

2007 REVIEW

By Roger Rostvet, Game and Fish Department Deputy Director

When someone is interested in investing in a company, the first piece of information provided is a prospectus, which is a detailed summary of past accomplishments, future plans and projected performance. If we were to look at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department and the state's fish and wildlife resources, this is what the prospectus would look like.

The Department

The Game and Fish Department is operating within its legislatively authorized budget. The revenue stream remains strong, based on increased returns from license sales and increases in North Dakota's share of federal excise taxes collected on sales of hunting and fishing related items. Increased revenue from license sales is the product of a rise in the number of licenses sold, not from a hike in the price of licenses.

The Department maintains a reserve balance near the upper end of its goal of 25-50 percent of the biennial budget. Future revenues are not projected to increase significantly from additional license sales, as license sales for resident and nonresidents are believed to be at their upper end. Youth recruitment is also at its upper end; however, the total number of youth in the state continues to decline at an alarming rate.

A significant reduction in license sales is likely at some point in the future. Big game license sales are currently at record levels and will decline as statewide deer populations are trimmed. If current high commodity prices and the rapid downward trend in the number of acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program fully materialize, wildlife populations such as pheasants are expected to plummet. To offset significant reduction in future revenues, license fees will need to be increased significantly.

There is justification for license fee increases in the future. Because of steadily increased revenue from resident and especially nonresident sales, the price of resident licenses has remained low compared to national averages. The last time resident big game license fees were increased, for example, was in 1984 when the price went from \$19 to \$20.

If the consumer price index was applied, a resident big game license today would cost more than \$48.

Revenue from fishing licenses does not have the potential volatility as licenses for game species and likely will be positively

affected by additional water in the Missouri River System. In the short term, angler activity in the Devils Lake region may exceed that of Lake Sakakawea.

Irrational Exuberance

Irrational exuberance was the phrase coined by Alan Greenspan, former chairman of the U. S. Federal Reserve Board, to describe the stock market boom of the late 1990s as a forewarning to the market crash in 2000, which was ignored by most investors. I would be remiss in a prospectus of North Dakota's wildlife resources not to convey the same kind of warning.

Circumstances have existed for the last two decades, especially the last 10 years, which have been ideal for the tremendous increase in wildlife resources in North Dakota: mild winters, more than 3 million acres of CRP, improved conservation practices by farmers and ranchers, and strong Department-funded programs which provided access to more than 1 million acres of private land through its Private Land Open To Sportsmen program. Many people have not experienced hunting in North Dakota under anything but optimal circumstances, but this may be about to rapidly change.

Let's use ring-necked pheasants as an example of how history is set up to repeat itself. A simplistic review would be this: North Dakota, on average, had good pheasant populations in the 1940s through the





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early 1960s. The mid-1960s saw the end of the Soil Bank days (a program similar to CRP), the 1970s saw huge increases in farm commodity prices and advice from then U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butts for farmers to farm “fence row to fence row.” The late 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s saw statewide pheasant harvest average range from 50,000-75,000 (one-tenth of recent years’ harvest), including several years of closed seasons. We are currently set up to see a repeat of the same scenario.

It is expected that CRP acreage will drop dramatically as contracts expire and are not renewed, either at the owner’s choice as CRP

rental rates do not appear to be keeping pace with accelerating cash rental prices, or because new contracts will not be offered to landowners or only for a short period of time (two to five years and then be phased out as qualifications for enrollment change). The areas that will likely be affected first and most severe are southwestern and southeastern North Dakota.

A lot is riding on the new farm bill. This will not only affect hunters, but also that part of the state’s economy that has grown based exclusively on this resource. The Department will be expected to mitigate these changes and is currently planning for this change.

In August 2007, Governor Hoeven praised the Private Land Open To Sportsmen program, which reached its 1 million acre milestone two years ahead of schedule.

The reality is that with limited resources we will only be able to mitigate a small portion of this shift in land use. For example, the federal government expends more than \$100 million in direct rental payments for CRP annually in North Dakota, while the Game and Fish Department's entire annual budget for PLOTS is \$6 million. The proposed farm bill calls for CRP acreage nationwide to remain at current levels, but those acres may not necessarily be in North Dakota.

Cautionary notes aside, let's now look at some of the highlights for 2007.

Conservation PLOTS

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program reached more than 1 million acres open to hunters in 2007.

Earlier this decade, Governor Hoeven set an ambitious goal of reaching 1 million acres by 2009. That milestone was met two years early. More than one-fifth of the Department's budget is ear-marked for PLOTS, making it the Department's largest program.

Reaching the goal two years early, Governor Hoeven said, is a real credit to the great partnership between the Game and Fish Department, landowners, farmers, hunters and all who worked to expand public access to North Dakota's rich outdoor heritage.

Since spring 2003, the Game and Fish Department has added more than 700,000 acres to the PLOTS program, which has expanded statewide and provides opportunities to pursue not only pheasants, but deer, waterfowl and other game species.

We know from Game and Fish surveys that a lot of hunters use these areas. One North Dakotan even remarked that he started hunting again because of the PLOTS program.

Conservation Reserve Program acres have been instrumental in increased pheasant numbers in North Dakota. Other wildlife species have flourished under the program as well.



RANDY HILTNER

The Game and Fish Department continues to work on a permanent solution for keeping carp out of Devils Lake.

Carp Found in Upper Portions of Devils Lake Basin

Heavy summer rains in the Devils Lake basin allowed young-of-the-year carp to cross a divide separating Devils Lake from the Pembina River drainage. Department fisheries crews intensively sampled the area, and it appeared carp below the divide were controlled and contained.

The first carp was captured on the Devils Lake side of the divide in early August. Most carp were found in sloughs near the divide, while one was captured downstream of Billings Lake in the extreme upper portion of Edmore Coulee.

Considering the connection between the two watersheds has existed periodically since 1997, the Game and Fish Department expended considerable money and effort to protect the Devils Lake fishery from a carp invasion.

The past two summers biologists have taken temporary measures to deter carp that have migrated upstream from the Pembina River (where carp are common) from crossing the divide into the Devils Lake basin.

Game and Fish has been working to establish a permanent barrier at the divide for a number of years, and productive discussions between government agencies and area landowners are leading in that direction. Carp would significantly reduce game fish populations in Devils Lake if they became established there.

CRP

The Conservation Reserve Program was the primary focus for the Department's private land section in 2007.

The U. S. Department of Agriculture's reenrollment and extension process provided an excellent opportunity for biologists to work with producers who have CRP contracts set to expire between 2007-10.



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The Department offers incentives to producers who reenroll or extend their CRP contracts and enter into the PLOTS program. In addition, incentives will be offered to producers who keep their land in grass.

By enrolling CRP lands into the PLOTS program, the Department is banking ahead essential wildlife habitat. Many CRP contracts will be around for the next three to four years, but after that, things will start to look much different as contracts gradually expire and phase out over the next 15 years. With the CRP habitat base gone, wildlife populations will suffer, along with hunters and the Department's PLOTS program.

Elk Management in Theodore Roosevelt National Park

Game and Fish Director Terry Steinwand sent a letter in September to the National Park Service explaining how the Department would like to see certified volunteers used as part of a planned effort to reduce the elk population within Theodore Roosevelt National Park's south unit.

Originally, the park service did not include qualified public volunteers as one of the final alternatives for elk management within the park. The Game and Fish Department at that time withdrew as a cooperating agency because it did not support the alternatives the park service was considering for reducing the elk population.

In the letter to NPS Director Mary Bomar, Steinwand defined a certified volunteer as someone who has passed an approved hunter education course, is legally eligible to obtain the necessary North Dakota license or permit to take or possess big game, and participates in a specialized training course designed by TRNP and North Dakota Game and Fish personnel. Once approved, a certified volunteer could receive a permit to remove an elk from the park.

Under the Game and Fish proposal, certified volunteers would remove elk by using high-powered rifles from November through February, a time that coincides with state hunting seasons outside the park, and a time when park visitation is low. Certified

How to trim a growing elk population in Theodore Roosevelt National Park's south unit was debated often in 2007.



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volunteers would remove the carcasses as per NPS policy, process the meat themselves and either keep it or donate it to a food pantry.

Once the initial elk population goal for the park is achieved, volunteers would also participate in additional removal action as needed to maintain the desired elk population.

The Game and Fish Department is adamant that the park service's development of an Environmental Impact Statement include using certified volunteers as an alternative for reducing elk numbers within the park's south unit. The EIS was scheduled for public presentation in December 2007.

Elk Hunting Amendment

In response to elk population concerns raised by landowners, the Game and Fish Department made changes to the 2007 elk hunting season in southwestern North Dakota.

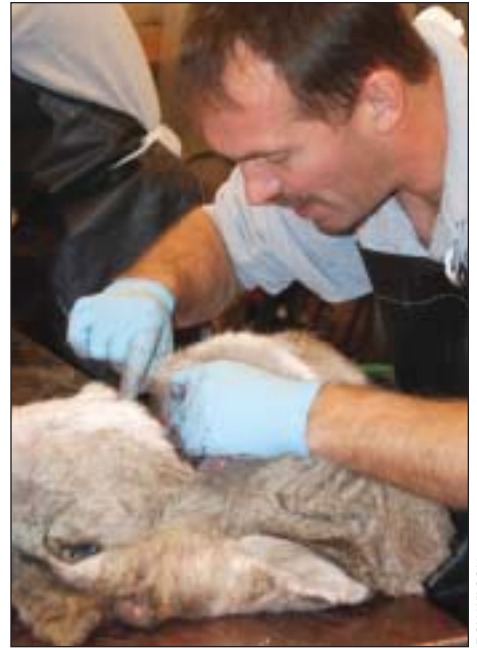
Changes included issuing additional licenses and expanding hunting time periods in elk hunting units adjacent to Theodore Roosevelt National Park's south unit.

The landowner concerns involved the increasing number of elk coming out of the park onto private lands, and the fact the park elk herd continues to grow while the National Park Service goes through its legally mandated Environmental Impact Statement process. Because of unpredictable movements of elk in and out of the park, it was uncertain what hunter success would be for those holding additional licenses.

Hunters saw a jump in the number of deer licenses made available in 2007.



RON WILSON



RON WILSON

Testing for chronic wasting disease in North Dakota's deer population continued in 2007 in the eastern third of the state.

The amendment called for an additional 160 second season licenses – 100 any-elk and 30 antlerless licenses in Unit E3, and 15 any-elk and 15 antlerless licenses in Unit E4. The licenses were issued by lottery using applicants from all units who were unsuccessful in 2007.

These licenses are considered once-in-a-lifetime licenses. However, if a person was selected and did not want to hunt in 2007 in the newly-proclaimed second season, they could return the license and participate in future lotteries.

An additional 20 landowner licenses were drawn in Unit E3. Landowner preferential license holders were able to hunt in any open season.

CWD Test Results Negative

North Dakota deer and elk populations remain free of chronic wasting disease, according to test results received in 2007.

North Dakota hunters submitted samples for testing from 2,993 wild deer, 37 elk and four moose collected during the 2006 hunting season. All samples, collected from hunter-harvested deer taken from all deer hunting units in the state, tested negative.

Since 2002, nearly 8,500 North Dakota deer and 147 elk have tested negative for CWD. To date, CWD has not been diagnosed in wild or farmed deer or elk in North Dakota.

The Department continued its Hunter-Harvested Surveillance program during the 2007 hunting season by sampling deer from units in the eastern third of the state. In addition, all moose and elk harvested in the state, regardless of hunting units, were eligible for sampling.

CWD affects the nervous system of members of the deer family and is always fatal. Scientists have found no evidence that CWD can be transmitted naturally to humans or livestock. The Department will continue to sample the entire state over a three-year period. Animals in central North Dakota are scheduled for testing in 2008, while the western third of the state is scheduled for 2009.

More Deer Licenses in 2007

The Game and Fish Department continued an aggressive approach to deer management by increasing the number of deer hunting licenses available in 2007.

A total of 148,550 licenses were available, an increase of 5,050 from 2006. The increase included an additional 4,350 whitetail and 700 mule deer licenses. In 2006, an all-time high of more than 100,000 deer were harvested.

Mild winters and a corresponding increase in reproductive success have maintained white-tailed deer populations above management objectives in many units in northeastern, north central and southwestern North Dakota.

The mule deer population in the badlands remained at or above management goals. The number of licenses available in 2007 included 8,350 for mule deer.

Missouri River System Access

Even though wet spring weather brought hope to North Dakota, the much-needed precipitation was of little benefit to low Missouri River System water levels.

While other upper basin states also endured dry conditions, North Dakota saw the upper reaches of Lake Oahe, which used to extend some 50 miles into the state, simply disappear. Upstream, Lake Sakakawea was about 45 feet below full pool, and neared the record all-time low of 1,805 feet above mean sea level.

While all of this was of considerable concern in 2007, boaters and anglers were still able to access most areas along the system despite the low water.

An angler loads his boat in 2007 after a day of walleye fishing on the Missouri River south of Bismarck.



RON WILSON



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A new grant program designed to encourage new hunters and shooters was launched in 2007.

Legislation

While the 2007 legislative session didn't have nearly the number of hunting and fishing related bills as 2005, Department officials were busy just the same. The session lasted through April 25 – 78 days from commencement.

In all, lawmakers considered 39 bills regarding hunters, anglers and the state's natural resources. In 2005, 58 such bills were introduced, more than in any other session.

Montana Bighorns Relocate to North Dakota

Twenty bighorn sheep – three rams and 17 ewes – from an area west of the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge in Montana have a new home in western North Dakota.

Game and Fish Department biologists released the bighorns in the northern badlands in January, the second such transplant in as many years. In 2006, 19 bighorns from CMR made the trip across the state line from habitat that is similar to North Dakota's, and had no difficulties acclimating to their new surroundings.

The Game and Fish Department appreciates the cooperation from Al Rosgaard and the rest of the staff at Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The entire transplant was funded by the Minnesota-Wisconsin Chapter of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, which in March 2007 donated \$95,000 to the Department's sheep management program.

North Dakota's 2007 bighorn sheep auction license, which allows the high bidder the rare privilege of pursuing a North Dakota bighorn on a self-guided hunt, sold for a record \$50,000.

New Grant Program Encourages Youth Participation

The Game and Fish Department developed a new grant program designed to assist private groups with efforts to encourage new hunters and shooters.

Under the program, grants of up to \$3,000 are available to qualifying wildlife, shooting, civic or fraternal organizations for events or projects that emphasize youth hunting participation or training.

The 2007 state legislature included \$100,000 in the Game and Fish Department's budget to carry out this grant program to encourage youth hunting. Of that, the Department allocated \$45,000 to further develop the National Archery in the Schools program, which provides equipment and training for schools that include archery within their physical education curriculum.

The remaining grant funds are available for youth-oriented projects that will occur in 2008. Nonprofit organizations registered with the North Dakota Secretary of State's office to provide public service are eligible to apply. The organization must have officers, a treasury account, liability coverage and private locations to conduct events.

Game and Fish grant funds are available to reimburse a variety of event expenses, including promotional printing; event memorabilia such as shirts, caps or vests; ammunition and targets, and eye and ear protection. Grants can also be used for shooting range improvement or development.

Twenty bighorn sheep from Montana were released in North Dakota's badlands in 2007.



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GREG GULLICKSON

The state's paddlefish snagging season closed early again in 2007.

Paddlefish Snagging Season

North Dakota's paddlefish snagging season opened May 1 and closed May 11 because the harvest cap of 1,000 fish was reached early.

In 2007, an option of snag-and-release-only was available for up to seven days after the regular season closed.

For several years, North Dakota and Montana have established a harvest cap of 1,000 paddlefish in each state. Paddlefish snaggers in North Dakota reached that overall harvest quota the past two years in about mid-May.

Because of ongoing drought and low flows in early May in the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers, paddlefish are more concentrated and more susceptible to snaggers. As a result of the higher harvest rate, the Department had to close the seasons early.

ANS Prevention Regulations

Game and Fish is establishing new regulations for reducing potential transfer of aquatic nuisance species.

The new regulations went through the administrative rules process in late 2007, and will go into effect early in 2008.

Mountain Lions in North Dakota

The 2007 mountain lion season was North Dakota's third in as many years, with a new structure involving zones and expanded harvest potential.

Zone 1 included the portion of North Dakota west of N.D. Highway 8 from the South Dakota border to the south shore of Lake Sakakawea, and south and west of N.D. Highway 1804 from the Montana border to a point where N.D. Highway 1804 lies directly across Lake Sakakawea from N.D. Highway 8.

The mountain lion season in Zone 1 closed in early November following harvest of a lion in McKenzie County. It was the fifth cat taken in Zone 1, filling the zone's predetermined quota of five.

All five cats taken in Zone 1 were females. The first was taken in early September in McKenzie County, the next two were taken in mid-September in McKenzie and Dunn counties, and the fourth in late October in McKenzie County.

Zone 2, the remainder of the state where there is no quota, remains open until March 9. By early December 2007, no mountain lions in Zone 2 had been harvested.

Aquatic nuisance species remain a threat in North Dakota's waters.



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SUMMARY OF VIOLATIONS – JULY 1, 2006 TO JUNE 30, 2007

BIG GAME (GUN)		Exceeding limit	80
Hunting without a license	4	Hunting in closed season	2
Using another's license	4	Hunting in closed area or zone	1
Failure to carry license on person	26	Failure to leave identification or sex of game	36
Failure to sign or affix stamp	8	Killing wrong species or sex	5
Shining (using artificial light)	10	Wanton waste	13
Illegal possession/taking	33	Harassing game with motor vehicle	1
Unlawful transportation	3	Hunting on posted land without permission	10
Aiding in concealment of unlawful game	2	Hunting before/after legal hours	25
Exceeding limit	3	Failure to accompany/transport other's game	1
Hunting in closed season	10	Steel shot violation	11
Hunting in wrong unit or closed area	7	Hunting without federal waterfowl stamp	3
Failure to tag game	28	Other migratory bird violations	22
Killing wrong species or sex	9	Total	291
Use of motor vehicle off established trail	44		
Harassing game with motor vehicle	5	FURBEARER	
Hunting on posted land without permission	35	Hunting/trapping without license	2
Hunting before/after legal hours	4	Failure to carry license on person	5
Failure to accompany/transport other's game	15	Shining (use of artificial light)	6
Failure to wear fluorescent orange	8	Untagged snares	1
Gratis hunter hunting off described land	1	Illegal possession/taking	1
Other big game violations	35	Unlawful transportation	1
Total	294	Hunting/trapping in closed season	4
		Harassing furbearers with motor vehicle	7
		Other furbearer violations	4
		Total	31
BIG GAME (BOW)		FISHING	
Hunting without a license	1	Fishing without a license	65
Shining (using artificial light)	1	No identification on fish house	9
Illegal possession/taking	2	Failure to carry license on person	102
Failure to tag	2	Illegal method of taking fish	2
Hunting on posted land without permission	4	Exceeding limit	57
Failure to wear fluorescent orange during gun season	2	Fishing in closed area	3
Other big game (bow) violations	1	Taking undersized/oversized fish	9
Total	13	Failure to remove fish house	2
		Possession/fishing with illegal bait	1
		Failure to attend lines	4
UPLAND GAME		Fishing with excessive lines	44
Hunting without small game license	9	Selling fish/bait without a license	4
Failure to carry license on person	9	Paddlefish/pallid sturgeon violations	10
Using gun holding more than three shells	31	Other fish, frog, turtle, clam violations	9
Illegal possession/taking	10	Total	321
Exceeding limit	36		
Hunting in closed season	4	BOATING	
Hunting in closed area	4	Use of unlicensed or unnumbered boat	92
Failure to leave identification or sex of game	48	Unlicensed boat rental	1
Killing wrong species or sex	5	Operating without lights at night	26
Use of motor vehicle off established trail	5	Inadequate number of personal flotation devices	148
Hunting on posted land without permission	36	No observer while towing skier	72
Hunting before/after legal hours	5	Operating vessel under influence/when intoxicated	15
Failure to tag turkey	1	Reckless or negligent operation	7
Other upland game violations	6	Other prohibited/hazardous operations	38
Total	209	Other boating violations	36
		Total	435
MIGRATORY BIRDS			
Hunting without small game/nonresident license	5		
Failure to carry license on person	38		
Failure to sign or affix stamp	9		
Using gun holding more than three shells	22		
Illegal possession/taking	7		

MISCELLANEOUS

Failure to register snowmobile/ATV	6
Shining wildlife	2
Cartridge in chamber (loaded firearm)	118
Use of illegal weapon/firearm	2
440 yard violation	29
Shooting birds on utility lines/fixtures	2
Killing/possession of harmless birds	3
Wildlife management area violation	36
Hunting in unharvested field	7
Hunting in federal refuge/park	1
Minor in possession of alcohol	51
Possession of controlled substance	19
Possession of drug paraphernalia	14
Assault on a peace officer	1
No guide/outfitters license	40
No taxidermist license	1
No propagation permit	1
Misrepresentation in license application	62
Hunt, fish, trap while privileges suspended	1
Hunting for another	1
Failure to appear on citation	12
Littering public areas/waters	48
Criminal trespass	8
Other ND Game and Fish violations	58
Non-ND Game and Fish violations	68
Total	591

Total Citations Statewide 2,185

2006 LICENSES AND PERMITS ISSUED

	Resident	Nonresident
Individual Fishing	45,000	7,576
Husband/Wife Fishing	14,106	2,474
Senior Citizen Fishing	10,800	
Disabled Fishing	466	
Short-Term Fishing		
10-Day		6,425
3-Day		18,120
Paddlefish Tags	2,415	559
Commercial Tags	36	
Retail Bait Vendor	234	
Wholesale Bait Vendor	32	12
Fish Hatchery	2	
2006 Boat Registrations	7,046	
(Second year of 3-year decal)		
Boat Rentals	14	
General Hunting	59,497	49,810
Small Game Hunting	29,919	33,877
Combination License	48,766	
Waterfowl Hunting		23,138
Furbearer Hunting/Trapping	16,536	2,650
Fur Buyer (2005-06)	32	3
Nongame Hunting		1,513
Deer Gun Hunting	126,036	5,246
Deer Gun Hunting (Gratis)	14,883	170
Deer Bowhunting	16,609	2,421
Pronghorn Gun Hunting	3,009	
Pronghorn Gun Hunting (Gratis)	803	
Pronghorn Bowhunting	1,852	108
Moose Hunting	111	
Moose Hunting	18	
(Preferential Landowner)		
Elk Hunting	214	
Elk Hunting	45	
(Preferential Landowner)		
Bighorn Sheep	6	
Turkey Hunting (Spring)	6,008	
Turkey Hunting (Fall)	7,510	
Turkey Hunting (Gratis Spring)	397	
Turkey Hunting (Gratis Fall)	556	
Habitat Stamp	109,307	
Shooting Preserve	27	
Fishing/Hunting Guide	270	23
Taxidermist	204	
Falconry	3	
Scientific Collector	48	

2007 SPECIAL BIG GAME LICENSES

	Licenses Available	Applications Received
Moose	147	13,218
Elk	437	12,835
Bighorn	6	9,531

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007

Income	\$26,354,235
Expenses	\$25,365,988

FUND BALANCES, FIXED ASSETS AND LONG-TERM DEBT

Game and Fish General Fund	\$28,169,127
Habitat and Depredation Fund	\$583,292
Nongame Wildlife Fund	\$129,058

TOTAL ALL FUNDS	\$28,881,477
FIXED ASSETS	\$24,001,311

DEPARTMENT NET WORTH \$52,882,788