

BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor



There was a time that reports of nesting bald eagles in North Dakota were truly rare.

Public Asked to Report Bald Eagle Nest Sightings

Anyone seeing a bald eagle nest this spring is encouraged to report the sighting to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

Sandra Johnson, Department nongame biologist, emphasizes the Department is looking for nest locations, not eagle sightings.

Johnson said it is easy to distinguish an eagle nest because of its enormous size. "They stand out because of the large tree and the size of the nest," she said.

Eagle nests can be found statewide, but most likely east of the Missouri River. "Historically, eagle nests were found along the Missouri River," Johnson said. "But over the past decade they have been seen in the Red River Valley, and have been observed in many parts of the state along streams and mid-to-large-sized lakes, and even in unique areas such as shelterbelts surrounded by cropland."

Nest observations should be reported to Johnson at (701) 328-6382, or by e-mail at ndgf@nd.gov. Johnson asks observers not to disturb the nest, and to stay away at a safe distance. "It is important not to approach the nest as foot traffic will disturb the bird, likely causing the eagle to leave her eggs unattended," she said.

Amendment to 2008-10 Fishing Proclamation

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department announces the following summary of changes to the 2008-10 North Dakota Fishing Proclamation and Guide.

- Stump Lake in Nelson County has been added to the list of waters allowing a northern pike daily limit of five and a possession limit of 10. The reasoning is that Stump Lake is now connected to Devils Lake and fish swim freely between the two. The pike limit on Devils Lake has been five for years, and given a strong population throughout the system, the inclusion of Stump Lake helps standardize the fishing regulations.
- Legal archery and spearing equipment for licensed anglers may also include the use of night vision equipment or electronically enhanced light-gathering optics – including flashlights and lanterns – as an aid in locating and/or shooting at fish.
- Archery, spear and underwater spearfishing will be legal from May 1 through September 30. The 2008-10 proclamation and guide has the closing date printed as November 30.



Game and Fish Summarizes 2008 Deer Gun Season

North Dakota deer hunters took more than 91,000 deer during the 2008 deer gun hunting season, a 7 percent decline from the 98,000 harvested in 2007, according to statistics released by the state Game and Fish Department.

The Game and Fish Department allocated 149,400 deer gun licenses in 2008, and more than 96 percent were issued to hunters. Overall hunter success was 70 percent.

Hunter success for antlered white-tailed deer was 79 percent, and antlerless whitetail was 77 percent. Mule deer buck success was 72 percent, while mule deer doe hunters had a success rate of 83 percent. Hunters with any-antlered licenses

had a success rate of 68 percent, while any-antlerless license holders had a success rate of 70 percent.

Heavy snow covered much of the state opening weekend, with the heaviest band extending from southwestern North Dakota through the Devils Lake region. Despite 10 inches of snow in Mott and 15 in Velva, hunting success in Unit 3E1 was 82 percent, and overall success in Unit 3A4 was 77 percent.

However, hunter success was down from previous years throughout the Red River Valley and much of the Sheyenne and James river systems. Bill Jensen, big game biologist, said the success rate was 60 percent in Unit 2A and 51 percent in Unit 2B.

A seven-day September antlerless deer season in northeastern North Dakota (Units 2C and 2D) was implemented early enough to ensure mild weather conditions. The objective was to give hunters an additional opportunity to reduce the deer population in the northeast. "We believe it was successful as 23 percent of the hunters



RON WILSON

with antlerless licenses in the two units participated," Jensen said, while mentioning that approximately 690 does, or about 10 percent of the total doe harvest in the two units, were harvested in the seven-day season.

By January, significant snow cover in much of the state allowed the Game and Fish Department to conduct a statewide winter aerial deer survey for the first time in more than a decade. Aerial surveys

showed stable to increasing deer numbers in the north central, southwestern and southeastern (except for Unit 2G1) portions of the state. Results in the northeast were mixed, with deer numbers in Unit 2C stable to decreasing, 2D stable to increasing and 2E declining.

Concerns over how the severe winter affected the population prompted a second survey of some areas in March. The follow-up survey in central North Dakota showed a 10 percent decline from January in Units 2K1 and 2K2, and a 35 percent decrease in 2J1 and 2J2.

Department biologists have determined recommendations for deer licenses in the 2009 deer proclamation, which was sent to the governor's office for approval in late April.

Deer license numbers are determined by evaluating hunter harvest and deer survey data, deer-vehicle collision reports, depredation reports, and comments from the public, landowners and Department field staff.

Deer Hunting, Free Fishing Reminders



Application deadline for the 2009 deer gun and muzzleloader seasons is June 3.

Applicants can access the Game and Fish Department's website at gf.nd.gov to submit a lottery application online, or to print an application for mailing. The online application feature should be active by about mid-May. Lottery and gratis applications will be available at Game and Fish offices, county auditors and license vendors. You can also apply by calling 800-406-6409.

Readers are also reminded that everyone fishes for free June 6-7. This is the weekend North Dakota residents may fish without a license. Refer to the 2008-10 North Dakota Fishing Guide for regulations and season information.



CRAIG BIRRE

Adult bighorn sheep came through winter in North Dakota's badlands in good shape.

Bighorn Survey Shows Healthy Population

Based on the state Game and Fish Department's annual bighorn sheep survey, biologists believe North Dakota's tough winter didn't significantly harm the bighorn population. In fact, statistics show the population likely increased from last year.

Brett Wiedmann, Department big game biologist, Dickinson, said lamb recruitment was at 35 percent, about average in North Dakota, but lamb survival was exceptional as 80 percent of lambs counted during summer survived the winter.

"Based on the high number of recruited lambs observed in the population, we are optimistic that the adult segment of the state's bighorn sheep population came through the winter in good shape as well," Wiedmann said.

Each summer, typically in August, Game and Fish Department biologists count and classify all sheep. Biologists then recount lambs in March to determine lamb recruitment.

In all, biologists counted 313 bighorn sheep, 11 percent above 2007 and 35 percent higher than the five-year average. The northern badlands' population was up 14 percent from last year, while the southern badlands' population saw a 4 percent increase.

All total, 96 rams, 167 ewes and 50 lambs were counted – record highs for each.

A big influence on the health of the population is attributed to bighorn sheep transplanted from Montana in January 2006. "These robust sheep are doing amazingly well, in fact you can say they are thriving," Wiedmann said. "All their lambs made it through this year's tough winter unscathed."

The only negative, according to Wiedmann, was the ram-to-ewe ratio was on the lower end, at about 57 rams per 100 ewes. "We would like to have that number between 60-70 rams per 100 ewes," he said.

Wiedmann knows there was some winter mortality, especially in the northern badlands, but the extent won't be known until the 2009 summer survey. "The 2008 adult numbers do not reflect winter mortality," Wiedmann said. "Consequently, just to be cautious, we reduced the number of hunting licenses available in 2009 from six to five."

Investing in Bighorn Sheep

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department received two checks totaling \$65,000 at the March Minnesota-Wisconsin Chapter of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep annual meeting.

North Dakota's 2009 bighorn sheep auction license, which allows the winning bidder the rare privilege of pursuing a North

Dakota bighorn on a self-guided hunt, sold for \$40,000. In addition, the Department received an annual grant of \$25,000.

The grant and license auction are part of a 10-year agreement between the Department and Minnesota-Wisconsin FNAWS.

Weekly Webcast Broadcasts

Be sure to check out North Dakota Outdoors Online, the Game and Fish Department's weekly video news broadcast, for upcoming regional fishing reports from Game and Fish Department district fisheries biologists.

Outdoors Online is available on the Internet (gf.nd.gov) and can be seen on eight community access channels around the state.

- Grand Forks
GFTV Channel 2 – Saturday, 10 p.m.
UND Studio One Channel 3 – Monday, 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.
- Dickinson
Consolidated Channel 18 – Monday, 6 p.m. and 8 p.m.

- Fargo
TV Fargo Channel 99 – Thursday, noon, and Sunday, 7 p.m.
- Bismarck
Community Access Cable Channel 12, Thursday, 9:30 p.m.
- Jamestown
Cable Services, The Replay Channel, CSi Channel 10
- Steele
BEK Sports Channel 8, Tuesday and Thursday, 6:20 p.m.
- Minot
Cable Channel 19, time to be determined.



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