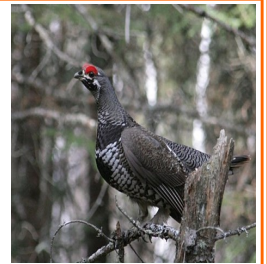


Photo by Stephen Maxson ©

Norris Camp News

News from the Red Lake Wildlife Management Area Headquarters
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – Wildlife Division

Issue 39 ~ October 2018



2018 Hunting Season

Grouse: Despite lower drumming counts in 2018, more hunters have been satisfied with the grouse harvest this fall. Dry spring and summer conditions likely resulted in higher chick survival than in previous years. Some hunting through mid-October was hindered by a cold and wet early fall. Norris Camp received 6 inches of snow on October 10 and persistent cold weather allowed the snow to persist for over one week.

Deer: There will be more opportunities to harvest deer in the Red Lake and Beltrami areas this fall than there have been in years' past. The deer population in permit area 111 has been recovering since the 2013/2014 winter but a further population increase is desired. Permit area 111 is designated as Hunter Choice in 2018 after several years of a Lottery designation. The reason for change is that population models showed no difference in population growth between a Lottery and Hunter Choice designation so a Hunter Choice designation was chosen to offer hunters more opportunity for harvest. The expectation is that the population will continue to grow.

(Hunting Season Continued on Page 2)

Another Successful Dragonfly Survey

On June 30, Norris Camp staff joined the public and the Minnesota Dragonfly Society (MDS) for another survey program at Norris Camp.

The program began with a presentation about dragonfly life history and their importance in our ecosystems. From there, MDS biologists demonstrated correct techniques for successful capture and handling of dragonflies before

everyone was given a net and headed out into the field to collect some specimens.

This is the third summer that MDS has visited Norris Camp to conduct surveys and lead a public program.



Above: Minnesota Dragonfly Society Vice President Ami Thompson discusses dragonfly and damselfly characteristics with two program participants.

(Dragonfly Survey Continued on Page 2)

The Moose River Impoundment Landscape Burn

The easiest definition for a landscape burn is that it is big. This burn area was over 12,000 acres. The intent is to allow the fire to burn naturally within the confines of the burn unit in order to replicate a large wild fire where some areas do not burn. Unburned areas (mostly islands of trees or areas with surface water) provide refuge areas for plants and wildlife.

The ecosystem goals for this burn were to promote and maintain the fire-dependent open sedge-prairie plant community and reduce competition from trees and shrubs.

(Landscape Burn Continued on Page 3)

2018 Hunting Season

(Continued from Page 1)

Bear: Statewide bear harvest totals will likely decrease slightly from 2017 when the final numbers are tallied. However, bear harvest in Zone 12, which encompasses much of Red Lake WMA, will likely increase to about 66 animals (42 males and 24 females). Overall, hunter success in Zone 12 has been high this year, at about 50%. The number of permits available and the number of animals harvested has been relatively stable over the last 3-4 years.

Dragonfly Survey

(Continued from Page 1)

The MDS is fulfilling a grant provided by Enbridge in order to better understand the distribution of dragonfly and damselfly populations in Minnesota and to increase public knowledge of natural systems. Each year that MDS has visited Norris Camp, they survey dragonflies for a full week and conduct a public program on the weekend. Each survey has been conducted at a different period during the summer in order to document species that emerge at different times and more fully survey the biota of the area.

For the 40 enthusiasts who showed up, learning about dragonfly life history during the program was part of the fun. For instance, participants may have learned that dragonfly larvae are important aquatic predators of mosquito larvae or that dragonflies can fly up to 18 miles per hour. They are also important food for other critters, and some bird species may time their fall migrations specifically to coincide with important dragonfly species that also migrate. Because dragonflies larvae are aquatic, they can also be important indicators of watershed health; loss of prairie wetlands, decreasing water quality, and increased use of pesticides are all threats that these species face.



Above: Breckon Olson with a damselfly.

Luckily, Red Lake WMA and its associated peatlands are some areas that still have good water quality and because of the unique environments found here, these habitats can support dragonfly species that are not found in other places of Minnesota.

Insects populations are poorly surveyed in many areas, and these surveys by MDS help gather baseline data that can help us determine if things change in the future. Because this area has been poorly surveyed, it is common for MDS biologists to document "County Records" each year when they visit Norris Camp. Finding a "County Record" for any species, plant or animal, simply means the species has never before been recorded within that particular county. Documenting a State Record is a much rarer occurrence, but this year's survey identified the Plains Forktail Damselfly, and this species has never before been collected in Minnesota even though MDS biologists have been looking for it for years because they suspected it may occur in Minnesota.

Overall, the event was a success, with participants getting as wet and dirty as they wished in attempting to catch and identify rare species. Each year after the survey, MDS biologists submit their collections to the Department of Entomology at the University of Minnesota and provide Norris Camp with additional specimens of rare species.

Landscape Burn

(Continued from Page 1)

The wildlife habitat goals of the prescribed fire were to benefit openland species such as sharp-tailed grouse, yellow rails, bitterns, and sandhill cranes.



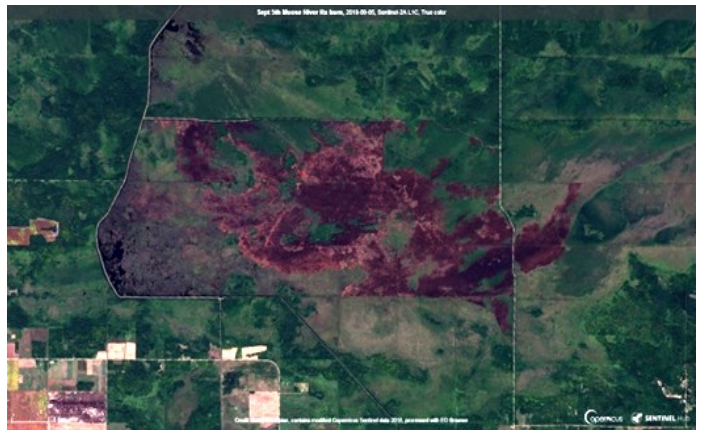
The aerial photo above shows the firebreaks around the burn area. Dick's Parkway (labeled "E") is on the east side, the Moose River Impoundment dike is to the west and the north and south lines are ditch grades. Due to the large size of this burn, a helicopter was used for aerial ignition.



This prescribed fire "escaped" onto the east side of Dick's Parkway during operations on August 21. The escape happened where there was a strip of intensely hot fire that was able to jump across Dick's Parkway despite suppression efforts. The result was that about 500 more openland acres burned than had been planned.

These acres were similar to the open brushlands within the planned burn unit.

A complete investigation for the escape is ongoing. But preliminary reasons for the escape include: changing conditions during the course of the burn (vegetation dried out during the course of the day and meteorological conditions were hotter and windier than anticipated), communication issues with lighting patterns and understanding which areas had been lit, visual difficulty in assessing whether areas were sufficiently burned due to smoke, and technical errors in switching from ignition to suppression for the helicopter during the escape. Overall, several aircraft were used to suppress the fire and most active flames were extinguished by the following day, but mop up continued for about one week.



The image above was taken on September 5th. The dark purple shows what burned in the fire including the wildfire area to the east of Dick's Parkway. Dick's Parkway shows as a white line running from top to bottom on the right hand side of the photo.

Red Lake WMA Master Plan

Red Lake WMA is undergoing a process to update the Red Lake WMA Master Plan. The last plan was written in 1980 and was intended to be a 10 year plan, so an update is needed. The WMA Plan is intended to guide management for the next 10 years and provide continuity in management across staff changes.

(WMA Master Plan Continued on Page 4)

Red Lake WMA Master Plan

(Continued from Page 3)

A formal management plan is required by statute for all WMAs that are identified as Major Units by the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1975.

The first unit to complete an updated Master Plan was Thief Lake WMA and there will be six other WMAs across the state that will go through the same process after Red Lake WMA. The process began in October with a kickoff meeting with representatives from the DNR Divisions that will be part of the planning for information and guidance regarding the management of this large WMA.

There will be opportunities for public involvement as part of the planning process. A public scoping survey will be held early in the process and comments can also be submitted at an open house when the draft plan is available. We will notify members of this email list when those opportunities occur.

Gray Fox

(*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*)

The Tree Fox

*By Jodie Provost, MN DNR
Private Land Habitat Coordinator*

Cat or Dog? The gray fox is a member of the dog family, Canidae, like red fox, coyotes and wolves. But it behaves more like a member of the cat family with its unusual and useful tree climbing skill to escape predators, find safe resting spots and obtain food. They have been observed 32 feet high! Extremely sharp, curved, semi-retractable claws and short, powerful legs make them well-adapted. Once in a tree, they can jump from branch to branch, and are so agile, they can descend head or tail first. Hence, they are also known as the tree fox.



Similar to a red fox in shape, gray fox are gray (surprise!) with a distinct, black back stripe. They are about 35-40 inches long, with about 1/3 of that length being a long, bushy, black-tipped tail. They stand about 12 inches at the shoulder and weigh 8-14 pounds. The backs of their ears, sides of their neck, underfur, legs, and feet are a yellowish buff. The dog-fox, or male, is slightly larger than the vixen, or female. On the rare occasion you hear a gray fox "talking", you may be treated to a bark, growl, snarl, squeal or harsh-sounding screech that is very identifiable.

Brushy, Forested Homes This unique creature is distributed in suitable habitat from southern Ontario and Quebec, through the United States except for the Washington, Idaho and Montana area, and down Central America into Venezuela and Columbia. Compared to red fox which have a more northern distribution, gray fox avoid open habitats and have more difficulty navigating deep snow. Their northern range edge is likely limited by climate, especially harsh winters. In Minnesota, suitable gray fox habitat entails deciduous forests, woodlands and brushy habitats. They are most common in the transition forest from the southeast to the northwest, and in the southern area of our northeast boreal forest.

Gray Fox

(Continued from Page 4)

Special habitat features that benefit them as cover, especially for den use, include fallen logs, woody debris and piles, standing snags, hollow trees, rocky outcrops, burrows dug by other animals, or soil suitable for burrowing.

For Better or Worse Gray fox choose life-long mates. Size of their home range, which can be up to four square miles, depends on habitat quantity and quality, season of the year, geography, and whether they are a dog-fox or vixen. Their scent glands and urine are used to mark the portion they actually protect, known as their territory. Mating occurs in late winter, likely peaking in February in Minnesota. After about 53 days, an average of four pups, also called kits or cubs, are born in a den in April or May. They are raised by both the dog-fox and vixen, particularly playful and taught to hunt at about four months. In late summer or early fall they venture out on their own, becoming mature to breed at 10 months. They typically survive 6-10 years in the wild.



Above picture: Gray Fox retrieving crab apples in a tree near Grand Rapids, MN. Photo courtesy of David Kuehn..

Bedtime Snack As predators, gray fox have keen eyesight and even better senses of smell and hearing. They are primarily nocturnal, hunting at night and alone, but may be active in day

or seen basking in the sun. Their vertically oriented pupils allow them to see well at night. By stalking and pouncing, they feast on small mammals such as voles, mice, squirrels, and especially cottontail rabbits. Small birds, eggs, carrion, reptiles, amphibians and even newborn fawns, are also eaten. More omnivorous than other canids, they also ingest plants, berries, wild grapes, apples, nuts and insects, such as grasshoppers and beetles. When food is plentiful, they are known to bury and mark it for a later snack.

Critters to Beware The most common predators on gray fox in Minnesota are likely coyotes, wolves and dogs. Coyotes may have an especially negative affect, but when wolves are present to push coyotes out, gray fox may benefit. Other predators include bobcats, great horned owls, and humans. Diseases such as distemper and parvovirus, and parasites such as heartworms, are also causes of death.

Fancy Fur In Minnesota, gray fox are managed with an annual, regulated hunting and trapping season. This year it opened October 20. No daily, season or possession limits exist. Though the gray fox's coat is attractively marked, it is coarser and less lavish than the red fox's. As reported by licensed fur dealers in the 2014-2015 season, Minnesota fur prices for 237 gray fox pelts averaged \$14.17, compared to \$20.41 for a red fox pelt. To get a sense of the harvest and number of hunters and trappers utilizing gray fox, an estimated 1,186 hunters harvested 816 gray fox in the 2015-2016 season, and an estimated 1,035 trappers harvested 1,902 gray fox in the 2014-2015 season. This compares to 4,150 hunters harvesting 3,780 red fox, and 2,012 trappers harvesting 6,040.

(Gray Fox Continued on Page 6)



Friends of Norris Camp

Treasurer's Report

by June Foss

Account Balance = \$7,290.54 on 10/19/2018

Thanks so much to the following people for donations they've made since April 2018:

Wendy Carlberg

and

Chis and Mary Grace Foret



The Johnson Hunting Clan 2018

The Johnson hunting clan from Thief River Falls celebrated their 34th year of hunting ruffed grouse and camping in and around the Norris Camp campground.

Four generations of family members have experienced "hunting camp" with several of the youngest members getting their first grouse this year.

Gray Fox

(Continued from Page 5)

Doing Well Though once threatened in parts of its overall range from over hunting and trapping, gray fox populations are generally stable today, with a conservation status of least concern by the World Conservation Union. In the eastern and southern United States however, there is a sense they are declining. While here at home, they've had an upward population trend since about 2000, especially in the northern part of Minnesota. Trappers report they are now more common than red fox in many areas. Minnesota's forest landowners can help ensure gray fox population remain strong by managing for brushy and forested deciduous habitats that are healthy, have young to old age patches, a diversity of native forbs, shrubs and trees, plenty of prey, adequate denning sites, and clean water sources.

Thank you to John Erb, Minnesota DNR Furbearer Research Biologist, for contributing information and passing along photos for this article.

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