



THIEF LAKE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 7 ISSUE 1

AUGUST 2008

Editors Note: If you know of others who might be interested in this information, please send us their address. If you received this newsletter as a hard copy and have an email address, please send it to us so we can add you to our electronic distribution list. We are, of course, also happy to provide hard copies to those of you without email addresses. We welcome your comments and questions too! You can reach us at:

Minnesota DNR/Thief Lake WMA
42280 240th Avenue NE
Middle River, MN 56737
Phone: (218) 222-3747
Fax: (218) 222-3746
e-mail: joel.huener@dnr.state.mn.us
randy.prachar@dnr.state.mn.us

ACCESS TO THIEF LAKE IN 2008 - WHAT CAN WE EXPECT?

Those of you that hunted Thief Lake the last few years know that access has been tough at times. The drier weather in recent years has led to lower lake levels. As I write this, the lake is only about an inch below target level, which provides good access from all the launch points. It has been dry since the end of June, however, with lower than average precipitation. If the remainder of August and September continue in this dry mode, the lake could drop further.

The marsh itself is in good shape, with good stands of both emergent and submersed vegetation. The access points themselves are in good shape, and the improvements made the last few years should aid in getting out onto the lake.



DUCK SEASON AT THIEF LAKE; LAST YEAR IN REVIEW AND PROSPECTS FOR THIS FALL

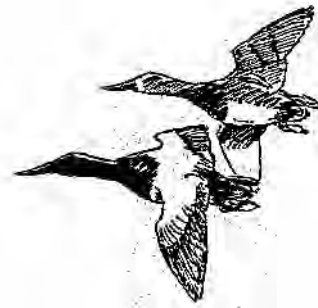
Last fall was another good one for waterfowl hunters on Thief Lake. Bag check showed that hunters averaged nearly 2 ducks per hunter per day for the entire season. Those of you that spent any time on the marsh know that divers comprised the bulk of the bag (particularly ringnecks and redheads), with 76% of the bag being

divers.

Diving duck enthusiasts will have some additional factors to consider this year. While Minnesota will again be offered a 6 bird total duck bag, it looks like the canvasback season will be closed in the Mississippi Flyway. In addition, the scaup bag will probably be reduced to one bird for 40 days of the 60 day season.

Local duck production was improved over last year, and was also later than most years. During banding operations, we've been seeing late broods of ducklings that are too small to band. These birds should still attain flight status before the waterfowl season.

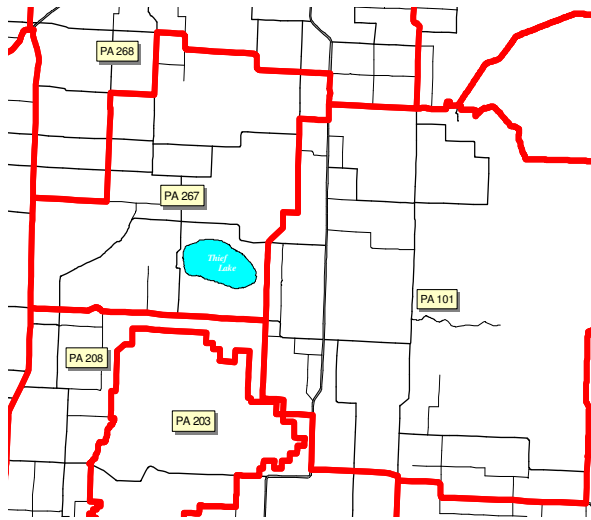
Goose production locally was improved from last year, and migrant EPP populations are also above the recent average. Goose visitation will again be driven by weather to the north of us, but has the potential to be good. The northwest goose zone is in the second year of a three-year experimental extension of the season from September 15 to the 22nd. We will again be opportunistically measuring any birds taken during this time to look at racial affiliation.



BEAR RESEARCH IN THE THIEF LAKE AREA

The Minnesota DNR Forest Wildlife Research Group is in the second year of their bear research in the aspen parklands portion of Minnesota. Additional bears were radio collared this spring, and the movement patterns of some of the bears from last year have been tracked. Researchers are currently looking at the availability of bear foods in the area. **Bear hunters in the area are asked to avoid shooting collared bears.**

BTB CONTROL EFFORTS IN NORTHWEST MINNESOTA



DEER IN NORTHWEST MINNESOTA

Those of you that hunt deer in Minnesota are probably aware by now of some of the changes that have taken place to simplify licensing. Rather than listing them here, I'll refer you to the hunting synopsis so that you are aware of all the changes that have taken place.

Here in the northwest, there are several changes from last year. Last year we changed Permit Area (PA) boundaries, and those boundaries remain the same. Some additional hunting opportunities are available as a result of the effort to stem bovine TB. Most PAs in this area are again Intensive harvest, and will also allow the Early Antlerless hunt in October. This will be in addition to the Youth Antlerless hunt, which will take place a week later.

In PA 101 (the area centered on Skime that starts east of Marshall County 127 on the east side of the lake), hunters will be able to buy antlerless tags for \$2.50, and there will be no bag limit for antlerless deer in this area. The buck limit in this PA will remain at 1.



By now, most of you are aware of the extreme efforts that have been made to contain and eradicate bovine TB (bTB) in wild populations in the northwest. To that end, hunting opportunities were liberalized considerably in the newly created Permit Area 101 last year, including an early antlerless hunt, a special late hunt, low cost (\$2.50) Disease Management tags, and a removal of the bag limit on deer in that area. Additional efforts were undertaken over the winter and into the spring, when USDA sharpshooters took an additional 546 deer, and aerial gunners under contract took 416 deer. A zone around the TB area was set up where landowners could shoot deer throughout the spring and summer.

Hunting opportunities in PA 101 and the surrounding PAs will be liberalized this fall to keep pressure on the deer populations, and to provide samples of wild populations to measure bTB incidence. The outcome of sampling this fall will determine actions this coming winter. One of the outcomes of this effort that is new will be an early antlerless season in October in addition (the weekend prior to) the Youth Antlerless Hunt in all of the PAs surrounding PA 101.

As part of the State's efforts to control spread of this disease, **the feeding ban in NW Minnesota remains in effect.**

MINNESOTA ELK SEASON IN 2007

The elk herd that is managed out of this office continues to do well, and we have scheduled a hunt again this year. Last year, hunters took 6 elk during the seasons allowed. This year we will hold three seasons, an either-sex hunt in September, an antlerless only hunt in late November, and another in early December. There will be 12 permits total authorized to hunt. We experienced higher depredation damage claims in the last year, which is the reason for liberalized hunting opportunities.

For the first time, a portion of the border elk herd range in Kittson County will also have an elk season.

An additional 10 permits will be offered in this area.

The application period for this hunt ended in mid-July, and the drawing was held shortly thereafter. Hunting elk is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity in Minnesota, and hunters may hunt singly or in parties of two (with one tag between them). Watch for news releases or the DNR website next summer if you're interested in applying for this unique opportunity.



AVIAN INFLUENZA TESTING

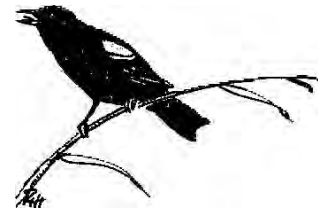
The subject of avian influenza (AI - commonly called bird flu) has received a lot of attention in recent years. AI occurs naturally in birds, including waterfowl, and there are a variety of strains. **The highly pathogenic form has not been found in North America.** Thief Lake staff assisted researchers in sampling ducks during banding operations again this summer, and the DNR has hired personnel to sample hunter-killed birds this fall. These researchers will be present again during waterfowl season, and will be contacting hunters at boat launches or at their camps. Sampling is quick, and no cutting is involved. For more information, see the hunting synopsis, check the DNR waterfowl link below, or go to www.birdflu.state.mn.us

DNR WATERFOWL WEB PAGE

For more information on some of the things that the DNR is doing for waterfowl and waterfowl hunting, go to the Web page at:

www.dnr.state.mn.us/hunting/waterfowl/index.html

During waterfowl season, there is a link from this site to the most current aerial census information for various key waterfowl staging areas around the state.



REMINDER - SPECIAL EARLY FIREARMS DEER SEASONS

There will actually be two early firearms deer seasons in the vicinity of Thief Lake this October. The first will occur the weekend of October 11-11 in all of the PAs in this area except PA 203 (Agassiz NWR and the State lands to the south and east). The second hunt will occur the following weekend, and is for youth hunters only in the five northwestern counties. Young people between 12 and 15 years of age may hunt with a rifle for deer in this area during that time period, and are allowed to take one antlerless deer. Youth must be accompanied by a non-hunting adult during the hunt.

Waterfowl hunters hunting over water or from fixed blinds are exempt from blaze orange requirements during these two hunts, but all other hunters (including archery deer hunters and small game hunters) are required to wear orange. This requirement also extends to goose hunters in the CHZ on their way to and from blinds. Once in the blind, goose hunters do not have to wear orange.

Special thanks to Ross Hier for the use of his artwork!

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is available to all individuals regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, age, sexual orientation, membership or activity in a local commission, or disability.

Discrimination inquiries should be sent to MN-DNR, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155-4031; or the Equal Opportunity Office, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.



Minnesota DNR
Thief Lake Wildlife Management Area
42280 240th Ave NE
Middle River, MN 56737

