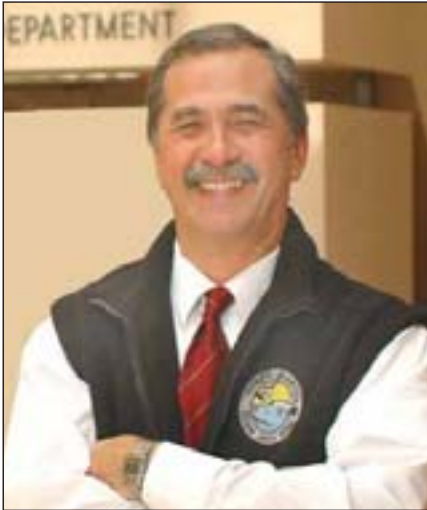




MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

According to the calendar, the first official day of spring is March 20. Seems like a long way away to you and I, certainly, but likely even longer to North Dakota's wildlife.

It's been more than a decade since we've had a "real" winter across all of North Dakota. A nice, long string of mild winters, in association with good habitat, has been a boon to the state's wildlife. Yet, on the other hand, the lack of precipitation has lowered water levels in some of our fisheries and has left many wetlands high and dry and unattractive to waterfowl. You just never know what you're going to get living on the Northern Plains, a landscape of weather extremes.

In this issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* we take a look at winter to date and what kind of influence it could have on the state's wildlife. Animals die every winter, no matter how mild or severe the weather, but we really sit up and take notice during winters such as this one when the snow comes early and has a good chance of staying late.

While the snow will be a good thing in terms of providing much needed precipitation in some parts of the state, it has been more than a hindrance to ice anglers wanting to wet a line this winter. Deep snow has caused some access issues, drastically reducing some ice fishing opportunities on many of our frozen waters, which is unfortunate.

This winter we're in the heart of another legislative session, which is important to note because it's our anglers, hunters and others interested in the outdoors that many times tip the scales in the decision-making process. I urge you to stay informed and involved on legislation that influences our natural resources.

To view legislation pertaining to our state's wildlife, which is updated daily, visit the Game and Fish Department's website at gf.nd.gov.

This issue also contains a feature about bovine tuberculosis, recently detected in a cow from a cattle herd in southwestern North Dakota. While bovine TB is a cattle disease, it can be passed on to deer and then back again to cattle.

To this point we have sort of "dodged the bullet," as further testing has not detected the disease in any other cows in the suspect herd. A second finding, however, would require an intensive effort from Game and Fish as well as the North Dakota Department of Agriculture, which could have a dramatic impact on future hunting opportunities in that area. The article explains what our agency would have to do to determine if the bovine TB had spread to the local deer population.

We do not want bovine TB in North Dakota. It can be devastating to the livestock industry and we're trying to do our part to reduce the potential that wildlife, particularly deer, are not, and do not become part of the bovine TB mix. To have that happen would cost Game and Fish hundreds of thousands of dollars, and mean many lost opportunities for deer hunters.

It's hard to believe the bonus point system we use to award deer, pronghorn and turkey licenses has been around for 15 years. In these pages we review the lottery system, which isn't perfect, but the most fair for the majority of hunters wanting to participate.

Think spring. But in the meantime, venture outside to see what North Dakota's wonderful outdoors has to offer.

Terry Steinwand