

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

Over the years I've accumulated a number of guns of assorted calibers and have always enjoyed shooting. I've reloaded ammunition for centerfire rifles for more than 40 years and rarely buy factory loads.

Reloading started out as a much cheaper alternative, and I always knew what power charge I had by doing it myself. Ammunition manufacturers have refined their quality and I believe modern ammunition is every bit as accurate as reloading. But I continue to reload, even though I have trouble finding the time to do so.

I've always enjoyed reloading for a number of reasons. When I started, factory ammunition seemed to not provide the groups I wanted. I started out with a .243-caliber rifle that my father bought me for my 16th birthday, and after some experimenting I finally found a load that achieved a half-inch grouping at 100 yards. The purpose of striving for that group was to reduce the factors that could make me miss that all important shot at a deer. And I evidently achieved that, as that .243 has harvested many deer for me. And, as importantly, every one of my sons has shot at least one deer with that rifle.

We're moving closer to deer season and many are anxious to find out whether they were successful in the deer lottery. Over the past several years we've been able to complete the lottery by the first or second week of July, but this year there was a law change that has served to delay the process to some extent.

The new law states that a gratis applicant must have their application in by the regular deadline if they are to receive an any-deer license, excluding mule deer does. If they did not apply by the deadline, they would still be eligible for a gratis license, but only for

those licenses remaining after the first lottery, which in the past few years has been limited to doe licenses. With this in mind, it takes longer to enter the gratis information, including legal land descriptions, into the computer system. It is an impartial system across the board, but will certainly delay the deer drawing to some extent.

Which brings me back to the reloading situation: It's never too early to get out and work up a new load and prepare for the deer gun season. Since I started reloading, I don't remember how many rounds I've fired, but know I've worked up loads for a number of different rifles and I'm still working on a few. I'm always striving for that perfect group, but have yet to achieve it.

While we all look forward to the fall hunting seasons, let's not forget about what is in front of us. Fishing has never been better in North Dakota and each week I hear about the fantastic opportunities across the state. Some lakes amaze me in that they shouldn't be as good as they are this time of year, but I'm not going to argue about it.

Loss of habitat is continually a concern and challenge and something we're addressing on a daily basis. Like shooting, we're rarely satisfied with the quality or quantity of habitat that's available in North Dakota, nor should we be. Hunting and fishing are important to many of us and we'll continue to strive to provide as many quality opportunities as possible.

There is still time to go out and get ready to hunt this fall, whether it be trap shooting, or sighting in your rifle. But certainly don't forget about wetting a line. The key is to enjoy what the state has to offer in the great North Dakota outdoors.

Terry Steinwand

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

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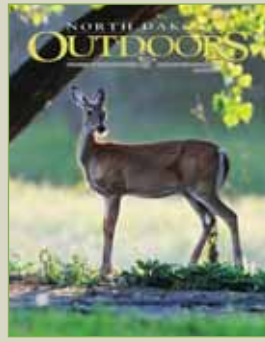
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Front Cover

A whitetail doe in summer. *Photo by Mike LaLonde, Bismarck.*



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TWO DECADES OF M


In summer 1993 it ended. A years-long drought that beset North Dakota in the late 1980s and early 1990s was erased with inches and inches of rain that started falling sometime in June, poured in July, and began to abate by late August.

In a land of weather extremes, what happened 20 years ago this month in North Dakota was unusual, as rain totals in all regions of the state were appreciably above average. July 1993, in many parts of the state, was the wettest month ever recorded. Many locations received 12 inches or more of rain than was typical for the month. Nearly 14 inches, for example, fell on Bismarck that July, which was well above the average of 2.89 inches. In terms of yearly precipitation rankings

for Bismarck, 1993 stands as the third wettest with nearly 27 inches of rain.

While it was inevitable, but certainly not guaranteed, that rain would eventually return, washing the landscape of arguably the worst drought since the Dust Bowl, it's unlikely anybody would have predicted what would follow.

"The mantra at the time was that we never had more than three wet years in row," said Mike Johnson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department game management section leader. "We'd see two or three wet years, then two or three dry years. Historically, we knew that North Dakota had wet cycles lasting longer, but we had never seen it."



An aerial view provides some perspective on how water rich North Dakota is, and has been for much of the last 20 years.

MORE WET THAN DRY

By Ron Wilson

CRAIG BIRRE

North Dakota has been more wet than dry the last 20 years, which is unprecedented since record-keeping began. “We are water rich right now,” said Scott Gangl, Department fisheries management section leader. “Where we are at today in terms of the number of lakes in North Dakota is just amazing.”

During the drought of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Game and Fish Department managed far fewer lakes, about 170, than today’s record of more than 400 waters.

The only thing predictable about weather on the Northern Plains is its unpredictability. “Tracking water on the landscape is kind of like watching the stock market,” Gangl said. “You see some years where

it really spikes, then you have a dry year like last summer and it falls. But over the last 20 years the trend has been upward.”

Waterfowl Rebound

Before water returned to the prairie in full force in 1993, Johnson said waterfowl managers thought it impossible for struggling duck populations to mount a comeback.

“We were doing everything, from building man-made islands, to predator-proofing nesting areas, to putting out thousands of duck nesting structures,” Johnson said. “The goal was to keep hunters hunting because hunters are the people who buy licenses,

duck stamps, shotguns and ammunition which funds the conservation effort.”

While the return of water to North Dakota was crucial to a rise in duck numbers, Johnson said other key ingredients played a major role in the recovery, such as huge blocks of Conservation Reserve Program acres and a decline in predators that are notoriously hard on nesting ducks. Mink numbers fell during the drought and red fox declined as mange worked its way through the wild canine population.

“While we had CRP in place, we had no idea that putting large blocks of grass on the landscape would change the situation we had with ducks,” Johnson said.

Yet, it did.

By 1994, breeding duck numbers in North Dakota were up significantly, likely equal to the high going back to 1948. “In 1995, we saw a huge increase in breeding duck numbers, breaking all the records at the time. The following two years we just went up from there and have been on a high ever since,” Johnson said. “Duck numbers have yet to drop in North Dakota back to what they were before 1993.”

Johnson said the continuing decline in CRP and native grasses in North Dakota today is a growing concern, but having plenty of water still attracts ducks and benefits production.

“Without the grass, ducks will struggle to reproduce, but the water in North Dakota is still drawing birds,” Johnson said.

Even so, Johnson said the hopes of waterfowl managers decline at about the same rate as North Dakota’s CRP acres. “Without the large blocks of cover for ducks to nest in, production will have to drop off, which will reflect in a lower continental population of ducks.”

Prairie Fishery Boom

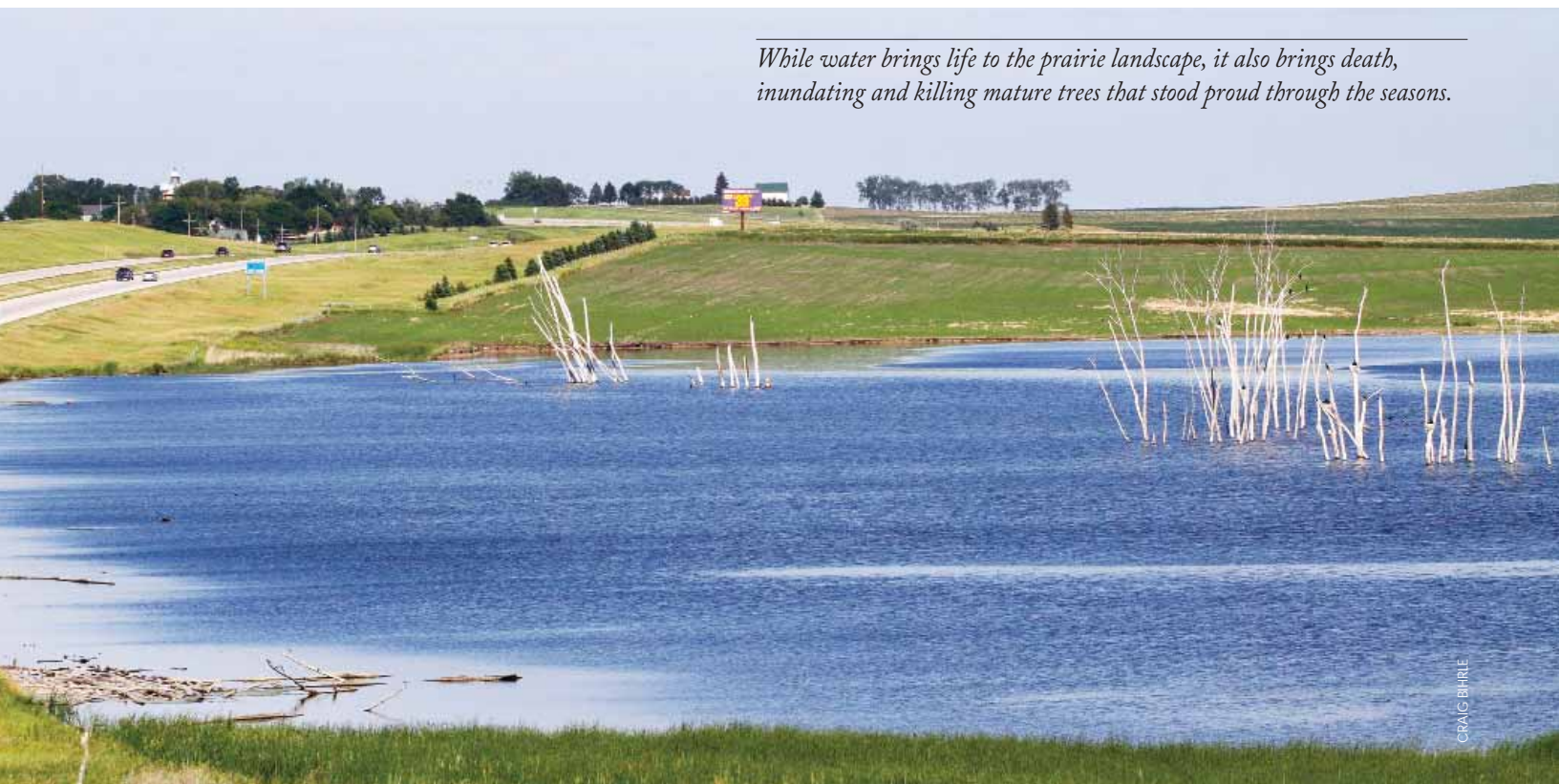
When rain clouds opened in 1993, thousands and thousands of acres of water flooded vegetation that had stood dry for years. The newly inundated vegetation provided ideal spawning habitat and nutrient-rich conditions for northern pike and yellow perch.

“Before the water came back, some of these perch lakes just didn’t exist,” said Greg Power, Department fisheries chief in a *North Dakota OUTDOORS* article in 2003. “Dry Lake (McIntosh County) went from a deer meadow to a 30-foot deep lake and, for a few years, was a world-class perch fishery.”

Power added at the time: “We feel safe to say that, in geological time, we have never had so many pike and perch in the state. There have never been so many fishing opportunities ...”

Spring forward to 2013 and the fishing picture, however, gets even brighter. “Today, we have surpassed even where we were then,” Power said. “Never in North Dakota has there been more water bodies, pike lakes, walleye lakes ... We might not be where we were in terms of perch, but that’s only because of the significant number of predators like pike and walleye.”

While water brings life to the prairie landscape, it also brings death, inundating and killing mature trees that stood proud through the seasons.



Power said when a new body of water was created with an abundance of rain and runoff 20 years ago, fisheries biologists called them “opportunistic” lakes because it was believed that the majority had short windows of time in which they’d provide fishing opportunities to anglers. Many of those waters, however, are still producing fish in these water-rich times.

“We don’t use ‘opportunistic’ when referring to these waters anymore,” Power said. “Having water this long is new to us. We’ve never been here before.”

But who knows what next year or the year after will bring, Gangl said. “Through experience we have learned to take advantage of what Mother Nature provides,” he said. “By the end of last summer as we lost 2 feet of water in some of our lakes, we thought, ‘Yep, it’s over ... it was good while it lasted.’ But this spring was terrifically wet and some of those lakes are higher than they’ve ever been.”

Cool Weather Killer

While the return of water to the landscape two decades ago was the start of a long-term boon for fish and ducks, it was a short-term blow to many species of ground-nesting birds, and a long-term blow to another.

It was reported in *North Dakota OUTDOORS* that 1993 reproduction surveys showed pheasant numbers were down 36 percent statewide from 1992. Sharp-tailed grouse were down nearly 43 percent, and Hungarian partridge were down a staggering 68.1 percent.

While much of the heavy rain that would have flooded nests fell after peak hatching periods for pheasants, grouse and partridge, it was believed that cool temperatures played a bigger role in killing young than anything else.

During the peak hatching period, and continuing through July 1993, temperatures were well below normal. Daily low temperatures fell to below 40 degrees during the last week in June in western North Dakota. From June 28-July 4 temperatures statewide at the time were 6-8 degrees below normal, and lows again plunged into the 30s at times in the western part of the state.

These kinds of temperatures are tough on young upland game birds, biologists say, that are not able to regulate their own body temperature until they are about 1-3 weeks old.

While pheasant and grouse populations have climbed and declined a number of times in the last 20 years, Hungarian partridge have yet to recover from the cool, wet summer of 1993.

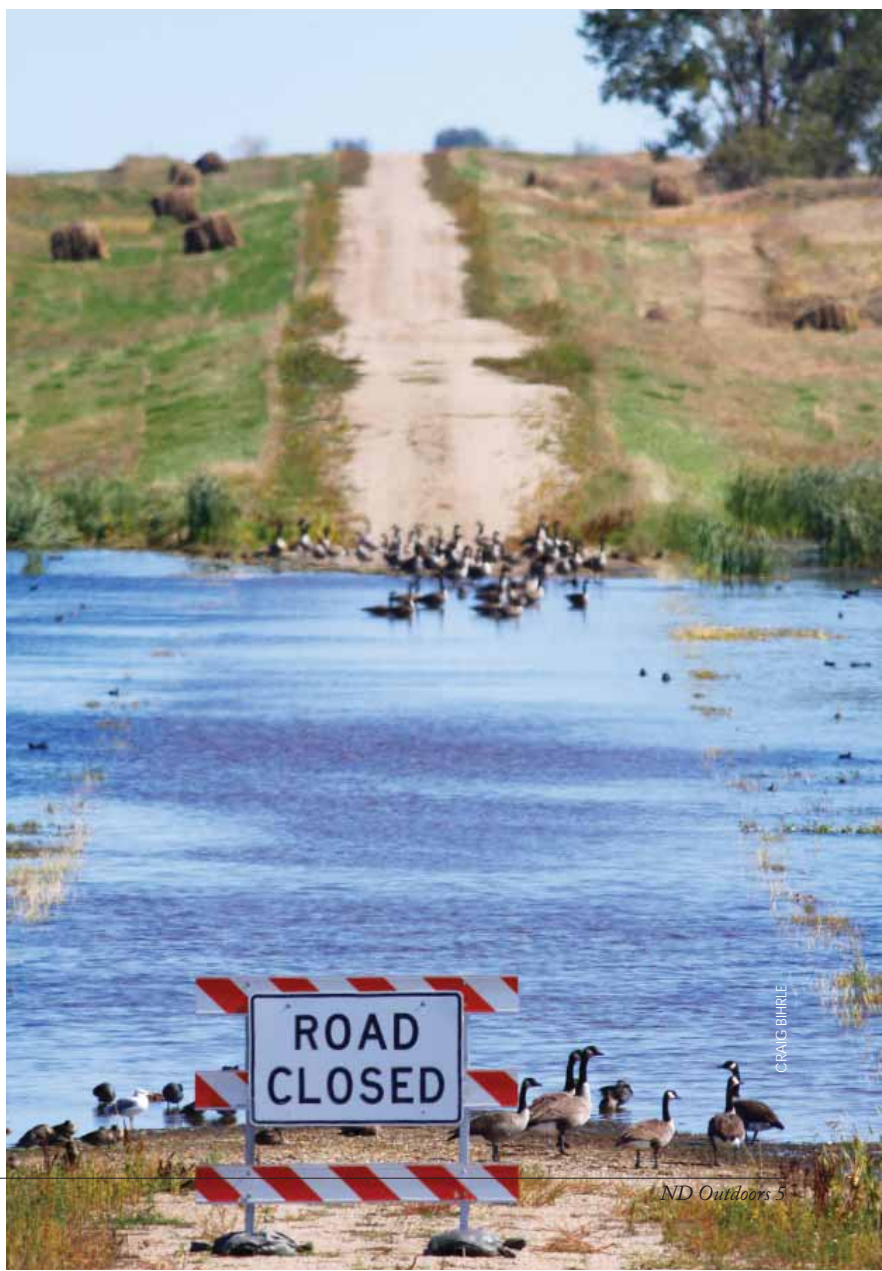
RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

July 2013



BRANDON KRAITZ

(Top) Today, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department manages a record 400-plus fishing waters. (Bottom) While water on the landscape is a boon to waterfowl, too much of it can flood roads and cause other headaches.

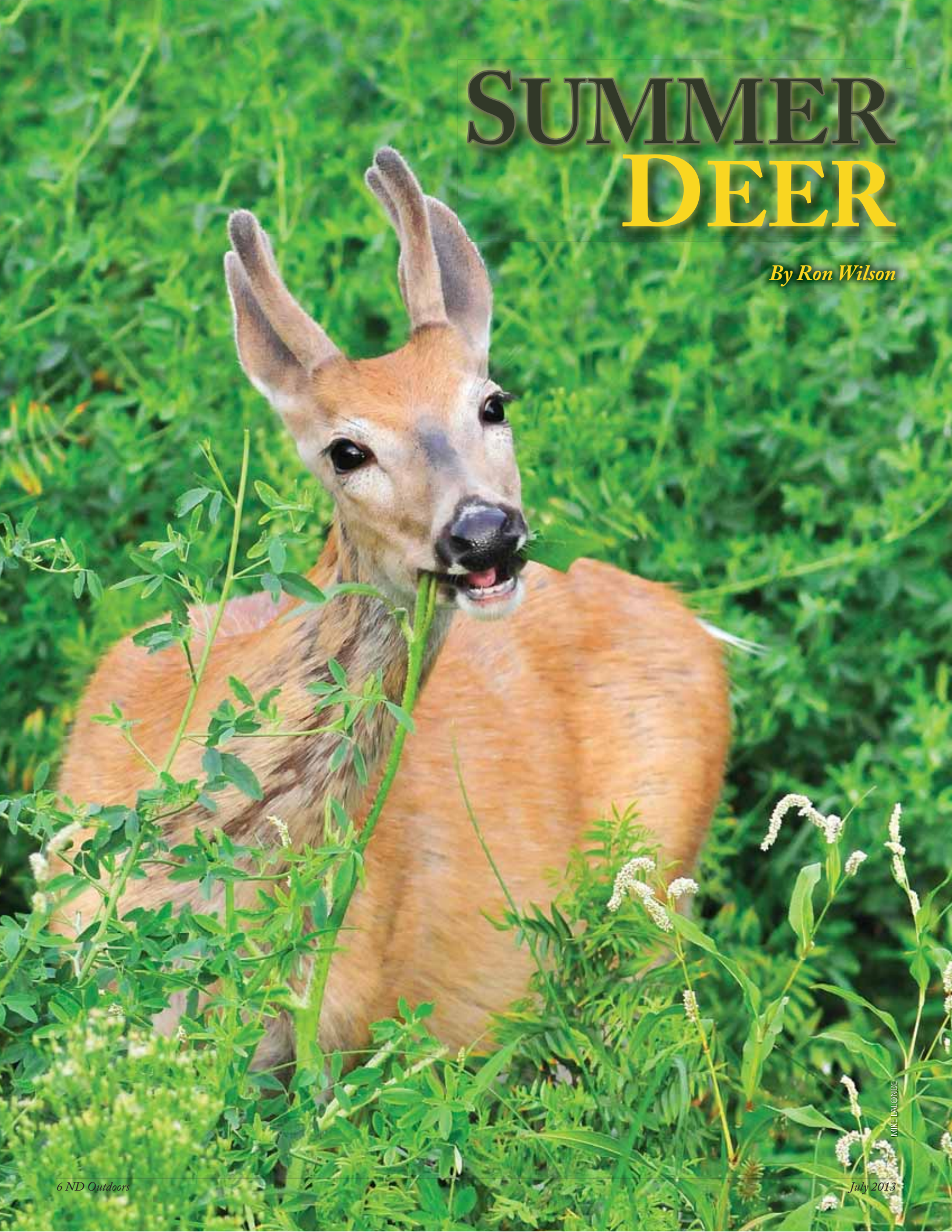


CRAIG BURLE

ND Outdoors 5

SUMMER DEER

By Ron Wilson



MIKE WALONDE

It's not like white-tailed deer are out of sight in summer – their reddish warm-weather coats fairly shine against verdant surroundings – but they are mostly out of mind.

In all fairness, our awareness of North Dakota's most abundant and popular big game animal is jumpstarted in autumn, when leaves turn, grasses lose their green and hunting season nears.

If you think summer is a time of indolence for white-tails because the leaner, crueler months of snow and cold

are behind them, think again. It's during this stretch of shirtsleeve weather that they are browsing on new forbs and succulent growth to progressively restore what they lost in winter. And adult does, you must remember, are doing this while raising one fawn, or sometimes two.

"Summer is the time white-tailed deer are sharing the success of the species, having fawns, which is their whole purpose for living," said Bill Jensen, North Dakota Game and Fish Department big game management biologist.



MIKE LALONDE



Spotted fawns are born in May or June, begin nursing soon after birth, and are taught early on to hide motionless from predators in tall grass or other vegetation while adult does wander in search of food.

“For the most part, adult does aren’t moving much at this time,” Jensen said. “They are confined to an area of about a half-mile or so from where their fawn is located. They do this until their fawn is able to follow their heel.”

The cute, big-eyed fawns feature reddish coats, with dozens of white spots, which help the nearly helpless young blend into their environment. This is typically the time in their lives when humans sometimes intervene, unknowingly assuming the animals have been abandoned and need “rescuing.” This isn’t the case, of course, as adult does are likely nearby watching unseen.

Fawns typically nurse until August, but at about 3-4 weeks of age they start sampling vegetation, while learning other skills needed to elude predators, survive and bolster North Dakota’s deer herd.

Whitetail bucks on the other hand are removed from fawn-rearing, hanging in bachelor groups and building body fat to fuel them through the rut and coming winter.

Bucks are also growing antlers in summer, a process started in early spring when daylight hours lengthen. Soft-growing antlers are covered in hairy skin called velvet. When the velvet is shed in September, what lies beneath is bone.



MIKE LALONDE



MIKE LALONDE





CRAIG BIRKLE



MIKE LALONDE

Whitetail buck fawns grow two small bump-like antlers, or buttons, their first year, and will grow their first true set of antlers the following spring and summer.

In late August and early September, whitetails start to shed their reddish summer coats for darker, brownish gray winter coats.

“We tend to get some calls from the public at this time because deer look ragged and people think maybe they are sick,” Jensen said. “They are simply putting on a new coat in preparation for what lies ahead.”

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.



Resurfacing After Historic Flooding

By Ron Wilson

Dalton DeLange, a Game and Fish Department seasonal employee, builds fence on a wildlife management area south of Bismarck. Miles and miles of fence was impacted by flooding on state-owned and managed lands along the course of the Missouri in 2011.



RON WILSON

Work to regain footing on more than 20 wildlife management areas along the Missouri River damaged by historic high water in 2011 is ongoing.

And if there is an end in sight for North Dakota Game and Fish Department staff tasked with the rejuvenation efforts, they're not seeing it just yet.

"We're finishing putting in food plots, spraying for leafy spurge, working on grass and tree plantings, rebuilding fence ... And that's just what we are doing today," said Bill Haase, Game and Fish Department wildlife resource management supervisor, Bismarck. Haase manages Oahe WMA, located south of Bismarck and Mandan, and other lands in the area. "It seems like we have been doing this work for five years, but it's only been two."

Of the 200,000-plus acres of state-owned and managed WMAs across North Dakota, about 72,000 are located along the Missouri River System from Williston to south of Bismarck-Mandan.

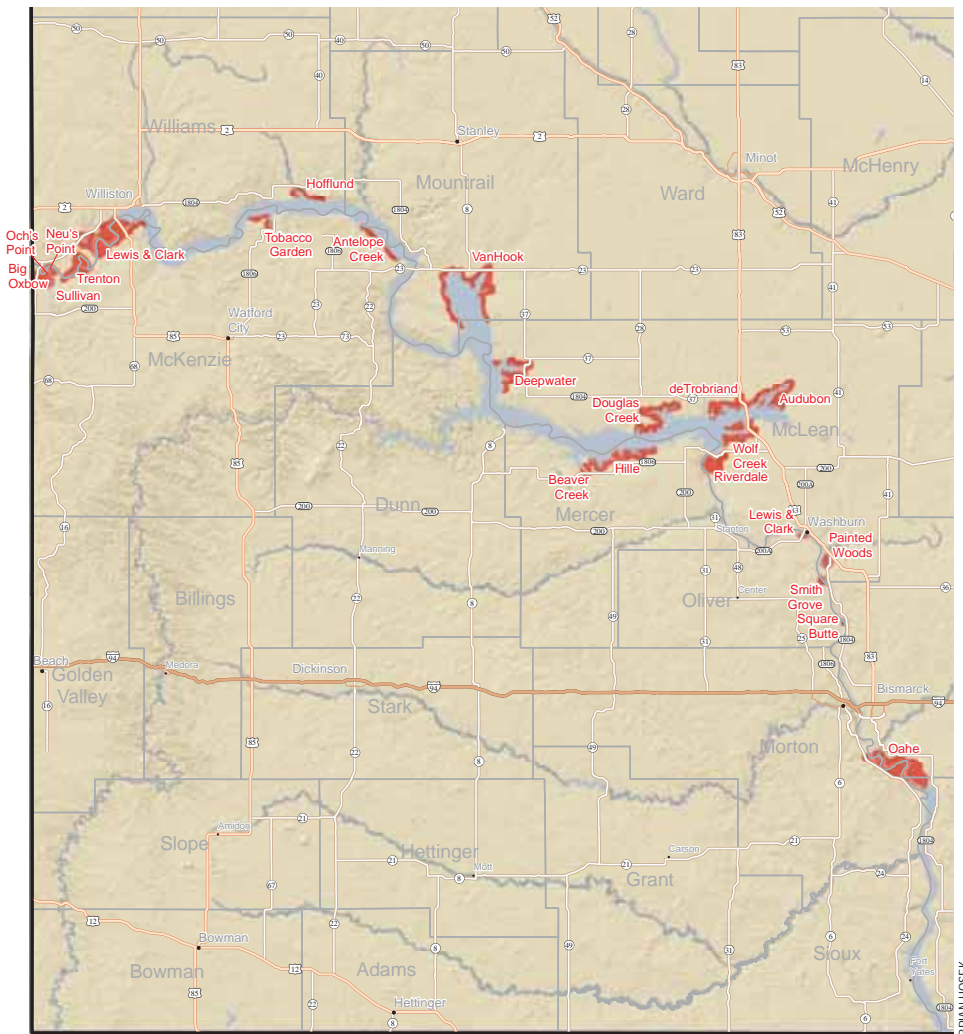
"Even if you give them 10-20 years, some of the wildlife management areas along the Missouri River System will never look the same," said Scott Peterson,

Department wildlife resource management section leader, Harvey.

The 2011 flood along the course of the Missouri was prolonged, hanging around for an unprecedented five months. While the damage wasn't comprehensive, it was devastating in places. Trees, grasses and other wildlife habitat were lost, while miles of roads and fences were washed away or buried under feet of sand and silt. Agricultural fields that produced crops for years may never be planted again.

"Once the water receded, our priority was to provide access and make the WMAs safe for users because we didn't want someone driving on a trail, or creating their own trail, and going off an embankment into the river," Peterson said. "The Department's WMA system is certainly useable today from a public use standpoint. People can enjoy them and enjoy them safely."

Haase said all the roads on Bismarck-Mandan area WMAs were damaged to some degree. "Some roads had deep washouts from 5 to 50 yards long," he said. "The road at Schmidt Bottoms on the Mandan side was totally washed out. There is 30 feet of water where the road used to be."



Starting in Williston and working downstream to south of Bismarck, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department manages 20-plus wildlife management areas along the Missouri River System. Acres and acres of wildlife habitat and infrastructure were influenced by flooding in 2011. Efforts to remedy losses to flooding started shortly after waters receded and will continue for some time to come.



A historic 500 year flood in 2011 slowly muscled its way overland, inundating wildlife habitat and flooding trees for months on state-owned and managed lands along the Missouri River System in North Dakota.

CRAIG BIRHLE

The footprint left behind by flooding along the Missouri River in 2011 wasn't as significant in places as some might have guessed. Some state-owned and managed lands, like this chunk of photographed habitat on Oahe Wildlife Management Area south of Mandan, rebounded nicely from flooding.



CRAIG BIRHLE

Upstream Damage

The disconnection between Bismarck-Mandan and the Williston area is simply river miles. Damage downstream from water that muscled its way overland is similar to the damage upstream.

“Roads were washed out and inundated for months, debris and logs floated everywhere, silt was deposited up to 5 feet in places, fences were buried, rusted ...” said Kent Luttschwager, Department wildlife resource management supervisor, Williston, who oversees management on Lewis and Clark WMA and others. “But the worst was the impact to vegetation, which mostly was drowned out. We work with several local farmers on crop and hay rotations and all of those fields were lost. We are working to get many fields seeded back to a grass/alfalfa mix or prepping them for reseeding. Exposed areas are now ripe for an invasion of Canada thistle. Certainly, we have our hands full.”

Two years removed from flooding, Luttschwager said the agency remains in recovery mode, repairing roads, building fences, the list goes on. In terms of wildlife chased away by flood waters, some have returned, but populations are not the same.

“Moose didn't seem to be bothered much and moved to higher ground and islands, and deer moved to adjacent breaks and drainages,” Luttschwager said. “The number of ground-nesting birds is way down. In 2012, there wasn't much cover, just exposed mud flats, and pheasants and turkey numbers reflect that.”

White-tailed deer numbers are down in the area, too, but recovering, Luttschwager said, yet that has more to do with tough winters and disease than flooding.

Unlike downstream on Riverdale, Oahe, Apple Creek and other WMAs, energy development is part of life on Lewis and Clark, high water or not.

“Most of the oil companies in 2011 drained their saltwater and crude oil tanks and refilled them with fresh water to prevent them from floating away,” Luttschwager said. “However, some tanks tipped and ripped off lines and there was some spills directly into the Missouri River. The infrastructure of oil wells was certainly impacted by the flood. Some access roads to oil wells were covered with several feet of silt once flood waters subsided.”

Leaving the Missouri

On other state-owned and managed lands across the state, Peterson said much of the damage caused by abundant water in 2011 has been repaired.

“Some of the repairs on our WMAs are made on an annual basis, such as washed out roads and dam blow outs,” Peterson said. “When you get a year like 2011, however, it forces you to make some decisions, to come up with more permanent solutions so you aren’t making repairs year after year.”

At Lonetree WMA, located near Harvey, for instance, Peterson said a number of Texas crossings have been constructed on trails that seemingly flood every year.

“Now these trails can go under water for weeks, but we still have useable trails because the rock beds in the Texas crossings are not washed away,” Peterson said.

Brian Kietzman, Department wildlife resource management supervisor, Jamestown, said the agency is currently dealing with high water issues, associated

with James River flooding, on Hyatt Slough WMA in Dickey County.

“The high water years of 2009-11 set us back and we will be working through these fields for the next few years to get back to where we want to be, habitat-wise,” Kietzman said. “The high water years poured water into Hyatt Slough and flooded much of our upland habitat.”

Kietzman reported that 7-8 inches of rain June 20 in the Oakes and LaMoure areas could push water to levels rivaling those of 2011.

High water, Kietzman added, influences more than management practices on public lands. “In 2011, I was unable to complete a pheasant crowing count route I run from Hyatt Slough to south of Ellendale due to water over the road,” he said. “So, in this instance, flooding also affected our ability to collect biological data. Other staff in southeastern North Dakota had difficulty completing their routes for the same reasons.”

Fighting Weeds, Building Roads

There were a number of unknowns concerning flooding along the Missouri River in 2011 because the event was unparalleled.

One of the uncertainties was the fallout of invasive species once the Missouri River retreated inside its banks.

“Noxious weeds have always been an issue and the Department has spent a lot of time and money to control weeds on WMAs,” Haase said. “Two years



The Game and Fish Department, in cooperation with Burleigh County, tackled major road repairs earlier this summer on Oahe WMA south of Bismarck. The project included reshaping and graveling about 8 miles of access roads at MacLean Bottoms and Apple Creek.

RON WILSON

after the flood, we are seeing large patches of leafy spurge and Canada thistle where it wasn't before. While we hoped that the sand and silt deposits would be good for cottonwood regeneration, it has turned out to be good for the weeds, too."

Haase said Department staff can battle the weeds in open areas, but those that have taken root in the woods are safe because chemicals used to combat the invaders would kill trees, shrubs and other wildlife habitat. Plus, it's nearly impossible to navigate sprayer equipment in the woods.

In late June, the Game and Fish Department was continuing work with Burleigh County to complete major road repairs on Oahe WMA south of Bismarck. The project, totaling nearly \$500,000, included reshaping and graveling nearly 8 miles of access roads at MacLean Bottoms and Apple Creek.

Haase said road projects are extremely costly and a project of this size would not have been possible

without the cooperation of Burleigh County Highway Department and Park Board.

"These areas are very popular recreation areas and receive year-round use due to the close proximity of Bismarck and Mandan," Haase said. "Therefore, this was a high priority project for the Game and Fish Department to complete following the flood."

On the Bright Side

Some Department land managers aren't too quick to answer when asked if there are any positives from flooding in 2011, while others do see some silver lining.

"When you deal with something like the flood of 2011, you are spending all your time fixing infrastructure – fencing, roads, signage and so on – and not managing for wildlife," Peterson said. "Plus, with most of our resources being spent on infrastructure, there is less to spend on planting trees, grasses, food plots, things for wildlife."

Haase said that while a lot of money has been spent on road work on WMAs, the end result is a plus for the public and wildlife.

"When we are done, the roads on the WMAs will be better than they were before the flood," Haase said. Plus, a number of undesignated roads created by motorists over the years have been closed to traffic.

Closing some two-tracks to vehicles has also meant an increase in walk-in acreage that many hunters prefer.

Haase said flooding has also prompted the Department to improve the popular MacLean Bottoms gun range at Oahe WMA. The Schmidt Bottoms range on the Mandan side of the river received a major facelift in 2012.

"After the flood we did a bunch of work to make the MacLean Bottoms gun range useable, but now we have plans to make it safer, make it better," Haase said. "If everything goes according to plan, which includes adding a 200-yard range, we're looking at the work being done by the end of September."

Luttschwager said historic flooding in 2011 served as a reminder. "One thing we already knew, but was definitely reaffirmed, is that we can't fight the significant power and influence of the Missouri River and Yellowstone River in a floodplain," he said. "We need to limit our infrastructure and let the river be a river, and let the floodplain be a floodplain. The silt load deposited a flush of nutrients and the bottomlands are recovering. Cottonwood seedlings are regenerating, vegetation is reappearing and the cycle of periodic flooding and all of its positives go on."

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



CRAIG BIRHLE

All along the course of the Missouri River, flooding in 2011 left its mark. Like a number of wildlife management areas, Lewis and Clark WMA near Williston (pictured) was influenced by high water that stuck around for weeks, depositing silt and killing habitat that harbored upland game birds, big game animals and other creatures.



CRAIG BIRHLE

AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES

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State law now requires boat operators to drain livewells, even if they contain fish, when leaving a water body. "Leaving a water body" means beyond the adjacent boat ramp parking area.

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SPECIAL LICENSE NOW NEEDED

Story and Photos by Craig Bihrlle

North Dakota has had an early Canada goose season for more than a decade, but this fall, for the first time, hunters will need a special license to participate.

State legislators created the new early Canada goose license as part of HB 1264, passed unanimously in both the state House of Representatives and Senate. The fee is \$5 for all residents, regardless of age, and \$50 for nonresidents, except that nonresidents under age 16 (as of September 1) would pay the resident rate if their state has a reciprocal youth licensing agreement with North Dakota.

While many other license fee increases that were part of another bill will not be in effect until 2014, the new early goose license is in effect this year.

“We supported this license as it gives us a way to specifically survey early Canada goose season hunters,” State Game and Fish Department wildlife division chief Randy Kreil said. “Starting this fall we will

have a much better handle on how many people are hunting during the early season and how many birds they are taking.”

One thing that both resident and nonresident hunters should note is that the early goose season licenses are only available through electronic purchase, either online at the Game and Fish Department website (gf.nd.gov); via phone at (800) 406-6409; or at license vendors in 22 counties (see accompanying list) that are linked to the Department’s online licensing system. In counties that are not on the Game and Fish system, the licenses are not available at vendors that only have the paper general hunting licenses.

HB 1264 also included other provisions that will affect hunters. Nonresidents who hunt during the early Canada goose season will no longer have to purchase a 14-day regular season waterfowl license. Previously, nonresidents needed to purchase a regular waterfowl license, and in all but Richland, Sargent,



FOR EARLY CANADA GOOSE SEASON

.....
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.....





Benson, Ramsey and Towner counties, they had to use at least seven of their 14 days for the early season.

The \$50 nonresident early season license does not have a limit on the number of days a nonresident can hunt.

For both residents and nonresidents, a federal waterfowl stamp is needed September 1 by all hunters ages 16 and over. In addition, all resident hunters, regardless of age, need a general game and habitat license at \$13. Residents age 16 and older also need a small game license.

All migratory bird hunters must also register with the Harvest Information Program prior to hunting. Hunters who purchase a license through the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website at gf.nd.gov, or instant licensing telephone number (800) 406-6409, can easily get HIP certified.

Otherwise, hunters can call (888) 634-4798 and record the HIP number on their fishing, hunting and furbearer certificate. Those who registered to hunt the

This special license will allow Game and Fish to specifically survey early Canada goose season hunters, providing a better picture of hunter numbers and birds harvested.

spring light goose season in North Dakota do not have to register with HIP again, as it is required only once per year.

While the license fee is a big change, the early goose season structure will likely be the same as last year, pending final approval of the governor's proclamation in late July. Tentative opening day is August 15, and the season would

run through September 15, except in the special Missouri River zone, where the season would close September 7. The eight fewer early season days in the Missouri River zone are added to the end of the regular goose season in that zone in December.

Last year the early Canada goose season had a daily bag limit of 15 and possession limit of 30. This year states can offer three times the daily bag limit for most migratory birds, so Game and Fish is proposing an early season possession limit of 45 in the governor's proclamation.

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

Online Counties

The following county auditors and all their authorized license vendors are part of the Game and Fish Department electronic licensing system.

Adams	McIntosh	Walsh
Benson	Mercer	Ward
Bottineau	Morton	Williams
Bowman	Ramsey	
Burleigh	Rolette	
Cass	Sargent	
Dickey	Stark	
Grand Forks	Steele	
Grant	Stutsman	

Counties Not Online

The license vendors in the following counties are not yet part of the Game and Fish electronic licensing system.

Barnes	Hettinger	Pembina
Burke	Kidder	Pierce
Cavalier	LaMoure	Ransom
Divide	Logan	Renville
Dunn	McHenry	Richland
Eddy	McKenzie	Sheridan
Emmons	McLean	Sioux
Foster	Mountrail	Slope
Golden Valley	Nelson	Towner
Griggs	Oliver	Traill
		Wells



BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor

Spring Breeding Duck Numbers

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual spring breeding duck survey showed an index of 3.9 million birds, down 17 percent from last year, but still 73 percent above the long-term average (1948-2012).

Mike Szymanski, Department waterfowl biologist, said blue-winged teal and gadwall saw the largest decline. "Blue-wings are coming off near-record highs, so it's not unexpected to see the drop," he said.

Blue-winged teal were down 38 percent and gadwall 28 percent. However, both are well above the long-term average – blue-winged teal 42 percent and gadwall 59 percent.

"Duck numbers are still really good, well above long-term averages," Szymanski said, while mentioning that total duck numbers for 2013 are similar to estimates over the past decade.

Scaup showed a notable increase from last year, while mallards, pintails, shovelers and canvasback were essentially unchanged.

The spring water index was up slightly from 2012. Water conditions were good in larger wetlands, but many shallow wetlands were on

the verge of drying up the week the survey was conducted.

"The somewhat poor wetland conditions probably resulted in losing ducks to Canadian nesting grounds," Szymanski said. "A big factor was probably that our smaller, shallow wetland basins were not holding much water throughout much of the state and the larger wetlands were all frozen when ducks were migrating through North Dakota."

Szymanski said water conditions were much better in the northern half of the state. "Duck numbers were down roughly 30 percent in the south central and southeastern areas of the state due to dry conditions," he said. "However, breeding and renesting conditions aren't reflected well in our data this year as most of the state got several inches of rain the week following our survey. That won't change duck numbers, but it will mean better conditions for breeding and raising young."

Additionally, the loss of Conservation



RENAE HEINLE

Reserve Program acres was evident during the survey, Szymanski said, as massive stretches of land conversion to cropland were obvious. "The loss of grass will hurt production of ducks and other grassland nesting birds," he said. "However, the recent overly wet conditions will also help bridge the gap a little bit for ducks."

The Department's July brood survey will provide a better idea of duck production and insight into expectations for this fall.

PHEASANT CROWING COUNTS DOWN STATEWIDE

North Dakota's 2013 pheasant crowing count survey indicates that rooster numbers were down about 11 percent statewide compared to last year, heading into the spring breeding season.

All four pheasant districts had lower counts than last year. The number of crows heard in the northeast declined by 18 percent, southeast and southwest by 11 percent, and the northwest by nearly 2 percent.

Stan Kohn, Game and Fish Department upland game management supervisor, said only the southwest was initially spared a harsh winter, but a spring snowstorm in April buried much of the area in more than 12 inches of snow.

"Had it not been for the long winter in most of the state and the April storm, I would have expected a higher crow count statewide," Kohn said. "But I think we did lose some birds during late spring, which reduced our 2013 spring breeding population slightly from 2012."

The late spring snowstorms and cooler than typical April delayed breeding and nesting for all upland game birds, Kohn said, with early nesting hens facing rainy conditions, and probably some flooded nests. "On the positive side, this occurred early enough in the nesting season that most hens should have renested," he said. "In addition, the wet spring seemed to jumpstart grass and forb

growth in pastures, helping later nesting pheasants with improved quality of nesting habitat. Unless we experience some early summer weather problems, I still expect much better upland game production this summer from all our species."

Pheasant crowing counts are conducted each spring throughout North Dakota. Observers drive specified 20-mile routes, stopping at predetermined intervals, and counting the number of pheasant roosters heard crowing over a two-minute period during the stop. The number of pheasant crows heard is compared to previous years' data, providing a trend summary.



FALL TURKEY LOTTERY PROCESS MOVED TO SEPTEMBER

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department moved the 2013 fall turkey license application deadline, originally set for July 3, to September to allow for a better assessment of the fall turkey population before determining license numbers.

The official date for the application deadline is September 4. Stan Kohn, Game and Fish Department upland game management supervisor, said the change will allow more opportunities for hunters. "Our fall turkey numbers are a lot more precise when we can use data from late spring and early summer before we have to finalize the proclamation," he said. "Now we can thoroughly assess brood production, which has a direct influence on the fall population."

For years, the fall turkey proclamation was finalized in late May, with applications out in early June and the deadline for applying in early July. Game and Fish made the decision to change the fall turkey process this spring, after a tentative application deadline of July 3 was publicized in news releases, online, and in the *North Dakota OUTDOORS* 2013 calendar.

Prospective applicants should check the Game and Fish website at gf.nd.gov in August for more information on the fall turkey license application process.

SUMMER SAFETY ON THE WATER

Failure to wear a personal flotation device is the main reason people lose their lives in boating accidents.

The National Safe Boating Council warns boaters that most drowning victims had a life jacket available, but were not wearing it when they entered the water. "It is difficult to put a life jacket on once you are already in the water," said Nancy Boldt, North Dakota Game and Fish Department boat and water safety coordinator. "The single most important part of safety on the water is wearing a personal flotation device."

North Dakota law requires all children ages 10 and younger to wear a personal flotation device while in boats of less than 27 feet in length. The law also requires all personal watercraft users to wear a life jacket, Boldt said, as well as anyone towed on skis, tubes, boards or other similar devices.

Water users should make sure to wear life jackets that are the appropriate size, and in good condition. It is also important that children wear a PFD while swimming.

When purchasing a PFD, Boldt suggests considering the most prevalent water activity. Water skiers and tubers should wear a life jacket with four nylon straps rather than one with a zipper, because straps are stronger than zippers upon impact with water. Anglers or persons paddling a canoe should opt for a PFD that is comfortable enough to wear for an entire outing.

Water skiers and tubers are reminded it takes three to ski and tube. When a person is towed on water skis or a similar device, an observer other than the operator is required on the vessel.

It is important for swimmers to know water depth, as serious injuries can occur from diving into water. Large objects hidden below the water's surface can lead to significant injury.

North Dakota boaters also are reminded that marine VHF radios are an important part of boat safety that should not be improperly used by operators. Boldt said they are intended for boat operators who are in distress and facing an emergency situation.

Regulations to help ensure safe boating this summer are found in the 2012-14 North Dakota Fishing Guide. A more comprehensive listing is available in the North Dakota Boat and Water Safety Guide or the Boat North Dakota education book. These guides are available online at the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov, by email at ndgfi@nd.gov, or at a local Game and Fish Department office.

FUR HARVESTER CLASSES SCHEDULED

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

The free 16-hour course in Bismarck and Jamestown is August 13, 15 and 17. The course in Dickinson is September 7 and 14.

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

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

Anyone interested in signing up for the class should 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.

SWAN APPLICATION DEADLINE

Swan applications will be online and at vendors throughout the state in late July. The application deadline is August 14.

Hunters are encouraged to apply at the Game and Fish Department's 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 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.

Violations Surge During Paddlefish Season

North Dakota game wardens issued a record number of citations during the recent paddlefish snagging season.

From opening day May 1 until the season closed May 19, wardens cited more than 170 individuals as part of an annual saturation effort in Williams and McKenzie counties. Last year the citation total for a similar time frame was 82.

Robert Timian, North Dakota Game and Fish Department enforcement chief, said the agency has for many years brought in wardens from other areas of the state to help during the paddlefish snagging season. "Our main priority is to protect the paddlefish resource from illegal harvest," he said. "However, paddlefish snagging is not the only outdoor activity during this time."

For instance, only 11 of the 177 total violations were directly related to paddlefishing. The most prevalent violation was fishing without a license, involving 41 nonresidents and 12 residents. Littering was another common infraction, with 19 citations issued.

The wardens also patrol several thousand acres of state wildlife management areas in the two counties and issued 21 citations for possession of glass beverage containers and 14 citations for prohibited use of a motor vehicle.

In addition, wardens also cited numerous individuals with open containers containing alcohol in motor vehicles, and minors in possession of alcohol, and made three arrests on felony warrants and turned four drug-related incidents over to county sheriffs.

"On our management areas," Timian emphasized, "we're full service law enforcement."

Enforcement saturation efforts are conducted statewide depending on the need, Timian said. "This isn't only done in the northwest during the paddlefish season," he said. "We bring in wardens for additional support for short-term, specific operations in other areas of the state as well."



KELLY KRABENHOFF

2012 Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest nongame runner up.

WATCHABLE WILDLIFE PHOTO CONTEST

The deadline for submitting photos to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest is September 30.

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 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 in *North Dakota OUTDOORS* magazine, and on the Department's website, gf.nd.gov.

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 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.



CRAIG BIHRE

Put Garbage Where it Belongs

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department reminds outdoor enthusiasts to do their part by packing out all trash from recreational areas.

All garbage should be placed in a proper trash receptacle. If trash cans aren't available, or are full, dispose of trash at home. It is not uncommon to see garbage piling up around trash containers after they become full. Styrofoam containers are not biodegradable, but yet are often found wedged in cattails, drifting or washed up on shore.

Worn tires, old mattresses and kitchen appliances have found their way to public use areas. This illegal dumping is costly to clean up and takes a significant toll on the environment. Not only does it spoil the beauty of the land, it destroys habitat, has the potential to pollute North Dakota waters and can injure wildlife.

Littering violations should be reported by calling the Report All Poachers telephone number at (800) 472-2121.

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back cast

By Ron Wilson



ASHLEY SALWEY



Some things you just don't see every day. On a 2,000-mile road trip earlier this month through six states, including Wyoming, we spotted a half-dozen or so camels grazing in a fenced pasture somewhere between Cheyenne and Chugwater.

Up to that point in our trip, the one-humped dromedary camels outnumbered the number of pronghorns seen grazing in the sage, but that would eventually change.

A week later, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries crews netted on consecutive days from Lake Oahe, two flathead catfish between 15 and 22 inches long, respectively.

While it's a matter of debate which is more unusual, spying camels in Wyoming or pulling a pair of flatheads from the Missouri River System in North Dakota, it is fair to say that flatheads are without question the state's rarest fish.

"To put it into perspective on just how rare these fish are to North Dakota, since 1968 we have handled about 17,000 channel catfish from the Garrison Tailrace to the South Dakota border," said Paul Bailey, Department fisheries supervisor. "In that same time, we handled just 17 flathead catfish."

Prior to the two this month, the last flathead to swim into Game and Fish Department sampling nets was a decade ago. Most of the flathead netted years prior were bigger than the latest two, measuring between 26-35 inches.

Greg Power, Department fisheries chief, said it has been years since an angler has reported catching a flathead catfish from the Missouri River System in North Dakota. The flathead was discontinued as a listing on the Department's state record fish chart in 2002 because it was believed that the species was well on its way to extirpation in the state.

When listed, the state record flathead was a 26-pound, 6-ounce fish caught in the Heart River, a tributary of the Missouri, in 1985.

Today, the flathead catfish is listed as a species of conservation priority in North Dakota, but will likely be taken off the list because it's a highly peripheral species, living on the extreme northern edge of its range.

"Flatheads, while native to North Dakota, have never been close to common," Power said. "They were never abundant and became even less abundant after impoundment. But you don't have to go very far south, say, the South Dakota and Nebraska border, before they become very common."

Power said there was a time flatheads turned up in Department nets on Lake Sakakawea, but fisheries managers are nearly certain that they no longer exist in the big lake.

As its name more than implies, the flathead catfish has a broad, flat head. While the more numerous channel catfish has a forked tail, the flathead does not.

Because the fish caught in Department nets earlier this month aren't that big, it more than makes sense that they aren't holdovers from the days of pre-impoundment, but rather the product of reproduction. One fish was aged at five years, while the other at six.

"While it appears there is some recruitment to the population, the flathead catfish still remains, hands down, the rarest fish in North Dakota," Power said.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



A Look Back

The date stamped on the back of the photo reads July 16, 1943. About one month earlier, Norman Fossum and Lillian Williams were married on the Williams' farm in Benson County.

Their honeymoon was a fishing trip to Devils Lake. Certainly, the trip from the farm to the lake took longer back then, not just because of vehicle speeds, but the lake was literally several miles farther away. The spot where this photo was snapped is probably now under 10 feet of water or more.

Much about fishing has changed over the past 70 years, and not just the record number of fishing lakes the North Dakota Game and Fish Department manages, or the size to which some have grown. Today, there are 20-foot boats, with motors that speed them along faster than cars of the 1940s. There are underwater

cameras that enable anglers to watch fish swallow the bait before setting the hook, hundreds of colors of jigs, fishing line that's invisible to fish, and crankbaits that float, dive, suspend, rattle, glow and tease fish to the point of surrender.

Or you could just try the ol' reliable hook and worm option, maybe from shore, like they so often did in 1943. Only one camera was used back then and that was to photograph memorable days fishing.

Although I do have a boat in the garage at home and a dozen or, well, maybe closer to two dozen colors of jigs, sometimes a day of shore-fishing is preferred. Recently, we hopped in the car, threw in one rod apiece (the ones with squeaky reels and dried worms on hooks from a previous fishing trip), and the plastic three-tray tackle box.

By Sandra Johnson

As I sat in prairie grasses on the edge of the shoreline, waiting for the bobber to disappear, I thought of grandma and grandpa's fishing days. Grandma probably sat in the prairie grasses, too, as grandpa paced the shore.

Both have been gone now for quite some time. They witnessed the early days of Devils Lake rising, but never saw it at its zenith. I don't think they ever got to ride in a fishing boat that went faster than their first car. But we all know that "tug tug" feel of a fish on the line and those few seconds when you stop breathing to time the hook-set to match the bite. We still take photographs, although no longer on film, of treasured days spent fishing.

SANDRA JOHNSON is a conservation biologist for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.