



Norris Camp News

News from the Red Lake Wildlife Management Area Headquarters
PO Box 100, 11536 Faunce-Butterfield Rd SW, Roosevelt, MN 56673
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – Wildlife Division
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Photos by Stephen Maxson ©

The 2016 Hunting Season So Far:

Ruffed Grouse: Ruffed grouse hunting has been relatively slow so far this fall. Hunters are reporting few multi-bird flushes and shooting a significant portion of older birds. Those two things usually mean that production was low. Drumming counts statewide were up 18% from last year, but counts in this area were very similar to counts from 2015. However, we had consistent rain during the first two weeks of June in this area. That usually leads to decreased chick survival.



Madelyn, Mckennah, and Carson Anderson with a grouse harvested near Norris Camp.

Bear: Bear harvest through October 3 is up 35% statewide. This can likely be attributed to more licenses being made available in response to higher bear populations and lack of a good acorn crop that made bears more likely to visit hunters' baits. Locally, in Bear Zone 12, 68 bears have been harvested so far this year. Last year, 53 bears had been harvested at this time. Most of the bears harvested locally so far have been males.

Deer: Deer permit Area 111 is a lottery area with a one deer limit and 100 doe permits available in 2016. This means that hunters must apply for a doe tag. The application period was in early September and successful applicants will be notified via mail. Lottery status (as oppose to bucks only) allows youth hunters to shoot a doe during the youth season and will also allow the population in the forest to continue to quickly grow. There are more deer in the forest now than there have been for several years.

LUP Citizens' Input Panel

There was a LUP citizen's input panel meeting on October 6th. The meeting commenced with a tour of the Palsburg Fire area, and Adam Munstenteiger of DNR Forestry gave a presentation on the salvage logging operations and regeneration plans for the area. Other topics at the meeting included an update on the State/LUP land exchange process and an update on trail planning in the state forest. David Dragon of DNR Wildlife also gave a presentation on the status of deer, bear and wolf populations in the area.

Norris Campgrounds

The original Norris Campground is located in an old growth pine forest. Using that forest area as a campground was preventing the development of old forest characteristics and hindering tree regeneration in the area around the campground. These old growth areas are windows into the past that show us what the forest used to look like, and protecting them is warranted because of their scarcity.

To concentrate the impacts of campsites elsewhere, we have built another campground just to the west of the original campground. This area also has big pines, mostly from a plantation, and is very similar in many ways to the other campground. We have installed a well, moved the kiosk from the old campground, and a portable outhouse is provided during the fall.

We have been slowly closing off campsites at the old campground, but will still allow camping at the old campground until next year when the new campground becomes better established.

Camping is also allowed at the Norris Picnic Area. That area is part of the same old growth forest where the original campground is located. However, there has been so much use, the picnic area is no longer a functional forest. But the large, old trees are still there to be appreciated by both picnickers and campers.

Gray Jays

Adapted from an article by Susan Thurn of the Cable Natural History Museum in Wisconsin



Ron Miles feeding a gray jay at Norris Camp.

Why are gray jays found so far north? They seem to be dependent on two things: a strong presence of certain tree species (both black and white spruce and jack pine) and cold temperatures. Both requirements relate to their food storage method.

In order to survive the long, bitterly cold winters in their range, gray jays must stash food all summer and fall. They accomplish this by coating mouthfuls of food in sticky saliva, then gluing the boluses in tree crevices, under lichens, in evergreen needles, and behind the flaky bark of their preferred tree species. A gray jay may hide 1,000 separate caches of their food in a single, 17-hour day. "Scatterhoarding" is the technical term for this technique. "Gray jays have a memory like a Vegas card counter," writes Joe Rankin in *Northern Woodlands* magazine, referring to the fact that the jays seem to be able to retrieve 80 percent of their food-filled saliva balls.

At least a portion of the lost 20 percent is due to spoilage. Some boreal tree species may contribute antibacterial compounds that help the food stored under their bark stay fresh. But that's not enough. Cold temperatures in the gray jay's preferred habitats are necessary to

prevent cached food, even chunks of meat, from spoiling.

This need for cold weather makes gray jays vulnerable due to climate change. Their refrigerator is broken. Warmer falls don't bode well for the longevity of cached meat and other food. Their reproductive rates may suffer, since gray jays nest in late winter, and feed nestlings from their caches. A study by the University of Guelph in Ontario confirmed that gray jays are food-limited during the breeding season. The researchers connected this with warmer fall temperatures allowing food to spoil and a 50% decline in numbers of gray jays in Algonquin Provincial Park over the past three decades.

It's not because they're picky eaters, either. Gray jays are opportunistic omnivores, and they consume everything from small mammals, nesting birds, carrion, and arthropods to fungi, fruits, and seeds. They have been observed picking engorged winter ticks off the backs of moose. Anyone who has camped within their range knows that these "camp robbers" are not shy about snatching up a crust of bread off the picnic table, or nabbing a marshmallow before it can become a s'more.

Gray jays mate for life and stick together year-round. In early June, their two-month-old chicks begin an intense sibling rivalry. Only one dominant juvenile gets to stay with its parents, after driving the rest of the young away. These "stayers" get access to their parents' food caches and mentorship, in exchange for helping to raise little brothers and sisters the next summer. Even with the help, they still face a 52% mortality rate. The "leavers" that get kicked out may be able to volunteer their nanny services to an unrelated pair currently without chicks of their own. Or they may simply perish during the hungry winter. Leavers experience an astounding 85% mortality rate, while stayers only die about half of the time. So even without a "broken refrigerator", it's often a tough lot for gray jays.

Friends of Norris Camp

Treasurer's Report

by June Foss

Account Balance = \$6,390.64 on 9/26/2016

Thanks so much to the following people for donations they've made since November 2015:

Joe Aberwald

Eugene & Rita Barrett

Bill and Terri Berg

Tim Bettcher

Gavin Bettcher

George Braunwarth

Chris & Mary Grace Foret

Dan Moss

Gary Moss

Jeff Moss

John VanderBeek

and

The Klaers Family

Given in Memory of Tom Klaers

Some work has begun as directed by the Norris Camp Master Plan including putting up signs welcoming people to Norris Camp and directing visitors where to park. Many thanks to Volunteer **Earl Woolsey** who started inventory work labeling historical artifacts. He also helped intern **Alison Agresta** with starting design work on two interpretive trails. University of MN student **Shaolei Jin** made some excellent suggestions for a future Norris Camp web site.

Work Projects:

Listed below is just some of the work we've done around the Red Lake WMA this past summer. We will highlight more in the next newsletter (including a Palsburg Fire Update).

Prescribed Burns: We completed 3 prescribed burns for a total of 172 acres this spring. We would like to burn more, but the window of opportunity is often short, and we must share burn equipment and staff among several offices which means that some project areas go unburned each year. We have plans for several fall burns, including a thinned pine plantation on the Roosevelt Road.

Surveys: We've done the annual small mammal and predator scent post surveys and banded 100 Canada geese with Baudette wildlife staff. All are part of long term projects that help assess wildlife populations and set hunting and trapping regulations.

Opening mowing: To mimic the historic effects of small-scale forest fires and to promote heterogeneity within the forest, Red Lake staff mowed approximately 215 acres of forest openings.

Trails:

Red Lake WMA has partnered with the Ruffed Grouse Society to construct new walking trails in the area. The Ruffed Grouse Society is interested in constructing a 50 mile trail and a 10 mile stretch of trail is already open this fall. This portion of the trail is located near the Smith-Stacy Minimum Maintenance Trail off Dicks Parkway. Several trails were not completely (or at all) mowed this year because conditions were too wet. Those trails include the Horner (Cecil's Landing), Hiwood, and 8-Mile Trail. In the future, we may look to re-design or close walking trails that have recurring maintenance issues. Currently, we are maintaining 36 walking trails covering 122 miles.



Northern Lights Over Norris Camp



Photos by Lorraine Rodriguez, a PhD student from the University of Wisconsin - Madison who was at Norris Camp researching populations of wild cranberries in July.

Camping Rules

Dispersed camping is allowed within the Beltrami Island State Forest and Red Lake WMA. A free permit is required for camping in the WMA which can be obtained by calling or writing to our office.

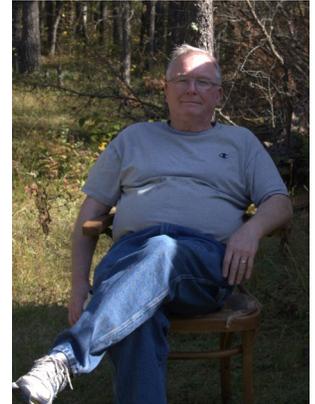
In order to be a good neighbor to other campers, please keep the following good camping practices in mind:

- ◆ Bring a spade or shovel and always bury your waste. Outhouses are not provided or allowed with dispersed camping.
- ◆ Be quiet while camping from one hour after sundown to one hour before sunrise (page 96 in the hunting regulations book).
- ◆ Any campfires should be built in an area cleared of any combustible materials 5 feet in all directions around the fire.
- ◆ Campfires must be 3 feet or less in diameter and not more than 3 feet in height.

In Memory . . .

A couple of long-time area hunters, Ed Sherwin and Gary Moss died this past year. The article below about Ed was written by Con Christianson. Gary's hunting buddies will be writing about him in the next newsletter.

The Ed Sherwin hunting camp in the Red Lake WMA area was born when a lucky group from the Wright County area drew a moose license for the '71 season, the first hunt in many years. In those early days we pitched a military surplus squad tent that served as our activity center, cook shack and poker room. Pickup campers and trailers were parked in a semi-circle to afford everyone a short walk to the late evening bull sessions and early morning breakfasts. Ed eventually bought a cabin in the Forest where he spent a great portion of his leisure time. Our center of deer camp activities moved to that cabin.



There are too many RLWMA-based memories to recall here. But those who knew Ed will never forget the river bridge he set up and took down each deer season so he could get to his favorite spot or his nose-bleed stand which swayed so much in the wind that he had to lead a standing deer or that you'd better be ready to maintain 30+ stations if you were going to hunt bear with Ed.

In the 40+ years we hunted Red Lake WMA or fished Lake of the Woods with Ed, we experienced abundant game years, a few not-so-abundant game years and a range of hunting camp weather conditions typical of Minnesota. As we laughed through the good times and endured the bumpy times, he was always able to show us the bright side of our situation. Ed had a few quaint sayings that he would cart out at these times. One of his favorites was, "Every place you go, there you are". Well, Ed is gone now, but we know he will always be here as well.