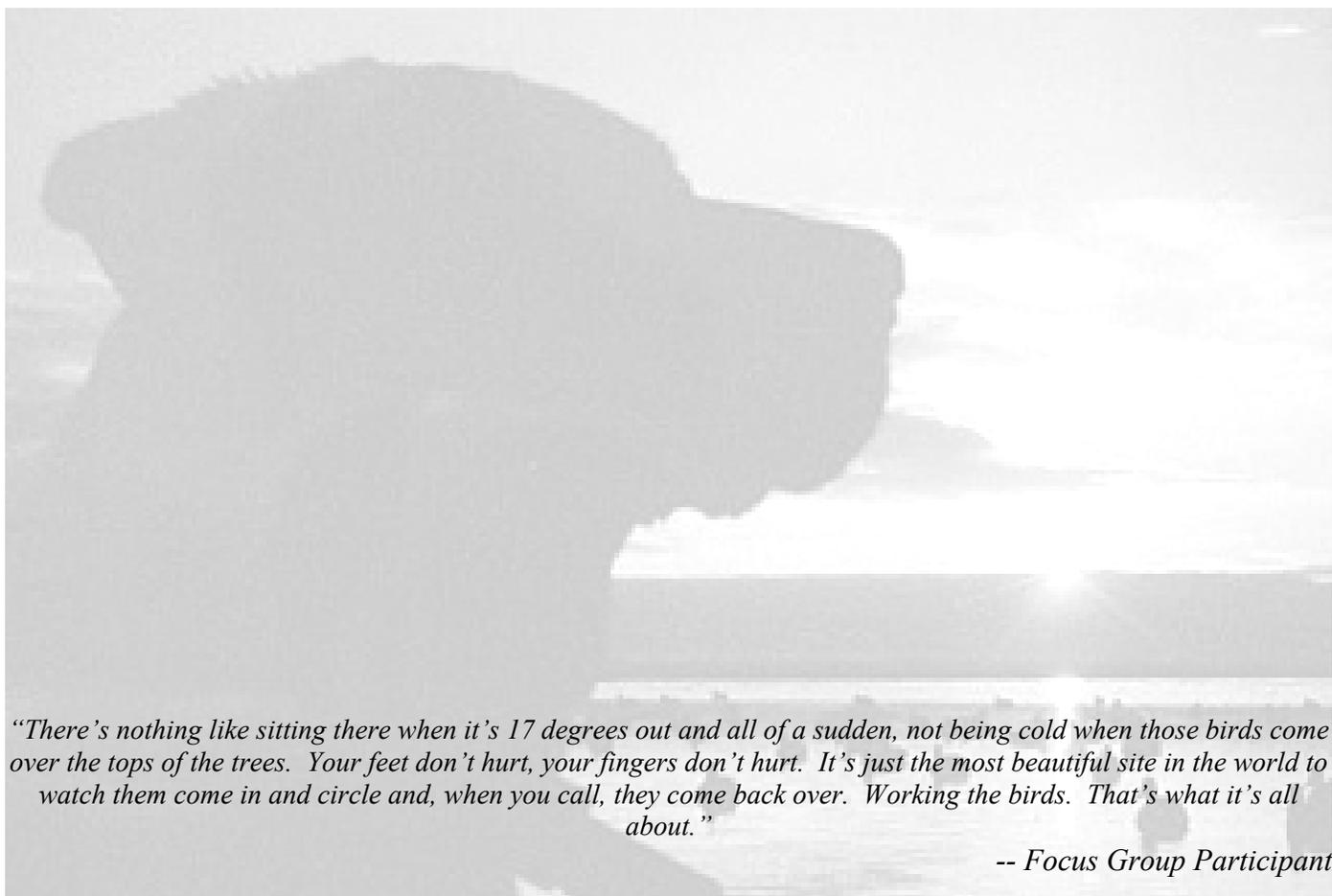


APPENDIX B

WATERFOWL HUNTER FOCUS GROUP RESULTS



“There’s nothing like sitting there when it’s 17 degrees out and all of a sudden, not being cold when those birds come over the tops of the trees. Your feet don’t hurt, your fingers don’t hurt. It’s just the most beautiful site in the world to watch them come in and circle and, when you call, they come back over. Working the birds. That’s what it’s all about.”

-- Focus Group Participant

SCE&G
SALUDA HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT
(FERC NO. 516)

WATERFOWL HUNTER FOCUS GROUP
RESULTS

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**SCE&G RECREATION ASSESSMENT
WATERFOWL HUNTER
FOCUS GROUP RESULTS**

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**SCE&G RECREATION ASSESSMENT
WATERFOWL HUNTER
FOCUS GROUP RESULTS**

1.0 PURPOSE

Waterfowl hunting is a potentially important recreation activity that occurs within the Saluda Hydro Project boundary. The Recreation Management Technical Working Committee (RMTWC) identified a need to obtain the views of waterfowl hunters to learn about their use of the project for hunting and their perceptions regarding the adequacy of existing resources and opportunities within the project boundary. The resulting information will be used during relicensing efforts to help SCE&G identify what can be done to support this activity and balance this with other recreational demands at the project.

Waterfowl hunting occurs outside the traditional summer recreation season, and, therefore, was not addressed in the recreation survey conducted during the summer months. It was determined that a focus group of waterfowl hunters would be an effective and efficient means of contacting and questioning hunters to obtain the information needed, and has the added benefit of allowing interaction between participants and researchers for more completely developed responses.

The purpose of conducting the focus group was:

- to learn how waterfowl hunters use public access sites and areas of Lake Murray
- to identify perceptions of existing resource conditions used by waterfowl hunters
- to identify needs for public access to Lake Murray for waterfowl hunting
- to identify perceptions of crowding on the water during waterfowl hunting

2.0 PARTICIPANTS

A list of potential participants was obtained from members of the RMTWC and from a local Ducks Unlimited chapter. A total of 90 names were solicited. Of those, 88 individuals were called and contact was made with 36 people. Eleven of the 36 people contacted had hunted waterfowl on Lake Murray and agreed to participate in the focus group.

Responses to Recruitment Phone Calls	Number
<hr/>	
<i>Of Individuals Contacted:</i>	
Recruited	11
Never Hunted on Lake Murray	9
Not a Duck Hunter	10
Refusal	6
<hr/>	
	36
 <i>Of Individuals Not Contacted:</i>	
No Answer/Not Home	32
Wrong Number	11
Disconnected/Out of Order	9
No Phone Number Available	1
<hr/>	
	52

3.0 RESULTS

The focus group meeting was held October 24, 2006, from 7:00 to 9:00 PM at Saluda Shoals Park, in Lexington, South Carolina. Individuals who agreed to participate were sent a letter confirming their participation and providing the time, location of the focus group and directions to the facility.

Five of the eleven individuals recruited, attended the session. All were male and reported varying levels of hunting avidity and varying levels of experience on Lake Murray. The group was facilitated by Kleinschmidt Associates. Thank you letters were sent to all participants within one week of the session.

3.1 Use of Lake Murray by Waterfowl Hunters

Lake Access

- Waterfowl hunters will use any lake access site available near the location where they would like to hunt. Whether a boat ramp is publicly or privately operated, or is free or for fee, is not relevant to a hunter's decision to use a ramp. Weather conditions and proximity to the hunting location are the two primary criteria used when selecting a lake access site for launching a boat.
- Lake access sites specifically mentioned included:
 - Private residence
 - Kempson's Bridge
 - Blacks Bridge
 - Boat landings near Taylor Road (on Little Saluda River)
 - Lake Murray Estates
 - Putnams
 - Hilton
 - Johnson Marina Road
 - Winding Road
 - Dam
 - Pine Island Road

Target Species

- Ducks on Lake Murray are plentiful, but there are many places ducks can go where hunters cannot follow or legally hunt due to shallow water or development. Lake Murray provides approximately 50,000 acres of habitat. The ducks will use it even if the hunters cannot.
- Waterfowl hunters target a variety of species on Lake Murray, including mallards, wood ducks, teals, ring necks, bluebills (scaup), redheads, pintails, and divers. Some hunters will take whatever they can shoot.
- Hunters stated that there are so few migrating mallards, that they are not worth significant effort as a target species.
- Most hunters did not consider “waterfowl” hunting to include geese. It was reported that the geese “here” are not flavorful. Although one avid participant reported targeting geese, all others indicated that they are only opportunistic goose hunters, and “might” shoot one if the opportunity presented itself.
- Geese are considered messy and a nuisance.
- Few people hunt geese, partly because the season overlaps with hunting seasons for more desirable species (e.g., deer).

Hunting Patterns

- Most individuals hunt both on shore and from a boat.
- Shoreline hunting sites are generally not accessible and/or available from land, so most hunters’ boat to these locations.
- Along the shoreline, hunters said they liked to layout, use blow downs or blinds for cover, and hunt marsh areas. In more populated areas or areas with limited shoreline access, they will hunt from a boat.
- Lake Murray provides a multitude of types of hunting opportunities. Hunters will adapt to a situation as necessary to continue hunting.
- Low water levels make it difficult to access shallow or marsh areas of the lake, and make it so that there is nowhere to layout on shore (lack of shoreline cover during periods of low water).

- Hunters reflected a range of avidity for the sport, reporting that they typically hunt anywhere from 1-15 times per season.
- Waterfowl hunters reported hunting all day types, but primarily on weekends. The time of day hunted also varies between dawn and dusk, and is dependent primarily on when the birds are present and weather.
- Most hunters engage in hunting with at least one additional person, and they frequently arrive at the launch location in separate vehicles.
- The timing of a hunt within the open season is primarily dependent on when the birds arrive. January was considered by some to be a good month for hunting. November was also considered a good month, when hydrilla is present, which is believed to attract ring necks.

Hunting Locations

- Locations where waterfowl are hunted on Lake Murray include:
 - Saluda River
 - Little Saluda River
 - Blacks Bridge area
 - Rocky Creek Area
 - Near Shull Island (Beaver Dam Creek)
 - Near Bundrick Island
 - Up Stinking Creek
 - Open water between Dreher Island to the Dam
 - Islands
- Primary reasons for selecting specific hunting areas include proximity to a hunter's home (some individuals hunt close to their home if possible) and distance from shoreline residences. Distance from shoreline residences was the primary reason reported for hunting around islands. Many hunters carry range finders for estimating their distance from homes. The specific species hunted seemed to be of secondary importance.
- The area of the lake from the fork of the Saluda River and the Little Saluda River downstream to Dreher Island is too developed for safe or successful hunting.

3.2 Shoreline Resources Used

Conditions

- Waterfowl hunters agreed that SCE&G maintains their public access sites very well, and noted that all public sites are well equipped, “pretty nice”, and reasonably clean.

Access or Facility Needs

- Although some boat ramps are not always useable during the winter months, participants unanimously agreed that boat access to the lake is adequate for their purposes and no additional access sites are needed.
- Trash cans and cabins were the only facilities suggested for additional resources. All recognized that the addition of trash cans would require an increase in maintenance needs at the sites, as they would need to be emptied.
- Primary suggestions for enhancing existing conditions included
 - Maintain higher water levels through the end of January to improve hunting conditions. This is the single most important thing SCE&G could do to benefit waterfowl hunters.
 - Food or habitat plantings to enhance and/or attract waterfowl and waterfowl habitat around the shoreline, particularly – thought not exclusively – in undeveloped areas.
 - Slow residential development along the shoreline. Development is going to persist. SCE&G should leave and/or salvage some pockets of protected (undeveloped) lands, particularly in the upper reaches of the lake (e.g., Saluda and Little Saluda Rivers). Recognition that SCE&G has no control over abutting properties.
 - Protect and/or provide habitat.

3.3 Perceptions of Crowding on the Water

- Generally, crowding of hunters at waterfowl hunting areas is considered light to moderate. Occasionally, hunters will experience moderate to heavy crowding when hunters all arrive at the same location.
- The most challenging issue for waterfowl hunters is conflict with other recreationists (anglers, boaters, and campers) and shoreline residents. All reported that anglers will frequently and intentionally interfere with waterfowl hunters by fishing a field of decoys or positioning themselves near a blind, even when the set up is obvious. Reportedly, boaters will also intentionally traverse a field of decoys, and homeowners will create interference if possible. Anglers, however, were reported to be the most frequent instigators of conflict. It was referred to as a lack of respect.

3.4 Perceptions of Success

- The experience is the primary reason for waterfowl hunting on Lake Murray.
- A successful hunt on Lake Murray is described as:
 - Killing one duck
 - Seeing ducks
- If success is defined as achieving the bag limit, most waterfowl hunters on Lake Murray are unsuccessful. In fact, hunters on Lake Murray anticipate low kill rates, and carry only a few (3 or so) shells because they know they will not see a lot of ducks.

In Their Own Words...

“It’s a lot of work, waterfowl hunting.”

“It’s fun. I enjoy it.”

“The older I get, the harder it is.”

“I don’t care if I shoot ‘em any more. I just like the experience.”

“If this was about killing, it wouldn’t be the sport that it is.”

“There’s nothing like sitting there when it’s 17 degrees out and all of a sudden, not being cold when those birds come over the tops of the trees. Your feet don’t hurt, your fingers don’t hurt. It’s just the most beautiful site in the world to watch them come in and circle and, when you call, they come back over. Working the birds. That’s what it’s all about.”

3.5 Lake and Shoreline Management, and Information Needs

- There are rumors that all duck hunting may be banned on Lake Murray and that new duck habitat may be created on the lake. No participants were able to comment beyond these rumors.

Hydrilla

- Hydrilla is not native vegetation in Lake Murray. Hunters do not wish to see the lake full of hydrilla, although they will take advantage of its presence when they can during hunting. Loss of hydrilla translates into a loss of duck habitat.
- Using grass carp to eliminate hydrilla was an action that received mixed reports from waterfowl hunters. Grass carp do not discriminate between native and nonnative vegetation and no one wants to see a complete loss of native vegetation. There is some questioning of whether SCDNR can really manage grass carp and whether or not they are actually sterile. Use of grass carp isn’t necessarily bad, but it should be well controlled.
- Hydrilla in the lake was sprayed with an herbicide, but the herbicide caused some kind of reaction with copper, which is apparently unique to Lake Murray and caused problems with boats.
- There is poor communication and cooperation on lake management between SCE&G and the SCDNR. The SCDNR stocked carp for a 40,000 acre lake, and then SCE&G dropped the lake, and all of a sudden, it was a 30,000 acre lake, resulting in an overstocking of carp.

Shoreline Management

- Nonpoint source pollution is coming into Lake Murray from the Bush River. Clear cutting is occurring along the Bush River and the inflow into the Saluda River is silty. Nitrogen from hog farms is also getting in. Individuals recognize that this is an EPA issue relating to private property, but believe the agency is failing to properly manage the issue. Setbacks are needed to better manage runoff.

SCE&G Communications

- SCE&G should try to pay more attention to the public – not talk, but listen. The company may look out for shareholders, but its attention to public preferences, public comment and stewardship could be improved.
- Would like SCE&G to share information on why lake levels are managed as they are. It would make accepting them a little easier