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Minnesota Update Forest Action Network



2010 Season Prospects

Ruffed Grouse in Minnesota

Each spring the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources conducts a ruffed grouse drumming survey. This survey capitalizes on the easily recognizable courtship display of the male ruffed grouse to estimate regional grouse population trends.

Ruffed grouse drumming counts conducted in Minnesota this spring show a statewide decrease 27% from levels recorded in 2009. In northcentral and northeast Minnesota, the core of the ruffed grouse range in the state, drumming activity was down 31%. Drumming counts in central Minnesota and the hills of the southeast portion of the state were down as well this year. This dramatic decrease suggests that 2009 was indeed the peak of the 10-year ruffed grouse cycle in Minnesota and that we are now moving toward the cyclic low, which should occur in 2014 or 2015.

Fall bird numbers can be affected by spring weather conditions. Cold and wet weather during the end of May and early June can increase mortality of newly hatched chicks. Spring 2010 in Minnesota was characterized by relatively variable weather conditions.

Spring came early throughout the Great Lakes region in 2010. Temperatures in April and much of late May were well above seasonal averages – this led to early leaf and flower development on most species

of plants. June temperatures were relatively normal – slightly below average for the first half of the month and slightly above average in late June.

Average June rainfall throughout much of Minnesota is approximately 4 inches. Most of the southern portion of the state received June rainfall that dramatically exceeded this long-term average, some areas by as much as 4-5 inches. In northern MN, rainfall in June was an inch or so above normal, although some areas received heavy rainfall. Heavy rains were most common toward the end of the month.

The bottom line: the decline in ruffed grouse drumming activity in Minnesota in 2010 suggests that our favorite covers will hold fewer birds this fall than last year. Localized areas with excellent grouse habitat that experienced good reproductive success can still hold promise for hunters.

Woodcock

Woodcock singing ground surveys conducted in the Great Lakes region this spring suggest that populations have remained relatively stable when compared to 2009. However, the 10-year trend and the long-term (40 year) trend for this region still show slow but steady declines in woodcock numbers.

New Ruffed Grouse Coordinator for Minnesota

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has selected Ted Dick to fill the recently established statewide Ruffed Grouse Coordinator position. Dick has spent the past 9 years working for the Department as the Assistant Area Wildlife Manager in Roseau.

The primary responsibility for the Coordinator position is to promote habitat management on public and private forestlands to benefit ruffed grouse, woodcock, and the other types of wildlife that prefer young forest conditions. Approximately 30% of the funding for the Coordinator position will be provided by the Ruffed Grouse Society.

According to Mike Zagata, President and CEO of the Ruffed Grouse Society, “The new Coordinator position will allow the Society to work even more closely with the Department of Natural Resources to enhance habitat conditions and hunting opportunities for ruffed grouse and woodcock in Minnesota. The establishment of this new position is a strong indication of the Department’s commitment to ruffed grouse and our hunting heritage.”

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