

# The Source

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MISSISSIPPI HEADWATERS  
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*The mission of the Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society is to foster personal connections to and stewardship of our natural world.*

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## Give to the Max, Give to MHAS

MHAS needs your support on Minnesota's  
"Give to the Max Day", November 18<sup>th</sup>

We all yearn for that 'special place' where we can experience the natural world — walking on a trail, enjoying fall colors with family and friends, or learning about nature in a small group. The pine forests, quiet lakes, and spongy bogs of the NSC is that place for many of us...

Our goal is to raise \$5000 for special projects to:

- Develop more nature and science activities for families & visitors.
- Improve our trails, boardwalks and other outdoor spaces.
- Expand our popular 'Young Naturalist Program'.



If we are successful, families could request 'nature backpacks' with supplies and activities at Spearhead and at home (tree id., wild edibles, animal tracks, bird watching), and updating our trail system with spurs to bogs and eagle nests. Contributions will allow YNP scholarships to kids who wouldn't be able to have this unique, summer experience.

This is a special appeal for support. Just go to [givemn.org](http://givemn.org) on November 18<sup>th</sup>, type in *Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society*, and make a donation on our page. Contributions will help us make the NSC even better — for you, your family, and like-minded nature lovers!

## Education & Science at the Neilson Spearhead Center

The entrance sign states "Ecological Research and Education", twin missions for NSC. YNP and outreach activities fulfill the Education mission, while other projects further science. In 2021 Dr. Xia Lee of the U of W-Madison and a team of interns, sampled NSC trails for ticks by dragging white cloth over mowed and unmowed stretches. No surprise — they found LOTS of ticks! In fact, NSC had a much greater density of deer ticks (*Ixodes scapularis*) than Movil Maze and Three Island County Park. Mowing didn't seem to make much difference. For a full report, email: [MHAS@spearheadMHAS.org](mailto:MHAS@spearheadMHAS.org).

MPCA recruits volunteers to monitor lake quality by measurements of water clarity. The Secchi Disk, a white metal disk, is lowered until it disappears, and the depth is recorded. Lake water clarity varies throughout the summer, so readings are taken weekly. Spearhead Lake has been monitored since 1980. In 2021 volunteer Dan Domeier recorded the measurements from June through Sept. The readings averaged 16-17 feet, which reflects the excellent water quality of our spring-fed lake. For historical records of Spearhead Lake go to:

<https://webapp.pca.state.mn.us/cmp/stations/29-0239-00-202/trends>

## MHAS BOARD MEMBERS

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## MHAS Annual Meeting at Spearhead

The afternoon began with the annual inspection by the MN Land Trust, to verify our conservation easement. Thanks, Shon, for conducting the canoe tour with inspectors Carter and Florence Hedeon, after we did a quick view of the buildings and trails. We signed the permanent Conservation Easement in 1998 in order to give NSC another layer of protection.

Brent Cizek, who achieved national fame for the photo of a merganser with 50 ducklings, presented an excellent program of his beautiful captures. He has been patiently observing and photographing owls for the past few years. He has a special fondness for Great Gray Owls and the photos to prove it!

Much gratitude to all who contribute towards this annual affair, support our many projects, and do the hard but enjoyable work of managing Spearhead as a special place.



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## Join the 2021 Christmas Bird Count



Add to over a century of community science. Join your friends and neighbors in the 122<sup>nd</sup> Annual Christmas Bird Count! Do we really count birds? YES! Data collected by counting numbers and species of birds adds to the longest running worldwide bird conservation dataset. Data from the CBC has been used by conservationists to monitor bird populations and ecosystem health using birds as indicators worldwide.

A CBC count takes place in an established 15-mile-wide diameter circle. In the Bemidji area there's two counts: one around Bemidji and another around Lake Itasca State Park. Participants work with compilers who make sure participants spread out throughout the circle. Compilers also collect data at the end of the day.

The CBC is a great way to get out and enjoy winter in our northern woods, but we also work with people who live within the circle who count birds at their feeders.



Bohemian Waxwing / 118th Annual CBC/Beth Siverhus / Roseau

To find out more, contact the compilers below. **December 18<sup>th</sup> Bemidji CBC:** Jaime Thibodeaux at 218-308-6853 [jaimethib@hotmail.com](mailto:jaimethib@hotmail.com) or, Becca Engdahl at 651-271-4038 [bemidjibecca@gmail.com](mailto:bemidjibecca@gmail.com) to participate. Bemidji CBC will be organized by prearranged contact and email of birds seen, distance traveled and time spent driving, walking or skiing.

**December 14<sup>th</sup> Lake Itasca State Park CBC:** Details coming in Nov/Dec. Check the Itasca State Park events page for update or contact Connie Cox (218-699-7259) [constance.cox@state.mn.us](mailto:constance.cox@state.mn.us) For more locations, visit: [www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count](http://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count).

## NSC 'Virtual Lab' Project

In 2020, Covid-19 forced MHAS to cancel the Young Naturalist Program and other group activities at NSC. On the other hand, our trail use increased significantly. The fresh air and quiet forests seemed to be just what the doctor ordered.

This increase in trail use got the MHAS Board thinking: "Are there additional ways we can reach out to the community and invite them to visit Spearhead? What can we do that meets Covid-19 guidelines, and offer opportunities for visitors?"

MHAS Board member Zach Gutknecht connected our Education Committee with Crystal Mathisrud, District Manager with the Hubbard County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD). The SWCD faces similar Covid-19 challenges and is working with partners to create a 'Watershed Virtual Lab' to teach about natural resources. This virtual lab seeks to lead people to places where they can act participate in exploring, documenting, and monitoring the natural world.



This summer SWCD staff came to Spearhead to video YNP activities and interview long-time MHAS supporters, George-Ann Maxson, Becky Marty, and Dan Bera. Online 'story maps' were then created to show what makes NSC and the YNP so special. A nature observation app, photo-points data logging app, nature photo share/view tool are also in the works. In the future, look for trail makers with QR codes you can scan with your phone and get narrated natural history information, or participate



in a year-round phenology project. The 'Virtual Lab' is not quite ready for prime-time, but keep visiting our website to see when it goes live. Then visit Spearhead to explore, learn, and share what you see with other trail users.

## Bemidji Connecting with Nature:

Bemidji celebrates its 5<sup>th</sup> annual Monarch Festival

MHAS, Bemidji Parks and Rec., BSU Sustainability and several other 'Birds, Bees, & Butterflies – Bemidji' partners hosted the Monarch Butterfly Festival on September 12<sup>th</sup>. The theme was "Bemidji Connecting with Nature".

Larry Weber started the day with a presentation at the American Indian Resource Center at BSU. Larry is a retired science



teacher and author of several nature guides. Larry engaged us with pictures and stories about the world of spiders and their webs. Who would know more about this topic than a person with the last name 'Weber'?



The Festival then shifted to Bemidji's North Country Park where Allison Barta gave us her 'Annual Butterfly Report'.

Allison is a science teacher from Bagley and one of the region's leading experts on butterflies. She had great pictures and stories of her quests to find and photograph some of our most elusive species.

Later we switched to larger winged creatures. Angela Morales from the Headwaters Science Center brought some live feathered friends to join in the celebration. Her presentation, "Raptors Rule", was an up-close and personal encounter with a merlin, red tailed hawk, and great horned owl. Angela entertained us with facts about how a raptor's eyes compare to ours, what we can learn from the shape of feathers, their life histories, and more.



Finally, two students from BSU, Erin and Zane, talked about research they are doing on bluebirds and purple martins. Festival participants visited booths set up by several area organizations and businesses. Come join us at next year's Monarch Butterfly Festival!

## Snow Sparkles & Winter Wonders at Spearhead Lake

Join Naturalist Dan Bera at the Neilson Spearhead Center for a very special post-Christmas treat! Wednesday, December 29, 2021, 12 noon to 5:00 pm Enjoy a toasty bonfire, hot chocolate, snowsnakes, animal tracks, and a walk on the frozen lake. If there's enough snow, we'll make quinzhees (snow shelter). Second grade and older - welcome! Dress warmly; bring an extra pair of snow pants and mittens.



\$15 for 1st child, \$10 for a sibling, or \$25 for a family. Register by Dec. 22; call or email Dan 218-835-4782 [ynp@spearheadMHAS.org](mailto:ynp@spearheadMHAS.org).

## Young Naturalist Program



It was another memorable summer with Dan Bera and assistants Mattie Snyder and Grace Lendway as 93 enthusiastic campers explored the woods and waters of Spearhead. Kids return year after year, absorbing nature knowledge and outdoor skills, playing favorite games like Camouflage, and listening to Dan narrate legendary stories.

The 2022 schedule and fees will be posted next March on our website. [www.spearheadMHAS.org](http://www.spearheadMHAS.org)

## Can You Identify These Minnesota Upland Game

