

OUTDOORS

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Flooding makes for winners, losers among wildlife

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

Flooding can certainly impact wildlife, with some species benefiting and others suffering from it.



Larry Petersen

“There are winners and losers — that’s generally true with naturally occurring events,” said Larry Petersen, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources area wildlife supervisor.

The flooding came at an unfortunate time for animals, as many were having young, he said.

“If it was in August, it would be different,” he said. “There would be no duck issues, fawns would be big enough.”

Petersen discussed last week the impacts of flooding on area wildlife. As an example, he said people may be seeing lone mallards without hens, which should have broods now, and that may be an indication nests have been flooded out.

He said ground nesters may have been impacted by rising waters and flooding of normally dry ground.

But beaver, he said, probably have few complaints about the spring weather. “They have new water that can provide opportunities to create new beaver ponds,” he said. “They need a water source and will sometimes dig out in swampy areas to get water. But mostly, it’s taking advantage of existing water.”

He said even if the water rises inside a beaver lodge, “they can build things in a short period of time. This is one of the winners in a flood situation.”

Another species benefit-



STAFF PHOTO BY LAUREL BEAGER

Mallards without broods may indicate a flooded nest.

ing from flooding is mosquitoes and other bugs. Petersen said loons have abandoned their nests this year due to the biting insects in some northern Minnesota locations. In addition, he said deer are avoiding biting bugs by hanging around roads and mowed ditches along roads.

“As long as there is standing water, they’re going to be happy and I think there will be standing water for a long time,” he said, urging people to use protection from bites by mosquitoes, which can transmit West Nile and other diseases now and in the future.

Loons, however, are among the losers in flooding, Petersen said. “Loon nests were doomed because they cannot deal with rising water levels, as with any other species nesting barely on the ground. Loons can’t walk on land barely at all, so unless their nests were floating, they were getting flooded.”

Because much of Koochiching County’s grassy areas are low lands and have had standing water because of saturated soils caused by

the record June rainfall, sharptail grouse nests may have flooded.

Rainfall, standing water, and cool temperatures in June may have impacted the young of several species, he said. During rainfall, many birds will spread their wings over their brood as an umbrella. However, Petersen said, the adults must leave the nests to gather food and the young may have been vulnerable to the elements.

Fawning time is spread out over the summer months, while the peak may be the first week in June.

The first week or two of a fawn’s life is spent mostly alone, as a doe will leave her fawn, which has no smell to predators, to eat. “Their strategy is to curl up and wait,” he said, noting that fawns found that appear to have been abandoned should be left alone.

Some weaker fawns may have succumbed to exposure in the first week or so of their life. He said thermal regulation is an important issue for all species, including humans. Even the coats of very young deer

shed water, he said.

“Generally it’s not really a problem, but given the hard winter, I guess some fawns born may not be in as good condition as they normally would,” he said. “They may have started smaller, and compromised in some way, and if they were born in the conditions where it was wet all the time they may not make it.”

But Petersen said he’s not concerned about a long-term impact to populations of wildlife.

“There are always things that affect populations naturally,” he said. “Numbers fluctuate up and down a fair amount. This is just one of those things — drought and disease can do things and wipe out a high percent, and winters can impact deer.”

Given time and the right conditions, populations rebound.

“Natural occurrences aren’t necessarily nice,” he said. “But then we get conditions ideal for productivity and most species can take advantage of really good conditions. In a few years, populations can rebuild.”

VNP starts new hiking program

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

In order to help its visitors get out and exercise, along with seeing more of the park, Voyageurs National Park has rolled out a new hiking program.

The Hike to Health program, in partner with Rainy Lake Medical Center, Voyageurs National Park Association, and Jefferson National Parks Association, encourages a healthy lifestyle while also taking in the natural beauty the park has to offer.

Tawnya Schoewe, VNP chief of interpretation/partnerships/public relations, said the program came about as a way to promote more free, land-based activities in the park.

“Not everybody can afford a tour boat or thinks of using the trails,” Schoewe said.

Visitors can pick up a trails passport bag at one of the park’s three visitor centers. The bags contain 19 park trail maps, a Hike to Health trails passport, and instructions on how to proceed with the program.

Schoewe said staff hope the program accomplishes two goals: Getting people out and active, and getting them exploring the park in their own backyard.

The park offers 19 designated trails, ranging from easy

to difficult. Visitors participate by locating a trail rubbing on each park trail, and etching it into their trails passport. Upon completion of five, 10, and all trails in the park, visitors can bring their passport back to a visitors center, where a ranger will stamp the passport and bestow special recognition.

Due to recent flooding, Schoewe said not all 19 trails are open currently, and the backcountry interior trails are scheduled to reopen July 21. The rest are easily accessible, though, she said, and five to 10 of the trails can be accessed without a boat.

Depending on which trail visitors take, Schoewe said they can see a wide variety of wildlife that call the park home. Hikers on trails closest to the different visitor centers tend to see more whitetail deer, black bear, foxes, and migrating birds, while interior trail hikers have a better chance of seeing the tracks of a wolf or moose.

As for which trail to start on, Schoewe said her personal favorite is the Blind Ash Bay Trail, which features a beautiful overlook of Kabetogama Lake.

“Lots of people tend to turn around before they get to that overlook,” Schoewe said. “If you push to do the whole trail, it’s really a beautiful spot.”

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