



North Norris & Walking Trail Mowing Fires

The summer of 2021 was exceptionally dry across much of Minnesota. Most Minnesotans have probably heard of the Greenwood Fire near Isabella, MN, but the dry conditions have resulted in more wildfires across much of the state than in a typical year. As of September 20, there had been more than 1,300 wildfires during 2021 in Minnesota, which is approximately twice the number of wildfires that occurred last year. On August 14 a wildfire erupted 2.5 miles north of Norris Camp. This fire was dubbed the “North Norris Fire” and initially spread quickly before being contained at 79 acres. A typical response included a flurry of aircraft and ground based resources, which kept the fire from growing larger. That fire was contained within a few operational shifts, but extinguishing the fire took several more days. The cause of this fire is still being investigated, but it may have been related to a lightning storm several days before the fire erupted.

Another notable large wildfire in the vicinity of Red Lake WMA during August included the Square Fire, which was north of Williams, MN. That fire totaled 87 acres and was unusually difficult to extinguish because peat was burning. That fire was likely started by human activity. Finally, Norris Camp staff started a wildfire while mowing walking trails on August 17. That fire totaled 1.9 acres and was largely controlled within the same day. However, monitoring and mop-up activities were required for a several days thereafter.



View of North Norris Fire from the fire tower near Norris Camp. August 14, 2021.

Luckily, concerns of wildfires have largely receded in the Red Lake WMA area. The weather station at Norris Camp has recorded 9.3 inches of rain since August 10.

Camp Fire Restrictions

There was a severe drought this past summer (see the article on the local wildfires) and there were campfire restrictions across this area up until two weeks. However we have had quite a bit of rain in the past few weeks, so those restrictions for the Red Lake WMA/Beltrami Forest area have been lifted. Camp fires are now allowed throughout this area. But remember that dry grass and leaves can easily start on fire, so be careful with any camp fires.

Thank you for doing your part to prevent wildfires.

Rare Plant Surveys

With support from Red Lake WMA, Malcolm and Rosemary MacFarlane have completed an investigation into some rare plants that can be found in the Red Lake WMA area. The results will be published in an upcoming volume of the Great Lake Botanist and will detail 16 years of surveys for Botrychiums. Botrychiums are small, rare ferns that can be difficult to distinguish, sometimes requiring genetic analyses to differentiate different species. Adding to the difficulty is their small size (some species can be less than one inch tall at maturity), they may produce only a single leaf per year, or they may not appear aboveground at all during any given year. All of these factors mean that dedication and persistence is required to understand these species. The MacFarlanes are indeed experts, and their efforts have greatly enhanced our understanding of these species in Minnesota.

Prior to this pioneering survey work, there were only nine locations where this group of species was known to occur in northwestern Minnesota. Through 16 years of work, the MacFarlanes collected 640 specimens from 12 species within this genus. These voucher specimens are important for further taxonomic investigations, and will be permanently stored at the University of Minnesota. Ten of the species collected are listed in Minnesota as rare, threatened, or endangered.

The researchers note some of the changes in the landscape since European settlement have included logging, agricultural clearing, fire suppression, and ditching. Despite this, the broad scale pre-settlement distribution of Botrychiums may not be much different than it is today, although the micro-habitats where small populations can presently be found can often be predicted by the events of the last century. If you

would like to read the details of this work please consult the next volume of the Great Lakes Botanist.

Walking Trails & Mowed Openings

The Red Lake WMA area currently has 39 Hunter Walking Trails totaling about 72 miles of trail length. All the trails are mowed and ready for fall use. Staff are continuing to work with the Ruffed Grouse Society to develop additional Hunter Walking Trails in the area and Ruffed Grouse Society volunteers continue to scout and develop new miles of trail.



Star of the North walking trail entrance. A cooperative project between Lake of the Woods Chapter Ruffed Grouse Society and the MN. Dept. of Natural Resources.

Brush Work & Openings Mowed

The Roving Crew did great work with the big dozers last winter. They sheared off 300 acres of overgrown lowland brush to maintain open habitat in the sharp-tailed grouse area off of Dicks Parkway. There have been a few openings mowed over by the Lost Lake Trail and J-9 Trail areas and more openings work is planned along the Hogsback trails and in the Axel Olson's area.

Water-Levels 2020 to 2021

Waters levels at our water impoundments were extremely low due to the drought. There were some that were close to being dry. The Keller impoundment off the Nelson Trail was mostly dry and the Manweiler off the same trail was almost dry, too. The picture you see is the outlet for the Manweiler impoundment. At this time, in a normal year, it would usually be flowing out the top of the grated culvert or be a few inches below.



2021 Bear Harvest Update

This summer's drought seriously impacted bear food crops around Minnesota, and the Norris Camp area was no different. Normal bear foods such as blueberries and juneberries were nearly nonexistent. This is usually a good thing for bear hunters. However, year to date statewide totals for registered bear harvests are lower than during 2020 (2,569 compared to 2,869). Even with a slightly lower harvest during 2021, year to date registrations are still about 22% above the 5-year average. So far in Zone 12, 56 bears have been registered during 2021. The success of bear hunters in Zone 12 so far this year is 45%, which is a high success rate for bear hunts in general.

Woodpecker Nest Work

Woodpeckers are important wildlife species for two reasons. First, they are cavity-nesting birds that excavate their own nesting cavities. These cavities are later used by a wide variety of other animals for breeding and sheltering, from pine martins and wood ducks to owls and chickadees. Second, woodpeckers consume vast quantities of insects that damage or destroy trees, keeping these pest species in check and/or controlling outbreaks. Nine species of woodpeckers occur regularly in Minnesota, but their nesting activities are inadequately studied, probably because nests are hard to detect.

The goal of this project is to learn more about the habitat preferred by woodpeckers by finding their nests and then collecting data on the species, size, and ages of the nesting trees. Contractors, other researcher personnel, and staff looked for and document woodpecker nests in the Red Lake WMA/Beltrami Forest Area both in 2018 and again last summer. As noted earlier, woodpecker nests are extremely difficult to find except when young are begging for food. In 2018 eight woodpecker nests were found and eight nests were discovered this past summer.

More woodpecker nest searching is planned for the summer of 2022. The more nests that are found and documented, the more we will learn to help us manage for these important species.



PHOTO BY BETH SIVERHUS

Sharp-Tailed Grouse 2021

Our sharp-tail lek surveys this year were similar in numbers to the past few years. They were down a little, but not significantly. There has been a little change where they are dancing as some of the areas have been converted into different agricultural land and they moved to more suitable habitat. It takes a little searching to find them again and sometimes they are far out and you can only hear them.

Future DNR Funding Ideas

Hunters and anglers have been a traditional funding source for DNR conservation work through both license sales and an excise tax on hunting and fishing equipment. However, the number of people who hunt and fish is slowly decreasing which is resulting in a decrease in sustainable funding. Therefore, the DNR is working on a future funding framework for conservation and outdoor recreation. Both DNR staff and the public are encouraged to contribute ideas on this project. These ideas and research work done on this topic will be critical to helping us identify key elements of this vision for the future funding framework.

Please check out and participate in the [Engage with DNR platform](#) website where we are asking members of the public to ask questions. You can also write a story about your best outdoor experience in Minnesota. And if you have a favorite place in Minnesota, there's a map where you can mark it and tell a little about it. The public online engagement page will be built out as possible solutions are developed that we want the public to weigh in on.

Minnesota's rich outdoor opportunities are available today in large part thanks to the care

and investments of past generations, but those same foundational investments are not being made today. With so much changing on the natural resources landscape, we need to move from a model that funds the past and work with Minnesotans to seize the opportunity to build a framework for the future we all want for Minnesota.

Address Updates Needed!

We've had to delete several names from our mailing list as we no longer have a working emails for some people. If you know of anyone who would like to be added to our mailing list – just let us know.

We can be reached at:
redlake.wildlife@state.mn.us or at
(218) 783-6861

Thanks!

Friends of Norris Camp Treasurer's Report

By June Foss

Account Balance = \$7,953.39

Thanks so much to the following people
for donations they have made since
January 2021:

**Dan Moss, Jeff Moss, Gavin Bettcher &
Tim Bettcher**

Wendy Calberg & Sandy Tigie

and

**Steve Sauer (BOGS Camp)
In Memory of Tom Lyon**