

Minnesota
Ecological & Water Resources
1601 Minnesota Drive
Brainerd, MN 56401

March 1, 2019

Important Announcement about the 2019 Loon Watcher Survey

Dear Minnesota Loon Watcher Survey volunteers,

39 years of data collected by passionate volunteers like you

The Minnesota Loon Watcher Survey began modestly in 1979 with 56 volunteers on 73 lakes and subsequently has grown to over 300 volunteers on upwards of 350-400 lakes. The kind of information volunteers like you have provided has also grown, with more detailed observation data being collected in recent years to help us make sense of environmental contaminants and the importance of deep, cold water lakes for pre-migration staging. Altogether, you have sent us over 10,000 individual surveys over the years, many representing multiple observation days. This is an incredible and unparalleled dataset that will provide essential insights into Minnesota loon biology, behavior and population characteristics.

As the spring of the 40th season nears, however, we have decided to take a break. After a great deal of discussion and consideration among our program staff, we have made the very difficult decision not to continue with the volunteer loon watcher survey in 2019.

We will spend the next several months re-evaluating the program objectives and considering our options for relaunching the survey including development of a revised database platform, all with the hope of being able to restart the volunteer survey program in the near future. We strongly feel that taking time to evaluate our options, build the necessary pieces if we are able, and then restart the survey will ensure a much smoother operation and will ultimately benefit the program while being respectful of our dedicated volunteers' time.

To this end, we will be taking time over the next several months to organize the data we have received over the past two seasons. We will be working on compiling and analyzing the data collected to give us some insights into the health of our state's loon population. Once that analysis is done we will be in a better position to chart the course forward. ***To ensure we have all available data entered into the database, please take this moment to send in your 2018 survey forms (and any previous year's forms for that matter) if you have not already done so.***

Please note that because the Minnesota Loon Watcher Survey is formally closed, any loon monitoring a person decides to run on his or her own is NOT considered a MNDNR-sanctioned volunteer activity. Nonetheless, I do encourage you to keep on watching loons if only for the simple joy of appreciating this beautiful and majestic bird.

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