

# OUTDOORS

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

## State’s moose population remains low

DNR STAFF REPORT

Data from the aerial moose survey just completed indicate that the downward trend in the statewide moose population continues, even though there has been no statistical change in the population during the past few years. Results of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources’ annual aerial moose survey place the 2015 statewide moose population estimate at 3,450. This compares with estimates of 4,350 in 2014 and 2,760 in 2013. “All wildlife population surveys have inherent degrees of uncertainty,” said Lou Cornicelli, DNR wildlife research manager. “Long-term trend and population estimates are more informative and significant than annual point estimates.” Overall, the number of moose is down approximately 60 percent from the 2006 estimate of 8,840. The DNR has conducted aerial moose population surveys in northeastern Minnesota since 1960. A spotter counts moose as a pilot flies a helicopter

across 52 randomly selected plots of 13 square miles. “Survey conditions this year were generally good across moose range, although there was much less snow compared to last year,” said Cornicelli. The DNR’s ongoing moose mortality research project also is providing important information on population status. “This year, 11 percent of collared adult moose died, as compared to 21 percent last year. Although adult mortality was slightly lower, which is good, the number of calves that survive to their first year has also been low,” Cornicelli said. “This indicates the population will likely continue to decline in the foreseeable future.” The adult and calf moose mortality studies are in their third year. As part of several studies, researchers will radio collar an additional 36 adult moose in the next couple of weeks. Another 50 newborn calves will be collared this spring. Researchers hope information and insights gathered during the studies will help identify potential population and habitat manage-



DNR PHOTO

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ment options that may stop or slow the long-term population decline. Final decisions about moose hunting are made after the DNR consults with the affected Chippewa bands in the 1854 Treaty ceded territory of northeastern Minnesota. The DNR discontinued moose hunting in 2013 until the population could support a hunt. The Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and the 1854 Treaty Authority contribute funding and provide personnel for the annual aerial survey. Most of the funding for the ongoing moose research project is provided by the Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources. A copy of the 2015 aerial survey is available online at [www.mndnr.gov/moose](http://www.mndnr.gov/moose).

## Winter severity index for the Falls area is 62

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

The winter severity index for the International Falls area was 62 on Wednesday, reports Larry Petersen, area wildlife supervisor with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources International Falls office. The WSI was 116 last year at this date, and 76 two years ago, said Petersen. The average WSI for this date is about 73. Borderland’s harshest winter in the mid 1990s had an index of 133 on this date. All the winter severity data dates from 1966 to present. The snow depth is around 12-16 inches in the International Falls vicinity, reports

Petersen. The winter severity index is a standardized number the DNR uses when considering impacts of the winter on deer. It is calculated using temperature and snow depth in the period from Nov. 1 through April 30 or whenever winter ends. Every day the daily low temperature is zero or below is one point, and every day the snow depth is 15 inches or deeper in an open aspen woods is one point. The points are added each week until winter ends.



Larry Petersen

## TRAIL REPORTS

VNP

Tucked amid the community of Kabetogama, the Echo Bay Ski Trail offers novice skiers another tracked ski trail within Voyageurs National Park. Located just off County Road 122 on County Road 332, the Echo Bay Ski Trail provides a winter ski experience around a frozen wetlands area. Wetlands such as Echo Bay are a crucial component to the park. In the past, wetlands were places to be avoided or drained and filled for other uses. Today, we know wetlands serve a variety of important functions. They provide critical habitats for fish and wildlife, purify waters, mitigate the power of floods and storms, and provide recreational opportunities like hiking, skiing, and birdwatching. Three ski loops are tracked in winter when conditions allow. The loops wander through mixed evergreen and deciduous forest and overlook wetlands created by beaver activity adjacent to Lake Kabetogama. The first loop provides gradual downhill segments with a moderately steep uphill climb near the trail’s end. The second and third loops provide slightly more challenging terrain as they move further from the wetlands into rockier terrain. At the signed scenic overlook, not ski accessible, or along the trail northeast of the pond, pause to look for the remains of a great blue heron rookery atop a ghost forest of dead ash trees. This once-active rookery reminds us landscapes are ever-changing, wildlife come and go, beavers create new wetlands, and old wetlands disappear over time. Preserved areas like the Echo Bay Trail, allow us to observe the natural



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Echo Bay Ski Trail offers novice skiers another tracked ski trail within Voyageurs National Park.

fluctuation of nature. Skis may be borrowed for use on the Echo Bay Trail from the Rainy Lake Visitor Center, open 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. Borrowed items must be returned the same day. During business hours, the visitor center offers maps, snowshoes, information, and hot cocoa. The most up to date winter trail conditions are available at [www.nps.gov/voya](http://www.nps.gov/voya). **Snowmobile trails** ■ International Falls to Kettle Falls (Purple Trail) – Open, staked, and groomed ■ Rainy Lake/Black Bay to Kabetogama Lake to Ash River (Green Trail) – Open, staked, and groomed ■ Ash River to Crane Lake (Green Trail) – Open, staked, and groomed ■ Chain of Lakes (Dashed Black Trail) – Open, staked, and groomed ■ Ash River to Kettle Falls (Yellow Trail) – Open, staked, and groomed ■ East Namakan Lake to Sand Point Lake (Blue Trail) – Open, staked, and groomed **Ice roads** ■ Rainy Lake Ice Road – Open to Cranberry Bay and

around Dryweed Island ■ Kabetogama Lake Ice Road – Open **Ski trails** ■ Echo Bay Ski Trail – Open, packed, and tracked ■ Black Bay Ski Trail – Open, packed, and tracked ■ Tilson Connector Trail – Open, packed, and tracked ■ KabAsh Trail – Open **Snowshoe trails** ■ Black Bay Beaver Pond Trail – Open, not packed ■ Blind Ash Bay Trail – Open, not packed ■ Oberholtzer Trail – Open, not packed ■ Sullivan Bay Trail – Open, not packed **IVSC** International Voyageurs Snowmobile Club: The MnUSA Winter Rendezvous weekend went well even though it could have been warmer. Everyone said our trails were great, the best they’ve rode on. Hats off to the operators. Bruce, the trail boss, said they’ll be the same way this weekend. Remember, the club is having its annual hot dog roast at the Hagerman Arrowhead Trail shelter this Saturday from 11 to 2 pm. Hope to see you there

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