

AUDUBON CHRISTMAS COUNTS (WATERFOWL), WILSON BRIDGE TO BELLEHAVEN PARK-ALEXANDRIA, VA.

Species	Dec. 26, 1959	Dec. 26, 1960	Dec. 30, 1961	Dec. 29, 1962	Dec. 28, 1963
Canada geese		10		15	32
Mallard	5	15	38	67	103
Black duck	28	71	1,006	150	1
Gadwall			184	55	44
Pintail	75	160	44		5
Green-winged teal		2			6
Shoveller	4				1
Wood duck			7		7
Redhead	2		4	1	34
Ring-necked duck		10	108		72
Canvasback	2	21	4,000+	109	1,000+
Greater and lesser scaup duck	28	1,200	38	40	72
Bufflehead	39	61	6,000+	539	948
Ruddy duck	3,822	1,500	5		
Mergansers	84	6			
Total	4,089	3,056	11,434	976	2,325

Counts by ornithologists and qualified observers show the 5-year average overwintering waterfowl population to be—

Buddy duck	4,000
Scaup	2,000-3,000
Ring-necked duck	300-400
Black duck	200
Canvasback	100
Mallard	80
Bufflehead	50
Pintail	50

¹ Occasionally 1,500.

Fishery resources in Hunting Creek area are of low quality and consist primarily of catfish, carp, and gar. Fisherman utilization is relatively low.

The diversity of wetland habitat provided by Dyke Marsh and Hunting Creek has been historically an attraction to a variety of waterfowl. These areas were formerly heavily utilized by duck hunters but are now closed to hunting by the city of Alexandria and the National Park Service. At present, they are heavily utilized by naturalists and other persons interested in studying or observing the natural flora and fauna of the region. Every species of waterfowl normally occurring along the Atlantic seaboard, with the exception of American scooters and eiders, has been recorded in the vicinity. Bellehaven picnic grounds at the north end of Dyke Marsh and Jones Point afford the principal means of access for the general public to observe these resources. The esthetic appeal and value of these pursuits are largely intangible and cannot be evaluated in monetary terms.

For many decades, urban, municipal, and industrial developments have gradually reduced natural wetland habitat in the vicinity of metropolitan Washington, D.C., until at present Dyke Marsh and Hunting Creek constitute two of the better remaining areas. The construction proposed in the subject permit applications will further encroach on these remnant wetland habitats. About 35 acres of productive creek bottoms will be filled and permanently lost as waterfowl feeding and resting areas, which, by virtue of location, produce a significant esthetic resource. The obstruction resulting from bulkheading and filling will alter natural silting processes at the mouth of Hunting Creek and may accelerate the formation of mudflats thus further reducing valuable habitat. Ensuing development on the proposed fills will constitute a disturbance factor which will adversely affect waterfowl and shore bird utilization in the general area and seriously obstruct public observation and enjoyment from the National Park Service's access area at Jones Point.

We conclude that the ecological factors of shallow productive waters, adjacent marshes, and abundant food supply combine to make Hunting Creek an attractive area for waterfowl and other water-oriented wildlife. The combination of available wildlife and public access provides an opportunity for the observation, study, and enjoyment of aquatic life in the immediate vicinity of our Nation's Capital. Therefore, the Bureau feels that every effort should be made to protect these esthetically valuable resources.

Sincerely yours,

WALTER A. GRESH,
Regional Director.