

# Welded in Wahpeton

## State Agencies Team in Dock Project

By Ron Wilson

Calling the union with a North Dakota college to help build lower-cost, quality boat docks for anglers a win-win for everyone is cliché, we know. But in this instance, the expression works.

The State Game and Fish Department has teamed with North Dakota State College of Science in Wahpeton to manufacture courtesy docks for public fishing waters that, it's envisioned, will remain maintenance free for years. "For years we've hauled in docks in winter to replace what was going bad, and it seemed to always be the same things going out," said Bill Haase, Department fisheries development project manager. "We just felt the docks weren't lasting as long as they should."

With the help of NDSCS instructors and students, a new 32-foot dock was designed, with the first six built in 2006. "The people at the college brought a lot of good ideas to the table in terms of design of the docks," Haase said. "We're to the point now that maybe we've worked out the kinks and it becomes less and less work each year."

The project is real world training in a classroom environment as NDSCS students learn to order materials, read blueprints and assemble the product. "What we don't want to do is cut into any industry business with the project, but we definitely want the students to get some type of industry experience," said Joel Johnson, NDSCS welding department coordinator. "This really works well for the state of North Dakota. The students win as they get some practical

experience and the sportsmen win because the docks are made for their use."

In 2006, NDSCS students manufactured six docks, with a goal of 12 for 2007. "We've discussed this being a yearly thing as docks that were there before we joined on start to deteriorate," Johnson said. "There are a number of areas that need courtesy docks and North Dakota has been good about supplying them for their resident and nonresident sportsmen."

Game and Fish is responsible for hundreds of courtesy docks around the state. And the number keeps climbing as requests for new docks come in every year. To keep pace with angler demand, Haase said, the Department will continue to purchase some commercial fishing piers.

Game and Fish pays for the materials, plus a small additional amount that goes to improving the college's equipment, Haase said. "They have to weld something for a project no matter what, but now they don't have to pay for the material," he said. "There has to be some gratification with the students in producing a quality product. They do an awesome job for us."

Nothing leaves the NDSCS welding shop unless it clears Johnson's discerning eye. "It gets inspected by me before it goes out the door," he said. "I've had students cut things

apart and reweld them many times."

The student-built docks feature adjustable legs, allowing the units to be raised and lowered on pace with North Dakota's fluctuating water levels. Neat feature, sure. But what Haase is looking forward to most is the overall durability he expects the docks to possess. "This is good for sportsmen as we expect to save a lot of money down the road as I don't think we'll have the maintenance issues 10 years from now that we've had in the past," he said. "I think the life of our docks will increase significantly."

When you factor in maintenance costs and that a NDSCS-built courtesy dock is about half of what a commercial dock goes for, the Department is saving from \$15,000 to \$24,000 per year, Haase said. "We have a certain amount of money in our budget and if we save money here, we can spend it elsewhere on fish cleaning stations, more docks, vault toilets, whatever," he said.

After the docks are assembled at NDSCS, Department fisheries personnel haul them to a company in Fargo where they are hot-dip galvanized from end to end. This is key as it keeps the dock frames from rusting. "The real test will be 10-15 years down the road and we're not expecting to have to haul these docks into the shop to refurbish them," Haase said.



*North Dakota State College of Science students weld one of several courtesy docks expected to be constructed at the college in Wahpeton this year.*

MIKE ANDERSON

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*Left: The kinks for Game and Fish Department courtesy docks are first worked out on computer by North Dakota State College of Science instructors and students before being welded.*

*Below: Bill Haase (left) and Wesley Erdle, both with Game and Fish, assemble a courtesy dock in the shop in Bismarck.*

Once the docks are galvanized, they're hauled to Bismarck where assembly is completed. The plastic decking is put in place; bumper material is added, and so on. Altogether, it takes about 10 hours to complete one dock once it's home and in Game and Fish hands. "The students have something here they can be pretty proud of," Haase said. "Some of these docks have been placed on waters near where some of the students call home. I think the students think that's pretty neat."

Anglers should take notice, too. Not simply for the convenience the courtesy docks offer, but for fact that their money is being well spent. "It's win-win for everyone," Haase said.

**RON WILSON** is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



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*The need for more courtesy docks, like this one at Stump Lake, continues to climb each year.*



BILL HAASE