



MATTERS OF OPINION



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Director

In this issue of *North Dakota OUT-DOORS* we review 2008. While this examination won't be much different than past years, the one thing that differs is the amount of precipitation prior to freeze-up and the amount of snow we received thereafter.

As they say: "It's both a blessing and a curse." There are portions of the state that desperately need the precipitation to fill wetlands for waterfowl production and lakes for fishing. But there are other areas that have been extremely wet and likely don't need additional moisture.

The snow cover can also make life more difficult for North Dakota's wildlife, while creating oxygen problems in many lakes, potentially leading to winterkill. But that's all part of living on the Northern Plains, North Dakota in particular. The fish and wildlife of our state have evolved under difficult conditions. They are resilient, as are North Dakota's human residents, and continually return stronger than ever if they are set back. I don't expect anything different if the worst occurs this winter.

As you will see by the annual review, we deal with a wide variety of issues on a daily, weekly, monthly and annual basis. It's what makes our jobs so enjoyable – and equally frustrating at times. We went from almost record lows in lakes Sakakawea and Oahe to the highest levels we've experienced in eight years. And judging from the way things are shaping up this winter, these Missouri River System waters will continue to rise and fish

populations will respond accordingly.

As sportsmen and women, we tend to focus on animals we can hunt or fish, but there are other creatures out there that offer different opportunities as well. In the past few years we've placed a little more emphasis on North Dakota's nongame wildlife. In this issue there are some wonderful photographs of our natural resources that we may take for granted and not necessarily notice, even though they are an integral part of what makes North Dakota unique. I want to thank those individuals who took the time to submit their photos, allowing us a glimpse of the natural beauty the state has to offer.

This issue will also feature an article on winter aeration systems in the state. For years, winter aeration systems were used on North Dakota waters to reduce the possibility of winter fish kills. But the hazards these systems create for humans venturing on frozen waters certainly overshadow the uncertain benefits to fish.

Remember, if you choose to venture on the ice, always be aware that ice thickness can vary. Ice fishing is a long-enjoyed tradition in North Dakota, and nothing can ruin an outing quicker than putting a vehicle through the ice.

While it might be a little cooler than some people would like it, winter is still a great time to enjoy the great North Dakota outdoors.

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