The cold and snow have returned to Turtle Lake. We had several 3 to 4 inch snowfalls in November and December. Our December temperatures varied from a high of 46 degrees to a low of -16 degrees. These cold temperatures caused Big Turtle to ice over (except for the flowage from Hatch Lake) on or about December 5th. Then crazy January was upon us. January has treated us to a high of 45 degrees and a low of -33 degrees with wind chills down to -50 degrees or better. If those temperatures and wind chills were not bad enough, Mother Nature added a day of rain that then turned to ice. This rain to ice storm was followed a few weeks later by a ten to twelve inch snow fall on January 27th. So January ended with a beautiful snow cover on all the trees and anything else that was standing still. Finally, for those interested in the precipitation levels for December and January, the Weather Channel says Bigfork registered .41 inches of precipitation versus the average of 1.06 inches for December and 1.23 inches versus the average of .82 inches for January. The combined precipitation for December and January is just slightly below the normal average (1.98 inches versus the average of 1.88 inches).

I can also report that we have made progress on two long term projects on which the Turtle Lake Board has been working. The Bigfork Fire Department and two landowners have agreed on the locations for two new underground water storage tanks. The first tank will be located near the intersection of Turtle Lake Road and Becker Road. This tank will provide an additional water source for fighting fires down Becker Road and the surrounding area. The installation of this tank will be financed jointly by the Bigfork Fire Department, Stokes Township and your Turtle Lake Association. The second tank will be located in a small triangle of land adjacent to the intersection of MacKenzie Island Road and Highway 286. This tank will provide a new water source for fighting fires along the south side of Turtle Lake and the surrounding area. The installation of this tank will be financed jointly by the Bigfork Fire Department, Marcell Township and your Turtle Lake Association. These tanks are scheduled to be installed this spring. Once installed these tanks will help the Bigfork Fire Department better protect our properties.

The second project involves qualifying the Turtle Lake area as a Firewise Community. During the summer of 2012 we established an organizing committee and prepared an application requesting that the Turtle Lake area be designated as a Firewise Community. On November 14, 2012, the National Fire Protection Association notified Turtle Lake that it had achieved Firewise Community status. This letter also informed us that recognized Firewise Communities get priority status in consideration for Federal Emergency Management Agency pre-disaster mitigation planning and project grants. Hopefully this will help Turtle Lake if we encounter major forest and tree damage like we encountered last year. As you will recall, the Itasca County Firewise Chipper Program helped numerous Turtle Lake residents remove about 150 tons of fallen trees and wood debris (no stumps) following the strong wind storms we had last year. We will display Firewise Community materials at our annual meeting this June.

In the meantime, stay warm and enjoy our beautiful winter wonderland.
The water level in Turtle Lake was near the 2012 low as we approached “ice over”. After receiving some precipitation in the form of rain in October and November, the level climbed up from the low of 1351.05 and went into winter at about 1351.20.

While out deer hunting in mid-November, I was in the vicinity of the beaver dams and took that opportunity to check their status. The lower dam had been rebuilt to a greater extent than the upper dam and has the potential to raise the lake level during the spring thaw. That amount will be determined by the amount of moisture that we receive between now and ice out. Once ice is out, I will once again look at the lake level and attempt to make the appropriate adjustments to the beaver dams to keep the lake level within the desired range.

Loons usually breed 2 chicks, sometimes 1 or 3; both males and females incubate the eggs and never leave the nest for more than an hour; chicks are hatched in 28-30 days; if the eggs are lost the pair may re-nest, usually in a different location.

Loons do not mate for life but are more mated to the lake and their territory on the lake; the size of their territory is approximately 100 acres.

Approximately 80% of loons return to the same lake the following year. Adults leave first in the fall. Chicks stay as long as they can until the water freezes and then fly south where they will stay until 3 years old. Most return to their nesting lake the following year to breed, but some stay in the lake by other loons. Another theory is that any other color might be a disadvantage in deep water as red is the first color to be filtered out by water. The red eyes turn a dull reddish brown in winter.

Following are more facts about our favorite lake bird:

- Loons have a pattern on their back as a camouflage on the water for protection from eagles; the front is white for protection from fish and turtles – from under water the white blends with the surface of the water.
- Why do loons have red eyes? No one knows for sure, but it is thought because they are attractive to the opposite sex while mating so they can be seen across the lake by other loons.
- Another theory is that any other color might be a disadvantage in deep water as red is the first color to be filtered out by water. The red eyes turn a dull reddish brown in winter.
- Their long bill is used for stabbing or grasping prey and is a primary weapon which can impale a rival; enemies include eagles, raccoons, muskie, mink, turtles.
- A loon eats fish and crustaceans, up to 2 lbs a day; 900 lbs of fish for a family of 4.
- Loons weigh 8-16 lbs, average weight is 10 lbs.
- It is important for fishermen to use nonlead tackle. Loons may inadvertently ingest small lead pellets that will contribute to lead poisoning and the loon’s eventual death.
- Their wing span is 5 feet – loons that fly the farthest tend to be lighter weight, they fly about 60-70 mph and flap their wings about 200x/minute. They are one of the fastest flying birds.
- Life span is up to 30 years.
- Loons build their nests close to the water, preferring sites that are completely surrounded by water such as islands or emergent vegetation. Loons use a variety of materials to build their nests including aquatic vegetation, pine needles, leaves, grass, moss and mud.

When asked what his goals were for the coming year, his replies were: 1. Survive! 2. To establish open regular communication with his constituency. He plans on having regular “Have coffee with Terry” sessions in several areas of his district.

If you have questions, concerns, or comments, Terry can be reached at: Email--Terry.Snyder@co.Itasca.Mn. US Phone--218-327-2847 Cell--218-360-5905 US mail--Terry Snyder, Commissioner #2 Administrative Services Department Itasca County Courthouse 123 NE 4th Street Grand Rapids, MN. 55744-2600