

**THIEF LAKE  
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA  
NEWSLETTER**

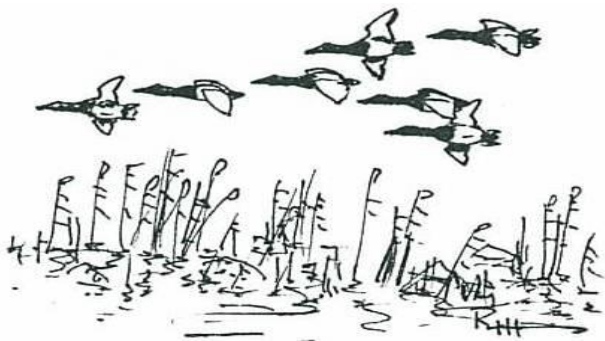
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*Editor's Note:* If you know of others who might be interested in this information, please send us their address. If you received this newsletter as a hard copy and have an email address, please send it to us so we can add you to our electronic distribution 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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### ACCESS TO THIEF LAKE IN 2017

#### WHAT CAN WE EXPECT?

Once again winter last year was kind of a non-event. We did get enough snow that the lake filled during spring runoff, and we've been slightly above target level most of the spring

and summer. Things have been very dry here during the latter half of the summer, however, and as I write this the lake is 0.3' **below** fall target level. 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 (we are still well above the levels experienced in 2012), although Maanum's is getting pretty shallow. July was the fifth driest on record, and August is the driest seen since records were began in 1949.

One of the impacts of dry conditions is that many shallower wetland basins are dry, which may impact waterfowl hunting on smaller basins.

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.

#### CATTAIL CONTROL AROUND THIEF LAKE

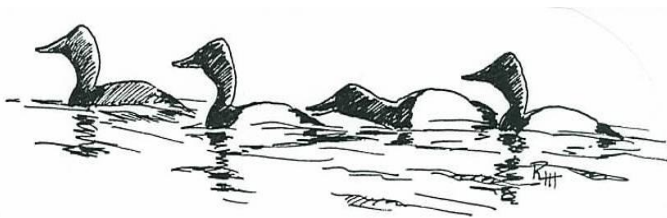
A lot of folks think cattail and good duck marshes are synonymous. The hybrid cattail that we have encroaching around the perimeter of Thief Lake, however is an aggressive hybrid between native and non-native cattail that displaces most other emergent vegetation, including the native bulrush and Phragmites. You may see additional areas on the lake where we've done more of this control last July.

#### 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) decreased from 2.19 ducks per hunter per day last year to 1.89 (sixth highest since 1949) and is still well above the long term average of 1.55. Ringnecks and redheads were most prevalent in the bag from the beginning of the season and made up 76% of the total harvest on the lake.

Most bag limits will be the same as last year. The limit for pintail dropped from 2 to 1, and the limit for black ducks increased from 1 to 2. The September early goose season will end on September 17, which will again give the geese a reprieve of 5 days before the general waterfowl season opens on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.



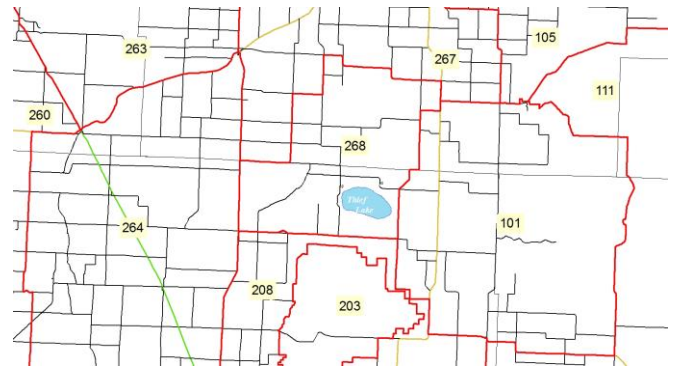
Continently, breeding waterfowl populations were similar to last year (above the long-term average). Habitat conditions at flight time had improved over last year. Dry conditions since that time have brought drought conditions to much of the Dakotas and eastern Montana and northwest Minnesota. We'll 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 from last year. We had an early spring and we got a good nesting effort from local Canada geese. Further north, 2017 spring surveys indicated a 10% increase in migrant goose populations like the EPP birds; these birds migrate through the Thief Lake area. A late spring likely resulted in a below average production season for these geese. Duck brood counts were down from last year, and spread out, but early banding efforts here were very

successful, with plenty of young birds observed.

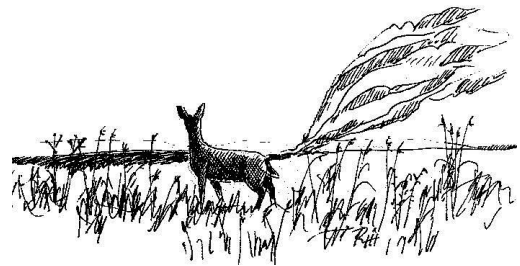
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### DEER PERMIT AREAS IN THE THIEF LAKE AREA



### DEER IN NORTHWEST MINNESOTA

**Once again, 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 19 to Sunday October 22). 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.



### DEER POPULATIONS IN NORTHWEST MINNESOTA

The string of consecutive mild winters continues, and deer populations here have responded. PA 267 and PA 268 are now managed, which means that the original tag is either-sex, and an additional management deer (antlerless only) may be taken. Regulations in PA 101 were also relaxed, and this unit is now Hunter Choice.

## 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:

[Minnesota DNR Waterfowl Index](#)

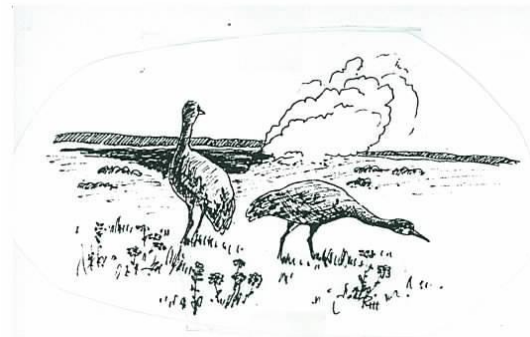
During waterfowl season, there is a link from this site to the most current aerial census information for various key waterfowl staging areas around the state.

## 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.**

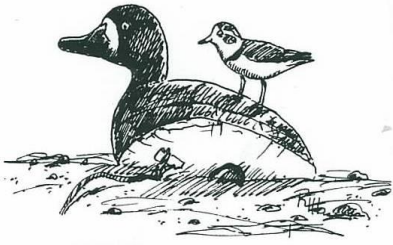
Firewood gathered on-site is still permissible.

We had a significant wind event here in late June, and a number of trees blew down. You may see some of them along access roads in the area. You are allowed to cut up and use this wood for campfires if you are camping on the WMA. You'll need a permit if you are taking wood to be burned elsewhere.



## 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 16 to October 22. Hunters will need a small game license, a sandhill crane



## 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](#)



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

We do two drumming counts for ruffed grouse in this work area. The route around Thief Lake itself was up this year, while the route along the Randen Ridge was similar to last year (but above average numbers). The rain we received in June had the potential to impact brood survival, but it has been drier than normal since that time. 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) were up somewhat from last year, and we have been seeing some sharptail broods.

Bear populations continue to do well in the Thief Lake area. Natural foods for bears have been much more variable than last 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 remains below the target level again this year, 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:

[MN DNR Information about Hunting Elk](#)

### FALL PRESCRIBED FIRE

We are again planning on conducting a prescribed fires this fall within the sanctuary on the west side of Thief Lake if we can get a reprieve from the unusually dry conditions. We're also hoping to do a large burn on the southeast corner of the lake in early September. 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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