunted.
100. Needs more water not deep enough for boat.
101. Great hunt! Thank you SCDNR!
102. Young man's game, old guys like me can't trapse thru pluff mud. Lost 3 birds. Need to hunt with dog.
103. Ashley was awesome
104. Excellent service Ashley!
105. Great job by the crew thanks so much!
106. Great staff
107. Very impressed with the checkin process and the courteous helpful spirit of the DNR personnel. A great improvement over the experience of my last visit. Keep up the good work!
108. Ashley was fantastic
109. Rick and Ashley were wonderful hosts and awesome representatives of SCDNR & the State of SC
110. Good hunt just no wind blue bird day! Will be back!
111. Great hunt! Thank you.
112. I had so much fun. The staff members were all so nice. I would love to come back.
113. Had a great time. Always enjoy these hunts. Thank you.
114. Staff was great! Increase limit on pintails.
115. Took 4 years to get drawn and it used to be 1 or 2. SC residents should have priority over out of state hunters
116. Somewhat limited as my partner unable to participate due to business emergency and unable to bring subsitute! Thank you
117. Pro handling hunt. Gives all waterfowl hunters a chance to have great hunting.
118. I have been coming on these hunts since the 1990s and am excited whenever I get the chance to return & hunt - Thanks

119. Great job!
120. Small jon boat hard to paddle -nit picky otherwise great hunt!
121. Great hunt, great staff!
122. Excellent staff. Pointed us to excellent location. Top notch equipment.
123. Everyone was great and I appreciate the hospitality
124. Sleds and marsh stools are awesome
125. Awesome hunt SCDNR staff were great!
126. Excellent staff & property mgmt.! Thanks.
127. Great opportunity
128. SHOTS FIRED: 18, 2 WOOD DUCKS, CRIPPLES/LOST: 0. THANKS FOR THE OPPORTUNITY
129. HARVESTED 2, WOUNDED 1 - LOST
130. SHOT 7 TIMES, LOTS OF BIRDS ROOSTED AND LEFT OUT PRIOR TO SHOOTING TIME
131. TOTAL HARVESTED 2 DUCKS BETWEEN 3 PEOPLE, 1 CRIPPLE, 12 SHOTS
132. SHOTS FIRED: 6, 1 WOODIE, CRIPPLES/LOST: 0. THANKS FOR THE OPPORTUNITY
133. SHOTS FIRED: 21, 3 WOOD DUCKS, CRIPPLES/LOST: 2 WOOD DUCKS. WE ENJOYED IT. THANKS FOR THE OPPORTUNITY.
134. 2 DEAD AND RETRIEVED BY DOG. WOOD DUCK/MERGANSER
135. 1 WOOD DRAKE, NO CRIPPLES. 5 TOTAL SHOTS
136. 1 CRIPPLE
137. GROUP HARVESTED 4 DUCKS. APPROX 30 SHOTS
138. 2 CRIPPLES, 8 SHOTS. GROUP SHOT 30 TIMES. ONLY 4 BIRDS, 2 WOOD DUCKS, 2 MERGANSER
139. THE DUCKS WERE MOSTLY MERGANSERS. PERHAPS I MISSED A COUPLE OF WOOD DUCKS? I ALSO CRIPPLED A MERGANSER. OBVIOUSLY I PREFER PUDDLE DUCKS RATHER THAN MERGANSERS, BUT WHO CONTROLS DUCKS? SAW A BEAUTIFUL RACKED BUCK
140. SHOT 3 TIMES
141. 1 DUCK, 11 SHOTS
142. 1 DRAKE WOOD DUCK
143. 6 SHOTS
144. SHOTS: 25, CRIPPLES/LOST: 1, DUCKS/SPECIES: 2 WOOD DUCKS
145. SHOTS: 25, CRIPPLES/LOST: 1, DUCKS/SPECIES: 1 RICK NECK, 2 WOOD DUCKS
146. SHOTS: 25, CRIPPLES/LOST: 1, DUCKS/SPECIES: 1 MERGANSER, 1 WOOD DUCK
147. SHOTS: 15, CRIPPLES/LOST: 0, DUCKS/SPECIES: 1 MERGANSER, 2 WOOD DUCKS
148. SHOTS: 17, CRIPPLES/LOST: 0, DUCKS/SPECIES: 3 - CANADA GOOSE 1, WOOD DUCK 1, MERGANSER 1
149. SHOTS: 13, CRIPPLES/LOST: 3, DUCKS/SPECIES: 1 MERGANSER, 2 WOOD DUCKS
150. SHOTS: 6
151. SHOTS: 6
152. SHOTS: 6
153. SHOTS: 21
154. SHOTS: 11, DUCKS/SPECIES: 1 DRAKE MALLARD
155. SHOTS: 16, CRIPPLE/LOST: 3, DUCKS/SPECIES: 1 HOODED MERGANSER
156. SHOTS: 13, CRIPPLES/LOST: 0

157.SHOTS: 12, CRIPPLES/LOST: 0

158.SHOTS: 24, CRIPPLES/LOST: 1