



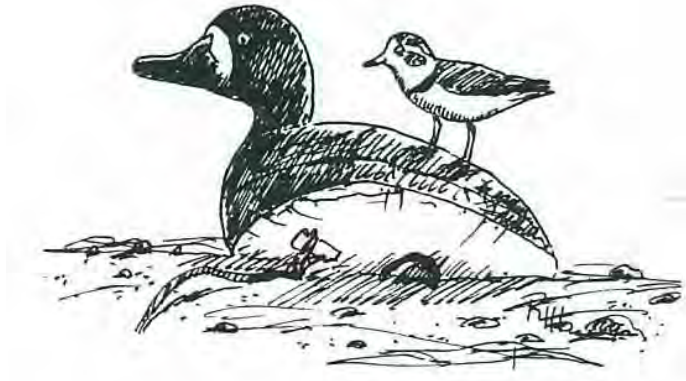
THIEF LAKE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA NEWSLETTER

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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 2010 - WHAT CAN WE EXPECT?

While this summer was fairly wet here in northwest Minnesota, we've been able to release water aggressively enough to keep the lake level from rising too much. 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 1.85 ducks per hunter per day for the entire season, which is up slightly from last year, and 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 79% of the bag being divers, and ringnecks being number one in the bag.

Diving duck enthusiasts will again get some relief in the regulations department this year. Minnesota will again offer a **6 bird total duck bag**, and 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.

We had an early spring here this year, and production got off to a good start, particularly for early nesting species like mallards and geese. We started seeing a lot of rain and runoff in the latter half of May and into June, and a lot of nesting cover was inundated. As a result, a lot of nests were flooded out, and hens re-nested. The result was a second peak in hatching, with a lot of broods of later nesting species like teal, gadwall and ringnecks. These birds should still attain flight status before the waterfowl season.

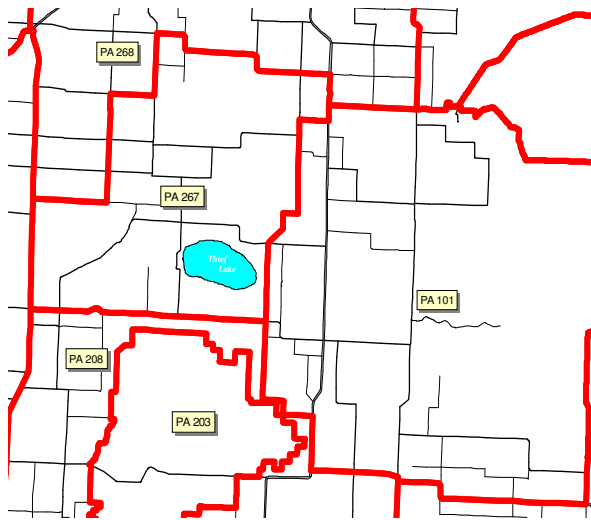
We had a very good year for local goose production, since most of the nests had hatched by the time that rains came in late May. Further north, migrant goose populations like the EPP birds that migrate through the Thief Lake area had a much better production season than the bust experienced last year. The result should be more total birds coming through the area, and a greater proportion of young birds. Of course, weather will drive goose use of the area and refuges further north.

The extension of the early goose season (to the 22 of September) in the Northwest Goose Zone is now operational. A re-structuring of regular and late goose seasons across the state will result in a **longer regular season with an expanded bag (to 3 birds)**, and elimination of the special December season (it has been rolled into the regular season).



BEAR RESEARCH IN THE THIEF LAKE AREA

The Minnesota DNR Forest Wildlife Research Group is in the fourth (and last) 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

Reduced numbers of bTB positive deer (only one was detected last year) in the area have resulted in bTB control efforts being focused in PA 101. Deer populations in the Thief Lake area (and throughout the remainder of northwest Minnesota) are generally at their target levels. As a result, the harvest strategy in these areas will be a **managed** one. **Bag limits in these areas will be two.** Hunters can take deer of either sex on their primary license, and can purchase and use on management permit for an antlerless deer. Efforts to control bTB will still be employed in PA 101, with unlimited numbers of antlerless tags and the Early Antlerless firearms deer hunt.

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 21 to Sunday October

24). Hunters afield during this time (except waterfowl hunters hunting over water) are reminded that they have to wear full (deer season) orange.

Hunters throughout most of the state will have the opportunity to register deer via phone or the internet starting this year. **Hunters in this area, however, will still have to register deer at conventional registration stations (as in years past).** This will provide additional opportunities to sample deer for bTB.



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. Last year, only one bTB positive deer was sampled during all of the hunts sampled. USDA sharpshooters took 450 deer, with no positives. No aerial shooting was done last year.

Hunters in PA 101 will be required to register their deer in the area, and are strongly urged to **have their deer tested for bTB** at stations staffed during the regular firearms season. If sample size commitments are met during hunting seasons, the need to sharpshoot could be eliminated or sharply reduced. If a sufficient number of hunter killed deer are not sampled, sharpshooting will need to be considered again next 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 2009 AND 2010

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 14 elk during the seasons allowed. Permit issuance was more aggressive to bring the herd size down to goals established in the newly revised elk management plan. This year we will hold two seasons, one hunt in September, and one hunt in early December. There will be 7 permits total authorized to hunt, with two either-sex tags and the remaining antlerless only. The herd is much closer to the population goal, with the result that permit numbers are reduced from last year.

An additional 4 tags will be offered in Kittson County, where hunters took 16 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. For more information, see the hunting synopsis, check the

DNR waterfowl link below, or go to 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

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

Early season firearm deer season opportunities will be different this year from what was in place the last few years. The first hunt will occur from October 21-24 (MEA weekend), and is for youth hunters only in the five northwestern counties. Young people between 10 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 deer of either-sex. Youth must be accompanied by a non-hunting adult during the hunt.

In PA 101, hunters with Early Antlerless or disease management tags may take antlerless deer October 23-24.

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

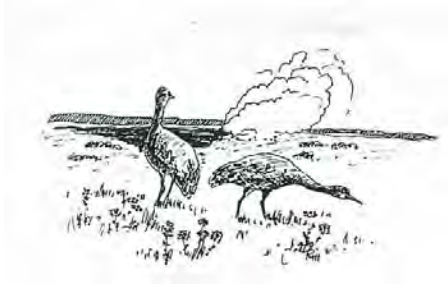
The discovery of the emerald ash borer in Minnesota has brought about some restrictions in firewood use in an effort to halt the spread of this invasive species. Only firewood purchased from a DNR approved vendor, or kiln dried dimensional lumber may be brought onto the management area. Firewood

gathered on-site is still permissible.

SANDHILL CRANE SEASON

New to Minnesota this year will be a sandhill crane season. Hunting will be allowed in the Northwest Goose Zone, and the season will run from September 4 to October 10. Hunters will need a sandhill crane permit and use plugged shotguns and non-toxic shot.

The bag limit is two birds per day, and hunters are subject to the same over-water restrictions as goose hunters during the September season. The population in northwest Minnesota is part of the Mid-Continent population, which migrates through the central Flyway. Cranes in the Central Flyway have been hunted since the early 1960s, and the population is above the goal.



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

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