

BUFFALOBERRY PATCH



By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor

Deer Samples Negative

Samples taken from North Dakota deer, elk and moose during the 2008 hunting season have tested negative for chronic wasting disease and bovine tuberculosis.

Last fall, samples for CWD testing were taken from nearly 2,300 deer (with 1,600 taken from the targeted area of the central third of the state), 53 elk and 24 moose.

"In addition to our CWD surveillance, we started routine bovine TB surveillance in the northeast, and random sampling throughout the state," said Dr. Dan Grove, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife veterinarian. "Altogether, 850 deer, moose and elk tested negative for bovine TB."

Since January, about 160 deer and moose that died or were showing clinical signs of disease were sampled for CWD and TB as part of the Game and Fish Department's year-round targeted surveillance. To date, all animals have tested negative for CWD, and bovine TB test results are still pending.

"As always, the success of our surveillance program could not be accomplished without the cooperative efforts of hunters, meat processors, taxidermists and local establishments," Grove said.

The Game and Fish Department's three-year cycle of sampling the entire state for CWD will conclude this fall by testing deer from the western third of the state. Grove said a new cycle will

begin in 2010 in North Dakota's eastern third. "We will also continue to test animals in northeastern North Dakota for TB until it has been eradicated from the adjacent Minnesota herd," he said, "and we'll continue to sample suspect or high risk cases of CWD and TB throughout the year."

Since 2002, more than 12,300 North Dakota deer, nearly 360 elk and 60 moose have tested negative for CWD. To date, CWD and TB have not been diagnosed in wild or farmed cervids in North Dakota, although these diseases have been found in surrounding states and provinces.

Sage Grouse Counts Low, Season Remains Closed

Results from North Dakota's spring sage grouse survey indicate the number of strutting males observed remains well below management objectives. Therefore, the sage grouse hunting season will remain closed in 2009.

Aaron Robinson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department upland game biologist in Dickinson, said a record low 69 male sage grouse were counted on 17 active strutting grounds. Last year, 77 males were counted on leks in the southwest.

The number of males counted on leks each spring has gradually declined since 2000. In 2008, spring counts dropped dramatically throughout North Dakota's present sage grouse range. The specific cause of the decline is unknown, but West Nile virus is suspected.

Sage grouse are closely tied to sagebrush habitat, which is limited in southwestern North Dakota. While grasslands and residual cover look in relatively good condition this spring in the southwest, the amount of sagebrush habitat has been slowly declining over the years. Sage grouse hunting seasons have been very restrictive the last 20 years and harvest has exceeded 50 birds only once during this time. There is no indication that hunting has caused a decline in the population.

Management of sage grouse in North Dakota has followed a specific plan developed by a diverse group of participants. The plan outlines hunting harvest objectives for the species with a recommendation that the hunting season close if the spring census indicates fewer than 100 males in the population. The 2008 hunting season was closed for the first time in nearly half a century.

When the spring breeding population increases above 100 males, Game and Fish Department biologists will recommend the season reopen. "Our objective is to maintain a viable sage grouse population in the state and to provide recreational hunting when bird numbers allow," Robinson said.

Even though sage grouse populations throughout the west are undergoing a review in status, the Department manages these birds based on the best biological data available. Sage grouse are North Dakota's largest native upland game bird. They are found in extreme southwestern North Dakota, primarily in Bowman and Slope counties.



CRAIG BIRHLE

Sage grouse numbers in southwestern North Dakota have been slow to rebound.

Walleye Tagging Continues at Devils Lake

A three-year project to learn more about walleye in Devils Lake is in its final year.

North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel tagged 3,000 walleyes for the project, 1,000 earlier this spring, to help biologists gather information on fish movements, total mortality between years, angling mortality rates and differences in mortality rates between sexes.

This year's tags are blue (tags the previous two years were yellow and orange) and are attached by wire to the top of the fish. The tag does not need to be sent in, just the information: tag number, kept or released, date caught, length, location and angler's name and address.

Anglers catching a tagged fish are encouraged to report it online at the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov. Also, tag return cards can be filled out at bait shops around the lake, or anglers can bring in the information or call the Devils Lake Game and Fish office at (701) 662-3617.

A follow-up letter will be sent to the angler with information such as when and where the fish was tagged, and fish length at the time it was tagged.

Prairie Chicken Hunt Applications

Hunters interested in chasing prairie chickens in October will need to have their applications in the mail and postmarked no later than August 12.

The prairie grouse hunting season – good for either sharp-tailed grouse or prairie chickens – is October 10-18 in two hunting units, one in Grand Forks County (north unit) and the other in southeastern North Dakota (south unit). Fifty licenses will be awarded to resident hunters in each unit.

To apply for the prairie grouse season, hunters need to send a postcard containing their name, address, phone number and choice of hunting unit (north or south) to Prairie Chicken Application, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, N.D. 58501.

Only one application per postcard and one application per hunter is permitted. Successful applicants will be notified through the mail.



Joshua Bartz, Bismarck, with his record bigmouth buffalo.

New State Record Bigmouth Buffalo

North Dakota's newest state record fish is a bigmouth buffalo taken May 30 by Joshua Bartz, Bismarck, while bowfishing in the Missouri River near Fox Island.

The 44-inch fish weighed 51 pounds, 4 ounces and shattered the old record of 40 pounds, 6 ounces taken by Trey Opp of Mandan in 2007 at Heart Butte Reservoir (Lake Tschida).

Native to North Dakota, the bigmouth buffalo is mainly a filter feeder, feeding on plankton, but it will eat insects. Because of its feeding habits, the bigmouth buffalo is not commonly caught by anglers.

The bigmouth buffalo is the largest member of the sucker family and often confused with carp, which inhabit the same waters. On warm days, this fish will rest quietly just under the water's surface, often in the midst of clumps of algae bloom.

Spring Duck Index, Water Conditions Up

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual spring breeding duck survey showed an index of more than 4 million birds, an increase of 18 percent from last year and 87 percent above the long-term average (1948-2008). The 2009 index is the eighth highest on record.

Pintail (up 157 percent and the highest since 1972) and northern shovelers (up 102 percent and the highest on record) showed significant increases. All other dabbling ducks except gadwall (minus 42 percent) showed increases from last year (blue-winged teal, plus 53 percent; mallards, plus 43 percent; wigeon, plus 44 percent; and green-winged teal, plus 14 percent).

All diving ducks except canvasback (plus 96 percent) decreased from last year (scaup, minus 60 percent; redhead, minus 16 percent; and ruddy ducks, minus 10 percent). However, all species were well-above the long-term average.

The spring water index showed the largest single-year turnaround in the 62-year history of the survey, according to Mike Johnson, Department game management section leader. The index was up 293 percent from 2008 and 69 percent above the long-term average. It was the eighth highest in survey history and the highest since 1999.

Johnson cautions that the water index is based on basins with water, and does not necessarily represent the amount of water contained in wetlands. "Water conditions were generally lower than we had expected, given the exceptional snow conditions this past winter," he said. "However, the spring was fairly dry, and considerable drying had occurred in wetland basins between the snow melt and the time of the survey."

Additional reports indicate that much of the Prairie Pothole Region from South Dakota, Montana, Saskatchewan and Manitoba is experiencing significantly improved water conditions due to late

winter/early spring precipitation. "Thus ducks have a much larger landscape providing good water conditions than in recent years," Johnson said.

However, nesting cover in North Dakota continues to decline. Since the beginning of 2007 North Dakota has lost more than 500,000 Conservation Reserve Program acres, and projections for the next two years indicate up to another 500,000 acres could be converted to cropland.

"This loss of one-third of our critical nesting cover will be disastrous for breeding ducks and hunting opportunities in North Dakota," Johnson said.

The July brood survey will provide a better idea of duck production and insight into what to expect this fall. Observations to date indicate that production will be improved across the state due to improved water conditions and increased wetland availability for brood production.

Pronghorn, Swan Hunting Reminders

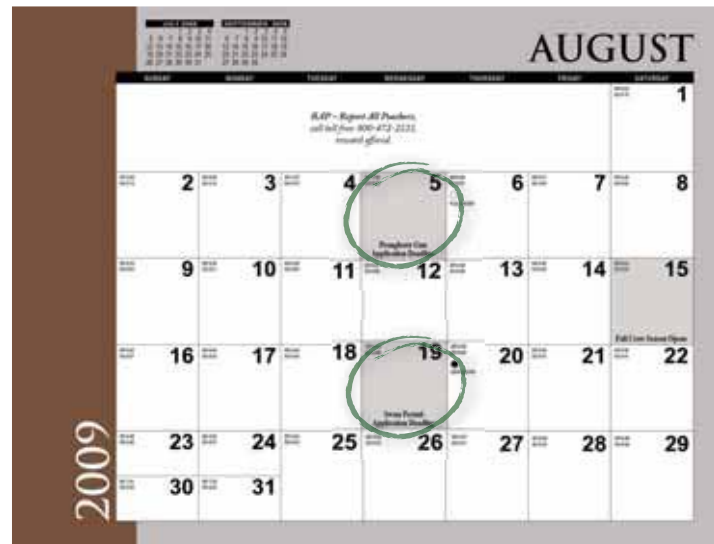
Pronghorn applications will be available in mid-July, and the deadline for applying is August 5. Only North Dakota residents are eligible for pronghorn gun licenses.

Applications for the state's 2009 tundra swan licenses will be available the end of July and the deadline for submitting an application is August 19. Residents and nonresidents are eligible to apply.

Pronghorn and swan hunters are encouraged to apply online at the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, which also contains application forms that can be printed and mailed. Regular license fees apply and no service charge is added.

Applications for both species will be available at Game and Fish offices, county auditors and license vendors. Applications are also accepted at the Department's toll-free licensing line, (800) 406-6409. A service fee is added for license applications made over the phone.

Successful swan applicants will be issued a tag to take one bird during the season. Since swans are classified as waterfowl, nonresidents may hunt them only during the period their nonresident waterfowl license is valid.



Addition to Smith Grove WMA Dedicated

By Allison Hesford

Some of North Dakota's oldest and largest cottonwood trees sit on a stretch of land along the Missouri River called Smith Grove Wildlife Management Area.

These living pieces of history have grown for more than two centuries, and it was the wish of Glen Smith, owner of the land around Smith Grove, that the North Dakota Game and Fish Department purchase his family's property to preserve it for future generations.

"We're honored that Glen would entrust his legacy to us and we'll do everything we can to live up to his expectations and those of his family," said Terry Steinwand, Game and Fish Department director.

The 200-acre addition is an extension of the 25 acres the Department originally purchased from George Smith in 1972. He wanted the land preserved to protect the giant cottonwood trees that stand there. George's son, Glen, inherited his father's appreciation of nature, along with the remaining land surrounding Smith Grove WMA. Glen passed away in 2008, but his resolve to preserve the area along the Missouri River endured.

"Glen thought that this should be protected and conserved for future genera-

tions and in his last will and testament he really clearly indicated that's his vision," Steinwand said. "He stated, 'It's my intention that the integrity and historical significance of the natural habitat remain in an unspoiled state.'" Glen also stated in his will that the Game and Fish Depart-

it aside for everyone to experience and enjoy."

Another key factor was support from various contributing partners. Speaking for one of the contributors was president and CEO of Starion Financial, Craig Larson, who also personally contributed.

"There are numerous organizations that were a part of this and this dedication ceremony is really living proof of how much can be accomplished when we partner together toward a common goal. Working together, this diverse group of public and private organizations has accomplished something that none of us could have done alone," Larson said.

Several members of the Smith family attended the dedication to see Glen's vision become a reality. Glen's cousin, Roger Smith, traveled from Seattle to



Glen Smith's family gathered to celebrate the dedication of the land he wanted preserved. From Left, Beverly Smith, Roger Smith, Candy Olzweski, Kathy Rooker, Crystal Olzweski, Danny Smith, Greg Anderson, Cheryl Langei, Jackie Anderson, Lenny Langei.

ment have the first opportunity to buy the land.

The Smith Grove WMA would not have been possible without the support of Governor John Hoeven. "I didn't have the opportunity to personally meet Glen Smith, but I wish I had," Hoeven wrote in a statement read at the dedication. "He sounds like a truly special North Dakotan. He clearly valued nature and wildlife and had the vision to see the importance of this piece of land and the vision to set

speaking about Glen and the land.

"This didn't surprise me when he gave this land to the citizens of North Dakota for their care and I think it's a good move," Roger Smith said. "This way it'll be maintained properly and people can enjoy it."

ALLISON HESFORD is a senior at Minnesota State University-Moorhead, and is interning with the Game and Fish Department this summer.

Smith Grove WMA Contributors

- Roughrider Electric Cooperative
- Starion Financial
- Tesoro Companies, Inc.
- The Nature Conservancy
- USFWS State Wildlife Grants
- American Foundation for Wildlife
- Basin Electric Power Cooperative
- Craig and Michelle Larson
- Great River Energy
- ND Chapter The Wildlife Society
- ND Conservation Foundation
- ND Conservation Fund
- ND Natural Resources Trust
- ND Wild Turkey Federation
- MDU Resources Group, Inc.
- Northern Great Plains Joint Venture
- Pheasants Forever

Party Fishing, Culling Illegal

North Dakota anglers are reminded of two fishing regulations that some anglers often ignore and might not even realize are illegal.

Greg Power, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries chief, said party fishing and culling is common practice with some anglers. "These acts are prohibited and anglers will get cited for these violations," Power said.

Anglers must catch their own fish while on the water, much like hunters must harvest their own game while in the field. "The same rule applies," Power said. "An angler cannot help another angler fill a limit by harvesting more fish than their own daily limit."

In addition, anglers may not cull fish. "Replacing one that is already in possession, such as on a stringer or in a livewell, for a freshly caught fish is not allowed,"

Power said. "In some states, this is an accepted practice so that anglers can catch and keep larger size fish over the course of a fishing outing. However, in North Dakota this practice has never been permitted."

Anglers should refer to the 2008-10 North Dakota Fishing Guide for a complete list of regulations, or access the Game and Fish Department website at gf.nd.gov.



CRAIG BIRHLE

Early Canada Goose Opens August 15

An early hunting season intended to reduce local Canada goose numbers in North Dakota opens statewide August 15.

Last year was the first time the early season opened in mid-August. Prior to that, opening day was September 1. The earlier opener is permitted under the framework provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which allows states to open what is considered a "management take" season on Canada geese as early as August 1.

Mid-August hunting is not for everyone, as hunters will likely come

across unharvested crops, mosquitoes and summer heat. Immediate care of game will most likely be required. It does, however, help landowners with crop depredation problems.

Despite liberalized Canada goose seasons the past several years, the statewide population remains high, with numbers well-above population goals. The growing population has resulted in increased reports from landowners concerning depredation on crops and nuisance problems.

During the past decade, hunters have been able to take advantage of longer Canada goose hunting seasons,

maximum bag limits and expanded shooting hours. While these strategies have helped in increasing harvest considerably, the population remains above objective levels.

Any Canada goose hunting days added in August do not count against the 107-day federal framework. Therefore, the two-week earlier opening date does not affect the length of the early Canada goose or regular waterfowl seasons.

Hunters should refer to the North Dakota 2009-10 Small Game Guide for additional information and regulations.

Summer Safety Encouraged on the Water

Summer is traditionally a time when families enjoy outdoor activities at a favorite recreation site. Nancy Boldt, North Dakota Game and Fish Department boat and water safety coordinator, says family outings and commotion go hand-in-hand, and that is why it is important to be alert and safe near water.

“Personal flotation devices are the single most important part of safety on the water,” Boldt said. “They are worn to save your life.”

North Dakota law requires all children ages 10 and younger to wear a personal flotation device while in boats of less than 27 feet in length. The law also requires all personal watercraft users to wear a life jacket, Boldt said, as well as anyone towed on skis, tubes, boards or other similar devices.

Water users should make sure to wear life jackets that are the appropriate size, and in good condition. It is also important that children wear a PFD while swimming. “It doesn’t matter how good you can swim because after being in the water for a period of time kids become tired or develop cramps,” Boldt said.

Failure to wear a PFD is the main reason people lose their lives in boating accidents. The National Safe Boating Council warns boaters that most drowning victims had a life jacket available, but were not wearing it when they entered the water. It is difficult to put a life jacket on once you are already in the water, Boldt said.

When purchasing a PFD, Boldt suggests considering the most prevalent water activity. Water skiers and tubers should wear a life jacket with four nylon straps rather than one with a zipper, because straps are stronger than zippers



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT PHOTO

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are providing water enthusiasts with a life jacket loaner station at the Spillway Pond in Riverdale. Life jacket loaner station signs are installed at the Spillway Pond and the Downstream Campground. Pictured at left is Nancy Boldt, North Dakota Game and Fish Department boat and water safety coordinator, and right, Nathan Busche, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

upon impact with water. Anglers or persons paddling a canoe should opt for a PFD that is comfortable enough to wear for the entire outing.

Water skiers and tubers are reminded it takes three to ski and tube. When a person is towed on water skis or a similar device, an observer other than the operator is required on the vessel.

“Know what is below the water’s surface, especially near shore,” Boldt said. “Larger objects can be hidden, potentially leading to a significant injury.”

It is important for swimmers to know the water’s depth, as serious injuries can occur when diving. “To be safe, never dive into the lake because you never know what is below the surface,” Boldt said.

North Dakota boaters also are reminded that marine VHF radios are an important part of boat safety that should not be improperly used by operators. Boldt said the radios are intended for boat operators who are in distress and facing an emergency situation.

Regulations to help ensure safe boating this summer are found in the 2008-10 North Dakota Fishing Guide. A more comprehensive listing is available in the 2008-10 North Dakota Boat and Water Safety Guide or the Boat North Dakota education book. These guides are available online at the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov, by emailing ndgf@nd.gov, or at a local Game and Fish Department office.



RON WILSON

OWLS Pond anglers are reminded that they must release the fish they catch.

Family Fishing at Bismarck OWLS

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is once again hosting family fishing days on Saturdays and Wednesdays this summer at the Outdoor Wildlife Learning Site located adjacent to the Department's main office in Bismarck.

Continuing through August, fishing equipment can be checked out at the OWLS on Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Adults will be in the area to answer questions and check out equipment, but there will be little or no direct supervision. If kids aren't old enough to get to the pond on their own, they need to have an adult with them.

The OWLS area is fairly primitive, with only a picnic shelter and benches upon entering the site. The area has no restroom facilities or running water. Users should bring water, sunscreen, folding chairs and appropriate clothing.

The Game and Fish Department is seeking volunteer instructors to assist with the program. Individuals at least age 18 with an interest in teaching kids to fish should contact Jeff Long, Department education coordinator, at (701) 328-6322.

The OWLS pond is open to fishing year-round during daylight hours. There are no bait restrictions, but anglers must practice catch-and-release. The area is designed for wheelchair accessibility. Pets and glass bottles are not permitted on the site.



Space Available for BOW

The Game and Fish Department is still accepting registrations for women interested in attending the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman workshop August 7-9 at Lake Metigoshe State Park near Bottineau. The cost is \$135 for those 18 years or older with an August 1 registration deadline.

The workshop, sponsored by the Game and Fish Department, offers 24 different seminars, each of which lasts more than three hours.

Classes are held outdoors, and each session contains 45 minutes of lecture with the remainder dedicated to hands-on instruction. Each session has room for 12 women. Participants are limited to four sessions.

Women will learn the basics of hunting and fishing, shooting, navigation, and plants and animals. New classes offered this year include basic boating skills and intermediate archery. Other classes include decoy carving, canoeing, fly-fishing, kayaking, plant identification and predator calling.

Participants will stay in dorms and must provide their own bedding and towels. All camp facilities are handicap accessible. Equipment will be provided unless noted in the course description.

To receive an information brochure and enrollment form, contact Nancy Boldt, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, at (701) 328-6312; ndgf@nd.gov; or visit the Game and Fish website at gf.nd.gov.