



MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

We endured a long winter and what seemed to be an endless spring in North Dakota. Most of us are grateful for the much-needed moisture, but I also think most of us are ready for summer and the outdoor opportunities it brings.

I believe the state's wildlife is on the same page as its human residents. They certainly endured a brutal winter, and then many were roused from their homes during spring flooding. And then many, primarily ground nesting birds, had to put up with rainy, cool weather during the nesting period.

Some wildlife species were negatively influenced by the challenging weather over the last several months, while others will benefit from near record snows and a soggy spring. Now that water has returned to many of our lakes and ponds, those species that depend on sufficient water to survive are expected to flourish.

For fish, the winter may have provided the harshest and, in some cases, deadliest environment imaginable. But the subsequent return of water means that the survivors welcomed some of the best aquatic environments they've seen in years. And the millions of fish that were stocked in spring stand a great chance of providing countless hours of recreation today and even more so in a few years.

One group of animals that will likely experience the biggest benefit from the abundance of water is waterfowl. For the past few years, prairie wetlands were rather scarce in North Dakota. Even though ducks certainly produced young during those leaner times, reproductive efforts should increase this year despite a decline in nesting habitat. As my predecessor, Dean Hildebrand, once said: "With the return of water, maybe the ducks can learn to swim again."

While those species that depend on sufficient water will do well, there are others that presumably were affected by the harsh winter. But as I've said in the past, the state's wildlife never fails to amaze me with its resiliency. Based on reports throughout winter, we thought the deer population was going to be hit hard. While it did go down, it wasn't nearly to the level we were anticipating. In fact, we still plan on having early doe seasons in the northeastern and southwestern portions of the state to reduce those populations to desirable levels. This issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* will explain the purpose and need for those early seasons in detail.

We definitely thought North Dakota's pheasant population was going to experience a substantial decline following months of tough weather. Past winters of similar intensity and duration resulted in dramatic reductions in the pheasant population. But once again, the pheasants showed us that they can survive. Crowing counts (those that indicate rooster abundance from one spring to the next) were definitely down from 2008, but higher than the previous three years. While the jury is still out on pheasant nesting success and brood size, the state's pheasant population should be fine if the weather cooperates.

Overall, fishing has been nothing short of phenomenal in some areas and certainly pretty good across the state as a whole. This means fall fishing will likely be the same as temperatures dip the other way.

This summer, whether you're fishing, water skiing, towing your kids around on wake boards, or doing whatever it is you enjoy doing, please use courtesy and common sense. Remember that the lakes, rivers and reservoirs belong to us all.

Be safe and enjoy your summer in North Dakota's great open spaces.

Terry Steinwand