

# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

\$2.00 JUNE 2010





## MATTERS OF OPINION



**Terry Steinwand**  
*Director*

As I sit down to write this, I'm in awe of Mother Nature's power and her ability to shape our lives and the landscape. The Bismarck-Mandan area is in the midst of a long-term flood situation and no one is quite sure of the end result.

While the local area will be the focus of our attention for some time, many areas around the state have varying issues and problems. As I've said before, I'm proud to be a North Dakotan and proud how everyone pulls together in times of need.

The current wet cycle we're in will change the landscape. As one person put it, "I don't think there's been this much water in North Dakota since the last glaciers melted!"

And while humans weren't around at that time, I'm guessing the effect on fish and wildlife was just as dramatic.

The Prairie Pothole Region was created when the last glacier retreated and eventually made North Dakota one of the premier areas for waterfowl production. The glacier also helped create the current route of the Missouri River, which we're now battling. It made the Red River run north and created what was then glacial Lake Agassiz, which some would say is being recreated under current conditions. The point is, major weather patterns can shape our landscape over time.

We've learned to enjoy what it created, but have we learned to appreciate it? I know when I consistently have something, I tend to take it for granted and think it will always be there, and in the same abundance. But that's

not necessarily true. It can be taken away or dramatically reduced in a short period of time.

The same is true of our fish and wildlife. We have to continually monitor the habitat available and how it affects the resource, and ultimately how it affects everyone. The last few years of unbelievable wet conditions have influenced everything from fish to farmers. Some of it's positive, some of it is not. The only thing we know is that we have to work with what we have.

High water or drought, we still do what we can to provide the best hunting and fishing opportunities possible, but we don't, and can't, do it alone. While we're a few months away from major hunting seasons, I have to give my appreciation to the large number of volunteer hunter education instructors, who are featured in this issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

While there are some exceptions, the vast majority of our hunters go through hunter education classes. This would not be possible without volunteers who graciously give their time to help educate those youngsters, and quite a few adults, who want to experience one of North Dakota great traditions, hunting. So next time you have a student take one of these courses, please thank the instructors.

We're into the fishing season and even though there's high water in a number of places and boating access may be limited, there's an abundance of opportunities across the state. Take some time to relax and enjoy what North Dakota has to offer.

*Terry Steinwand*

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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.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

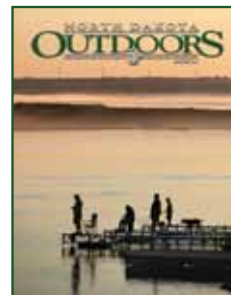
FEATURES

A Decade of Saving our Lakes ..... 4
Volunteers Drive Hunter Education Program ..... 6
From Egg to Adult ..... 10
The Fallout of Transporting Fish ..... 14

DEPARTMENTS

From Both Sides: Best of Both Sides II ..... 2
Buffaloberry Patch ..... 18
Back Cast ..... 25

Front cover: An evening of fishing along the Missouri River near Washburn. Photo by Greg Gullickson, Minot.



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## BEST OF BOTH SIDES II

At the end of every Both Sides column is an invitation for *North Dakota OUTDOORS* readers to provide comments. Some topics generate considerable feedback, others not so much.

Every note of correspondence, from email to handwritten note, is distributed to North Dakota Game and Fish Department administrators. This month, we're going to take a look back at some of the topics that prompted the most feedback over the past couple of years, and share a cross-section of reader emails and letters.

We're also including a short summary of the topic and the issue in which it originally appeared.

Full versions of the selected columns are available on the Game and Fish Department's website at <http://gf.nd.gov/multimedia/ndoutdoors/issues/article-index/issues-ndx.html>. Some of the comments were edited for clarity and length.

### Blinds, Blaze Orange and Big Game Hunting

**August 2009**

This article provided background on a growing concern over whether Game and Fish or the state legislature should establish some type of regulation for marking or identifying ground blinds during the deer gun season. It also served to increase awareness that more and more deer hunters – both bow and gun – were using ground blinds during deer gun season. Many hunters who responded strongly recommended that people in ground blinds should put some sort of orange marker or flag outside the structure.



#### One Side

- “I don't know how far you should go on this type of thing. First, do you then include muzzleloader season? Second, I usually just use natural foliage or a tree as a blind – would that mean I would have to hang an orange flag above me? Kind of defeats the purpose of hiding or the use of camo.”

#### The Other Side

- “I was glad to see the article on this subject ... I say this as I was thinking about taking along my pop-up blind this deer rifle season. I had been wondering if there was any type of law(s) on this. When one stops to think about it, it does make sense we should have some clear text written ... Make it mandatory to have some kind of high visibility flag/marker over the blind.”
- “Thank you for publishing this story in your magazine this month. I think you did an outstanding job at bringing hunters in the know of this serious safety

risk prior to the opening of this 2009 season ... To answer your question, yes, there ... needs to be legislation passed that requires some type of visibility marking for both stands and blinds.”

### Roost Busting

**October 2008**

This article addressed a concern the Game and Fish Department sometimes hears,

primarily from waterfowl field hunters, who

would prefer some type of regulation that would restrict hunting over water in situations where large concentrations of ducks or geese are roosting, even if the water is otherwise accessible to public hunting.



#### One Side

- “It was so frustrating to read the article on roost busting ... if some of these ‘screamers’ could tell me how to hunt scaup, redheads, canvasbacks, buffleheads, goldeneyes, or ringbills set up out in a grain field, I'm all ears ... .”
- “It is a very good article. There is a lot of truth to it. I am from northern Wisconsin and our only option to hunt is over water. I was out in North Dakota in 2007 and had to hunt water there due to lack of access to private land. We spotted a field full of geese and while watching them we noticed there were mallards with them. We asked the landowner if we could hunt the field and their response was no. We didn't get mad and respected their decision. There was a lake next to the field and public access to this lake. We hunted that the next morning and had our bag limit in an hour. We continued to observe the birds coming in for a couple of hours. Our hunting trip was three days long, and in these three days we saw more ducks and geese than we see in Wisconsin in a whole season. I respect the concerns of North Dakota residents, but do enjoy coming to your state to hunt.”

#### The Other Side

- “When it comes to goose hunting I learned at an early age to leave them alone on the water and we might get some good shooting for a while. However, with the influx of our nonresident hunters ... I find it harder and harder to find that field to do some late goose or duck hunting. A nice small body of water near our home that always holds ducks and geese is always full of activity until the nonresident puts his boat in the water for the weekend ... but how about us who would like to hunt the surrounding area for weeks ... I don't know what the correct action is that needs to be taken, but certainly it needs to be watched very closely.”

## Deer Gun Season, Thanksgiving and the Calendar

### October 2009

For about 20 years, North Dakota's deer gun season has opened on the Friday before Veteran's Day, and lasts 16.5 days. Because of the way the calendar works, in two or three years out of seven, the deer gun season runs through Thanksgiving weekend. This article examined the possible pluses and minuses of varied structures that would include Thanksgiving weekend in the deer gun season every year.

### One Side

- "As a rancher in the badlands and an avid hunter, I would like to add my input on the topic. The deer gun season is already plenty long! A week shorter would be fine with me. With all the activity around the ranch in fall already, chasing inconsiderate trespassers around for 2 ½ weeks just adds to our workload ... On top of all this, the long season during the rut results in a high rate of harvest of buck deer. There seems to be few mature bucks of either whitetail or mule deer. With the quality of equipment and knowledge available to today's hunter, there seems little reason for such a long season during the rut. If hunters want Thanksgiving week, then just make the season Thanksgiving week."
- "I say if it ain't broke – don't fix it. It seems to be working very well now and it rotates adequately so Thanksgiving is in deer gun season some years. Game and Fish has looked at alternatives before, there are other activities later that would be altered, and landowners seem to tolerate the current structure very well."

### The Other Side

- "My friends and I had discussed these very issues just days before the publication came out. We talked about the positives of lengthening the season to include Thanksgiving weekend. First is safety ... Second, so many other activities occur at that time ... I'm a teacher and a coach. The football playoffs and finals are in the middle of the hunting season and if we aren't in the playoffs, wrestling starts. Friends, students, coworkers and parents don't have the time to do the hunting that they would like. I would like to spend more time hunting with my wife and son ... I vote for the change and hope you really are considering it."
- "As long as lengthening the existing deer season has no biological impact on the deer population I see no reason not to include the Thanksgiving holiday during



2007 – Deer gun season includes Thanksgiving weekend.



2008 – Deer gun season does not include Thanksgiving weekend.

the season. My daughter will be going off to college this fall and this is one time during the year when I know for a fact we are going to get some quality time together ... I would really like to see the season lengthened or moved to coincide with Turkey Day each season."

## One Buck License Per Hunter

### August 2010

Every year, a small number of North Dakota deer hunters are lucky enough to draw a buck license in regular deer gun season and muzzleloader season lottery. In addition, these hunters may also buy an archery license which also allows taking of a buck.

Other hunters who do not draw even one buck license in a lottery frequently suggest that the Game and Fish Department come up with some type of system that limits hunters to only one buck license per year.

### One Side

- "After hunting North Dakota for thirty years (as a nonresident) whenever we were drawn – we moved here and love it. The quality of the hunting – limited numbers per area and off-highway vehicle restrictions – make for the best quality hunts of the 13 other states I have hunted. Those rare years when I am able to hunt for more than one buck are the highlights. I have had a mule deer buck rifle tag once in the four years we have been here, and am still waiting for a black powder buck tag. But the year I took a buck with both bow and rifle was super! Please do not change it ... it averages out."
- "Having been the recipient of three buck licenses in 2009, I have pondered the equity of this rather lucrative scenario. Personally, having taken a couple of bucks with a bow in 10 years, I would hate to see the over-the-counter (archery) buck tag gone."

### The Other Side

- "I think it was a great story, and I totally agree with one buck license per hunter ... there are years I don't get my buck tag and I hear about people who can shoot three bucks ... I believe it would give more hunters the opportunity to get a buck tag."
- "Read your recent article in ND Outdoors and I really think that (it) is a great idea to implement the one buck per hunter program. We are really getting some quality deer in ND in many units, and I think this would be a great idea as it would give hunters interested in shooting a buck three seasons to choose from."

*Any other questions or issues out there that might make a good topic for this column in future issues? To pass along your comments, send us an email at [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov); call us at (701) 328-6300; or write North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501.*



FROM BOTH SIDES



# *a decade of* SAVING *our* LAKES

**By Greg Freeman**  
**Photos by Scott Elstad**

*Among a number of improvements made at West Arroda Dam in Oliver County included removing sediment and aquatic vegetation and adding riprap along the shoreline.*

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Save Our Lakes program has invested nearly \$8 million in upgrading state lakes and reservoirs over the past decade.

Scott Elstad, Department SOL coordinator, said the program was initiated in 2001 with a simple goal of making the fishery better for fish and people. "We started with a mindset of improving lakes and reservoirs, but it has evolved to more than that," he said. "It has been very well received."

Altogether, crews have undertaken more than 300 separate projects and enhanced more than 40,000 feet of shoreline. Some of the typical work entails creating dry dams to collect sediment, low-level draw downs, and planting trees and native grasses on cultivated property. Bigger projects include repairing eroded shorelines and removing sediment so fish have habitat and people have access.

One such project was completed at Crown

Butte Dam in Morton County a handful of years ago. "The lake was drawn down 10-12 feet," Elstad said. "We removed sediment, resloped 50 percent of the shoreline, built 17 earthen fishing piers and installed a walking path along the northeast corner and west side of the lake. From start to finish, it took about three months to complete."

Big projects generally cost around \$100,000, Elstad said, with the goal of tackling one per biennium.

A typical SOL project costs anywhere from \$30,000 to \$50,000, and usually takes three weeks to a month to complete. "These kinds of projects, such as shoreline enhancements, are what we spend most of our time on," Elstad said.

Shoreline enhancement projects typically take place at older reservoirs, generally one that is 40 plus years. "The sedimentation has reduced the amount of shoreline access to anglers," Elstad said, "so we go in and remove the accumulated sediment and aquatic vegetation, and reslope

the bank so that most of the vegetation doesn't come back. We try to do this to about 1,000 feet of shoreline so anglers have easy access. In addition, this greatly improves habitat for fish."

Even though SOL is designed to improve lakes and reservoirs, Elstad said the program also includes urban fisheries. "For example, Watford City Pond is an urban fishery that is targeted toward getting kids involved in fishing," he said. "We want to make sure we provide them with the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors, and hopefully establish a lifelong commitment to fishing."

Work on urban fisheries has occurred at Dickinson, Watford City, Williston, Beach, New Salem, Bismarck, Wahpeton, Grand Forks and New Rockford.

The SOL program is entirely funded by angler dollars, with a budget of slightly more than \$1 million per biennium. District fisheries biologists recommend waters best suited for rehabilitation. In addition, various public entities request assistance in lake or watershed improvements.

The Department is looking at spending more than \$250,000 in SOL projects in 2011, Elstad said. Lakes scheduled for work in upcoming months include the Bismarck OWLS Pond (artificial habitat), Rock Lake (fish control structure), Davis Dam (shoreline



*A sign was raised at Beach after an urban fishery was created through the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Save Our Lakes program.*

enhancement), Dead Colt Creek (shoreline enhancement), Lake LaMoure (shoreline enhancement), McDowell Dam (shoreline enhancement), Sykeston Dam (shoreline enhancement), Warsing Dam (shoreline enhancement) and Watford City Park Pond (shoreline enhancement).

While the SOL program is successful, Elstad reminds anglers that a blue ribbon fishery doesn't happen overnight. "It takes a few years for a lake or reservoir to recover," he said. "But the SOL program certainly can facilitate recovery."

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

*Some young anglers fish from shore of an improved New Rockford Reservoir in Eddy County.*

## SOL by the Numbers

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has enhanced opportunities for anglers through the Save Our Lakes program since 2001.

- 106 – Easements, such as establishing filters on private land for aquatic environment
- 53 – Fishing piers
- 53 – Shoreline enhancements, such as planting shrubs and trees used for shade, seeding grass, placing fabric, reshaping banks
- 47 – Sediment dams
- 12 – Waste management ponds, such as assisting financially with lagoon systems for ranchers
- 7 – Outlets
- 7 – Alternate water, such as wells and rural water systems
- 5 – Low-levels, such as releasing water of less quality off the bottom of the reservoir
- 24 – Other





# Volunteers Drive Hunter Education Program

*By Ron Wilson*

*Since 1979, about 175,000 students have been certified through the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's hunter education program. Many of those students have gone on to test their gun safety skills in the field.*

CRAIG BIRBLE



**L**orne Sterner taught his first hunter education class in 1973, six years before it became a requirement for some to pass a certified course to hunt in North Dakota.

He's been volunteering his time for 38 years, or plenty long enough to watch three daughters, three grandchildren and kids of former students pass through the program successfully.

"I'm a volunteering type of person," the Cas-selton man said, which is a bit of an understatement. In two years Sterner will become the first volunteer to mark 40 years with the Game and Fish Department's hunter education program. "I plan on sticking around for it."

It's that "sticking around" approach adopted by Sterner and others (44 instructors have been teaching for 30-plus years while 168 have done likewise for 20-plus years) that has made the hunter education program a success.

"Our veteran volunteers are the 'rock' of the hunter education program," said Jon Hanson, Game and Fish Department hunter education coordinator. "They have built up the program to what it is today and we wouldn't be where we are without them. It's their knowledge and experience that is providing us the next steps in improving on an already successful program."

With any volunteer program, however, there is turnover. People move, find other interests or direct their energies elsewhere. Hanson said the Department's goal is to recruit 50 instructors per year, something he came close to doing in two out of the last three years.

"We'll never run out of the need for new instructors as the demand from a growing number of students will always be there," Hanson said. "In Bismarck and Fargo, for example, we are always adding classes or at least trying to."

There are more than 830 active hunter education instructors in North Dakota, and in any given year courses are taught in 125-140 cities across the state. On average, more than 5,000 students per year have graduated from the Department's hunter education program in the last decade. And since 1979 when the course became mandatory, about 175,000 students in total have been certified.

"Think about the service the volunteers provide to their communities and state without any compensation," Hanson said. "Without them,

we don't have a hunter education program. It's as simple as that."

New instructors to the program arrive via a number of avenues. Some took classes with their kids, liked what they experienced and decided to give a class a try, while others were encouraged by former instructors to become instructor themselves. This sort of recommendation pulls some weight, Hanson said.

"When you ask a hunter education graduate who their instructor was, it's not unusual for little or no hesitation before they answer," Hanson said. "They leave an impression with their students, a positive one that they'll remember for many years."

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*It's likely that more than 5,000 students will graduate from hunter education courses across the state in 2011.*



RON WILSON



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*There are more than 800 active hunter education instructors in North Dakota. Many instructors nowadays teach in teams.*

MIKE ANDERSON

## Hunter Education Numbers

- 1979 – Year that hunter education became mandatory in North Dakota.
- 175,000 – Number of hunter education graduates since 1979.
- 833 – Number of active hunter education instructors.
- 125-140 – Number of North Dakota cities where hunter education courses are offered.
- 2,465 – Number of students who graduated from hunter education home study courses since 2004.
- 5,000-plus – Number of hunter education graduates in North Dakota per year.

Another prevailing theme among instructors, new or veteran, is that they volunteer their time because of North Dakota's strong hunting heritage. "You hear a lot of people say that they do it because they like to hunt, appreciate the opportunities we have in North Dakota, and want to make sure that their kids and grandkids have the same opportunities in the future."

Most of the instructors teach in teams nowadays, anywhere from 3-10 to a team, Hanson said. They divide duties, divide class times, making it more manageable for people who want to give, but also have responsibilities outside the classroom.

Sterner is involved in the team approach. About 10 years ago he started cutting back his duties. Today, he said he mostly organizes and gets students signed up for the classes. "I'm still enjoying it and getting a lot of help from other instructors," he said.

Hanson said some of his hunter education counterparts in other states have a tough time recruiting volunteers. "While I don't know it for a fact, volunteerism as a whole is not what it was nationwide 10 years ago," he said. "At least it sure feels that way."

To get ahead of a mood of indifference in North Dakota, Hanson said there is talk among staff about getting more youth involved in the program by making assistants out of those graduates younger than 18. "Other states have done this and it's very successful," Hanson said. "One of the goals, of course, is that you hope that one day these assistants will become certified instructors."

While teaching safety is the heart of a 14-hour hunter education course, Hanson said instructors also focus on ethics, laws, regulations and basic wildlife biology. "The course reinforces the importance of safety, but it also touches on important information like wildlife conservation that kids just aren't going to get anywhere else," he said.

If the 10-year average holds true, more than 5,000 students will graduate from hunter education courses across the state this year with the plan, at least for many, of ushering their newly-learned skills into North Dakota's outdoors. If Hanson could send each and every graduate off with one last piece of advice it would be this tidbit gleaned from a counterpart in Kansas: "Load your brain before you load your gun."

"It's a simple, but important message students have heard from their volunteer instructors in one form or another," Hanson said. "I like it because it fits."

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

## Getting Signed up

To register for a hunter education class, students should access the Game and Fish Department website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov) and click on the education/outreach link and “hunter education.”

Classes are listed by city, and can also be sorted by start date. Click on “enroll” next to the specific class, and follow the simple instructions. Personal information is required.

Jon Hanson, Department hunter education coordinator, said one of the hurdles the hunter education program faces is when people enroll for classes online, but don’t show up for classes.

“If they can’t attend, we’d really like

them to go online and take their name off the list,” Hanson said. “We are experiencing an almost 20 percent no-show in classes, which is unfortunate because we have people waiting to take some classes.”

Those who do not have access to the Internet and want to sign up for a class can call the hunter education program in Bismarck at (701) 328-6615.

The Game and Fish website also provides a free hunter education study guide and a tree stand safety course.

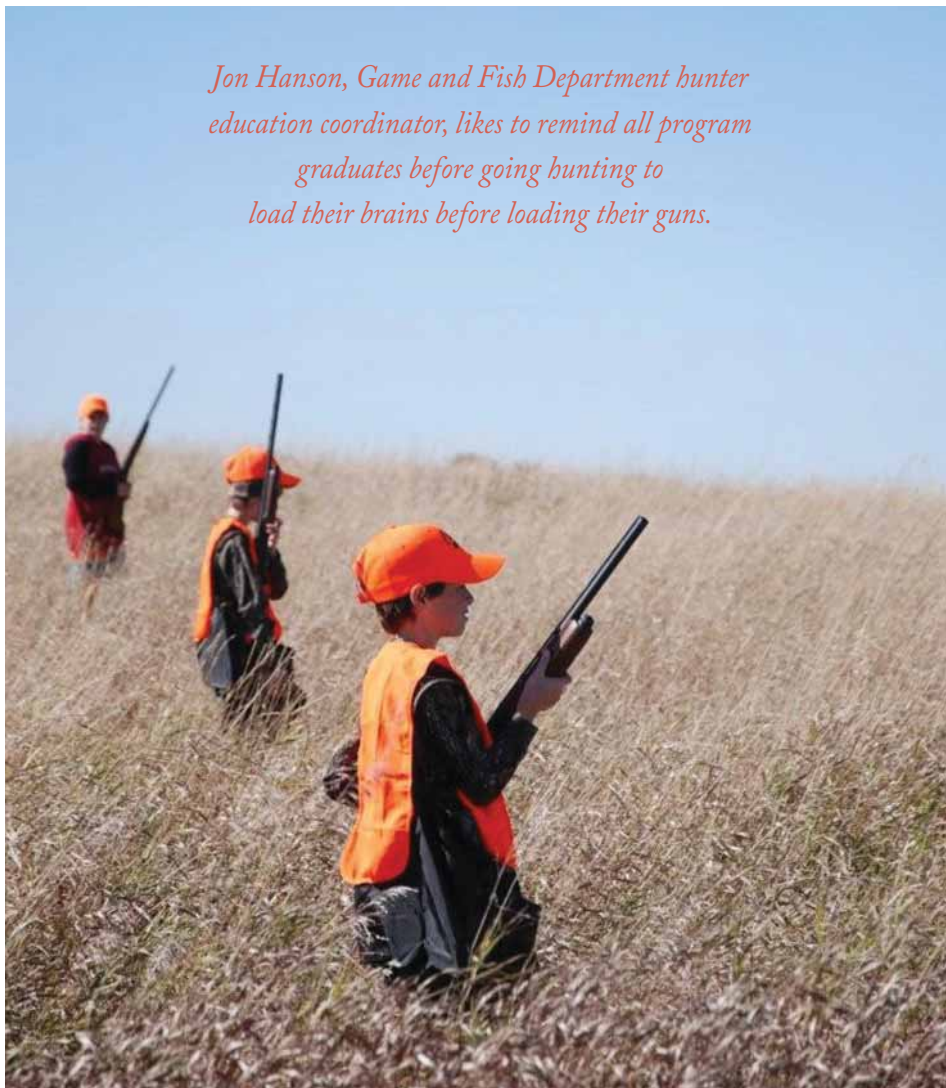
“The free study guide contains all the material students will learn in the course,” Hanson said. “They can use it to study the material while attending class, use it as a

primer for taking the course, or simply use it as a refresher.”

State law requires anyone born after December 31, 1961 to pass a certified hunter education course to hunt in the state. Hunter education is mandatory for youth who are turning 12 years old, and children can take the class at age 11.

Home study courses are offered for students 16 years and older. Home study students must also attend two classes in person to complete the course. Hanson said 2,465 students have completed this course since 2004.

*Jon Hanson, Game and Fish Department hunter education coordinator, likes to remind all program graduates before going hunting to load their brains before loading their guns.*



GREG GUILICKSON



FROM EGG

TO ADULT

*By Ron Wilson*

*This young walleye is only about 5 days old and has nearly absorbed all of its yolk sac.*

I am a 3-year-old walleye about 14 inches long. Because of my size, anglers are interested in me now. Just the other day I was hooked, played and scooped into a landing net. There was some debate in the boat about my fate, but I was eventually slid overboard to swim another day.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me start from the beginning.

In spring 2008, right after ice-out, mature males of my species nosed into the current of a tributary of the Missouri River, stalling at an area littered with rocks and cobble. When the water temperature felt about right, somewhere in the upper 40s, the mature females, heavy with eggs, arrived and broadcast their burden over the rocks under the cover of darkness. The males did likewise with milt to fertilize the eggs.

There were thousands of us, small, creamy-colored eggs less than a tenth of an inch in diameter. We were sticky at first, which helped us to adhere to the rocks and each other. It wasn't long until we hardened from the cool, fresh, flowing water, losing our stickiness. Once hardened, I, like many of the other eggs, settled into nooks and crannies created by rocks.

We were alone. Unlike, say, bluegills and bass, there was no nest building by the adults, and no sticking around after spawning to contest predators while we waited to hatch.

As the days lengthened and the water warmed, our time as eggs was coming to an end. In less than two weeks after settling into the rocks, I hatched, donning a yolk sac attached to my abdomen. The nutrient-rich sac, my first food, is something I absorbed rather quickly.

I was only about a quarter-inch long and couldn't swim very well at first, mostly just in a vertical direction. This is what I believe biologists call the swim-up stage. What I know is that once I swam toward the surface, the tributary's current caught me and ushered many of us on a lazy, serpentine

course that eventually wedded with the much larger Missouri River.

If timing is everything, then ours was perfect. The Missouri River and its downstream reservoir, Lake Oahe, were loaded with zooplankton. These microscopic organisms proved to be our lifeblood for a few weeks. Without this food source, I wouldn't be telling this story.

By sometime in mid- to late June, I had grown to about 2 inches long. I had

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*For the majority of the anglers in the state, the walleye is the fish of choice.*



GREG GULLICKSON



NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT PHOTO

*Walleye eggs are taken from females during spring spawning, raised in a hatchery, then released sometime after hatching into state waters..*



MIKE ANDERSON

*This walleye is likely about 2 years old.*

graduated from an all-zooplankton diet and mixed in some insects and invertebrates. The key to growing, surviving, I had noticed, was taking advantage of anything edible around me.

Unfortunately, I discovered the list of things on my diet were as long as the list of things that wanted to eat me. The quick, torpedo-shaped northern pike were the worst. They even ate their own young, which is tough to swallow when you think about it. Aside from the pike, you had to watch out for other fish and an assortment of birds such as cormorants and great blue herons that waded the shallows and stand statue still.

By the end of July, I was about 3 inches long. I'd eaten some larval fish that I recognized as minnows, carp and gizzard shad. That's the neat thing about nature. Not all fish species spawn at the same time, which, in my case, meant there were lots of fish out there smaller than me that I could eat.

Aside from occasional close calls with predators, life during the summer months was pretty easy. With plenty to eat and water temperatures just so, I continued to grow. By the end of September I was between 6-8 inches long, which is pretty good in North Dakota I learned. I was bigger than some walleyes that hatched at the same time and smaller than others. I was told that odds of making it through my first winter were good because of my size. Not so for those smaller than me, though.

*Young fish that hatch and grow in the wild have to dodge a number of predators, including cormorants, to reach maturity.*



CRAIG BIRLE



*A walleye in North Dakota measuring roughly 20 centimeters is about a year old, fisheries biologists say.*

CRAIG BHIRLE

## Walleye Notes

- The first walleye stocking in North Dakota was recorded in 1893 at Devils Lake.
- Walleye have a strong drive to return to the same spawning area each spring. Fish tagging studies in North Dakota have shown that more than 95 percent of returns during tagging include marked fish captured at the same location at which they were originally tagged.
- Tagging studies have also revealed that some walleyes are seemingly always on the move, or at least you'd think so considering the miles they put on. One study reveals a walleye tagged near Bismarck was caught 117 days later after swimming 221 miles south to Oahe Dam in South Dakota. Two walleyes tagged at Lake Sakakawea's White Earth Bay were caught 277 miles upstream in Montana's Fort Peck Dam Tailrace. Long distance swimming honors, however, go to a female tagged at White Earth Bay and caught 50 miles up the Milk River in Montana. She swam 321 miles in 108 days.
- Another tagging studied showed that a female walleye was caught by fisheries biologists' nets four times from 1996 to 2005, and by hook and line twice in 2005. She was at least 15 years old when harvested.
- In 2010, Game and Fish Department fisheries crews stocked a record 11.5 million walleye fingerlings, besting 10.9 million in 1991. Altogether, 114 lakes and rivers were stocked with the young walleyes.
- Because winter refused to go away without a fight, 2011 was the first year no eggs were collected from walleyes by Department fisheries crews in the month of April.



CHRIS GRONDAHL

*This mature fish has been swimming in North Dakota's waters for about 5 years.*

Winter, to be honest with you, wasn't a picnic. It was long, cold and I noticed that I became lazy, hardly moved and wasn't growing much even though I continued to feed. I guess you could say I was sort of a like a tree in winter. My roots were still in the ground and I was alive, but the development experienced during warmer months had slowed considerably.

At ice-out, the water finally started to warm and I became more active. I spent the majority of my time looking for minnows to eat. I was closing in on 10 inches and hungry. Older fish, I noticed, were more interested in what brought me here in the first place, spawning. Even though I was considered an adult because I made it through my first winter, I didn't have any interest in navigating up a tributary to spawn. I heard that will change in a couple years or so, though.

So, that's the story of my first year of life – from egg to adult. Unless I end up as a guest to some angler's fish fry, I could celebrate many more years. I've heard that some walleyes in certain waters in the state live into their 20s, which is heartening if you don't think about all the winters that involves.

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



# THE FALLOUT OF







MIKE ANDERSON

**W**hat's the big deal about stocking northern pike into a new lake in my brother's back yard, or emptying a bait bucket of unused minnows into a favorite small fishing lake to feed other fish?

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries division gets these questions periodically, but the answers are not so simple. While fish have been introduced or stocked into many North Dakota waters for more than a century, there is a big difference between strategically planned introductions and illegal fish transfer.

Fisheries professionals in North Dakota and across the United States have spent too much time and money over that same 100 years righting the wrongs of indiscriminate fish stocking.

Legally, the responsibility of introducing or stocking fish in North Dakota waters falls to the state Game and Fish Department. The state has a number of success stories regarding introductions of new fish species into new water bodies. Rainbow smelt into the Missouri River System, large and smallmouth bass into numerous lakes and reservoirs and trout into many smaller impoundments are examples of past successful efforts.

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*Carp (left) were introduced into U.S. waters in the late 1800s. Today, they plague far too many fisheries across the country. A pickup bed full of white suckers from a northwestern North Dakota fishery (left) is likely the fallout of someone illegally dumping their bait bucket into the water. Stocking fish in North Dakota waters should be left to professionals.*

# TRANSPORTING FISH

Generally, these introductions were planned and well researched, matching fish species with available habitat. Their success was predicated on the fact that approximately one-half of the state's water bodies managed for fishing are reservoirs, and nearly all fishable waters in North Dakota have been altered by humans in one form or another.

If not conducted by resource professionals, introduction of fish into new waters can often cause irreparable harm. For example, live white suckers were once legal bait in most of the state's waters. Although stocking suckers was illegal, anglers knowingly or unknowingly often emptied their bait buckets containing suckers into the water at day's end, thus introducing suckers to existing fish populations. In North Dakota, suckers eat aquatic invertebrates used by desirable species such as bluegill, and in time they compromise the quality of a fishery.

As a result, the Department spent a lot of money and time, especially in the 1990s, killing all the undesirable fish – and along with those the desirable ones – in a number of waters in an effort to remove white suckers and start over. These lake renovations, however, would not last without changes to statewide bait regulations.

*By Greg Power*



FRED RYCKMAN



CRAIG BIRHLE

*Planned stocking helps supplement fish populations in many North Dakota lakes.*

About 20 years ago, Game and Fish made white suckers illegal bait in all North Dakota waters, except the Red River. This change has dramatically reduced problems of too many white suckers in waters where they're not wanted. While abundant white sucker populations were listed as management problems in many waters across the state two

decades ago, only one of about 70 fisheries sampled in 2011 has troublesome sucker numbers.

Another approach taken by a few anglers in the past was to play armchair biologist and purposely stock lakes with various fish species, including predators like northern pike. Often the introduced pike would reproduce and become established in

*Fathead minnows, creek chubs and sticklebacks are the only legal live baitfish that can be used in most North Dakota waters. White suckers, pictured here, can only be used in the Red River.*



CRAIG BIRHLE

the newly-stocked lake. Unfortunately, as a top-line predator, pike effectively reduce or even eliminate any chance to develop a quality fishery for panfish such as yellow perch, bluegill or crappie. When this happens, a local fishing opportunity is lost and public demand for good panfishing cannot be met.

Perhaps the most notable and regrettable decision to purposely introduce a species was made by federal officials in the late 1800s when common carp were brought into the United States and released into many water bodies across the country, generally by train. These carp were transported in old fashioned cream cans and thus the term “cream-canner” made its way into modern day fish biology vocabulary. Carp never did provide a commercial fishery for human consumption as anticipated. Instead, 100-plus years later, they continue to plague far too many waters across the nation.

The intentional introduction of carp is viewed unfavorably today by virtually everyone. These bottom dwellers have destroyed habitat of more preferred species such as yellow perch and northern pike, and have aided in the ongoing deterioration of water quality. Unless eliminated, carp today remain a formidable obstruction to a lake realizing its true fishing potential.

A good example of this is Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge in south central North Dakota. Conceptually, without carp this large, shallow lake could provide outstanding, albeit periodic, pike and perch fishing. However, carp in Long Lake have prohibited game fish populations from ever becoming firmly established and have compromised the refuges’ waterfowl productivity potential. Carp today remain the poster child of an unwanted fish species and what can go wrong when poor decisions are made.

For decades after statehood, little regard was given to any potential adverse impacts of indiscriminate stocking. However, by 1933 the first law that prohibited dumping minnows into fishing waters went in the books.

Beginning in 1958, anglers could no longer release fish after they were reduced to creel. Stricter yet, from 1963-75, anglers could not release game fish, not even immediately after catching. In 1976, this law changed to what currently exists today. Anglers can release fish, but must do so immediately. If reduced to creel (stringer, livewell, etc.), anglers must keep the fish.

For 50 or more years, stocking of any live fish (or eggs) into North Dakota waters has been illegal without the appropriate license or permit from the Department.

In the past few years, the state has put more regulations into place relating to fish movement and transport. The most recent of these made it illegal to transport fish – other than legal bait fish – in water

away from a water body.

The primary purpose of this rule is to help reduce the potential spread of aquatic nuisance species. However, this regulation also serves to reduce the chance that misguided anglers will use bait buckets, coolers or other containers to transport and illicitly stock fish into new waters.

Rules that restrict movement of live fish are necessary to provide safeguards for North Dakota’s valuable fisheries. Game and Fish can only do so much, and is counting on anglers to help with the effort.

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

## Live Baitfish Regulations

Anglers are reminded that fathead minnows, creek chubs and sticklebacks are the only legal live baitfish that can be used in most North Dakota waters. Also that it is illegal to release baitfish into any waters in the state.

The only exception for waters that allow live baitfish is in the Red River where white suckers may also be used. In addition, there are 21 state waters where it is illegal to use any live baitfish.

Because it is sometimes hard to identify bait fish species due to their small size, it is important that anglers buy bait from a licensed retail bait vendor. “They inspect their bait and can identify the species properly,” said Greg Power, Game and Fish Department fisheries chief. “They know what is going into our state waters.”

It’s illegal to release baitfish, or dump a bait bucket into any fishery, to help keep our lakes free of unwanted species.

Power also cautions anglers that using game fish, or parts of game fish as bait is illegal, except for perch eyes, and trout and salmon eggs. “Using game fish as bait could lead to the introduction of fish species into waters where they cause serious management problems,” Power said. “For example, we have seen a number of lakes with illegal perch introductions over the years, and many of these lakes had to be renovated.”

Anglers should refer to the 2010-12 North Dakota Fishing Guide, available at license vendors or online at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), for more information.



*It's illegal to release baitfish into any waters in the state.*

# BUFFALOBERRY PATCH



By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor



CRAIG BHIRLE

*The East Bay ramp just south of town is undergoing an upgrade that will provide access throughout the summer.*

## Five Boat Ramps Ready on Devils Lake

Five boating access sites are usable on Devils Lake, and three more are expected to be ready by early summer.

North Dakota Game and Fish Department personnel completed installing a slide-in metal ramp at Pelican Lake on the north side of Highway 19, about one mile east of the junction of old Highway 281.

Crews extended both Six Mile Bay (Schwab) ramps to elevation 1,458 feet above mean sea level, and installed a high-water ramp immediately north of the existing Creel Bay (Lakewood) ramp site. "There isn't much slope above 1,458 so that may be as far up as we can raise the site," said Bob Frohlich, Department fisheries development supervisor. "In addition, the high water levels have collapsed the septic system for the fish cleaning station. We are exploring other options to

keep the station open and for getting rid of the waste."

Spirit Lake Casino ramp remains open. However, Henegar Landing (Dike Area) is closed this summer due to raising the dike that protects the city of Devils Lake.

"Devils Lake has risen to a record elevation," Frohlich said. "Since the ice went out we're doing everything we can to keep current ramps usable or develop new ones."

Grahams Island State Park ramp is currently usable, but recreationists should call ahead at (701) 766-4015 to check for updates. The park is not taking reservations and camping is on a first-come, first-served basis. The Game and Fish Department's appropriations bill includes a \$400,000 grant to the Parks and Recreation Department for costs associated in raising the elevation of the access road

from ND Highway 19.

In addition, work is progressing on raising the East Bay parking area and boat ramps to elevation 1,461 msl, six feet higher than its 2010 elevation.

A new boating access site on Round Lake should be completed in early June, which will provide access to the western part of the lake and replace the Minnewaukan area ramps that were inundated earlier this spring. Benson County officials are working with the Federal Highway Administration for approval to breach the old Highway 281 roadbed, helping facilitate access to the main lake.

Construction of the new access area along ND Highway 20 on the south end of Black Tiger Bay is scheduled to begin in June, with completion scheduled around July 4. The site will include a gravel access road and turnaround area,

a 32-foot-wide concrete ramp, courtesy docks and large parking area.

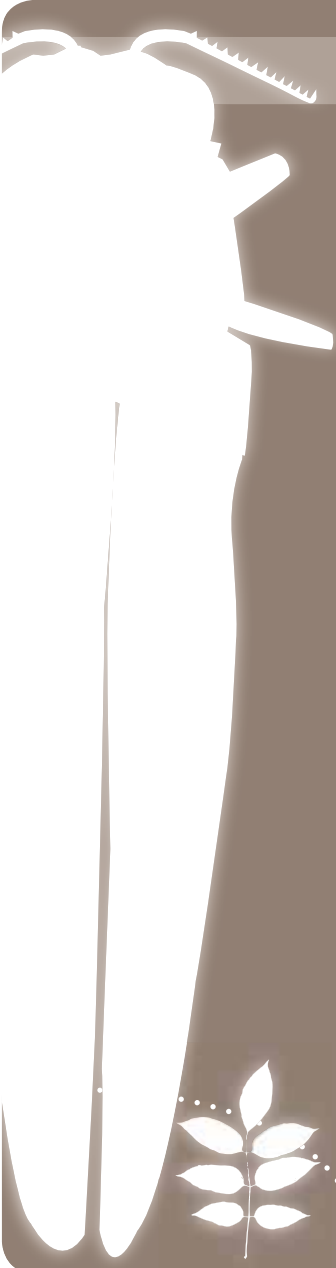
The new access area on the south end of Black Tiger Bay is an alternative to the Black Tiger Bay Recreation Area, which is no longer operable because rising water has topped the county road leading to

the popular boat landing and camping area. Because of the flooded road, Game and Fish and State Parks and Recreation can no longer maintain the site, and have removed roadside directional signs.

Walleye, northern pike and white bass populations are all in very good shape,

Frohlich said, and should continue to provide great fishing opportunities for years to come. Anglers and boaters can access the Game and Fish Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), throughout the summer to find the current status of Devils Lake boat ramps.

## ASH BORER A THREAT TO NORTH DAKOTA TREES



Ash trees are a significant component of North Dakota's native forests, as well as farm and urban plantings. That's why a number of state agencies are trying to prevent the invasive emerald ash borer from continuing its destructive advance across the Midwest.

Native ash species are important nesting habitat and shelter for a variety of game and nongame species. Deer and other big game browse the twigs and buds of ash during winter, and also use ash-rich wooded draws, windbreaks and riparian forests as shelter. If the ash borer arrives in North Dakota, forest managers expect that over time this foreign insect would destroy most ash trees in the state.

Currently, the closest known infestation is in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area.

The emerald ash borer is native to Asia and was first detected in the United States in 2002, feeding on ash trees

in the vicinity of Detroit, Michigan. According to the North Dakota Forest Service, this pest has killed tens of millions of ash trees in the 15 states where it is currently known to exist.

Some of the typical symptoms that may indicate presence of emerald ash borer include branch dieback, sprouts on roots and the lower trunk, vertical bark splits with s-shaped tunnels just under the bark. The presence of signs such as serpentine insect galleries, whitish worm-like larvae or D-shaped exit holes warrants further investigation by a trained professional.

The larvae are the most destructive life stage of the insect, as they create s-shaped tunnels under the bark as they eat water- and nutrient-conducting tissues. This feeding eventually girdles the tree and leads to mortality within four years.

### *What can citizens do?*

An emerald ash borer

generally does not fly more than a mile after it emerges to mate and lay eggs on a new ash host, yet it has spread to 15 states and two Canadian provinces in just nine years. Clearly, humans have unknowingly helped spread the ash borer around.

The most important thing citizens can do is to not move firewood long distances, and not bring out-of-state firewood into North Dakota. While North Dakota is not among the many states that prohibit transportation of firewood across its borders, forestry managers urge residents and nonresident travelers as well to use local sources for wood, which reduces the threat of spreading ash borer or other pests.

For more information, visit the North Dakota Department of Agriculture website at [www.agdepartment.com](http://www.agdepartment.com); the North Dakota Forest Service website at [http://www.ndsu.edu/ndfs/forestry/forest\\_health/](http://www.ndsu.edu/ndfs/forestry/forest_health/).

## Trout Stocked in State Waters

Efforts to stock thousands of trout in dozens of North Dakota waters were completed in May.

About 70,000 rainbow and brown trout ranging from 11-14 inches were released in 55 waters statewide, said Jerry Weigel, Game and Fish Department fisheries production and development supervisor. Included were 3,500 rainbows weighing 1-3 pounds from state hatcheries in Wyoming.

In addition to the Turtle and Missouri rivers, counties with fishing waters receiving trout are:

- Adams – North Lemmon, Bolke Dam
- Barnes – Blumers Pond, Hatchery Kids Pond, Moon Lake
- Bottineau – Strawberry Lake
- Bowman – Lutz Dam, Holocek Dam
- Burke – Northgate Dam
- Burleigh – McDowell Dam, OWLS Pond, Wilton City Pond, Cottonwood Park Pond
- Cass – North Woodhaven Pond
- Cavalier – Langdon City Pond
- Divide – Baukol-Noonan Dam, Baukol-Noonan East Mine Pond
- Golden Valley – Beach City Pond, Camels Hump Lake
- Grand Forks – Ryan Park Pond
- Grant – Raleigh Reservoir, Sheep Creek Dam
- Hettinger – Castle Rock Dam, Mott Watershed
- McIntosh – Blumhardt Dam
- McKenzie – Watford City Park Pond
- McLean – Custer Mine, Lightning Lake, Riverdale City Pond
- Mercer – Harmony Lake
- Morton – Crown Butte Dam, Fish Creek Dam, Gaebe Pond, Harmon Lake, Krieg's Pond, Nygren Dam, Porsborg Dam
- Mountrail – Stanley Pond
- Renville – Glenburn Pond
- Richland – Mooreton Pond
- Rolette – Hooker Lake
- Slope – Davis Dam
- Stark – Dickinson Dike, Belfield

Pond, Slater Pond

- Ward – State Fair Pond, Velva Sportsmen's Pond
- Williams – Iverson Dam, Kettle Lake, Kota-Ray Dam, McGregor Dam, East and West Spring Lake Ponds (Williston)

To find out more about North Dakota trout lakes, contact your local Game and Fish Department office, or visit the fishing link on the Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

## Anglers Reminded of ANS Regulations

North Dakota anglers are reminded of regulations intended to reduce the risk of aquatic nuisance species transfer between water bodies.

Current law states all water must be drained from watercraft prior to leaving a water body, including livewells. This means fish, including bait, cannot be transported in a livewell containing water. However, bait buckets and/or any container of five gallons or less in volume can be used to transport legal live baitfish and other bait in water. All other fish species, including game fish, may not be held in water and/or transported in bait buckets/containers when away from a water body. Transportation of fish in or on ice is allowed.

In addition, no aquatic vegetation, or parts, shall be in or on watercraft, motors, trailers and recreational equipment when out of water. Time out of the water needed to remove aquatic vegetation at the immediate water access area (boat ramp) is allowed.

All built-in structures to boats, including livewells and bait compartments, and containers (bait buckets) used to transport legal live bait, must also be free of aquatic vegetation.

More information on ANS is available on the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website at [gf.nd.gov/fishing/ans.html](http://gf.nd.gov/fishing/ans.html). A listing of frequently asked questions and answers is available at [gf.nd.gov/fishing/ans-faqs.html](http://gf.nd.gov/fishing/ans-faqs.html).



RON WILSON

*Mule deer numbers dipped again in 2011, according to the spring mule deer survey.*

## Spring Mule Deer Survey Complete

Western North Dakota's mule deer population has decreased for the fourth consecutive year, according to results from the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's spring mule deer survey.

Biologists counted 1,756 mule deer in 294 square miles during this year's survey. Overall mule deer density in the badlands was six deer per square mile, which is down from 7.8 deer per square mile in 2010 and less than the long-term average of 6.9 deer per square mile.

Three years of harsh winter conditions have increased adult mortality and reduced production. The last two years have resulted in the two lowest production rates ever documented, and biologists expect this year's production to be similarly low.

Conversely, white-tailed deer abundance in the badlands has increased during the last five years.

The spring mule deer index is used to assess mule deer abundance in the badlands. It is typically conducted after the snow has melted and before the trees begin to leaf out, providing the best conditions for aerial observation of deer. Biologists have completed aerial surveys of the same 24 study areas since the 1950s.



State of  
**North Dakota**  
*Office of the Governor*

Jack Dalrymple  
*Governor*

PROCLAMATION  
**GREAT OUTDOORS MONTH**  
JUNE 2011

**WHEREAS**, the outdoors significantly impact the lives of North Dakotans; and

**WHEREAS**, North Dakota's residents benefit physically and mentally from outdoors activity as they work and play; and

**WHEREAS**, the state's citizens have a proud tradition of safeguarding the environment and enjoying outdoor recreation; and

**WHEREAS**, a clean and sustainable environment contributes to quality of life, providing activities which promote good health and fitness; and

**WHEREAS**, outdoor activities bring people together, promote family togetherness, and provide memorable experiences through healthy interaction; and

**WHEREAS**, it is important to introduce children to nature, teaching them the importance of maintaining North Dakota's legacy of environmental stewardship and leading a healthy lifestyle; and

**WHEREAS**, Great Outdoors Month emphasizes outdoor activities and opportunities available in North Dakota in which people can participate and make a part of their lives.

**NOW, THEREFORE**, as Governor of the State of North Dakota, I do hereby proclaim June 2011, **GREAT OUTDOORS MONTH** in the state of North Dakota.

*Jack Dalrymple*  
Jack Dalrymple  
Governor

ATTEST:

*Alvin A. Jaeger*  
Alvin A. Jaeger  
Secretary of State

600 E Boulevard Ave. • Bismarck, ND 58505-0001 • Phone: 701.328.2200 • Fax: 701.328.2205 • www.governor.nd.gov

Governor Dalrymple  
Proclaims June  
as Great Outdoors Month



GREG GULLICKSON

*There is no better time to get out and enjoy North Dakota's outdoors.*

## Sage Grouse Counts Remain Low

Results from North Dakota's spring sage grouse survey indicate the number of strutting males observed remains well below management objectives. Therefore, the sage grouse hunting season will remain closed in 2011.

Aaron Robinson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department upland game bird biologist, said biologists counted a record low 63 males on 12 active strutting grounds. Last year, 66 males were counted on 15 active leks in the southwest.

"Given the increased population in sharp-tailed grouse this year in the southwest, we were expecting the same by sage grouse," Robinson said.

The number of males counted on leks each spring has gradually declined since 2000. In 2008, spring counts dropped dramatically throughout North Dakota's sage grouse range. The specific cause of the decline was unknown, but West Nile virus was suspected. There is no indication that hunting has caused a decline in the population.

"Our numbers are declining at a consistent rate of about 5 percent a year," Robinson said.

Sage grouse management in North Dakota has followed a specific plan developed by a diverse group of participants. The plan outlines hunting harvest objectives for the species with a recommendation that the hunting season close if the spring census indicates fewer than 100 males in the population. If the spring breeding population increases above 100 males, Game and Fish Department biologists will evaluate if a hunting season is plausible given the threats facing the species in North Dakota.

Sage grouse are North Dakota's largest native upland game bird. They are found in extreme southwestern North Dakota, primarily in Bowman and Slope counties.



RON WILSON

*These chicks were not abandoned by their mother. She was perched in a nearby tree.*

## Leave Baby Animals Alone, Motorists Advised of Deer

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department emphasizes a simple message to well-intentioned humans who want to pick up and rescue what appear to be orphaned baby animals – don't touch them. Whether it is a young fawn, duckling, cottontail rabbit or a songbird, it is better to just leave them alone.

More often than not young animals are not abandoned or deserted, and the mother is probably watching nearby. Young wildlife are purposely placed into seclusion by their mothers to protect them from predators.

Anytime a young wild animal has human contact its chance for survival decreases significantly. It's illegal to take wild animals home, and captive animals later returned to the wild will struggle to survive because they do not possess learned survival skills.

The only time a baby animal should be picked up is if a young songbird is found on a doorstep. If that is the case, the young bird should be moved nearby to suitable habitat.

Citizens should also steer clear of adult wildlife, such as deer or moose that might wander into urban areas. Crowding stresses animals, and this could lead to a potentially dangerous situation.

Also, motorists are reminded to watch for deer along roadways. June is one of the peak months for deer-vehicle accidents because young animals are dispersing from their home ranges. With deer more active during these months, the potential for car-deer collisions increases.

The number of reported deer-vehicle collisions in 2010 was 2,949, the fourth consecutive year with declining numbers and the lowest since 2000.

## White-tailed Deer Study Helps Biologists

A study of white-tailed deer in the Wing-Tuttle area has provided North Dakota Game and Fish Department biologists with valuable information.

Bill Jensen, Department big game biologist, said research focuses on seasonal movements, mortality factors, habitat use, population biology and other management questions.

The study involved radio-collaring 62 adult females. In addition, four adult males, eight female fawns and six male fawns were ear-tagged. "We contacted area landowners in the fall of 2009 to let them know what we would be doing," Jensen said.

In mid-February 2010, 48 deer were fitted with collars and tagged, and another 14 were collared this past winter. As of April 1, South

Dakota State University graduate student Brian Schaffer has made more than 3,700 relocations of these radio-collared deer.

Some of the information biologists have obtained centers on general movement, and Jensen said the average distance deer move from summer to winter habitat is 3.8 miles. "The farthest a deer traveled was 17 miles, and the flip side of that is some didn't move much as they stayed in the immediate vicinity of where they were collared," he said.

A total of 16 radio-collared deer have died; one from starvation, four were harvested by hunters, three from vehicles, two from predation and six from undermined causes. "The two confirmed deaths by coyote predation had been observed with prior physical

problems," Jensen said. "Both of these deer were in very poor physical condition, one with an injured front leg and one with a fractured hind leg. These two were observed in progressively declining physical condition for four to six weeks prior to their death. This shows the value of having someone visually monitor the condition of deer."

Schaffer was able to monitor the reproductive performance of 36 radio-collared adult females during the summer and fall of 2010; 26 were observed with one fawn and 10 had two fawns. Visual observations were not able to be made on the remaining 12 does and their reproductive performance is unknown.

The study will continue through December, with a final report expected next summer.



## Pike Eggs Come Quick, Walleye Take Delayed

Weather conditions didn't deter fisheries crews from wrapping up another successful spring spawn.

Jerry Weigel, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries production and development section leader, said ice went off late at walleye collection sites on Lake Sakakawea and Devils Lake, making it the latest start on record.

"With the help of the late spring blizzard, strong winds blew everything open," Weigel said. "There has never been a time when we didn't collect walleye eggs in April, but this year we got our first nets set May 2 and the first eggs were collected May 4."

Record water levels on Devils Lake made netting extremely difficult, so crews collected all 60 million walleye eggs from Sakakawea over a 10-day period. "Catches of more than 1,000 walleye a day on Lake Sakakawea made for large egg takes," Weigel said. "Given the great catch on Sakakawea, no eggs were collected from Devils Lake this spring."

A healthy northern pike population is a main reason fisheries crews were able to complete spring spawning efforts in short order under less than ideal weather conditions.

Scott Gangl, Department fisheries management section leader, said crews wrapped up taking northern pike eggs in just six days. "Our crews battled rain, snow and sleet," he said. "Despite the weather, everything else was like clockwork."

Crews collected more than 19 million eggs from Beaver Bay (Lake Oahe) and Alkali and Spiritwood lakes (Stutsman County).

"Oahe has been full the past couple years so we were able to collect a lot of eggs from Beaver Bay," Gangl said. "The high water has really benefited our spawning operation the last two years."

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*Game and Fish Department fisheries crews completed northern pike spawning efforts in just six days.*



NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT PHOTO

## Boats Need 2011-13 Registration

Boat owners are reminded that 2011 is the first year of the new three-year registration period. All boat registrations with an orange decal expired December 2010.

The new registration cycle runs through December 2013. New blue and white boat validation stickers have the expiration year of 13 prominently readable in the middle of the sticker.

For information on how to attach the

number and validation sticker to a boat, refer to page 10 of the 2011-13 North Dakota Boat and Water Safety Guide.

Renewal notices for the current three-year period were mailed in December. Boat owners who have not received a renewal notice, or have misplaced it, should contact the North Dakota Game and Fish Department by email at [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov), or call (701) 328-6335.

Boat registrations can be renewed online at the Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), by accessing the online services link, and "watercraft registration and renewals" under the watercraft heading.

Also, anyone buying a new or used watercraft can register online and generate a 10-day temporary permit that is valid until the registration is processed.

## Lake Sakakawea Navigation Beacons Scheduled for Removal

About a dozen navigation light structures in place along Lake Sakakawea's shoreline for decades are scheduled for removal over the next 12-18 months as they become inoperable.

Designed to serve as navigational aids, these beacons no longer serve their original purpose. Wave and ice action have greatly eroded many of the foundations of the light beacons, and proper

operation and maintenance is difficult to justify, given the electronic aids that most boaters have in cellular phones and global positioning systems.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department, local U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials and the U.S. Coast Guard agree the time has come for their eventual removal.

Over the next two summers Game and Fish staff will remove the lights and their concrete bases at Mallard Island, Fort Stevenson State Park, Sakakawea Bay, Beulah Bay, Nishu Bay, Red Butte Bay, Little Missouri, Independence Point, Bear Den Bay, Little Knife Bay, Tobacco Garden Bay and Lewis and Clark State Park.



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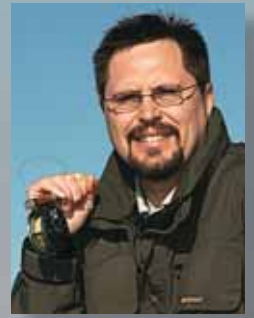
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# back cast

By Ron Wilson



It's been a year, but I recognize the voice immediately. It's a welcome call because I know, following some polite small talk, the conversation will slide into what we have in common.

His phone call from eastern North Dakota is right on schedule. The ice has finally gone off the lakes, the sun is showing itself now and again and the promise of some good fishing is out there.

He calls because he's doing his homework, seeing what winterkilled and what didn't, getting a feel for what the fishing holds in North Dakota after another long winter. I tell him what I can, but I think we both know that I don't provide anything of much use. To get more detailed information he'll have to work higher up the chain, I tell him, which he does not long after hanging up.

Smart guy.

I don't remember the details from past phone conversations, but it seems to me that each call preceded his departure on a pretty cool road trip that

may or may not have involved fishing in a couple of states, North Dakota included, and a Canadian province. Like I said, I don't remember for sure. What I do recall is hanging up and getting bummed out because I didn't have it figured out like this guy.

Nothing has changed. This year he was off on some 11-day fishing adventure to parts known and some maybe not so much. His trip would start somewhere in Canada, he said, where the fish were big and, for the most part, willing. Then he'd turn south, cross back into North Dakota and fish wherever the wind (or his homework over the phone) blew him. I told him if he got near Bismarck we might bump into one another out on the water somewhere. Then again, if I didn't see the small camper he described that he'd be pulling, there was a good chance, having never met him in person, I wouldn't recognize him.

I'm guessing he'd be fishing alone. If anyone ever goes on these trips with him, he's never said. Never mentioned a wife or kids, either, now that I think

about it. What he did talk about is the small camper, a newish purchase that's a cinch to tow and offers a warm, dry, comfortable retreat when he's done fishing for the day. No more sleeping in the dirt and using a picnic table as a rain fly like we did when we were poorer, younger and oblivious to discomfort. (Well, maybe that last part was just me, but I doubt it.)

Every year we end our conversation with him saying he will call and give me an update, tell me about the places he fished, the camping, what the fish were biting on, the interesting people he met ... all the things that make up a road trip, good or bad.

I'm still waiting. But maybe that's OK because I've been living vicariously through this guy for some time and in my imagined participation from my office, the fishing was great and the weather, for North Dakota in spring, even better.

I would hate to spoil that with reality.

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RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



STEVE SILSETH

Muskrat

## Muskrat Boom

Just add water.

While the recipe to an increase in the state's muskrat population is more involved than that, water has played a major role in the current muskrat boom.

"As with most wildlife, good habitat makes all the difference," said Stephanie Tucker, North Dakota Game and Fish Department furbearer biologist. "And with muskrats, good habitat is related to good water conditions."

So, when nature dictates, the muskrats waste little time in building their numbers.

"Muskrats are capable of high reproductive rates ... when habitat conditions are good, a population can grow rapidly," Tucker said. "Their high reproductive rates are a product of large litter sizes – up to 11 young per litter – and the ability to have several litters in a single season."

While there is no official tally, Mike Johnson, longtime Department water-

fowl biologist, said he's never seen this many muskrats on the North Dakota landscape. This is both good news and bad news for ducks.

First the good news. While cattail-choked marshes provide good cover for white-tailed deer and ring-necked pheasants, they are useless to ducks, Johnson said. But because muskrats feed on the pervasive aquatic vegetation and use the remnants to build lodges, the mammals create open areas that waterfowl prefer.

Now the bad. When muskrat numbers go up, mink populations typically follow suit. Mink are not only major predators of muskrats, they prey on duck eggs and ducklings.

More good and bad news that comes with an increase in the muskrat population: "Because muskrats are a valuable furbearer, harvesters can take advantage of a muskrat boom," Tucker said. "On the other hand, muskrat burrows can cause damage to roads,

railroads and dam dikes."

The muskrat, and its lodge, is an easily recognizable prairie wetland resident. Measuring from 32-36 in length (that includes a 10-inch tail), the muskrat has a broad head, small eyes and ears, and short, stout legs. Its hind feet are webbed to aid in swimming. The animal got its name from the musky odor give off by males and females during the breeding season.

A muskrat lodge is made of cattails and other vegetation and sticks 3-4 feet above the water's surface. Entrances to the lodge are below the water, while living areas are high and dry above the water. Some ducks and Canada geese find that the tops of lodges are good places to nest.

"The top of a muskrat lodge is also a good spot for a kid to sit in a marsh on his first duck hunt," Johnson said.

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*RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.*