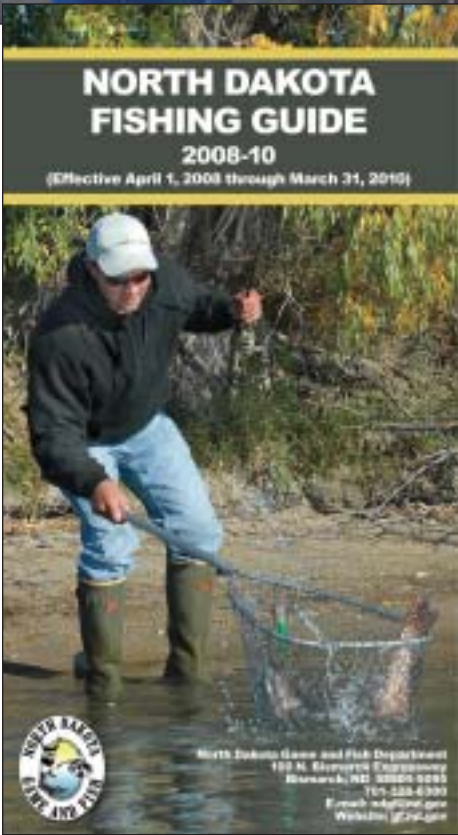




MANDY THOMAS



CRAIG BIHRLE

There are a number of changes found in the new two-year fishing proclamation that anglers must note. Included is new wording to help make clear the steps an individual needs to follow to legally possess and give away fish. For more information see the 2008-10 North Dakota Fishing Guide.

Fisheries Overview 2008

By Greg Power

Next to stocking fish, regulations receive the most attention from anglers in terms of fish management wants and needs. Often there's a rush for more fishing regulations, while others sit back and criticize any rule that may hinder their fishing outing.

North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries staff certainly hear from both sides, but tries to use biology as the guide for establishing and implementing fishing regulations that will protect and enhance the state's fishing resources.

Anglers are reminded that a new fishing license is needed starting April 1. In addition, a new two-year (2008-10) fishing proclamation is in place and included are a few changes anglers must note.

- All boats, trailers, motors and other recreational and construction equipment must be free of aquatic vegetation and have the water drained when leaving a water body. Water, however, can be left in livewells to transfer bait or game fish.

- Any container used to hold bait must be free of aquatic vegetation.

Rationale: The intent is to greatly reduce the potential movement of aquatic nuisance species to new locations.

- Spottail shiners are no longer legal live baitfish.

Rationale: Spottails had been legal bait for years, but both availability and use were limited. Since few anglers used spottails, eliminating their use makes it easier to recognize the handful of legal baitfish, especially fathead minnows.

- Establishes a wanton waste restriction. No person shall possess any game fish species then waste, destroy or abandon the edible fillets.

- Clarifies that there is no storage limit for fish fillets at a person's permanent residence. However, at no time may a person transport more than a possession limit.

- Clarifies that giving fish away is legal. However, gifted fish, including packages of fish, must be accompanied with the following information from the individual gifting the fish: name, fishing license number, phone number, date and species and number of fish gifted.

- Packaging fish away from a person's permanent residence must be done in such a manner that the number of fish in each package is easily determined.

Rationale: Some of the past rules were somewhat unclear. This new wording clarifies what is and what is not acceptable. Fish and fish fillets can exchange hands. These changes are intended to make clear the steps an individual needs to follow to legally possess and give away fish. It also provides law enforcement additional latitude when working with anglers to ensure compliance.

- Added two weeks to the darkhouse spearfishing season. The season will now run through March 15.

- Opened 16 more lakes to darkhouse spearfishing.

Rationale: Ongoing assessment of lakes that could be opened resulted in expanding the list



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Anglers will note that they need to adequately mark any hole greater than 10 inches left in the ice.

to approximately 50 lakes statewide. The move is meant to increase darkhouse spearfishing opportunities, while making sure northern pike populations are adequately protected from overharvest. In the past, biologists were concerned a late season may lead to concentrations of large pike being harvested.

However, after six years of monitoring, it appears late-ice harvest is low compared to the rest of the season, and is especially low compared to hook and line harvest.

- Removed the maximum hole size (12 inches in diameter) for ice fishing. However, when a hole greater than 10 inches in diameter is left in the ice, or when a darkhouse is removed, the opening must be adequately marked with a natural object or colored or painted wooden lathe visible from a minimum of 150 feet.

Rationale: Ensures any large hole left in the ice after ice fishing or darkhouse spearfishing is adequately marked.

- Changed the 60-hour public notice period to close the paddlefish season to 36 hours in years when the paddlefish harvest cap (1,000 fish) is projected to be met before the end of the season (May 31).

Rationale: Simply an ongoing tweak of the paddlefish regulations to increase the flexibility of the Department to make a more informed decision when the season should be closed.

- Eliminated the 14-inch minimum walleye size limit on Lake Elsie (Richland County), Brewer Lake (Cass County), and Dead Colt Creek Dam (Ransom County); struck all size restrictions for Sprague Lake and Lake Tewaukon (both Sargent County).

Rationale: These restrictions had been in place for years, with the intent to increase the

size of various fish species in these lakes. However, subsequent evaluations determined the regulations were ineffective and not needed.

- Removal of rainbow smelt season and restrictions.

Rationale: In the past, smelt trapping was allowed only from April 1 through May 10, and only along the Missouri River System. Since smelt are only accessible during spring spawn and are found only in the Missouri River System, having a set season and area isn't needed. This simply eliminates a regulation that isn't required. The daily and possession limit of 5 gallons and legal gear type remains the same.

- Clarifies that it is illegal to introduce any substance in North Dakota waters for the purpose of attracting fish that is not attached or applied to a lure. Decoys used for darkhouse spearfishing are excluded.

Rationale: There are various laws that prohibit throwing materials into North Dakota waters for any purpose. This rule clarifies it is also illegal for fishing. Placing trees, tires and other objects in the water to attract fish is illegal, unless it's a Department approved project. Using egg shells to mark the bottom of the lake for darkhouse spearfishing remains legal.

- It's illegal to leave fish houses on state-owned or managed land after March 15 (changed from April 1).

Rationale: The occasional house left on public land often resulted in rutting of the roads in April. Nowadays, most anglers pull their permanent houses from the lake to their residence in one trip. The deadline was moved to ensure these public lands are adequately protected before spring thaw. The adjustment also standardizes one date for anglers to remember. Federal refuges have a March 15 date for all houses to be removed from their lands, and the new date for closing darkhouse spearfishing season is also March 15.

In all cases, public input is sought when regulation changes are proposed and such was the case this past year. North Dakota's fishing regulations are fairly straightforward. Anglers should reference the North Dakota Fishing Guide and Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, to familiarize themselves with the fishing rules and regulations. Hopefully, by keeping our regulations simple, all anglers can enjoy their fishing experience.

Now, wet a line and good fishing.

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