

Thief Lake Wildlife Management Area Newsletter

August 2021 Volume 20 Issue 1



The fall season is about to kickoff and the staff at Thief Lake have been busy getting everything ready. This includes seeding goose food plots, clearing and mowing hunter walking trails, mowing parking areas and the controlled hunting zone, and many other activities. It is an exciting time of year and most of us can agree on one thing- it goes by way too fast! There have been a number of changes in staffing and a few new habitat projects in the area. Enjoy the newsletter and we will see you out in the field!

MN Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGS)

If conditions stay favorable, you will see an active brush management project taking place east of the lake this fall. We have partnered with the MSGS to lease a bulldozer with a mulching head to mow the willow and alder in this unit. This work is done to set back plant succession and open up the area to be more suitable for sharp-tailed grouse. Deer and elk will hone in on the new growth as it provides high-quality browse. You can find out more information about MSGS and all their great work here: [MSGS Website](#)

In addition to MSGS, this work wouldn't be possible without Minnesota's Legacy Amendment passed by voters in 2008. This raised sales tax by three-eighths of one percent and a portion of these funds go directly to wildlife and habitat projects. If you are curious to learn more, check out their webpage here: [MN Legacy Funds](#)

Staff Update

You will notice a few changes around here this fall. Many of you likely ran into Rick Beito over the years. Rick started working at Thief Lake in 2005. He helped with bag checks during the week and was responsible for a lot of the behind the scenes work to get the area ready for hunting seasons. He retired on March 2nd, 2021 and he is enjoying his new schedule!





Marshall Deters started his career with MNDNR in 1991 digging outhouse holes with the Minnesota Conservation Crew at Thief Lake WMA. After working seasonal resource jobs, he started working a permanent position for the Section of Wildlife at Thief Lake WMA in 1996. In 2008, he changed course and joined DNR Waters as a hydrologist in Cambridge, Sauk Rapids and St. Paul. In 2013, Marshall came back to the Section of Wildlife as the assistant manager at Carlos Avery WMA. Marshall's last working day was August 26th, perhaps we will see more of him on the marsh now!



Paul Telander (left) and John Williams (right)

Our last Thief Lake related retirement is John Williams. John joined the DNR in 1991 as the Assistant Manager at Thief Lake and from there went to Thief River Falls as the Manager and then to the NW Regional Wildlife Office in 2006. His last working day was August 3rd. John had this to say about his retirement: "Retirement brings the chance to spend more time with family hunting and fishing, wood working, gardening and once again putting in food plots with a 1950 Farmall M on some beach ridges near Viking."



Access to Thief Lake in 2021

What can we expect?

Current conditions are similar to what we experienced in 2012. As I write this in late August, the **lake is 16 inches below target level**. We were nearly two feet low two weeks ago (see pictures below), but the 6 inches of rain we received helped turn things around. Right now, the water level at the Maanum's boat launch is 30 yards from the water's edge, the channel at Henning's is a mere trickle and there is a substantial delta where the Moose River enters the lake. The channel at the NE Landing does have water in it. Cover on the lake is in great shape. If these conditions persist, this will be a year when motors may be more of a hindrance than a help, and canoes or shallow duck boats may be a good bet. You'll definitely want to dig out your push pole. Hunters are reminded that it is illegal to drive into the lake basin to launch boats. Hunters at Maanum's or the pull-offs will need to leave their trucks at the landings. Trailers can be backed in by hand to launch boats. 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.

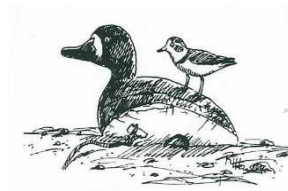


Current conditions at Henning's Landing (left) and Maanum's Landing (right)

Duck Season at Thief Lake; Last Year in Review and Prospects for this Fall

Total duck harvest on Thief Lake was estimated at 2,483 in 2020, which was very similar to the harvest of 2,425 in 2019. Hunter success, measured in ducks per hunter per day, was up from last year (2.06 vs 1.34). So why was the total harvest so close but the hunter success so much higher? This was the result of thick ice forming at the launches around October 20th, making access very challenging. The hunter participation dropped significantly after that freeze event, but those that did get out had great success. Harvest was biased towards divers (65%), but a good variety of species were taken throughout the season. Ringnecks alone made up 42% of the total harvest on the lake.

There are a number of changes that hunters will see this year. There will be an early teal season September 4-8 where hunters can harvest 6 teal daily. Shooting hours are now sunrise to sunset for the entire season. The bag limit on Canada geese will increase from 3 birds per day to 5 for the regular goose season. Motorized spinning-wing decoys may be used statewide including on WMAs. Please refer to the [DNR waterfowl hunting page](#) for all regulations for 2021.

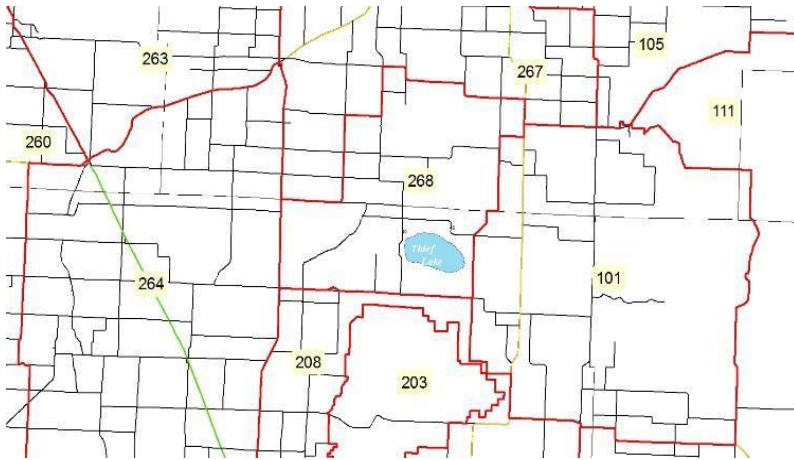


Invasive Rules Apply to Duck Boats (and gear), too!

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:

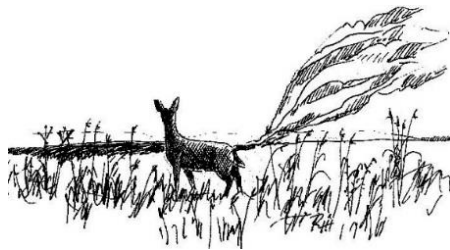
[MN DNR Information about Aquatic Invasives](#)

Deer Permit Areas (DPAs) in the Thief Lake Area



Deer in Northwest Minnesota

The deer populations are doing very well in the deer permit areas (DPAs) surrounding Thief Lake. DPAs 267 and 268 will once again be Intensive. DPA 101 will be Hunter Choice for another year in order to reach the public's desire to increase the population by 25%. This was the result from the deer population goal setting process we underwent a couple years ago.



Grouse, Bear and Elk

We do two drumming counts for ruffed grouse in the work area. The routes around Thief Lake and the Randen Ridge were both down slightly from 2020. Although nesting conditions were favorable this past spring and summer, very few broods have been observed.

Bear populations continue to do well in the Thief Lake area and there have been numerous sightings by staff this summer. Natural foods for bears in the area are considered poor to fair in the area this year due to the drought. We see increases in bear complaints during years when natural food sources are not as plentiful. A great resource to refer to is our living with bears page on our DNR website: [Living with Bears](#)

The mid-winter aerial survey of elk in the Grygla herd was not conducted this past winter due to Covid concerns. We have been receiving reports of elk being sighted west of Thief Lake, in Beltrami Forest, and just north of the Red Lake Reservation. The DNR recently released a new tool to report elk sightings in Minnesota and that can be found here: [Elk sighting page](#)

For more info on elk hunting opportunities please see: [MN DNR Information about Hunting Elk](#)

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

Editor's 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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