

# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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# MATTERS OF OPINION



**Terry Steinwand**  
*Director*

As I write this, we're almost half way through February and another relatively mild winter. Sure, we've had a couple cold snaps, and parts of the state have been hit with more snow than others. Yet, overall, it's another good winter to date.

I don't know if that's good or bad at this point. Given the lack of moisture last summer, could it mean another dry spring and summer? What it means now is that deer depredation issues are way down from a couple years ago, and the 400 or so managed fishing lakes are at a lesser risk for low oxygen levels and winterkill conditions. Both of those are good things.

As you know, lawmakers are in town for the 63<sup>rd</sup> legislative session. It's a very busy time and sets the stage for what's to come as they set policy and determine how we're going to proceed for at least the next two years. Currently, we're monitoring about 50 bills ranging from the Game and Fish Department budget to water issues, and everything else in between.

Some of the bills may seem inconsequential, but each one has a purpose depending on who views it. This is an important process and we have to pay close attention because changing one word can alter the meaning of the bill. I've heard some comments that more information should be provided on bills we deal with. We do what we can, but given the constantly changing wording, it's almost impossible to give an accurate description until a bill has passed.

While rumors often abound during the session, it's always good to wait until you see the facts in writing before forming an opinion or much time can be wasted.

This is an important, time-consuming process the public needs to be aware of and involved in. It's a citizen's legislature and legislators listen to their constituents. While we can provide factual information and science to help develop the best possible legislation for the state's natural resources, public input is the most important component.

Soon we'll begin that gradual slide into spring and open water fishing. And before we know it, we'll be staring fall in the face and one of the more popular seasons in North Dakota, deer gun season.

This issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* contains statistics on last year's deer lottery. In 2012, the Game and Fish Department made available the lowest number of licenses in nearly a quarter-century, in an effort to help the state's deer herd rebound. The mild winter weather we've experienced thus far, should also help in that effort.

Also in this issue you'll find a feature on research being done within the Department's wildlife division. One of these projects is specific to deer that will help us better manage the population.

Lake access has been good this winter and I continue to hear good ice fishing reports. I'm also hearing that predator hunting is going strong, and it appears a partnership project between the North Dakota Agriculture Department and Game and Fish, called the "coyote catalog," is working well. The project connects coyote hunters and trappers with landowners who would like to reduce coyote populations in their area.

In the end, there's always something to do in 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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### Front Cover

Ring-necked pheasant near winter cover.

Photo by Mike LaLonde, Bismarck



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# More Questions Than Answers

*By Ron Wilson*

*Sharp-tailed grouse are a popular game bird in North Dakota and are recognized as an indicator species of the health of its prairie ecosystem. This native species is of particular concern for wildlife managers making prairie management decisions and understanding how changes influence grassland birds.*

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One of the certainties of wildlife research is that there are always more questions than answers, leading scientists down a curious twisting and turning path.

“Rarely with wildlife research do you completely answer all your questions,” said Mike Johnson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department game management section leader. “It seems the more you learn, the more questions you have.”

The tradition for investigating wildlife in the Game and Fish Department’s wildlife division is

storied, leaning back into the early 1940s when, for example, a statewide beaver study was launched to determine status and distribution of an animal never before researched in the state.

Nearly three-quarters of a century later, the animal species being scrutinized has shifted somewhat, but the need to assemble a scientific foundation to provide responsible hunting and fishing opportunities for the public remains solid. That need is, arguably, more pronounced today as the landscape is under more adjustment with expanding urban populations, changing agricultural focus, and the influences of oil





AARON ROBINSON

and gas exploration in western North Dakota.

While many Game and Fish wildlife research projects are currently underway or proposed, to say that today is the hey-day of investigating North Dakota's wildlife would be inaccurate. To say that technology allows biologists to approach things differently and, in some instances, tackle more than their predecessors would be fairer.

Take for example an ongoing five-year study in western North Dakota to determine the influence of oil and gas development on mule deer populations. Both Johnson and Bruce Stillings, Department big game management supervisor in Dickinson, said researchers will fit 90 female deer with global positioning system radio tags to evaluate mule deer movements and survival, making it one of the largest project of its kind in North America.

To try to do the same with 90 animals using radio-collars just isn't manageable, Stillings said.

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*The tradition of wildlife research in the North Dakota Game and Fish Department is long. Bill Jensen, Department big game management biologist, is pictured here in 1985 with a radio-collared mule deer doe. Jensen spent three years in the badlands researching the summer and fall ecology of mule deer.*



BILL JENSEN



MIKE ANDERSON

*Kristin Sternhagen, a South Dakota State University graduate student, is researching white-tailed deer in Walsh County. Because the Game and Fish Department doesn't have a large enough staff to conduct all research efforts, the Department often works with university researchers to do some of the on-the-ground work.*



MANDY THOMAS

*When you break it down, there are two types of research, operational and targeted. Duck banding (below) is one of the Department's operational projects in which a long-term commitment is made to maintain the activity.*

The GPS tags have several advantages over traditional radio-collars, including the ability to collect multiple locations of deer at predetermined times year-round. The GPS tags Department researchers will use have been programmed to collect locations at five-hour intervals.

"We went with that many deer in order to have a strong sample size distributed across the badlands," Stillings said. "Ninety animals at five-hour intervals is a huge undertaking."

Because mule deer populations have declined range-wide across North America, and biologists can't say exactly why, the results of the research in North Dakota will be of great interest to wildlife professionals who manage the animals. Montana and South Dakota have even offered additional funding and labor to the research project. "This is a hot topic for both mule deer and pronghorn," Stillings said. "Biologists are interested in the quantifying effects that human development is having on these animals on public lands."

Mule deer are high profile animals that are coveted by hunters. Depending on the hunter's luck, it can take five years or more to secure a mule deer buck license through the Department's lottery system. "This is a very important piece of work in indentifying limiting factors to mule deer in North Dakota and how we can maintain the highest sustainable populations," Johnson said. "The industry is looking over our shoulder, the public is looking over our shoulder ... This is important research for other states with energy development."

Randy Kreil, Game and Fish Department wildlife division chief, said in light of new challenges in North Dakota, such as the loss of millions of Conservation Reserve Program acres and native grasslands, research findings will play a significant role in managing wildlife in a changing environment. "We need to know how all of these factors influence wildlife species and our ability to provide hunting opportunities for the public," he said. "Without good scientific research we find ourselves in the position of making decisions based on assumptions and perceptions that may not be accurate."

If you were to compile a list of research projects within the North Dakota's Game and Fish Department's wildlife division, it would be long.

If you break it down, there are two types of research, operational and targeted. "Operational is a long-term commitment to maintain the activity," said Randy Kreil, Department wildlife division chief. "For instance, if you are going to band Canada geese to learn about their movements, life history, and so on, you need to do it for more than one or two years. You need to do it for a decade or more in order to actually learn anything. One or two year's worth of information is not very valuable."

The Department's wildlife division has many operational projects, including dove banding, upland game roadside brood surveys, dancing ground surveys and winter aerial surveys for big game.

Game and Fish scientists also conduct surveillance for rabies, distemper, parvovirus, moose health and chronic wasting disease.

Targeted research, on the other hand, is designed to answer specific questions and can be accomplished in a shorter time.

The Department's wildlife division is also conducting a number of targeted research projects. The following is a sample of the many projects:

### Mule Deer Fawn Recruitment

Researchers are evaluating years of data to determine the relative importance of weather, predation, changes in landuse, including oil/gas development, and a number of other factors known to influence fawn recruitment rates in North Dakota's badlands.

### Mule Deer in Western North Dakota

A collaborative five-year study in which 90 female deer will be tracked via GPS radio tags to identify the influence of oil and gas development on mule deer populations. The results will provide valuable information to wildlife managers and the oil industry on how to avoid or minimize potential impacts.

### Ecology of Mountain Lions in the Badlands

The purpose of this research project is to obtain information on home range, movement, survival and prey use for population modeling. Researchers will also monitor harvest impacts and assess the influence of mountain lions on primary prey (big game).

### Wild Turkey Abundance in North Dakota

Researchers use roadside brood count data, winter landowner and rural mail carrier surveys and other information to summarize relative abundance of wild turkeys across North Dakota. With these estimates of abundance, Game and Fish Department biologists will be able to confidently manage populations across the state with regulated spring and fall harvest, and maintain healthy, sustainable populations in the future.

### White-tailed Deer in Seasons

Two studies in central and northeastern North Dakota involving trapping and fitting dozens of deer with radio-collars to allow researchers to track the animals' movements from summer to winter habitats. The research will also reveal survival rates and fall recruitment of fawns into the

winter population.

### Trapping Muskrats

In 2011, the North Dakota expanded its regulation to allow for float sets – traps set on a floating board or log of which many different designs exist – to be used for muskrats during spring.

To minimize potential incidental injury or take on waterfowl, North Dakota regulations require covering of float sets with wire mesh, wood, or plastic, but must not have openings exceeding 8 inches to minimize trapping of nontarget species. One of the objectives of this study is to estimate the encounter rates of waterfowl with muskrat float sets.

### Sharp-tailed grouse in Western North Dakota

Starting in 2010, researchers trapped and fitted more than 200 sharp-tailed grouse and their chicks with tracking devices in an effort to get a baseline idea of how grouse move and survive in relation to the influences of energy development and other landscape changes.

The data will provide biologists with a better idea of how the native population is doing, nest success and how many chicks are being recruited into the fall population for the hunting season.



*Mike Johnson, Game and Fish Department game management section leader, said having a pilot on staff is a tremendous asset as researchers are able to look at habitat and track animals from the air. The Department's Scout is used for mission-specific purposes such as flying big game surveys and locating radio-collared animals. The Scout is designed to fly low and slow, which is required for survey work. The Department's pilot is Jeff Faught.*



STEPHANIE TUCKER

*Dave Wilckens, a South Dakota State University master's degree student, with the first mountain lion he trapped and collared in North Dakota's badlands in 2011.*

Johnson said wildlife officials work hard to make sure the research is tied to the Department's management needs. "For instance, we are doing research on mountain lions in the badlands in order to get a better handle on our lion population so we can appropriately manage harvest in a sustainable way," he said.

Dave Wilckens, a South Dakota State University master's degree student, started the mountain lion field work in North Dakota in August 2011, said Stephanie Tucker, Game and Fish furbearer biologist, who oversees the field work. In that time, Wilckens has captured 14 lions and currently eight are roaming the wilds with GPS collars.

Tucker said one of the primary objectives is to determine the survival of adult lions. "If we get a better idea of adult survival, it makes our annual monitoring a lot more accurate," she said. "We'll better understand if our harvest is having an impact on the population and, if so, what kind of impact."

Tucker said if you combine the efforts of Wilckens' on-the-ground work and results of GPS technology, biologists are getting an unprecedented look into the lives of North Dakota mountain lions.

"I think we have a better understanding of our mountain lion population, being that we've had someone on the ground for more than a year," Tucker said. "Dave essentially has been stalking

mountain lions in the badlands, setting trail cameras, looking for tracks, capturing lions ..."

With the GPS technology, biologists have a better understanding of lion home range, habitat use, food sources and movement rates. "We have collected more than 13,000 GPS locations since we started monitoring, which is awesome," Tucker said.

While Wilckens' role in the research process is not unique, it is vital because the Game and Fish Department doesn't have a staff large enough to conduct all the research efforts. "Our biologists have full-time jobs managing hunting seasons, dealing with the public and overseeing the management of species, which is why we work with university researchers to do some of the on-the-ground work," Kreil said. "Ultimately, we are responsible for the design and implementation of the study and making sure it gets done and done right."

Johnson said both the universities and the Game and Fish Department are picky when it comes to choosing student researchers because it takes a particular person with academic and field skills to do the job.

"Graduate student research is important for a number of reasons," Johnson said. "We're not just going out there and slapping collars on mountain lions, but instead training the next generation of biologists and leaders, and trying to answer questions about North Dakota's wildlife that the public wants to know."

Game and Fish Department officials have worked hard, Johnson said, to hire full-time, energetic, curious, top-notch researchers who know how to analyze research data, and eventually publish their findings.

"Your research has to be published or it has very limited value," Johnson said. "I make it very clear when I hire staff that I expect them to work with other scientists elsewhere. You can't operate in North Dakota in a vacuum."

"Scientists" is a word that doesn't get tossed around that often when referring to Game and Fish biologists, Johnson said, but that's what they are.

"Without them in our changing world, it would be very difficult to do this work," he said.

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



## Research Minutiae

The following are random bits of research information, or facts about the animals under scrutiny:

- With the five-year mule deer study in western North Dakota, researchers will monitor mule deer survival through GPS tags and will receive email notification when the collar has not moved more than 50 meters in eight hours. Researchers then will attempt to determine the animal's cause of death.
- Wild turkeys are not native to North Dakota. Attempts in the 1930s and 1940s to stock turkeys in the state were unsuccessful. But in the early 1950s, three wildlife turkey subspecies – Eastern, Merriam's and Rio Grande – were successfully introduced into North Dakota. Today, wild turkeys are found across the state.
- During white-tailed deer research in the Wing area, 13 fawns were fitted with expandable radio-collars and monitored on a daily basis. Bed site analysis was conducted during the first 30 days of each fawn's life. Of the 30 bed sites located, 70 percent were located within native grasses and Conservation Reserve Program acres.
- Mountain lions are native to North Dakota. This animal was not protected from indiscriminant killing, and by the early 1900s was likely extirpated from the state. Beginning in the late 1950s through the 1990s, the Game and Fish Department received sporadic reports of mountain lions throughout the state, and their continued presence in North Dakota became apparent during the early 2000s.
- 30,000 muskrats on average are harvested annually in North Dakota. In the 2010-11 trapping season, more than 50,000 muskrats were harvested, generating more than \$38,000 in payments for pelts. Muskrats are managed by the Game and Fish Department. Spring trapping is frequently the most popular time for muskrat harvest.
- Native sharp-tailed grouse are a popular game bird in North Dakota and are recognized as an indicator species of the health of its prairie ecosystem. This species is of particular concern for wildlife managers making prairie management decisions and understanding how changes influence grassland birds.



RON WILSON

*Mike Szymanski, Department migratory game bird biologist, has been running an operational mourning dove banding research project in North Dakota for years. Since 2005, about 10,000 doves have been banded in North Dakota. This banding effort is taking place in dozens of states from Alaska to Texas. Since 2005, more than 340,000 doves have been banded.*



MIKE ANDERSON

*A radio-collared whitetail fawn tries to hide from researchers.*



# DRAWING IN 2012

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's deer drawing was different in 2012.

Because the state's deer herd is still recovering from three consecutive hard winters, the Game and Fish Department made available just 65,300 licenses for the regular gun season, which was 44,650 fewer than 2011. The 2012 total was the lowest number of licenses in nearly a quarter-century.



CRAIG BIRBLE

*By Ron Wilson*

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*Securing a buck license in the Game and Fish Department's deer drawing in 2012 wasn't easy, as nearly 56,000 hunters applied for the 22,342 licenses made available. Also, hunters were allowed only one deer license last fall, which was a first since the mid-1980s.*

Also, in response to a decrease in adult mule deer survival and some of the lowest measurements of fawn production on record, no mule deer doe licenses were issued in the badlands hunting units. And mule deer buck licenses were cut by 1,300 from the 2011 total.

Despite a major decrease in license numbers, there was no functional effect to the Department's nearly 20-year-old bonus point system used to award deer licenses, said Randy Meissner, Game and Fish Department licensing manager.

Meissner said the number of applications was also down in 2012, as some people likely sat out the year because they felt the state's deer population was low. "Even so, I expect there will be greater percentages of people with higher numbers of preference points, most likely over the next few years if the trend continues," he said. "People will probably have to wait one to two years longer than they are accustomed to get a first-choice deer license."

Drawing a buck license in 2012 wasn't easy. Meissner said nearly 56,000 hunters applied for the 22,342 buck licenses made available, meaning that more than 33,000 applicants didn't get the license they wanted. "All licenses, both buck and doe, were issued in many of North Dakota's hunting units in 2012," he said. "People who did not get a doe license in the first drawing had an opportunity to get a doe license in a different unit in the second drawing."

Hunters were allowed only one license for the 2012 deer season, which was a first since the mid-1980s. Those times of hunters carrying multiple tags in their pockets may be behind us, at least for the near future.

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*RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.*

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## Reviewing the Lottery

Despite fewer licenses in 2012, the lottery process did not change. Even so, with new hunters venturing afield every year, there are always questions concerning how the lottery system works. Using deer as the example, though pronghorn and turkey work the same way, here is a reminder.

If you fail to draw your first license choice in any given year, but apply within the next two years, you receive a bonus point. You do not have to apply in the same unit, or for the same deer type, to qualify. You get an additional bonus point each year you apply and do not receive your first license choice, as long as you have applied in the first drawing at least once in the previous two years.

You receive additional chances in the drawing for each bonus point accumulated. For points one through three, you are entered in the drawing two times the number of points you have. So, if you have two points you would get four additional chances to be drawn, compared to a person who got his or her first choice the previous year. If you're both competing for the same license, you have five chances, he or she has one.

When you accumulate four or more points, the number of additional chances is determined by cubing your bonus points. So, when you have four points, you will be in the drawing 64 additional times, 125 times if you have five points, and so on. Bonus points are accumulated as long as you do not draw your first license choice and apply in the first drawing at least every other year. You do not receive bonus points in years you do not apply.

Each drawing is still random, but the more bonus points you have, the better your odds. When you receive your first license choice, you lose your bonus points and start over. Bonus points can only be earned, or used, in the first drawing for each species in each year.

The license lottery consists of four separate drawings, one for each choice on the application. First, we hold a drawing for the first unit/first deer choice. When those have been issued, we draw for the first unit/second deer choice, then the second unit/first deer choice, and finally the second unit/second deer choice.

## 2012 Turkey Lottery Results

Percent of applicants who received their first choice of license in the 2012 spring turkey drawing.

LICENSE TYPE	POINTS									OVERALL
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
02 S	100	100								100
03 S	100	100								100
04 S	82.6	100								85.4
06 S	100									100
13 S	100	100	100							100
17 S	75	100								75.2
19 S	100									100
25 S	100	100								100
27 S	56.6	92.4	100							64.8
30 S	93.8	100								93.8
31 S	100	100								100
37 S	54.4	90.5	96.2		100					64.1
40 S	97.5	100								97.9
44 S	100	100								100
45 S	100									100
47 S	100									100
50 S	57.2	94.2	100							67.2
51 S	100	100								100
53 S	100	100	100	100						100
98 S	92.4	100	100							93.6
99 S	100	100								100

Percent of applicants who received their first choice of license in the 2012 fall turkey drawing.

LICENSE TYPE	POINTS									OVERALL
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
02 F	43.5	86.7	100							47.3
03 F	100									100
04 F	79.7	100								81.3
06 F	100									100
13 F	100									100
17 F	69.7	100								71.3
19 F	100									100
25 F	100	100								100
27 F	71.2	93.3								74.7
30 F	100	100								100
31 F	100									100
37 F	69.4	100								71.1
40 F	82.2									82.2
44 F	100									100
45 F	100									100
47 F	84.8	100								85.1
50 F	69.7	70	100							69.8
51 F	100	100								100
98 F	100									100
99 F	100									100

## 2012 Lottery Results

- 65,300 deer licenses, down from 109,550 in 2011.
- 1,200 mule deer buck licenses were available in 2012, down from 2,500 in the previous year. Hunters who applied for these licenses decreased from 10,145 in 2011 to 7,009 in 2012.
- 66,042 people applied for deer licenses (not including gratis, nonresident, youth or muzzleloader), down from 80,271 people who applied in 2011.
- 55,677 applicants applied for buck licenses as their first choice; 22,342 buck licenses were available in the drawing after 14,853 gratis and 647 nonresident licenses were withheld. There were no doe licenses available for the drawing in units 3A1 and 3B1 as the few that were available were all issued as part of the allocation to gratis applicants.
- All buck licenses were issued in the first unit/first choice drawing.
- Applicants could have had as many as 19 bonus points, but the highest number of points in the 2012 drawing was 8.
- 3,337 applicants had four or more bonus points, and 1,325 drew their first license choice.
- Applicants who applied for a mule deer buck license accounted for 20 percent of applicants with four or more bonus points and those applying for a muzzleloader buck accounted for an additional 66 percent.
- The number of people with four or more bonus points increased again this year from 3,361 to 3,737. This reflects the lower number of licenses available in the drawing. Allowing hunters to set out a year without losing their bonus points also contributed to this increase.
- A buck license in 3A1 was the most difficult license to draw with 20 time more applicants than licenses available. A muzzleloader buck license was the second most difficult to draw, with almost 16 times more applicants than licenses.
- There was no pronghorn season again in 2012.
- 5,745 spring turkey licenses were available in 2012, while 6,720 were available in 2011. The number of applicants in 2012 decreased from 7,077 to 5710.
- The number of fall turkey licenses available in 2012 decreased from 4,830 to 4,145. The number of applicants was about the same with 2,928 in 2011 and 2,964 in 2012.

## Nonresident Deer Licenses

One percent of the licenses made available for the deer gun hunting season each year is reserved for nonresident applicants who want to hunt in North Dakota.

Nonresidents who apply are competing

only against other nonresident hunters for that 1 percent. Understandably, buck licenses in the past have been much harder to come by than doe licenses. The Game and Fish Department offers first-come,

first-served doe licenses for nonresidents for \$50 following the second lottery drawing. In the last few years as North Dakota's deer population has declined, those licenses have become fewer.

## 2012 Deer Lottery Results

*Percent of applicants who received their first choice of license in the 2012 deer drawing.*

		POINTS										OVERALL
LICENSE TYPE		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
1	A Any Buck	48.6	84	75	100							55.1
1	B Any Doe	100	100									100
2A	A Any Buck	10.5	26.6	43.4	45.2	100	100					23.5
2A	B Any Doe	22.1	63.2	85.7	100							39.5
2B	A Any Buck	34.6	71.9	74	100	100						42.7
2B	B Any Doe	91.2	99.1	100	100	100						91.9
2C	A Any Buck	32.4	68.3	95.7	75	100						40.5
2C	B Any Doe	98.9	100	100								99
2D	A Any Buck	60	94.5	100	100	100						66.6
2D	B Any Doe	97.8	100	100	100							98.1
2E	A Any Buck	13.3	31.6	46	46.2	100	100					21.8
2E	B Any Doe	91.8	100	100	100							93.8
2F1	A Any Buck	57.7	95.9	100	100	100	100					59.2
2F1	B Any Doe	98.1	100	100	100							98.2
2F2	A Any Buck	29.8	65	87.9	100	100						42.8
2F2	B Any Doe	95.1	100	100	100	100						96
2G	A Any Buck	28.4	62.5	82.4	0	100						39.2
2G	B Any Doe	94.4	100	100								95.2
2G1	A Any Buck	17.7	43.8	63.5	80	100						30.4
2G1	B Any Doe	88.5	94	94.1	100							89.3
2G2	A Any Buck	22	56	71.2	73.3	100						38.4
2G2	B Any Doe	95.2	97.6	100	100							95.6
2H	A Any Buck	28.8	68.6	82.2	80	100						48.2
2H	B Any Doe	98.8	100	100	100							99.1
2I	A Any Buck	21.8	49.6	66.8	91.2	100	100					36.9
2I	B Any Doe	96.9	100	90		100						97.2
2J1	A Any Buck	2.7	7.7	15.9	23.6	81.4	100	100	100			13.7
2J1	B Any Doe	93.9	100	100	100	100						95.7
2J2	A Any Buck	40.7	75.6	93.8	92.9	100						51.1
2J2	B Any Doe	98.7	100	100								98.9
2K1	A Any Buck	11.9	26	45.9	69.4	100	100					27.6
2K1	B Any Doe	96.4	94.3	90.9	100	100						95.7
2K2	A Any Buck	23.5	59.7	78.9	97.1	100	100					39.5
2K2	B Any Doe	99.5	100	100	100							99.6
2L	A Any Buck	80.7	94.9	100	100							81.8
2L	B Any Doe	100	100		100							100
3A1	A Any Buck	1.4	3.6	5.2	8.1	42.9						4.3
3A1	B Any Doe*	0										0
3A2	A Any Buck	39.4	78.9	94.7	100	100	100					56.4
3A2	B Any Doe	99	100	100	100	100						99.2
3A3	A Any Buck	3.3	8.8	14.5	16.7	73.2	100		100			10.5
3A3	B Any Doe	90	88.2	100	100	100						90.7
3A4	A Any Buck	33	70.1	80.2	82.4	100		100				46.3
3A4	B Any Doe	98.6	100	100	100							98.8
3B1	C WT Buck	1	3.7	5.2	6.7	56.1	100					6.4
3B1	D WT Doe*	0										0
3B1	E MD Buck	9.5	15.4	31.4	41.7	100						16.2
3B2	C WT Buck	22.4	54.5	83.3	100							37.1
3B2	D WT Doe	97.1	100	100	100							97.7
3B2	E MD Buck	21	51.3	50	100							31.8
3B3	A Any Buck	7.1	22.4	35.3	42.3	100	100					21.9
3B3	B Any Doe	84	92.3	100	80	100						86.1
3B3	C WT Buck	67.7	95.5	100	100	100						74.2
3B3	D WT Doe	99.5	100	100	100							99.6
3C	A Any Buck	2.5	12	21.5	27	100	100					15.8
3C	B Any Doe	46.8	78.1	100	100							56.7
3C	C WT Buck	65.5	90	100	100	100						73.7
3C	D WT Doe	99.5	97.1	100	100	100	100	100				99.2
3D1	A Any Buck	14.3	25.5	55.1	66.7	100						26.5
3D1	B Any Doe	96	100	100								96.8
3D1	C WT Buck	56.7	100	100	100							64.4
3D1	D WT Doe	100	100									100
3D2	A Any Buck	4.9	10.8	17.1	37.5	100	100					11.3
3D2	B Any Doe	92.6	85.7	100	100	100						91.9
3D2	C WT Buck	23	55.6	71.4	100							30.5
3D2	D WT Doe	100	100	100								100
3E1	A Any Buck	21	54.7	65.1	73.1	100						40
3E1	B Any Doe	100	100	100	100							100
3E1	C WT Buck	80.2	100	100	100	100						85.6
3E1	D WT Doe	100	100									100
3E2	A Any Buck	39.2	82.9	89.7	100	100	100					59.4
3E2	B Any Doe	97.4	100	100	100	100						98.1
3E2	C WT Buck	98.1	100	100	100							98.5
3E2	D WT Doe	100	100									100
3F1	A Any Buck	33.9	75.7	96	100	100		100				54.3
3F1	B Any Doe	93.8	100	100								95
3F1	C WT Buck	99.5	100	100	100	100						99.4
3F1	D WT Doe	100	100	100	100							100
3F2	A Any Buck	28.3	64.1	70.8	78.3	100						45.8
3F2	B Any Doe	98.1	100	100	100	100						98.4
3F2	C WT Buck	99.4	100	100	100	100						99.5
3F2	D WT Doe	100	100									100
4A	C WT Buck	6.1	27.8	40.5	14.3	100						21.7
4A	D WT Doe	81.8	100									85.7
4A	E MD Buck	2.2	3.6	6.8	8.7	63.6	66.7	100	100			10.2
4B	C WT Buck	38.3	51.4	40	80							43.3
4B	D WT Doe	100	83.3	100	50							92.6
4B	E MD Buck	.8	1.9	4.7	9.1	36	50	100	100			7.7
4C	C WT Buck	53.3	89.5	100	100	100						62.5
4C	D WT Doe	100	100	100								100
4C	E MD Buck	.7	1.5	4.1	5.6	23.3	45.9	77.8	100			8
4D	C WT Buck	67.2	80	71.4	100	100						69.3
4D	D WT Doe	88.9	42.9	100	100							78.6
4D	E MD Buck	1.2	3.6	2.6	5.8	57.7	100					7.2
4E	C WT Buck	95.8	81.8	100								94
4E	D WT Doe	100	100									100
4E	E MD Buck	4.1	14.2	19.4	19.4	75	100					14.1
4F	C WT Buck	88.8	100	100								90.1
4F	D WT Doe	100	100									100
4F	E MD Buck	12.4	34	81.3	100							26.2
MUZ	C WT Buck	.2	.6	1.1	1.6	15.4	27.2	41.3	66.7	100		6.2
MUZ	D WT Doe	54.3	91	98.2	100	100	100	100				62.7

*\*No antlerless licenses were available in units 3A1 and 3B1 in the Department's regular deer lottery in 2012. All antlerless licenses in these units were issued to gratis applicants.*

# Half-Century of CONSERVATION

*The North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society has long been a champion of preserving North Dakota's wetlands, which are critical habitat for migratory waterfowl and other wildlife species.*



**A** long-time, important voice on wildlife issues in North Dakota celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2013.

The North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society was established in 1963 during the rapid and unsustainable development of the state's natural resources. Founded by 43 wildlife biologists and natural resource specialists, the chapter's mission was to provide a forum for members to discuss ecological issues, actively pursue conservation efforts and provide scientific information on sustainable use of natural resources.

"The 1960s and 1970s were the hey-day of environmental legislation, with the Clean Air Act, Clean Water

Act, Wilderness Act, National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act all being enacted in about a 10-year period," said Robert Seabloom, biology professor emeritus at the University of North Dakota and 1966 chapter president. "Wildlife Society members back then were passionate about what they believed and some literally laid their jobs on the line."

Since then, the North Dakota chapter has grown to about 400 members representing at least 27 entities, including state and federal agencies, consultants, non-governmental organizations and academia. The chapter typically focuses on major natural resource issues, such as agricultural and energy policy, and relies on the seven

# RVATION

## *and Counting*

By  
*Allyn J. Sapa*

CRAIG BIRBLE

principles of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation to determine which issues to target. Today, the chapter is best known as a leader of sound resource management within the decision-making environment of North Dakota.

### **Defining Issues**

Early in its development, the North Dakota chapter tackled a few critical projects that helped shape it as a unified, professional voice for natural resource issues at local, state and federal levels. The Garrison Diversion Irrigation Project is a prime example of the chapter's effective activism.



ND CHAPTER PHOTO

*Mike McEnroe, North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society president in 1984, presents Bruce Burkett, a longtime Game and Fish Department game warden, with an award at a chapter function.*







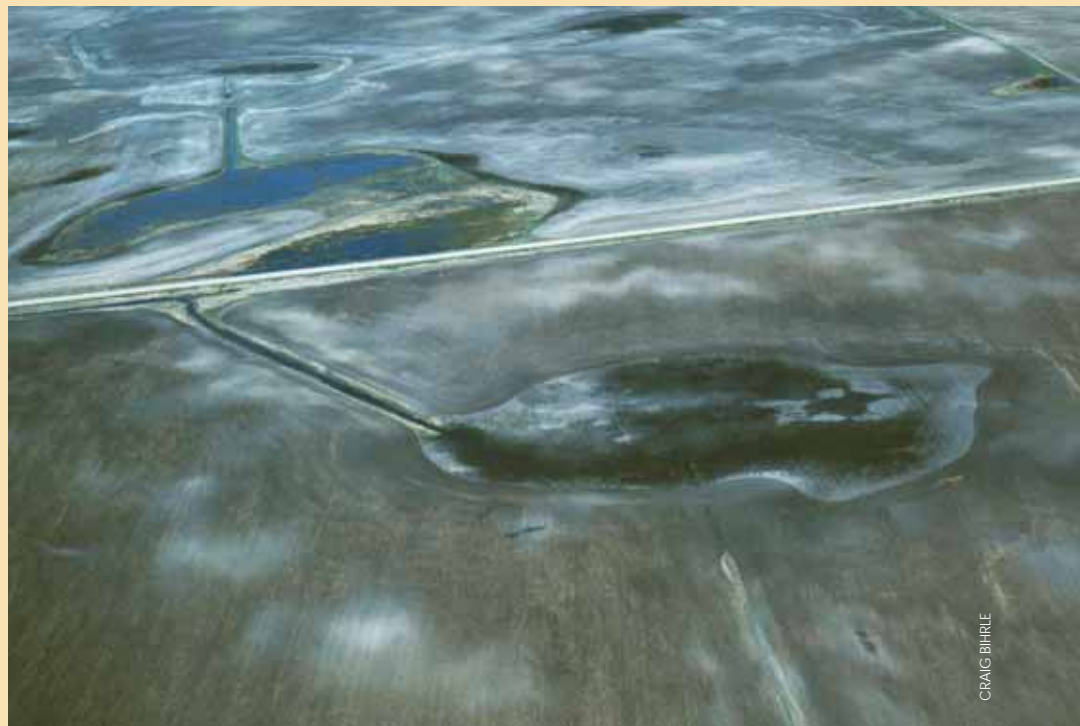
## North American Model of Wildlife Conservation

- Wildlife is held in public trust
- Eliminating commerce on dead wildlife
- Allocating wildlife use through law
- Hunting opportunity for all
- Wildlife may be killed only for legitimate reasons
- Wildlife is an international resource
- Science is the basis for wildlife policy

tackling issues related to the U.S. Forest Service National Grasslands within the state, including grazing impacts and associated allotment permits, potential wilderness designation and the growing energy industry in western North Dakota.

In the 1990s, chapter members began working with North Dakota's congressional delegation to explore mineral exchanges between the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Bureau of Land Management and private individuals holding mineral rights in critical badlands habitat.

Largely as a result, President Clinton signed Public Law 105-167 in 1998, directing a mineral exchange of nearly 10,000 acres of privately owned minerals on federal land for other federal minerals. The outcome protected blocks of public land from piecemeal fragmentation of wildlife habitat.



CRAIG BIERLE

*Shortly after forming, the North Dakota Chapter of the Wildlife Society launched plans to curb large-scale wetland drainage in the Prairie Pothole Region.*



BRUCE KREFT

*Sandra Johnson, Game and Fish Department conservation biologist and chapter member, said one of the key issues the chapter will be looking at is the loss of Conservation Reserve Program acres in the state. In 2007, North Dakota had about 3.3 million acres of CRP. Today, that total has been cut to about 1.6 million acres.*

The mission of the North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society is to provide a forum for discussion of ecological issues among natural resource professionals; to enable its membership to pursue conservation of natural resources; and to inform the public on ecologically wise use of natural resources in support of a conservation ethic.

## Building on Strengths

Over the last few decades, the North Dakota chapter has evolved into an effective independent voice for natural resources in the state. Its success is rooted in the willingness of chapter members to volunteer time, talents and money to solve controversial issues, along with a blend of collective wisdom of many experienced biologists.

“I think the chapter is still looked at as people who have a clear head about fish and wildlife issues, who can speak intelligently, but who can also understand how to approach things, how we need to bring people together and talk about what is good and what is bad about all the different fish and wildlife issues,” Dryer said.

## Diverse Membership

Throughout the year, members work on chapter business through administrative, policy and project committees. The chapter has tapped into the expertise of its membership for more than 105 different committees to address contemporary issues, such as Missouri River management and wildlife commercialism.

Some, like the Garrison Diversion Irrigation Project Committee, have been in place for nearly five decades, while others form, resolve the issue and disband.

Using its standing in the state to address issues that affect natural resources, the chapter provides credible objective positions through white papers, testimony and position statements that support good agency environmental decisions.

“In the past, some Wildlife Society members put their jobs on the line for what they believed and it’s something we admire,” said Sandra Johnson, chapter member and North Dakota Game and Fish Department conservation biologist. “I believe the new generation of Wildlife Society members is willing to stand up for what they believe in.”

## Professional Forum

Through regular meetings, newsletter and a website, the chapter serves as a forum for social and professional interaction of members and students.

An annual conference is held in February, providing the state’s managers, biologists and students the opportunity to communicate ideas, recognize professional and conservation excellence and generate financial resources.

The chapter has official representation on a number of boards and committees, such as the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust, USDA Technical Committee and Garrison Master Plan.

Through the years, experts associated with the chapter have presented more than 1,000 scientific papers, and had access to panel discussions, research posters and nationally known keynote speakers.

## Student Participation

The chapter recognizes the importance of student participation by providing scholarships, travel stipends, free registration for the annual conference and student-professional lunches.

Each year the chapter recognizes academic and professional achievement by students at North Dakota State University, University of North Dakota, Valley City State University, Minot State University (Bottineau) and Sitting Bull College. Students are encouraged to present papers or posters on research projects.

“New members to the Wildlife Society bring a new perspective to how we manage wildlife in the state,” Johnson said.

## Lobbying for Change

Recognizing the need for a professional voice for wildlife conservation at the biannual state legislative sessions, the chapter has employed a lobbyist since 1989.

Coordinating through its legislative committee, which includes agency representation and interested members, the chapter provides testimony on major issues affecting wildlife resources in North Dakota.

## Direction for the Future

Despite its many accomplishments, contemporary resource issues abound in the state and region.

“One of the key issues we’ll be looking at is the loss of Conservation Reserve Program acres, as we are at a point in our history where we are losing a lot of grassland and wetland habitat,” Johnson said. “Also, oil and gas are booming in western North Dakota and we are still figuring out the impacts to wildlife and habitat and how we will manage that in the future to find a balance.”

The chapter will continue to tap into lessons learned over the past 50 years to address these and other future challenges. Still, the unstated goal remains the same: using the chapter to shape issues for the benefit of wildlife resources in North Dakota.

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*ALLYN J. SAPA, retired North Dakota field supervisor with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is the 50th anniversary committee chairman of The Wildlife Society’s North Dakota Chapter.*

Learn more about The Wildlife Society’s North Dakota Chapter at <http://joomla.wildlife.org/NorthDakota>.



# AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES

## ANS PREVENTION IN WINTER TRANSPORTING LIVE BAIT

Only legal live bait can be transported in water in a container of up to five gallons.

Neither game nor nongame species can be transported in water, although a daily catch can be packed in snow.



## OTHER ANS PREVENTION MEASURES

- Do not use illegally imported baits.
- Do not empty a bait bucket into any water body.
- Do not drop plant fragments into the water.
- Dispose of unused bait into the trash.

## KEEP ANS OUT OF OUR WATER

NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
100 North Bismarck Expressway  
Bismarck, ND 58501-5095  
(701) 328-6300  
Email: [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov)  
Web: [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov)





# BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor

## DeKrey Named Game and Fish Deputy Director

State Game and Fish Director Terry Steinwand has appointed Duane DeKrey as the agency's deputy director.

DeKrey began his new position January 1. Game and Fish had been without a deputy director since June when Roger Rostvet, who had served in the position since 1998, retired.

"During my search for a deputy, I was looking for an individual who would work with me to address challenges into the future," Steinwand said. "Duane showed that he is willing and has the ability to integrate our current views, as well as provide a different viewpoint

that will help move the Department forward."

**Steinwand added that DeKrey is well-versed in the Game and Fish Department's mission and will be a strong advocate for hunting, angling and other conservation issues.**

DeKrey, a native of Pettibone in northern Kidder County, served in the North Dakota Legislature for 20 years and was a member of the House of

Representatives Natural Resources Committee. He is an avid deer hunter, a landowner, a graduate of North Dakota State University, and has served more than 30 years in the North Dakota National Guard.

"I've always had an interest and appreciation for wildlife, and I gained great respect for the Game and Fish Department during my years in the legislature," DeKrey said. "Now I look forward to working with Terry, the rest of the staff, and the state's citizens to help find solutions to major issues facing the agency."



ASHLEY SALWEY

*Duane DeKrey,  
North Dakota  
Game and Fish Department  
Deputy Director*



CRAIG BIRRE

### MIDWINTER BALD EAGLE COUNT COMPLETED

This year's midwinter bald eagle survey conducted in January along the Missouri River revealed 61 bald eagles, slightly above-average since the survey started in 1986.

Patrick T. Isakson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department conservation biologist, said the survey route from Bismarck to the Garrison Dam is conducted at the same time each year, and in coordination with

other surveys nationwide.

"Conducting the surveys close to the same day throughout the nation reduces the number of eagles that may be counted by other surveys as eagles tend to move around," Isakson said.

Large numbers of waterfowl were allowing a high number of bald eagles to winter in the state. "A change in weather conditions will force waterfowl to migrate farther south,

thus the eagles will follow," Isakson said.

Eagles are relatively easy to spot as they prefer to perch in large cottonwood trees along the river. Adult bald eagles have a white head and tail and a dark brown body, while immature bald eagles are brown with irregular white plumage. Golden eagles, which are also counted, are dark in color and have a gold cap on their head.



## SPRING LIGHT GOOSE

### LICENSES AVAILABLE

Light goose hunters planning to hunt during North Dakota's spring season can purchase a license online at the state Game and Fish Department's website. The season opens February 16 and continues through May 5.

Residents can hunt during the spring season by having last fall's 2012-13 bird licenses. Otherwise, hunters will need to purchase either a 2013-14 combination license; or a small game, and general game and habitat license.

Nonresidents, regardless of age, need a 2013 spring light goose season license. The cost is \$50 and the license is good statewide. Nonresidents who hunt the spring season remain eligible to buy a fall season license. The spring season does not count against the 14-day fall hunting season regulation.

A federal duck stamp is not required for either residents or nonresidents.

Licenses are available only from the Game and Fish Department's Bismarck office, the Department's website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or by calling (800) 406-6409.

Availability of food and open water dictate when snow geese arrive in the state. Early migrants generally start showing up in southeastern North Dakota in mid- to late March, but huntable numbers usually aren't around until the end of March or early April. If this winter's mild weather conditions continue, light geese could arrive earlier than typical. However, movements into and through the state depend on available roosting areas and the extent of the snow line.

**Hunters must obtain a new Harvest Information Program registration number before venturing out into the field. The HIP number can be obtained online or by calling (888) 634-4798. The HIP number is good for the fall season as well, so spring hunters should save it to record on their fall license.**



CRAIG BIRRE

The Game and Fish Department will provide hunters with migration updates once geese have entered the state. Hunters can access the Department's website, or call (701) 328-3697 to receive generalized locations of bird sightings in North Dakota until the season ends or geese have left the state. Migration reports will be updated periodically during the week.

The spring season is only open to light geese – snows, blues, and Ross's. Species identification is important because white-fronted and Canada geese travel with light geese. The season is closed to whitefronts, Canada geese, swans and all other migratory birds.

Shooting hours are 30 minutes before sunrise to 30 minutes after sunset. There is no daily bag limit or possession limit. Electronic and recorded calls, as well as shotguns capable of holding more than three shells, may be used to take light geese during this season.

There are no waterfowl rest areas designated for the spring season. Hunters should note that private land within

waterfowl rest areas closed last fall may be posted closed to hunting.

Nontoxic shot is required for hunting all light geese statewide. Driving off established roads and trails is strongly discouraged during this hunt because of the likelihood of soft, muddy conditions, and winter wheat that is planted across the state.

To maintain good landowner relations, hunters are advised to seek permission before hunting on private lands or attempting any off-road travel during this season. Sprouted winter wheat is considered an unharvested crop. Therefore, hunting or off-road travel in winter wheat is not legal without landowner permission.

All regular hunting season regulations not addressed above apply to the spring season.

For more information on regulations refer to the 2013 Spring Light Goose Hunting Regulations and the 2012 North Dakota Waterfowl Hunting Guide.



CRAIG BIRLIE

**MIDWINTER WATERFOWL SURVEY**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual mid-winter waterfowl survey in early January indicated nearly 160,000 birds were still hanging around the state.

**Mike Szymanski, Department migratory game bird biologist, said an estimated 123,000 Canada geese were observed on the Missouri River, and another 2,100 were scattered on Nelson Lake. Lake Sakakawea, declared frozen over on December 26, had only about 100 geese near the Garrison Dam intake structure. Szymanski said after summarizing the numbers, a total of 127,000 Canada geese and 31,700 mallards were tallied statewide.**

“Conditions for this year’s survey were much more normal and starkly contrasted last year’s extremely mild conditions that resulted in a record count of 279,000 birds,” he said. “A strong winter storm that occurred on Veteran’s Day weekend pushed most waterfowl from North Dakota. In addition, essentially all water in the state was frozen at the time of this year’s survey, with the exception of a few places with fast moving, or warm water.”

Overall, Szymanski said the numbers of birds was somewhat surprising given some harsh weather conditions experienced thus far. “However, relatively shallow snow cover allowed birds to feed without too much trouble,” he said. “If heavy snow had fallen in the western part of the state, this year’s count would have been much lower.”

**MOOSE, ELK AND BIGHORN SHEEP APPS**

Hunters interested in applying for a 2013 moose, elk and bighorn sheep license should watch the Game and Fish website in early March for applications. The deadline for applying is March 27.

Applicants can apply online at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). Application forms will also be available at license vendors, county auditors and Game and Fish offices.



**Bighorn sheep, moose and elk lottery licenses are issued as once-in-a-lifetime licenses in North Dakota. Hunters who have received a license through the lottery in the past are not eligible to apply for that species again.**



CRAIG BIRLIE



## COYOTE CATALOG CONNECTS LANDOWNERS, HUNTERS, TRAPPERS

The state Agriculture and Game and Fish departments have launched a cooperative project to connect coyote hunters and trappers with landowners who would like to reduce coyote populations in their area.

**Called the “Coyote Catalog,” the project creates an online database similar to what the Game and Fish Department has used for the past several years to match deer hunters with farmers/ranchers who wanted to reduce deer populations on their land.**

### Registration

- Landowners can sign up via the North Dakota Department of Agriculture’s website at [nd.gov/ndda/coyote-catalog](http://nd.gov/ndda/coyote-catalog). Required information includes county and contact information.
- Hunters and trappers can sign up at the Game and Fish Department website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

Landowners will receive information on hunters

interested in hunting and/or trapping in their county and will need to make the initial contact with prospective hunters.

“We’re pleased to have a collaborative project such as this with the Department of Agriculture that is meant to provide a service to match those who want to hunt or trap coyotes, and those who may have a problem with coyotes on their land,” said Game and Fish Department Director Terry Steinwand. “This type of system has worked well in getting those landowners with deer and hunters together and we believe this can work equally as well.”

Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring said “This is a critical issue for livestock producers, especially entering calving and lambing season. There is a high risk of incidence when you have a high population of coyotes. This program is a great and effective partnership between our agencies, and certainly between our state’s landowners and hunters and trappers.”

The Coyote Catalog will remain active through March 31, and then start up again next winter.



CRAIG BIRNLE



ASHLEY SALWEY

## BOW at Lake Metigoshe

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department’s Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program has openings available for a three-day workshop February 22, 23 and 24 at Lake Metigoshe State Park, Bottineau.

Classes available are snowshoeing, winter survival, darkhouse spearfishing and cross country skiing, wild game cooking, birding and more. Cost of the workshop is \$135.

Women interested in the workshops are encouraged to visit the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). Those interested should sign up immediately, as each class is limited to 12 participants. Preregistration with payment is required. Equipment and snacks will be provided.

More information is available by contacting Nancy Boldt at (701) 328-6312, Brittany Fish at (701) 527-3075, or email [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov).

## GAME WARDENS ASSOCIATION TO GIVE SCHOLARSHIP

The North Dakota Game Wardens Association has a \$300 scholarship available for a graduating high school senior entering college in fall 2013 who enrolls in fisheries or wildlife management with an emphasis on law enforcement.

Applicants must be North Dakota residents and have maintained a 3.25 grade point average. The scholarship will be awarded to the student upon proof of enrollment in college.

Applications are available by contacting the North Dakota Game and Fish Department at (701) 328-6604; or email [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov). Applications must be post-marked no later than May 10, 2013.



# EARTH DAY PATCH CONTEST

The state Game and Fish Department's annual Earth Day awareness campaign is accepting entries for design of a 2013 Earth Day patch. North Dakota students ages 6-18 are eligible to participate. The deadline to submit entries is March 15.

The Game and Fish Department will announce a winner in three age categories – 6-9, 10-13, and 14-18. Each winner will receive a pair of 8x40 binoculars. The final patch design will be chosen

from the three winners.

The winning design will be used on a patch given to members of Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, 4-H clubs and any school participating in Earth Day cleanup projects on state-owned or managed lands in North Dakota in April and May.

The patch should incorporate some aspect of Earth Day, celebrated April 22, or keeping North Dakota clean. It must be round and three inches in diameter. There is a limit of five colors on the

patch, and lettering must be printed. Name, address, age and phone number of the contestant must be clearly printed on the entry form. Only one entry per person is allowed.

Earth Day entry and reporting forms are available on the Game and Fish Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). For more information, contact Pat Lothspeich, Department outreach biologist, by email at [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov), or call (701) 328-6300.

## Watchable Wildlife Checkoff On State Tax Form

North Dakota citizens with an interest in supporting wildlife conservation programs are reminded to look for the Watchable Wildlife checkoff on the state tax form.

**The 2012 state income tax form gives wildlife enthusiasts an opportunity to support nongame wildlife like songbirds and birds of prey, while at the same time contributing to programs that help everyone enjoy all wildlife.**

The checkoff – whether you are



CRAIG BIRRE

receiving a refund or having to pay in – is an easy way to voluntarily contribute to sustain this long standing program. In addition, direct donations to the program are accepted any time of year.

To learn more about Watchable Wildlife program activities, contact the North Dakota Game and Fish Department at (701) 328-6300; or email [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov).

## LEGISLATION ON WEB

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department will track hunting and fishing issues during the 2013 legislative session.

Interested outdoor enthusiasts can follow proposed outdoors-related bills by logging onto the Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

**A brief description of each bill will be included, along with the bill sponsor and hearing schedule. To view each bill in its entirety, click on the hot-linked bill number.**



RON WILSON



# STAFF NOTES



Bruce Burkett



Mark Pollert

## BURKETT RETIRES; ERCK, POLLERT TAKE NEW POSTS

Longtime law enforcement officer Bruce Burkett retired in January after more than 40 years with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. Warden supervisor Corey Erck transferred from Jamestown to Bismarck to fill Burkett's position.

Burkett started his career in 1972 at Hazen, and spent most of his time in Devils Lake as the northeast district warden supervisor. In 2003, he transferred to Bismarck to become the agency's commercial investigations supervisor.

District game warden Mark Pollert, Jamestown, has been promoted to southeast district warden supervisor.

## HEADRICK RETIRES

Longtime Game and Fish employee Pat Headrick retired in November after more than 35 years with the agency.

Headrick started his career in 1977 as a district game warden. Other positions he held during his tenure include hunter education coordinator, news editor and website editor. He spent most of his career as a public information officer in the Bismarck office.



Pat Headrick

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# back cast

By Ron Wilson



There is a half-section of land about a 40-minute drive from home that has treated us well the last four or five years. I couldn't tell you the number of pheasants and grouse we've taken off this property, but I can tell you the number of hunters we've bumped into over the years, which is darn few.

The southeast end always holds a crop – sunflowers, corn or wheat, depending on the year – planted in between four shelterbelts. There are two wetlands that are mostly cattail-choked, and a handful of low spots that must harbor some water in spring, but are dry when we arrive in fall.

The property's defining feature is its mostly rolling landscape covered in acres and acres of grass. In the low spots, the grass can grow waist high, but thins on the sidehills and benches, which is where we typically find sharptails.

While I always knew that someday the grass would disappear, following the unsettling trend in which another 650,000 Conservation Reserve Program acres were lost just last year in North Dakota, we'd knock on wood and hope for the best during the 40-minute drive.

In 2012, we didn't knock hard enough.

It would be difficult to say with a straight face the loss of our hunting spot was devastating, considering our investment was simply gas and boot leather. We were disappointed, for sure. But that's just how things are nowadays, and we weren't ready for it.

Going into fall, it's always a mystery how the season will shake out. I would not have predicted that in 2012 we'd more than double the number of days we'd hunt sharp-tailed grouse as compared to pheasants, because it hardly ever works out that way. Nor would I have predicted spending several days chasing fox squirrels in the Missouri River bottoms, while deer hunting just two.

On January 6, the last day of the upland season, we were sitting on a log we'd just dusted clear of snow, listening to quick bursts of gunfire in the distance from hunters pushing heavy cover for a ring-necked rooster or two to round out their season. Scattered flocks of giant Canada geese flying not much higher than the Missouri River bottom treetops swapped back and forth between sandbars and open fields to feed.

The big birds were welcome, but loud, making it difficult to mark with much accuracy the angry bark of a squirrel. With only about an hour to hunt before my 9-year-old had to change out of his insulated hunting coat into swim trunks for a birthday party, we pushed the issue, and hiked down a deer trail, ducking under limbs and tip-toeing around deadfall, trying to be as quiet as possible, even though every critter in the woods likely knew we were there.

What we were hoping for was a slight flick of a tail, or simply an out-of-place bump on a limb, because it's seldom you see an entire squirrel this late in the season. In October, we repeatedly, and with success, used a store-bought squirrel call to coax the animals out of hiding and into gun range. This late in the game, that ruse doesn't work as well, or at all, so the call stays in my pocket.

I don't know who spotted the squirrel first, and it doesn't matter, but what appeared to be a cottonwood knot for the last 10 minutes was now most definitely fox squirrel, with its head tucked close to its chest and tail running up its back.

Before the echo of gunfire cleared the river bottom, the squirrel landed with a familiar thump, ending a season that started 120 days earlier.

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



CRAIG BIRRE

# A CLOSER LOOK

By Ron Wilson



DEVANE WEBSTER

## Tracks in the Snow

While it's common to see ring-necked pheasants in roadside ditches, white-tailed deer hugging the shadows of a tree row or Canada geese standing in stubble, there is much that eludes us.

Most animals are guarded, venturing out only in the lowlight hours of early morning or evening, or waiting until the cover of darkness. Their comings and goings are mostly secret.

Yet, the curtain on their daily whereabouts, everyday travels and brushes with predators, is parted in winter. Animals, from the biggest to the smallest, leave tracks in the snow, detailing where they've been, where they were headed, and what they might have encountered along the way.

Then again, some tracks end suddenly as if the animal that made them melted and became one with the snow, or was carried away by an aerial predator that didn't leave even the faintest of wing marks behind as a clue.

Take to the woods and follow a fox squirrel and you'll get an idea of this vanishing act. One minute the squirrel's wandering trail is detailed distinctly in snow

on the ground and the next, it's gone. Or is it? For a clue, search the lower branches of trees or deadfall to see where snow was disturbed or brushed away completely as the animal moved from branch to branch to get to higher ground.

By the way, you'll recognize a squirrel's tracks because, like other hopping animals, its wandering trail is depicted by its five-toed hind prints landing in front of its smaller, four-toed fore prints.

One of the most conspicuous tracks you'll run across is the two-toed, heart-shaped track of a white-tailed deer. Most everyone knows a deer track when they see it. Yet, there are others that leave you scratching your head, such as the tiny, dog-like prints, usually showing only four toes, of the long-tailed weasel, or the 4-inch long hind print left by a raccoon that resembles a small human foot.

With snow on the ground, a world that mostly goes unseen opens up to anyone willing to go for a winter hike, guided only by their curiosity.

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*RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.*