



*Millions of dollars over the years have been spent to provide boaters access to North Dakota's waters.*

MANDY THOMAS

# Fishing for Access

*By Greg Freeman*

---

*Statewide, access is fairly good despite extremes in water levels from one part of the state to the other.*

---

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has allocated nearly \$800,000 toward fisheries development improvement projects this year.

"Fishing and boating continue to be a favorite pastime for many North Dakotans," said Bob Frohlich, Department fisheries development supervisor. "Even though some of the major water bodies are suffering due to lack of water, the public's demand for fishing and boating related facilities continues to grow and expand."

Access remains a priority for the public and Game and Fish. Statewide, access is fairly good despite extremes in water levels from one part of the state to the other. No work is planned for the Red River this summer, but boaters will find good access on both the North Dakota and Minnesota sides. Water enthusiasts will have to take the good with the bad on Devils Lake, Lake Sakakawea and stretches of the Missouri River.

On Devils Lake, average precipitation has

left ramps in generally good shape. There are eight access sites on Devils Lake – the same as last year. Water levels have actually dropped a couple feet, which is good news for development work. Four projects are scheduled for this year, and all include the replacement of existing boat ramps that have deteriorated and require annual maintenance. Frohlich said portable metal ramps will be replaced with concrete.

Access on the Missouri River System will be similar to last summer. "Lake Sakakawea has been a real challenge, with \$5.5 million spent by various agencies for boating access improvements over the last six years, and another \$1 million designated again this year," Frohlich said.

The bulk of this year's money will be used to extend the top and bottom end of ramps, and replace existing plank and metal ramps with new concrete ramps. Boaters can expect to find 24-26 usable ramps once all the construction is completed. "This is a good number considering the lake is 20-30 feet lower than normal

levels," Frohlich said.

The upper third of Sakakawea is hardest hit, where there is only one access site in roughly a 60-mile stretch from New Town to Williston. "The only usable site is at White Earth Bay," Frohlich said. "There is not much lake left up there."

There will be 17-18 usable ramps on the Missouri River from Garrison Dam to South Dakota. However, for what was once Lake Oahe, no boat ramps are south of Beaver Bay. "We are unable to find any suitable sites in this area to develop low-water access," Frohlich said.

From Garrison Dam to Beaver Bay, access will be much the same as last year. Some ramps have been experiencing problems due to lower releases from Garrison Dam. With lower flows there is less water on the bottom end of each ramp, and some don't extend out far enough, causing boaters to back their trailers off the bottom end. In other areas, silt on ramps or at the mouths of channels has created problems.

Frohlich said boat ramp information and status for the Missouri River System is available throughout the summer at the Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

The Game and Fish Department's Fisheries Development Out-Grant Program offers up to 75 percent funding for development and construction of fishing and boating projects.

Whether it's replacing an older style metal or concrete boat ramp, constructing a new fish cleaning station, or improving shorefishing access by installing a new floating fishing pier, Frohlich says the goal of the program is to provide anglers and boaters with the finest facilities feasible.

Almost all new developments are sponsored and administered by local interest groups or municipalities, with funding assistance from the Game and Fish Department, using both federal Sport Fish Restoration funds and Department funds, along with a 25 percent local match. In addition to the 25 percent match, the local sponsor is responsible for providing free public access, overseeing construction of the new facility, and for all future maintenance.

Frohlich said the program is very popular and effective, thanks to continued support and commitment from local entities, clubs and political subdivisions across the state. Although some state funding is involved (less than 20 cents of every \$1 spent on a ramp, dock, etc., comes from fishing license sales), the majority comes from the Sport Fish Restoration program, which places an excise tax on fishing-related gear. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service distributes the proceeds, based on a formula, to every state.

"The Sport Fish Restoration program is a perfect example of a user pays/user benefits program and has been remarkably successful," Frohlich said.

---

**GREG FREEMAN** is the Game and Fish Department's news editor.



*North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel work on a new section of ramp in spring at Nelson Lake in Oliver County.*

## Underdahl Donation

Shore anglers will benefit from a sizeable financial donation made to the Game and Fish Department by Lloyd and Ella Underdahl, Bismarck. This donation will allow the Department to enhance shorefishing opportunities, including the purchase and installation of a number of floating fishing piers to be placed at lakes throughout the state.

These piers will allow shore anglers to access areas where shorefishing has been restricted or limited in the past.

With this donation the Department is able to purchase the piers, and not require a local 25 percent match. However, the local entity is still responsible for operation and maintenance of the pier.

In 2008, the Department will fund the following 13 new fishing piers: East Park Lake and Strawberry Lake, McLean County; Clausen Springs, Barnes County; Odland Dam, Golden Valley County; Larimore Dam, Grand Forks County; Lake Josephine, Kidder County; Lake LaMoure, LaMoure County; Harmony Lake, Mercer County; Fish Creek Dam, Morton County; McVile Dam, Nelson County; Nelson Lake, Oliver County; Pipestem Reservoir, Stutsman County; and Blacktail Dam, Williams County.

A list of other existing piers can be found at the Game and Fish Department website at the following link: <http://gf.nd.gov/fishing/fishing-piers.html>.