



MINNESOTA is very excited to host the 2007 NAWEOA Conference during the 120th anniversary of Minnesota conservation law enforcement.

By Rich Sprouse, Public Information Officer, Minnesota DNR Enforcement

The year is 1887. The Boone & Crockett Club is organized to protect U.S. wildlife from ruthless slaughter by commercial market hunters. Its founders are a group of "American hunting riflemen" including Theodore Roosevelt.

1887 also marked a milestone in the history of conservation in Minnesota when the legislature appointed W.F. Zwickey as the first Minnesota game warden. His mission: cover the entire state enforcing game and fish laws. Never mind there was no salary, no expense money and no personnel to assist him. Not surprising that Zwickey lasted less than two years before taking another law enforcement position in Washington state.

In 1889 the legislature deleted the position entirely, shifting the enforcement of "wildlife" laws back to local sheriffs, policemen and constables. Two years later the position of game warden was re-established. He received a small salary and could select four unpaid deputies to assist.

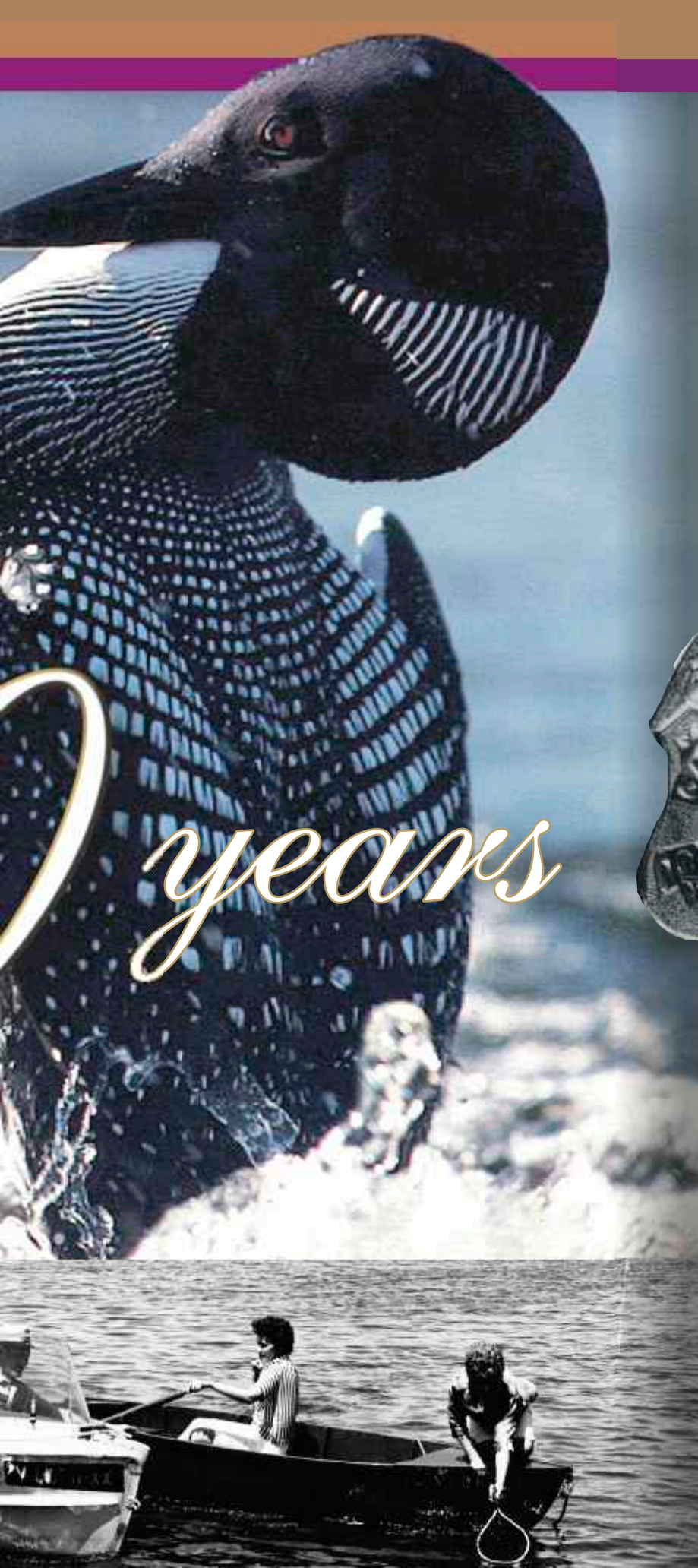
Flash forward to 2007. The job title has changed from game warden to conservation officer. There are 155 field conservation officers enforcing a bevy of natural resources laws, as well as Conservation Officer/Pilots, Regional Training Officers, Wetland Enforcement Officers, a Special Investigation Unit and supervisory staff. In total some 204 licensed conservation officers and a small support staff are now dedicated to protecting and preserving Minnesota's natural resources.

Minnesota DNR Enforcement celebrates

120

Hosts 2007 NAWEOA Conference





Natural resources under attack

The first 20 years of natural resources law enforcement in Minnesota saw a tremendous change in game and fish laws. Some species, such as bison, elk, and antelope, had disappeared or dwindled in number. Many small game birds, fur bearing animals, and waterfowl were dwindling as well. It was commonplace for railcars packed with Minnesota game to be shipped to the eastern United States for commercial profit. Recognizing that the resource was under attack, fish and game limits were imposed in 1881.

By 1894, the handful of wardens in the state had prosecuted 75 violators. Total fines: \$1,346. Backing these prosecutions was a legal principle established that same year:

Wild animals were the property of the state; the state could pass laws to regulate fishing and hunting; all citizens had to obey these laws.

It was also during this time period that the first game warden fatality occurred when poachers near Bemidji killed Charles Wetsel. There were other firsts as well: fishing and hunting licenses were required; the

number of wardens grew to 100 (mostly part-time deputies);

the Lacey Act of 1900 made transporting illegally obtained game across state lines a federal offense; and stiff penalties were enacted for shipping Minnesota fish and game to other markets.

Slowly, cracks in the law that lead to exploitation of the resource were closed. For the first time there was awareness that the state's fish and game were not inexhaustible. Also, the legislature was ready and willing to provide the laws necessary for game wardens to protect and preserve the resource for generations to come.

Bolstering support for game laws and wardens

While a new era of greater regulation of wildlife harvest met the new century, game wardens were continually running into rampant acts of resource abuse.





A celebrated poaching case took place in 1904 when Minnesota courts imposed two \$20,000 fines on market hunters Robert Poole and William Kerr for attempting to export 2,000 ducks from Minnesota. The case against Poole was eventually upheld by the state Supreme Court. Despite the fact that the fine was never paid, and there was no record that any jail time was served, the case bolstered support for game laws and discouraged market hunting for waterfowl.

The State vs. the Nicollet Hotel of Minneapolis was another high profile natural resources case. The courts upheld a state law forbidding the sale of protected birds regardless of the source, even if from out-of-state. This meant that poachers could no longer rely on hotels and restaurants to buy illegally taken game.

1908 saw the first Conference of Game Wardens (or Warden School) in Minnesota with some 40 salaried wardens attending the event in St. Paul. The salary for wardens was around \$100 a month.

In 1915 the legislature changed the administrative framework of the Game Warden Service by abolishing the five-member Game and Fish Commission and creating the new Department of Game and Fish, headed by former Chief Warden Carlos Avery. His expectation of game wardens was clear, and relevant today:

“Wardens are expected to assist all individuals and organizations in efforts to conserve wildlife, to carry on educational work through schools, rural clubs, businessmen’s organizations and otherwise As the support of the general public is necessary to successful administration of fish and game laws, wardens are. . . to so conduct their work as to deserve the commendation of all good citizens....”

“The game warden is engaged in a public service of the most exacting nature, requiring much special knowledge of the laws, the facts of natural history, rare good judgment and common sense, strict integrity, physical fitness, and the ability to secure the support of good citizens....”

A new innovation was added which further complicated game and fish law enforcement. The automobile was slowly replacing horses and wagons, the staples of transportation at that time. No longer confined to a specific geographic area, hunters and anglers now had speedy transportation to all sections of the state thereby increasing hunting and fishing pressure.

More change

A true purveyor of change, as well as a visionary, Carlos Avery welcomed legislation that included the first “hunter’s report card” in 1919. He recognized the contribution wildlife made to Minnesota’s burgeoning recreation industry. He also realized that fish and game populations could only be maintained through professional management of the resource, education, and enforcement of regulations.

The names of two female game wardens are first noted in 1924 Minnesota Department of Game and Fish arrest records: Anne Hodgdon of Bemidji and Florence Stuckel of St. Paul. Stuckel, who grew up on a cattle ranch in Wyoming, was not a stranger to firearms or “fisticuffs.” A male game warden at that time said, “She could hold her own with any man in any situation.” Although each woman stayed on the job a



short time they both proved effective. However, it would be many decades before females would again join the force.

More change continued in 1926 when the state was divided into 12 warden districts, each under the supervision of a district chief warden. In 1930, uniforms were issued to district chief wardens. That same year, warden’s tallied 4,220 convictions and \$73,608 in fines, the highest totals so far achieved.

Administrative change continued the next year with creation of a Department of Conservation administered by a five-member board. Within the Department’s structure, the Warden Service was placed under the Division of Game and Fish.

In 1937 this five-member board was abolished. In its place the governor appointed a single commissioner. A merit system, patterned after the model Civil Service Law, was established for Department employees. Warden Service applicants now tested for a job. Two years later the State Civil Service Act was enacted.

Change did not lessen the danger of the job when Game Wardens Marcus Whipps, Melvin Holt and Dudley Brady were murdered on July 12, 1940 during a check of a commercial fish selling operation near Waterville. When asked to see his license, the operator entered his residence and returned with a shotgun. He then shot and killed the three officers before turning the gun on himself.

Shortly after the murders the



120 years of service

Minnesota Conservation Officer

It's official, as of March 20, 2007 Minnesota Game Wardens will have provided 120 years of service to the state of Minnesota in the protection of fish & game laws. The appointment of the 1st Minnesota Game Warden occurred on March 20, 1887 as then Governor Andrew McGill hired W. Fred Zwickey, sheriff of Polk County. It wasn't until May 25, 1967 when the legislature changed the term Game Warden to Conservation Officer and followed a few months later a separate Division of Enforcement through Commissioners order #122.

Since its conception, the duties of Conservation Officer have unfolded to include a myriad of duties from basic fish & game enforcement, wetland & shoreline protection among the 10,000 lakes, commercial game operations and off road motorized vehicle enforcement. With the onset of terrorism threats against the U.S. since September 2001, CO's have been trained in Homeland Security responsibilities.

To celebrate 120 years of service to the state of Minnesota, the division of enforcement has created a 120th anniversary commemorative badge. Over the last 120 years the badges carried by game wardens have gone through various cosmetic changes. Badge manufacturer Symbol Arts® Ogden, Utah was commissioned to design and create a similar badge worn by full-time salaried game wardens working for the MN State Game and Fish Department circa 1920s. Commemorative badges will be worn by officers' starting in March.

The creation of the commemorative badge is to coincide with Division of Enforcement and the Minnesota Conservation Officers Association hosting the NAWEOA 26th Annual Conference in St. Paul.

Commemorative badge created and manufactured by Symbol Arts Ogden, Utah
www.symbolarts.com



Department said that wardens would be equipped with uniforms and guns within a month. It would be May 1941 before game wardens were issued uniforms as well as a standard .38 caliber revolver.

By 1941, there were 147 field stations staffed by 135 game wardens averaging about 650 square miles to patrol.

Post war prosperity and growth

The booming economy that followed World War II allowed many people to enjoy a two-week vacation, weekends off, and greater mobility. This also created an army seeking further recreational opportunities causing further pressure on the fish and game resource.

In 1947 the Warden Service purchased their first aircraft. Other tools of the trade, including two-way radios in patrol cars, followed in quick succession.

Despite the large group of veterans with firearms experience, the Firearms Safety Training program established in 1955 today boasts over one-million graduates. In 1962, Game Wardens were also given the responsibility to acquire, develop and maintain public accesses to lakes and streams.

The next decades would see ever increasing numbers of people seeking recreation in old and new ways (snowmobiles, personal watercraft, all-terrain vehicles, etc.), along with terms such as annexation, feedlots, landfills, toxic emissions and urban sprawl. To better reflect the societal changes the title Game Warden gave way in 1967 to the name they're known as today: Conservation Officer.



An ever-expanding role

Mandatory training needs established by the Peace Officer Standards Training board in the 1970s required that all Minnesota peace officers be licensed. Conservation Officers fell under this edict as well requiring their assistance be given to other local, state and federal authorities when requested. It's now common for Conservation Officers to provide security for federally elected and appointed officials. In 2005, 20 officers with 10 boats deployed to Baton Rouge, La., to participate in recovery efforts following Hurricane Katrina. Homeland security has also been added to the workload.

In the past 30 years, civil-rights laws helped open the doors of opportunity for women and minorities. The first modern

Minnesota DNR Enforcement bolsters its ranks Conservation officer field stations fully staffed

For the first time since the early 1980s, Minnesota's 152 field conservation officer stations are staffed.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources officials made the announcement when 18 conservation officers were sworn into duty after graduating from the 12-week Conservation Officer Academy at Camp Ripley on May 1. Candidates now shift to the arduous 16-week field training officer program for field experience.

DNR Enforcement Chief Conservation Officer, Colonel Mike Hamm, praised the candidates on their successful completion of the Academy, calling them part of the Department's vanguard of protection for Minnesota's outdoor heritage.

Hamm noted that 131 officers have graduated from the Academy since 1997. They have filled the ranks of officers hired in the 1970s and 1980s who have retired. He said reaching full staffing would not have been possible without the assistance of many people and organizations.

"With this class of graduates the Division has a full complement of field officers to uphold the laws and regulations that protect our natural resources. This would not have been possible without the assistance of

Governor Pawlenty, all of our elected officials, outdoors stakeholder groups and individuals, the media and the people of Minnesota," Hamm said.

A typical conservation officer is responsible for an average patrol area of nearly 600 square miles of Minnesota's precious natural resources. That responsibility includes general natural resources law enforcement, investigations, and education.

Although the graduation ceremony was formal it was also a family oriented event. Children, spouses, family, friends and other law enforcement members were in abundance, many armed with cameras. Chief Hamm took time during the swearing in ceremony to pose for pictures with the new officers and their families.

"Family support is so important so I make it a point to explain to family members that their loved one will likely miss many family events since the job of a conservation officer is a 24/7 responsibility," Hamm said. "No doubt it's a balancing act with family, but officers and families make it work."

Although the Division is at full complement, Hamm noted it will be so for only a short time since more retirements are expected in the coming months and year. Another Academy is tentatively scheduled to begin in May 2008 to meet the shortfall.

In all, new conservation officers study 52 subjects while at the Academy before spending 16 weeks with their field training officer. The field training officer is a veteran conservation officer who will "show them how to do it, assist them in doing it and then evaluating how well they do it," Hamm said.

Upon completing field training the new conservation officers will receive their initial assignments. These newest conservation officers and their assignments include: Aaron Kahre, Minnetonka; Brent Wiebusch, Spring Valley; Michael Martin, International Falls; Anthony Salzer, Ortonville; Daniel Thomasen, Two Harbors; Matthew Miller, Mora; Edward Picht, Madison; Troy Richards, Roseau; Brent Ihnen, Worthington; Brandon McGaw, Unassigned at this time; Brian Dobbick, Unassigned at this time; Paul Parthun, Unassigned at this time; Jeffrey Denz, Montevideo; Gregory Salo, Unassigned at this time; Shane Siltala, Unassigned at this time; Troy TerMeer, Babbitt; Daniel McBroom, Silver Bay; and Robert Gorecki, Unassigned at this time.

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federal refuges); solid waste/litter; wildlife complaints and disposal; illegal burning activity; general timber trespass and theft; water and land Search and Rescue operations; boat and water safety/training; hunter education/training; invasive species; public access enforcement; personal watercraft enforcement; equipment maintenance; trespass (ATVs, fishing, hunting, snowmobiles); TIP program; background investigations; flood response; tornado response; Indian Treaty issues; radiological emergency preparedness; public relations; and much more.

day hiring of female conservation officers occurred in 1980 when Cathy Hamm and another female officer were hired. Today, Captain Cathy Hamm is among 20 female conservation officers. In the late 1990s the Division hired officers of Cambodian, Vietnamese and Hmong descent to serve as liaison between the DNR and the state's growing Southeast Asian community.

Minnesota's "Thin Green Line" would also see the development of specialty programs and positions within what became the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources -Division of Enforcement. Those would include conservation officer/pilot, community liaison officer, special investigations unit, training officer, wetlands enforcement officer, marine unit, and K9 officer.

The changing and expanding role of conservation officers is indicated today in some of the current work activity codes on timesheets: wild fires; special regulation lakes; roadside pheasant surveys, water quality enforcement; toxic and hazardous waste; aquatic vegetation enforcement; Wetland Conservation Act; state parks enforcement; forestry recreation enforcement; state trail enforcement (snowmobiles, ATVs, bikes, cross-country skiing); commercial enforcement management (game farms, shooting preserves, commercial fishing, fur, and taxidermy operations); federally regulated areas (Boundary Waters Canoe Area, Voyageurs, St. Croix,

Today there are 155 field stations scattered across Minnesota, averaging about 650 square miles to patrol. Thanks to the leadership of Chief Conservation Officer, Colonel Mike Hamm, the Minnesota Conservation Officers Association and many others, the Division is nearly fully staffed.

Despite 120 years of change the fundamental mission for Minnesota's conservation officers has remained the same: enforce the laws that protect and preserve Minnesota's outdoor heritage for generations to come. 🐾

