



MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

We're well into the fall hunting season and our choices are many. I wish I could say I've repeatedly enjoyed the bounties our great state provides in autumn, but that wouldn't be true. But I'm going to remedy that, and most certainly take part in what many consider a holiday in North Dakota – the deer gun season.

Deer hunting is certainly a tradition in North Dakota and one I haven't missed in 40 years. My first few years were spent under the tutelage of my father, but as I grew older it became somewhat of a social hunt with my friends. From there, it evolved into hunting with relatives, and then by myself. It came full circle when my children were old enough to go hunting and I became their mentor. The thrill of opening day hasn't changed throughout all those years.

While I'm one of those people born before the date hunter education is required in North Dakota, I've hopefully absorbed the wisdom passed down by my father to make me a knowledgeable, safe hunter. But hunter education is much more than gun safety or hunter safety. While it certainly encompasses those areas, it goes beyond that.

In past articles, I've written that my father taught me to respect all animals. In part, that meant understanding the behaviors of the animals I pursued. It gave me some advantage in hunting them in habitat they knew intimately. The more you know about the animal and its habits, the better your chances. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's hunter education program provides a jump start for much of this. And that wouldn't be possible without the dedication and time commitment of hundreds of volunteer hunter education instructors.

This issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* will provide the latest update on the lead in venison

issue. As I write this, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report had not been released. I don't think there's any question that ingestion and absorption of lead is not healthy for any individual. But our philosophy on this issue is to provide all the information we can, along with possible alternatives. The final decision is left up to individual hunters as to whether they want to use alternative bullets, take alternative care in processing the animals they harvest, or stay with what they've been doing.

Even though we're in the fall hunting season, we should not forget about fall fishing opportunities and the coming ice fishing season. We've been in the midst (and hopefully the end) of an extended drought in most of the state, but there is some good news for the future. This issue will highlight a couple waters that showed some fantastic natural reproduction, which bodes well for the future of these fisheries.

The Game and Fish Department is typically viewed as a "hook-and-bullet" agency, and that's true to a large extent. But our responsibility extends to those nongame fish and wildlife populations that aren't necessarily known for being hunted or caught. The animals highlighted in this issue are what I would classify as "neat critters" since they are relatively rare in North Dakota.

I know there are a number of people in the field on a daily basis and even more on weekends. So, please be careful while you're out hunting. Nothing can ruin an enjoyable experience quicker than a careless and unfortunate accident. Take care, have fun, and enjoy one of the greatest places and seasons – North Dakota in the fall.

Terry Steinwand