

DNR NEWS – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE March 27, 2012

Media contacts: Erik Thorson, Big Game Program leader, 218-766-0734; Chris Niskanen, DNR communications director, 651-259-5023.

DNR to offer limited moose hunt this fall

Consistent with the state’s moose management plan, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) announced today that it will offer a limited bulls-only hunting season this fall.

Although hunting mortality of bulls is not a significant factor in the moose population decline, the state’s moose plan, which addresses habitat, climate change, disease and other moose population factors, identifies specific thresholds when moose hunting should cease. The DNR is following that plan by closing two hunting zones in northeastern Minnesota, but continuing to allow limited hunting in other zones.

“Our approach is based on the scientific and social considerations brought forth by experts on the legislatively created Minnesota Moose Advisory Committee,” said Erik Thorson, acting DNR big game program leader. “Committee members envisioned a time when hunting would become an issue. That time has come. We’re implementing a reasoned and responsible plan.”

Minnesota’s moose population is estimated at 4,230. This compares to last year’s estimate of 4,900 and is down significantly from the 2006 estimate of 8,840. The DNR estimates about 50 bulls will be taken by state hunters this fall.

Thorson said the DNR’s limited hunting season will have no significant impact on the moose population. That’s because the bull-cow ratio is sufficient to ensure that all cows can be bred, thereby creating the next generation of moose. The state’s moose management plan recommends using bull-cow ratios as a measure to determine whether a bulls-only hunt should continue. DNR biologists base the harvest level on 5 percent of the estimated bull population.

“While it’s true that the state’s moose population is declining it’s also true that bulls-only hunting is not a significant factor in that decline,” said Thorson. “A decade of research has shown that most mortality is from unknown causes unrelated to hunting, perhaps linked to parasites or disease.”

In 2008, the Minnesota Legislature directed the DNR to create a Moose Advisory Committee to make recommendations to the agency. The DNR convened a group of individuals from agencies, universities, tribes, and organizations representing a broad cross-section of moose expertise and interests. The Moose Advisory Committee filed a report that the DNR used to formulate its moose management and research plan. That plan states hunting should cease if:

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* The bull to cow ratio drops below 67 bulls per 100 cows for three consecutive years.
* Overall hunter success drops below 30 percent for three consecutive years.
* The harvest success rate for any individual hunting zone averages less than 20 percent for three consecutive years.

“The bull to cow ratio is well above the identified threshold and at the highest level since 2006,” said Thorson. “Overall hunter success was 58 percent last year, well above the 30 percent threshold. And hunting success rates for individual zones have not dipped below 20 percent for three consecutive years except zones 23 and 34, which we have closed to hunting this year.”

Rolf Peterson, chair of the Moose Advisory Committee, said while many people will focus their concern on moose hunting, the real news – that the moose population is still declining – continues to be disturbing.

“Even though hunting is not causing the decline, it makes sense to reduce hunting pressure in an orderly manner if the population continues to decline,” Peterson said.

Today’s announcement means Minnesotans who want to hunt bull moose this fall can apply for 87 available licenses starting Monday, April 2. The state’s moose hunting season is open to residents age 10 or older. Application deadline is Friday, May 4.

Eleven of the of the 87 available permits will be offered first to hunters who were selected in last year’s lottery but opted not to hunt because of hunting access issues caused by the widespread Pagami Creek Fire. If any of the 11 choose not to hunt, their permits will be available to this year’s applicants. The state’s moose hunting quotas also take into consideration the expected tribal moose harvest by the Bois Forte, Fond du Lac and Grand Portage bands, which also conduct moose hunting seasons.

The moose season will open Saturday, Sept. 29, and conclude Sunday, Oct. 14. Hunters may apply at any DNR license agent or at the DNR License Center, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul. Moose hunters must apply in parties from two to four individuals. An application fee of $3 per individual must be included with the application.

Permits are issued through a random drawing, except that applicants who have been unsuccessful at least 10 times since 1985 will be placed in a separate drawing for up to 20 percent of the available licenses. A person who is still unsuccessful in this separate selection also will be included in the regular drawing.

Because the moose hunt became a once-in-a-lifetime hunt in 1991, hunters who received permits for moose hunts for the 1991 hunt and later are not eligible to apply for the 2012 drawing. The license fee is $310 per party. There will be mandatory orientation sessions required for all hunters chosen for moose licenses.

In 2011, 92 state-licensed hunters harvested 53 bull moose.

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