

back cast

By Ron Wilson



As hunters, we spend the better part of fall chasing – as ethically and humanely as possible – the very animals many of us are so concerned about this winter as deep snow dominates the landscape.

Our interest isn't so much how this winter will influence future hunting trips in terms of reduced bag limits, but rather how animals are getting by day to day. To some – those who don't hunt and refuse to find our fascination with it – this way of thinking is simply contrived to somehow help justify the chase, the kill and the feast.

While I can't speak for the entire hunting fraternity, it's really not that way. You have to be pretty thick-skinned not to have some concern this winter for creatures that are such a big part of what makes North Dakota North Dakota. Whether there will be fewer pheasants to chase next fall isn't the biggest consideration right now.

Every winter, many young, weak and old animals eventually yield to the conditions. The unknown this winter is what the fallout will really be, considering we likely have weeks of lean weather still ahead of us.

Maybe we're jumping the gun simply because this is the first real winter we've had statewide in years. Certainly, the conditions are magnified because, at least around these parts, we're not used to seeing this much snow hanging around for this long.

Whatever the case, let's move on. Like a lot of people, and most certainly the animals, I'm tired of it; tired of the snow, cold, wind and too-short days. (Note: While I was typing that last sentence, The Weather Channel icon in the corner of my monitor turned from blue to red. Means trouble is brewing. The weather folks have just issued a winter weather advisory – winds of 15-30 mph and higher gusts, which will cause blowing and drifting snow. Temperatures are expected to dip below zero, with wind chills much lower.)

Perfect.

There's a guy at work who, when you ask how he's doing, he responds with "It's another day closer to spring." I cheer his optimism, but understand he's saying it out the side of his mouth. Spring is a carrot dangling from a string, but it's so far out there we can barely make it out.

In mid-January my youngest son, 5, and I decided to take a drive in the country to see what we could see. We packed his BB gun with the intention of finding a lonely spot along a gravel road and shooting holes in the plastic pop bottle we brought along as a target. First he decided the bottle was going to be a buck, then a moose and then a bear.

Of course, every gravel road we tried to venture down was blown in. I couldn't risk getting stuck in the country with a short-legged youngster, so we headed home, looking for something to cure our cabin fever.

A campfire in the backyard was our next option. We'd roast hot dogs over an open fire, I told him, and pretend we were camping in the deep woods, all the while keeping an eye out for bears.

Turns out, the clay insert to our fire pit was busted, fractured in half and useless. The crescent crack, if you looked at it just right, resembled an ear-to-ear smile that, I promised my son, we'd wipe off with a couple of hammers come spring.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

