



## MATTERS OF OPINION



I typically coordinate this column with articles appearing in the current issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*. I've deviated from this approach only once, when my father passed away, and I'm doing it again out of great respect for a friend, individual and former Game and Fish Director Dean Hildebrand.

In mid-August, North Dakota celebrated the career and contributions of Dean at the dedication of a new wildlife management area named in his honor. During the time necessary to coordinate the event, Dean was stricken with cancer – not once but twice. Even so, the dedication and celebration continued, as Dean wanted it. This issue features a story on the event, but the celebration has been replaced by sadness as Dean passed away on September 10, less than three years after retiring from this agency. He served as director from April 1996 through December 2005.

We'd known for some time that Dean had been battling cancer and, in retrospect, we are very glad Dean and his entire family could attend the dedication and enjoy the experience. Very few former Game and Fish employees have their names on state wildlife management areas. Those who do are well-deserving, and in Dean's case, I don't think there is any doubt about it.

I worked with Dean as fisheries division chief for his entire tenure as director. I met Dean once before he joined the Department and was immediately impressed with his passion for hunting, fishing and people. During his first few years as director, no matter where I attended a meeting in the state, someone would inevitably say, "Oh, yeah. Dean was my biology teacher," or "I served with Dean in the National Guard."

After awhile it seemed like I was the only one in North Dakota who hadn't had Dean as a teacher prior to his appointment to the Game and Fish Department.

It's certainly clear that Dean made lasting and positive impressions on many, many people

in a state he so adored. He was one of the more gregarious individuals I've ever met. He had the innate ability to talk for hours with anyone on any subject. While he had many strengths as a person and a leader, Dean excelled at communicating with people. And he didn't cower from contentious issues. He was always looking for the best possible solution and, as such, was willing to talk to anyone and everyone to find the answer.

Dean was also the epitome of the "Idea Man." To Department staff, it sometimes seemed that he lay awake all night pondering ways to fix what was broken. While we frequently argued with him about the merits of his ideas, I came to understand what he was doing – staying out in front of all of us. Dean's motto was that you couldn't lead from the rear. While not all of his ideas were implemented, I would have to say most were in some form or another.

I learned of Dean's passing while attending meetings out-of-state, and after that I don't remember much of the gatherings. I do remember going outside and looking to the sky thinking, "I bet Dean is talking hunting and fishing with my father and brother-in-law," both of whom passed away within the last 16 months.

North Dakota has lost a great citizen with the passing of Dean Hildebrand. And I've lost a great friend and mentor.

I know Dean was looking forward to another great hunting season in North Dakota, but it's one he'll have to miss. But I also know he would tell us all to get outdoors and enjoy what he worked so hard to provide.

So when you flush a sharp-tailed grouse that chuckles at you as it flies away, or flinch as a ring-necked rooster flushes at your feet, or set the hook as your rod tip bends, think of Dean and thank him for what he's done to help provide those experiences. He was a tireless advocate for providing outdoor opportunities for all of us in a state he loved so much.



**Dean Hildebrand**  
1937-2008

*Terry Steinwand*