

# OUTDOORS

## Balsam fir: A Koochiching County record

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We have another state record right here in Koochiching county. Balsam fir's scientific name is *Abies balsamea*. It is often misidentified as a Christmas tree or pine tree. It is not a pine tree but is the only native fir tree species to Minnesota. Balsam fir grows in a wide range of habitats. However as a boreal species it mainly occurs in the northern portion of the state.

In Koochiching County it is most common as a component of other stands such as mixed in with aspen or pine, and less frequently in more wet types such as cedar. As a shade tolerant and opportunistic species it can spring up in the understory in large and concentrated numbers or can be spread out sparsely within a stand. There are a few distinctive features of this tree that make identification simple. It grows in pyramidal form-it looks like a Christmas tree. It is a coniferous tree so its needles stay green year round, and do not fall

off every year. Two unique characteristics are the balsam fir's flat needles and cones that grow up not down like other trees. Smooth bark is another trait you can use to further confirm a balsam's identity. My favorite feature is the pleasant distinct smell of crushed balsam needles that I can only describe as a classic holiday scent.

Minnesota's only fir does have some enemies. It is a relatively short lived conifer species with a maximum lifespan of 200 years, with the average being much shorter than that. The main problem for our local balsam is the native insect pest known as the spruce budworm. This insect has periodic outbreaks than can wipe out all the balsam in the area they occur. Balsam are shallow rooted and so are susceptible to blowdown and drought. They are also thin barked so fire will often kill them.

The benefits of balsam are multiple. Human beings harvest the tree for fiber for making paper. We also use it to make lumber and siding. Balsam fir oil is sometimes



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Kevin Olson poses with the balsam fir he and Chris Scofield discovered. The fir is a tie for a state record.

used as a rodent repellent. It is often used for Christmas trees and seasonal decorating. Balsam bough harvesting is done locally with the boughs eventually ending up in wreaths or other decorative uses. Permits are available to harvest boughs on state land, just stop into your local DNR forestry office if you

are interested. Many people enjoy it in their homes for a refreshing fragrance. Many types of wildlife also make use of this tree. It is used as food and shelter for birds, squirrels, moose, deer, rabbits, snowshoe hares, ruffed grouse, and others.

A tree was recently discovered by state foresters out of the International

Falls office that is a tie with the state record tree. The tree measures 61 inches circumference, 79 feet tall, and 27 feet wide crown spread. The record tie tree also resides in Koochiching County and measures 62 inches circumference, 80 feet tall, and 22 feet crown spread. Information on state record trees can be found

on the MNDNR website at [http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/trees\\_shrubs/big-tree/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/trees_shrubs/big-tree/index.html).

So just like our white spruce, we have some large balsam fir out in our forests. Keep your eyes out for the tree that can beat the currently tied champions.

## Whitefish and tullibee sport netting opens

### DNR STAFF REPORT

Recreational netting for whitefish and tullibee opened Friday on designated lakes in northern Minnesota, according to the Department of Natural Resources.

Lakes known as Schedule II lakes are open to recreational netting as follows:

- Schedule II A lakes open Oct. 10, and close Dec. 7.
- Schedule II B lakes open Nov. 7, and close Dec. 14.
- Schedule II C lakes open Nov. 14, and close Dec. 14.

Schedule II lakes are not overly susceptible to sudden changes that affect water temperature. Recreational netting for Schedule I Lakes (more susceptible to factors that impact water temperatures) will be opened and closed on a 48-hour notice posted at lake accesses and other public places. However, Schedule I lakes that are infested with invasive species may not open, or may open later than in the past. **Invasive species considerations**

New this year, nets used for whitefish and tullibee in all waters designated as infested with invasive species may not be used in any other water body unless they have been frozen for at least

two days, or dried for at least 10 days. Find a list of infested waters online.

Before leaving any water access, licensees must: clean all plants off their nets, trailers and other equipment; inspect nets and other gear for prohibited invasive species like zebra mussels, and remove them; and drain water from boats and livewells.

### Regulations

About 700 people obtain special permits to net for whitefish and tullibee each year. The DNR bases netting schedules on expected water temperatures. As the water temperature cools, game

fish head to deeper water and whitefish and tullibee come to shallow water for fall spawning. Netting is allowed when there is little chance that game fish populations would be harmed by recreational netting in shallow water.

A complete list of all Schedule I and II lakes, status of the seasonal or invasive-species related openings and closures, as well as detailed netting sport netting regulations are available online or by calling the DNR Information Center at 651-296-6157 or 888-646-6367.



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