

# The Nature Conservancy

Silver Creek Preserve  
Post Office Box 624, Picabo, Idaho 83348

2/1/81

## REPORT OF 1980-81 SILVER CREEK HUNTING

At the August, 1980 meeting of the Fish and Game Commission a decision was made to lift the refuge status of the Silver Creek Preserve and open those navigable waters to waterfowl hunting. With very little time, the Conservancy elected to consult with a wildlife committee consisting of locally concerned individuals and develop a hunting policy for use on the Preserve waterways. In addition, a TNC employee began living on the Preserve and administering the program. The guidelines and policies of the program were consistently enforced, some being successful but others that may need changing in the years ahead.

Public opinion has been mixed over the hunting program, some people oppose it of those that have spoken up, but the majority feel that it was handled correctly. Local citizens remain more in favor of the program and support its continuation. There may, of course be comments during the coming fishing season over the spent shells and trampled vegetation and this will be monitored.

The local press has assisted generously in publishing policies and by continuing with follow-up stories as difficulties developed. The publicity ultimately advertised duck hunting on Silver Creek and caused increased use but it was a major proponent in maintaining a workable program under what was a hastily prepared program. For instance, as of 11/19/80, 123 hunters had used the Preserve and 59 had in some form violated policy. Shortly after this time, the permit system went into operation which included press coverage from both local papers and the stories warned hunters of F&G violations and of the privilege of hunting Silver Creek under the trespass permit. From this point on violations dropped well below 10% for the 211 hunters using the Preserve during the remainder of the season.

Anticipated bird migrations out of the valley due to hunting on the Preserve did not occur. A population survey by TNC during the week following

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the close of hunting season showed approximately 3700 ducks and 400 Canadian Geese in the central portion of the valley. One week after season, the birds dispersed and began feeding normally across the valley.

The most successful aspect of the hunting policy was that there was 100% cooperation of the three day per week hunt. The part-time hunting eliminated excess pressures and resulted in birds remaining in the area that may have otherwise left for better refuge.

With the absence of refuge on Silver Creek, several other areas in the valley substituted. The McMahan property along Loving Creek often held more than one thousand birds, the stretch of Silver Creek through the RR, Purdy Ranch, although hunted occasionally held many birds. There was also a major success in that Sullivan Lake, on the Preserve, was not hunted and consistently held from several hundred up to 1500 birds. The importance of these refuges cannot be stressed enough if birds are to remain in the valley.

Other variables come into play besides refuge- weather, food supply and hunting pressure all play equal parts. This year, the absence of snow left grain stubble exposed and there was sufficient food to support the waterfowl but the clear, warm weather was discouraging to hunters as birds tend to do less moving.

Following are points that may need revision in the policy for future years:

## HIGH WATER TO HIGH WATER

Nearly impossible to enforce, hunters stretched this regulation daily. Islands were considered legal but hunters often preferred to use areas where birds were attracted such as lower sloughs and stretches of stream that had no islands. The result of this was that hunters encroached their way into questionable areas such as cat-tails and frozen, damp ground. Upon



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## High Water cont.

questioning, there were often arguments over the water content of the frozen ground. These constant confrontations eventually led to a relaxation of the regulation and opened all marsh areas to shooting.

## BANK SHOOTING

Many hunters simply carried the frozen ground question too far and insisted on shooting from under willows etc., far from high water lines. Constant patrols for enforcement of the regulations was necessary. To be consistent it was necessary to patrol the Preserve an average of 8-10 hours each hunting day. Common responses from bank shooters was either ignorance of the regulation, insistence that the ground was actually frozen water or stating that the regulation was ridiculous.

## GUNS ON LAND

Throughout the season, but primarily early, hunters carried guns ashore mainly to recover downed birds that had been crippled. Since many hunters did not use dogs they argued the necessity of having a gun to stop wounded birds.

## ROAD SHOOTING

Early in the season, the firing line situation along Kilpatrick Road reappeared and several times hunters also used the road along Stalker Creek. The firing line represented the poorest of hunting ethics and was totally inconsistent with the developed hunting policies of the Preserve. Most after dark shots (illegal according to F&G law) were fired from the roads, not one bird was seen recovered due to their height above the shooters and several times birds were witnessed being wounded at these heights and landing sometimes one-half mile away, often in the dark. Many road hunters were often drinking heavily and the only incidences of vandalism was from

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## Road Shooting cont.

this group, evident in shot-up signs. Also, the only incidences of outright confrontation between TNC employees and volunteers and hunters that bordered on violence were along the road- two near fist-fights and one hunter that pointed a gun at the employee. There were times when road hunting was more popular than floating in. On one occasion, 5 cars were present with 14 hunters. The road hunters flatly refused to go along with the three day per week program and could be found on any evening of the week. Finally, articles in the local papers explaining the trespass permit system on the Preserve and a landowners right to prosecute for trespass when hunters entered upon their land to recover downed birds stopped the road shooting 100% on Kilpatrick Road. However, TNC is placing itself in the position of enforcing a questionable law that states that it is illegal to shoot from a public roadway. A roadway is legally considered only that traveled portion of the road. The borrow pit, or ditch, has been and is still a legal place to shoot from. TNC was not tested on this matter this year but it may be in the future.

## FISH AND GAME REPRESENTATION

It was stated prior to opening day by the F&G Commission that local Officers would be directed to Silver Creek waterfowl season as a top priority. The hundreds of square miles patrolled by two officers, conflicting seasons of big-game, upland birds, regular administrative duties and concerns over an unprecedented amount of big-game poaching caused very little patrol of the Silver Creek Preserve area. It was late in the season when F&G patrols became more regular. Shooting was at its' peak during the month of November and F&G had only made one appearance during that month as far as observation could be relied upon.

## LITTER

A clean-up trip through the Preserve during the week following hunting

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## Litter cont.

season found several hundred spent shells. From the location of the shells it could be determined that most were left by a small number of hunters. Heavily hunted areas by "regulars" turned up very few shells in contrast to other areas where sometimes 75-100 were picked up in one place. There was no other litter found besides the spent shells. However, for each shell found there is probably another that wasn't.

## TRAPPING

With the opening of the navigable waters, trapping for muskrat was also legalized. Trappers originally made dry land sets but were told to restrict their activity to the water course. Three separate reports from hunters stated that non-target species were trapped.

## POSSIBLE ACTIONS

### I. Permit System

It is being suggested that the permit system remain in effect, at least for the waterfowl season in coming years and possibly on a year-round basis. With the Visitor Center now functioning this may open further communications between users and TNC. Perhaps first time users could obtain a permit for a fishing or hunting season and then sign in each time at a convenient place. This system would also provide much more accurate data on user numbers. Also, for the period of time that waterfowl nesting is in progress, a permit system would be a valuable tool of control to prevent disturbances by floaters from Stalker Creek through the Preserve. Permits to float could be granted after an explanation describing the vulnerability of birds during this critical time. And it could be explained how to courteously pass a fly-fisherman on the stream. We should refrain from placing too many restrictions on the Stalker Creek portion, east of Stalker Bridge in that it may open the challenge of navigability. A cooperative attitude towards public use, with open communication may be more successful than tight re-



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## Permit System Cont.

straints at this point.

For the 81-82 bird season the permit system should definately be continued. Surrounding landowners who have been plagued by hunting problems have admired our system and may go with a similar system next year. A further refinement of our system may also be helpful. A hard look should be made at making the permits a daily requirement, including license numbers. As it has been stated, after issuance of the original permit, hunters could then sign up on a sheet at headquarters which could be located outside in such case as the preserve employee is absent.

A change that may need discussion would be, should any limits be placed on the numbers of times a hunter may use the Preserve? At times, there was conjection on the creek.

## II. Reservation/ control of numbers

Since it seems that duck hunting is a fact of life on Silver Creek now, an attempt should be made to better control it and lessen the differences between the Conservancy and the hunters. A daily permit system would help in this control but a further step could be taken which is similar to TNC's program on the McCloud Preserve whereas a limited number of users are allowed each day. Half the number could be on a reservation basis, the other half on a first come first served. The only legal way to implement this is by leverage with the tresspass law but peer pressure also plays an important role as it did this year. Although this type of program would be an ideal one in terms of management, it could be open to criticism and should not be started without full support of advisors from a committee and F&G.

## III. Blinds vs, Present Methods

Vegetation damage was signifigant on several islands and in some marshy areas, however most damage was to annuals and this will not be long term in its' affects. The vegetation question however, can be coupeled with



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## Blind vs. Present Methods cont.

the Conservancies concerns over non-compliance with hunting policies such as high water to high water, bank shooting, shell littering and guns on land. Erection of blinds and requiring hunters to use these may alleviate or lessen all these problems. Individuals familiar with hunting on Silver Creek and a revised advisory committee could be consulted with concerning number of blinds and their locations. This may be more favorable from a management standpoint than the situation that existed this year and should be considered.

## IV. TRAPPING

Hunting may be open but it would be in the best interest of the Conservancy to discuss with F&G trapping for muskrat on the Preserve. It may be difficult or impossible to obtain a trapping closure but discussions should be carried out about methods that may do less damage to non-target species and which would be more in line with Conservancy policy.

## V. FISH AND GAME REPRESENTATION

Considering the amount of use the Preserve received during the bird season (334 hunters) plus better than one thousand fisherman per year, it is vitally important to continue a cooperative relationship with F&G. Improving their presence under present conditions may be difficult unless the Dept. adds another officer to the area. Aside from this possibility, discussions should be carried out to increase the peer pressure among sportsmen that would help them "police their own ranks". There have been discussions between F&G and the Preserve employee about the possibility of F&G developing public information programs that explain the legal needs of prosecution for F&G offenses. Citizens would be encouraged to report offenses they witness and then supply the required specifics. TNC could lend support to such a program.

The question of requiring hunting license numbers when a permit is issued should be discussed for the dual purpose of aiding the Dept. and eliminating illegal hunters from the Preserve.

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## VI. ROAD HUNTING

While the hunting season is still fresh in mind, the legal question of road shooting should be addressed. F&G should be urged to take a stand themselves and advise TNC so that next year we are able to formulate a rigid policy towards this activity.

## LONG RANGE GOALS

A continual approach towards further clarification of Preserve policies on hunting should be pursued. Included in this clarification should be constant updating and cooperative strategy of which a significant beginning has been accomplished this year.

A larger role from the F&G Dept., not strictly from a legal-enforcement standpoint would have advantages. The Dept. should be represented on advisory committees and continue to assist in Preserve decisions. The Preserve cannot function independently of the Dept. and future relations should have this point in mind. A similar situation exists with surrounding landowners.

We should continue and pursue to involve our neighbors in a larger capacity. Several landowners who have admired our handling of the hunting program have expressed the desire to open their lands under a similar permit system next year. We could encourage them to do so and offer assistance with the goal in mind of strengthening a cooperative bond towards wildlife management.

A refinement of the present Wildlife Committee into a well-balanced cross section of local individuals would be beneficial to a manager in the years ahead. Matters arise that must be dealt with immediately and the availability of advisors is a necessity, often on a moments notice.

There are many concerned individuals in the area and each has his own attitudes towards wildlife, land and public use management, but a coordinated effort such as was displayed this year should continue and expand.





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WINTER 1980-81 DUCK SURVEY, 1/14/81

Flight was taken at 2 pm. A Cessna 182 was used and stream courses were followed at slowest possible speeds averaging 150 to 200 feet above ground. Two individuals counted birds on smaller tributaries in sparsely populated sections and photographs were used on the denser sections:

	Birds
West of highway 75, wood River drainages	60
Irrigation ditch, Rogers ranch	20
Irrigation ditch, west of Rogers	10
Bicket Ranch	15
Stalker Creek, TNC downstream	60
Mud Creek	25
Larkin Ranch	125
Wilson Creek, N. of hwy. 20	30
Upper Grove Creek	55
Lower Stalker Creek	50
Grove-Silver confluence	200
Loving Creek, McMahons	763
Lower Silver Creek, below hwy. 20	60
Purdy Lake (Kilpatrick)	412
Silver Creek, above hwy. 20, below dam	300
Gardener Ranch	20
Helyer Ranch	20
Sullivan Lake	1112
Silver Creek, TNC	350
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,687</b>

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## WELCOME TO THE SILVER CREEK PRESERVE

### 1980 WATERFOWL HUNTING POLICIES

The Fish and Game Commission has authorized hunting on the navigable portion of The Silver Creek Preserve, from the confluence of Stalker and Grove creeks downstream. To ensure the proper management of the Preserve's wildlife and to oversee hunting of the Preserve, The Nature Conservancy has established the Silver Creek Wildlife Committee, in cooperation with neighboring land-owners, duck hunters and the Idaho Fish and Game Department.

The Committee has formulated the following policies for the Preserve:

1. The Silver Creek Committee seeks to encourage waterfowl hunting on a three-day-a-week basis only— Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays. The Committee asks that hunters limit their hunting to these days on the navigable portion of the preserve (see map below ).
2. To further promote a three-day-a-week program, the Committee is permitting float hunting from the Stalker Creek Bridge downstream on these days. Motors are not permitted (see map below ).
3. On both Stalker and Silver Creek portions of the Preserve, the Committee asks hunters to restrict their hunting to boat hunting only and on the stream courses only, from high water to high water.
4. To enable hunters to retrieve waterfowl, the Committee will permit hunters to leave their boats as long as firearms are left in the boats.
5. Because of the Proximity of Silver Creek to residences, the Committee requests that hunters not hunt within posted residential zones ( see map below ).
6. The Committee asks that hunters observe all "No Hunting" signs and refrain from hunting on foot or walking for hunting or flushing purposes.
7. The Committee requests that hunters park their vehicles at designated areas adjacent to Kilpatrick Bridge and Stalker Bridge ( see map below ).
8. The use of dogs will be permitted, please limit their activity to the retrieval of waterfowl and maintain reasonable control at other times.
9. The Committee requests that hunters not litter the Preserve, particularlyly with spent shells and shell boxes.
10. The Committee is anxious to assess the success of the hunting program and hunters are encouraged to stop by the Preserve Headquarters after hunting to share their ideas. ( See map. ) Written sugestions are also welcome.
11. Full-time personnel and Committee members will be on hand to ensure the observance of the policies and to lend assistance when needed.

We hope you enjoy your visit to the Preserve.

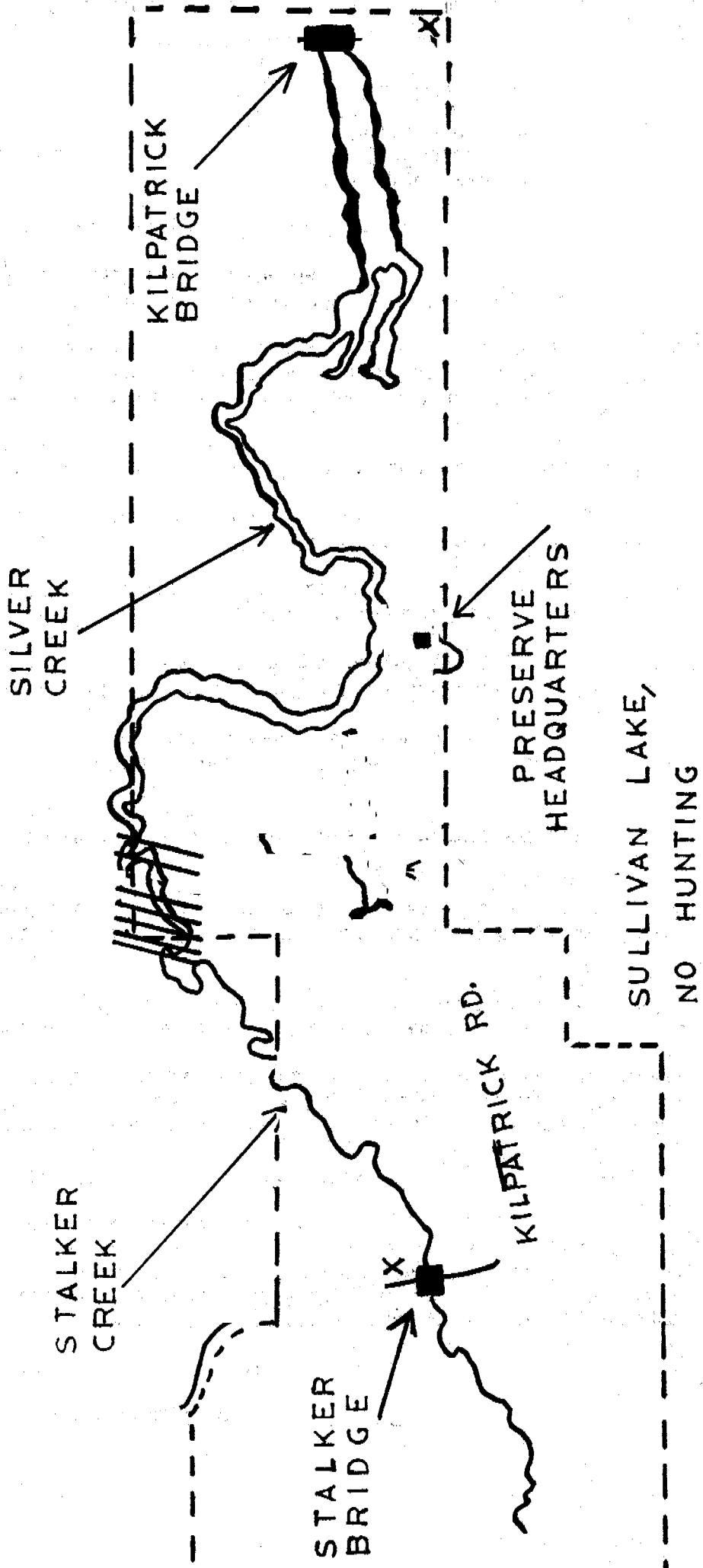
Silver Creek Wildlife Committee  
Tim Crawford, Chairman Tel. # 726-8473  
Harvey Bickett  
Dave Griffith  
Lee Mortimer  
Mike DeChevrleux

Preserve Headquarters  
P.O. Box 624  
Picabo, Idaho 83348  
Tel. # 788-4683  
Guy Bonnivier, Asst. Preserve Mgr.

PRESERVE BOUNDARY - - - - -

RESIDENTIAL ZONE - IIII

PARKING - X







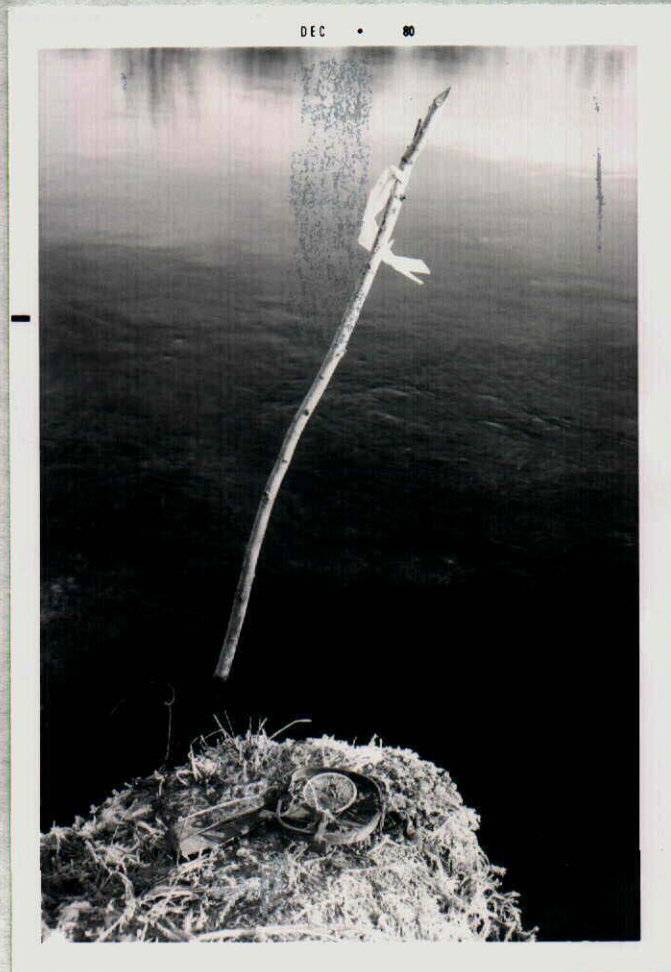
Top photo, a road hunter along Kilpatrick Road. Bottom, hunters who decided to quit hunting in mid-stream and portage their boat across the Preserve, drinking beer along the way.





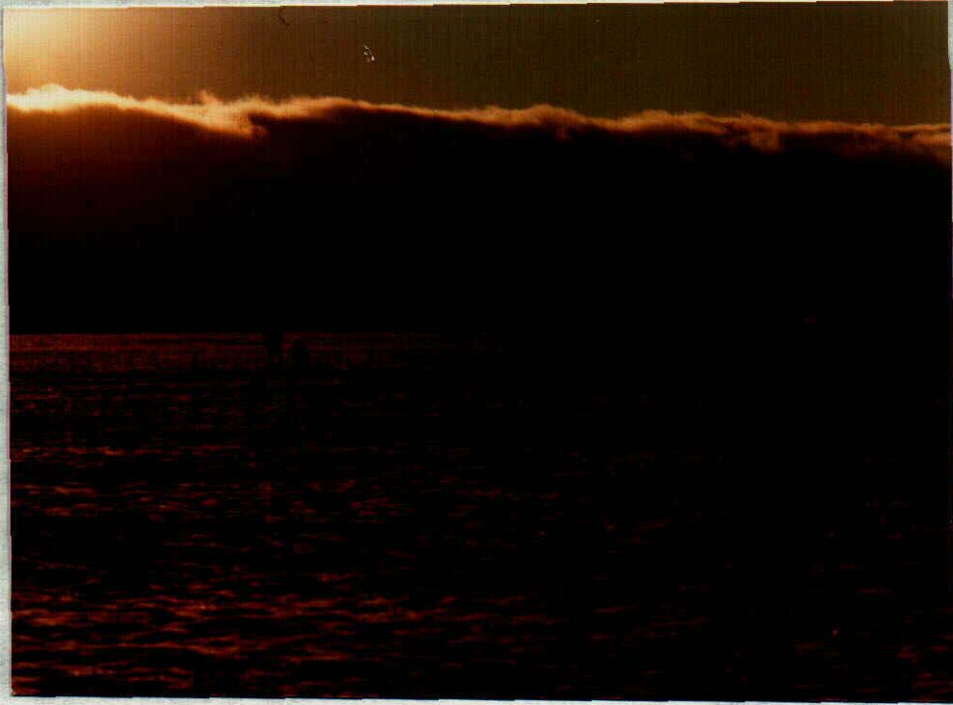
Guns on land. Both hunters are searching for downed birds that were not recovered. It was a difficult task confronting each hunter, they were spread out over several miles of creek, on either side. A horse was used on such patrols, a spotting scope, long-lens camera, hip waders, canoe and a truck.





Trapping on Silver Creek. Trappers exercised their rights to the navigable water. After the first day they were forced to place traps within the public water and not on the ground.





Hunters on land. Top photo taken on Stalker Creek Ranch, two Goose hunters walked in and set decoys in barley stubble. Lower hunter was 20 ft. up on bank shooting along Silver Creek.





Over 50 signs were posted along roads and water courses. Originally they were posted No Hunting on boundaries but later changed to No Trespassing. The residential zone where Silver Creek passes residences was posted no shooting and was not violated all season.





Crushed vegetation was characteristic on many islands and sloughs. Here, a clean up trip through the Preserve, a neighbor volunteered to help, and several hundred spent shells were collected. The island in top photo had more than one hundred shells on it. Both problems may have less impact if a blind hunting program was implemented in the future.