

# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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# MATTERS OF OPINION



**Terry Steinwand**  
*Director*

As North Dakotans we tend to be pretty resilient and have tremendous endurance given the weather patterns we experience, especially over the last three years. We go from drought to flood in what seems like a heartbeat, and while we experience some psychological trauma from the roller-coaster weather, we continue to survive and thrive in a great state with enthusiasm and perseverance.

This was especially evident in 2011. Once again we experienced heavy snow that began at a somewhat normal time of the year, but didn't seem to quit until much past normal. Then an abnormal precipitation pattern set up, putting most of the state in a situation that, while painful and heartbreaking at the time, showed the resilience and capacity that exists in North Dakota. While the communities and state continue to recover, I have no doubt both humans and wildlife will be stronger in the end.

Wildlife and people on North Dakota's landscape have had to endure three consecutive hard winters, and wildlife populations are down due to a number of factors.

One example is the deer population. Survival is tough on the Northern Plains and deer sometimes do what they're programmed to do – find food to eat so they can survive. Unfortunately, they sometimes find stored agricultural food supplies. We've dealt with the depredation issue for years and our strategies have evolved. Most of our tools are successful in dramatically reducing the problem.

One of those tools described in this issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* is deer-proof hay yards.

No one wants to see starving deer on the landscape, but we also want to do what we can to help agricultural producers protect their stored feed supplies. We'll continue to improve our strategies to help those producers.

Harsh winters have also reduced ice fishing opportunities. While there are chances to hunt and fish in North Dakota year-round, ice fishing opportunities were limited the last three winters due to heavy snow cover and difficulty accessing lakes.

While the above-normal precipitation has caused many problems, it's also created some additional opportunities in fishing lakes. We've had some good reports almost statewide and predictions of some good winter angling if the weather allows.

We'll always have our challenges living on the Northern Plains, but it also makes us who we are. As the saying goes, "If it doesn't kill you, it makes you stronger."

We're still around and stronger than ever. And as long as we're here we're going to get outdoors to enjoy and appreciate what we have. We just have to make sure we care for our natural resources for ourselves and future generations. Get out and enjoy the great North Dakota outdoors.

*Terry Steinwand*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

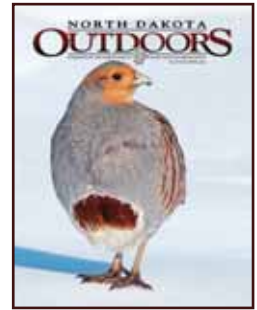
FEATURES

Pike Opportunities Under Ice ..... 4
Tenders of the Rut..... 8
The 100-Year-Old License ..... 12
Winter Deer Management..... 14

DEPARTMENTS

From Both Sides: Bounties Revisited..... 2
Buffaloberry Patch..... 18
Back Cast ..... 25

Front cover: Hungarian partridge. Photo by Darcy Kramlich, Grassy Butte.



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# Bounties Revisited

Last winter, the third in a row with difficult conditions for North Dakota wildlife, people from many parts of the state were reporting an apparent increase in local coyote populations.

Game and Fish Department surveys from recent years verified that coyote numbers were indeed on an upswing statewide, but most notably in central North Dakota.

In just about any winter it's not unusual for the Game and Fish Department to also get reports of coyotes chasing or killing deer. Since deer are a natural prey of coyotes at any time of year, some deer mortality is expected, but it is seldom significant in any one area.

Last winter, however, with many deer having a tough enough struggle for survival, some hunters and other citizens expressed concerns about too many coyotes killing too many deer. Those concerns eventually evolved into a public discussion about bounties, or payments from agencies or organizations as incentives for hunters to take more of certain animals.

The discussion advanced all the way to the state legislature, where senators voted down a bill that would have provided Game and Fish funds to establish a bounty on coyotes.

While other discussions on bounties have surfaced over the last 50 years, and at least one local wildlife organization briefly sponsored its own bounty system, the state has not sponsored any bounties on coyotes or fox since 1961. And it took 10 years or so preceding that for North Dakota citizens to convince the state legislature that bounties were not a good investment of hunting license dollars.

## North Dakota Bounty Background

In 1881, before North Dakota became a state, territorial law allowed county commissioners to pay a bounty on wolves. State law in 1890 required county commissioners to pay a bounty on wolves if 50 stock-raisers petitioned for it.

State funds were first used to pay bounties in 1897 – \$3 for each wolf, though wolves were mostly gone from the state by then. It wasn't long before coyotes joined the mix and through 1947 coyote and wolf bounties ranged from \$1.50 to \$5 for adults and \$1 to \$2.50 for pups.

Also during this time the state authorized bounties for magpies, rattlesnakes, skunks, gophers, rabbits, crows and possibly other wildlife. Red fox and bobcats were added to the list in the 1940s.

By 1961, when the state legislature stopped authorizing bounties, North Dakota hunters and taxpayers had footed the bill for more than \$2.2 million in bounty payments, with little to show for the investment.

From April 1, 1945 to March 31, 1946, the first full year the state paid a bounty on adult red foxes, hunters turned in nearly 25,000 adults and pups to county auditors.

While the number of fox turned in for payment went down over the next several years, by 1955 the take was back up to nearly 30,000 fox, and in 1959 hunters and trappers turned in 48,000.

During that period the state paid out more than \$500,000 dollars in fox bounties, yet the fox population went up.

Coyotes, on the other hand, became fewer in number after 1945, primarily because poisoning and hunting from airplanes was legal. Some people, especially plane-hunters, were highly skilled at killing coyotes, and poisons were very effective.

The downside is that the reduced coyote population was likely a primary reason the fox population started to escalate in the early 1950s, creating a far worse problem for ground-nesting birds.

In nature, the largest canine predator on the landscape works hard to keep the next in line out of the territory. When the wolf was dominant, North Dakota didn't have many coyotes. When the wolf was eliminated, coyotes began to thrive. At the time the coyote population was likely at its lowest, in the mid-1950s, the fox population was on its way up and spreading into new areas, including southwestern North Dakota where red foxes had never existed prior to 1940.

This swing in predator population dynamics may have created an unintended dilemma. Foxes are much more significant predators of game birds and nests than are coyotes. When one coyote family is taken out, several fox families can move in, greatly increasing nest predation in that area.

Then again, in the 1950s wildlife biologists were just starting to learn about relationships between predators, and the consequences of certain actions weren't always clear. Later, Game and Fish research indicated the coyote population would have to be reduced by 50 percent for any long-term, noticeable benefits. For fox, the necessary reduction is closer to 67 percent.

With evidence that coyote and fox populations were both climbing in the late 1950s, despite years of bounties and the total payout nearing \$2 million, North Dakota hunters and landowners were still overwhelmingly in favor of paying out money for fox, coyote and several other kinds of animals. In a large survey of hunters and farmers, both groups favored a bounty system by a 2-to-1 margin.

A few years later, however, the legislature stopped state-sponsored bounty payments.

If the Game and Fish Department took a similar

survey today, it might still find a fair number of people who believe that some kind of bounty system might help reduce predator populations. What might sound good in theory, however, does not hold true in practice, and it doesn't matter if the payment comes from license dollars, or contributions from private groups.

Here's a look at some of the justifications and rationalizations that may arise when bounties are discussed ... **From Both Sides.**

## One Side

- Proponents believe that bounties can create interest in hunting and trapping by people who would not otherwise pursue that species, an interest that would carry on when bounties are no longer offered.
- Bounties may reduce predator numbers in local areas.
- Bounties for predators like fox and coyote can help make up for low fur prices.
- Game animals and birds need additional protection from predators.

## The Other Side

- Recent research documents that in areas where bounties were reinstated, they did not recruit new hunters and trappers, nor did they increase participation by avid hunters and trappers.
- Over a century's worth of documentation from nearly all states and provinces confirms that bounty programs do not reduce predators over the long term, nor do they increase prey populations (deer, pheasants, waterfowl). Money spent on bounties, either by state or private organizations, is better spent establishing or maintaining habitat for game species.
- Bounties encourage fraud and cheating in presenting animals for payment. For instance, people trying to collect bounties on animals taken in other states, out of the intended area, or road kills.
- Bounty programs are expensive. Bounties wind up paying for many animals that would have been killed anyway, such as the trapper or hunter's normal take.
- Bounties don't target specific animals that are causing problems for livestock producers or vulnerable wildlife populations. Depredation problems are best alleviated when problem

animals are targeted and removed, not by reducing general predator densities over a larger area.

- Bounties designed to eliminate top-level predators will encourage replacement by the next in line. For instance, if a township has several coyote families, it would likely not have many fox. If the coyotes are removed, red fox would soon inhabit all available areas, and they are much harder on ground-nesting birds than are coyotes.
- Bounties encourage a "kill at all costs" attitude among a few people who think that because an animal is bountied, they can justifiably break laws (running with snowmobiles, trespassing) in the name of reducing that population. Such illegal behavior brings bad publicity to people who hunt and trap legally and ethically.
- To control or reduce a population long-term, it's necessary to continue to take animals even after they appear to be very scarce, a point at which most people would give up because the bounty wouldn't begin to pay for the effort (law of diminishing returns).

- Predators can alter their reproductive strategies, so that when densities are reduced, pregnancy rates and litter sizes increase to make up for the lower numbers.

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

**Editor's note:** This article contains some material originally published in *North Dakota OUTDOORS* in November 2005.



CRAIG BHRLE

# PIKE

## Opportunities Under Ice

*By Greg Power*



CRAIG BIHRLE

**I**n July 1993, following drought in the late 1980s, it finally rained and rained some more, initiating a lengthy shift in North Dakota's landscape to more water and less land. In the last 20 years or so, many dry spots have become sloughs, and waters once best described as marshes are now natural lakes that sustain recreational fisheries.

Northern pike, North Dakota's state fish, are perhaps the biggest benefactor of today's wet terrain. Terrestrial vegetation growing on shorelines has been inundated in recent years, providing excellent pike spawning habitat.

The recent trend of a growing number of pike lakes continues in earnest in 2011. North Dakota now has more than 200 lakes with pike, including the Missouri River System and the Devils Lake chain. As a result of outstanding natural reproduction the last three years, many of these waters have never harbored so many northerns.

The hope is that ice anglers will catch a break this winter and have easy access to the abundant pike populations. Although many pike are currently young and relatively small, fish of 5 pounds or more should weigh heavily in the mix.

While just about every angler in the state marvels at the sight of a whopper pike, many of these same anglers dismiss smaller northerns as nuisances, which is unfortunate. Even if an angler passes on taking excellent-tasting pike home to eat, these fish are, pound-for-pound, one of the more feisty to catch on hook and line.

The following, reported by Department fisheries supervisors, is a short list of lakes where there is great potential for pike seekers this winter.

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**GREG POWER** is the Game and Fish Department's fisheries chief.

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## South Central Fisheries District

### **Rice Lake (Emmons County) –**

Northern pike natural reproduction was excellent in 2009 and 2-5-pound pike are abundant.

### **Alkaline Lake (Kidder County) –**

Northern pike natural reproduction was excellent in 2009 and pike over 8 pounds are common.

### **Cherry Lake (Kidder County) –**

Suffered a winterkill in 2009 but stocked pike have done well and 2-4-pound fish are currently abundant.

**Lake Helen (Kidder County) –** One of the state's most consistent pike fisheries

in recent years and fish numbers remain excellent.

### **Beaver Lake (Logan County) –**

Northern pike are abundant and fish occasionally surpass 10 pounds.

### **West Lake Napoleon (Logan County) –**

Northern pike were restocked in 2009 following years of drought and 2-5-pound pike are currently abundant.

### **Harmon Lake (Morton County) –**

Northern pike natural reproduction was excellent in 2009 and 2-5-pound pike are currently abundant.

**Lake Oahe** – Lake Oahe contains

record numbers of northern pike, most of which are the result of phenomenal natural reproduction in 2009. Small pike make up the bulk of the population, but fish surpassing 20 pounds are occasionally caught.

*Report by Paul Bailey, South Central district supervisor, Bismarck*

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*More waters have been added to the list of lakes open to darkhouse spearfishing in North Dakota. Pike and nongame fish are the only legal fish species that can be taken by darkhouse participants.*



CRAIG BIRLIE



## North Central Fisheries District

**Buffalo Lodge Lake (McHenry County)** – Northern pike numbers have increased substantially along with the rise in lake levels the past three years.

**Lake Metigoshe (Bottineau County)** – Holds some nice-sized northern pike, along with good numbers of smaller fish.

**Crooked Lake (McLean County)** – Suffered major winterkill during winter 2008-09, so many pike are two years of age or younger. However, conditions were very good for pike reproduction shortly after the winterkill, which led to good natural reproduction.

**North and South Carlson lakes (Ward County)** – Both lakes contain high densities of small pike. Great lakes to take a kid pike fishing.

*Report by Jason Lee, North Central district supervisor, Riverdale*



## Southwest Fisheries District

**Heart Butte Reservoir (Lake Tschida) (Grant County)** – Pike up to 10 pounds.

**Cedar Lake (Slope County)** – Mostly smaller pike.

**Danzig Dam (Morton County)** – Pike up to 5 pounds.

**Raleigh Reservoir (Grant County)** – Mostly smaller pike with some up to 10 pounds.

*Report by Jeff Hendrickson, Southwest district supervisor, Dickinson*



## Northwest Fisheries District

Substantial winterkill the past few years greatly reduced adult pike populations at several northwest waters. Restocking and natural reproduction have reestablished pike populations in most, but most pike in these waters, although fairly abundant, are still fairly small. Good pike fishing opportunities in these fisheries will be a few years from now.



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT PHOTO

*Justen Barstad, Game and Fish Department fisheries technician, holds a whopper northern pike netted from Lake Oahe. Pike populations in Oahe are the highest ever documented by fisheries personnel.*

Best current pike fishing waters include:

**Lake Darling (Renville County)** –

Pike numbers remain strong, all due to natural reproduction since pike haven't been stocked since 2004. Pike of all sizes are present, including a few angler catches of Whopper and Catch and Release club fish.

**Blacktail Dam (Williams County)** –

Pike numbers remain strong, all due to natural reproduction since pike haven't been stocked since 2000. Pike of all sizes are present.

**Skjermo Lake (Divide County)** –

Despite its small size, pike in this lake are fairly abundant.

**Upper Lake Sakakawea, Trenton Lake (Williams County) and the Little**

**Muddy River** – This year's high water in the Missouri River System essentially

combined all of these waters into the headwaters of Sakakawea. Anglers experienced some good pike fishing this summer. The Little Muddy River along the east side of Williston had the most fishing effort ever. Although the Trenton Lake area was entirely flooded and mostly inaccessible this summer, the water level is now down well within the normal lake elevation and anglers are again fishing the lake. Trenton Lake and the Little Muddy should provide good winter fisheries, provided that angler access isn't limited by snow.

*Report by Fred Ryckman, Northwest district supervisor, Williston*





## Northeast Fisheries District

**Lake Irvine (Ramsey County)** – This large, bowl-shaped lake has high numbers of pike ranging from 12 to 30-plus inches. The average fish is around 24 inches. Irvine can accommodate lots of anglers as the fish are spread throughout.

**Island Lake (Rolette County)** – High numbers of pike that are fat and fast-growing in this natural lake. Fish range from 14 to 32 inches, with an average of about 24 inches.

**Lake Laretta (Nelson County)** – An excellent pike lake that has good-sized fish as well as high numbers. Small, medium and large fish are available with some fish more than 10 pounds. Winter access can be difficult with heavy snow cover, snowmobiling and walking are options.

**Devils Lake (Ramsey County)** – Northern pike of all sizes found throughout the Devils Lake complex.

*Report by Randy Hiltner, Northeast district supervisor, Devils Lake*



## Southeast Fisheries District

Due to flooding of the Wild Rice River in Richland and Sargent counties, pike populations are likely established in many contiguous wetland basins. Three that come to mind include Bisek Slough, Kreiser Slough and Silver Lake, all Richland County. Eckelson Lake South, Barnes County, while difficult to access, is a good lake in the Valley City area. Darkhouse spearfishing participants should note that the pike population in Spiritwood Lake, Stutsman County, is apparently recovering and should provide opportunities this winter.

*Report by Gene Van Eeckhout, Southeast district supervisor, Jamestown*



## Missouri River System

In 2011, Game and Fish Department fisheries biologists documented the highest pike abundance in Lake Sakakawea and the Missouri River/Lake Oahe. This population is due mostly to the strong 2009 year-class. These fish are of moderate size, but given current conditions, trophy-sized pike will be abundant in a few years. Although the number of large pike is relatively low, the Missouri River System in North Dakota remains a top destination for those seeking truly trophy-sized pike.

*Report by Dave Fryda, Missouri River System supervisor, Riverdale*

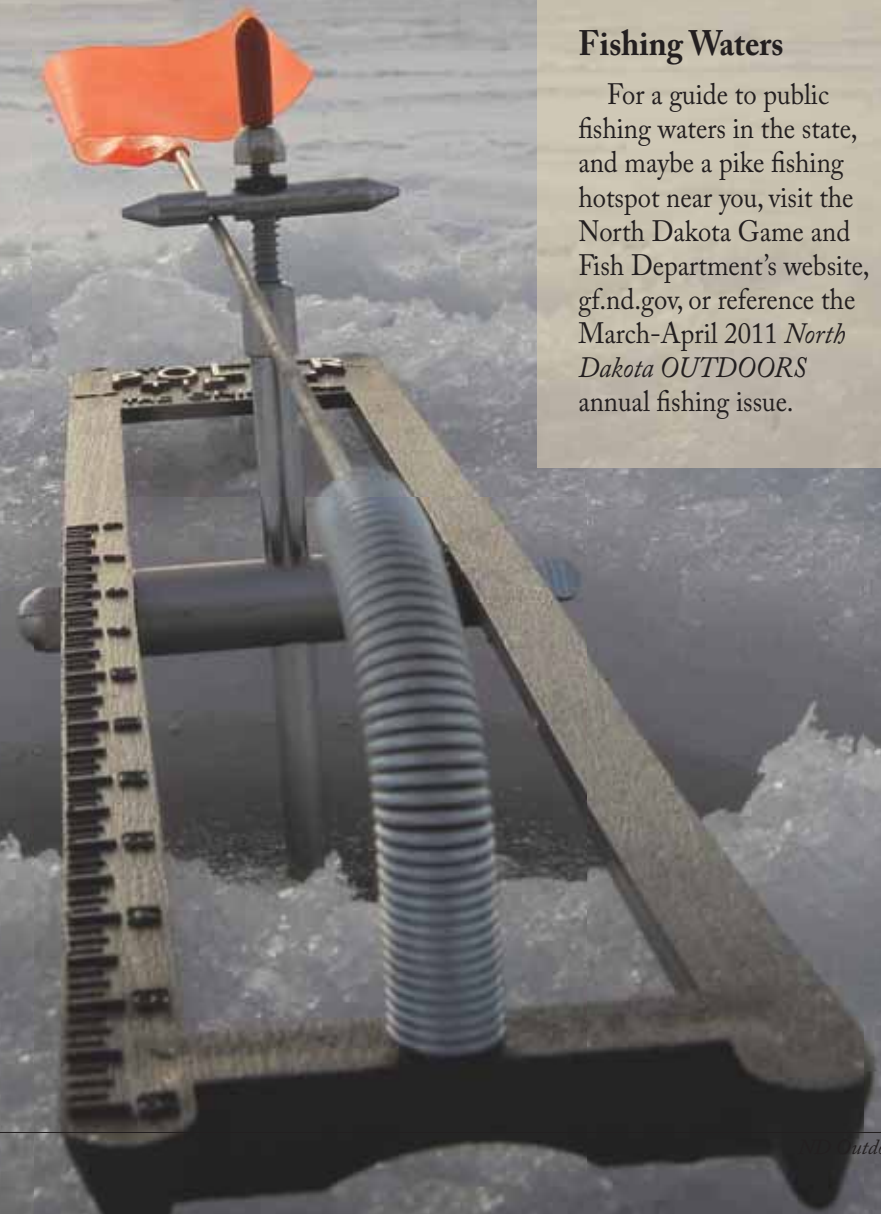
### Fishing Waters

For a guide to public fishing waters in the state, and maybe a pike fishing hotspot near you, visit the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or reference the March-April 2011 *North Dakota OUTDOORS* annual fishing issue.

### Pike Fry

For those anglers who plan to include northern pike in their menu, visit the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or the January 2011 *North Dakota OUTDOORS* for *Removing the Y Bones From Northern Pike*.

While there is more than one way to remove bones from pike, this simple method has worked for many anglers.



CRAIG BIRLE

# Tenders of the Rut

*By Ron Wilson*



CRAIG BIHRLE

*The peak of the rut in North  
Dakota generally occurs  
around November 15.*

**T**he hunter and animal are poles apart in their regard to the rut.

The hunter, armed with a high-powered rifle, scent, call and rattling antlers, trusts that being in the field at this magical time when bucks drop their guard somewhat, will mean a tag around an antler and venison in the freezer.

The animal, physiologically different from the lazy summer days when he wandered the landscape in bachelor groups, now considers these one-time running mates as foes in his biological quest to pass on his genes.

“For a buck, it’s just numbers as he is trying to breed as many does as possible,” said Bill Jensen, North Dakota Game and Fish Department big game management biologist. “The rut, and what comes of it, is the whole point of the animal’s existence.”

But let’s back up.

While long debated around campfires and meat poles, the trigger to the rut is photoperiod, or the amount of daylight versus darkness. “Hunters talk about the weather, the cold stimulating the rut, and yes, there might be something to that,” Jensen said. “And they talk about the moon affecting the rut, and there might be something to that, too. While weather and moon phase might shift rutting behavior a day or two,

it’s photoperiod in the end that is driving the bus.”

Diminishing daylight hours in fall, Jensen said, elicits hormonal and behavioral changes in both bucks and does. “Photoperiod drives everything from bird migration to sharp-tailed grouse dancing on their leks in spring,” he said. “For bucks, their antlers are hardening, testosterone and tension levels are building, necks are swelling and their behavior is more and more aggressive to other males. It’s not like flipping a switch, though, it’s a process.”

Photoperiod also synchronizes the reproductive status of does, which is important because: 1) fawns are all born about the same time across the landscape; 2) fawns are born when vegetation on the landscape is lush and easily digestible, enabling does to meet the nutritional requirements of producing milk for their young; and 3) fawns have months to mature before heading into the coming winter.

The peak of the rut in North Dakota generally occurs around November 15. “The attraction of hunting deer during the rut, of course, is that bucks are focusing mostly on females in estrus, or that sneaky satellite buck trying to interrupt the process,” Jensen said. “What they’re not paying as much attention to is what remains of their surroundings, which includes hunters.”

*A doe can occupy the attention of a rut-driven buck for three or four days until she comes into heat, biologists say.*



RON WILSON



PHOTO SEQUENCE BY RON WILSON

*When a buck tilts its head back, wrinkles its nose and exposes teeth, it's performing what wildlife biologists call the "flehmen" behavior. In hunter circles, it's called the lip curl.*

Both white-tailed deer and mule deer are tenders. That is to say, bucks tend to one doe at a time, not a harem of females like, say, a bull elk with a group of cows. Whether it's real or perceived on his part, Jensen said whitetail bucks, which are traditionally more of a woodland animal, court individual does. Mule deer bucks in open terrain have the ability to assess different doe groups from a distance. "There is a tendency for older, more mature mule deer bucks to associate with larger doe groups," he said. "The does are going to stay together because they are maternally related to one another. By selecting a larger doe group, the potential for the buck to optimize his reproductive performance is increased."

The typical white-tailed deer group consists of a doe, her yearling, and fawns of the year. Bucks do not typically associate with does except during

the rutting season. While the approximate size of a whitetail's home range is debatable, bucks will leave these familiar surroundings during the rut in search of does.

A buck may follow a doe for three or four days until she comes into heat. "A doe in estrus is receptive for a couple of days," Jensen said. "If there is no breeding, she goes out of estrus for a couple weeks and then will come back in again. If breeding is successful, the buck moves on to another doe."

During the rut, Jensen said, bucks wield their dominance and advertise their availability to does by rubs on trees, scrapes on the ground and other visual and olfactory signals. Overhanging branches and twigs are marked with the animal's scent.

"Bucks try to ward off other bucks with posturing and eye contact, but sometimes that isn't enough,"



*The purpose of the lip curl is to expose the scent from doe urine to an olfactory organ called the vomeronasal. This organ aids the buck in his evaluation of the doe's reproductive stage and willingness to mate.*

Jensen said. "Tensions are high and the bucks are pretty single-minded about what they need to do. It's dangerous to fight for these animals because once they engage there is little control over the outcome. Deer are blinded, wounded and sometimes worse."

The rut takes its toll on bucks as fall runs downhill into North Dakota's cruelest months. "Bucks aren't eating much during the rut, they are actively courting, and they just go and go until they are totally spent," Jensen said. "Eventually, a buck's physical condition gets to the point that his testosterone drops off, his antlers drop and he's out of the game."

Generally, older bucks are the first to lose their antlers because they're the animals that have spent the majority of the time in the rutting arena, using all reserve energy in furthering the species. "It gets

to the point where they are starving to death and the body says 'enough,'" Jensen said.

The fallout of rut is evident in winter as snow accumulates and temperatures fall. "When you go to a winter concentration area for deer, the die-off occurs in stages," Jensen said. "The first deer to die are the ones with problems, maybe an old injury, then it's the late-born fawns and the older bucks that just can't recoup their losses from the rut."

Months later, as the photoperiod swings in favor of daylight, the snow melts, temperatures moderate and pregnant does seek seclusion to give birth in May and June to spotted young that will one day continue the cycle.

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**RON WILSON** is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

# THE 100-YEAR-OLD LICENSE

By Craid Bihrlé

On September 6, 1911, the day before North Dakota's hunting season opened 100 years ago, 35-year-old G.E. Bendickson of Upham bought his hunting license. He was one of 25,506 North Dakotans, in a state of about 580,000 people, to pay \$1 for the privilege to hunt birds and deer.

There is no record of whether Bendickson went out the next day on the September 7 opener (a Thursday, by the way) for all birds, or his species of choice when he did go out. All we have is the 100-year-old license, authorized by A. J. Keifer, McHenry County auditor, in flawless cursive script.

Game and Fish Department records, however, provide an interesting historical look at what hunters could anticipate a century ago, when North Dakota's abundant wildlife from just a



few decades earlier was in a state of transition.

The base season for sharptail, prairie chicken, ruffed grouse, snipe, wood cock and plover was September 7 through November 1. The plovers were likely golden plovers, which migrated through North Dakota in huge flocks and were pursued by market hunters at that time. Shooting of other shorebirds was legal with no limits established.

Daily limit for grouse, prairie chicken and many other birds was 10, with 20 in possession. These daily limits were established in 1909; for years before that the daily limit was 25.

A 1911 license allowed the hunter a seasonal limit of two deer of any species or sex. Open season was November 10-30 and deer hunting groups were limited to four or fewer members. Only two years later, the state closed the deer season for the first time, and it did not open again until 1921.

Duck season ran from September 7 to December 15, though two years earlier the duck season started in September and ran until May 1 the following year.

Goose season in 1911 started September 7 and continued until May 10, 1912.

Daily limit for waterfowl in 1911 was 25.

The state did not have an established season in 1911 for moose, pronghorn, elk, mountain sheep, buffalo, caribou and sage grouse.

In 1911 the state legislature prohibited shooting of waterfowl with rifles.

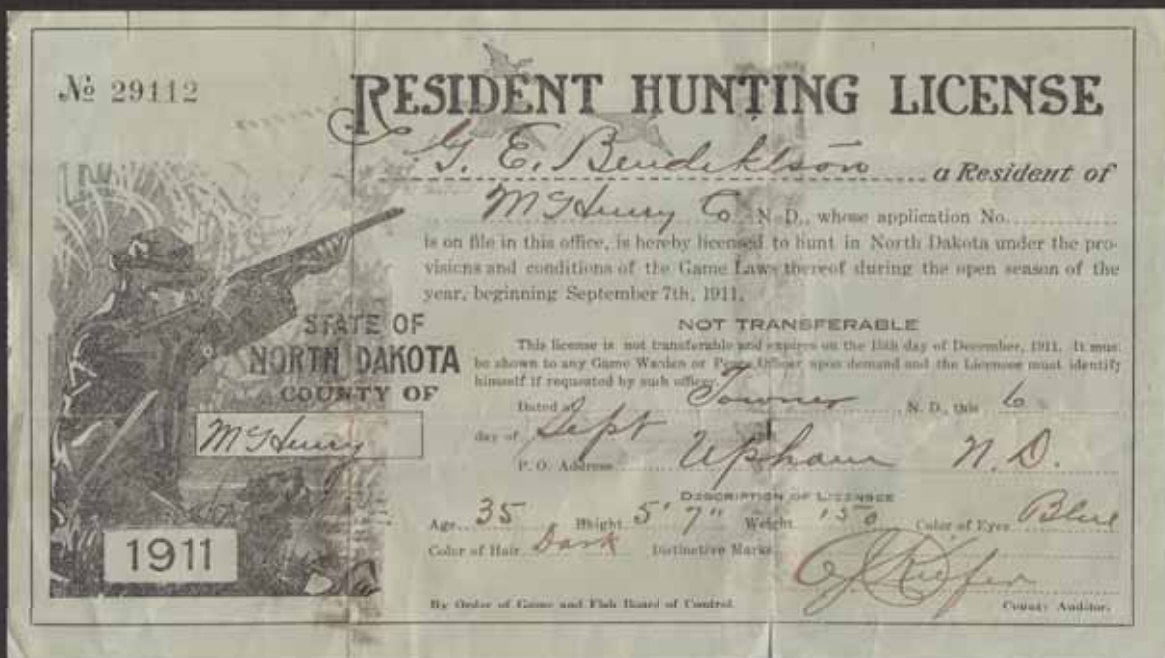
In 1909, the North Dakota legislature established the Game and Fish Board of Control, primarily as an agency of game law enforcement. In 1911, the legislature reduced the Board of Control's membership from five to three. At the same time, the Board of Control had three employees – a fisheries commissioner and two game wardens.

The fisheries commissioner distributed nearly 10 million "walleyed pike" fry to various lakes in 1911 – 5 million went to Fish Lake in Rolette County, and a million each to Metigoshe and Spiritwood lakes.

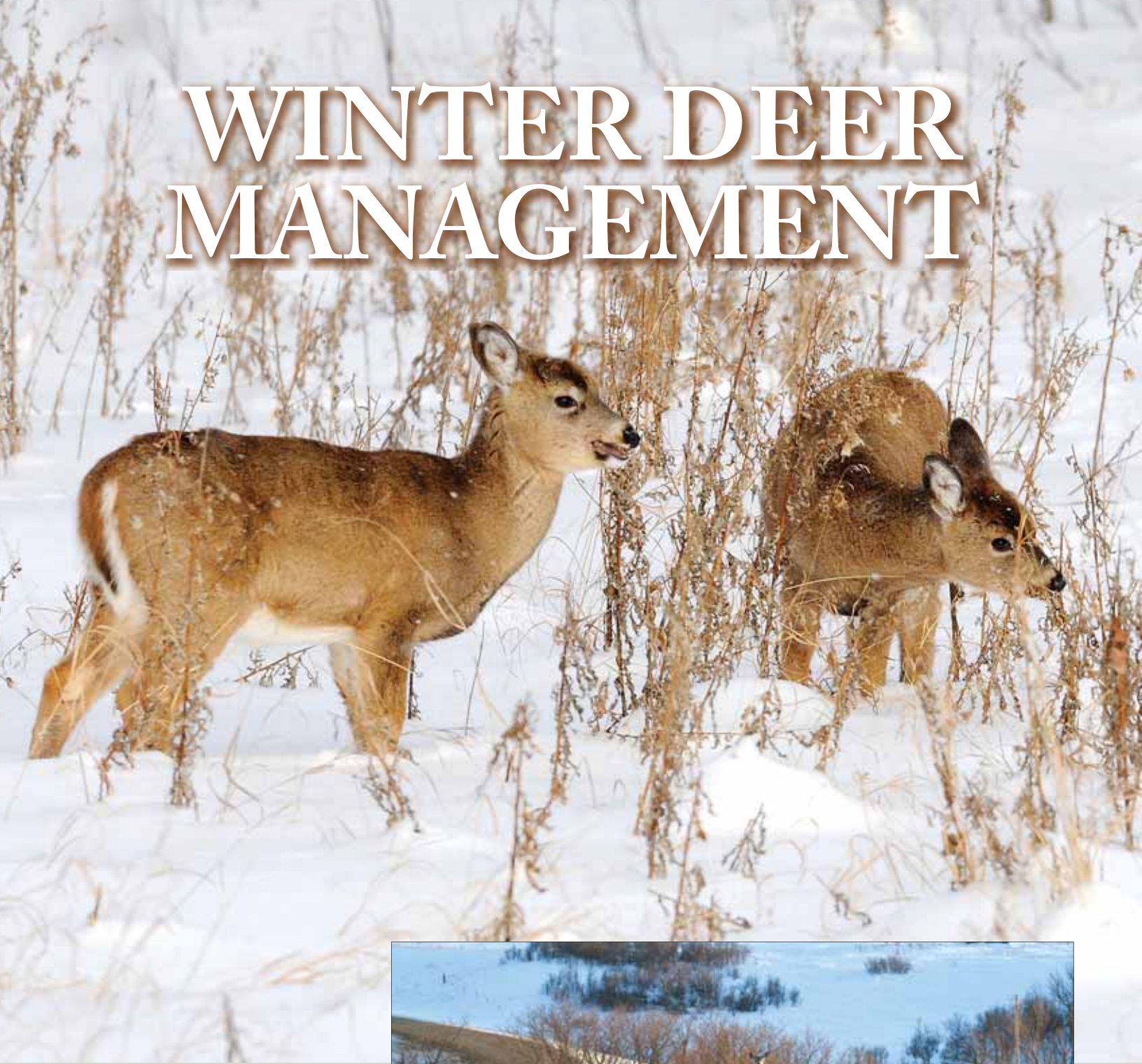
A 1911 law prohibited the carrying of guns afield between June 1 and the start of hunting season.

In 1911, 63 nonresidents bought North Dakota hunting licenses at \$25 each.

**CRAIG BIHRLE** is the Game and Fish Department's communications supervisor.



# WINTER DEER MANAGEMENT

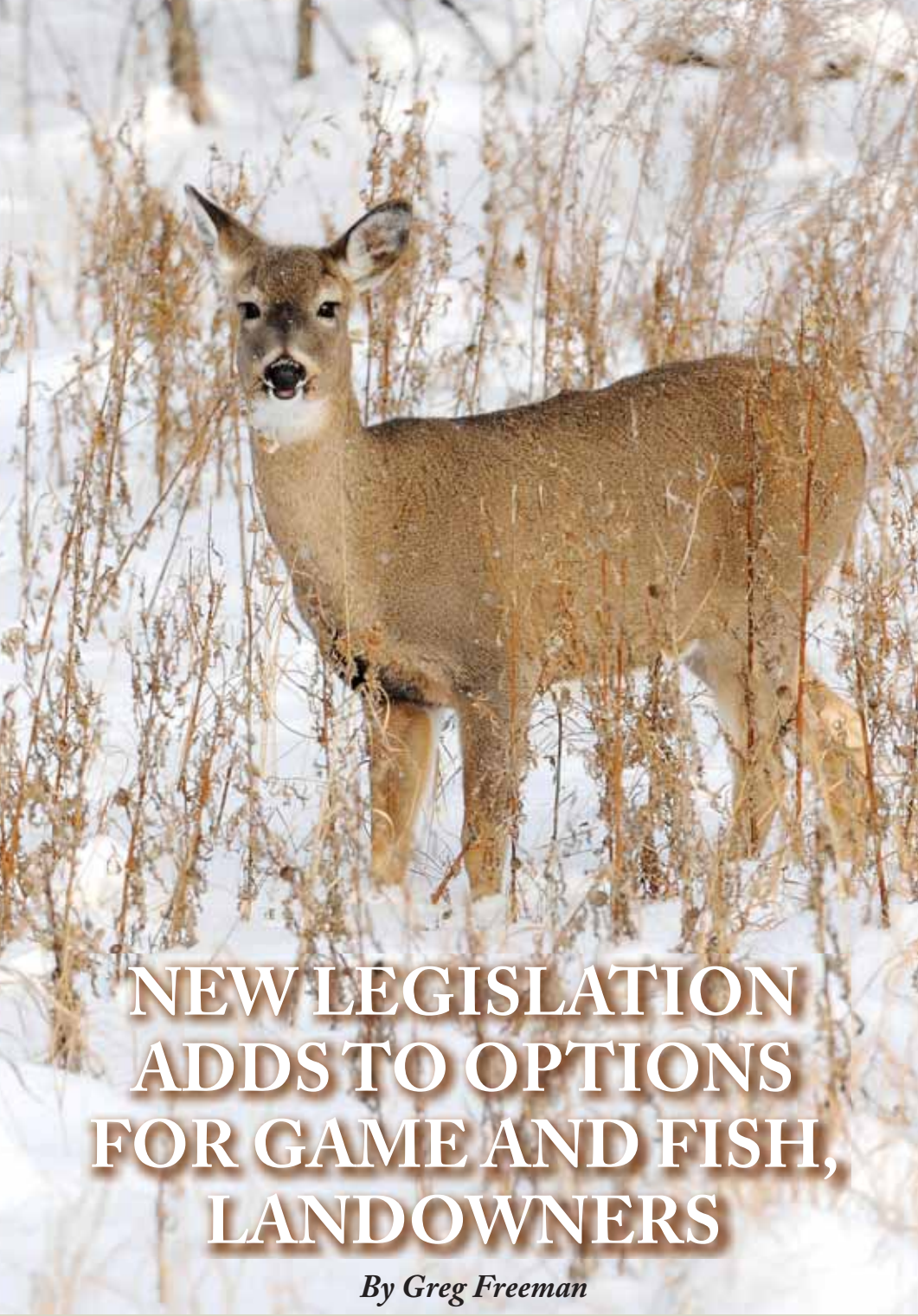


*When the going gets tough during North Dakota's leanest months, deer are sometimes attracted to unprotected livestock feed supplies. The Game and Fish Department is continuing to improve strategies to help producers with depredation problems. One of the tools is the use of deer-proof fencing surrounding feed supplies.*



DEVANE WEBSTER





CRAIG BHIRLE

# NEW LEGISLATION ADDS TO OPTIONS FOR GAME AND FISH, LANDOWNERS

*By Greg Freeman*

**A**fter three rough winters in a row, North Dakota wildlife could use a break. So could people.

Even so, take a drive in a rural area this winter, and pay attention to the scene around farm yards and shelterbelts. It might not look like wildlife populations have suffered at all.

Kevin Kading, North Dakota Game and Fish Department private land section leader, said the effects of the last three severe winters and the loss of Conservation Reserve Program acres on wildlife populations have been well-documented, and those animals that remain must find a place to survive.

“During any severe winter in North Dakota, wildlife struggle to survive, and it’s clearly evident by what has transpired in recent times,” Kading said. “And when wildlife species, such as deer, seek food and shelter in tough times, it can become a problem for those living in a rural setting.”

From December through March it is not uncommon for deer to congregate in a livestock producer’s feed supply. “Often during winter, deer are forced to travel long distances to seek food and shelter,” Kading said. “At that time, and it happens almost every winter, is when the Game and Fish Department gets called in because of depredation from big game on livestock feed supplies.”

The number of depredation cases varies depending on deer numbers, the severity of winter, and availability of natural food. But invariably, Kading said, no matter how high or low the deer population is, if winter is severe enough, deer will seek out food and shelter in livestock feed supplies somewhere in the state. “That is the nature of the beast in a prairie state like North Dakota,” he said.

The Department has a variety of short- and long-term depredation solutions. Some are intended to help producers get through the worst of winter, only to find a more permanent solution after snowmelt.

Some landowners choose to use hunters to increase harvest – and this is either coordinated through a cooperative effort with the Department’s hunter-landowner contact list, or through the Private Land Open To Sportsmen program.

A popular solution is the use of temporary fencing and permanent deer-proof hay yards to protect feed supplies, or to plant a nearby habitat development or a wildlife food source to pull animals away.



MIKE ANDERSON

*Kip Rath, ranch foreman, left, and Rick Kaufman, hired hand, set posts before attaching wire fencing to a deer-proof hay yard earlier this fall on a ranch near Sterling.*

“Deer-proof hay yards provide producers with a long-term solution to their depredation problems, and in some cases they can almost eliminate the problem if used correctly and maintained,” Kading said. “The Department can provide more than one hay yard to a producer if needed, and the hay yard design can be flexible, allowing it to fit into each producer’s unique operation.”

The Department has had a deer-proof hay yard program for more than 20 years, with 580 hay yards on the landscape today. After the severe winter of 1996-97, the Department obtained additional funding to purchase deer-proof hay yard materials.

“We identified the need for a more permanent long-term solution after coming off such a bad winter,” Kading said, when the Department provided

more than 200 hay yards to producers. Since then, hay yards have been provided annually to producers with chronic depredation issues.

“There was a period of almost 10 years of mild winters where depredation was very minimal, and not many hay yards were purchased or needed by producers,” Kading said. “But once again, after coming off of three severe winters in 2008, 2009 and 2010, the Department has provided nearly 300 more hay yards to producers.”

In addition to these viable solutions, the 2011 state legislature passed Senate Bill 2227, which is an effort to provide the Department and produc-

ers with more options to address depredation situations. “The new law provides some additional tools and strengthens some tools that were already available,” Kading said. “It is kind of complex, with a lot of variables tied into one.”

First of all, SB 2227 requires the Game and Fish Department to set aside \$1 million for depredation out of the Private Land Habitat and Access Improvement fund, with up to \$1 million carried over to the next two-year biennium.

In addition, it requires up to \$100,000 to be set aside for wildlife food plots. “While the Department already has a food plot program, the new law doesn’t require that public access be part of the agreement between the landowner and the Department,” Kading

## Save Unused Antlerless Deer Licenses

One of the other provisions of Senate Bill 2227 allows the Game and Fish Department director to “authorize individuals with valid antlerless deer licenses to take deer on private property determined by the director to be severely impacted by deer.”

This option basically means the Game and Fish director now can authorize a hunt to reduce deer numbers on specific private property, with a couple of qualifiers. First, the landowner and Game and Fish must attempt other measures to deter deer from livestock feed supplies. If those measures are determined to be ineffective, the director can authorize individuals to take deer from the property between December 1 and January 15.

Before winter weather sets in, no one knows whether one of these special herd reduction efforts will be necessary, or where it might occur. “If we do need to set up one of these hunts, it will not be like an extended season where an entire unit would be open,” says Game and Fish Director Terry Steinwand. “However, eligible hunters would be those who had unfilled antlerless licenses from the unit in which the private land is located.”

Steinwand says the likelihood of a herd reduction hunt in any one unit is probably not high, “but just in case, hunters might want to keep their unused licenses around until January 15.”

said. "Public access is encouraged, and in many cases can help the situation by increasing deer harvest and distributing deer densities."

SB 2227 also strengthens the Department's already well-proven and effective deer-proof hay yard program. Prior to SB 2227, the Department provided materials to producers with documented depredation problems for a deer-proof hay yard to protect their feed supplies. The standard package included enough material to cover approximately 2.5 acres with 6.5-foot high woven wire fence with gates. Kading said some producers have been given up to three or four hay yards to cover additional areas, or combine them into one large yard to fit their operation.

"Prior to 2227, the producer was responsible for installation and maintenance of the fence, but many producers were finding that it is very costly to hire a contractor to install the fence," Kading said. "Therefore, 2227 added a provision for the Department to provide cost-share for the installation of the fence as well. The current cost-share is \$2,500 per hay yard and can be reimbursed to the landowner once the Department inspects the fence to ensure it was put up and installed correctly."

In addition, the Department must develop depredation management plans for producers experiencing chronic depredation. "This part of the new law gives the Department the ability to sit down with

the landowner and really try to get after the details of what is causing the depredation situation," Kading said. "Sometimes the solution is very simple, such as increasing the deer harvest on neighboring lands that surround the depredation site, or developing natural food and cover away from the depredation site. Other times it can become complex, and may involve working with surrounding neighbors as well as the landowner experiencing depredation. It all depends on the producer's situation."

If none of these options works, SB 2227 also provides an opportunity for the Department or the producer to use the North Dakota Department of Agriculture's Ag Mediation Service to help each party come to an agreement over difficult deer depredation situations.

"AMS will assign a mediator to each depredation case and help both parties find a workable situation," Kading said. "There is a provision in the law that reads if the parties cannot reach an agreement, the issue can be forwarded to the Credit Review Board for further review. AMS simply provides a non-biased, neutral, third party to help achieve a successful outcome for both the Department and the producer."

Most cases will never get to the AMS because Game and Fish and landowners usually develop a solution that works.

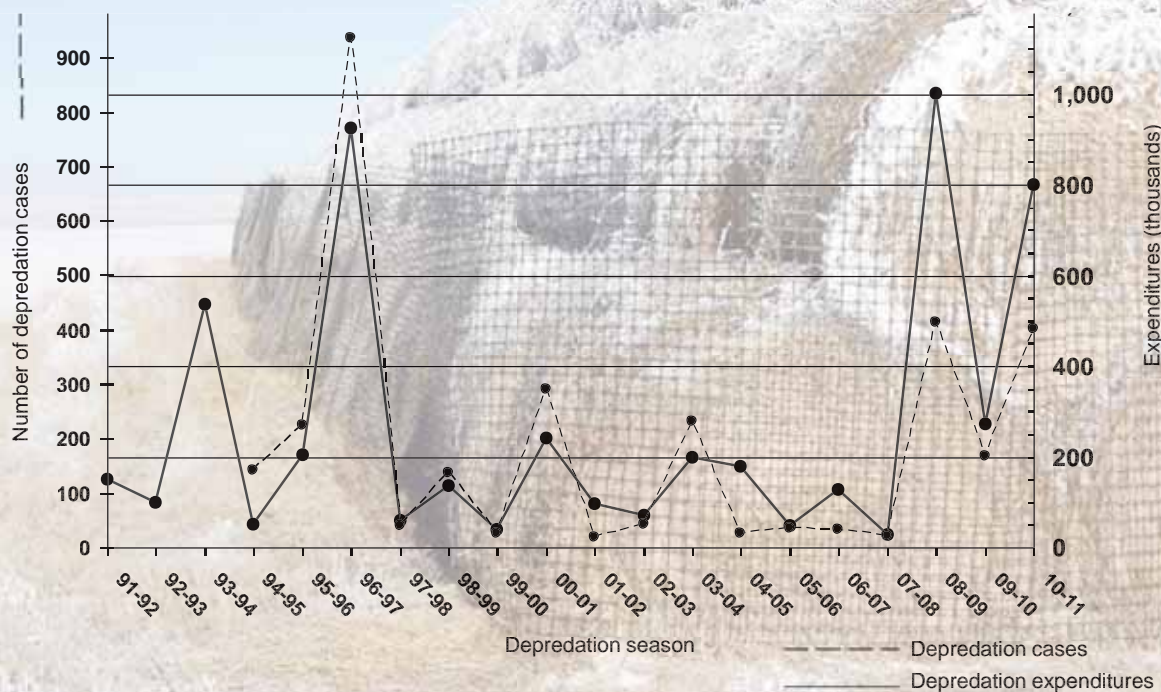
*GREG FREEMAN is the Game and Fish Department's news editor.*

## Winter Depredation Calls

Number of depredation calls per year since mid-1990s:

- 1996-97 – 1,000
- 1997-98 – 40
- 1998-99 – 137
- 1999-2000 – 25
- 2000-01 – 291
- 2001-02 – 20
- 2002-03 – 42
- 2003-04 – 231
- 2004-05 – 26
- 2005-06 – 35
- 2006-07 – 34
- 2007-08 – 21
- 2008-09 – 414
- 2009-10 – 168
- 2010-11 – 402

# ANNUAL DEPREDATION EXPENDITURES



KEVIN KADING

# BUFFALOBERRY PATCH



By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor

## CWD Surveillance Continues

The state Game and Fish Department will continue its Hunter-Harvested Surveillance program during the 2011 hunting season, by sampling deer for chronic wasting disease and bovine tuberculosis from 12 units in North Dakota. In addition, all moose and elk harvested in the state are eligible for testing.

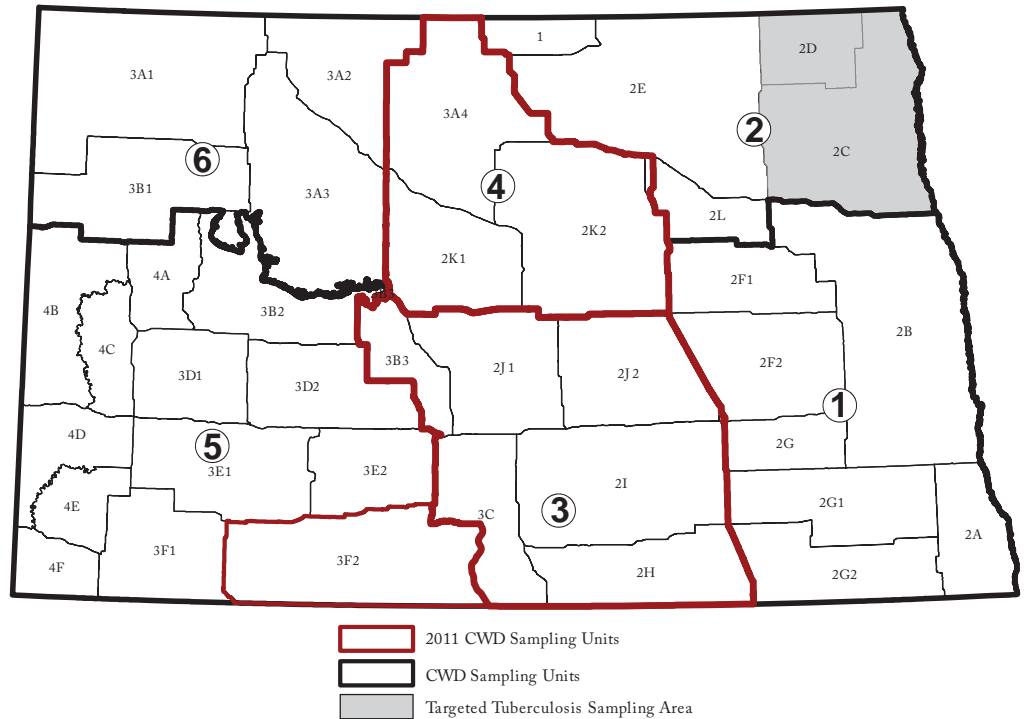
Samples from hunter-harvested deer taken in the central portion of the state will be tested from units 2H, 2I, 2J1, 2J2, 2K1, 2K2, 3A4, 3B3 and 3C. In addition, deer will be tested from units 2C and 2D in the northeast, and unit 3F2 in the southwest.

Every head sampled must have either the deer tag attached, or a new tag can be filled out with the license number, deer hunting unit and date harvested.

Hunters are encouraged to drop off deer heads at the following locations:

- Ashley – Ashley Super Valu Store
- Bismarck – Game and Fish Department headquarters, Call of the Wild Taxidermy, M&M Sausage and Meats, West Dakota Meats
- Bottineau – Mattern Family Meats
- Carrington – Barton Meats
- Devils Lake – Devils Lake Game and Fish district office, Goldade Processing
- Edgeley – Edgeley Meat Processing
- Granville – S&E Meats
- Harvey – Lonetree Game and Fish district office
- Heaton – Miller Game Processing
- Jamestown – Jamestown Game and Fish district office
- Kulm – People's Meat Market
- Linton – Bosch's Meat Market, Schmaltz Meats

## 2011 CWD AND TUBERCULOSIS SAMPLING UNITS



- Mandan – Butcher Block Meats
- Minot – S&K Processing, Hensen's Fur and Leather
- Moffit – Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge office
- Parshall – Myers Custom Meats
- Riverdale – Riverdale Game and Fish district office
- Sheyenne – Brenno Meats, Wild Things Taxidermy
- Steele – Devore Custom Meats
- Turtle Lake – Barry's Jack and Jill
- Upham – J. Clark Salyer NWR office
- Westhope – Country Meats
- Woodworth – Chase Lake NWR office.

Drop off locations for deer taken from units 2C and 2D:

- Aneta – Aneta Meats Service
- Edinburg – Market on Main Meats
- Fordville – Fordville Wildlife Club (Baier Body and Glass)

- Grand Forks – Bob's Oil, Ted's Taxidermy
  - Langdon – Hickory Hut
  - Larimore – Glenn's EZ Stop
  - Park River – Jim's Super Valu
  - Reynolds – Weber's Meats
  - Walhalla – Walhalla Co-op
- Drop off locations for deer taken from unit 3F2:
- Elgin – Gunny's Bait and Tackle, Melvin's Taxidermy
  - Glen Ullin – Kuntz's Butcher Shop
  - Hettinger – Dakota Packing
  - New Leipzig – Hertz Hardware
- Moose and elk heads should be taken to a Game and Fish office.

CWD affects the nervous system of members of the deer family and is always fatal. Scientists have found no evidence that CWD can be transmitted naturally to humans or livestock.



CRAIG BIRRE

## Silver Carp Caught in James River

The state Game and Fish Department has verified silver carp in the North Dakota portion of the James River.

An angler caught the first verified silver carp below a lowhead dam near LaMoure. Following that catch, Game and Fish biologists found another silver carp on October 12 while sampling the Jamestown Reservoir tailrace near Jamestown.

Silver carp, an exotic species, are well established in the lower Missouri River and in the James River in South Dakota. These are the first discoveries of this aquatic nuisance species in North Dakota waters.

Lynn Schlueter, Game and Fish aquatic nuisance species coordinator, said Department personnel are disappointed but not surprised that silver carp have entered the state.

“Record high flows in the James River this year have facilitated their movements upstream, causing them to move up the James River in South Dakota in recent years,” Schlueter said. “Control measures for these species are largely ineffective. Once established in a large river system they are virtually impossible to eliminate.”

Silver carp out-compete native and other game fish in large river systems. They eat phytoplankton, a food item used by zooplankton, which in turn are eaten by small game fish. They concentrate below dams and can drive out desirable fish. When frightened, silver carp can jump several feet out of the water, thereby posing a danger to boaters and skiers.

*Silver carp from the James River.*



*Fishing tournaments in North Dakota may not occur without first securing a valid permit from the Game and Fish Department.*

GREG GULLICKSON

## Fishing Tournaments Require 30-Day Notice

Organizers planning fishing tournaments, including ice fishing contests this winter, are reminded to submit an application to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department at least 30 days prior to the start of the event.

The 30-day advance notice allows for review by agency staff to ensure the proposed tournament will not have negative consequences or conflicts with other proposed tournaments for the same location and/or time.

Tournaments may not occur without first obtaining a valid permit from the Department.

In addition, the number of open-water tournaments on lakes Sakakawea and Oahe, the Missouri River and Devils Lake are capped each year, depending upon the time of the year and location. Tournament sponsors for these water bodies must submit their application to the Department prior to January 1 to ensure full consideration.

## Lakes Closed to Fishing

Anglers are reminded that three North Dakota lakes will close to fishing for several months beginning in November.

The State Fair Pond in Ward County, McDowell Dam in Burleigh County and Lightning Lake in McLean County are closed to fishing from November 1 through March 31.

Anglers should refer to the 2010-12 North Dakota Fishing Guide for open water and winter fishing regulations.

## More Waters Open to Darkhouse Spearfishing

Additional opportunities highlight this winter's darkhouse spearfishing season, as more lakes are open, though Patterson Reservoir (Dickinson Reservoir) in Stark County has been removed from the list.

North Dakota's darkhouse spearfishing season opens on most state waters December 1, with the exception of Spiritwood Lake which opens January 1. The season extends through March 15. Legal fish are northern pike and nongame species.

Darkhouse spearing is allowed for all residents with a valid fishing license and for residents under age 16. Nonresidents may darkhouse spearfish in North Dakota if they are from states that offer the same privilege for North Dakota residents. Minnesota was recently added to the list of states that allow nonresidents to darkhouse spearfish.

All individuals who participate in darkhouse spearfishing must register with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department prior to participating. Registration is available on the Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or through any Game and Fish Department office.

Winter access difficulties in 2010-11 were reflected in the number of darkhouse spearfishing participants. Overall, harvest last winter was the second lowest on record, when nearly 700 participants speared more than 2,300 pike. Lake Laretta (Nelson County), Devils Lake (Ramsey/Benson County) and Buffalo Lodge Lake (McHenry County) were the top three lakes for harvest.

Lakes open to darkhouse spearing are:

- Barnes County – Eckelson Lake Complex
- Benson County – Devils Lake, Silver Lake
- Bowman County – Gascoyne Lake, Kalina Dam, Spring Lake
- Burke County – Powers Lake
- Emmons County – Rice Lake
- Foster County – Juanita Lake
- Grant County – Heart Butte Reservoir (Lake Tschida)
- Griggs County – Sibley Lake
- Hettinger County – Blickensderfer Dam
- Kidder County – Alkaline Lake, Cherry Lake, Etta/Alkaline complex, Fresh Lake, Lake Helen, Horsehead Lake, Lake Josephine, Lake Williams, Round Lake
- LaMoure County – Diamond Lake, Flood Lake
- Logan County – Beaver Lake, West Napoleon Lake
- McHenry County – Buffalo Lodge Lake
- McIntosh County – Clear Lake, Coldwater Lake, Dry/Goose Lake
- McLean County – Crooked Lake, Long Lake
- Mountrail County – Stanley Reservoir
- Nelson County – Lake Laretta, Stump Lake
- Ramsey County – All waters open to public fishing
- Renville County – Lake Darling
- Richland County – Grass Lake
- Rolette County – Carpenter Lake, Gravel Lake, Island Lake, School Section Lake
- Sargent County – Buffalo Lake
- Steele County – North Tobiason Lake
- Sheridan County – Coal Mine Lake
- Stutsman County – Mallard Marsh, Spiritwood Lake, Sunday Lake
- Ward County – Carlson lakes
- Williams County – Cottonwood Lake, Tioga Reservoir
- Lake Oahe – South Dakota border to MacLean Bottoms boat ramp and all tributaries upstream to the first vehicular crossing
- Lake Sakakawea – Garrison Dam to U.S. Highway 85 bridge at Williston and all tributaries upstream to the first vehicular crossing



GREG GULLICKSON



## Theodore Roosevelt Youth Award

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is promoting a Theodore Roosevelt award that recognizes North Dakota youth who have advanced outdoor skills and are active in Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts or 4-H.

Bill Jensen, the Department's coordinator for the award, said the award is inspired by Roosevelt's spirit and writings. "Our agency developed the award in 2008 to honor the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of this remarkable American," he said. "Our goal is to promote the development of a healthy mind and body, good citizenship, a strong conservation ethic, an understanding of North Dakota's natural history, and the ability to handle oneself while engaging in a wide variety of outdoor recreational activities."

Existing programs developed by Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts and 4-H account for more than 80 percent of the award requirements. The remaining criteria are educational programs the Game and Fish Department provides, such as hunter education, National Archery in the Schools and the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

The Game and Fish Department believes a young adult who completes the selected requirements will not only be a well-rounded and well-informed citizen, Jensen said, but also will have mastered skills needed to handle an active life outdoors.

In addition to training youth for a wide variety of outdoor adventures, this award program is intended to assist in the retention and involvement of North Dakota youth in 4-H, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

Adult advisors can download and print the *Theodore Roosevelt Award Workbook* from the education/outreach link at the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov); or direct additional questions to Bill Jensen at (701) 220-5031.

## Hunting Big Game Over Bait Restrictions

Hunters are reminded that hunting big game over bait is prohibited on all state-owned or managed wildlife management areas, all U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service national wildlife refuges and waterfowl production areas, U.S. Forest Service national grasslands, and all North Dakota state school, state park and state forest service lands.

In addition, the governor's proclamation relating to chronic wasting disease includes a provision that prohibits hunting big game over bait on both public and private land in deer unit 3F2.

Hunting over bait is defined as the placement and/or use of baits for attracting big game and other wildlife to a specific location for the purpose of hunting.

Baits include but are not limited to grains, minerals, salts, fruits, vegetables, hay or any other natural or manufactured foods. It does not apply to the use of scents and lures, water, food plots, standing crops or livestock feeds used in standard practices.



RON WILSON

*Hunting over bait is prohibited on some lands in North Dakota.*

## Possessing Road-Killed Deer

Even though motorists are especially attentive to deer movement this time of year, accidents occur. When it happens, a local law enforcement agency should be contacted.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department often receives calls from motorists wondering if they can keep the carcass, or at least the antlers of deer they have hit. The answer is yes, but only after obtaining a permit.

A permit is required if someone wants to take possession of parts or all of a road-killed animal. A permit is also required to possess skulls with antlers attached.

Permits to possess road-killed deer are free and available from game wardens and local law enforcement offices.

## Hunter Education Update

Hunter education courses have wrapped up for this year. However, individuals or parents with children who will need to take a course in 2012 should monitor the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), as classes that begin in January will be added to the online services link as soon as times and locations are finalized.



CRAIG BIHRE

*Open Fields funds have boosted the Game and Fish Department's popular Private Land Open To Sportsmen access program.*

## Open Fields Legislation Boosts PLOTS Program

The Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen hunting access program has added several thousand acres over the past couple of years, thanks to federal Open Fields provisions included in the 2008 Farm Bill.

Funding is intended to provide incentives for landowners to allow public

access for hunting, fishing and other outdoor-related activities, as well as habitat management. "It's been a nice addition to our PLOTS program," says Kevin Kading, the Department's private land section supervisor. "We've developed some long-term agreements that would not have been possible without Open Fields dollars."

States apply to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency for

grants, and so far Game and Fish has received two grants totaling \$1.3 million. The Department's private land program has allocated about \$525,000 from the first grant and is now working on the second grant.

The highlight so far is nearly 3,000 acres of USDA Wetland Reserve Program land enrolled into PLOTS across the state. These acres are restored wetlands and associated uplands committed to 30-year agreements.

Landowners receive an additional payment from PLOTS for allowing public access for 30 years. Kading says the Department's goal is to enroll up to 20,000 acres of WRP into the PLOTS program with the help of Open Fields funds.

"Currently, we have more interest than there is funding available," Kading said, "so we're hoping the next farm bill will keep this program going."

Open Fields was originally introduced by senators Kent Conrad from North Dakota and Pat Roberts from Kansas in the 2002 Farm Bill. It eventually passed in the 2008 Farm Bill at a funding level of \$50 million.

*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.*

**R.A.P**  
**REPORT ALL POACHERS**  
**1-800-472-2121**  
*Poachers Steal Your Wildlife – Make the Call!*



## Game and Fish Advisory Board Meetings Announced

Outdoor enthusiasts are invited to attend a North Dakota Game and Fish Department advisory board meeting in their area.

These public meetings, held each spring and fall, provide citizens with an opportunity to discuss fish and wildlife issues and ask questions of their district advisors and agency personnel.

The governor appoints eight Game and Fish Department advisors, each representing a multi-county section of the state, to serve as a liaison between the Department and public.

Any person who requires an auxiliary aid or service must notify the contact person at least five days prior to the scheduled meeting date.

- **District 7** – Counties: Burleigh, Emmons, Grant, Kidder, McLean, Mercer, Morton, Oliver, Sheridan and Sioux

**Date:** November 22 – 7 p.m.

**Location:** North Dakota Game and Fish Department headquarters office

**Host:** North Dakota Furtakers Association

**Contact:** Phil Mastrangelo, 250-4405

**Advisory Board Member:**

Frank Kartch, Bismarck, 751-3414

- **District 2** – Counties: Bottineau, Burke, McHenry, Mountrail, Pierce, Renville and Ward

**Date:** November 28 – 7 p.m.

**Location:** 210 Main Street, Berthold

**Host:** Berthold Sportsman's Club

**Contact:** Joe Lautenschlager, 721-1882

**Advisory Board Member:**

Robert Gjellstad, Voltaire, 338-2281

- **District 3** – Counties: Benson, Cavalier, Eddy, Ramsey, Rolette and Towner

**Date:** November 28 – 7 p.m.

**Location:** Lake Region State College,



*Wildlife Division Chief Randy Kreil (seated), and Director Terry Steinwand (standing), answer questions at an advisory board meeting.*

Devils Lake

**Host:** Lake Region Anglers

**Contact:** Ralph Gardner, 662-5639

**Advisory Board Member:**

Tracy Gardner, Devils Lake, 662-5639

- **District 1** – Counties: Divide, McKenzie and Williams

**Date:** November 29 – 7 p.m.

**Location:** Civic Center, Watford City

**Host:** McKenzie County Pheasants Forever

**Contact:** Rick Pokrzywinski, 770-2736

**Advisory Board Member:**

Jason Leiseth, Arnegard, 586-3714

- **District 4** – Counties: Grand Forks, Nelson, Pembina and Walsh

**Date:** November 29 – 7 p.m.

**Location:** Fordville Legion Club

**Host:** Dakota Prairie Wildlife Club

**Contact:** Lynn Baier, 229-3665

**Advisory Board Member:**

Ronald Houdek, Tolna, 262-4724

- **District 5** – Counties: Cass, Ransom, Richland, Sargent, Steele and Traill

**Date:** November 30 – 7 p.m.

**Location:** City Hall, Casselton

**Host:** Cass County Wildlife Club

**Contact:** Gary Knox, 280-2714

**Advisory Board Member:** Lorán

Palmer, West Fargo, 282-8479

- **District 8** – Counties: Adams, Billings, Bowman, Dunn, Golden Valley, Hettinger, Slope and Stark

**Date:** November 30 – 7 p.m.

**Location:** Hettinger Research Extension Center

**Host:** Hettinger Rod and Gun Club, Pheasants Forever

**Contact:** Bill Ecker, 567-2149

**Advisory Board Member:**

Wayne Gerbig, Amidon, 879-6353

- **District 6** – Counties: Barnes, Dickey, Foster, Griggs, Logan, LaMoure, McIntosh, Stutsman and Wells

**Date:** December 1 – 7 p.m.

**Location:** Civic Center, LaMoure

**Host:** James River Sportsman's Club

**Contact:** Bob Flath, 320-0194

**Advisory Board Member:**

Joel Christoferson, Litchville, 973-4981

# GAME AND FISH STAFF NOTES



Bill Haase

## Haase is New Wildlife Resource Supervisor

Bill Haase has been named wildlife resource management supervisor for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's south central district in Bismarck. Haase is responsible for management of 25,000 acres of Department wildlife management areas in a nine-county district.

Haase has been the Department's fisheries development project manager since 2003.



## 2012 Calendar Orders

Now is the time to order the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's *North Dakota OUTDOORS* calendar, the official source for all the season and application dates you need to know in 2012. Along with outstanding color photographs of North Dakota wildlife and scenery, it also includes sunrise-sunset times and moon phases.

To order, send \$3 for each, plus \$1 postage, to: Calendar, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095. Be sure to include a three-line return address with your order, or the post office may not deliver our return mailing.



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Bismarck, ND 58501-5095  
701.328.6300  
Email: [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov)



# back cast

By Ron Wilson



Like a flag waving lazily in a breeze, a chinook salmon measuring maybe 24 inches fins above a multi-colored rock bottom that winks shades of red, orange and brown through the creek's mostly clear water.

Without knowing for certain, you guess the fish is a female, and at any moment will turn on her side and repeatedly flex her body and tail to make a nest, called a red, where she'll broadcast her eggs. Occasionally, much darker male fish nose into her territory, only to be aggressively chased away.

If it weren't for the traffic noise from Expressway and Main, or the razor wire reminder of the state penitentiary in the background, this idyllic setting just yards below a beaver dam that feeds more than a trickle of water downstream, could be almost

anywhere.  
Someplace  
remote,  
perhaps,  
where  
salmon  
indeed drop  
their pea-sized eggs  
with success before  
dying in the shallows  
where predators pick at their  
deteriorating flesh.

The setting, interestingly enough, is a stretch of Hay Creek located just a short walk from the Game and Fish Department's main office. Hay Creek originates maybe 10 miles north of Bismarck, runs downhill before spilling into Apple Creek, a feeder of the much larger Missouri River.

While the complexion of Hay Creek may change over its course, this stretch is simple to negotiate in chest waders and it's unlikely there is a spot deep enough to float your hat. And because some water quality issues were addressed in years past, you can see the bottom in a lot of places in this mostly urban drainage.

It's mid-October and the diminishing daylight hours have elicited the urge for these fish to leave the Missouri River and point their noses into the current and pick their way up one tributary or the next, in search of a place to spawn. This is not surprising. What is unexpected, perhaps, is that they chose Hay Creek.

"Who knows what these fish are doing," said Greg Power, Department fisheries chief. "Maybe they're doing the same thing up the Knife and Heart rivers, or perhaps they run up these creeks every fall and we just don't see them."

No matter how heroic or pedestrian their journeys, their spawning efforts are for naught. North Dakota simply doesn't have the habitat conditions in terms of highly-oxygenated water and cobble substrate needed to nurture eggs through winter.

What's curious is where the salmon came from. Are they part of the South Dakota stock released into Lake Oahe, or did they move downstream from the Garrison Dam Tailrace or Lake Sakakawea to get to their final resting place of Hay Creek?

The Game and Fish Department has for some time stocked salmon in both the Tailrace and Sakakawea. While fish routinely make their way through the dam into the Tailrace, the odds of even more Sakakawea stocked fish being in the river this year are high, considering the dam's emergency spillway was opened for weeks in summer.

A slice of this small mystery will be answered when fisheries biologists find and read micro-tags embedded in the heads of a handful of salmon netted from Hay Creek. Micro-tags are inserted into a sample of young salmon before being stocked into Sakakawea and the Missouri River. Similar work is done in South Dakota.

Biologists know which fish carry a tag because their adipose fin has been clipped.

"No matter that these fish can't spawn here successfully, or whether they originated in South Dakota or North Dakota, it's kind of cool that they made their way up the five or six miles of Hay and Apple creeks to get here," Power said. "It's yet another one of those wild twists of the great outdoors and something the public should witness."

*RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.*



Whitetail buck



Bull elk

PHOTOS BY CRAIG BHIRLE

## Antler Development

Bighorn sheep have horns and deer have antlers.

There's a difference.

Horns stay with sheep their entire lives. Deer shed their antlers every winter, and grow new ones when the weather warms.

Whitetail buck antler growth begins in early spring as daylight hours lengthen. Soft-growing antlers are covered in hairy skin called velvet. When the velvet is shed in September, what lies beneath is bone.

Not all bone is the same from deer to deer, elk to elk or moose to moose. Disease, nutrition, injury, all sorts of things, factor in to antler development.

Take the whitetail buck in the inset photo above. While it's only a guess why this young animal simply grew spikes and nothing more, Bill Jensen, North Dakota Game and Fish Department big game management biologist, said the answer likely has to

do with nutrition.

"The engine for building larger antlers is body size ... larger fawns are typically going to have larger antlers," he said. "This spike buck is likely a yearling coming off a hard winter."

The elk pictured above, on the other hand, grew only spikes, perhaps, for a completely different reason.

"The elk, maybe, was dealing with a hormone imbalance ... it didn't produce a lot of testosterone, and the result was incomplete development of its antlers," Jensen said.

Whitetail buck fawns grow two small bump-like antlers, or buttons, their first year, Jensen said, and will grow their first true set of antlers the following spring and summer. "This first true set can be four points to a side, and I've seen five points to a side, which is a sign of good nutrition," Jensen said of the basket racks typical of young, well-fed bucks on the Northern Plains. "The second

rack will be larger than the first, and if the buck has access to a high-quality natural source of food throughout the year, it will grow an even larger rack."

Deer and other members of the deer family like elk and moose can grow abnormal racks for a number of reasons. Injury, and not just to the growing antler, is one of them.

"A buck injuring a leg at the wrong time can influence antler development because the body has to take care of first things first," Jensen said. "In this case the nutritional demands are needed to repair the injured leg."

There is some anecdotal evidence that says if the injury is to, say, a right leg, the abnormality will occur in the left antler, which is weird.

But not as weird as female deer growing antlers, which is an entirely different story.

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**RON WILSON** is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.