



# 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 2015 - WHAT CAN WE EXPECT?

Last winter we didn't have as much snow as usual, with the result that we didn't get up to our target lake level until rains came in mid-May. Since that time we've gotten a lot of frustratingly timed rains, and we are still above target level, but getting back down to within an inch or two. Cover looks good on the lake 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. We started fighting back by spraying some of these cattail peninsulas on the east side of the lake this summer. You may see them turning brown before the rest of the vegetation turns color.

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.

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

Hunters once again enjoyed a more traditional season here at Thief Lake last year, with good access throughout the season. Hunters' days afield and ducks in the bag were down slightly from the previous year, but above the season long average from previous years. Hunter success (in ducks per hunter per day for the entire season) dropped slightly from 1.94 ducks per hunter per day to 1.83, which is still above the long term average of 1.49. Ringnecks were most prevalent in the bag from the beginning of the season. 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 increase to two birds. While technically an early opener, the season will open on September 26 this year – which is closer to the traditional opener (Saturday nearest October 1). This will also give geese a 3 day "rest" between the September early season and the full waterfowl season.

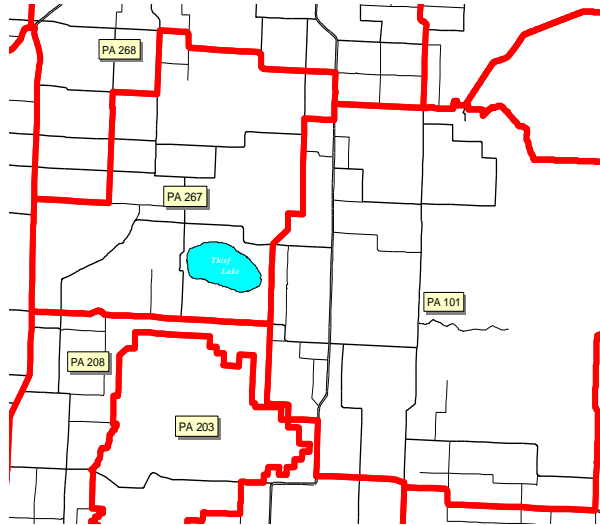
Continently, breeding waterfowl populations again hit an all-time high. A close look at USFWS Fall Flight Forecast shows that habitat conditions actually declined in many areas somewhat, and this decline was more noticeable in the Dakotas, where it had been dry. We'll have to see how migration unfolds this fall, and how birds funnel through this part of the flyway.



Locally, counts of breeding waterfowl were up again from last year, and a wet late spring/early summer 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 again seemed more drawn out than usual this year, and somewhat later, but there seems to be decent local production

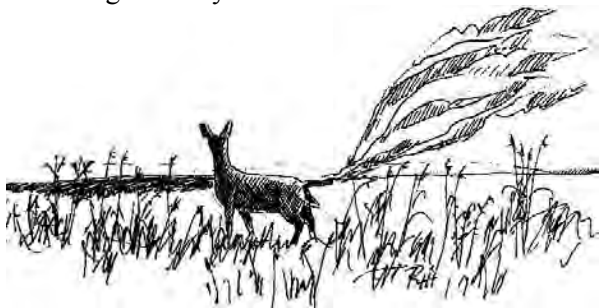


DEER PERMIT AREAS IN THE THIEF LAKE AREA

### 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 15 to Sunday October 18). 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 again 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. We had a pretty mild winter, though, and 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 September 10. Permit numbers are the same as last year for the PAs managed from this office (101, 267 and 268).



### 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. For more info (including pictures) see:

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/aquatic/index.html>



## 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.

## NAVIGATION LIGHT EXPERIMENT AT NORTHEAST AND HENNING'S LANDINGS

While most of the folks on this newsletter mailing list have hunted Thief Lake for a number of years, we do get new folks every fall. For some of them, navigation on the lake in the dark can be a concern. Kyle found some small lights that come on only at night and have solar chargers. We'll try putting them up at the Northeast and at Hennings Landing.

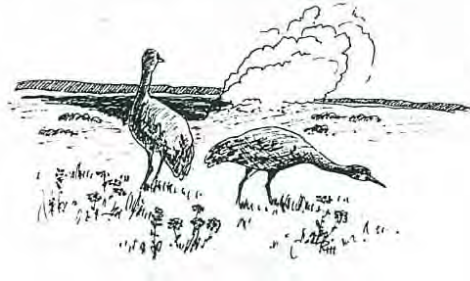
## FIREWOOD RESTRICTIONS

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 12 to October 18. Hunters will need a small game license, a sandhill crane permit and use plugged shotguns and non-toxic shot. The

bag limit on cranes remains at one bird per day, 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 down locally from last year. The rain we received in June had the potential to impact brood survival. Wet weather in the first week after hatching is tough on young grouse. We've been seeing some grouse broods, though, so we'll see how many birds we have in the woods this fall. Sharptail numbers (as measured by lek counts) seemed to be up from last year in many locations, but changes in cropping patterns and CRP have eliminated or removed other leks.

Bear populations continue to do well in the Thief Lake area. Natural foods for bears seem to be reduced this year, which may make it easier to get 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. For more info on elk hunting opportunities, see: <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/hunting/elk/index.html>

## FALL PRESCRIBED FIRE

We are again 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. Timing will be dependent on weather, and we may have completed them before waterfowl season. If not, we may end up with a burn during duck season, 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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