



MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

I don't know where summer went, but its farewell doesn't seem to make any difference in North Dakota, considering the wonderful year-round outdoor recreational opportunities we have to enjoy.

Of those opportunities, the fall hunting seasons seem to attract the most attention and anticipation. We have a rich hunting and fishing heritage in our great state, which is one of the reasons we look forward to fall. Hunting seasons open and fall fishing can be nothing short of fantastic as nighttime temperatures cool and fish fatten themselves for the upcoming winter.

But this issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* will focus on the hunting aspect of fall and what we can all expect in coming days.

It's been said that "the only thing constant is change." But we also know that most of us are creatures of habit and extreme change can cause some stress. We've seen some fairly substantial changes on the landscape within the past year, most notably in the loss of thousands of Conservation Reserve Program acres. Because many of North Dakota's CRP acres have vanished, hunters may alter the manner and places in which they hunted the past few years.

While we'd like to see all of those CRP acres, and more, remain on the landscape, you certainly can't blame landowners for making changes given the rise in commodity prices. However, it becomes a challenge with a diminishing habitat base to maintain the hunting success we've come to expect. It's also a challenge for our Private Land Initiative biologists to accurately track those areas that have been in CRP and in our Private Land Open To Sportsmen program, but are withdrawing almost on a daily basis.

Our PLI staff, with cooperation from

landowners across the state, has done a great job in keeping the PLOTS acreage above 1 million acres. However, there may be some tracts included in the PLOTS Guide, a publication designed to help users find these areas easier, that were taken out of CRP, and therefore out of the PLOTS program, after the guide was published.

As such, it is possible a hunter could drive up to a familiar PLOTS tract, one that is highlighted in the guide, and find no signs and/or no habitat. It's not an ideal situation, but we'll make changes to the PLOTS maps on the Department's website as often as necessary. More information on this matter can be found in this issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

If you're a deer hunter, you've likely heard about the lead in venison issue. We haven't taken this matter lightly and have collaborated with the state Health and Agriculture departments to educate and inform the public, and how to minimize the risk associated with hunting big game with lead bullets. This issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* contains some very good information on the potential health risks and provides associated guidelines and recommendations to reduce the risk associated with eating big game harvested with lead.

We believe that the decision on whether to consume venison is the choice of the individual. And we want you to be as informed as we are on the subject, so you can make an informed decision on what you should do.

Remember, when you're out in the field pursuing birds, big game or whatever you choose to hunt, please respect the game and respect the land. And if you're hunting private land, remember to say thanks. Have a great hunting season. I know I will.

Terry Steinwand