



Outdoors

Our lives in the
Northwoods

DEER HUNTING

DNR keeps a lid on area deer permits

Most areas to offer a small number of antlerless tags, but many remain bucks only

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER
Managing Editor

REGIONAL — Last year's exceptionally mild winter isn't translating into more generous bag limits for deer hunters this fall, at least here in northeastern Minnesota.

Indeed, hunters in most areas will be limited to bucks only again, although several local permit areas, including 107, 109, 176, 177, and 178

will each be offering a limited number of antlerless tags through the lottery.

The Department of Natural Resources will issue 600 antlerless tags in Permit Area 177, which is the largest number offered in any permit area in the region. That area includes farm country west of Cook as well as the shoreline of Lake Vermilion, both of which tend to hold the largest concentrations of whitetail deer in northern St.

Louis County. Up near the border, PA 107, located in far northwestern St. Louis and eastern Koochiching counties will offer 500 tags. PA 178, in central St. Louis County, will have 400 antlerless tags available, while PA 176, just to the north, will offer 150. PA 109 will offer just 25 antlerless tags. Such relatively low numbers of antlerless tags mean that most hunters in these permit areas will be limited to bucks only.

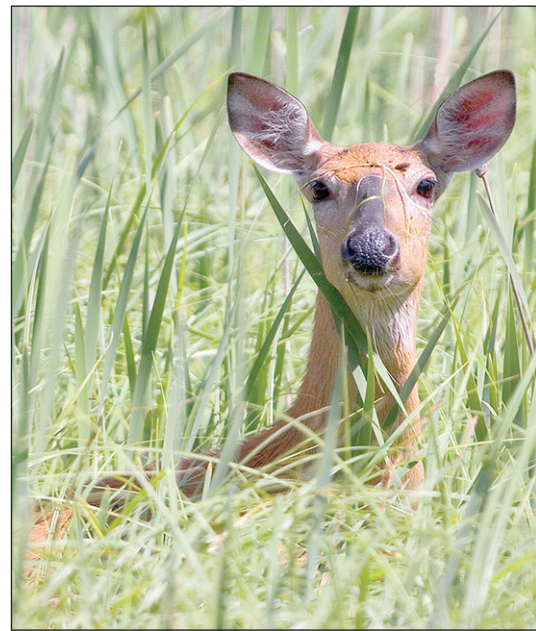
Right: A doe won't be a legal target for most deer hunters in northeastern Minnesota this fall.

file photo

Meanwhile, hunters in PA 119, in northeastern St. Louis County, and in PA 118 and 130, will be limited to bucks only this year, without any opportunity to take part in the lottery.

Hunters who hope to win

See **PERMITS...pg. 3B**



WILDLIFE WOES

Devil in the brush

Wily woodchuck wreaks havoc in my squash bed

I reacted with alarm back in July the first time I noticed my winter squash plants had been browsed. Like many backyard gardeners, winter squash is my pride and joy, a delicious fruit that is a staple in our household throughout the winter and often right into the following spring.

I tend my winter squash like a mother hen. It's usually my first stop in morning after waking up, when I check for the newly-opened female flowers, which I typically hand pollinate. I'm out there morning and evening, making sure they have enough moisture and watching the progress on the developing fruits. Because we're high up on a ridge, we usually miss the first frosts of the fall, which means I can almost always bring even butternuts, a notably long-season squash, to maturity.

In a normal fall, we sock away several bins worth of squash, secure in the knowledge we'll have months of good eating.

So, when my garden invader

moved from nibbling my squash plants to devouring my actual squash, I was, understandably, in full panic mode. Not knowing what exactly I was dealing with, I went into deer mode, and quickly erected my electric fence. It made no difference. In the meantime, whatever it was had apparently decided that it really, really liked squash.

I put up chicken wire and other fencing material I had stashed away over the years all around my squash, figuring that might be enough to keep a hare at bay. I sprayed my squash to the point of dripping with deer and rabbit repellent. And still, each day, when I would come home from the office, another burgeoning squash fruit would have been reduced to a stem and a pile of seeds. My delicious kabocha squash, so dry and nutty, that cook up with the finest squash texture, were being devoured along with good portions of the plants. Then, the hopi gray squash started disappearing, and yet I had never been able to spot the creature who was destroying my garden. I put out a trail cam on several occasions, wanting to confirm that I was dealing with a mere animal, and not some evil spirit vexing me, yet I could never capture an image.

My garden, for so many years the place I am most at peace, became a place I almost feared to venture if only to avoid another stabbing disappointment.

I had a pretty good idea that whatever was raiding my garden lived underneath a brush pile off the edge of the driveway, which had become the repository of about three years' worth of brush and tree branches. I was tempted to light the thing on fire, but then I didn't think it was worth burning the entire township up over some lost squash, even if they were kabochas.

I had also concluded by this time that my perpetrator was a woodchuck, since I had never experienced such depredation from one of our neighborhood snowshoe hares before and the process of elimination left it as the most likely alternative.

I thought about sitting out with a rifle, but I had no idea when this nasty critter emerged from its lair under the brush pile and I really, literally, didn't have the time to sit in the yard all day. Finally, Jodi suggested borrowing a live trap from our friends Chuck and Mickey, which sounded at least like a workable solution. So, I asked Chuck, a squash grower himself, who instantly understood my agony. He had Mickey deliver their big Havahart trap to the office the following day.

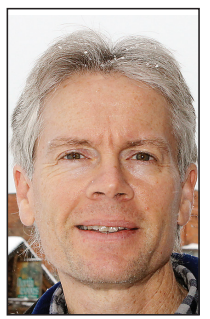
I deployed it with high hopes, using a partially devoured

squash as bait, only to come home to an empty trap and a new destroyed squash two days in a row. In desperation, I covered my remaining squash with fencing, buckets, straw, or anything else I could find to try to protect the fruits.

Finally, on the third day, I came home, and the trap had been tripped. And there, inside, was my garden devil, a woodchuck who seemed not the least bit ashamed of himself. Even from inside his tiny prison, he wanted it known he was ready to take me on. And he had clearly fortified himself. Rather than getting worked up being caught in a trap, the critter decided, "hey, I might as well eat," and devoured the entire squash, other than the seeds and the guts. It had probably eaten at least a third of its body weight by the time I got home.

I can't tell you the relief that washed over me. Yes, half of our squash crop is gone and many of the plants were damaged to the point they won't produce a single fruit, but at least my perpetrator had been caught. I drove him to a gravel pit about three and half miles west of our house and let him go, or at least tried to let him go. The animal had apparently eaten so much it could barely move. I eventually got him out of the trap and he waddled off to his next adventure while I went home to tend to my squash.

Next year, we're installing a fence.



MARSHALL
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Wildflower Watch

This week's featured flower
PANICLED ASTER



If you see a tall, all-white aster in the North Country, it's likely **Panicled Aster**, *Symphyotrichum lanceolatum*, although you'll need to check a few things to confirm it. You'll need to count the number of rays on the flower. If there are more than 50, you're likely looking at a fleabane, another type of aster. If the flower cluster is relatively tight and flat on top, and the flowers are more cream colored than white, it's a flat-topped aster. On the panicled aster, the flowers (which measure 1/2-3/4 inches across) are grouped in a very loose cluster of as many as 100 blooms. Its leaves are long and narrow with fine, scattered teeth about a quarter inch apart.

It's actually our most common white aster, so it's worth getting to know its characteristics.

Outdoors briefly

Public Trust film to be shown in Ely

ELY - Environmental advocates will gather at the Ely State Theater next month for a screening of Patagonia's "Public Trust," a film highlighting America's three most threatened public lands, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, Bears Ears National Monument, and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The documentary will be shown on Thursday, Sept. 2 at 4:30 p.m. Tickets are \$5.

A panel discussion will follow the screening focusing on the controversial proposals threatening these areas.

This event is sponsored by Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness, the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters, Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters, and the Wilderness Society.

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