

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:

**Minnesota DNR/Thief Lake WMA
42280 240th Avenue NE
Middle River, MN 56737
Phone: (218) 222-3747
Fax: (218) 222-3746**

e-mail: Kyle.Arola@state.mn.us



NEW ADVENTURES FOR A FAMILIAR FACE

Joel Huener retired from Thief Lake; his last working day was February 6. Coming from Utah, where he was the State's Waterfowl biologist for the Division of Wildlife Resources, his work at Thief Lake had kept him in touch with his passion for waterfowl. Joel's career with Minnesota DNR began in 1996 at Thief Lake filling the Assistant role and later became the Area Wildlife Supervisor in 2012. Joel is enjoying his retirement and fills his time fishing, hunting, carving and chasing his 3 grandchildren.



THIEF LAKE HAS A NEW MANAGER

Kyle Arola accepted the position of Wildlife Area Supervisor and had been the assistant at Thief Lake since 2013. Kyle received his college degrees from St. Cloud State University—a B.S. degree in Ecology and Field Biology with a Wildlife Emphasis, a minor in GIS, and a M.S. degree in Ecology and Natural Resources. Prior to coming to Thief Lake he held natural resource positions with Three Rivers Park District, the USFWS, and numerous positions with MNDNR. He notes that, "In my free time I enjoy canoe trips in Ontario's wilderness, winter camping in the BWCA, waterfowl hunting on Thief Lake and attempting to train my dog, Isla, to find shed antlers".

PARTNERS AND INTERNS MAKING A DIFFERENCE ON THE GROUND

From balancing budgets to planning the next prescribed fire, there is a lot to get done. To help keep up with all the habitat work we have been partnering with the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association (MDHA) and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF). These two organizations have helped us manage thousands of acres, primarily through prescribed fire and invasive species control.

These activities benefit many species of wildlife such as sharp-tailed grouse, waterfowl and, of course, elk. So how are we able to accomplish all this work done with these organizations? MDHA and RMEF provide funding that has been used as a match when applying for grants. They have been successful in obtaining multiple grants through the Conservation Partners Legacy Grant Program (CPL). What's that? This grant program falls under the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment that Minnesota voters passed in 2008. Minnesota voters decided that clean water, healthy habitat, better parks and trails and sustaining our arts and cultural heritage was worth imposing a three-eighths of one percent tax on themselves for 25 years. The habitat projects that are funded through the Legacy Amendment must take place on public lands and waters, meaning everybody benefits from and can enjoy the results. There have been many great projects through this Amendment; you can learn more about the Amendment and the projects accomplished at [DNR Legacy Index](#)

Let's get back to the habitat management being accomplished. One of the recent CPL grants that MDHA and RMEF successfully secured was used to get more "boots on the ground" by hiring seasonal staff- Chianne. She started back in April and has been busy learning the work area and helping DNR staff accomplish more work in the field. She has been a great asset to us. Let's take a minute to meet and learn a little bit about her.

MEET CHIANNE KIMBER



Chianne is from Marquette, Wisconsin and has a B.S. in Biology. When asked what made her decide to choose this job she said she is looking to pursue a career in conservation. Types of work she has

done thus far include prescribed burns, tracking elk collars, invasive species control and maintaining hunter walking trails and access points. Her favorite part of the job is enhancing habitat for wildlife. She hopes to explore as many wildlife management techniques as possible during her time here. We asked her what has surprised her most about the landscape of NW Minnesota and she said the lack of topography in the area came as a shock at first, but it is fascinating to see and work in the variety of habitat types that make up the tallgrass aspen parklands, including prairie, woodland, and wetland. The most interesting thing she has learned about Minnesotans which she admires is their passion for hunting and growing their own food. If you see her out in the field feel free to say hi and introduce yourself!

ACCESS TO THIEF LAKE IN 2018

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. We have been very dry since May and we are currently 5" below the average rainfall received between May and September. As I write this the lake is 9" below fall target level. The bulrush and phragmites cover is in good shape throughout the basin. Access is good at the NE and Moose River landings; however, the delta that has been forming at the inlet of the Moose River might prove a little challenging to get around. All other access points will require a little extra work to get boats out far enough to drop the motor (we are still well above the levels experienced in 2012). In this country all it takes is one significant rainfall event to change all that.

Feel free to call the office to ask about current lake levels prior to arrival.

CATTAIL CONTROL AROUND THIEF LAKE

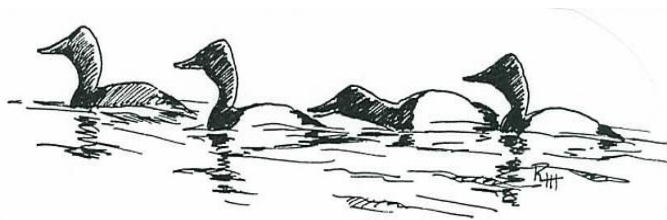
A lot of folks think cattail and good duck marshes are synonymous. The hybrid cattail that we have encroaching around the perimeter of Thief Lake, however is an aggressive hybrid between native and non-native cattail that displaces most other emergent vegetation, including the native bulrush and phragmites. You may notice where we treated at the boat launches and pull-offs along the south

side of the lake last July to make access easier.

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

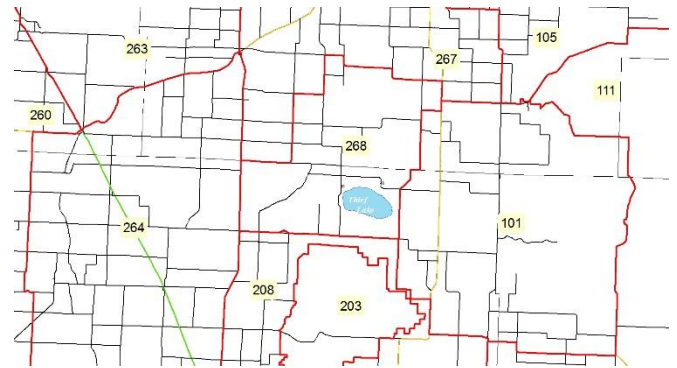
Hunters once again enjoyed a more traditional season here at Thief Lake last year, with good access throughout the season. Hunters' days afield and ducks in the bag were up slightly from the previous year. Hunter success (in ducks per hunter per day for the entire season) increased from 1.89 ducks per hunter per day last year to 2.12 (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 65% of the total harvest on the lake.

Most bag limits will be the same as last year. The only change is the limit of pintails increasing from 1 to 2. The September early goose season will end on September 16, which will give the geese a reprieve of 5 days before the general waterfowl season opens on the 22rd.



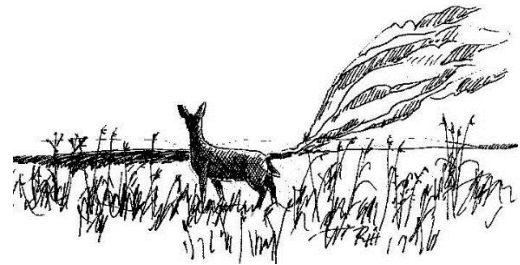
Continently, breeding waterfowl populations were down from last year (still above the long-term average). Habitat conditions at flight time were similar to last year. Dry conditions since that time have brought drought conditions to northwest Minnesota and portions of the Dakotas. We'll have to see how migration unfolds this fall, and how birds funnel through this part of the flyway.

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 18 to Sunday October 21). 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 **Intensive**, which means that the original tag is either-sex, and two additional management deer (antlerless only) may be taken. Regulations in PA 101 were also relaxed, and this unit is now **Managed**.

site to the most current aerial census information for various key waterfowl staging areas around the state.

COLLEGE STUDENTS

There's a good chance you'll be checked by new faces this year if you are hunting Thief Lake. We are partnering with Bemidji State University and University of Minnesota Crookston to get students currently enrolled in wildlife programs real-world experience. With us being short-staffed this also helps us continue our bag check tradition, which dates back to 1949. Feel free to share some Thief Lake stories with them if you see them while you are here!

GROUSE, BEAR AND ELK

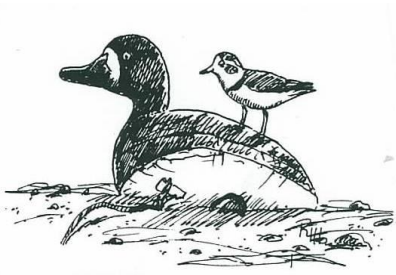
We do two drumming counts for ruffed grouse in this work area. The routes around Thief Lake and along the Randen Ridge were both down from last year (but above average numbers). Nesting conditions throughout the spring were favorable and we've been seeing some grouse broods. Sharptail numbers (as measured by lek counts) were up somewhat from last year, and we have been seeing sharptail broods.

Bear populations continue to do well in the Thief Lake area. Natural foods for bears throughout the summer had been plentiful this year. Acorns appear to be in low abundance throughout the work area, which may make it easier to get a bear to respond to bait.

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](#)

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



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](#)



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

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is available to all individuals regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, age, sexual orientation, membership or activity in a local commission, or disability. Discrimination inquiries should be sent to MN-DNR, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155-4031; or the Equal Opportunity Office, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240