



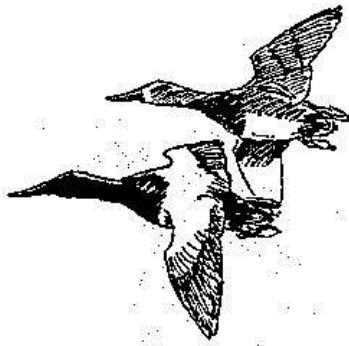
THIEF LAKE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 13 ISSUE 1

AUGUST 2014

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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PERSONNEL CHANGES AT THIEF LAKE

We have a new Office Administrative Specialist in the office now – Cari Dostal. Cari is here every other day during the week. If you're in the office say hi!

DUCK SEASON AT THIEF LAKE; LAST YEAR IN REVIEW AND PROSPECTS FOR THIS FALL

Hunters enjoyed a more traditional season here at Thief Lake last year, with good access throughout the season. Hunters responded with more days afield and more ducks in the bag than the season long average from previous years. In spite of the increased hunter pressure, hunters averaged 1.94 ducks per hunter per day for the season, which is above the long term average of 1.49. While blue-winged teal were most prevalent in the bag opening weekend, the season-long bag was dominated by ringnecks and other divers. This is typical of years with normal to deeper than average water conditions. Shallow conditions (like those in 2012) favor a bag dominated by dabblers.

Most bag limits will be the same as last year, with the exception of the Canvasback bag which will drop back to one bird. While technically an early opener, the season will open on September 27 this year – which is closer to the traditional opener (Saturday nearest October 1). This will also give geese a 5 day “rest” between the September early season and the full waterfowl season.

Continently, breeding waterfowl populations again hit an all-time high. A close look at USFWS Fall Flight Forecast shows that much of the improvement in habitat conditions and production took place further north, and that conditions and production from the eastern Dakotas actually declined. We'll have to see how migration unfolds this fall, and how birds funnel through this part of the flyway.

ACCESS TO THIEF LAKE IN 2014 - WHAT CAN WE EXPECT?

What a difference a year or two can make – in 2012 the lake was 1.5' below target level during duck season. As I write this in mid-August, we have still not gotten the lake down to summer target, although we hope to be there by duck season. The spring and summer have been very wet, and stands of cover on the lake are somewhat sparse at this time. We'll see what the next month brings. Currently, access is good at all the normal points around the lake.

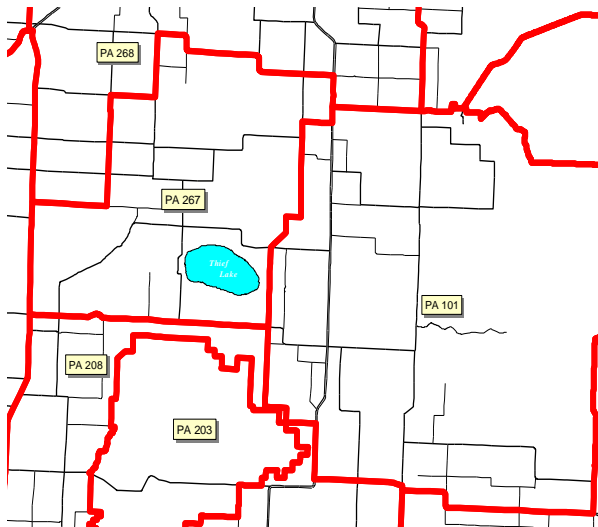
Emergent vegetation that became established during the 2012 drawdown is still present. Some islands are now connected to shore.

In this flat country, this can all change in a few days with some substantial rains. Feel free to call the office to ask about current lake levels prior to arrival.



Locally, counts of breeding waterfowl were up from last year, and another delayed spring may have spread out production again. While the spring was late, we got a good nesting effort from local Canada geese, and more typical production. Further north, migrant goose populations like the EPP birds that migrate through the Thief Lake area had a good production season. Of course, weather will drive migrant goose use of the area and refuges further north.

Duck production seems more drawn out than usual this year, and somewhat later, but there seems to be decent local production



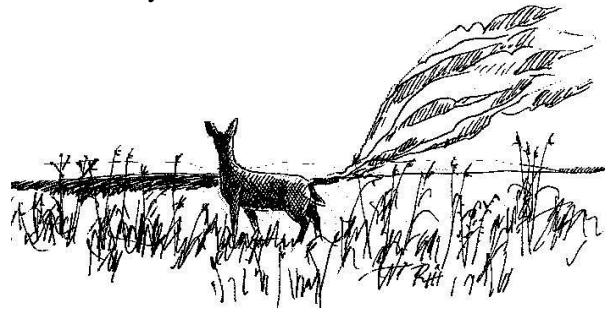
DEER PERMIT AREAS IN THE THIEF LAKE AREA

DEER IN NORTHWEST MINNESOTA

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 16 to Sunday October 19). Hunters afield during this time (except waterfowl hunters hunting over water) are reminded that they have to wear full (deer season) orange. Hunters in the CHZ can remove their orange once they are in a blind during this season.

Hunters throughout most of the state will have the opportunity to register deer via phone or the internet. This

will include this area, as there will be no sampling for bovine TB this year.



DEER POPULATIONS IN NORTHWEST MINNESOTA

With no TB positive deer detected in testing for several years, Permit Area (PA) 101 is no longer considered a disease management area. Most of the PAs in this part of the state are below their long term deer population goal, and we are in a re-building mode. Although we had a long, cold winter with plenty of snow, our deer locally seem to have fared pretty well. Many of the PAs are in lottery status this year with the result that hunters wishing to take antlerless deer with a firearm or muzzle-loader will need to apply by the deadline in September. Permit numbers are similar to last year with the exception of PA 101, where permit numbers dropped from 50 to 25.



INVASIVES RULES APPLY TO DUCK BOATS, TOO!

Boats used strictly for duck hunting are exempt from some of the regulations that apply to other boats in the state of Minnesota, such as the need for registration or running lights. They are still subject to the rules regarding invasive species. For decades we have been battling a small infestation of purple loosestrife at the Maanum's boat launch, which undoubtedly came in with someone's trailer or boat from an infested area. If we want to maintain the character of Thief Lake, we need to protect it from introductions of aquatic plants like Eurasian milfoil or curly leaf pondweed, or invertebrates like the faucet snail (an alternate host for a parasite that has killed off thousands of scaup on Winnie and the Upper Mississippi).

We need to clean off trailers and drain boats. In duck hunting, though, we have lots of additional gear that you might not think about – boat blinds with non-native vegetation or decoys strings and anchors that could transport eggs and seeds.



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.

THIEF LAKE MAP AVAILABLE!

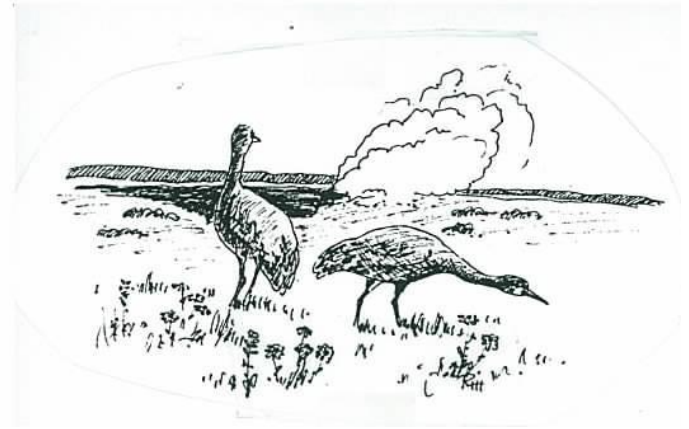
We handed out copies of our new map to many of you the last couple of years. It shows access points and facilities, cover types and other WMAs in the area. In addition, the map includes use rules for the area, and the rules for the use of the CHZ. Stop by the office and pick up a copy if you don't already have one!

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

Minnesota will once again be holding a sandhill crane season, and the season timing is similar to last year. Hunting will be allowed in the Northwest Goose Zone, and the season will run from September 13 to October 19. Hunters will need a small game license, a sandhill crane permit and use plugged shotguns and non-toxic shot. The bag limit on cranes dropped from two birds per day to one, and hunters are subject to the same over-water restrictions as goose hunters during the September Early Goose season.



GROUSE, BEAR AND ELK

Drumming counts were up substantially from last year, but wet conditions in June probably didn't help brood survival. Wet weather in the first week after hatching is tough on young grouse, and extensive areas of the WMA (including wooded area) had standing water for parts of the summer. We've seen some grouse broods, but it remains to be seen how many birds we'll have in the woods this fall. Sharptail numbers (as measured by lek counts) were similar to last year.

Bear populations continue to do well in the Thief Lake area. Natural foods seem particularly abundant this year (even better than last year), which may complicate getting a bear to respond to bait. Some of this will depend on the availability of acorns and other foods during the first week in September.

The mid-winter aerial survey of elk in the Grygla herd was below the target level, and as a result no season was offered for this herd this year. Elk hunting continues in the Kittson County areas, however.

Fall Prescribed Fire

We are planning on conducting a couple prescribed fires this fall within the sanctuary on the west side of Thief Lake. Fall fires offer us the opportunity to set back woody encroachment within our open sites without sacrificing any nesting waterfowl. So, if you happen to see smoke in this area while out hunting don't be alarmed, it is just us managing the habitat!

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

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