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For Immediate Release

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Aftermath of Ham Lake Fire Brings Unusual Winter Birds to the Gunflint Trail

Gunflint Trail, Grand Marais, MN – The area along the Gunflint Trail that burned last spring in the Ham Lake fire has attracted some unusual winter birds. Many Black-backed Woodpeckers and Three-toed Woodpeckers, birds that are highly sought-after by wildlife watchers, have been drawn to the burn area this winter.

“Some observers have seen over a dozen of these birds in a day—many of them from easy spots right along the Gunflint Trail road,” said Dave Benson, a birder from northeastern Minnesota. These two woodpeckers eat bark beetles; when the bark of a tree is burned, the birds are able to flake off the bark and get to the beetles quite easily. Burned over areas are always good places to check for these woodpeckers, which are ordinarily very difficult to find and see.

Both species are glossy black with white markings, and the males have a yellow patch on the head. Black-backed Woodpeckers have a solid-black back; Three-toed Woodpeckers have pale barring on the back.

Much of the Gunflint Trail was unaffected by the fire, and birders who come to find the woodpeckers might want to check the feeders at these resorts: Poplar Creek Guesthouse and Cabins, Golden Eagle Lodge, Heston’s Resort,

Voyageur Canoe Outfitters, Gunflint Pines, Gunflint Lodge, and Tuscarora Lodge.

Other winter wildlife specialties that might be seen along the Gunflint Trail include Gray Jays, Boreal Chickadees, and winter finches, like Pine Grosbeaks and Common Redpolls. Look for Ruffed Grouse feeding in aspens along the trail at dawn or dusk. With luck, you might even spot a Great Gray Owl, or one of the other owls that comes south in severe winters. Winter can also be a good time to look for moose and other mammals, because the lack of leaves on the trees makes spotting them easier.

The beauty of a winter in the north woods is accentuated this year by the presence of birds that few of us would get to see in an ordinary winter.

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~ from the Gunflint Trail, Grand Marais, Minnesota – located in the heart of Superior National Forest, a designated Important Bird Area.

~ for more information on the Gunflint Trail area, call 1-800-338-6932.