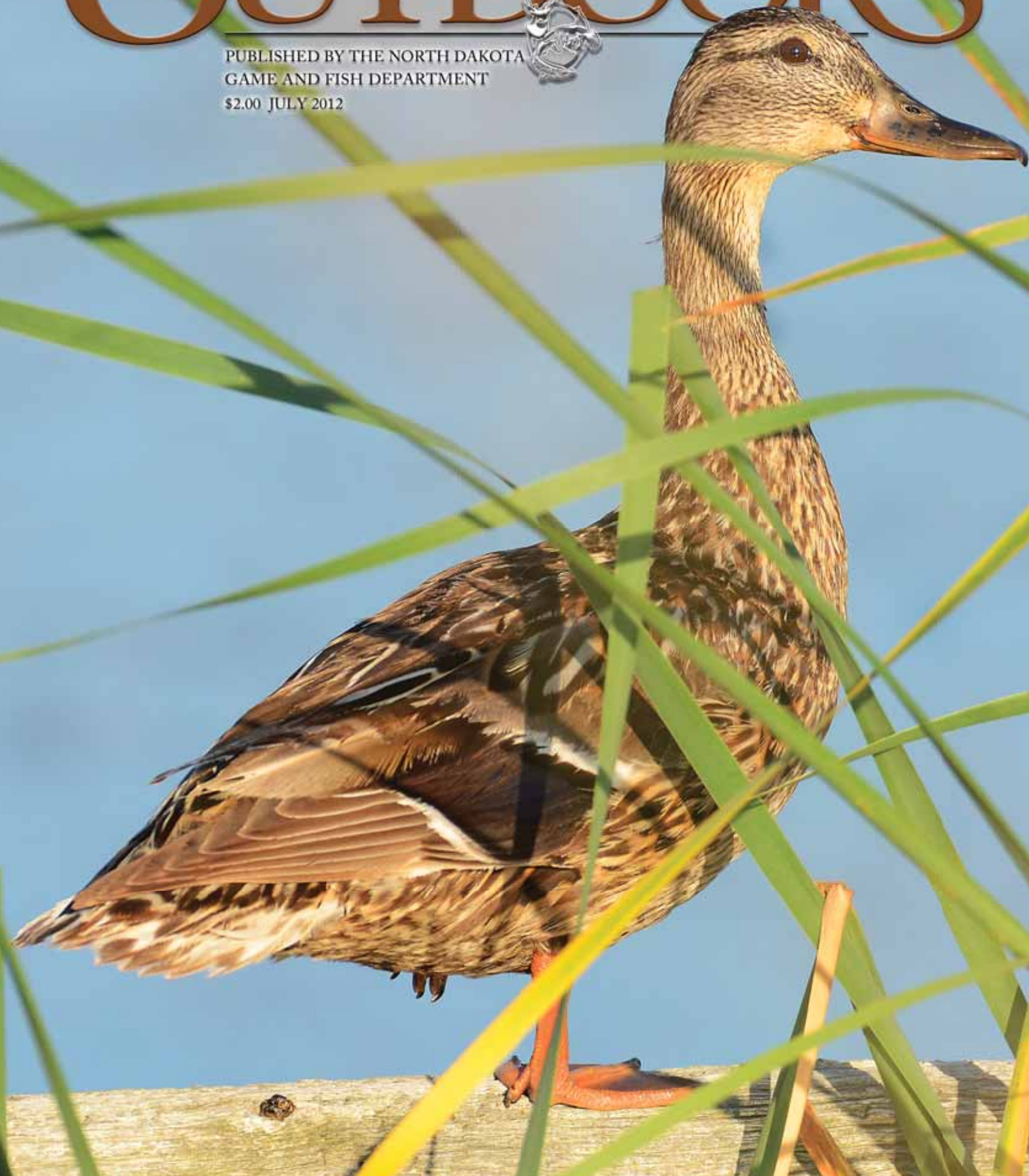


NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA
GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
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MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

Summer seems to be flying by at record pace. Maybe it's because I haven't done many of the things I'd planned, or maybe it's because time seems to slip away faster as I get older.

Even so, the calendar tells me that there is still time to get out and enjoy the warm weather and great fishing, as well as prepare for upcoming hunting seasons, which, if the first six months of 2012 are any indication, will be here in a heartbeat.

In an effort to get out and enjoy the outdoors, one of my sons and I went to the farmstead with plans to visit my mother, do a little target practice in anticipation of the hunting seasons and maybe do some fishing. We kind of got two of the three accomplished, but considering we live in North Dakota, sometimes you have to adapt.

The wind was blowing about 30 miles per hour and fishing was out of the question. Even shore-fishing would have been a challenge given the wind direction. On to activity number two. We set up targets and readied everything to get in some high-power rifle shooting, knowing that accuracy or precision wasn't going to be the goal considering the conditions. After about a dozen shots it was apparent that wasn't going to work either, as it was a challenge to simply keep the crosshairs on the target.

Here comes the adaptability. We definitely wanted to shoot so we switched to a .22-caliber pistol and started a competition, shooting at a bulls-eye about 35 feet away. Two hundred rounds later we decided to call it a draw, mostly because our thumbs were getting a little sore from reloading the clip.

The purpose of this story is to point out that not everyone has the privilege to participate in this type of shooting activity. I've attended national meetings where it was revealed that other states charge – and even then it's limited entry – for use at their rifle and pistol ranges. At one of those

meetings, North Dakota was recognized as having some of the best public shooting opportunities in the country. This surprised me somewhat since I felt we probably didn't have enough of these types of opportunities, but was still proud that such a statement was made.

Yet, that doesn't mean we should be satisfied, and we're not. In this issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* we discuss some dramatic upgrades to shooting ranges on wildlife management areas along the Missouri River. We feel these upgrades are worth the time and effort because we have an outdoors culture in North Dakota, and shooting is part of it. Plus, if we don't provide these opportunities through public ranges, it will eventually spill over to private lands where safety may be compromised and issues may arise.

Many people shoot just to shoot, much like I described earlier with the pistol, while others want to get ready for hunting seasons. With getting ready there is the anticipation of harvest, but in order to have that opportunity there has to be the resource available. North Dakota lost a lot of CRP in the last year and that will undoubtedly reduce the capability to produce some of that resource, but we also have great partners to help us rebound.

While the Game and Fish Department works with a number of partners, one that I want to recognize is Ducks Unlimited, which celebrates its 75th anniversary this year. They've been great conservation allies for years and will continue to be in the future.

With great anticipation, I look forward to the wonderful fishing opportunities expected throughout summer and well into fall. Take time to wet a line and prepare for what the coming fall has to offer. Above all, enjoy the great North Dakota outdoors.

Terry Steinwand

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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

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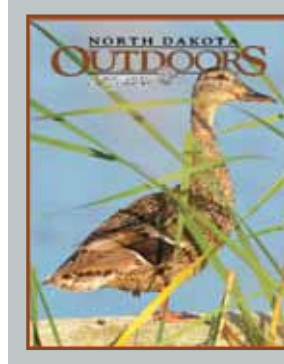
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Front Cover

A hen mallard takes a midsummer one-legged rest on a weathered fence.

Photo by Craig Bihrl, Bismarck



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 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095

Website: gf.nd.gov • email: ndgf@nd.gov

Information (701) 328-6300 • Administration (701) 328-6305

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A person wearing a camouflage vest and a cap is sitting on a wooden stool at a concrete table, looking at a map. The table has some papers and a yellow box on it. In the background, there is a dirt shooting range with several targets on a hillside under a clear blue sky.

Providing Places for **SAFE SHOOTING**

By Ron Wilson

MacLean Bottoms gun range, located on Oahe Wildlife Management Area south of Bismarck, will see needed upgrades in 2013.

Many outdoor opportunities are available on 200,000-plus acres of state-owned or managed wildlife management areas.

On the majority of these acres, unless otherwise specified, you can hunt, fish, trap, hike, bird watch, pitch a tent overnight, or simply immerse into North Dakota's outdoors.

At four WMAs along the Missouri River, from south of Williston downstream past Bismarck, people can also shoot at gun ranges specifically designed for such activities. Ranges are located on the following WMAs:

- Lewis and Clark, 6 miles southwest of Williston
- Riverdale, 2 miles southwest of Riverdale
- Oahe (Schmidt Bottoms), about 13 miles south of Mandan
- Oahe (MacLean Bottoms), about 8 miles south of Bismarck
- Wilton Mine WMA, 1 mile east of Wilton, also has a gun range and is included in this mix. This range, however, remains closed from flooding in 2011.

While the shooting ranges are unknown to some, their popularity is growing within the ranks of people who enjoy punching holes in paper targets and hunters readying for hunting season.

"Having these public gun ranges available to recreational shooters and hunters – and in many instances these people are one in the same – is very important because not everyone has the connection or opportunity to go on private land and plink at targets or sight in their deer rifles," said Jeb Williams, North Dakota Game and Fish Department assistant wildlife division chief. "As wildlife managers we understand the importance, as does the hunting and shooting public, of shooting accurately when hunting. When people feel more comfortable with their marksmanship, that's a good thing."

While tallying the number of shooters visiting the ranges along the Missouri River System isn't practical or necessary, it doesn't take much guesswork to note a dramatic increase in the number of participants over the years.

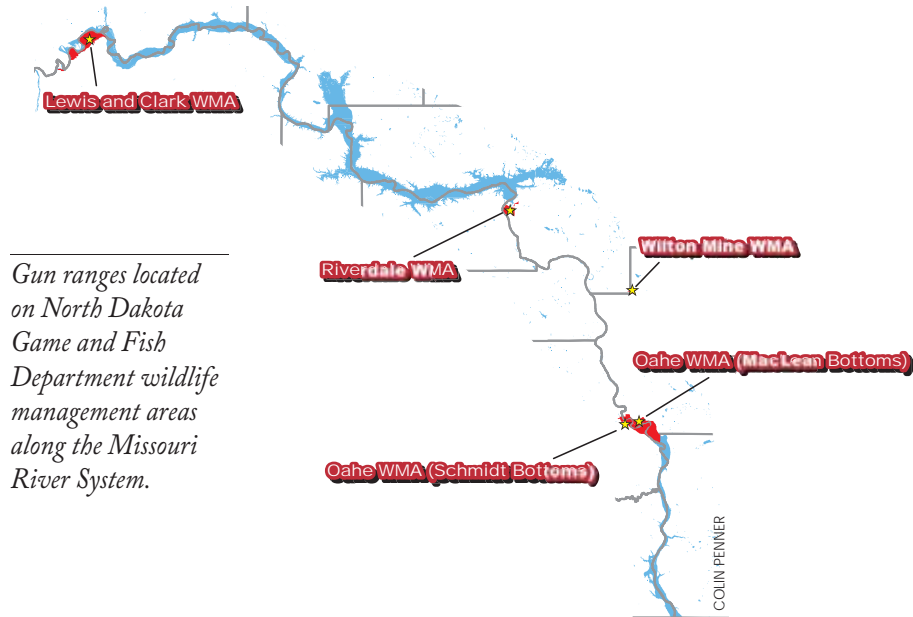
"Growth has been huge ... I would say use at some of these ranges has doubled in the last 10 years," said Chris Grondahl, Department outreach supervisor. "Even in winter, when you wouldn't think anyone would be shooting with snow on the ground, you can find a half-dozen people braving the elements and enjoying themselves. These ranges are just going to get busier and busier in the future."

Four of five ranges from Williston to south of Bismarck are managed by Game and Fish, while Schmidt Bottoms is managed by Morton County.

Management includes general maintenance, cleanup, replacing backboards and repairing shooting benches.

"Our seasonal and full-time employees put in a lot of time in maintaining these shooting ranges," Williams said. "There is rarely a time you go to one of these ranges when the weather is decent and there aren't a number of people plinking away."

Much of the funding for shooting ranges on state-owned or managed WMAs comes from the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, commonly known as the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Act, which



Gun ranges located on North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife management areas along the Missouri River System.



No matter the time of year, gun ranges up and down the Missouri River System see a number of shooters daily.

provides an 11 percent manufacturer's excise tax on sporting rifles, shotguns, ammunition and archery equipment, plus a 10 percent manufacturer's excise tax on handguns.

With growth comes the need to update facilities to accommodate more shooters, while at the same time being the best neighbor possible for those living in the area. The range at Schmidt Bottoms is the first along the river to receive a facelift, with work beginning in June and ending sometime this month.

When completed, the Schmidt facility will feature

a pistol range, 100- and 200-yard ranges and a shotgun range. "It will be a bigger, better range, with more shooting benches when it is done," Williams said.

Construction on the popular MacLean Bottoms range will begin in 2013. Grondahl said Game and Fish will upgrade all ranges to meet National Rifle Association safety standards. "We will do whatever we can to make sure they are the safest possible places to shoot," he said.

Bill Haase, Game and Fish wildlife resource management supervisor, said it's important that people

shoot in designated areas only on Department's WMAs.

"We have these ranges so there are safe designated areas for everyone to enjoy shooting sports," he said.

Even with the best shooting facilities possible, Grondahl said much of the responsibility of a safe shooting environment falls on the shoulders of participants. "We ask people to educate their fellow shooters and not to be afraid to make the call when rules are being broken," he said. "The idea is to take care of these places and to make sure they are safe places to shoot. If not, they can be shut down as fast as they are being built."



RON WILSON

While the gun range at Wilton Mine Wildlife Management Area, pictured above, remains closed from flooding in 2011, work to upgrade Schmidt Bottoms gun range, pictured at right, got underway earlier this summer. Schmidt Bottoms is located south of Mandan on Oahe Wildlife Management Area.



BILL HAASE

Grondahl said Game and Fish would like to establish some type of working relationship with, say, a wildlife club or shooting group, that would provide a part-time presence at the WMA ranges to help with general maintenance, but more importantly to make sure shooters are following the rules.

“Like the adopt-a-highway program, it would be something like an adopt-a-range program,” Grondahl said. “I think it’s going to take some kind of group, or individuals to take some ownership in their range and help educate shooters next to them.”

This sort of arrangement has been used for years at Lewis and Clark WMA. Kent Luttschwager, Department wildlife resource management supervisor, Williston, said the Upper Missouri Chapter of the United Sportsmen, along with the Williston Rifle and Pistol Club, has donated many hours in cleanup, maintenance and monitoring at the range, with some financial reimbursement by Game and Fish.

This sort of ownership works. Skip Balzer, Bismarck, who has volunteered hundreds of hours over the years to the Department’s Family Fishing Days program, took it upon himself to adopt the MacLean Bottoms gun range.

“Skip has done everything from helping to clean up, to helping people sight in their rifles, to demonstrating proper gun range etiquette,” Grondahl said. “He volunteered to do this, did it himself, and it has been a great show of what can happen if someone pays attention to a range and to the people who shoot there.”

Balzer said he goes to the range every day, sometimes just for a couple hours. “I think having someone down there really makes a difference,” he said.



RON WILSON

One Game and Fish Department official said use at some wildlife management area gun ranges has doubled in the last decade.

“I’m cleaning up the messes left behind and trying to keep the range safe.”

Balzer is a gun range fixture and people are starting to recognize him. “People see me picking up garbage and now some are starting to pick up after themselves,” he said. “That’s the way it should be.”

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.

Range Rules

- No tracer rounds or exploding targets.
- Shooting from sunrise to sunset only.
- No alcohol allowed on range.
- Shooting allowed only from benches to designated targets.
- No shooting bottles or any other trash materials such as garden produce.
- No fully automatic weapons or any device that allows a gun to shoot fully auto.
- No .50-caliber centerfire rifles allowed.
- No gun handling when anyone is beyond firing line.

RON WILSON



CRP WOES

By Ron Wilson

In 2007, North Dakota was home to nearly 3.4 million Conservation Reserve Program acres. By fall 2012, that acreage total will plummet to about 1.6 million acres.

The continuous loss of Conservation Reserve Program grassland across North Dakota's landscape was theoretically slowed this spring, when the U.S. Department of Agriculture considered offers on contracts totaling 190,000 CRP acres.

However, about 850,000 CRP acres will expire by fall in North Dakota, for a net loss of approxi-

mately 650,000 acres.

"That 190,000 acres potentially accepted in the general signup in spring simply reduced the amount of expiring acres coming out in fall," said Kevin Kading, North Dakota Game and Fish Department private land section leader.

During the spring signup, Kading said the CRP acceptance rate was about 50 percent east of



RON WILSON

away from the program, there are others who wanted to keep their land in CRP, but didn't qualify. "It's not because they want to be out of CRP, but due to a scoring system that favors more highly erodible lands and diverse grass mixtures, many offers in North Dakota simply were not able to compete with offers from other parts of the country," Kading said.

The Conservation Reserve Program, long lauded for improving water quality, protecting marginal cropland soils and providing essential wildlife habitat, celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2011. Unfortunately, this conservation program that has provided income to enrolled landowners over the years is in decline.

In 2007, North Dakota was home to nearly 3.4 million CRP acres. By fall 2012, that acreage total will plummet to about 1.6 million acres.

When North Dakota was at its CRP zenith five years ago, the nationwide cap was set at 39 million acres. That figure, however, was reduced by 7 million acres in the 2008 Farm Bill. Talk surrounding the 2012 bill, which is occurring during difficult financial times nationwide when many conservation programs are being cut, CRP is likely destined for further reductions.

"There is an effort to reduce the national cap to about 25 million acres, which would result in fewer opportunities down the road for producers to enroll many of these acres in North Dakota back into CRP," Kading said.

Acre-wise on paper, CRP is going backward in North Dakota. Yet, what you see on paper and

the Missouri River and about 72 percent west of the river. There were also fewer offers east of the river than in the past, he said, as producers have more opportunities and are choosing not to use CRP as an option, but farming their land instead.

While high commodity prices, high cash rents and demands for more cropland for food, feed and fuel production have lured some producers



CRAIG BIRRE

Waterfowl, upland game and many other birds nest in the sanctuary of tall grasses that make up CRP.



CRAIG BIRRE

An aerial view of native prairie in North Dakota, described by some as one of the most imperiled ecosystems on the planet.

what is found on the landscape are two different things to a degree, in that some of the land that didn't qualify under the program will still remain in grass. "There are some producers who are not going to put it into farm production, but keep it in grass for grazing, haying, or use it for hunting purposes," Kading said. "There are others who plan to crop some of the better soils, leaving grass around wetlands, odd areas or lower productive soils, such as saline areas."

CRP has long been a component of the Game and Fish Department's popular walk-in access program, Private Land Open to Sportsmen. Roughly half of the 1 million PLOTS acres across the state have a CRP component, but that will change significantly, beginning this fall, as more than 100,000 CRP acres within PLOTS contracts expire, Kading said.

After this fall, the loss will continue as more CRP contracts expire, but it will not happen overnight.

"While new CRP acres coming into the program will slow way down, there are also many CRP acres that have been enrolled in long-term PLOTS agreements and some of those will hang on for as long as 10-15 years, depending on the agreement and when they were signed up," Kading said. "Because we might not have the ability to enroll large blocks of CRP to replace those acres lost, we might have to replace them with other types of habitat, such as native prairie pastures with woody draws, wetlands out in crop fields, or establish habitat with other programs."

Kading said there are some really good things coming down the road in regards to high diversity cover crops that provide excellent wildlife habitat and food, while also helping the producer improve soil health. "This is an area that is rapidly expanding and we'll be offering assistance to producers to develop cover crops as part of their PLOTS contract," he said. "Cover crops aren't what they used to be, they are much more nowadays."

With the reduction of CRP, Kading said the Department's PLOTS program will likely have to shine even brighter to meet the demands of hunters. "With all the challenges out there, it will become even more important to work with producers to provide quality access and develop new practices and programs for wildlife habitat," he said. "This is definitely a time of change for wildlife and hunters because the resource is under tremendous pressure right now."

While much of the focus is on the reduction of CRP in the state, wildlife managers are even more concerned as they see irreplaceable native prairie turned into cropland in response to rising corn, soybean and other crop prices.

Scott McLeod, North Dakota state coordinator for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said 9-10 million acres of native prairie remain in the state, down from about 38 million acres when North Dakota was settled.

“Basically, we’ve lost nearly three-fourths of the native prairie in the state,” McLeod said. “Yet, when sportsmen drive across the landscape, they see all this native prairie and think it’s great and they wonder what we are talking about. Yeah, we do have a lot of native prairie remaining compared to other states, but when do we say enough is enough in breaking native prairie?”

Some lawmakers are pushing for sodsaver legislation that would reduce crop insurance assistance for less productive land, while safeguarding habitat for a myriad of wildlife species.

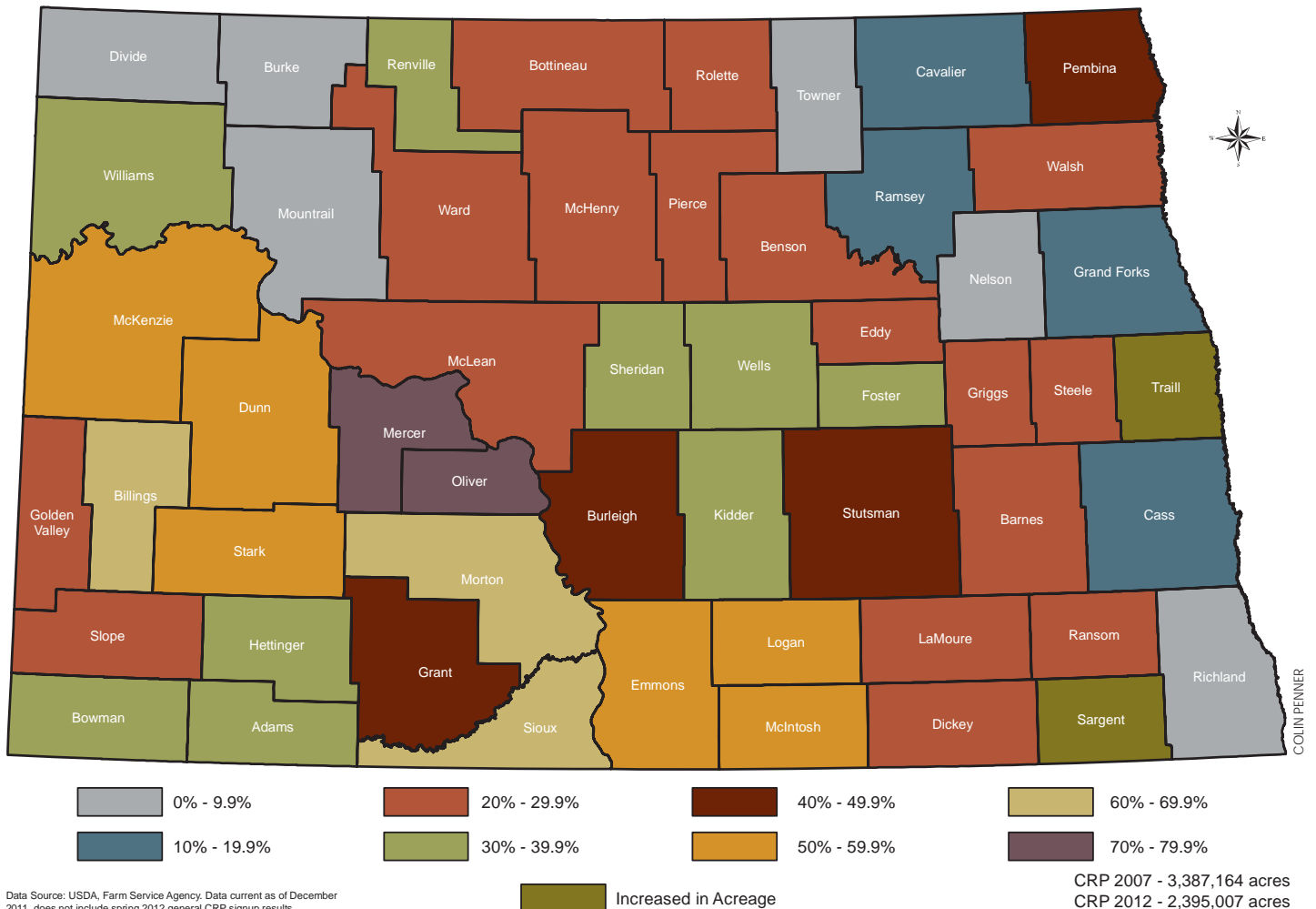
The legislation would reduce crop insurance assistance for the first four years for crops grown on newly converted native sod without a cropping history. Proponents say the move to reduce crop insurance assistance so that it is proportionate with the production capability of the land, instead of insuring it at the same rate as land that has been in production for years, would save taxpayers millions in future outlays

in federally subsidized crop insurance. Also, it would greatly reduce incentives that are driving some of the decisions to break native sod, knowing there is little risk in doing so.

“The increased interest in conversion of native prairie grasslands in the Dakotas largely stems from high crop prices, and a federally subsidized crop insurance program that essentially removes risk to producers,” Kading said. “Native prairie grassland on the Great Plains is one of the most imperiled ecosystems on the planet, but many segments of the general public don’t even realize this. As a society, we probably know more about the rain forests in Central America than we do about the prairie in our own back yard. When it’s gone, it’s more than just grassland birds and other wildlife species that are being affected.”

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

Percent of CRP Loss 2007 - 2012



Data Source: USDA, Farm Service Agency. Data current as of December 2011, does not include spring 2012 general CRP signup results.



In the United States, more waterfowl take their first flight in North Dakota than in any other state in the lower 48. Naturally, with a vision to “fill the skies with waterfowl today, tomorrow and forever,” North Dakota is part of a top priority landscape for Ducks Unlimited.

Ducks Unlimited at 75

By Becky Jones Mahlum

Ducks Unlimited officials have long understood the important role North Dakota plays in North America's waterfowl population.



ALLISON HESFORD

DU is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year with special events, projects and promotions across the continent. The dustbowl days of the 1930s dried out wetlands and devastated waterfowl production, resulting in a 30-day duck season in 1936, with hunting of canvasbacks, redheads and wood ducks prohibited.



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT PHOTO

The Lake Arena project in North Dakota received significant media coverage as it was the first DU project in the United States. As the logos on the sign indicate, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department was the first U.S. cooperating partner.

At that time, a small group of avid waterfowlers decided to take action, forming DU in 1937 with the mission of restoring and protecting wetlands in Canada, where the majority of the continent's ducks nest.

Today, DU has helped to conserve more than 12 million acres of habitat and is the world's largest wetlands and waterfowl conservation organization. "Having a conservation entity like DU as a partner and as a resource has allowed us to do a lot of good work on our wildlife management areas and on private land in the state," said Randy Kreil, wildlife division chief for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

In 1984, DU's board opened the first U.S. regional office in Bismarck, North Dakota on the edge of the Missouri Coteau, which boasts duck-breeding densities as high as 100 pairs per square mile. The office originally covered five states: North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Minnesota and Alaska.

"The habitat program started here because they knew from past studies that the five states were the primary waterfowl production states," said Bob Meeks, who started as chief biologist when the office opened and became its supervisor a year later.

"DU actually goes to where the resource is," Kreil said. "They're guided by the science and what is best for waterfowl and wetlands, as evidenced by the simple act of placing their office in Bismarck rather than Minneapolis or Denver."

Meeks said the office was told to get its first project on the ground as soon as possible; one on public

land with an agency that would agree to maintain the property.

North Dakota Game and Fish had the right project. Lake Arena, in Burleigh County near the townsite of Arena, is in a wildlife management area that had a long peninsula. "Studies showed nesting success was significantly improved on islands within alkali wetlands, which discouraged the presence of most predators," Meeks said.

DU cut off the peninsula, making a 100-yard gap to create an island, establishing a large area of secure waterfowl nesting habitat, after any predators were removed with box traps.

"The project came about because we were able to get the required permits in a brief period," Meeks said. "There were no draft agreements for something like this, so we had to write one. Once we had this agreement, we could continue to use it on other projects, saying, 'Here's the agreement and it's been approved already by this state agency or another.'"

Director of engineering for the Great Plains, Roger Smith, said surveying technology available in the mid-1980s was antiquated compared to the systems in use today. "All surveys were done with levels, transits, chains and note keepers," he said. "You would have to measure 500 to 1,500 points to determine elevation and angles to create a topography map. On a good day, you could probably collect 100 points. Today, one person can collect thousands of points a day. We use GPS (Global Positioning System); all of our data is collected digitally, downloaded digitally, and computer programs build the topography maps."

Kreil was at the dedication for the Arena project in 1985, featuring then-DU board president Pete Coors, along with the presidents of Ducks Unlimited Canada and Ducks Unlimited de Mexico. "It was pretty cool that all the people around the country showed up to talk about the first project in the United States," he said.

Over the years, Smith said, DU restored many North Dakota wetlands and installed water control structures to existing marshes so wildlife agencies could manage water levels.

When Conrad Hillman started as a regional director with DU in 1980, the state had 15 DU chapters in the state and about 1,600 members. "There were a whole lot of anti-wetland people at that time who were opposed to conservation easements. But back then we also had a tremendous number of waterfowl hunters in the state, more than we have today," Hillman said. "Basically, sportsmen are always willing to step up to the plate and have always supported conservation."

Hillman said he often got help with fundraising dinners from people who worked for Game and Fish and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "At one time, I had five different wardens volunteering their personal

time, chairing events, because they knew everybody,” he said. “A lot of the first North Dakota chairs were bank presidents or independent insurance agents – people who talked with people in the community every day.”

Today, DU North Dakota has more than 6,800 members. This year at DU’s national convention, Bismarck and Dickinson were recognized as President’s Elite chapters for raising more than \$100,000 for DU’s habitat conservation.

Faced with declining waterfowl numbers in the 1980s, brought on by a combination of a drought on the prairies and wetland drainage, conservation groups and government agencies came together to draft the North American Waterfowl Management Plan to restore waterfowl populations to healthy levels. The North American Wetlands Conservation Act was signed into law in 1989, making matching dollars available for wetland restoration in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

“The North American definitely created more opportunities with additional dollars,” Meeks said. “It was the first time we had a pool of money beyond our own funding. NAWCA required a 50-50 match, and we were encouraged to work with other conservation groups. That’s when all the joint ventures, such as the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture, got started. It was definitely a new time for conservation.”

In the late 1990s, DU made a shift from mostly restoration work in North Dakota to protecting native prairie and wetlands already on the ground. “When the prairie wetlands filled up in the mid-1990s, we saw we had what we needed for duck populations to rebound,” said Steve Adair, director of the Great Plains Region. “We just had to try to keep it intact.”

Randy Renner, DU manager of conservation programs for easements, said research DU was conducting on CRP showed if the habitat was there, the ducks did just fine when water returned to the prairies. “It’s cheaper to protect the habitat before it’s gone than to go back and restore it,” he said, “plus, once you lose the native grass, it’s pretty hard to restore.”

Since 1984, DU has invested more than \$68 million in protecting, enhancing and restoring more than 397,000 acres of wetlands and uplands in North Dakota.

Ten years of nest success research on native prairie in the Prairie Pothole Region showed ducks do best when water returns to the prairies after a dry cycle. Although droughts are challenging to endure, waterfowl and wetlands are adapted to them and actually require periodic dry cycles to reach their potential.

Researchers have been looking at how recent grassland and wetland losses affect waterfowl production. They have used the research to develop planning tools to determine which tracts of habitat are at highest risk

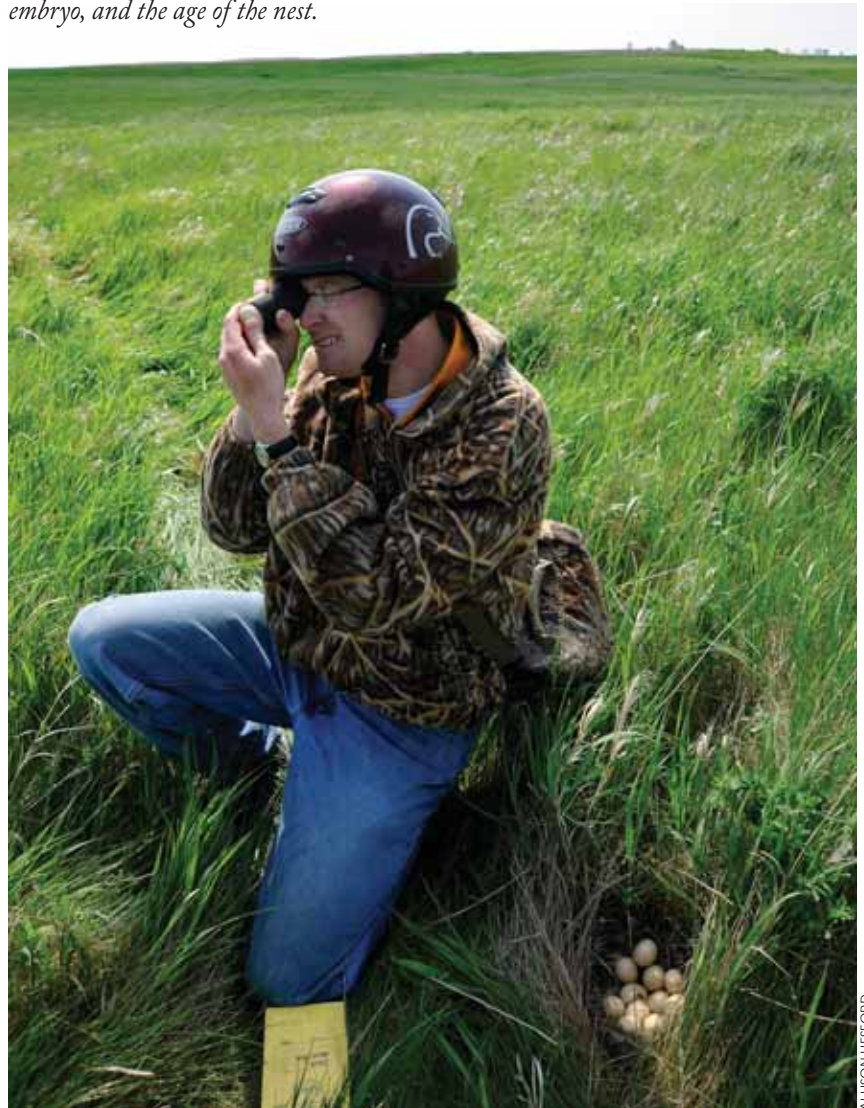
for conversion. Adair said DU and other conservation groups are concerned about the accelerating loss of native prairie, Conservation Reserve Program land and wetlands in the nesting grounds.

“We have had a good run of quality habitat and excellent water conditions in the prairies for a couple of decades now,” Adair said. “With the rapid loss and fragmentation of habitat occurring, we need to develop new programs and new sources of conservation funding if we are going to be able to maintain the abundant waterfowl populations that we have enjoyed in the past.”

Now, DU’s program in the Prairie Pothole Region has become more diverse, including working with agricultural producers through programs such as farm program biologists, through a partnership with Game and Fish and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, who assist landowners in evaluating and applying for conservation programs.

DU is also collaborating with Bayer CropScience on an educational and research initiative called *Winter*

North Dakota raises more ducks than any other state in the lower 48. Here a DU biologist is using a field candler to determine the developmental stage of a duck embryo, and the age of the nest.



Many signs like this are found across North Dakota, indicating cooperative projects between Ducks Unlimited and varied government and private sector partners.



CRAIG BIRRE

Cereals: Sustainability in Action. Winter wheat is good nesting cover in a landscape dominated by cropland, but with

agriculture.”

Adair said DU needs to continue to grow its outreach efforts to landowners and to look for new incentives for habitat protection. He sees DU continuing its involvement in public policy efforts, specifically to support the economics of ranchers, who own most of the native prairie in the state. “We’ve been working with ranchers at the ‘farm gate,’ with programs to improve their operation, such as grazing systems and providing water, but we may need to think about how we can help with marketing or safety nets for ranchers,” he said.

BECKY JONES MAHLUM is the regional communications manager for Ducks Unlimited’s Great Plains Regional Office in Bismarck, North Dakota.

intact wetlands. Because producers plant winter wheat in fall, there is less disruption for nesting waterfowl in spring than with spring-planted crops. “We realized winter wheat was a real practical solution to areas of the state best suited for crop production,” Adair said. “Winter wheat can be a real win-win for wildlife and



THE MAIN, CANADIAN MANAGER OF DUCKS UNLIMITED, SHOWN AS SUPERVISOR ENGINEER FOR THE CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS BEFORE HE WAS LOANED TO THE ORGANIZATION OF DUCKS UNLIMITED. MR. MAIN BELIEVES SO INTERESTED IN DUCKS UNLIMITED ACTIVITIES THAT HE NEVER HAD TO GO AWAY TO THE BALANCE. DUCKS UNLIMITED HAS PROCEEDED THROUGH THE EXPERT GUIDANCE OF THE MAIN AND DEPT. KEELESEN. THOUSANDS OF SPORTSMEN IN THE UNITED STATES HELP SUPPORT DUCKS UNLIMITED. (PICTURES COURTESY OF DUCKS UNLIMITED.)



125 Million Ducks

The biggest waterfowl crop since the great wild duck disaster of the early 1930's was produced on the Canadian breeding grounds in 1943. The fall flight from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Northwest Territories was estimated at 125,000,000.

That's a lot of ducks. It's 28,000,000 more — over the space of a single year — than came south in 1942. It's 83,000,000 more than in 1938 when Ducks Unlimited started restoration work in these areas. Never in the history of conservation have more practical results been shown by any game restoration movement — anywhere, at any time.

But, is 125,000,000 ducks enough? That number is less than nine one-day legal bag limits for the 1,437,230 sportsmen who bought Duck Stamps for a single recent hunting season of 70 days! That many ducks is nearly a challenge to the duck hunters of America to carry on this proven miracle of game restoration so that never again will the sport of wildfowling face extinction.

A Little History . . .

The Duck Disaster

In 1934-'35 the U. S. Biological Survey estimated there were less than 30,000,000 wild ducks left on the continent. By 1937, hunting seasons had been cut from three and one-half months to 30 days; bag limits from 25 to 10. Live decoys, dawn and dusk shooting, feeding, batteries and other old-time hunting methods were banned. Guns were restricted to three-shell capacity. Canvasback, redhead, bufflehead, ruddy ducks and three species of geese were added to the rapidly-growing protected list. Prohibition of all duck hunting threatened.

These restrictions were aimed at reducing duck losses, but did not provide for increased production. A federal refuge program was launched in this country with Duck Stamp and unemployment relief funds. But some of these public funds could be spent in Canada — where the bulk of waterfowl breed.

What Is Ducks Unlimited?

Many sportsmen of North Dakota are not familiar with the organization "Ducks Unlimited." This is not as it should be because Ducks Unlimited is one of the organizations that has done an outstanding job in providing a better habitat for migratory waterfowl in Canada. It is safe to say that much of the funds which support this splendid organization come from sportsmen in the United States.

In 1937, Ducks Unlimited proposed the restoration and management of our last remaining most important duck-breeding grounds on the continent in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Field studies revealed that 70 per cent of the annual duck crop was being destroyed in these areas before the American hunter fired a shot.

Why Ducks Were Scarce

Of 100,000,000 prospective ducks, drought killed 30% (30,000,000), cranes and swallows 15%, fire 12%, pigs 8%, other predators 7%, farming operations, disease, Indians and other factors 11%. NO WONDER DUCKS WERE GETTING SCARCE!

In 1938, over 4,500 American duck hunters had subscribed \$100,000 to start the Ducks Unlimited program in Canada. Canada gave full co-operation, including free grants and easements on all lands required. Over 3,000 Canadians volunteered their services as Keen-men to work without compensation with Ducks Unlimited's field staff of engineers and naturalists.

What DU Has Accomplished

After six years of practical restoration work, Ducks Unlimited in this country has grown to an organization of over 25,000 sportsmen and conservationists. They have contributed \$700,000 to increase duck production on the breeding grounds. This money has been used to:

- Establish over 1,100,000 acres of safe refuges.
- Construct over 100 permanent dams.
- Excavate over 30 emergency reservoirs.
- Build 350 miles of fences and fire guards.

Oldest and Youngest Waltonians

IT IS ALMOST NINETY YEARS BETWEEN J. D. ALLEN, OF MANITOBA, WHO WILL BE 92 APRIL 20TH, AND MARION CLAUDE BROWN, DAUGHTER OF MR. AND MRS. ARNOLD STRAND, DAUGHTER OF BISMARCK, N. D. THE YOUNG MISS IS THREE YEARS OLD, AND THEY ARE BOTH CHARTER MEMBERS OF THE MANITOBA BRIDGE CHAPTER OF THE ISLAND WALTON LEAGUE. MR. ALLEN, WHO IS A FORMER LEGISLATOR IN THE STATE, IS STILL ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN HIS PROFESSION AND IS VICTORIOUS BELIEVER IN THE UDDY WILDFOWLING IN THE UNITED STATES. THE DAY THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN, MR. ALLEN WAS BEING HONORED A DEER HEAD. MR. ALLEN AWARDED TROPHY FOR THE LATE "TRUCK" BROWNE AND THE MANITOBA DEER MOVED IN BISMARCK DATE, AND HE LOVES TO TALK OF MEMORIES WHICH FORM PLACE IN THOSE EARLY DAYS IN CANADA. THE MANITOBA BRIDGE CHAPTER OF THE ISLAND WALTON LEAGUE HAS A MEMBERSHIP OF 201 AT THE PRESENT TIME. THE CHAPTER WAS ORGANIZED LAST FALL. AT THE RECENTLY HELD MEETING OF THE CHAPTER HELD IN BISMARCK ON JANUARY 20TH, 1943, MR. ALLEN WAS IN ATTENDANCE. MR. G. E. SPER, REGIONAL INSPECTOR FOR THE FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, OF MINNEAPOLIS, WAS THE PRINCIPAL SPEAKER.



- Organize destruction of 1,700,000 cranes and magpies.
- Form farmers into fire-prevention co-operatives.
- Reduce nest destruction by farming operations.
- Fight waterfowl diseases.
- Organize volunteer workers throughout the province.

Results have been phenomenal. Millions more ducks have been produced — at an estimated cost of only three cents a duck!

Here Are the Results

In 1943, the duck population was more than triple that of 1937. The shooting season also has been more than doubled as ducks increased. In addition, every waterfowl sportsman and Ross's goose has been taken off the fully protected list.

This salvation of the sport of wildfowling is not accidental. It is the result of research, study, intelligent work and careful expenditure of money. Ducks Unlimited does

Here's the Record:		
Here are duck and hunting season increases since DU was organized:		
	Ducks	Seasons
1935-'37	30,-40,000,000	30 days
1938	30,000,000	45 days
1939	62,000,000	45 days
1940	69,000,000	60 days
1941	75,000,000	60 days
1942	97,000,000	70 days
1943	125,000,000	70 days

not claim all of its credit for the vast increase of migratory waterfowl. The work of governmental agencies in this country has helped send many more birds north each year to breed.

How You Can Help

Ducks Unlimited operated by a Board of Trustees composed of nationally-known businessmen and sportsmen, already has set a record of practical accomplishments unequalled in the history of game restoration. But to insure the future of duck hunting, 2,000,000 acres more of safe nesting refuges are needed. Canada will donate the lands free.

Every wild duck hunter has an obligation to both the birds and his sport to help restore these areas in accordance with his means. The more you invest the greater the dividends in more ducks — and your contribution is deductible for income tax.

—Send In Your Membership Subscription Now—
Ducks Unlimited,
24 Madison Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.
I hereby subscribe to Ducks Unlimited, Inc.
\$ _____ annually until cancelled by me.

DU Projects in the Greatest Breeding Area



NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS FOR FEBRUARY, 1944

[4]

While Ducks Unlimited started in 1937, it took a few years before it expanded across the country. This North Dakota OUTDOORS magazine article from February 1944 details some of the earliest media publicity about DU in the state.

AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES



RULES

TO KEEP NORTH DAKOTA'S LAKES AND RIVERS CLEAN



BOATERS AND ANGLERS MUST:

REMOVE all aquatic plants from boats, livewells, trailers, bait containers and other equipment when leaving a water body.

TRANSPORT live aquatic bait in containers (e.g. bait buckets) no larger than 5 gallons volume.

DRAIN all water from boats and other watercraft. This includes livewells and baitwells.

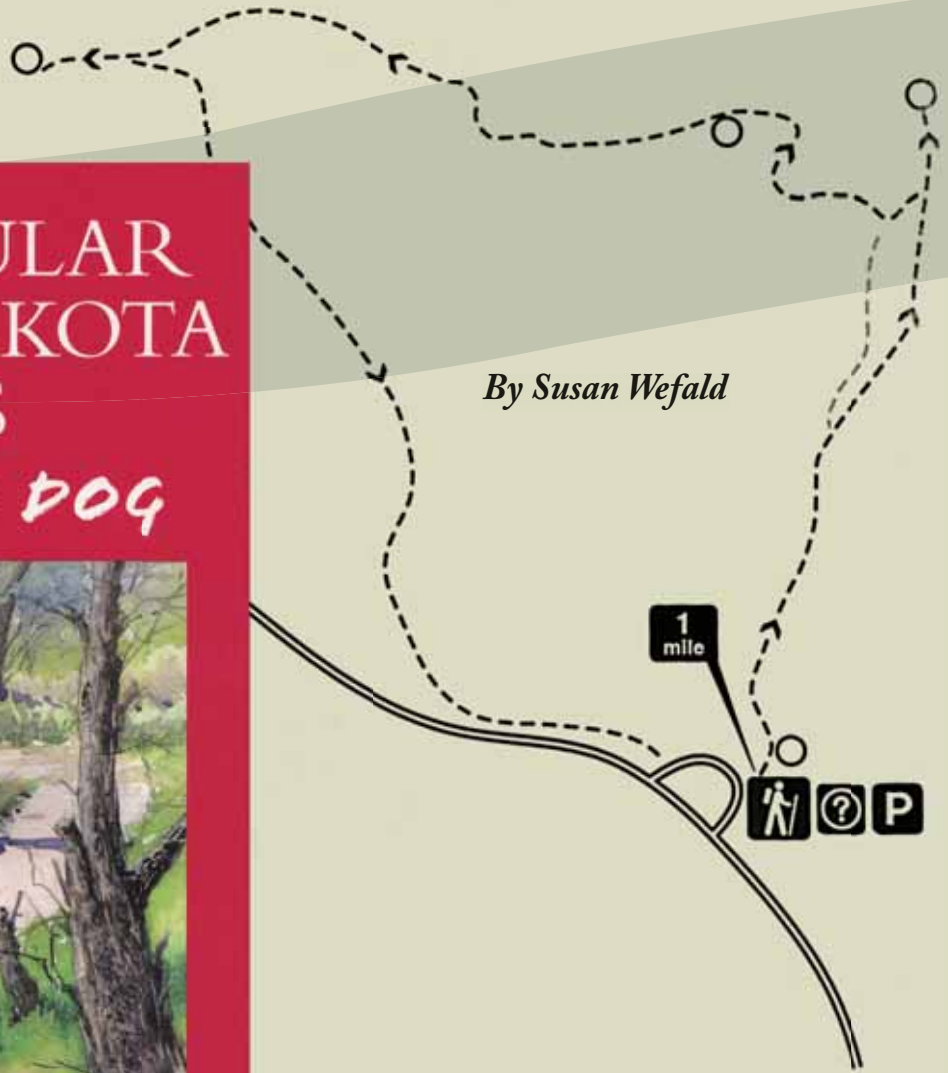
OBTAIN all live aquatic bait within North Dakota. No live aquatic bait can be imported into the state.

NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

100 N. Bismarck Expressway
Bismarck, ND 58501-5095
701-328-6300

Email: ndgf@nd.gov
Website: gf.nd.gov

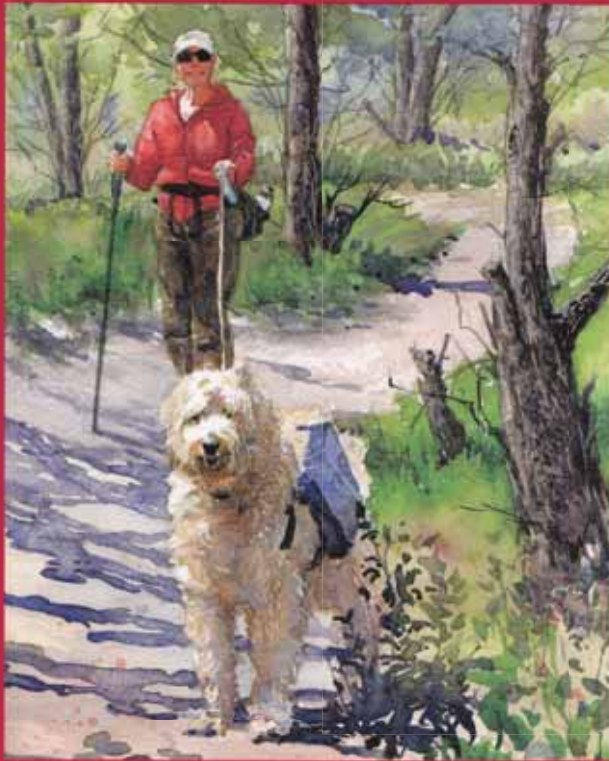




By Susan Wefald

SPECTACULAR NORTH DAKOTA HIKES

BRING THE DOG



SUSAN WEFALD

“This book is for anyone who wants to explore North Dakota’s diverse landscape and learn more about its history. It’s for families who want to expand neighborhood strolls into the great outdoors. It’s for seasoned hikers looking for new experiences. And it’s for people who love the idea of hiking with their dogs,” from “Spectacular North Dakota Hikes – Bring the Dog.”

*~I stop to examine
A patch of native prairie and
Find an intricate tapestry of
Grasses and forbs. ~*

*~Seeking out a quiet place
I find quacking ducks,
Honking geese, singing birds.
I revel in the noisy silence. ~*

Susan Wefald

~A Passion for Native Prairie~

I love walking through native prairie with my dog, Sandy, on the many beautiful hiking trails in North Dakota. While our mixed-grass native prairie is not as imposing as the redwood groves in California, it is just as precious and is a resource we need to treasure and work to preserve.

Before settlement, North Dakota was home to some shortgrass prairie in the west, some tallgrass prairie in the east, and lots of mixed-grass prairie across the middle of the state. Mixed-grass prairie is a blend of both tall and shortgrass prairie plants, so it is the most diverse of the prairie environments. This grass mixture attracted many species of grazing wildlife, and is well adapted to the extremes of North Dakota's climate.

Growing up in suburban Detroit, Michigan, there was a half-block patch of prairie behind my house. For the first 12 years of my life, this was one of my favorite playgrounds. Kids dug forts in the ground and covered them with boards, one lone tree was my climbing tree, and Mr. Miller down the street always created excitement in spring when he lit fires to burn the prairie. Little did I realize that Mr. Miller was teaching me an excellent lesson in prairie management.

In 1970 I moved to North Dakota with my husband, Bob, who grew up in Minot. We started hiking in the badlands and wherever we could find a trail. I liked hiking across the prairies, spotting coyotes and bull snakes, identifying wildflowers with help from my guidebook, and watching waterfowl on prairie potholes, as they paddled in the marshes, raising their young. I looked for pasque flowers in early spring at Fort Lincoln State Park, enjoyed hearing the sounds of sandhill cranes as they travelled north, and had a great time spotting pronghorns in western North Dakota.

Then, in 1992, I was appointed, and then elected to serve on the Public Service Commission for 16 years. For 12 of those years, I held the portfolio on permitting and reclamation of land mined for coal.

I loved to accompany staff as they performed regular inspections of mine properties, checking to see that all state laws were followed. Each staff member was an expert in some aspect of land reclamation, and each time I accompanied them into the field, I learned something new. For example, I learned

prairie grasses grow deep roots the first year to take advantage of any moisture in the soil, and only then put forth thin blades of new grass visible on the surface. Reclaimed prairie may only include 10-15 species of grasses, whereas mixed-grass native prairie can include dozens of different grasses, forbs (wildflowers) and shrubs. Management of native prairie takes work and planning to include grazing and periodic burning to help maintain healthy grasslands.

North Dakota is losing some of its remaining native prairie to conversion to cropland and energy development.

In my book, "Spectacular North Dakota Hikes – Bring the Dog," I identify many places in the state where people can hike through native prairie. One of my favorite places to wander through native grasses is at Lostwood National Wildlife Refuge north of Stanley. This special place located in the Missouri Coteau has around 2,000 wetland areas and more than 750 species of plants. When my nephew John and I hiked the 7.4-mile loop trail we spotted a moose, white-tailed deer, lots of waterfowl, and many beautiful wild flowers. It is a wonderful place to experience the diversity of the prairie.

"If you want to experience miles of pristine native northern mixed-grass prairie, take this hike ... Here at Lostwood, you really get a feeling for what the vast prairies were like before settlement occurred," from "Spectacular North Dakota Hikes – Bring the Dog."

Another place to hike through native prairie is at Lake Sakakawea State Park near Riverdale. A 2.5-mile loop trail on native prairie bluffs starts at the visitor center. This trail is interesting because some of it runs through recreated prairie, and some is through native mixed-grass prairie. It doesn't take much time to spot the difference. But it is time worth spending because each patch of native prairie is unique, and deserves our full attention and protection.

SUSAN WEFALD, a North Dakota Public Service Commissioner for 16 years, now enjoys serving on nonprofit boards, playing her violin with the Bismarck Mandan Symphony, and exploring North Dakota. She and her husband, Bob, have been hikers for more than 40 years and, Sandy, a 3-year-old goldendoodle, is their enthusiastic hiking companion.

"Spectacular North Dakota Hikes – Bring the Dog" was published by North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies. Cover and interior design by Lourdes Hawley, cover and interior illustrations by Janet Flom and map design by Thomas Marple.

BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor



CRAIG BIRLIE

Spring Duck Index Up, Water Conditions Down

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual spring breeding duck survey showed an index of 4.8 million birds, up 16 percent from last year and 112 percent above the long-term average (1948-2011). The 2012 index is the third highest on record.

All species were well above the long-term average. Wigeon (plus 88 percent) and green-winged teal (plus 221 percent) were at record highs. Mallards, gadwall, blue-winged teal, shovelers, redheads and ruddy ducks exceeded the long-term average by more than 100 percent.

Only pintails, shovelers and canvasbacks were down more than 10 percent from last year, and mallards were essentially unchanged. Blue-winged teal were at their highest level since 2001, missing the record high by less than 1 percent.

"Excellent production last summer brought many breeding pairs back to the state," said Mike Szymanski, Department waterfowl biologist. "Fortunately, there was still enough habitat to attract them to North Dakota."

The spring water index was down 57 percent from 2011 and 6 percent from the long-term average. The water index is based on basins with water, and does not necessarily represent the amount of water contained in wetlands.

"Water conditions were good in larger wetlands, but the lack of snow this past winter and the lack of significant spring rains reduced the number of temporary and seasonal wetlands," Szymanski said. "Undoubtedly, many wetlands dried up within days of completing the survey."



SUBMITTED PHOTO

New State Record White Bass Caught

Charlie Vang's catch on June 10 is the latest entry to the list of North Dakota state record fish. The Brooklyn Park, Minnesota angler reeled in a 4-pound, 10-ounce white bass from Devils Lake.

The 19-inch fish broke the old record of 4 pounds, 8 ounces taken at Devils Lake in 2000.

Pike Stocked, Opportunities Plentiful

North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel, along with staff from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service fish hatcheries, stocked 2.3 million pike fingerlings in 69 lakes and rivers across the state.

Jerry Weigel, Department fisheries production and development section leader, said this year's goal was to stock 2 million fingerlings. "These were some of the largest pike fingerlings we have ever shipped, given they were only 30 days old," Weigel said.



CHRIS GRONDAHL

In addition to stocking efforts, Weigel said there is good potential for natural pike reproduction in many lakes across the state.

"Wet conditions during the last 10-15 years, and an aggressive stocking program, is the main reason for the many pike fishing opportunities in the state," Weigel said. "We encourage anglers to give pike fishing a try."

Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest

The deadline for submitting photos to the Game and Fish Department's annual Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest is September 28.

The contest has categories for nongame and game species, as well as plants/insects. An overall winning photograph will be chosen, with the number of place winners in each category determined by the number of qualified entries.

Contest entries are limited to digital files only submitted on disk or via email. Contestants are limited to no more than five entries. Photos must have been taken in North Dakota.

By submitting an entry, photographers grant permission to Game and Fish to publish winning photographs on the Department's website, gf.nd.gov, and in *North Dakota OUTDOORS* magazine.

Prints or photo disks should be sent to Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest, C/O Patrick T. Isakson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095.

Send emailed digital photos to photocontest@nd.gov. Digital submissions can be either original digital photographs, or scans made from prints or slides/transparencies. Photographers will



Sharp-tailed grouse, by Kenneth Miller, Golden Valley, 2011 photo contest place winner.

need to supply the original image if needed for publication.

Photo disks will not be returned. All entries must be accompanied by the photographer's name, address, phone number and email address if available. Other information such as photo site location and month taken are also useful.

AUG 15

August Swan Application Deadline

Swan applications will be online and at vendors throughout the state in mid- to late July.

Hunters are encouraged to apply at the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov. The website also contains application forms that can be printed and mailed. Regular license fees apply and no service charge is added.

Applications will be available at Game and Fish offices, county auditors and license vendors.

Applications are also accepted at the Department's toll-free licensing line, (800) 406-6409. A service fee is added for license applications made over the phone.

Residents and nonresidents can apply. Since swans are classified as waterfowl, nonresidents may hunt them only during the period their nonresident waterfowl license is valid.



CRAIG BIRLE

Fur Harvester Classes Scheduled

The North Dakota Cooperative Fur Harvester Education program is sponsoring a fur harvester education class in Bismarck, Dickinson and Jamestown for anyone interested in trapping or hunting furbearers.

The free 16-hour course is set for Bismarck August 14 (5:30-9:30 p.m.), 16 (5:30-9:30 p.m.) and 18 (8 a.m.-5 p.m.) at the Game and Fish Department headquarters office.

The class in Dickinson is at the Game and Fish district office on August 25 and September 1 from 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

The course in Jamestown will run September 4 (5:30-9:30 p.m.), 6 (5:30-9:30 p.m.) and 8 (8 a.m.-5 p.m.) at the Game and Fish district office.

Students will learn about traps, trapping and snaring techniques, furbearer biology and fur care. A field day is also included where students will make a variety of land, water and snare sets.



CRAIG BIRHLE

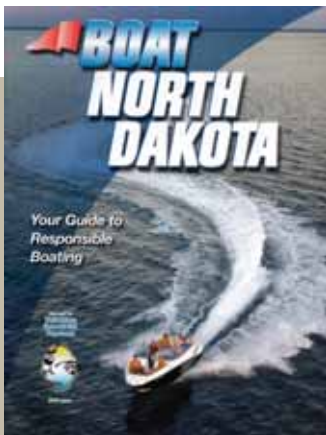
Graduates of fur harvester classes in North Dakota earn a certification card that is recognized by any state requiring trapper education prior to buying a license.

Upon completion, graduates receive a certification card that is recognized by any state requiring trapper education prior to purchasing a license.

To sign up for the class access the Game and Fish Department website at

gf.nd.gov, click on the online services link, and “online course enrollment” under the hunter education heading.

For more information contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s wildlife services division at (701) 250-4405.



Boat North Dakota Course

Children ages 12-15 who want to operate a boat or personal watercraft this summer must take the state’s boating basics course.

State law requires youngsters ages 12-15 to pass the course before they operate a boat or personal watercraft with at least a 10 horsepower motor. In addition, major insurance companies give adult boat owners who pass the course a premium discount on boat insurance.

The course is available for home-study from the North Dakota Game and Fish Department’s Bismarck office. Two commercial providers also offer the course online, and links to those sites are found on the Department’s website at gf.nd.gov.

While the home-study course is free, students will be charged a fee to take it online. The online provider charges for the course, not the Game and Fish Department. The fee stays with the online provider.

Upon completion of the online test, and providing a credit card number, students will be able to print out a temporary certification card, and within 10 days a permanent card will be mailed.

The course covers legal requirements, navigation rules, getting underway, accidents and special topics such as weather, rules of the road, laws, life saving and first aid.

For more information contact Nancy Boldt, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, by email at ndgf@nd.gov; or call (701) 328-6300.

State Fair Conservation Skills Park Expands

The green space at the Game and Fish Department's Conservation and Outdoor Skills Park at the state fairgrounds in Minot turned brown last summer following the Mouse River flood.

Like the rest of the fairgrounds, though, it's coming back nicely this summer and will once again welcome visitors at the state's biggest outdoor gathering.

"We've basically had to redo our entire area," said Greg Gullickson, the Department's outreach biologist in Minot, "and we've even added some new space for educational displays."

In addition, Gullickson says the free fishing, shooting, archery and furtaker education programs are still a mainstay of the Game and Fish Department's state fair presence.

"Our conservation area is a great place to take a break from other fair activity," Gullickson said. "Our pond is stocked with fish and we invite anyone headed to the fair to stop by and try to catch one."



GREG GULLICKSON

Construction of a new dock is just one of the improvements at the Game and Fish Conservation and Outdoor Skills Park at the state fairgrounds in Minot. Flooding last summer (inset) inundated the area, requiring major repairs to structures, landscaping and the fishing pond.



GREG GULLICKSON

Sullivan and Big Oxbow WMA Dedicated

Additional land around the Missouri-Yellowstone river confluence in northwestern North Dakota is now in public ownership.

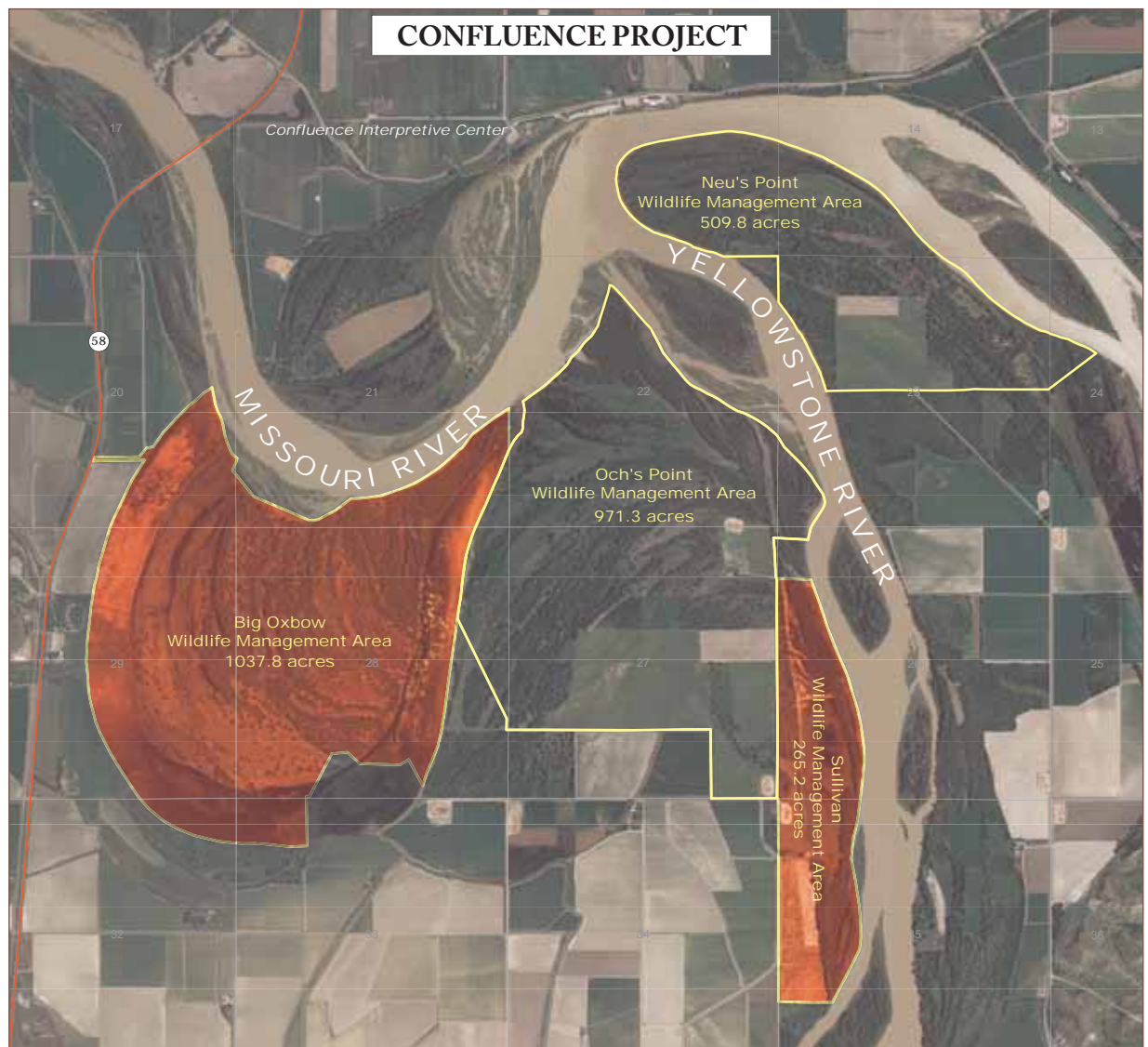
Two tracts, now called the Sullivan and Big Oxbow wildlife management areas, add to the adjacent Ochs and Neu's Point WMAs to encompass nearly 3,000 acres of diverse riverbottom habitat.

The two new tracts were purchased by the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust and other partners and signed over to the State Game and Fish Department. The acquisition represents the final phase of a public/private partnership that first began in 2001 to protect the landscape at the confluence and near the Missouri-Yellowstone Confluence Interpretive Center.

“The confluence holds a real historical significance for our state, marking the joining of two great rivers that guided Lewis and Clark more than two centuries ago,” said North Dakota Lieutenant Governor Drew Wrigley, who spoke at the project dedication in April. “Today we celebrate the preservation of that history and the management of that land for future generations to experience and enjoy. I congratulate everyone involved in the completion of this project for their great work and leadership in preserving and protecting this important habitat.”

Also attending the dedication ceremony were Game and Fish Department Director Terry Steinwand, North Dakota Senator John Hoeven, and numerous participating landowners.

Sullivan and Big Oxbow wildlife management areas in northwestern North Dakota add to the adjacent Ochs and Neu's Point WMAs to encompass nearly 3,000 acres of riverbottom habitat.



Hunting Guide and Outfitter Test Set

The next guide and outfitter written examination is August 4 at 1 p.m. at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department office in Bismarck. The test is given periodically to anyone interested in becoming a hunting guide or outfitter in the state.

In addition to passing a written exam, qualifications for becoming a guide include a background check for criminal and game and fish violations; certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and standard first aid; and employment by or contract with a licensed hunting outfitter.

Hunting outfitter eligibility requirements include the guide qualifications, as well as an individual must have held a hunting guide license for two years; and must have proof of liability insurance.

Interested individuals are required to preregister by calling the Game and Fish Department's enforcement office at 328-6604.

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WILLISTON	KUMV 8	Tuesday - 10 pm
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MINOT	KMOT 10	Tuesday - 10 pm
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DICKINSON	KOCD 7	Tuesday - 9 pm (MT)
	KXMA 2	Sunday - 9 pm (MT)
BISMARCK	KFYR 3	Tuesday - 10 pm
	KXMB 12	Sunday - 10 pm
	CATV ACCESS	Saturday - 9:30 am
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FARGO	FOX 4	Sunday - 9 pm

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

STAFF notes

Caspers, Hoge Hired in Fisheries

Todd Caspers is the new fisheries biologist in the Devils Lake district office. He is a native of Iowa and received a master's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

Kyle Hoge has accepted the fisheries development technician position. He has been a seasonal employee in the fisheries division for several years.

Hoge, a Bismarck native, has a fish and wildlife management degree from North Dakota State University.



Todd Caspers



Kyle Hoge



Eugene Masse



Daryl Kleyer

Enforcement Positions Filled

Longtime game wardens Eugene Masse, New Rockford, and Daryl Kleyer, Williston, recently retired from the Game and Fish Department.

District game warden James Myhre transferred from the Steele/Dawson district to New Rockford.

District game warden Jerad Bluem transferred from the Belfield district to Steele/Dawson.

Hanson Retires, Peterson Fills Position

Jon Hanson retired in May after four years as the Department's hunter education coordinator. Zach Peterson has filled the position.

Peterson, a native of Harvey, has a wildlife and fisheries biology degree from South Dakota State University. He has worked for several years as a seasonal employee in both the wildlife and fisheries divisions, and has worked in the private sector as a wildlife/natural resource biologist.



Jon Hanson



Zach Peterson



Tiffany Quast

Quast Fills IT Position

Tiffany Quast is the Department's new programmer analyst. She has a bachelor's of science degree in mass communications from Minnesota State University-Moorhead, and an associate's degree in computer information systems from North Dakota State College of Science in Wahpeton.

back cast

By Ron Wilson



My dogs, running out ahead over hard-pack sand deposited a year ago by a Missouri River that muscled over its banks but drug its feet in retreating, got to the sleeping bag first, giving it a mandatory onceover with their noses before moving on.

Resting in the early morning shade of a downed cottonwood as big around as a culvert, the bag was bunched up slightly in the middle as if someone small was lying on their back, with knees in the air.

Blue on top and black on the bottom, the sleeping bag, while looking nearly new, clearly wasn't top of the line, but would do OK outside in summer temperatures. The \$29.95 price tag that was still attached to the zipper with one of those frustratingly tough plastic ties you need a pocketknife to remove, confirmed it.

Not knowing who or what had been inside what looked like a perfectly good sleeping bag, I left it where it was, thinking its owner might come back looking for it.

I'm not a River Rat, although I do like the name and carefree, suntanned persona that pops into my head when I say those words, but simply an occasional visitor who hasn't spent a bunch of time on the Missouri in a boat or walking its shores. The flood changed that somewhat as it left behind acres and acres of sandy shorelines that, if you readjust your scale and use your imagination a bit, are reminiscent of an ocean coastline. Sand dunes as tall as two-story homes and flat, white beaches where a dog can pin his ears back and run full out for a couple hundred yards or more, can be found and accessed with just a little bit of poking around.

We've frequented a few of these places so far this summer, going most often in the mornings when, if we've timed it right, other people were still at home building ham and cheese sandwiches, packing sunscreen and loading coolers for a day by the river. Once or twice we've brought along coffee in disposable cups, which we smashed flat when drained and packed out in the side pockets of baggy summer shorts.

Our footprint, if we've left one at all, has been small.

Unfortunately, not all river users have held fast to the same philosophy. The amount of garbage we've stumbled across, and I'm talking "new" garbage that didn't wash in with last summer's flood waters, is startling in spots. One "camp," complete with a rock fire ring and partially burned cans and other debris, held the plastic wrap and cardboard remains of recently purchased camping and fishing equipment. A cooler, that looked as new as the sleeping bag, but missing its lid, was flipped upside down and parked next to the fire where it was likely used as a seat.

Litter isn't just unique to the Missouri River, but is found along many of North Dakota's riparian corridors, and drier places like the badlands, prairie back roads and state-owned or managed wildlife management areas. It's an ugly scab that blows across the landscape, bobs in river currents and rusts in ditches.

In a late June news release, Nancy Boldt, North Dakota Game and Fish Department boat and water safety coordinator, reminded river users the need to pack out what they pack in.

"People are excited to be able to enjoy the river again after not being able to use it last year due to the flood, but it is really disappointing to see shorelines littered with bottles, cans and wrappers," Boldt said.

Not to mention a sleeping bag.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.



Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel

Many animals found in North Dakota – white-tailed deer, cottontail rabbits, striped skunks, bighorn sheep and kangaroo rats, just to list a few – are named for obvious physical characteristics.

Add the thirteen-lined ground squirrel to that list. North Dakota's most common ground squirrel does indeed have 13 stripes running down the length of its back. Seven are pale yellow in color, separated by six darker ones that feature a series of white spots running down their middle.

The thirteen-lined ground squirrel is one of those animals that catch our eye as it sprints to the safety of a burrow or stands stick-straight to see over taller vegetation, but it doesn't hold our attention for long. Maybe this is because the thirteen-lined ground squirrel is so familiar, occupying the well-drained soils of roadsides, farm field edges, cemeteries, parks and golf courses across the state.

The smallest of North Dakota's ground squirrels, the thirteen liner measures about 10 inches in length, and one-third of that is tail. Active only in daylight hours, its menu includes everything from grasses to roots, to insects, mice and carrion. The list of predators that prey on this squirrel – from hawks to snakes, weasels, badgers and feral cats – is also long.

Thirteen-lined ground squirrels spend a lot of time underground in extensive burrows used for different purposes. Burrows for hiding, for example, are short and there are lots of them. Nesting burrows are larger, while hibernating burrows are dug below the frost line and feature a plugged entrance.

Unlike some other burrow diggers that leave evidence of their work above ground, thirteen-lined ground squirrels dig without leaving a mound of soil at the entrance. Instead, they take care to spread the soil and pat it down with tiny feet and the top of the head.

Thirteen-lined ground squirrels are described by wildlife biologists as relatively solitary animals. When loose colonies are formed, the squirrel count is, say, just 10 animals per acre.

Mating occurs in March or April after the animals emerge from a long winter underground. Females give birth to one sizeable litter of 8-9 young. By late summer, young disperse to find, or most likely construct, new digs of their own.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.