



## MATTERS OF OPINION



**Terry Steinwand**  
*Director*

Fall is here. While I enjoyed the cool summer, our early autumn weather was far too nice in my opinion. Being of northern European descent, I prefer cooler temperatures over what I consider blistering heat, which is anything above 80 degrees.

Yet, the nicer weather certainly assisted late crops to mature, helping our agricultural neighbors remove crops from the field, while holding some doves in the state later than normal. Typically, small grains are done by early September and doves are gone close to Labor Day. But this isn't a typical year by any stretch. And if the Old Farmer's Almanac is accurate, which I hope it isn't, we're expected to have a winter similar to last year.

The winter of 2008-09 was brutal for most of the state and we thought many of our game species populations were going to be considerably reduced. As usual, they surprised us in their ability to survive. While deer numbers are down slightly, they are higher than anticipated.

Upland game bird numbers are also down, but pheasant crowing counts weren't as low as we anticipated. Even so, we digested the information with cautious optimism since we weren't really sure what the hard winter and cool, wet spring actually meant for hens. Well, it meant they were down, too, which affected brood size.

To get a better picture, however, you have to compare this information not only to the previous year, but to a series of past years. By doing so, bird numbers are in much better shape than in most years past. This translates into tremendous hunting opportunities once again.

And the opportunities are plentiful for all ages. With wet spring conditions and adequate nesting habitat, duck numbers in most parts of the state are phenomenal. I know they're not record-setting, but if

early season observations where I hunt are any indication, they're record-setting in my book.

The last legislative session brought about some changes in hunting opportunities, specifically for youth. It's now legal for 12- and 13-year-olds to hunt whitetail does only. Going in, we didn't know what kind of participation this would bring, but more than 1,500 12- and 13-year-olds took advantage of this during the youth deer season. In addition, we had one of the highest application rates of 14- and 15-year-olds during that same time frame. This means exceptionally good things for the future of hunting in North Dakota. I know the phrase is over used, but youth are the future of hunting in North Dakota.

As fall slides into winter, we'll be closely watching weather forecasts, hoping the aforementioned Old Farmer's Almanac is inaccurate. If not, we'll be as prepared as possible to deal with heavy snows once again. In this issue there is important information concerning those individuals who store livestock feed for winter use. While we respond to situations of deer getting into stored feed as soon as we can, the article gives some good advice on how to minimize these kinds of challenges.

While we prepare for winter of any kind, let's first enjoy fall of North Dakota. Fall fishing can be some of the finest in the nation, and the hunting just as good. Let's not forget that while the goal of hunting or fishing is to harvest what we're after, it's not always obtaining a limit or getting the biggest. It's the value of being outdoors and enjoying what North Dakota has always been able to provide – good friends, neighbors and family. Plus, of course, a chance to spend quality time in the great North Dakota outdoors.

*Terry Steinwand*