



# THIEF LAKE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA NEWSLETTER

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*Editor's 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 240<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE  
Middle River, MN 56737  
Phone: (218) 222-3747  
Fax: (218) 222-3746  
e-mail: [Joel.Huener@state.mn.us](mailto:Joel.Huener@state.mn.us)  
[Kyle.Arola@state.mn.us](mailto:Kyle.Arola@state.mn.us)



## ACCESS TO THIEF LAKE IN 2016 - WHAT CAN WE EXPECT?

Once again winter last year was kind of a non-event. We did get enough snow that the lake filled during spring runoff, and we've been slightly above target level most of the spring and summer. As I write this the lake is 0.1' above fall target level. Cover looks good on the lake at this time. We'll see what the next month brings. Currently, access is good at all the normal points around the lake.

In this flat country, this can all change in a few days with some substantial rains. Feel free to call the office to ask about current lake levels prior to arrival.

## CATTAIL CONTROL AROUND THIEF LAKE

A lot of folks think cattail and good duck marshes are synonymous. The hybrid cattail that we have encroaching around the perimeter of Thief Lake, however is an aggressive hybrid between native and non-native cattail

that displaces most other emergent vegetation. Historically, Thief Lake has been a basin dominated by hardstem bulrush and the native *Phragmites* (or common reed).

During the low water we experienced in 2012, the hybrid cattail that we have around the perimeter of the lake started encroaching into the basin. We started fighting back by spraying some of these cattail peninsulas on the east side of the lake last summer, and sprayed additional areas this summer. We also sprayed a swath down either side of the channel from the Northeast Landing. You may see the cattail turning brown before the rest of the vegetation turns color and dies back.

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

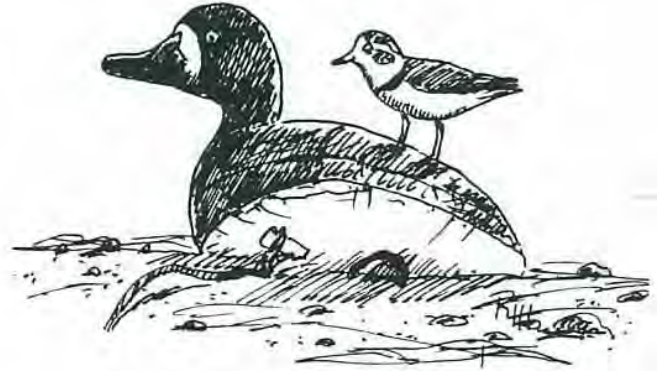
Hunters once again enjoyed a more traditional season here at Thief Lake last year, with good access throughout the season. Hunters' days afield and ducks in the bag were down slightly from the previous year, but above the season long average from previous years. Hunter success (in ducks per hunter per day for the entire season) increased from 1.83 ducks per hunter per day to 2.19 (third highest since 1949) and well above the long term average of 1.55. Ringnecks and redheads were most prevalent in the bag from the beginning of the season.

Most bag limits will be the same as last year. Hunters during the September early goose season may now take snow and blue geese. The September early goose season will end on September 18, which will give the geese a reprieve of 5 days before the general waterfowl season opens on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

Continently, breeding waterfowl populations were similar to last year (an all-time high). Habitat conditions had declined in the portions of the prairie pothole region closest to us. Rain since the time of the surveys has put some water back into the prairies. We'll have to see how migration unfolds this fall, and how birds funnel through this part of the flyway.

## DEER POPULATIONS IN NORTHWEST MINNESOTA

We have had several consecutive mild winters, which has allowed for good recovery by area deer herds. PA 267 and PA 268 are no longer lottery areas, but are now hunters choice (bag limit of one but the hunter can shoot either a buck or antlerless deer). PA 101 remains in lottery status, but permit numbers have been liberalized to 300 permits (from 25 permits last year).



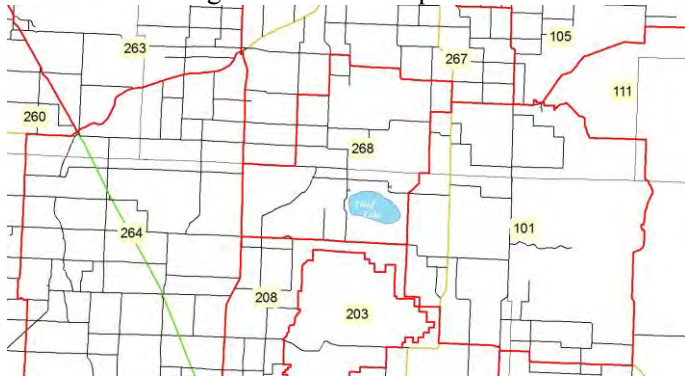
### INVASIVES RULES APPLY TO DUCK BOATS, TOO!

Boats used strictly for duck hunting are exempt from some of the regulations that apply to other boats in the state of Minnesota, such as the need for registration or running lights. They are still subject to the rules regarding invasive species. For decades we have been battling a small infestation of purple loosestrife at the Maanum's boat launch, which undoubtedly came in with someone's trailer or boat from an infested area. Just this week we discovered a new infestation at the Northeast Landing. If we want to maintain the character of Thief Lake, we need to protect it from introductions of aquatic plants like Eurasian milfoil or curly leaf pondweed, or invertebrates like the faucet snail (an alternate host for a parasite that has killed off thousands of scaup on Winnie and the Upper Mississippi). We need to clean off trailers and drain boats. In duck hunting, though, we have lots of additional gear that you might not think about – boat blinds with non-native vegetation or decoys strings and anchors that could transport eggs and seeds. For more info (including pictures) see: <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/aquatic/index.html>



Locally, counts of breeding waterfowl were down from last year, and a wet late spring/early summer may have spread out production again. We had an early spring and we got a good nesting effort from local Canada geese. Further north, migrant goose populations like the EPP birds that migrate through the Thief Lake area had a good production season. Of course, weather will drive migrant goose use of the area and refuges further north.

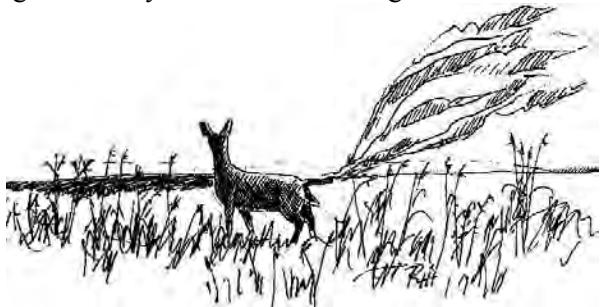
Duck production was down from last year, and somewhat later, but we did well night lighting with the banders, so we seem to have gotten some local production



DEER PERMIT AREAS IN THE THIEF LAKE AREA

### DEER IN NORTHWEST MINNESOTA

A **four day either-sex youth deer hunt** will be offered throughout the area (see the synopsis for hunt zone boundaries) for youth hunters aged 10-15 at the time of the hunt. The hunt will run over MEA weekend (Thursday October 20 to Sunday October 23). Hunters afield during this time (except waterfowl hunters hunting over water) are reminded that they have to wear full (deer season) orange. Hunters in the CHZ can remove their orange once they are in a blind during this season.





## 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](http://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.

## NEW CAMPING REGULATION ON WMAS

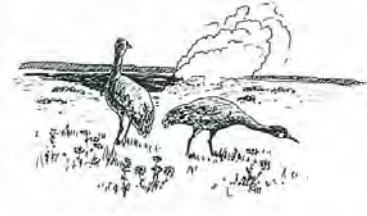
A new camping regulation is in place for campers on the WMA system. The new regulation is spelled out on page 96 of the regulations booklet. The new regulation states that: "Campers may not make noise above that of a quiet conversation from one hour after sunset until one hour before sunrise." Like so many of our WMA regulations, this one is designed to keep things fair for all users. Most of our campers are looking to get a good night's sleep before heading out early the next morning. Being considerate of our neighbors is only appropriate.

## FIREWOOD RESTRICTIONS

The discovery of the emerald ash borer in Minnesota has brought about some restrictions in firewood use in an effort to halt the spread of this invasive species. **Only firewood purchased from a DNR approved vendor, or kiln dried dimensional lumber may be brought onto the management area.** Firewood gathered on-site is still permissible.

## SANDHILL CRANE SEASON

Minnesota will once again be holding a sandhill crane season, and the season timing is similar to last year. Hunting will be allowed in the Northwest Goose Zone, and the season will run from September 10 to October 16. Hunters will need a small game license, a sandhill crane permit and use plugged shotguns and non-toxic shot. The bag limit on cranes remains at one bird per day, and hunters are subject to the same over-water restrictions as goose hunters during the September Early Goose season.



## GROUSE, BEAR AND ELK

Drumming counts were a mixed bag compared to last year – some were up and some remained the same. The rain we received in June had the potential to impact brood survival. Wet weather in the first week after hatching is tough on young grouse. We've been seeing some grouse broods, though, so we'll see how many birds we have in the woods this fall. Sharptail numbers (as measured by lek counts) were down somewhat from last year, but we have been seeing some sharptail broods, so some production took place.

Bear populations continue to do well in the Thief Lake area. Natural foods for bears seem to be very abundant this year, which may make it tougher to get a bear to respond to bait. Some of this will depend on the availability of acorns and other foods during the first week in September.

The mid-winter aerial survey of elk in the Grygla herd was below the target level again this year, and as a result no season was offered for this herd this year. Elk hunting continues in the Kittson County areas, however. We initiated an elk research project this year, and radio collared cows from both areas will be monitored to examine elk habitat use. For more info on elk hunting opportunities, see: <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/hunting/elk/index.html>

## FALL PRESCRIBED FIRE

We are again planning on conducting a couple prescribed fires this fall within the sanctuary on the west side of Thief Lake. We're also hoping to do a large burn on the southeast corner of the lake in early September. Fall fires offer us the opportunity to set back woody encroachment within our open sites without sacrificing any nesting waterfowl. Timing will be dependent on weather, and we may have completed them before waterfowl season. If not, we may end up with a burn during duck season, so, if you happen to see smoke in this area while out hunting don't be alarmed, it is just us managing the habitat!

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



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

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