



THIEF LAKE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 1

SEPTEMBER 2007

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:

Minnesota DNR/Thief Lake WMA
42280 240th Avenue NE
Middle River, MN 56737
Phone: (218) 222-3747
Fax: (218) 222-3746
e-mail: joel.huener@dnr.state.mn.us
randy.prachar@dnr.state.mn.us

ACCESS TO THIEF LAKE IN 2007 - WHAT'S NEW?

Those of you that hunted Thief Lake last year know that access was tough – by freezeup the lake was 15” below normal level. Getting boats into the lake was tough in spite of the channel cleanouts that occurred at both the Northeast and Hennings landings. **Access this year should be improved** – at this writing the lake is about 2-3” below target level, but that still makes the lake 12” deeper than it was at this time last year. In addition, the Moose River landing has been extended. Hunters that camp on the north side of the Moose River will need to make sure that access to the boat launch is not blocked.

Since the end of June, the weather has been very dry here. Weather over the next month will determine whether the lake will be at normal pool or below that level by the time that waterfowl season opens. The improved submersed vegetation in the basin will make it challenging to run motors in places. Bring your push pole and waders, and call ahead if you have questions!



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

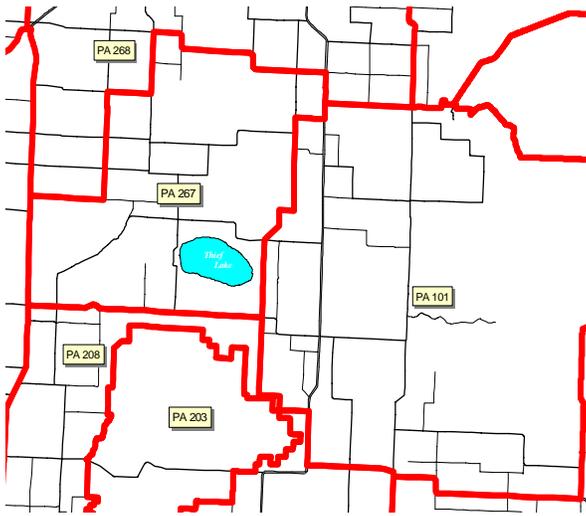
Those of you who hunted Thief Lake last fall know that it was one of our better duck hunting seasons, but one where access was difficult at times. Low water levels made access a real challenge, in spite of efforts to clean

the channels at two of the boat launches. The season-long ducks per hunter per day average was the third highest for Thief Lake since this information has been recorded (starting in 1957). The season-long average bag check was 2.13 ducks per hunter per day. Although low water conditions favored dabbling duck use (and hunters did quite well on teal and pintails at times), divers (mostly ringnecks and scaup) comprised 57% of the bag.

Minnesota’s breeding duck numbers declined again this year. Locally, habitat conditions were good until June rains raised the lake a foot. The result was that local production was affected as some nest sites were flooded. Local nesting Canada geese were affected by extreme cold and snow early in the nesting period, which froze many nests out. Continental populations (particularly those in prairie Canada), however, are improved from last year, with the result that continental fall flight forecasts are up from last year. Duck limits have been increased to 6, and the canvasback season will be open season long with a two-bird limit. During the regular season, Thief Lake is now part of the remainder of state zone for Canada geese, and the season will be 70 days with a two bird bag. The Northwest Goose Zone continues to have the over water prohibition during the September early goose season, **but the season has been extended to September 22 (consistent with the remainder of state zone).**

BEAR RESEARCH IN THE THIEF LAKE AREA

The Minnesota DNR Forest Wildlife Research Group has been conducting some research into the bears that live in NW Minnesota. Research staff, a graduate student and technicians, have been busy capturing bears in the area this summer and outfitting them with GPS collars. When data from these collars is downloaded this winter, it will give important information on bear movements relative to foods and other cues in the environment. At this writing, there are 16 bears on the air. **Bear hunters in the area are asked to avoid shooting collared bears.**



DEER IN NORTHWEST MINNESOTA - PERMIT AREAS CHANGE

Those of you that deer hunt in this part of the State will see some major changes in permit area (PA) boundaries from previous years. Some of these changes were to allow creation of a special zone with liberalized hunting opportunities around the area where we are dealing with Bovine Tuberculosis (BTB). Other changes were made to combine the remaining areas to reflect differences in land ownership.

The area around Thief Lake will now be part of PA 267, and this will be a managed deer area. This means that the bag limit in this PA will be 2, regardless of weapon type. The area further north will be PA 268, and populations are still high enough to offer the Intensive Harvest option in this area. Recent changes in licensing have allowed hunters to tag deer with both archery and firearms equipment statewide, but only one buck per person may be tagged.

In PA 101 (the area centered on Skime that starts east of Marshall County 127 on the east side of the lake), hunters will be able to buy antlerless tags for \$2.50, and there will be no bag limit for antlerless deer in this area. The buck limit in this PA will remain at 1.

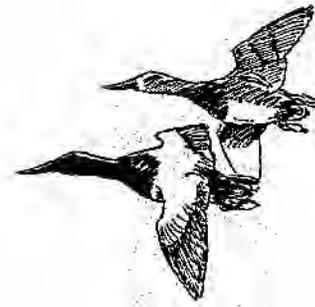


BTB CONTROL EFFORTS IN NORTHWEST MINNESOTA

Many of you have heard that sampling for Bovine Tuberculosis (BTB) last year during the firearms deer season in the Skime area revealed additional animals with the disease. In an effort to curb spread of the disease, the DNR undertook a population reduction in that area with the help of USDA Wildlife Services. A total of 488 deer were taken in the core area between February and March of this year. The animals were brought here to the HQ, sampled, processed, and distributed to the public.

This year, the DNR has created a new deer Permit area (PA 101) that encompasses the area where TB has been encountered. **Hunting opportunities within PA 101 have been liberalized.** The firearms season in that PA is now 16 days, there is a special October antlerless season in that PA, and there is no bag limit on antlerless deer in that PA. Special licenses for antlerless deer in that block cost only \$2.50.

As part of the State's efforts to control spread of this disease, **the feeding ban in NW Minnesota went into effect last November, and remains in effect.**



MINNESOTA ELK SEASON IN 2007

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 4 elk during the seasons allowed. This year we will hold two

antlerless seasons, one in September, and another in December. There will be 3 permits authorized in each hunt. We experienced higher-than-normal bull mortality over the last year, which is why we are not offering a bull season this 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.



GROUSE CONDITIONS MIXED

Last summer's dry conditions resulted in good nesting conditions for the area's upland birds – primarily ruffed and sharp-tailed grouse - with the result that upland hunting was improved last year. Ruffed grouse populations are on the upswing in their 10 year cycle. However, heavy rains during June probably affected grouse production in this area. We have been seeing some broods, so there should still be birds in the area.

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 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

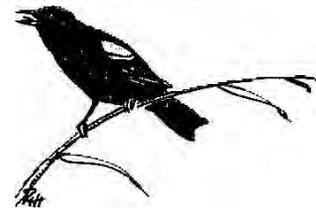
boat launches or at their camps. Sampling is quick, and no cutting is involved. For more information, see the hunting synopsis, check the DNR waterfowl link below, or go to www.birdflu.state.mn.us

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

There will actually be two early firearms deer seasons in the vicinity of Thief Lake this October. The first will occur the weekend of October 13-14 in PA 101 only (the Permit Area around Skime). This will be similar to the early antlerless seasons held in other parts of the State that same weekend. 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.

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

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Minnesota DNR
Thief Lake Wildlife Management Area
42280 240th Ave NE
Middle River, MN 56737

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from

