

Correction

An error appeared in a sports brief in last week's edition: (The deadline looms, May 11.)

The 2015 Western Canada Summer Games will be held in Wood Buffalo Municipality, Alta. *News/North* apologizes for any confusion or embarrassment this may have caused.

NEWS Briefs

Fire damages trailer home

A fire on May 13 damaged a trailer home in Towering Pines Trailer Park in Fort Smith.

No information on the incident was immediately available from the Fort Smith Fire Department, such as the extent of the damage to the building.

However one community resident, who saw the aftermath of the fire, said it appeared the trailer home may have been damaged to the point where it is not liveable.

RCMP were not available to provide any more information on the fire.

— Paul Bickford

Crash sends four to hospital

A single vehicle with six occupants crashed into a ditch outside Behchoko after rolling several times in the early morning hours of May 10.

According to an RCMP news release, police say alcohol may have been a factor in the crash.

The vehicle rolled several times before coming to a stop in a ditch according to an RCMP news release.

The occupants were taken to the Behchoko Health Centre. Two were released and four were transferred to the Stanton Territorial Hospital in Yellowknife for further assessment.

The names of the individuals involved with the crash have not been released.

Police are seeking any witnesses to the crash.

— Shane Magee

Campgrounds open

Most campgrounds across the territory are now open with a few exceptions.

Parks in the Beaufort-Delta Region near Inuvik will open June 1.

The Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment said in a news release the GNWT plans to spend \$2.5 million in upgrading and maintaining park infrastructure this year.

The plans include new hiking trails in Gwich'in Territorial Park and improvements to Prelude Lake's marina and shoreline.

Camping sites are available for pre-booking on the territorial government's NWT Parks website.

— Shane Magee

DEA election set in Fort Resolution

The Fort Resolution District Education Council has an election set for May 25.

All seven seats are open on the council, and 11 candidates have put their names forward.

The successful candidates will be elected for three-year terms.

— Paul Bickford



photo courtesy of Dr. Bill Samuel, University of Alberta

A moose infected with ticks. It takes an infestation of around 50,000 ticks to kill an animal. Although moose in NWT typically carry a few hundred at a time, animal carcasses in the south have been found with as many as 100,000 on them.

Warming North a new breeding ground for ticks

Cases increasing in moose populations as temperatures rise

by Meagan Leonard
Northern News Services
NWT

A photo of a mangy moose running across Highway 3 between Behchoko and Yellowknife on May 2 has people talking about ticks. It's a sight that could become more common, according to biologists.

Dean Cluff, a regional biologist for the North Slave region, says the warming climate is encouraging more moose to move north while also providing a breeding ground for ticks.

"It's warming up so as the moose move into the territory these larvae are surviving," he said.

Cluff says it takes upwards of 50,000 ticks on one animal to kill it and typically infected moose in the NWT are only found to carry a few hundred at a time. However, ticks can debilitate an animal making it more susceptible to exposure, starvation and predation. He says he has seen "ghost moose" where all the brown guard, or outer layer hair has fallen out leaving just the grey under-layer.

"That is a problem if it's still late winter because the insulating value of the hair is gone and then they can starve," said Cluff. "They also spend a lot of time grooming instead of feeding and so they starve or they're more vulnerable to predation."

Although there is no easy way to alleviate the pests, cold temperatures and forest fires help keep the larvae population under control, says Cluff. Female ticks fall from a moose in the spring and lay their eggs in the forest brush. After the eggs hatch, larvae spend the summer there and then latch onto a moose in the fall.

"The only real way to get rid of them would be to put a flea collar on the moose," he said. "What really does control them is fires, so when you've got eggs or larvae in the ground and a fire goes through, that kills them."

If winters continue to get shorter and warmer, the North could face a situation similar to Alberta or Quebec, where hunting bans have had to be put in place as ticks become more numerous.

"In Minnesota, New Hampshire and Quebec the moose populations are getting down to the point where no hunting is allowed," he said, adding moose in those areas can have up to 100,000 insects on them at any one time.

Although ticks have been known to feed on many members in the moose family, such as caribou, deer and elk, moose have not adapted to the bugs as well as other species and therefore are at the highest risk.

Moose are relatively new to North America. They are believed to have come across the now-underwater land bridge from Asia only 10,000 years ago, while evidence shows deer have been here for millions of years. This means elk and deer have developed ways to mitigate tick infestations while moose haven't.

"Deer and ticks have been in North America for maybe a million years and evolved together," said Cluff. "Elk and deer also seem to be able to groom a little bit better and remove those ticks."

University of Alberta professor emeritus Bill Samuel specializes in the influence of parasites on large mammals and says large counts of tick-related deaths in moose have been occurring

since the early 1900s.

"In central Alberta in the winter of 1981/82 ... many hundreds, like some thousand or more died," he stated in an e-mail to *News/North*.

"(We) found an average of 82,900 ticks on those moose. That is just under five ticks per square centimetre of skin."

Cluff emphasized at this point the threat to the territory's endangered caribou population is low, as the animals do not usually spend time in exposure areas.

"We don't see ticks on caribou (because) caribou are on the tundra in the summertime ... and then they come into the trees in the winter," Cluff said. "Ticks don't drop off

until the spring or summer and the caribou have already left – if they were around in the summer it might be more of an issue."

This particular species of tick is not a health risk to humans and does not pass on infections such as Lyme disease, says Cluff.

"It's a one-host tick. It doesn't drop off and go to another host – it always is on the same moose for its lifetime," he explained. "There's no risk ... and it's an external parasite so it doesn't affect the meat in any way – it's still edible."

Cluff says ENR encourages anyone who encounters a moose displaying signs of a tick infestation to report it.



photos courtesy of Jenna Snow

A moose with tufting fur, which indicates it may be infected with ticks, runs across Highway 3 between Yellowknife and Behchoko May 2.