



## WARDEN STORIES

### *A Weekend During Deer Season*

*By Scott Winkelman*

For many people in North Dakota, a weekend in the middle of

November only means one thing, participating in the state's firearms deer season. It is a tradition for many families, and some even think that deer season is a holiday. But for North Dakota Game and Fish Department game wardens, mid-November weekends mean working long hours to ensure that everyone enjoys the state's deer season safely and legally.

While many game wardens get time off during the week when they can hunt deer, having to work weekends can be difficult, especially for those wardens who have children old enough to hunt. But even though wardens don't get to hunt deer on weekends, most come across some interesting situations that make working while everyone else is hunting enjoyable and sometimes even comical.

I had one of those weekends during the 2003 deer season. It was the second weekend, and quite a few hunters were out in the Turtle Mountains. I was working on the western side of the mountains, near the Carbury Port of Entry into Canada.

It had been a long Saturday, and since it was after legal shooting time and almost dark, I started to work my way home. As I drove down the highway I noticed a Dodge pickup parked on the highway in front of me. It would not have been anything unusual, except that the truck was parked facing southbound in the northbound lane and three men wearing blaze orange were standing on the shoulder of the road. As I got closer I saw why they were standing where they were. In the middle of the men laid a nice 4x4 whitetail buck.

Something didn't seem quite right to me so I pulled up, flipped on my lights for safety reasons, and got out to talk to them. Before I could even say anything, I noticed that the deer was alive.

"Are you guys going to finish this deer off or am I?" I asked.

As soon as I asked the question, the deer died, and then I noticed that the soft cover over the pickup bed – the kind that rolls up out of the way – had several tears in it. Knowing that people will shoot deer illegally and throw them in the truck quickly without field dressing them, I asked the men how the untagged deer ended up on the shoulder of the road. The men proceeded to tell me that they had shot the deer and were on their way home, driving 65 miles per hour down the highway, when they noticed that the deer was alive and jumping around in the back of the truck, tearing up the tarp with its antlers.

When they pulled over, the deer jumped out of the truck, they tackled it, and that's when I pulled up. I almost couldn't believe it, but all the evidence was there. I issued citations for failing to tag the deer, confiscated the deer, and sent the men on their way.

The next day, as Sunday was coming to a close, I was thinking I was going to get off easy when another warden in the area called me on the radio. He informed me that he had found a man out hunting who had his deer license suspended for failing to pay child support. On my way to assist him, I came upon a weaving vehicle going about 30 miles per hour. Believing the driver was possibly intoxicated, I called the local highway patrolman on the radio. He replied by saying that he had a vehicle stopped about 30 miles away from where I was, and that the vehicle he was with had an untagged deer in it. I guess the old adage, when it rains it pours, is true.

It took about an hour to take care of everything before I could head home and wonder what kind of stories that weekend would bring me.

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*Editor's note: This is the first installment of a new column in North Dakota OUTDOORS. "Warden Stories" is designed to offer insight into the varied working world of the North Dakota game warden.*