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DNR to close - Best Buck Grand Prize Winner - Upper Sioux Agency State Park next month

By Brian Mozey
Staff Writer

St. Paul — The Minnesota DNR announced last week that it permanently will close Upper Sioux Agency State Park to the public on Friday, Feb. 16. The closure is one of the final steps in transferring the park to the Upper Sioux Community.



BEST BUCK GRAND PRIZE WINNER. Cole Pint, of Northfield, shot this 12-point buck while bowhunting in Rice County on Oct. 7. The rack had an 18-inch inside spread and green-scored 173 gross nontypical. See the rest of this year's *Outdoor News* Best Buck Contest winners on pages 16-17.

The 1,300-acre slice of property will be open to visitors until 10 p.m. on Feb. 15, 2024. Once it's closed, there will be no public access and no services available. A press release from the agency stated that gates will be closed, facilities will be locked, informational and wayfinding signs will be removed, and trails won't be maintained.

The DNR hosted a press conference at 9:30 a.m. on Jan. 10 to discuss the closure as well (See **Upper Sioux** Page 20)

DNR to seek input on teal hunt, season splits

By Tori J. McCormick
Contributing Writer

Bemidji, Minn. — The Minnesota DNR is preparing to roll out a general waterfowl-hunter survey. It's an effort to collect information on a range of topics, most notably hunter opinions on an early September teal season and the state's three-tier hunting-zone system.

The agency, which conducts such surveys roughly every three years, is slated to mail 4,000 survey postcards this week to randomly selected

waterfowl hunters who purchased state duck stamps last year. Steve Cordts, Minnesota DNR waterfowl staff specialist, said the goal is to get an overall response rate as high as possible.

"It's the best way we have to gather information and keep a pulse on what waterfowl hunters are thinking, so it's important," Cordts said of the regular waterfowl-hunter surveys. "We encourage those who get a survey ... to fill it out and send it back as soon as possible. I filled it out twice as a test, and it took me between five and six minutes to complete."

(See **Input** Page 28)



WINTER WALLEYE. Michael Stegura, of Bowlus, caught and released this 28½-inch walleye on Two Rivers Lake in Stearns County on Jan. 6.

DNR: Bobcats and fishers are expanding southward

Could trapping expand, too?

By Brian Mozey
Staff Writer

New London, Minn. — Cory Netland, Minnesota DNR New London area wildlife supervisor, remembers hearing the first report of a fisher in the New London area. It happened in 2013, and he was caught off-guard because he thought it was unusual to see fishers in that area of the state.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Feb. 9: Spring turkey app deadline (where applicable).

Now, Netland said, there are multiple reports of fishers each year and sightings have increased steadily. Many citizens don't recognize fishers and think they're wolverines or another member of the mustelid (weasel) family, he said.

Along with fishers, bobcats are being seen more often in southern Minnesota. Each animal species has a different path to reach the region, but both are forming larger populations.

"We're seeing (bobcats) in the Minnesota River valley more

(See **Expanding** Page 8)

Inside News

▶ Group: WMAs Aren't Getting What's Needed

A group dedicated to the betterment of state wildlife management areas says DNR leaders and the Legislature must devote more time, dollars to these lands. **See Page 3**

▶ Wildlife Artist Killen, a State Treasure, Dies

Jim Killen, a renowned wildlife artist from Owatonna, died Jan. 6 at age 89. His paintings over the years raised millions of dollars that benefitted wildlife habitat across the state of Minnesota. **See Page 4**

▶ An Early Beginning to Shed Hunting 2024?

Limited snow in some areas of Minnesota mean shed hunters could get a jump this year. Check out some tips for locating them. **See Page 25**