

Bighorn Sheep Population Healthy

The bighorn sheep population in North Dakota's badlands is thriving.

An August-September survey in western North Dakota showed 316 sheep. "We count all sheep during the summer survey, and numbers signify our population is in excellent shape," said Brett Wiedmann, North Dakota Game and Fish Department big game biologist. "Including the number of bighorns in the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park, our total reaches 350 animals."

Survey results revealed 93 rams, 162 ewes and 61 lambs, for a 9 percent increase in the number observed from 2007. Biologists counted 232 sheep in the northern badlands and 84 in the southern badlands. "We have more work to do in the south to get to where we were before the die-off in the late 1990s, which was 130 sheep," Wiedmann said.

The goal for the southern badlands is 125 sheep. The 84 counted this summer is 11 percent higher than last year, which means the sheep population is moving in the right direction. "We can't compare the numbers from the two areas because the 11 herds in the northern badlands have a lot more habitat and better conditions than the five herds that occupy the southern badlands," Wiedmann said.

The 61 lambs was a record, surpassing the mark of 60 in 2005. "The lambs were big and healthy, and are already 3-4 months old, which means they are mature enough to have a really good chance of survival," Wiedmann said, while mentioning predators and other dangers tempt the fate of newly-born lambs.

While all the sheep look healthy, Wiedmann was especially impressed with the herd transplanted from Montana. "They are big, robust critters," he said. "We were confident they would do well, and they continue to surpass our expectations."

The herd is the largest in the state, Wiedmann said, and the 70-80 percent lamb recruitment success is phenomenal. "We might have to pull some out this winter and distribute them to the southern badlands," he said.

The annual summer bighorn sheep survey begins in early August and takes about 45 days to complete. "The most cost effective and efficient way to obtain the best data is the method we use," Wiedmann said. "We radio-collared two to three sheep in each herd, locate them from an airplane, and then hike into each herd and count them by using a spotting scope and binoculars. It is very labor intensive."

Darkhouse Spearfishing

Two additional weeks on the ice and 16 more lakes highlight changes to this year's darkhouse spearfishing season.

North Dakota's darkhouse spearfishing season opens on a number of state waters December 1, with the exception of Spiritwood Lake which opens January 1. The season extends through March 15. Legal fish are northern pike and nongame species.

All darkhouse spearfishing participants must register with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department prior to going on the ice. Registration is available at the Department's website, gf.nd.gov, or through any Game and Fish Department office.

Darkhouse spearing is allowed for all residents with a valid fishing license and for residents under the age of 16. Nonresidents may darkhouse spearfish in North Dakota if they are from states that offer the same privilege for North Dakota residents.

Lakes open to darkhouse spearing are:

Barnes County Eckelson Lake Complex	LaMoure County Diamond Lake Flood Lake	Sargent County Buffalo Lake
Benson County Devils Lake Silver Lake	Logan County Beaver Lake	Stark County Patterson (Dickinson Reservoir)
Bowman County Gascoyne Kalina Dam Spring Lake	McHenry County Buffalo Lodge Lake	Steele County North Tobiason Lake
Burke County Powers Lake	McIntosh County Clear Lake Coldwater Lake Dry/Goose Lake	Sheridan County Coal Mine Lake
Emmons County Rice Lake	McLean County Crooked Lake Long Lake	Stutsman County Mallard Marsh Spiritwood Lake Sunday Lake
Foster County Juanita Lake	Mountrail County Stanley Reservoir	Williams County Cottonwood Lake Tioga Reservoir Lake Sakakawea from Garrison Dam to U.S. Highway 85 bridge at Williston and all tributaries upstream to the first vehicular crossing.
Grant County Heart Butte (Tschida)	Nelson County Lake Laretta Stump Lake	Lake Oahe from the South Dakota border to MacLean Bottoms boat ramp and all tributaries upstream to the first vehicular crossing.
Griggs County Sibley Lake	Ramsey County Cavanaugh Lake Devils Lake Lake Irvine Morrison Lake Sweetwater Lake	
Hettinger County Blickensderfer	Renville County Lake Darling	
Kidder County Alkaline Lake Cherry Lake Etta/Alkaline Complex Fresh Lake Helen Lake Horsehead Lake Lake Josephine Lake Williams Round Lake	Richland County Grass Lake	
	Rolette County Carpenter Lake Island Lake School Section	

Winter Creels at Odland Dam, Alkaline Lake

Anglers fishing Odland Dam and Alkaline Lake this winter are asked to participate in creel surveys designed to help managers assess the status of these fisheries. Interviews take only a few minutes and information is kept confidential.

A year-long creel survey at Alkaline Lake in Kidder County is currently in process and runs through April 2009. A winter creel at Odland Dam in Golden Valley County begins in December and continues through March 2009.

Creel survey information is useful in assessing angler demographics, harvest and catch rates, catch-and-release information and angling effort.



CRAIG BIRNLE

New Winter Fishing Regs

Anglers fishing North Dakota waters this winter are reminded of new regulations implemented since last year.

There is no longer a maximum size of a hole for ice fishing. (Previously, the maximum size was 12 inches in diameter.) However, when a hole greater than 10 inches in diameter is left in the ice for any reason, the hole must be adequately marked with a natural object or colored or painted wooden lath visible from a minimum of 150 feet.

- Two weeks are added to the end of the darkhouse spearfishing season.
- 16 additional lakes are open to darkhouse spearfishing.
- Wanton waste – no person shall possess any game fish species and then waste, destroy or abandon the edible flesh (fillets). Therefore, it is illegal to discard fish on the ice.

Anglers are also reminded that McDowell Dam (Burleigh County) and Lightning Lake (McLean County) are closed to all fishing from November 1 through March 31 of each fishing year.

For a complete list of winter fishing regulations anglers should consult the North Dakota 2008-10 Fishing Guide.

Habitats of North Dakota in Classrooms

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department and North Dakota Center for Distance Education have completed a wildlife and conservation unit that will be part of the state's fourth-grade curriculum.

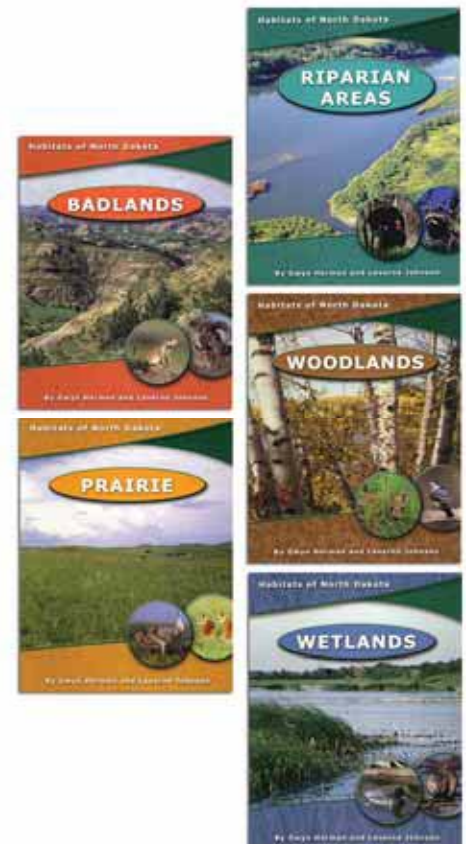
The Habitats of North Dakota project encompasses five habitats – wetlands, prairie, badlands, woodlands and riparian areas – that are prominent in the state. The materials are available online at ndstudies.org, and hard copies will be distributed to all fourth-grade classrooms. The project was developed and completed over the past year.

Chris Grondahl, outreach supervisor for the state Game and Fish Department, said the Department was fortunate to have the opportunity to develop a wildlife and conservation component for students at the same time North Dakota studies materials were being developed for fourth and eighth graders. "We are all optimistic about this resource and are quite sure it will be the way to present wildlife and conservation concepts in the future," he said. "Information gathered from a number of teachers makes us believe this resource will be very popular and the first of its kind in North Dakota, and in most other states as well."

The materials are specific to North Dakota, correlated to the current teaching standards and promoted through the teaching industry. While the project is intended for educators, distribution is also available to other interest groups, including wildlife and conservation organizations and libraries.

Sherry Niesar has been hired by the Game and Fish Department to develop and conduct workshops, and also train educators to implement the North Dakota Habitat Guide into their curriculum.

To learn more information about Habitats of North Dakota, Niesar can be reached by e-mail at sniesar@nd.gov.



National Conservation Award

Ron Reynolds, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Bismarck, has received the prestigious National Blue Heron Award for his contributions toward the conservation of waterfowl habitat.

Reynolds was recognized for his 17 years as project leader for their Habitat and Population Evaluation Team. "Ron's contributions to the conservation and understanding of waterfowl and their associated wetland and grassland habitats at state, national and international levels are substantial," according to a press released issued by the FWS. "He is a respected and proven leader in waterfowl and wetland conservation in the Prairie Pothole Region and his advice and guidance is regularly sought by individuals and agencies throughout the United States and Canada."

The National Blue Heron Award, sponsored by the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, not only recognizes efforts to benefit waterfowl, but also many other migratory bird species that rely on wetlands.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department received the award in 2007.



Ron Reynolds

GAME & FISH STAFF



Daniel Grove, D.V.M.

Grove Hired as Wildlife Veterinarian

Dan Grove, a native of Tennessee, has been hired as the Department's wildlife veterinarian. He has a degree in animal science and a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from the University of Tennessee.

Grove has considerable experience with a variety of wildlife disease issues, especially chronic wasting disease.



Jim Houston

Houston Fills Wildlife Tech Post

Bathgate native Jim Houston has been hired to fill a wildlife technician position in Bismarck. He has spent the last six years working in the Department's Williston office.

Houston has a fisheries and wildlife biology degree from the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks.