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Welcome to the 2009 Conservation Private Land Open to Sportsmen Guide. We hope you find the guide informational and useful in your outdoor pursuits.

The primary purpose of this publication is to identify lands open to public hunting across North Dakota, and it also provides additional information as well.

We at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department are extremely appreciative of all the private landowners who have willingly participated in the PLOTS program and helped us reach our goal of 1 million acres two years ahead of schedule.

However, when we reached that goal in 2007, we knew the work wasn't completed. There was concern whether we could maintain the million-acre mark, given the changing landscape in North Dakota.

I'm once again proud to say the wildlife division staff has done a remarkable job of maintaining that acreage, actually even increasing it slightly.

Of course, the PLOTS program involves more than just access. We also need wildlife on that land, so we strive to enroll PLOTS tracts that contain good quality wildlife habitat.

We knew a winter the likes of 2008-09 would occur eventually and that the importance of habitat such as contained in our wildlife management areas, PLOTS and other areas would be evident. We had concerns over potential losses of deer and pheasants, but fortunately they mostly came through the winter better than anticipated.

While North Dakota experienced some wildlife losses over the winter, waterfowl will certainly benefit from the extra moisture contained in the near-record snow. Most wetlands on the landscape have water again and we have many PLOTS areas that will contain an abundance of waterfowl.

With almost ideal conditions for vegetation early in the season, both upland game birds and ducks should have good nesting habitat, and that should mean favorable hunting prospects around the state, on PLOTS acreage and on other public and private lands.

And that's a good position. After all, we want as many people as possible to get out and enjoy the wonderful resources that North Dakota provides. Our philosophy is that the public should have the greatest opportunity possible to access and utilize those resources. The PLOTS Guide is a valuable publication for informing hunters which lands are accessible.

While the PLOTS access concept has had wide support since its inception, don't forget about those areas that aren't in PLOTS. Approximately 95 percent of the land base in North Dakota is privately owned. Take advantage of the PLOTS and other public hunting opportunities, but I certainly encourage everyone to take the time to acquaint or reacquaint yourself with those people in the rural areas who make their living off the land.

It's also important to respect the land on which you hunt and the game you pursue, and show courtesy to others using the same area.

Part of our job at Game and Fish is to provide the best opportunities possible to hunt and fish in North Dakota. Many hunters and anglers in other states are envious of what we have, and we all need to work together to preserve or even improve our current situation.

We're heading into what looks like another great hunting season in North Dakota and it's time to get out and enjoy the wonderful and abundant resources we are fortunate to have.

Terry Steinwand