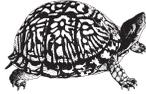




# Monthly Report

[www.mefishwildlife.com](http://www.mefishwildlife.com)

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## RESEARCH & ASSESSMENT SECTION

**Snowy Owl Irruption** - *Written by Erynn Call, Raptor Specialist, Bird Group*

A rare phenomenon not seen for more than a half century has recently been unfolding— a major snowy owl irruption. While it’s not uncommon for these Arctic Tundra natives to visit northern regions of the U.S., the last two winters have been different. Owls appeared all around the Great Lakes, along the Atlantic Coast as far south as the Carolinas, and in balmy locales of Florida and Bermuda. In Maine, they were seen more frequently than normal, in many more locations than during a typical winter, and sometimes in exceptional numbers in one setting across the entire state from expansive farmlands in northern Aroostook County to York County beaches in southern Maine.

These impressive raptors are larger than a Great Horned Owl, have a five-foot wing span, and prefer wide open spaces of shorelines, beachfronts, sand dunes, extensive marshes and open fields. Field mice, voles, squirrels, and ducks are hunted day or night. Wildlife enthusiasts and photographers are encouraged to give a wide berth, even if the owl doesn’t appear disturbed their prey is unlikely to emerge.



The cause of this owl surge appears to be a superabundance of food on the breeding grounds in 2013 and 2014. Female owls are capable of producing up to 11 eggs when food is plentiful. Lemmings are a foundation prey of Arctic ecosystems and follow a boom-bust cycle. A photograph of a nest surrounded by heaps of lemmings provided a stunning example of the banner lemming year that led to a large number of owlets experiencing high survival rates. As the Arctic winter set in and lemmings found safe haven under deep snow, the pulse of owls dispersed across Eastern North America to find areas of sparse snow cover and prominent perches to spot their next meal.

A collaborative research effort, Project SNOWstorm, was initiated to learn from this historical irruption. To learn more visit [www.projectsnowstorm.org](http://www.projectsnowstorm.org).

## INFORMATION CENTER

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

- 2,301 Phone calls
- 1,296 Emails
- 138 Walk-ins



**Missed an issue?**

To view previous Weekly Reports, please visit [www.mefishwildlife.com](http://www.mefishwildlife.com) and select “About Us”



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Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife

Swan Island

Maine Wildlife Park

## WILDLIFE DIVISION

### **Cooperative Deer Wintering Area Management -**

*Written by Ryan Robichau, Wildlife Management Section Supervisor*

This winter, the Department worked with Plum Creek Timberlands on management within a Deer Wintering Area (DWA) in Beaver Cove. Management activities were carried out in accordance with a Cooperative Agreement between the landowner and the Department.

Plum Creek and their contractors conducted the actual management activities agreed upon within the framework of the Cooperative Agreement, with the Department assisting with the development of the operation plans.

The goal within the Deer Wintering Area is to provide for necessary winter shelter and food in a manner that can be sustained in perpetuity, while also balancing the need for sustainable timber products and resource needs of the landowner.

Cooperative Agreements are one tool available to the Department to ensure deer population objectives can be met, and to be able to work with a landowner in a proactive approach to land management can certainly be effective.



## OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

- The Commissioner gave a presentation to the Boy Scouts on fishing laws and safe outdoor practices at the Methodist Church in Waterville.
- The Deputy Commissioner and appropriate staff were present at a regularly scheduled meeting of the Advisory Council. The Council voted to adopt amendments to the watercraft rules and Maine guide rules. The Council also discussed a proposal for spring turkey hunting in WMDs 1-6 and moose permit allocations for 2015.
- The Commissioner attended and was a guest speaker at the 16th annual Maine Milfoil Summit at the University of Maine Lewiston on February 27th. The annual Milfoil Summit is a state wide gathering of individuals, organizations and governmental agencies working to prevent the spread of milfoil in Maine.
- Public hearings and works sessions are now in full swing with the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. For a list of bills before the Committee, bills of interest and Department testimony please visit our IFW homepage: [www.maine.gov/ifw](http://www.maine.gov/ifw).

## INFORMATION & EDUCATION



The New Year always brings along with it the Sportsman Show season for I & E. This is a great opportunity to have one on one conversation with the sporting public and answer their questions about Maine Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. It is great to see the reaction to someone we have spoken to, that they say thanks for taking the time to speak with them. How easy it is to make a good impression.

Emily MacCabe keeps everything straight with organizing, packing and making sure everyone has what they need for the trip. This includes, finding the employees to go to the event, the reservations for hotels, info on the booth space, displays, brochures, maps, and all the incidentals that are needed for the event.

We have been out of state, (Marlborough and Springfield, MA, Somerset, NJ, Harrisburg, PA, heading to Suffern, NY and Washington, DC) and out of country in Montreal, QC. The shows in Maine have started with the Cabin Fever Reliever in Bangor last weekend. Now we head to the Eastern Maine Sportsman show in Orono, March 6-8, The Presque isle Sportsman Show, March 21 and 22, the Western Maine Fly Fishing Show Mar. 21, the State of Maine Sportsman Show Mar. 27-29 and let's not forget some time at Kittery Trading Post Spring event and L.L. Beans Spring event. So, if you are near any of these shows, stop by and say hi.

Emily will write a blog post and share some photos after the show season, but, here are a couple photos from a couple of the shows earlier this season.



## INFORMATION & EDUCATION

All of the snow in February didn't stop us from getting out on the ice. Lots of smiling faces and fun while learning how to ice fish around Maine! Britt Humphrey attended nearly a dozen events including:

- \*Wilson Lake Derby- Wilton Fish & Game
- \*Jack Traps Kids Derby- Monmouth
- \*Crystal Lake w/ MSAD 6th graders- Gray
- \*Crowell Pond Derby- Cape Cod School in New Sharon
- \*BOW Winter Skills Weekend- Bryant Pond 4-H Camp & Learning Center



## MAINE WARDEN SERVICE



< Division A: Game wardens from section two worked the annual Crystal Lake Ice Fishing Derby in Gray. The weather was not favorable for the derby but it still drew a large crowd and some nice fish were caught.

> Division B: Game Warden Chris Dyer along with Sergeant Chris Simmons dealt with a vehicle that had broken through a snowmobile bridge prior to heavy snow. The occupants were trying to remove the vehicle and one member of the group called 911 activating a rescue call. The vehicle was removed and plans were made to fix the bridge in cooperation between the snowmobile club and the vehicles occupants.



< Division D: Game Warden Jonathan Parker rescued a stranded snowmobiler in Dexter that was diabetic and had lost feeling in both feet and hands from the cold. He used Dexter Fire & Recues toboggan and brought the subject out to a nearby road where May Regional EMS personnel had staged to warm the subject.

> Division D: Warden Kemp patrolled by snowmobile a few days in February and came upon this shack while checking Sebec Lake with Warden Josh Polland. The picture is a good indicator of recent weather, snow and wind!



< Division E: Game Warden Beal handled a call regarding a bobcat in a duck pen and was causing problems. After some strategic planning, Warden Beal removed the bobcat with a catch pole and released it away from the duck pen and back into the wild.

< Pressure ridges: The Maine Warden Service reminds everyone travelling on lakes and ponds to be mindful of pressure ridges. This pressure ridge is located on Moosehead Lake.

## FISHERIES & HATCHERIES DIVISION

### Schoodic Lake Fishery Management – An Update - *Written by Gordon Kramer, Reg. Fisheries Bio., Penobscot Region*

Schoodic Lake in Piscataquis County has developed a reputation over the years as a destination for togue (lake trout) anglers, and for good reason. There is an abundance of lake trout, and while most weigh in at around 2 to 3 pounds, there are numerous fish angled every year between 4 and 6 pounds, and a few over 10 pounds. Catch rates are good and getting better, so much so that we have recently allowed anglers to harvest more togue from Schoodic than is the general law.



We conducted a season long winter creel survey on the lake in 2008 and 2014 to collect information on angler activity, catch, and harvest. The catch rate of legal togue doubled from 2008 to 2014 (0.25 lake trout per angler day to 0.57 lake trout per angler day). That increase in the catch is indicative that the population of lake trout is growing. This is a positive development, provided that the lake's primary forage (smelts) can be sustained. If not, then fish growth and size could be severely impacted. We'll continue to monitor



this important togue fishery and if necessary, we'll recommend management changes to assure that fishing quality is maintained.



Also worth mentioning is that we also manage a limited landlocked salmon fishery at Schoodic. Our management objective for this popular sport fish is to maintain higher-than-average size quality. A very small number (500 to 600) of 6" to 8" salmon are stocked each spring. These fish are allowed to grow to provide a limited fishery for very large fish. Current rules allow anglers the opportunity to harvest one salmon over 21 inches at Schoodic. The trade-off, of course, is that catch rates are very low (0.06 salmon per angler day). There is a very high legal release

rate (43% of all legal sized salmon over 21 inches caught are released), primarily because anglers know that there are some very large salmon caught once in a while. Some fish in the 6 to 8 pound category are reported on a fairly regular basis, and fish up to 10 pounds and larger have been documented. One notable salmon was caught by Jim Albert of Glenburn in 2002 that was 34" long and weighed 13 pounds and 3 ounces. I have seen pictures of a 31" 10 ½ pound salmon that I believe was also taken at Schoodic this winter, and would like to have an opportunity to examine that fish!



The Department wishes Sarah Demers the best of luck in her new position as Director of the Land for Maine's Future Program at the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. For the last 4½ years, Sarah has been the Bureau of Resource Management's point person for all land acquisition activities, working with Department biological staff, management, and contractors, and providing technical assistance and cost-share to private landowners, land trusts, and conservation partners, for the purpose of benefitting at-risk species and habitats. We will definitely miss Sarah's great work ethic and positive attitude as a Department employee, but look forward to continuing to work with her in her new capacity. Good luck Sarah, we know that you will do well!

