

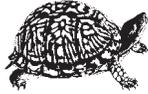


Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife

Monthly Report

www.mefishwildlife.com

284 State St., 41 SHS, Augusta, ME 04330 207-287-8000



October, 2015

MAINE WILDLIFE PARK



Saturday, Sept. 26 was the busiest day of 2015 for the Maine Wildlife Park with 2,179 people attending the North Woods Law event. The wardens were gracious and patient as ever with the fans. And Animal Planet filmed almost all day! Look for our event on future NWL shows!

MANY THANKS to all Wardens, K-9s, Warden Service folks, MWP staff, Friends of the Wildlife Park BBQers, Deputy car-parkers and others that helped make this such a successful event!

Gamekeeper Amanda created a new beaver exhibit from start to finish and Ruddy the beaver is enjoying it a lot!



This weekend would be a great weekend to come see the new exhibit. Ruddy is building his winter den, come witness nature in action!



Caleb Morin is the grandson of Fish Culture Supervisor Tom McLaughlin, and he shot his first animal ever at age 10! With a single shot 20 gauge, he took this bear in Wytopotlock. The bear dressed out at 122 pounds. Way to go Caleb!



INFORMATION CENTER

In September the front office of the Department received and replied to (approx):

- 4,038 Phone calls
- 1,870 Emails
- 271 Walk-ins



Missed an issue?

To view previous Weekly Reports, please visit www.mefishwildlife.com and select "About Us"



Like us on Facebook!

Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife

Swan Island

Maine Wildlife Park

FISHERIES & HATCHERIES DIVISION

Smelt Project - *Written by Tim Obrey, Biologist*

Last fall and winter we documented an abrupt decline in smelt abundance in Moosehead Lake. It was a bit of a surprise because from 2008 to 2013 we witnessed steady improvement in lake trout and salmon growth, which is a good indicator that the main forage for these two highly prized gamefish was in abundant supply. Other data from the lake indicated that the decline in smelt abundance was not related to an over-abundance of lake trout since we had successfully thinned this population to meet our abundance goals. Instead, it was likely a natural fluctuation in the smelt population that may be related to water temperatures or available food. The good news is, this summer our sampling indicates that lake trout growth has rebounded nicely and we will get a look at our salmon at the end of October. But this does point to a short-coming in our ability to predict smelt abundance which is directly related to the success of our salmon and lake trout fisheries.

In the past, we have examined smelt runs in the spring, but we can't really put a number on a smelt run. It is impossible to count eggs, and we typically just note whether the spawning run was heavy or light. This is totally subjective and not very useful over a long period of time. This summer we tried some new techniques designed to shed light on smelt population dynamics in Sebec and Moosehead Lakes. The information gained could be applied to other lakes as well.

This spring we deployed plankton nets in several tributaries with known smelt runs about 10 days after the eggs were deposited in an attempt to catch the newly hatched smelt fry. We were successful! We will be able to repeat this work each year to develop a catch curve to compare smelt fry abundance from year to year.

After smelt fry hatch, they immediately drop into the lake downstream. Other smelt studies indicate that the proper food source (plankton) must be available for these very small fish or they will starve soon after they absorb their yolk sac. Therefore, it would be useful to monitor smelt abundance throughout the summer months and monitor plankton abundance/species composition.

This summer we were very successful at sampling smelt fry from the surface of the lakes in early spring. However, by mid-June we found that we had to sample at night to capture smelts, since they only come to the surface after the sun sets. We were also able to collect and identify plankton during these sampling events.

This winter we will develop a sampling protocol that will allow us to track our smelt populations over time and hopefully detect impending declines before they occur. We may not be able to change the environmental conditions that cause the declines, but in some cases, we may be able to minimize the impacts by reducing stocking rates of salmon and/or lake trout in advance.

We want to acknowledge the Natural Resource Education Center at Moosehead (NREC) for providing the funds to purchase the new equipment necessary for this work. NREC also paid for one of our interns this summer. This allowed us to conduct full creel surveys on Moosehead Lake and First Roach Pond, as well as complete a number of other projects. Funds for the NREC summer internship program come from the Moosehead Lake Togue Derby with Ricky Craven and other donations.



Smelt fry captured in the spring.



Summer interns Zach Pratt (UMO) and Natalie Ameral (Unity College) collect plankton and smelt samples.

RESEARCH & ASSESSMENT SECTION

New England Cottontail Listing Decision & Next Steps for Maine - *Written by Wally Jakubas, Mammal Group Leader*



Jason Weller at the podium during the recognition ceremony.

This September, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) concluded their 12-month review on whether New England's only native cottontail rabbit should be designated as a threatened or endangered species under the federal Endangered Species Act. The finding of not warranted for listing was announced at a recognition ceremony, held in New Hampshire, for landowners, state wildlife biologists, university researchers, and federal biologists that have been working to recover the species. Dignitaries at the event included Secretary of Interior -- Sally Jewel, New Hampshire Senator -- Jeanne Shaheen, Dan Ashe -- Director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Jason Weller -- Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Secretary Jewel spoke of the "epic" collaboration that occurred for this rangewide recovery initiative. For this initiative, state and federal agencies, universities, non-profit conservation groups, and (cont.)

landowners worked together to formulate a conservation strategy, develop recovery goals for each state, and procure funding that was shared among all the initiative's partners. Secretary Jewel held up the New England Cottontail Rangewide Initiative as an example to follow for recovering other imperiled species that are candidates for federal listing.

The team of biologists that are working to recover Maine's New England cottontail population were formally recognized for their role in the rangewide recovery effort. This team includes representative from USFWS, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and IFW. Maine was one of the first states to conduct a population survey for the rabbit, take steps to protect it, and one of two states to list them as a state endangered species. Currently, the New England cottontail is still listed as endangered in Maine, and it is a Priority I Species of Greatest Conservation Need in IFW's new Wildlife Action Plan.

Although it was great to celebrate the collaborative work that has been done to date on behalf of the New England cottontail, all of the biologists recognize that the majority of the work still lies ahead of us if we are to recover and stabilize the rangewide population of these rabbits. Both Maine and New Hampshire have very low numbers of cottontail rabbits left in the wild and these rabbits live in a very fragmented landscape. There is a need to repopulate habitat that native rabbits cannot easily reach through natural dispersal. State and federal wildlife agencies, in both states, are exploring plans to work together on a captive breeding facility to be built at Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge in New Hampshire. The breeding stock for this facility will come, in part, from a captive breeding program that has been underway for about five years at the Roger Williams Zoo in Rhode Island. In addition, Maine may donate additional wild rabbits to the captive breeding effort. For this effort to be successful, it will again necessitate that different state and federal agencies, and private organizations combine resources and work together towards a common goal. These types of collaborations will be essential if we are to achieve the restoration goals set for 2030 for the New England cottontail rabbit. The USFWS promises to continue to monitor the progress of the New England Cottontail Rangewide Initiative to ensure the rabbit stays on the path to recovery.



MAINE WARDEN SERVICE

A beautiful sunset photo taken from the MDIFW Warden Service aircraft hangar on the shore of Moosehead Lake in Greenville, Maine.



Game Warden Mike Boyer started September off involving Landowners Cleanup Day and had the Penobscot Off-Road Riders ATV Club show up with 14 of their members all ready to go! He teamed up with the Maine Forest Service and together they had six truckloads brought to the Lincoln landfill; it was a very productive day!



Game Warden Wayde Carter conducted an investigation in conjunction with Department of Environmental Protection Agency where a subject stole a skidder and did substantial damage to the shoreline of Hadley Lake in the town of East Machias. The suspect took the skidder and pushed up mud and clay onto the shoreline for approximately 150 to 200 yards; leaving the skidder stuck in the water. The subject also cut trees and left them in a pile to block the boat landing belonging to the town of East Machias. This case remains under investigation.



Game Warden Joey Gardner finished up an investigation regarding a vehicle found submerged in Patrick Lake. He and Game Warden Joe McBride summonsed a subject for littering. Gardner also wrote several summonses for ATV related violations. Warden Gardner also dealt with several landowner related issues involving trespassing and marijuana growing info.

Game Warden Corporal Merrifield and her K9 Piper were deployed on the Baxter State Park search. K9 Piper experienced her first helicopter ride and the team was dropped off at "The Klondike" where they began their search and hiked to the top of South Brother Mountain. Around the same time they reached the trail at the top of South Brother Mountain, the lost hiker was located and transported by the Maine Forest Service helicopter.



WILDLIFE DIVISION



Landowner Outreach Efforts - *Written by Ryan B. Robicheau, Wildlife Mgt. Section Supervisor*

On the 24th of September, Regional Wildlife Biologist Chuck Hulseley participated in an annual training held by American Forest Management, Inc. (AFM), a management company that manages over 1,000,000 acres in New Hampshire and Maine for its clients. The topic for the day was biological diversity in a forested setting and Chuck was specifically asked to cover endangered and threatened species as well as important deer wintering area management. The Maine Forest Service and Maine Natural Areas Program also participated in the training to round out the topics discussed – from basic biological diversity to recognizing and protecting unique natural habitats.

With more than 20 AFM staff members in attendance, Chuck covered Bald and Golden Eagles, lynx and deer wintering areas. Due to my involvement with the Northern Long-eared Bat, he asked that I cover potential management implications with it being listed by the USFWS in the spring of this year.

After brief presentations in the morning on the topics above, the second half of the day was spent visiting sites in the field to see some of these important habitats up close. Andy Cutko, with Maine Natural Areas Program, brought the group to a cedar stand on the edge of an emergent wetland where an uncommon yellow lady's-slipper has been documented. He discussed how landform is the key component to the presence of the plant, which requires ample moisture and nutrient rich soils.

The second portion of the field tour was led by Chuck, and was focused on the successful management of a Deer Wintering Area. Chuck talked about the harvest requirements and how he had worked with the landowner to meet their goals as well as enhance the area for wintering deer by maintaining cover and producing browse as a food source. Chuck, who has an interest in addressing landowner concerns regarding impacts from beaver, couldn't resist adding one more stop to the list – an effective beaver control device which was installed to reduce impacts to the public road and allow for beaver to utilize the stream in which they were located.

In the end I found the meeting to be very productive, providing a chance to connect with folks actively managing the forest in Maine for the values we all enjoy – timber production, wildlife habitat, recreation, water quality, and the many other public benefits provided by a working forest. It also provided an opportunity for the folks in attendance to ask questions and discuss the issues of the day.

INFORMATION & EDUCATION

Processing Your Deer Workshop - Written by Bonnie Holding

I had tough duty on Saturday Sept. 19, 2015. Inland Fisheries and Wildlife partnered with Southern Maine Community College's Culinary Arts program to have a workshop, 'Processing your Deer'.

We had been asked by both experienced and new hunters about how to dress out their deer and then different cooking methods, so why not put that together and have a workshop?!

Game Warden Corporal Rick LaFlamme, joined us to actually do the processing. He did a great job of showing and discussing how to skin the deer, and as he was doing that, Scott Lindsay, a wildlife biologist in Gray talked about deer management and the way hunting is a tool in that management. There were a few questions from the group of over 20 participants, but, mostly they were focused on what was being done.

Once the skinning was taken care of, we moved into the teaching kitchen in the Culinary Arts building. There Rick asked Chef Geoffrey Boardman from the school, what cuts he would like to have. After that was discussed, Rick continued on to breaking down the deer, discussing as he went about the cuts for steaks, roasts and burger.

Chef Boardman then put his cooking skills to work. The venison was cooked to perfection and sauces were used, and the great thing about all of it, anyone can do it!!



Grand Falls- Maine Huts & Trails

Britt Humphrey & Bonnie Holding got together for a fun educational fishing lesson with students from Jackman Middle School at the Maine Huts & Trails site at Grand Falls. The students learned about fish and laws in the area and got to practice their skills in the parking lot with traditional poles then headed to the water to practice fly casting.



Sportsman's Alliance of Maine Banquet

I&E teamed up with SAM to hand out 18 youth lifetime fishing licenses at the annual SAM banquet. Children were accompanied by family members to the dinner where they were presented with their certificates!



OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

- The Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner attended the annual Fisheries & Hatcheries meeting at Long Pond in T7R9 on September 9th.
- The Commissioner and staff attended the annual SAM banquet at the Waterville Elks Club. The Commissioner presented the first Lifetime Outdoor Achievement award to two deserving individuals selected from over 100 applications.
- The Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner and staff attended an Advisory Council meeting on September 16th, and the Council voted to adopt the 2015/16 beaver season dates and closures and the 2016 fishing regulations. Fishing regulations also included the addition of 4 waters to the State Heritage fish waters list and changes to the fishing derbies as they apply to Maine/NH border waters.
- A retirement party was held for Deputy Commissioner Erskine at the Birches Campground in Litchfield. Andrea will be retiring on Wednesday, September 30 after 30 years of service with the Department. Many Department staff and friends and family were there to congratulate her and wish her well. IF&W will not be the same without her! She has assured us she will be returning for the annual Christmas luncheons.