

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
\$2.00 OCTOBER 2011





MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

Finally, the time of year many of us anxiously await is here, the fall hunting season. I don't know where summer went, but with the frenetic activity involved with issues that affected many lives, it's easy to understand how it slipped away.

From the beginning of September to the first of November, there's hardly a weekend when another hunting season doesn't begin – deer bowhunting, upland game, youth waterfowl, youth deer, pheasant, and the list goes on. We are truly in a state where the opportunities are endless if we take time to enjoy them.

It doesn't seem that long ago when the Missouri River was overflowing its banks and causing damage from Montana to South Dakota and beyond. Fishing activity basically ceased and efforts focused on recovery efforts.

I should know better, but Game and Fish Department staff never cease to amaze me. I wasn't sure how many ramps would be available on the Missouri River from Garrison Dam to the Lake Oahe headwaters, but once again our fisheries development staff kicked into gear an extraordinary effort to clean sediment from long-flooded ramps and assessed the safety and use of those areas. Within a week, a number of ramps considered unusable until next year were up and running, providing access to a good late summer/early fall walleye bite. This crew, which is just a staff of three, didn't stop there as they

provided access to anglers across the state.

Fall in North Dakota provides many opportunities, but also creates the challenge of what to do each day? Go hunting? Go fishing? It's a great quandary to have.

Having grown up in central North Dakota, the only pheasants I remember seeing were on the north shore of Lake Sakakawea, and certainly not in great numbers. Around the mid-1980s, pheasant and sharp-tailed grouse started showing up on the landscape with more frequency. This was largely due to an increase in habitat, mainly Conservation Reserve Program acres, and some mild winters that provided good overwinter survival. While CRP is still on the landscape, the acreage is diminishing annually, along with the number of upland game birds.

Game and Fish Department staff is working to maintain habitat, while teaming with other state and federal agencies on conservation issues in the farm bill. But losing up to 2 million CRP acres will eventually mean fewer animals on the landscape. We'll survive, but we'll have to adjust our expectations.

Enjoy all that North Dakota has to offer this fall season, but also remember to be courteous to fellow hunters and landowners. While some wildlife populations are down from previous years, it will still be a great fall. Be safe and have fun in the great North Dakota outdoors.

Terry Steinwand

DEPARTMENT DIRECTORY

Governor Jack Dalrymple
ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION
Game and Fish Director: Terry Steinwand
Deputy Director: Roger Rostvet
Chief, Administrative Services: Kim Molesworth
Business Manager: Corey Wentland
Administrative Assistant: GERALYN M. EVANS
Administrative Officer/Building Maint. Supvr: George Lee
Building Maint. Tech: Dustin Repnow
Chief Accountant: Terry Kreiter
Accountants: Kelly Wike, Melissa Long
Data Processing Coordinator: Randy Meissner
Information Technology Coordinators: Jerry Gulke, Alan Reile, Sally Sorensen
GIS Specialist: Brian Hosok
License Section Supervisor: Vacant
Assistants: Gail Mosset, Katherine Mernitz, Janet Wolf, Amanda Schroeter

Administrative Assistant - Dickinson: Janel Kolar
Administrative Assistant - Devils Lake: Lisa Tofte
Administrative Assistant - Jamestown: Tonya Kukowski
Administrative Assistant - Riverdale: Clare Renner
CONSERVATION AND COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION
Division Chief: Greg Link, Bismarck
Administrative and Water Safety Coordinator: Nancy Boldt, Bismarck
Communications Supervisor: Craig Bihrl, Bismarck
Editor, North Dakota OUTDOORS: Ron Wilson, Bismarck
Website Editor: Pat Headrick, Bismarck
News Editor: Greg Freeman, Bismarck
Video News Director: Tom Jensen, Bismarck
Videographer: Mike Anderson, Bismarck
Information Specialist: Dawn Jochim, Bismarck
Graphic Artist: Connie Schiff, Bismarck
Outreach Supervisor: Chris D. Grondahl, Bismarck
Outreach Biologists: Doug Leier, West Fargo; Greg Gullickson, Minot; Marty Egeland, Grand Forks; Pat Lothspeich, Bismarck
Education Coordinator: Jeff Long, Bismarck
Hunter Education Coordinator: Jon Hanson, Bismarck
Conservation Supervisor: Steve Dyke, Bismarck
Resource Biologists: Alexis Duxbury, John Schumacher, Bruce Krefit, Bismarck
Conservation Biologists: Sandra Johnson, Patrick Isakson, Bismarck

ENFORCEMENT DIVISION
Division Chief: Robert Timian, Bismarck
Investigations Supvr: Bruce Burkett, Bismarck
Investigator: Scott Winkelman, Bismarck
Pilot: Amy Jo Brown, Bismarck
Region No. 1 Warden Supvr: Corey Erck, Jamestown
District Wardens: Mark Pollert, Jamestown; Erik Schmidt, Linton; Tim Phalen, Wyndmere; James Myhre, Dawson; Andrew Dahlgren, Edgeley
Region No. 2 Warden Supvr: Paul Freeman, Devils Lake
District Wardens: Gene Masse, New Rockford; Kurt Aufforth, Cando; Gary Rankin, Larimore; Michael Sedlacek, Cavalier; Randy Knain, Rugby; Josh Frey, Devils Lake
Region No. 3 Warden Supvr: Daryl Kleyer, Williston
District Wardens: Brent Schwan, Watford City; Michael Raasakka, Stanley; Jim Burud, Kenmare; Al Howard, Minot; Cory Detloff, Williston
Region No. 4 Warden Supvr: Dan Hoenke, Dickinson
District Wardens: Bill Schaller, Killdeer; Arthur Cox, Bowman; Courtney Sprenger, Elgin; Jeff Violett, Mandan; Jerad Bluem, Belfield
Region No. 5 Warden Supvr: Doug Olson, Riverdale
District Wardens: Jackie Lundstrom, Bismarck; Ryan Tunge, Hazen; Tim Larson, Turtle Lake, Ken Skurza, Riverdale
Administrative Assistants: Lori Kensington, Bismarck

WILDLIFE DIVISION
Division Chief: Randy Kreil, Bismarck
Assistant Division Chief: Jeb Williams, Bismarck
Game Mgt. Section Leader: Michael A. Johnson, Bismarck
Procurement Officer: Ray Parsons, Bismarck
Pilot: Jeff Faught, Bismarck
Upland Game Mgt. Supvr: Stan Kohn, Bismarck
Upland Game Mgt. Biologist: Aaron Robinson, Dickinson
Migratory Game Bird Biologist: Mike Szymanski, Bismarck
Big Game Mgt. Supvr: Bruce Stillings, Dickinson
Big Game Mgt. Biologists: Bill Jensen, Bismarck; Brett Wiedmann, Dickinson, Jason Smith, Jamestown
Wildlife Veterinarian: Dr. Daniel Grove, Bismarck
Furbearer Biologist: Stephanie Tucker, Bismarck
Game Management Technician: Vacant
Wildlife Resource Management Section Leader: Scott Peterson, Lonetree
Wildlife Resource Mgt. Supvrs: Brian Prince, Devils Lake; Kent Luttschwager, Williston; Brian Kietzman, Jamestown; Dan Halstead, Riverdale
Wildlife Resource Mgt. Biologists: Arvid Anderson, Riverdale; Randy Littlefield, Lonetree; Rodd Compson, Jamestown; Judd Jasmer, Dickinson
Wildlife Techs: Tom Crutchfield, Jim Houston, Bismarck; Dan Morman, Robert Miller, Riverdale; Ernest Dawson, Jamestown; Morgan Johnson, Seth Gaugler, Lonetree; Alan Roller, Williston; Scott Olson, Devils Lake
Private Land Section Leader: Kevin Kading, Bismarck
Asst. Private Land Coordinator: Doug Howie, Bismarck
Private Land Field Operation Coordinator: Casey Anderson, Bismarck
Private Land Biologists: Jon Roaldson, Colin Penner, Terry Oswald, Jr., Bismarck; Ty Dressler, Dickinson; John Bauer, Riverdale; Ryan Huber, Williston; Nathan Harling, Devils Lake; Renae Heinle, Jamestown
Administrative Assistant: Dale Repnow, Bismarck
Lonetree Administrative Assistant: Diana Raugust, Harvey

FISHERIES DIVISION
Division Chief: Greg Power, Bismarck
Fisheries Mgt. Section Leader: Scott Gangl, Bismarck
Northwest District Supvr: Fred Ryckman, Williston
Southwest District Supvr: Jeff Hendrickson, Dickinson
North Central District Supvr: Jason Lee, Riverdale
South Central District Supvr: Paul Bailey, Bismarck
Northeast District Supvr: Randy Hiltner, Devils Lake
Southeast District Supvr: Gene Van Eeckhout, Jamestown
District Fisheries Biologist: Brandon Kratz, Jamestown
Missouri River System Supvr: David Fryda, Riverdale
Missouri River System Biologist: Russ Kinzler, Riverdale
Fisheries Techs: Shane Shefstad, Williston; Phil Miller, Devils Lake; Pat John, Jamestown; Justen Barstad, Bismarck; Brian Frohlich, Riverdale; Jeff Merchant, Dickinson
Production/Development Section Supvr: Jerry Weigel, Bismarck
Aquatic Habitat Supvr: Scott Elstad, Bismarck
Fisheries Development Supvr: Bob Frohlich, Bismarck
Fisheries Dev. Proj. Mgr.: Bill Haase, Bismarck
Fisheries Development Technician: Wesley Erdle, Bismarck
ANS Coordinator: Lynn Schlueter, Devils Lake
Administrative Assistant: Janice Vetter, Bismarck

ADVISORY BOARD
District 1 Jason Leiseth, Arnegard
District 2 Robert Gjellstad, Voltaire
District 3 Tracy Gardner, Devils Lake
District 4 Ronald Houdek, Tolan
District 5 Loran Palmer, West Fargo
District 6 Joel Christoferson, Litchville
District 7 Frank Kartch, Bismarck
District 8 Wayne Gerbig, Amidon

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

The mission of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department is to protect, conserve and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitats for sustained public consumptive and nonconsumptive use.

Editor: Ron Wilson Graphic Designer: Connie Schiff Circulation Manager: Dawn Jochim

OCTOBER 2011 • NUMBER 3 • VOLUME LXXIV

TABLE OF CONTENTS

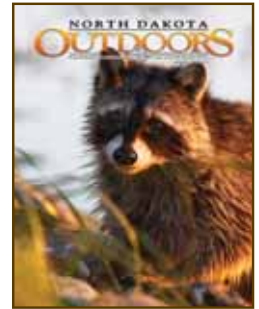
FEATURES

Flood Fallout Along the Missouri River System..... 4
Roller Coaster Ways of Ringnecks 10
Check Stations: A Fall (and Summer) Routine..... 16

DEPARTMENTS

From Both Sides: Five Pike per Day? 2
Buffaloberry Patch 20
Back Cast 25

Front cover: A raccoon foraging along a North Dakota wetland. Photo by Craig Bihrl, Bismarck.



Official Publication of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (ISSN 0029-2761)
100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095
Website: gf.nd.gov • email: ndgfn@nd.gov
Information (701) 328-6300 • Administration (701) 328-6305
Hunter Education (701) 328-6615 • Licensing (701) 328-6335
24-Hour Licensing by Phone: (800) 406-6409
The TTY/TTD (Relay ND) number for the hearing or speech impaired is (800) 366-6888

North Dakota OUTDOORS is published 10 times a year, monthly except for the months of April and September. Subscription rates are \$10 for one year or \$20 for three years. Group rates of \$7 a year are available to organizations presenting 25 or more subscriptions. Remittance should be by check or money order payable to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. Indicate if subscription is new or renewal. The numbers on the upper right corner of the mailing label indicate the date of the last issue a subscriber will receive unless the subscription is renewed.

Permission to reprint materials appearing in North Dakota OUTDOORS must be obtained from the author, artist or photographer. We encourage contributions; contact the editor for writer and photography guidelines prior to submission.

The NDGFD receives federal financial assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the NDGFD joins the U.S. Department of the Interior and its bureaus in prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex (in education programs or activities) and also religion for the NDGFD. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or you desire further information, please write to: N. D. Game and Fish Department, Attn: Chief Administrative Services, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095 or to: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Attn: Civil Rights Coordinator, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Mail Stop: MBSP-4020, Arlington, Virginia 22203.

Periodical Postage Paid at Bismarck, ND 58501 and additional entry offices. Printed in the United States

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: North Dakota OUTDOORS 100 North Bismarck Expressway Bismarck, ND 58501-5095

Report All Poachers (RAP) 800-472-2121

In cooperation with North Dakota Wildlife Federation and North Dakota State Radio.

Five Pike per Day?

In September of 1973, North Dakota Governor Art Link signed an order that changed the minimum length limit for northern pike caught from Devils Lake from 24 inches to 20 inches.

The short explanation is that State Game and Fish Department biologists felt the lake was in imminent danger of significant winterkill, and they wanted anglers to take advantage of a high pike population that consisted mainly of fish less than 24 inches long, but greater than 20 inches.

Earlier that year, Game and Fish had set the length limit at 24 inches to allow pike stocked in the previous couple of years to grow up. In the early 1970s the lake was just becoming deep enough to support fish life over the long term, but apparently 1973 was dry enough to send the lake level in the other direction.

In the last 60 years, this is one of the few instances that Game and Fish has changed northern pike regula-

tions. For decades, the daily limit held at three, while a few specific lakes had length restrictions, most of which were removed over time. Currently, only North Golden Lake and South Golden Lake in Steele County, and Red Willow Lake in Griggs County have a 24-inch minimum length restriction on pike.

The only change in limits for pike also involved Devils Lake (and the surrounding area), when in 2000 Game and Fish increased the daily limit from three to five in all the waters in Benson, Ramsey and Eddy counties. Later, Stump Lake in Nelson County was included when it became connected to Devils Lake.

At the time of the minimum size change in 1973, the Devils Lake surface elevation stood at around 1,422 feet mean sea level. Today, Devils Lake is more than 30 feet higher than that, and its pike population has even improved from the level that prompted the daily limit increase in 2000.



CRAIG BHIRLE

Many North Dakota lakes will have northern pike like this one over the next few years. Game and Fish biologists are trying to decide whether to increase the statewide pike limit from three to five daily so anglers can better take advantage of this pike population surge.

In recent years, a surge in the wet cycle that began in summer 1993 has created conditions in many North Dakota waters, including the Missouri River System, that favor high northern pike populations. In fact, today the state has more than 750,000 fishable acres of water. Because of that, Game and Fish is considering whether to expand the current five-pike limit in the Devils Lake region to all lakes statewide.

If this occurs, it would take effect April 1, 2012 with the start of a new two-year fishing proclamation.

The decision to take a look at the pike limit is not necessarily driven by overwhelming public input. While the northern pike is North Dakota's state fish and a large billboard along U.S. Highway 83 once proclaimed Garrison Reservoir (Lake Sakakawea) as the "Pike Capital of the Nation," many state anglers aren't exactly fond of pike and would seldom keep three, let alone five fish.

Some of the aversion to pike stems from their heavy mucous or "slime" coating, while other anglers shy away from eating them because of bones in the fillets. While you can't do much about the slime, which all fish have to some degree, it is relatively simple to remove the bones from pike. Game and Fish has instructions for doing just that on its website at gf.nd.gov/fishing. Once the bones are removed, pike are excellent table fare.

At the same time, some anglers have discovered or even rediscovered the excitement of northern pike and would happily extend their fishing day to secure five pike instead of three.

A common question often fielded by staff biologists over the years has been "why isn't the pike limit just the same as walleye at five a day." Intuition might suggest the more popular, relatively less abundant walleye would have the lower limit, but more than a half-century ago when biologists established the forerunners to today's limits, pike were the more highly sought fish. For example, in 1956 the pike limit was three, with an 18-inch minimum while anglers could keep five walleyes with no minimum length requirement.

The limits eventually became somewhat of a tradition, and with a few exceptions, have stayed the same even though angler preference has shifted over the last 40 years.

Game and Fish biologists are trying to determine if this is the right time to break that tradition. Following are some points of consideration for raising the pike limit, **From Both Sides**.

One Side

- North Dakota has a record number of lakes that contain pike.
- Many lakes that contain pike have a record number of fish, especially those lakes north and east of the Missouri River.
- Many of these pike populations receive little fishing effort and some are virtually untapped.
- Many smaller lakes have a top end to how large pike can grow (generally only 8 pounds or less), thus there is no need to protect fish so they can grow to a larger size.
- Opportunities for pike fishing should only get better in the next 2-4 years.
- Current pike populations are not sustainable over the long term, so anglers might as well harvest them.
- A daily limit of five pike makes regulations consistent statewide.
- Pike are often easy to catch and can provide a lot of excitement for anglers in open water and through the ice.
- Once the Y-bones are removed, pike provide a tasty and healthy meal.

The Other Side

- North Dakota has had a statewide daily limit of three pike for more than 50 years.
- A few small lakes might attract heavier fishing pressure which could lead to overharvest.
- In larger water systems, some anglers might target stringers of trophy pike. While harvest of large fish is not detrimental to a healthy pike population, it does create concern among some anglers. If Game and Fish does propose a daily limit of five, there is discussion about adding a "one-over" length limit to it, such as only one fish over 36 or 40 inches.
- A higher pike limit could increase conflict between traditional anglers and those who darkhouse spearfish.
- When pike populations go down, as they inevitably will, Game and Fish would reduce the limit back to three. This could possibly create confusion among anglers, but perhaps not to a greater degree than current regulations which have different pike limits in different parts of the state.

What do you think? To pass along your comments, send us an email at ndgff@nd.gov; call us at (701) 328-6300; or write North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501.



FLOOD FALLOUT ALONG THE

By Ron Wilson

Flooded roads are included on a long list of damages caused by Missouri River floodwater on Game and Fish Department wildlife management areas. All but the trees in this photo were flooded in June (see photo on Page 5). Once the water went down, vegetation started to grow back rather quickly.

Measuring the fallout of a 500-year flood to state-owned and managed wildlife areas along the length of the Missouri River in North Dakota is ongoing. But as flood waters began retreating in late summer and early fall, Game and Fish Department officials got a taste for what's ahead.

Some of what they've encountered was expected. Yet, there were some surprises. Not many, but some.

south of Mandan didn't fare as well. "It's a different story over there in terms of roads and access," Williams said. "At Schmidt Bottoms, there's a significant chunk of property that was completely washed away ... it's just gone. Along with that, some of the crop fields used for food plots suffered significant deposition in terms of silt and sand. They will probably never be used as farm fields again."

MISSOURI RIVER SYSTEM

"You'd expect acres and acres of wildlife habitat to be silted in or simply washed away," said Jeb Williams, Game and Fish Department assistant wildlife division chief. "While that was the case in some areas, there was some good news."

The popular MacLean Bottoms gun range, located downstream of Bismarck on Oahe Wildlife Management Area, made it through the high water better than anticipated, Williams said. "In terms of the roads, pistol, centerfire and shotgun ranges ... they were in reasonably good shape," he said.

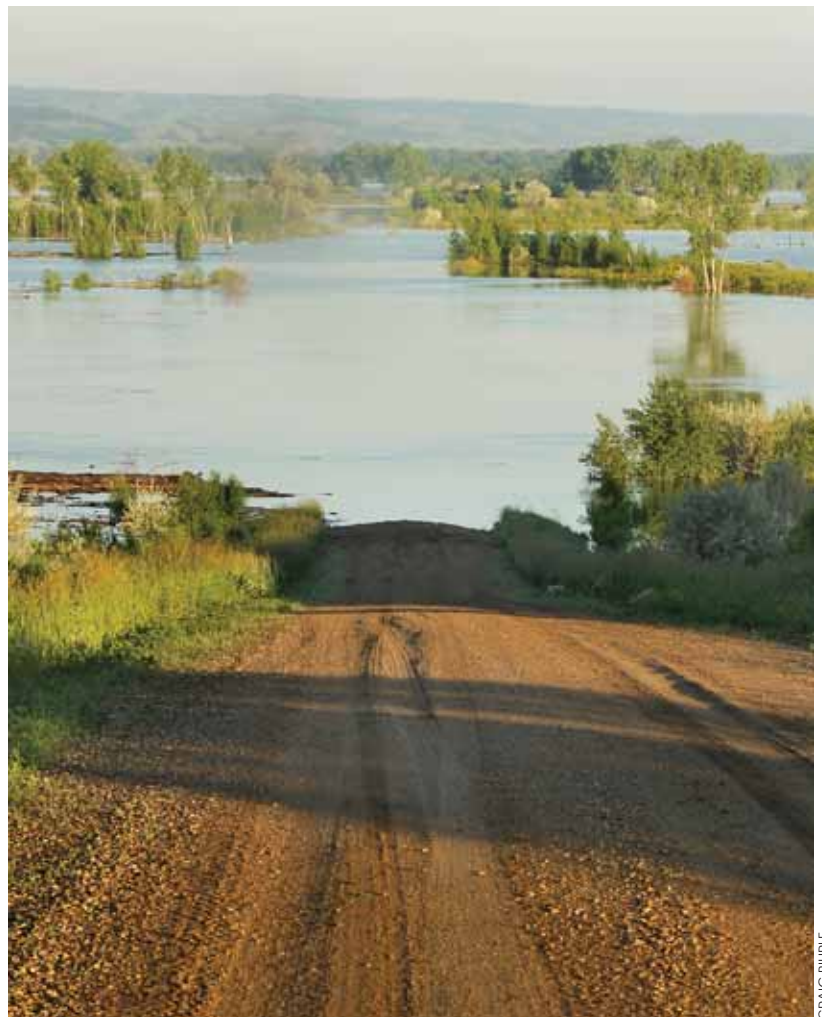
Even so, the gun range is closed until further notice because of the cleanup required. "The gun range is a busy, popular place and there will be some displaced shooters for a while," Williams said. "We removed snow last winter to keep it open so people would have another winter activity. We also spent \$25,000 to move the pistol range to make it more user-friendly. For a time, there will be some people who are going to feel a little lost without it."

While other area gun ranges will take up some of the slack from shooters, Williams said it's important to eventually get the MacLean Bottoms range up and running from a safety standpoint.

"If people don't have a place to shoot, they are going to create a place, and who knows where that will be," he said. "We want them shooting in an environment where safety is always the top concern."

Schmidt Bottoms range south of Mandan and Riverdale Wildlife Management Area range near Riverdale remain open. Shooters need to understand that the Schmidt range is relatively small and will likely be crowded during fall.

On the west side of the river, parts of Oahe WMA



The same road as pictured on Page 4, at the peak water level in late June. At that time, Game and Fish biologists didn't know what the habitat would look like when the water receded.

CRAIG BIHRE

From Williston to south of Bismarck-Mandan, more than half of 72,000 wildlife management area acres along the Missouri River aren't yet fit to hold the interest of wildlife or hunters. Months of high water have deposited tons of silt, covering grasses and other wildlife habitat. Standing water remains in many areas and it's only a guess when it will dry.

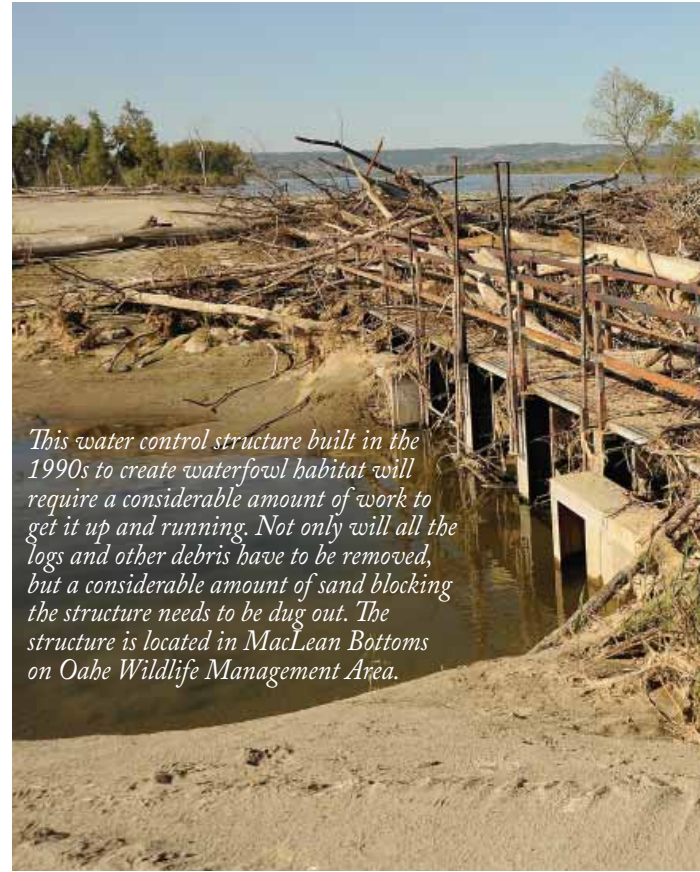
"The wildlife value on Oahe WMA, Lewis and

hunting opportunities, depending on access. "There's going to be water in the bottoms, that's a given, but what kind of cover there is left for hunter concealment is yet to be determined," he said. "But you would have to think that these areas will be a stop for migrating waterfowl headed south this fall."

Kent Luttschwager, Game and Fish Department wildlife resource management supervisor, Williston,



GREG FREEMAN



This water control structure built in the 1990s to create waterfowl habitat will require a considerable amount of work to get it up and running. Not only will all the logs and other debris have to be removed, but a considerable amount of sand blocking the structure needs to be dug out. The structure is located in MacLean Bottoms on Oahe Wildlife Management Area.

MIKE ANDERSON



Untold acres of shoreline (top) eroded as the Missouri River left its banks. Some of the parking lot at Kimball Bottoms (Desert) boat ramp (bottom) was lost due to months of high water. The ramp is closed indefinitely due to deteriorating ramp conditions.

Clark WMA near Williston and others along the Missouri River is certainly diminished this fall and winter," Williams said. "Animals accustomed to wintering in the river bottoms will seek refuge somewhere else when the weather turns. In places it's swampy and will likely remain that way for some time. In a few places there is grass and shrub growth that could provide some winter shelter.

"There isn't a doubt that a lot of people who annually hunt and recreate in the river bottoms will be left with lost opportunities this fall," he added. "People will have to plan accordingly and recreate elsewhere."

On the other hand, Williams said flooded river bottoms could create some wonderful waterfowl

said Lewis and Clark WMA was once home to some of the most prolific wildlife habitat in the region, and was popular with hunters. "Some exceptional wildlife habitat has been covered in water for several months," he said. "We have also some damage to our infrastructure in roads and fences that will need to be repaired. We also have flooded oil wells, flooded propane tanks and huge, downed trees blocking access. It's going to take some time to recover."

Not all areas along the river were affected the same by flooding. Dan Halstead, Department wildlife resource management supervisor, Riverdale, said Riverdale WMA, unlike Oahe and Lewis and Clark, was only inundated with high water for maybe a week as water quickly made its way back into the channel. "We are going to have some vegetation issues, but the river bottom in this area is in better condition than Bismarck and Williston, just because of the prolonged impact of overland flooding in those areas," he said.

The Garrison Dam spillway channel, which runs through Riverdale WMA, has taken on a new look because of the weeks-long pulse of water running through the area. The channel that was once 30 yards wide is now 200 yards wide.

Issues concerning vegetation will stretch along the length of the Missouri from Williston to beyond Bismarck. "A big challenge, considering all the barren

budget this biennium."

Williams said one of the fall chores for Game and Fish officials is to continue to assess the fallout of the prolonged flood. "We will be creating a priority list of what we can get done this fall, what can wait until spring and what we can afford," he said. "Creating this list will depend on our ability to access some of the areas because of the water remaining."



This food plot field in the Graner Bottoms area on the west side of the Missouri is partially covered by more than a foot of silt, leaving its future use uncertain.

landscape up and down the river, will be noxious weeds," Williams said. "One of the first things you have to worry about is the emergence of Canada thistle."

While river bottom wildlife has no use for Canada thistle, they do favor the native and tame grasses, legumes and forbs planted by Game and Fish in the past. Williams said reseeding of such habitat is a priority, but because of a number of unknowns and water still covering much of the landscape, he said reseeding might not be a possibility this fall, but more likely next spring.

"Access will be an issue for reseeding," he said. "One of the things we'd like to look at is an aerial seeding project just because of the terrain and the habitat we are dealing with."

Be it aerial seeding, repairing or rebuilding infrastructure, it's going to cost. Money to recover from a flood of this magnitude is certainly a concern. "This could get real expensive," said Randy Kreil, Department wildlife division chief. "We don't have that kind of money in our

Because a flood of this nature is new to everyone, Williams said there are a number of unknowns. One is the health of standing cottonwoods and regeneration of new stands of trees. For certain, some mature trees were toppled when high winds stormed across the state more than once in summer.

"Nobody has been through this ... a 3- to 5-month flood," he said. "Who knows

how the trees are going to react to this. Some people are saying the big cottonwoods are going to be OK, but I can't believe we are not going to have some tree loss. If tree loss is significant, it will drastically change the landscape."

There has been little cottonwood regeneration along the Missouri River since Garrison Dam was built, and there is still some question whether seeds were dropped at the right time this summer to foster new growth. "We've been dealing with the same old stand of cottonwoods along the river for years and it would be good to have some new blood," Williams said.

Only time will tell, which might as well be the slogan for the recovery effort along the Missouri River. "It is going to take some time," Williams said. "It will likely be awhile before the river bottoms are going to look like how people remember them from years earlier."

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

*Oahe WMA
overlook late
June, 2011.*



CRAIG BIHRLE

Statewide Glance

It's difficult to assess damage from high water to wildlife management areas around the state because the focus seemingly always returns to the Missouri River System.

Of the 200,000-plus WMA acres in North Dakota, more than a third of those acres are associated with the Missouri River System. "While we had some issues on WMAs away from the Missouri River, they weren't as significant as you'd find along the river," said Scott Peterson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife resource management section leader. "We had some minor washouts on roads, some damage to dams, things like that."

On Lonetree WMA, the state's largest wildlife management area at about 33,000 acres, Peterson said road repairs have been a priority. "We fixed a road leading into a campground, so now we are whole again," he said. "The things we've had to deal with haven't been overwhelming."

Peterson said many high water issues Department personnel dealt with in spring and summer at Lonetree, Wakopa WMA in the Turtles Mountains and elsewhere were not out of the ordinary.

"Road and trail washouts and those kinds of things are issues we deal with most years with a heavy runoff," he said. "I'm not sure the general public would even notice the impact from high water this time of year. What's important is to make sure people have access to our WMAs. With the exception of the Missouri River WMAs, we've done that."

*Same
general view
from Oahe
WMA, early
September,
2011.
Vegetation is
growing back
and standing
water may
provide
waterfowl
hunting
opportunities.*



CRAIG BIHRLE

Missouri River Access Work Continues

High water and strong flows not seen in at least 60 years damaged nearly two dozen boat ramps in varying degrees along the stretch of Missouri River from Garrison Dam to the South Dakota border.

“While some ramps were impacted more than others, most all of them experienced some erosion and really created some unsafe conditions,” said Bob Frohlich, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries development supervisor. “Some ramps have 2-5 feet of silt across the parking lot and access road . . . we’ve got others that have tons of debris, big logs that have washed in. Then there are others where we have lost 50-100 feet of shoreline, which may jeopardize the integrity of the ramps and parking lots.”

Work to remove silt and debris to

make as many boat ramps as possible usable for recreational boaters and anglers began in late summer and will continue through fall.

“When the water started dropping, we committed all our resources in fisheries development to removing silt, sand and logs at boat ramps,” he said.

By mid-October, Frohlich said most of the 22 ramps between the Tailrace and South Dakota will be useable. For updated boat ramp status on the entire Missouri River System in North Dakota, visit the Game and Fish Department’s website at nd.gf.gov.

“The ramps right in the Bismarck area are going to be the toughest ones to get up and running because they were impacted the most,” Frohlich said. “There will be two or three that won’t be open this fall.”

Kneifel Landing has 2-5 feet of sand across the entire parking lot and ramp and likely will not be open this year.

“The Bismarck Park District will solicit bids to remove the huge quantities of sand from Fox Island boat ramp and is looking to stabilize the eroded shoreline and reestablish the access road that was washed away,” Frohlich said.

In the short-term, work will continue up and down the river to remove silt, sand and logs, and install boat docks. “But it really doesn’t address some of the major, bigger issues we are seeing at these sites,” Frohlich said. “Shoreline erosion is a long-term issue that probably won’t get addressed next year or the year after. We are looking at some major riprap, shoreline stabilization projects.”




MIKE ANDERSON

As soon as flood waters receded, the Game and Fish Department fisheries development crew went to work on the large task of getting boat ramps along the Missouri River up and running.



MIKE ANDERSON

A photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, a dirt road or path runs through tall, dry grass. A wooden fence with a wire mesh runs along the right side of the path. In the distance, a person wearing a blue jacket and a red cap is walking towards the camera, holding a rifle. Another person is visible further down the path. The background shows a grassy hill under a clear blue sky with utility poles.

“Until 1963 there was a 9 a.m. opening for shooting upland game birds. It was a compromise between the sportsmen desiring to hunt in the morning hours and landowners not wanting to be roused out of bed before sunrise.” – Feathers from the Prairie

ROLLER COASTER WAYS

As gaudy as a circus clown but as inconspicuous as a house mouse when it needs to be, the ring-necked pheasant has long been a favorite of upland game bird hunters in North Dakota.

Introduced into the state in 1910 from hatchery stock, pheasants today feel as much a part of this Northern Plains landscape as barbed wire and weathered, forsaken buildings that lean a little south in surrender to never-tardy winter winds. But no matter what a generation of hunters might think, or

what eight decades of hunting seasons might suggest, these birds are not indigenous, they haven't always been here. Ring-necked pheasants are visitors with a sometimes tenuous – and sometimes not – toehold on the landscape, depending on weather, winter habitat, nesting and brooding cover, agricultural practices and so on.

The first pheasant season in North Dakota was held 80 years ago in Sargent, Richland and Dickey counties. It lasted just a day and a half.

“We had no trouble getting our bag limit in the fall



LARRY KRUCKENBERG

1940s. The number of birds shot during what has been called the Golden Forties will likely never be seen again during these more modern times. Harvest was estimated in the millions from 1940-46, highlighted by nearly 2.5 million birds taken in both 1944 and 1945. That's a bunch of birds, especially when you consider shotgun shells were tough to find, gasoline was rationed and many would-be bird hunters were fighting in World War II.

From *North Dakota OUTDOORS*: "We have never seen so many upland game birds since we have been in the state ... With an estimated upland game bird population of 15 million, it is going to be impossible to harvest the necessary number of birds ... The state could stand to harvest 7.5 million birds. It is estimated that there will be about 20,000 licenses sold this fall, and therefore the Department has been making an effort to interest more nonresident hunters to

OF RINGNECKS

By Ron Wilson

of 1931. Most of our hunting then was in cornfields and sweet clover patches ..." reported a Ludden, North Dakota hunter in *Feathers from the Prairie*, published by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

The number of roosters shot that first season wasn't documented, but the estimated harvest in 1934, according to Game and Fish Department records, was 213,000 birds. By 1936, hunters were shooting five times as many roosters as native grouse, and pheasants were fast becoming the bird of choice.

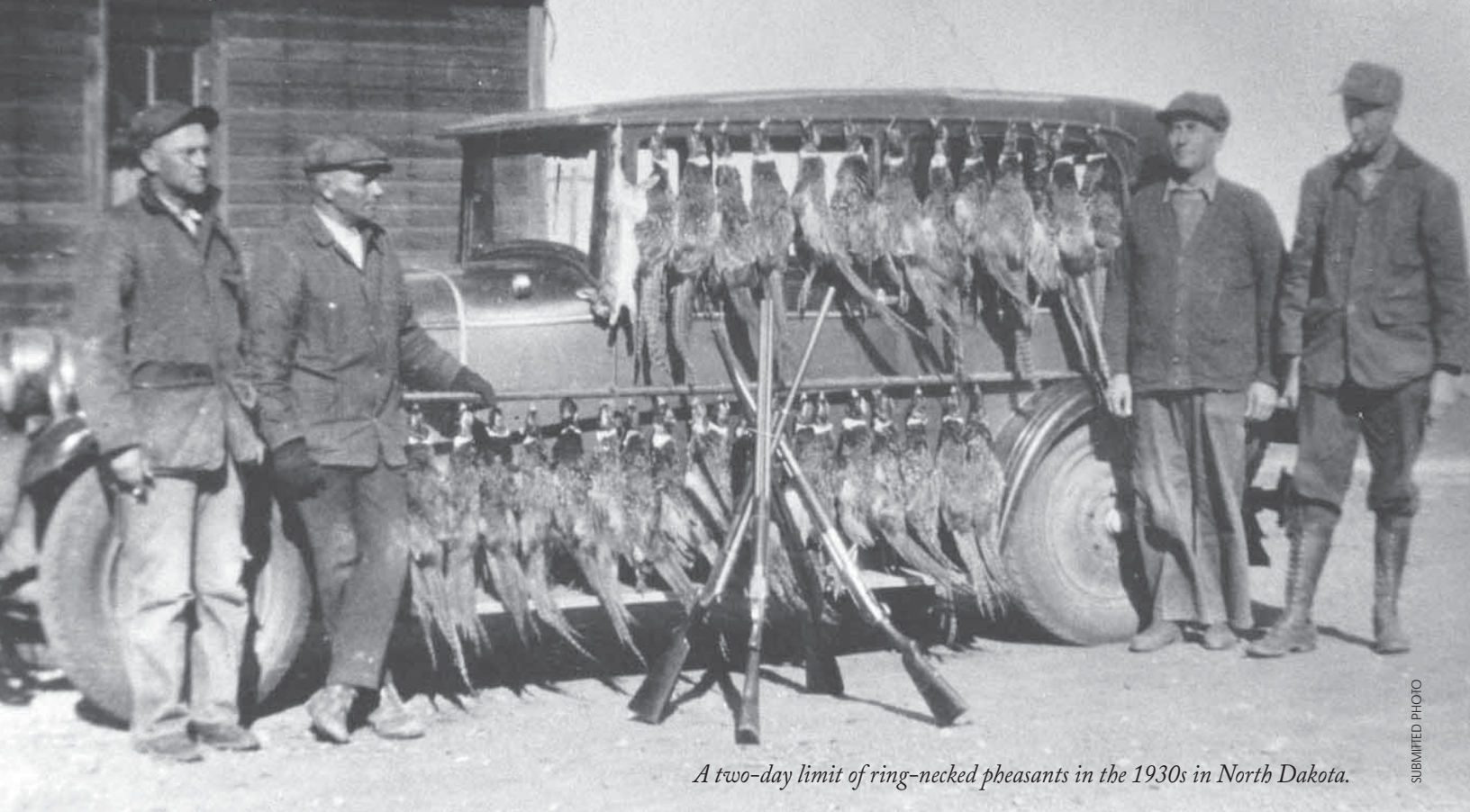
The stars aligned for pheasants and hunters in the early

Prairie: "Gunners shot pheasants practically anywhere during these years of high populations. They could easily be shot from the road and walking was unnecessary. The birds 'boiled out' of sweet clover patches for those who did get out and walk. The grounds in areas where the birds concentrated often had the appearance of being tramped down by cattle and was littered with droppings and feathers. There were literally millions of pheasants, and hundreds on one section or in one sweet clover patch. Nearly everyone enjoyed pheasants at the dinner table and servicemen traveling railroads received free pheasant

come to North Dakota."

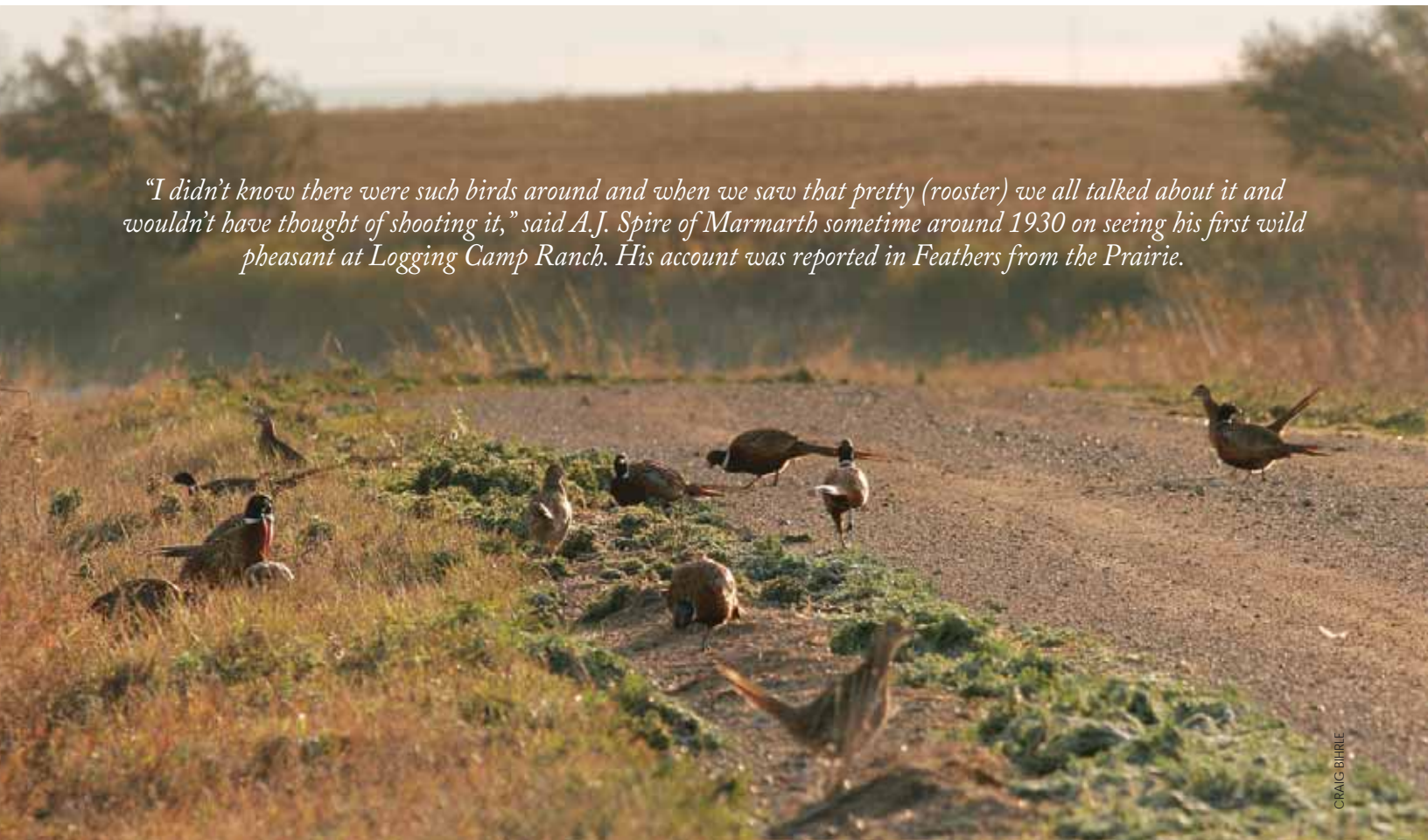
Department records show that the average hunter shot more than 34 pheasants per season from 1942-45.

From *Feathers from the*



A two-day limit of ring-necked pheasants in the 1930s in North Dakota.

SUBMITTED PHOTO



"I didn't know there were such birds around and when we saw that pretty (rooster) we all talked about it and wouldn't have thought of shooting it," said A.J. Spire of Marmarth sometime around 1930 on seeing his first wild pheasant at Logging Camp Ranch. His account was reported in Feathers from the Prairie.

CRAIG BISHRE

sandwiches served by the USO and other organizations in places like Mandan, where the troop trains stopped. Hunters followed the birds. In the banner year of 1945, 62,000 residents and 4,800 nonresidents bought licenses to hunt in North Dakota. Even still, the numbers of hunters were small compared with the numbers of pheasants that were in the field for the taking.”

Weather and landscape conditions aligned back then to create ideal conditions for an exotic bird so far from home. “There was a lot more habitat on the landscape as compared to today,” said Randy Kreil, Game and Fish Department wildlife division chief. “Farming practices were much different then because, in part, of the machinery they used. They didn’t have equipment like today that could pull around the space

“Since 1937 the state has had several wet and bountiful seasons. The past three years have been rather exceptional from the moisture viewpoint. Cover in the form of grasses and other plants have come back in an amazing way. Intensive land utilization has not kept pace with the amazing development of habitat ... From the birds’ standpoint, habitat has kept ahead of land usage and the results of this are readily indicated. From a cover and food standpoint, especially the summer of 1943, represents the acme in North Dakota’s game history,” read a Department report in *Feathers from the Prairie*.

By 1946, a landscape generously peppered with wildly-colored birds had come to an end. Not long after the echoes of shotgun blasts had faded, hunters rallied against wildlife managers and politicians



While buffaloberry provides some food and cover for this young rooster, vegetation such as this is not enough to sustain the pheasant population at a level seen earlier this century.

shuttle. Land farmers were unable to farm back then is farmed today.”

The inefficiencies of agricultural practices benefitted birds on the ground. “It was the perfect mix because you had so many odd chunks of habitat that were simply left alone out of necessity ... lots and lots of grass that was idle and not being farmed,” said Greg Link, Department conservation and communications division chief. “These were things that the pheasants loved.”

alike for a return of what would be regarded today as another unfathomable run of hunting luck.

“The general effect has been to start the ‘anvil chorus’ going again, blaming everything and everybody for these conditions. All the old nostrums will be trotted out. Every other suggestion will be made before the average gunner will face the fact that a combination of destruction of habitat, poor breeding conditions, and the heavy gun pressure are the basic causes of this condition. Predators, the regulations, the weather during the hunting season

and every other conceivable factor will be blamed before the average gunner will face the facts ... If those who are crying would stop and think for a moment they should realize that it is not now, nor never will be possible for the land which must of necessity be primarily devoted to other purposes to produce continuously the maximum crops of pheasants that have been available the past few years," reported the president of the Wildlife Management Institute in the Game and Fish Department's 1946 annual report.

And other good runs did materialize – not early 1940s good, but good nonetheless. Most notably in the late 1950s to early 1960s during Soil Bank days when pheasant harvest topped a half-million birds in 1958, and within the last decade when hunters shot more than a half-million birds per season from 2002-10.

While it's a lengthy stretch to think pheasant numbers could someday mirror those of the Golden Forties, there are legitimate concerns about matching even those of the last decade, considering the hurdles that stand in the way. Such as the continued decline in Conservation Reserve Program acres and the increased conversion of the state's native prairie to marginal cropland. There are roughly 2.4 million CRP acres in North Dakota today, down 1 million acres from the high in 2007. The forecast doesn't get any better as total CRP acreage in the state is expected to fall below 1 million acres by 2013. Native prairie conversion has increased to the point where North Dakota loses 80,000 acres of this critical habitat component annually.

"It may never happen because of the tremendous

loss of habitat that has occurred due to increased technology and size of equipment utilized by today's agricultural producers," Kreil said of returning to the 'good old days' of pheasant hunting of the last decade. "It's difficult economically for producers to farm around odd areas of habitat with the size of equipment they are using, and today's high commodity prices make it difficult for even the most conservation-minded landowner to economically justify not putting available acres into production."

In addition, the 2008 Farm Bill cut the number of CRP acres allowed in North Dakota, and changed some of the qualification factors. In the most recent CRP signup, less than half of the landowners who wanted to enroll or keep land in CRP in North Dakota were not accepted.

If all the offers were accepted, the state would have roughly an additional 150,000 acres of CRP on the landscape this fall.

Furthermore, the future of pheasants in North Dakota is also tied to the 2012 Farm Bill. "If conservation provisions are cut too deeply we are going to see an unprecedented loss of habitat that pheasants depend upon," Kreil said. "With the aforementioned high commodity prices and poor condition of the federal budget, the chance of returning to pheasant populations and hunting opportunities we experienced in the last decade aren't looking good right now."

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

Nonnative ring-necked pheasants typically don't die of starvation during North Dakota's leanest months. Most often these birds succumb to exposure to the elements.



Pheasant Forecast

Even with a similar amount of habitat on the landscape today, the forecast for a pheasant season that would match 2010, when more than a half-million birds were harvested, might not be in the cards.

Like habitat, weather plays an important role in the number of pheasants hunters encounter each fall. After three tough winters in a row and as many cold, wet springs when birds are nesting and raising young, the forecast for fewer birds this fall is realistic.

Spring rooster crowing counts were down 18 percent statewide, but Stan Kohn, Game and Fish Department upland game management supervisor, said this provides only a glimpse at what the fall hunting season might hold.

"Spring crowing count data has little to do with predicting the fall population," Kohn said. "It does not measure population density, but is an indicator of the spring rooster population trend based on crows. Roadside brood surveys, which begin in mid-July and are completed in August, provide a feel for the summer's pheasant production and provide insight into what to expect in the fall."

Kohn said the 2011 roadside survey indicated statewide total pheasants are down 36 percent from last year. In addition, brood observations were down 38 percent, but the average brood size was up 4 percent.

"Brood survey numbers from this summer match closely to numbers from 2001, when hunters harvested 420,000 roosters," Kohn said. "If fall weather conditions hold through most of the year, I could see a fall harvest of about 400,000 birds. But if winter weather sets in early, we could be much lower. Either way, this could be the first fall since 2001 that we harvest less than 500,000 roosters."

Statistics from southwestern North Dakota indicate both the number of



Winters are tough on pheasants, maybe more so on hens.

MIKE LALONDE

broods and number of birds observed were down 26 percent from 2010. Observers counted 14 broods and 118 birds per 100 miles. The average brood size was six. "Census numbers indicate this district will have the best pheasant numbers in the state this fall," Kohn said.

Results from the southeast show the number of birds observed down 54 percent from last year, and the number of broods was down 60 percent. "Removal of CRP in the southeast may have already affected the number of birds produced this spring, with weather conditions adding more pressure on spring production," Kohn said.

In the northwest, pheasants are down 53 percent from last year. In the northeast, both the number of birds observed and number of broods recorded were down about 66 percent.

A number of factors have contributed to a declining pheasant population, another difficult winter being one of them. Winter is tough on pheasants, maybe more so on hens. Hens are smaller than roosters and naturally more susceptible to exposure, and aren't as aggressive as males when it comes to feeding when snow is deep and temperatures are low.

"Coming through a tough winter in fair to good physical condition is important to hens because they immediately enter the breeding cycle," Kohn said. "Hens in poor condition in spring do not lay as many

eggs."

No matter the number of eggs females produce, they are expending more energy than males while developing eggs, sitting on nests and caring for broods. A hen's fitness going into fall and winter can certainly be problematic if she has to re-nest two or three times in summer because eggs were lost to predation or weather.

A hen's life is not easy.

Pheasant hens produce 10-15 eggs, incubate for 23-25 days, or until about mid-June in North Dakota. After hatching, she safeguards young from cool weather, storms, predators and other uncertainties in nature.

During the egg-laying process or in early incubation, if the female loses her eggs to a predator, weather or some other disturbance, she will nest again. Hens will do this until they are able to produce a brood, or it gets too late in summer. However, if the hen successfully hatches a brood and loses some chicks, her energy is devoted to raising what's left of her young, not re-nesting.

Even if the entire brood is wiped out, the hen's obligation of hatching her eggs has been fulfilled, and she will not reproduce until the following year. As such, young chicks observed as late as early September are the product of a successful late nesting attempt, and are not a second brood from a single hen.

Fall is a busy time for hunters and anglers and Game and Fish Department wardens. Check stations are held in various locations across the state in fall, many being manned during deer, waterfowl and pheasant seasons.



MIKE ANDERSON

Check Stations: A Fall (and Summer) Routine

By Greg Freeman

North Dakota Game and Fish Department warden Erik Schmidt, Linton, visits with hunters at a check station.



The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's law enforcement division conducts game and fish check stations in an effort to ensure hunter and angler compliance with state laws and regulations.

Robert Timian, Department enforcement chief, said hunters shouldn't be surprised by these, as game wardens routinely conduct check stations each year, especially in fall. "Fall is a busy time with all of the hunting seasons open, causing a flurry of activity from bird to big game hunting," Timian said.

Most checkpoints are set up during deer, waterfowl and pheasant seasons in various locations across the state, often in different settings. "We can be set up near fields, on roadways and in airports," Timian said.

Airport checkpoints often occur when many hunters are in the field, such as opening of pheasant

or waterfowl season, and during teacher's convention weekend.

"It is a high traffic time for nonresident hunters, and we mainly focus on licensing requirements, bag limits and proper transporting of game," Timian said.

An easy way to stay on the right side of the law is for hunters to prepare ahead of time, by simply double-checking regulations to make sure they are doing everything legal. "Whether check stations are done next to a road or in an airport, it is especially important to recognize proper identification of game, understanding the procedure for transporting game and knowing the daily and possession limits," Timian said.

Compliance checkpoints aren't just for enforcing game regulations. Timian said game wardens conduct some checkpoints during waterfowl season with the intent of educating hunters on aquatic nuisance species.

"We do operate check stations in popular duck hunting areas, as many waterfowl hunters will be transporting duck boats and decoys into and through North Dakota," he said. "We need to make sure hunters follow proper ANS protocol as well."

Waterfowl hunters must clean boats, decoys, waders and other hunting equipment before leaving a water body. Hunters must also drain water from all hunting equipment prior to leaving the water, and are encouraged to brush their hunting dogs free of mud and seeds.

In addition, Game and Fish law enforcement and fisheries personnel conduct check stations during open water boating season in an effort to ensure compliance with ANS regulations. "Inspections are simple," Timian said.



MIKE ANDERSON

Hunters are urged to plan ahead by simply double-checking regulations to make sure they are doing everything legal.

“We make sure all vegetation is removed and water is drained at the boat ramp.”

Inspections focus on aquatic vegetation in or on the boat, including any equipment and in livewells, and drained/dry livewells and bilges.

All boats and equipment contaminated with ANS are held until they are properly disinfected. “This is a serious situation,” Timian added. “To allow a boat or equipment to leave before it is disinfected would be irresponsible.”

Some common problems found during an ANS compliance checkpoint include weed fragments in the boat or on the motor, trailer or depth finder, and water left in a few livewells. “Overall, compliance is very good,” Timian said. “Anglers know to keep boats and equipment clean.”

Check stations are an efficient way to detect violations and to gauge compliance. “In general, the comments we receive are positive, and the vast majority are supportive of these activities,” Timian said.

And while compliance checkpoints help game wardens track down violators, receiving help from the public is also appreciated. Timian said anyone witnessing a violation should report it to law enforcement personnel.

“Reporting a violation is extremely important, because each warden covers a large district,” Timian said. “With a relatively small warden staff covering the entire state we can’t be everywhere.”

Callers should report a violation by calling the Report All Poachers hotline. “A typical call received through RAP is from someone saying ‘I want to report someone shooting too many ducks’, or ‘Someone didn’t tag a buck,’” Timian said. “A violation of any type can and should be reported.”

GREG FREEMAN is the Game and Fish Department’s news editor.



MIKE ANDERSON



MIKE ANDERSON

North Dakota Game and Fish Department warden Jackie Lundstrom, Bismarck, helps with a game check station in a North Dakota airport.

Reporting Violations

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department encourages hunters, anglers and landowners who have witnessed a fish or wildlife violation to file a report with the Report All Poachers program.

RAP is a cooperative project between the Game and Fish Department, State Radio Communications and the North Dakota Wildlife Federation. The RAP line offers rewards – from \$100 to \$1,000 depending on the nature and seriousness of the crime – for information that leads to conviction of fish and wildlife law violators. Reports can also go directly to game wardens or other law enforcement agencies. Callers can remain anonymous.

Witnesses should note vehicle details, including make, color, license plate number and state issued and provide a description of the violator if possible.

Robert Timian, chief of enforcement for the Game and Fish Department, said even though some citizens are not interested in the reward, it is still important to play a role in landing potential violators.

Witnesses should report a violation by calling the RAP number at (800) 472-2121. RAP will then contact the local game warden immediately. If the witness gives the RAP operator a phone number, the witness will be contacted right away.

R.A.P.
REPORT ALL POACHERS
1-800-472-2121

Poachers Steal Your Wildlife – Make the Call!

CRAIG BIRLIE

BUFFALOBERRY PATCH



By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor



MIKE ANDERSON

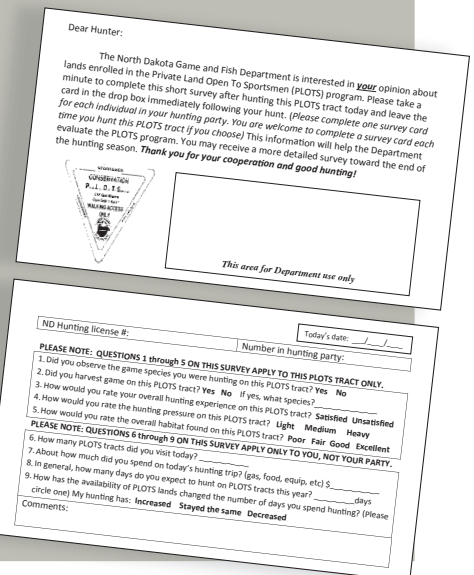
Cooperation Sought in PLOTS Survey

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is asking hunters to complete a short survey immediately after hunting on selected tracts enrolled in the Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program.

Kevin Kading, Department private land section leader, said about 50 PLOTS tracts statewide are included in the survey. "We will have these survey points on various types of PLOTS tracts so we can hopefully gain a better understanding of what our hunters are looking for in the PLOTS program," he said.

Because PLOTS tracts can involve many different types of lands, Kading said they all offer their own unique hunting opportunities for wildlife species such as pheasants, waterfowl and deer. "We have to find that right balance of what hunters are looking for and use our hunter dollars in the most responsible way we can," he said.

Survey cards will be placed on a PLOTS sign at the entrance of the tract. Hunters are asked to complete the survey and place them in the drop box.



3F2 Carcass Guidelines

Hunters harvesting a big game animal in North Dakota deer unit 3F2 cannot transport a carcass containing the head and spinal column outside the unit unless it's taken directly to a meat processor.

The head can be removed from the carcass and transported outside the unit if it is to be submitted to a chronic wasting disease surveillance drop-off location or a licensed taxidermist.

In addition, hunting big game over bait is prohibited in deer unit 3F2. Bait, in this case, includes grain, seed, mineral, salt, fruit, vegetable, nut, hay or any other natural or manufactured food placed by an individual. Bait does not include agricultural practices, gardens, wildlife food plots,

agricultural crops, livestock feeds, fruit or vegetables in their natural location such as apples on or under an apple tree, or unharvested food or vegetables in a garden.

PLOTS Rules

North Dakota Private Land Open To Sportsmen hunters are reminded of regulations that went into effect in 2010.

The additional rules apply to leaving equipment and other materials on a PLOTS area overnight, and also define walk-in access as "an individual traveling by foot," and specify that walk-in access is allowed only during legal hunting seasons or as otherwise signed.

Activities besides hunting, and public access when a hunting season is not open, are not covered in the Game and Fish

Department's agreement with the landowner; thus, they require written permission from the landowner.

Activities such as riding horses for hunting purposes or for pleasure on PLOTS require written permission from the landowner. Permission from the landowner is always required for motorized vehicle access such as for setting decoys in a field, unless specially designated on the PLOTS sign.

In addition, leaving equipment or other provisions in a PLOTS area overnight, for example tree stands or blinds, decoys, firearms and archery equipment, trail cameras, or any type of bait used to attract big game animals, is not allowed without written permission from the landowner.

Landowner-Sportsman Council Signs Available

Ask Before You Enter and Walking Hunters Welcome signs are available to North Dakota landowners who encourage hunting on their land during fall hunting seasons.

The signs are free and sponsored by the North Dakota Landowner-Sportsman Council. Landowners can order quantities of four, eight or 12. To order, contact the North Dakota Game and Fish Department at (701) 328-6300, or email ndgf@nd.gov. Signs can also be ordered online at the Department's website at gf.nd.gov.



Donate Deer to Fight Hunger

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department encourages deer hunters to consider donating a deer to the Sportsman Against Hunger program.

SAH is a charitable program that raises money for processing of donated deer, and coordinates distribution of ground venison to food pantries in North Dakota. It is administered by the North Dakota Community Action Partnership, a nonprofit agency that serves low-income families across the state.

"We strongly support the donation program and hope that deer hunters will do the same, not only during the early seasons, but the regular deer gun, archery and muzzleloader seasons," Game and Fish Director Terry Steinwand said.

"We have enough funding for the program to grow this year," said Ann Pollert, NDCAP executive director, "and our food pantries tell us they have a demand for all the venison we can provide them."

A current statewide list of participating SAH venison donation processing sites is available by accessing the NDCAP website, capnd.org.



Bighorn Sheep Numbers Remain Strong

After three consecutive severe winters, bighorn sheep numbers in western North Dakota remain strong.

A July-August survey showed 290 bighorn sheep, unchanged from last year and just 26 below 2008's record summer survey. "After recording dramatic declines in mule deer and pronghorn numbers, we were pleasantly surprised to see that our bighorns have remained stable," said Brett Wiedmann, North Dakota Game and Fish Department big game biologist in Dickinson.

Bighorn sheep can tolerate frigid temperatures, but deep snows can cause problems because of their short legs, Wiedmann said. "Low adult mortality last winter despite very deep snow conditions demonstrates just how hardy bighorns are," he said.

Survey results revealed 85 rams, 158 ewes and 47 lambs – 233 in the northern badlands (an increase of two from last year) and 57 in the southern badlands (down just one). "Bighorns are doing very well in the northern badlands, and following three years of declines, have stabilized in the south," Wiedmann said.

Although the ewe population actually increased 5 percent from last summer's survey, rams saw a 10 percent decline. "Due to an abundance of forage, rams were scattered and in smaller than usual bachelor groups," Wiedmann said. "Consequently, I'm confident that because they were harder to detect it had more to do with the lower ram count than an actual population decline."

The Department's survey does not include an additional 30 bighorns that inhabit the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

Public Asked to Report Whooping Crane Sightings

Endangered whooping cranes migrating through North Dakota this fall en route to wintering grounds should be reported so scientists can track their whereabouts.

Whoopers stand about 5 feet tall and have a wingspan of about 7 feet from tip to tip. They are bright white with black wing tips, visible only when the wings are outspread. In flight, whooping cranes extend their long necks straight forward, while their long, slender legs extend out behind the tail. Young-of-the-year whoopers are white with scattered brown feathers. Whooping cranes typically migrate singly, or in groups of two to three, and may be associated with sandhill cranes.

Other white birds such as snow geese, swans and egrets are often mistaken for whooping cranes. The most common mistake is pelicans because their wingspan is similar and they tuck their pouch in flight, leaving a silhouette similar to a crane when viewed from below.

Anyone sighting whoopers should not disturb them, but record the date, time, location, and the birds' activity. Observers should also look closely for and report colored bands which may occur on one or both legs. Young whooping cranes were marked during 1975-88 with colored leg bands to help determine their identity.

Sightings should be reported to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office at (701) 387-4397, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's main office in Bismarck at (701) 328-6610, or to local game wardens around the state. Reports help biologists locate important whooping crane habitat areas, monitor marked birds, determine survival and population numbers, and identify times and migration routes.



Lynn Schlueter, Game and Fish Department ANS coordinator, shows a young hunter how aquatic nuisance species can hitchhike on waders.

Waterfowl Hunters Reminded of ANS Regulations

Waterfowl hunters need to do their part in preventing the spread of aquatic nuisance species into or within North Dakota.

Waterfowl hunters must clean boats, decoys, waders and other hunting equipment before leaving a water body. Hunters must also drain water from all hunting equipment prior to leaving the water, and are encouraged to brush their hunting dogs free of mud and seeds.

Cattails, phragmites, bulrushes and terrestrial plants may be transported as camouflage on boats. All other aquatic vegetation must be cleaned from boats prior to transportation into or within North Dakota.

Detailed ANS information and prevention regulations can be found on the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's website at gf.nd.gov.

Hunt Safely from Duck Boats

Waterfowlers hunting from boats are encouraged to wear properly-fitted life jackets while on the water.

Nancy Boldt, North Dakota Game and Fish Department boat and water safety coordinator, said there are comfortable hunting coats available with life jackets already built in.

"They are no longer too bulky to wear, you can't even tell you have one on," Boldt said.

Eight people have drowned in state waters since 1998 while hunting from a boat, and none were wearing life jackets. Boldt wants to make sure a duck hunter doesn't become another statistic.

"Capsizing and falling overboard from a small boat is the most common type of fatal boating accident for hunters," Boldt added. "With all the gear in the boat, including dogs, it can quickly become unbalanced."

In addition, wearing a life jacket will not only keep the overboard hunter afloat, but also help slow the loss of critical body heat caused by exposure to cold water.

Check Deer Licenses

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department urges deer hunters to find their licenses and check them for accuracy.

Every year Department staff receive inquiries from hunters at the last minute, including the morning of opening day, who can't find their license. If it happens at that point, it's difficult to try to get a replacement quickly.

Another reason to find your license now is to check it for accuracy. Double-check the license to make sure the unit, species and deer sex is what you thought it should be.

Deer hunters in need of a replacement license can print out a duplicate (replacement) license application from the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov, or can call (701) 328-6300 to have an application mailed or faxed.

The form must be completely filled out and notarized, and sent back to the Department with a fee. The application

will be processed the day it is received at the office, and the license will be mailed out the next day.

Motorists Warned to Watch for Deer on Roads

Motorists are reminded to watch for deer along roadways, especially this time of year, because juvenile animals are dispersing from their home ranges.

Deer are most active in late October through early December. Motorists are advised to slow down and exercise caution after dark to reduce the likelihood of encounters with deer along roadways. Most deer-vehicle accidents occur primarily at dawn and dusk when deer are most often moving around.

Deer-vehicle accidents are at times unavoidable. However, motorists should be aware of warning signs signaling deer are in the area. When you see one deer cross the road, look for a second or third deer to follow. Also, motorists are urged to pay

attention on roadways posted with *Deer Crossing Area* caution signs.

If an accident does happen, contact a local law enforcement agency. Also, a permit is required to take parts or the whole carcass of a road-killed deer. Permits are free and available from game wardens and local law enforcement offices.

A few precautions can minimize chances of injury or property damage in a deer-vehicle crash.

- Always wear your seat belt.
- Don't swerve or take the ditch to avoid hitting a deer. Try to brake as much as possible and stay on the roadway. Don't lose control of your vehicle or slam into something else to miss the deer. You risk less injury by hitting the deer.
- If you spot deer ahead, slow down immediately and honk your horn.
- No published research supports the effectiveness of deer whistles on vehicles.



Alecia Berg, Minot, shows off her 15-pound, 4-ounce walleye, likely the largest weighed in North Dakota in more than 50 years.

Big Walleye

The largest walleye reported in North Dakota in more than 50 years came out of the Garrison Dam Tailrace in late August.

Alecia Berg, Minot, caught the 15-4 trophy on August 27, only a few hours after purchasing her fishing license for the year via cellphone on the hour drive from Minot to the dam.

Berg and her husband, Jeremy, were fishing with friends Jason Foss and Amy Isakson when the big fish hit about 10:30 p.m.

Night fishing in the Tailrace is typically popular in late summer, and this year fishing pressure was heavy as walleyes were biting quite well. The Foss/Berg boat brought in 16 walleyes that night by the time they quit at 1 a.m., Jeremy Berg said, but the next biggest fish was around 5 pounds.

Because of high water flow through the dam, rainbow smelt were washing downstream, providing an abundant food source. While all fish that hang around the Tailrace could eat to their heart's content, Game and Fish Department Missouri River System biologist Dave Fryda says a walleye the size of Berg's is extremely rare.

While smelt moving through the dam provide a good food source, biologists are concerned that a summer of high flows could significantly reduce smelt and other fish populations on Lake Sakakawea above the dam. Long-term monitoring of fish populations will continue.

GAME AND FISH STAFF NOTES



Jeb Williams

Division Changes

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department announces several staff changes in the Department's wildlife division.

Jeb Williams, a native of Beach with a biology degree from Dickinson State University, was promoted to assistant wildlife division chief. He has been employed with the Department since 1999 as a natural resource biologist, outreach biologist and wildlife resource supervisor.

Bruce Stillings has been named the Department's big game supervisor. He has been a big game biologist in Dickinson since 2001. Stillings is a University of Wyoming graduate with a master's degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Stillings replaced Roger Johnson, who retired this summer after spending more than 30 years with the Department.

Jason Smith has been selected to fill the big game biologist position. He has been a game management technician in Jamestown since 2005. Smith, a native of the Wood Lake area near Sheyenne, North Dakota, has a biology/education degree from Valley City State University and a master's degree from the University of North Dakota.

Rodney (R.J.) Gross Jr. has filled the game management technician position. He has worked in Bismarck as a wildlife technician since 2009. Gross is a native of Jamestown and received his wildlife biology degree from North Dakota State University.



Jason Smith



Bruce Stillings



R. J. Gross



NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH ONLINE

visit <http://gf.nd.gov>

PURCHASE and Print Licenses and Apply for Lottery Licenses

VIEW North Dakota OUTDOORS Magazines

EXPLORE North Dakota PLOTS Guide

WATCH Outdoors Online Weekly Webcasts and TV Features



MORE FEATURES

- Current wildlife and fishing news
- GIS map creation
- Review important season dates and regulations
- Register for hunter education classes



NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
 100 North Bismarck Expressway
 Bismarck, ND 58501-5095
 701.328.6300
 Email: ndgf@nd.gov



back cast



By Ron Wilson

While hunting, I've lent a hand to stuck motorists, been on hand for first deer, first pheasants and first grouse, and more than once have, with hat in hand, asked permission to hunt private property.

I sometimes wear hand-me-down hunting pants that are held in place with red suspenders, have been wandering around the same acres of prairie for years and would like to think I know them like the back of my hand, and one time while elk hunting out West I got lost in fog so thick I couldn't find my nose with either hand.

But until recently, I've never held hands while hunting grouse.

I take my 8-year-old son, Jack, hunting because that's what we do in our family. He's good company, but is chatty because he's excited and loaded with donuts and chocolate milk. His mind and mouth race along a mysterious course with no clear finish line, filling the cab of the vehicle with honest questions and youthful exaggerations. It's not always clear if he's talking to me, himself, or if it matters either way.

When we turn the dogs loose, they run hot laps around the vehicle, nose in and out of a ditch with honest enthusiasm not fueled by chocolate. I put a handful of shotgun shells into a vest pocket. Jack drops silver BBs one by one into his Red Ryder. I keep an eye on the area where we saw some grouse sit down, hoping they hang tight until we're done messing around.

The grass is too tall for short legs that beg to keep up. And the vegetation that has been knitted together near the ground grabs at Jack's feet like would-be tacklers in a playground football game. I know without turning my head when the grass catches him and he falls because his BB gun sounds like pebbles sliding down the hollow insides of a folk art rain stick.

The sharp-tailed grouse flush like I expect from early-season birds, within shotgun range and not all at once. These are gimme birds. Big, fat underhand pitches right in the strike zone. Even so, I rush things and punch two holes in the air around a handful of birds that I so want to shoot to congratulate the dogs and impress my kid.

I cuss under my breath, kneel and rummage around in the grass for spent shells that still smell wonderfully of burnt gunpowder. Jack slips the shells on his pointer fingers, raises both hands and says that I have to shoot eight more times to cover them all.

Two hours later and my game bag weighs the same. We haven't seen another bird and have covered some ground. Jack is falling farther behind more often as I keep pace behind the dogs.

We rest often, kneel in the grass and scratch the dogs that have no interest in running ahead when we stop. They're good boys this way, even though their stopping has more to do with the possibility of dog treats magically appearing from my game vest than being obedient. Whatever works.

We're in the final push and I tell Jack it's only about a quarter-mile back to the vehicle, but distance means nothing to him. Four football fields, I say, which makes a little more sense. Then he grabs my hand as if we are crossing a busy street, squeezing tighter as I try to hustle along.

I understand there is nothing intimate about his act. The kid is no dummy and wants me to nearly drag him back to the vehicle. So I slow and let the dogs work ahead, knowing, because I have two teenagers at home, there will come a time when Jack won't even want to hold a conversation, let alone my hand.

RON WILSON
is editor of
North Dakota
OUTDOORS.



RON WILSON



CRAIG BIRHLE

Tree Squirrels

Beavers haven't cornered the market entirely on being busy, especially during fall when tree squirrels are at their most active, gathering and caching food for winter.

Squirrels bury acorns, nuts and seeds by the hundreds in small, shallow holes in the ground, with the aim of digging them up during North Dakota's leaner months when food is tougher to come by. They find their stored cache by memory or smell, or maybe a combination of both. What isn't recovered, and there is always some, can go on to sprout new vegetation.

Fox, gray and red are the three tree squirrel species found in North Dakota. The fox is the largest, a big one weighing about 2 pounds, followed by the gray and red. The fox squirrel is found throughout

the state and is the most common squirrel along the Missouri River and draws and river bottoms of western North Dakota.

The fox squirrel is a newcomer to North Dakota, first reported in the state in about 1925. Biologists figure this squirrel moved into the state from South Dakota and Minnesota, traveling along shelterbelts and river drainages, spreading north and westward.

The agricultural landscape suits the fox squirrel if there are trees nearby in which to build nests and hunker in hollow cavities when the weather is unwelcome. This squirrel will cut and carry an entire ear of corn or other foods to a feeding perch, such as a stump or log.

While tree squirrels are considered small game animals in North Dakota, they are not as aggressively pursued as other small game,

such as ring-necked pheasants and sharp-tailed grouse. On average, about 2,000 people – a good crowd for a high school football game, but not a hunting fraternity – hunt squirrels in North Dakota each season. In 2010, roughly 92,000 hunters chased pheasants in the state.

But don't let the numbers cheapen the quarry. Tree squirrels have sharp eyesight and can detect the slightest movements. Their sense of smell and hearing are also outstanding. So, if you are tiptoeing through the woods with a firearm cradled in your arms this fall, it's a good bet you haven't gone unnoticed, even though the only thing you see or hear are colorful leaves dancing in the breeze.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.