



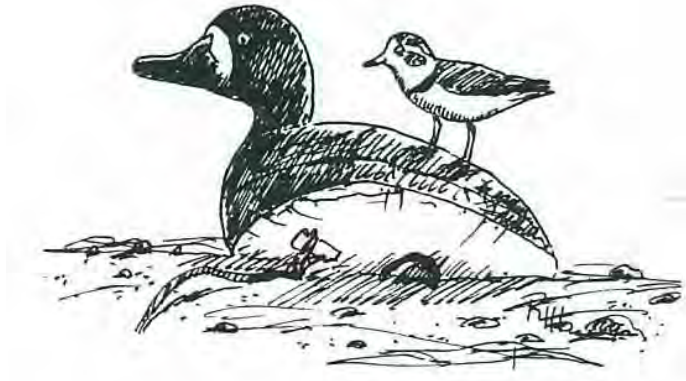
# THIEF LAKE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 8 ISSUE 1

AUGUST 2009

*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:

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## 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 lead to lower lake levels. This year, we had more snow pack, and a much wetter spring, with the result that we didn't get down to normal lake level until early July. As I write this, the lake is within an inch or two of target level, which provides good access from all the launch points.

The marsh itself is in good shape, with good stands of both emergent and submersed vegetation. The access points themselves are in good shape.

## 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 checks showed that hunters averaged 1.79 ducks per hunter per day for the entire season, which

is above the long term average of 1.49. Those of you that spent any time on the marsh know that divers comprised the bulk of the bag (particularly ringnecks, scaup and redheads), with 74% of the bag being divers.

Diving duck enthusiasts will get some relief in the regulations department this year. Minnesota will again offer a 6 bird total duck bag, but it looks like the canvasback season will be open season-long, with a 1-bird bag. In addition, the scaup bag will be open with a 2-bird bag for the entire 60 days.

Because of the high water levels we had here this spring, local duck production was lower than last year, and was also later than most years. During banding operations and lake checks recently, however, we've been seeing late broods of ducklings that weren't counted during brood surveys. These birds should still attain flight status before the waterfowl season.

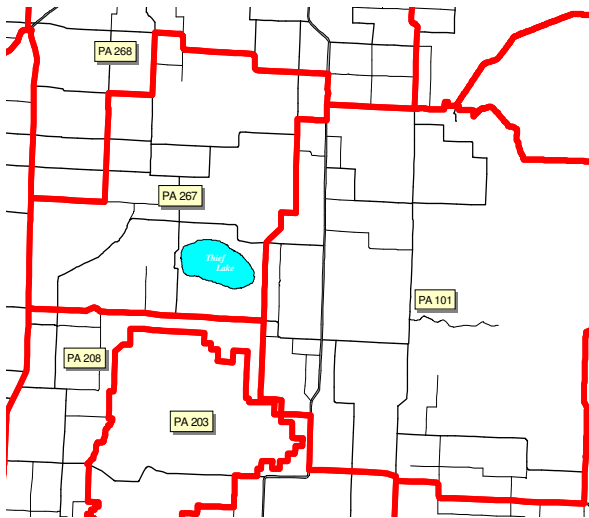
In contrast, local goose production locally was improved from last year, and we had one of our better goose production years. At the same time, migrant EPP populations experienced a bust production year. Conditions in Churchill saw 3-4' of snow in early to mid-June. Because goose harvest has shifted (both locally and statewide) to a bag comprised primarily of giant Canadas rather than migrant interior birds, there won't be restrictions on goose seasons or bags this year. In the past, when goose harvest was focused on migrant (primarily EPP) geese, a bust production year would have resulted in a shortened season and reduced bag limit. We can expect to see fewer young birds among the migrants that visit us. Goose visitation will again be driven by weather to the north of us.

The northwest goose zone is in the third year of a three-year experimental extension of the season from September 16 to the 22<sup>nd</sup>. We will again be opportunistically measuring any birds taken during this time to look at racial affiliation.



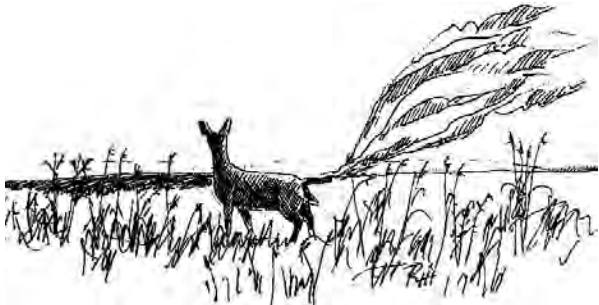
## BEAR RESEARCH IN THE THIEF LAKE AREA

The Minnesota DNR Forest Wildlife Research Group is in the third 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, and interviewing farmers about bear depredation. **Bear hunters in the area are asked to avoid shooting collared bears.**



## DEER IN NORTHWEST MINNESOTA

There isn't much new to report about deer in the Thief Lake area. Changes in Permit Area boundaries took place several years ago, and new hunts introduced as part of the bovine tuberculosis (bTB) control effort have become well established. Deer populations in the Thief Lake area are generally at their target levels. The ongoing efforts to control bTB, and provide tools for its control have resulted in all Permit Areas that adjoin PA 101 being in an Intensive Harvest status, and will have the Early Antlerless firearms deer hunt.



## BTB CONTROL EFFORTS IN NORTHWEST MINNESOTA

The issue of control of bTB in wild populations isn't as new as it was several years ago, but the work continues. In addition to the array of hunts and staffing check stations last year, additional efforts were undertaken over the winter and into the spring, when USDA sharpshooters took 535 deer, and aerial gunners under contract took 200 deer.

As mentioned above, hunting opportunities in PA 101 and the surrounding PAs will remain liberal 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.

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 2008 AND 2009

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 8 elk during the seasons allowed. This year we will hold three seasons, two hunts in September, and one hunt in late November. There will be 15 permits total authorized to hunt, with two either-sex tags and the remaining antlerless only. We experienced higher depredation damage claims in recent years, which is the reason for liberalized hunting opportunities.

An additional 15 tags will be offered in two different

blocks in Kittson County, where hunters took 11 elk last year.

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](http://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](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.

## REMINDER - SPECIAL EARLY FIREARMS DEER SEASONS

Once again there will be two early firearms deer seasons in the vicinity of Thief Lake this October. The first will occur the weekend of October 10-11 in all of the PAs in this area except PA 203 (Agassiz NWR and the State lands to the south and east). Early antlerless tags are required for this hunt, with the exception of PA 101, where disease management tags may also be used. 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.

### 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.

### MARSHALL'S GONE!

Marshall Deters, wildlife technician here at Thief Lake since 1996, left Thief Lake last fall to take a position as a hydrologist in the Cambridge area. Many of you knew Marshall from bag checks or visits to the office. If you see him this year at one of the boat launches, wish him luck, since he's probably out hunting!

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

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