

Thief Lake Wildlife Management Area Newsletter

August 2019 Volume 19 Issue 1

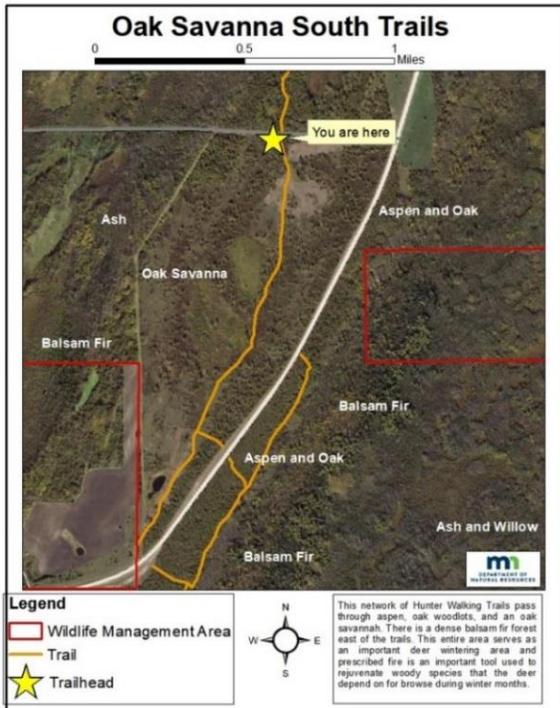


Thief River Falls Chapter of the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association

Volunteers from the Chapter came out to Thief Lake on June 8 to help staff replace Hunter Walking Trail signs, the two signs on the Observation Mound, and clear brush in parking areas. Participating in this event qualified the youth to attend the Chapter's Forkhorn Camp later in the summer. The camp provides hands-on training on firearm and bow hunting, hunter safety, and many other important tools used in outdoor participation.

2019 Changes to Youth Hunt

One major change you will see in the waterfowl hunting regulations handbook this year is the extended youth hunt. Youth now have two days to participate in this hunt, which will be September 7 and 8. In addition to the extra day, youth are allowed to hunt to sunset both days. Consider rounding up your kids or grandkids and bring them to Thief Lake for a weekend full of fun!



Hunter Walking Trails

Thief Lake staff were busy last winter installing nearly 12 miles of new hunter walking trails. The majority of these can be found along the Randen Ridge, which is about 5 miles straight east of Thief Lake off of highway 89. Consider taking an afternoon to chase ruffed grouse on them and let us know what you think.

We are also in the process of developing maps for all of our trailheads. These will be handy to show folks what type of forests the trails go through and how long they are. Each map will also have a paragraph of text describing the trail and pointing out any unique tidbits about the area.



Kiosks

You will find informational kiosks at Thief Lake's four main boat launches and office this year. Weekly waterfowl reports will be posted in them along with other handy information to share with our visitors

2019 Extra Help at Thief Lake

The MN DNR hired 10 interns across the state for the 2019 season. Thief Lake was fortunate to have one stationed at our headquarters. This program not only helps us keep up with our day-to-day tasks, but also gives the participating students a variety of wildlife related experiences to build a strong skillset for future jobs.

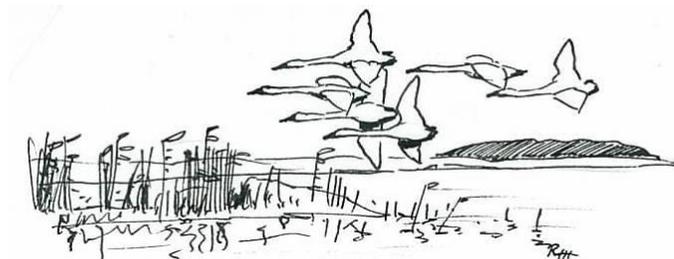


Meet Ellen Peterson

Ellen is from Menomonie, Wisconsin and is currently pursuing a degree in Wildlife Ecology and Management from UW Stevens Point. Ellen is very passionate about wildlife, especially big game animals, such as elk and deer. Some activities and projects she has been a part of at Thief Lake are goose and duck banding, creating hunter walking trail maps, and taking part in various surveys. Other things she enjoys doing in her free time are running, hunting, and camping.

College Students

There's a good chance you'll be checked by new faces (again) this year if you are hunting Thief Lake. We are once again collaborating 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!



Access to Thief Lake in 2019

What can we expect?

The lake came up to one foot over our target level following spring runoff. The level gradually dropped due to a dry spring and early summer. A 5" rain event in late July brought the level up a foot and we are now within 2" of our summer/fall target level. That means that access is forecasted to be good at all boat launches around the lake. To put it in perspective, we were 9" below target at this time last year. The bulrush and phragmites cover is in good throughout the basin. 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

Access in 2018 was more challenging than it had been in recent years. We had an unseasonably dry spring and summer and therefore lake levels were about 8" below target when the season opened. Those low levels continued until we received late September and early October rains; even after receiving nearly 5' of rain, the lake only came up 3". This made for more difficult access than normal and that likely contributed to fewer hunters on the marsh. In fact, hunter participation was down 40% from the long-term average. However, hunter success (measured in ducks per hunter per day for the entire season) **was 2.28, the third highest on record!** As far as species in the bag goes, the top five were ringnecks, mallards, redheads, green-winged teal and pintails.

Most bag limits in 2019 will be the same as last year. The only change is the limit of **pintails** decreasing from **2 to 1**. The September early goose season will begin on September 1st end on the 15th, which will give the geese a reprieve of 5 days before the general waterfowl season opens on the 21st.

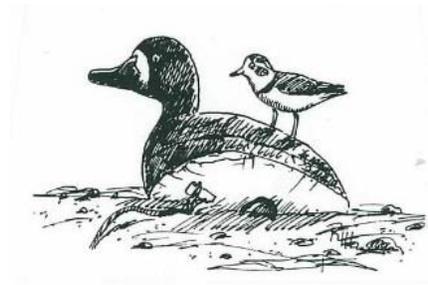


Continentially, breeding waterfowl populations were down from last year (still above the long-term average). Habitat conditions at flight time were similar to last year. Dry conditions since that time have brought drought conditions to northwest Minnesota and portions of the Dakotas. We will have to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

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: [MN 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.

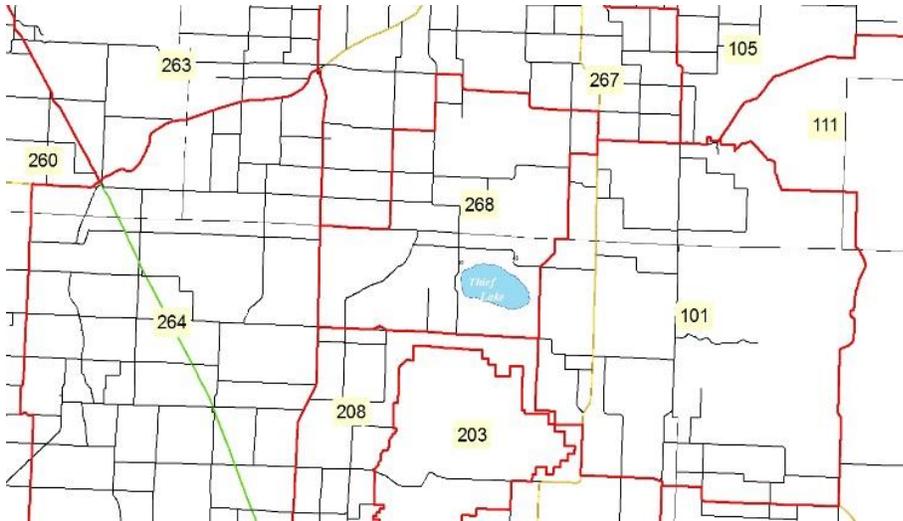


Invasive Rules Apply to Duck Boats (and gear), too!

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:

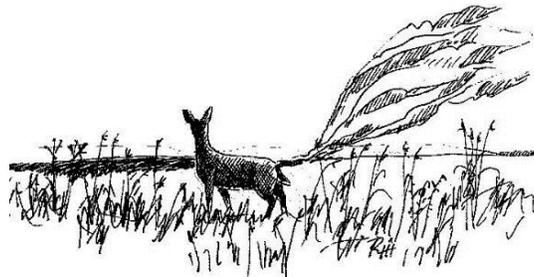
[MN DNR Information about Aquatic Invasives](#)

Deer Permit Areas (DPAs) in the Thief Lake Area



Deer in Northwest Minnesota

The four-day youth deer hunt has been expanded statewide for the 2019 season (except in Itasca State Park). The hunt will run over MEA weekend (Thursday October 17 to Sunday October 20) and youth ages 10-17 are allowed to take one either-sex deer by firearm. Hunters afield during this time (except waterfowl hunters hunting over water) are reminded that they have to wear full (deer season) blaze orange or pink. Hunters in the CHZ can remove their orange or pink 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. DPAs 267 and 268 are again Intensive, which means that the original tag is either-sex, and two additional management deer (antlerless only) may be taken. DPA 101 will again be in a Managed designation and hunters there are permitted to take two deer.

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 in 2018, but the hunting last fall was great in the area. Part of that is likely due to the warm, dry spring we had in 2018. Not surprisingly, drumming counts were up this spring and we once again had a warm, dry spring. Hopefully that will once again lead to a great fall in the woods. Sharptail numbers (as measured by lek counts) were slightly down from last year, but we have been seeing sharptail broods in the area.

Bear populations continue to do well in the Thief Lake area. Like 2018, natural foods for bears throughout the summer have been plentiful this year. Acorns appear to be in low abundance, but hazel nuts are abundant which will make it interesting to see how bears respond to bait this season.

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!

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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