

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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**SPECIAL FALL
OUTLOOK ISSUE**





MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

Early season goose hunters have been in the field since August 15, bowhunters climbed into their tree stands starting August 30 and dove season opened shortly thereafter.

No doubt about it, the time of year that is so celebrated in our neck of the Northern Plains is upon us. North Dakota's hunting heritage is strong, which is something we all should be proud of. And let me assure you that the Game and Fish Department is doing everything in its power to make sure that this tradition continues.

The August-September issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* takes more than a casual look at what hunters might encounter as they venture afield this fall. From deer to ducks, you'll find forecasts of the animals you enjoy pursuing inside this publication.

It's not often that the stars align – the "stars" in this case being wildlife habitat and Mother Nature – and the countryside is flush with all species of wildlife. While 2013 isn't one of those years – it's no secret that deer numbers are down and the ring-necked pheasant population isn't gangbusters compared to a few years ago – the fall hunting opportunities North Dakota has to offer are nearly endless. And I haven't said anything about fall fishing, which can be outstanding as the leaves turn and we start the too-fast slide into winter.

Just the mere mention of winter means I'm getting ahead of the game. The last thing I want to do is rush fall, arguably the best time of year to be outdoors in North Dakota.

In a perfect world, which would include plenty of free time, and a really, really short chore list, the autumn activities a person could pursue in earnest is impressive, including archery hunting for deer, beating the

brush for pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse, Hungarian partridge and the often ignored ruffed grouse living in North Dakota's northern woodlands. There is also hunting for ducks and geese, which could be really good this fall.

When you read the waterfowl forecast by Mike Johnson, Department game management section leader, in this issue, you'll see that biologists are predicting a fall flight of ducks from North Dakota this year similar to those of 2007-11.

Johnson also says: "Numbers of resident Canada geese, Western Prairie Canada geese and arctic nesting Tallgrass Prairie Canada geese, snow geese and Ross's geese all remain high. Hunting opportunities for all these birds should again be good, but are highly dependent, as always, on fall weather conditions, especially for migrant birds."

The weather, as waterfowlers understand, plays such a huge role in hunting success. "Last fall, ducks and geese arrived early and stayed until nearly mid-November, providing one of the better hunting seasons in recent memory," Johnson said. "Similar weather patterns this fall would help hunters to enjoy our abundant waterfowl populations."

And I'm one of those hunters who would enjoy nothing more than to conceal myself in a stubble field and shoot some Canada geese. For the first time, the daily limit of Canada geese in the regular season is eight birds (five in the Missouri River Zone).

Here's to hoping our chore lists are short this fall so we can enjoy all the opportunities available in North Dakota's outdoors. Be safe, thank a landowner and take a kid hunting. Our hunting heritage is strong and we need to keep it that way.

Terry Steinwand

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FEATURES	
2013 Hunting Outlook	2
The Future of PLOTS.....	16
DEPARTMENTS	
Buffaloberry Patch.....	20
Back Cast	25



Front Cover

A young ring-necked rooster. North Dakota's 2013 pheasant season opens October 12. *Photo by Craig Bihle, Bismarck.*



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

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

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

Hunter Education (701) 328-6615 • Licensing (701) 328-6335

24-Hour Licensing by Phone: (800) 406-6409

The TTY/TTD (Relay ND) number for the hearing or speech impaired is (800) 366-6888

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Last fall, ducks and geese arrived early and stayed until nearly mid-November, providing one of the better hunting seasons in recent memory. A return of similar weather patterns this fall would go a long way to help hunters to enjoy North Dakota's abundant waterfowl populations.

Earlier this year a close friend who is a fourth grade teacher asked my opinion on an issue they were debating at their school. They were discussing the need to continue teaching map reading skills in this day and age of Global Positioning Systems and other navigation systems.

It took me about five seconds to respond: "Absolutely, people need to have a mental image of where they are on the face of the earth and what the landscape around them consists of."

Electronic navigation systems are amazing tools, but they have a tendency to focus the user on listening to instructions instead of looking around and understanding the

landscape. Learning to use a map to identify rivers, hills, cities, road systems and routes of travel is valuable, and it requires us to use our minds to develop a mental image of where we are and where we want to go.

This discussion got me thinking about how technology has influenced hunting over the past decade. While improvements

2013 HUNTING OUTLOOK

By Randy Kreil

A Sense of Where We Are

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in firearms, archery equipment, clothing and other hunting-related items have always occurred over time, it seems as if the race to develop new and better products has intensified in recent years.

We see it at the Game and Fish Department on a regular basis. Someone stops by or calls and asks if a new piece of equipment is legal for hunting or fishing.

And then our internal debate begins, just like at the elementary school.

All technological advances are not necessarily a negative, and in many cases they are a distinct positive. Take cell phones for example. The first cell phone call I made from the field was in 1996 while sitting on a hilltop in the Killdeer Mountains. I called home to let my wife know that we

were successful in our pronghorn doe hunt, and we were going to stay an extra day to chase some sharptails.

At the time it was a novel experience, but of course today such calls are routine to the point where if you don't call in with a location and an expected time of arrival, someone will start to worry.

Cell phones serve many purposes, including safety in times of emergency, tracking weather changes, and communicating with family back home or with other members of your hunting party. Following a recent law change, hunters and anglers can now store an electronic image of their license on their phone, in lieu of having to produce a paper license if checked by a game warden.

While I believe people still need to have an innate sense of direction and understanding of where they are, the advent of GPS is, overall, positive for a number of reasons. Knowing where you are, and if you can hunt in that particular spot, is important, and the combination of reading a map such as our Private Land Open To Sportsmen Guide, combined with a GPS system, can certainly assist a hunter and clarify their location.

The list of technological items is long and growing every day. The following are just a few examples: electronic predator calls, spinning-wing decoys, neoprene waders versus the old rubber and canvas; rifle scopes, range-finders and spotting scopes; compound bows and all the improvements that have occurred in recent years; trail cameras; inline muzzleloading rifles; improved walkie-talkies; moisture wicking fabrics for warmth and dryness; and the seemingly endless changes in bullets, powders, primers, shot pellets and cases used for loading and reloading all sorts of ammunition.

In most instances these improvements to gear, clothing and equipment are positive and provide hunters with increased comfort, and more often than not a perceived increased opportunity for success. And therein may be the biggest problem.

The manufacturers, retailers, television shows, print ads and marketing schemes in general are directed at convincing hunters that their chances of success will be improved if they buy and use certain products.

While that may be true in some cases, long-term improvements still depend on whether there is enough habitat to support wildlife out there

on the ground. Without habitat of the proper quality and in the right quantity, you will not have enough wildlife to meet people's expectations. While improvements in technology by themselves may increase hunter expectations, ironically that couldn't come at a more tenuous time.

When you find your way into the field this fall, whether you use your GPS or simply the latest printed version of the PLOTS Guide, you will see changes to North Dakota's landscape in many areas. As our Department has noted repeatedly over the past several years, habitat losses we are experiencing will reduce wildlife populations and hunter success.

Unfortunately, this trend that started in about 2007 is not only continuing, it has accelerated in the past year. The loss of Conservation Reserve Program grasslands, native prairie, wetlands and shelterbelts is ongoing at an alarming rate. Many of the following updates mention this loss of habitat as it relates to future population prospects for the species we hunt in North Dakota.

That said, North Dakota has plenty of opportunities for successful hunts this fall. Some of that technology can help make the season better, but technology does not create habitat. Only people can decide on and implement actions that protect, restore or enhance wildlife habitat.

***RANDY KREIL** is the Game and Fish Department's wildlife division chief.*



UPLAND AND SMALL GAME

In recent years, the number of pheasant hunters in North Dakota has dropped below 100,000, with a harvest running about 600,000 roosters annually.

UPLAND AND SMALL GAME

Ring-necked Pheasants

Regular Season Opens: Oct. 12

Delayed Opener: Oct. 19

Regular Season Closes: Jan. 5, 2014

Delayed Season Closes: Jan. 5, 2014

Daily Limit: 3

Possession Limit: 12

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Those of us living in the south central and southwestern parts of the state thought we had it good last winter, but then a blizzard arrived in mid-April, depositing snow and lots of it.

This is just what we didn't need at a time when pheasants were leaving winter cover for breeding areas. And then, when the snow finally did melt this spring, May arrived with almost continuous rain throughout the state.

With 75 percent of the Game and Fish Department's roadside brood routes completed as of this writing, preliminary numbers indicate total pheasants are down about 30-40 percent statewide from last year, the lowest since 2003. In addition, brood observations were down 43 percent, and the average brood size was down 4 percent.

So it goes on the Northern Plains. Habitat and weather play important roles in the number of pheasants we see each fall, so a long, harsh winter or a spring blizzard can certainly cause problems with the breeding population. Initially, things appeared not to be as bad as first thought. Spring crowing counts were only down 11 percent statewide from 2012, and were comparable to 2011 counts.

In recent years, the number of pheasant hunters has dropped below 100,000, with a harvest running about 600,000 roosters annually. It seems that whenever we have a harvest of 500,000 roosters or more, hunters are seeing plenty of birds and they deem it a good pheasant year.

Whether we can maintain that level of harvest is uncertain, regardless of weather conditions. As we are beginning to see, removal of CRP from the landscape is occurring in many areas, most notably in the southern half of the state. Removal of this nesting and brooding habitat will surely have a negative influence on our pheasant population.

Stan Kohn, Upland Game Management Supervisor, Bismarck

A delayed fall turkey application deadline will allow time to analyze additional brood information before determining license numbers.



RON WILSON

Wild Turkeys

Opens: Oct. 12

Closes: Jan. 12, 2014

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Hunters have likely noticed that wild turkey numbers are lower than a few years ago, which is the result of several years of poor production. Even though last spring was a fairly good production year, North Dakota's breeding population was low, limiting the number of young produced. As a result, the number of both spring and fall licenses have been reduced to coincide with the lower population in almost all turkey hunting units.

In addition, major flooding on the Missouri, Little Missouri and Souris river bottomlands in 2011 inundated thousands of acres of nesting habitat. Even though the breeding population is low, biologists will have to wait and see how production is this summer before determining fall numbers.

To allow for more summer production information in the fall season-setting process, the Game and Fish Department rescheduled the fall turkey application deadline to September 4 to allow time to analyze additional brood information

before determining license numbers.

This summer, habitat conditions in most areas of the state are quite good for turkeys and, for the most part, weather conditions were favorable for nesting and brooding hens. While license numbers this fall are reduced from last year in many units, with some preseason scouting and contacts, hunters should be able to locate birds, especially if they concentrate their efforts along wooded river bottoms, drainages and forested areas.

Stan Kohn

Sharp-tailed Grouse

Opens: Sept. 14

Closes: Jan. 5, 2014

Daily Limit: 3

Possession Limit: 12

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Weather patterns and the quality and quantity of habitat are the main reasons game bird populations fluctuate from year to year. In the last year, extreme weather was an issue, from 18 inches of snow in April in southwestern North Dakota, to severe drought last summer, to record rainfall this May and June.

Additionally, thousands of CRP acres returned to crop production will be devastating to the future of North Dakota upland game species. While in the western part of the state, habitat fragmentation and disturbance from energy development is starting to disrupt the natural ecology of sharp-tailed grouse and other ground nesting birds.

History has shown that if birds have quality habitat, Mother Nature will provide the other necessary ingredients to maintain healthy upland bird populations. While some lows are inevitable, the thought that keeps hunters heading to the fields every fall is the hope that this will be a banner year.

Even though spring survey numbers indicated a population comparable to last year, the telling factor is always late-summer counts.

Data from summer roadside counts indicate sharp-tailed grouse populations are down significantly from last year. Brood results suggest grouse numbers are down 51 percent statewide, with the

number of broods observed down 50 percent. The average brood size is about the same as 2012, and the age ratio is up 19 percent.

Fall hunting season success is directly correlated to the current year's reproductive success. If there is a good hatch, then logically there will be more birds on the landscape during the fall hunting season.

Aaron Robinson, Upland Game Management Biologist, Dickinson

Ruffed Grouse

Opens: Sept. 14

Closes: Jan. 5, 2014

Daily Limit: 3

Possession Limit: 12

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Ruffed grouse are the only native woodland grouse species inhabiting North Dakota. They are found in the native aspen woodlands in Rolette, Bottineau, Pembina, Walsh and Cavalier counties. These birds provide an interesting segment to the state's landscape, are most enjoyable to hunt, and provide superb table fare.

More than 40 years of ruffed grouse census data in North Dakota shows that ruffed grouse numbers tend to cycle about every 8-10 years. Even though native aspen forest habitat continues to shrink, birds are doing their best to adapt to what is available for habitat.

As with all species, habitat is the key to ruffed grouse success and any land use change that permanently removes aspen forest from the landscape affects grouse populations.

Hunting season dates, bag limits, numbers of hunters and harvest have remained fairly constant over the last 20 years. In 2010, it seemed we were slowly moving out of the low point in the population cycle. However, spring drumming counts in both 2011 and 2012 showed a decline from 2010.

2013 spring census information is limited because weather conditions prevented data collection. There were no drumming counts collected from the Pembina Hills, and the Turtle Mountains showed a decrease of more than 50 percent in the number of drums heard from 2012. In early July, nesting success and



CRAIG BIRLE

production information for ruffed grouse was unknown. It's anticipated that the fall population will be low, so hunters can expect to spend more time walking trails in fall before encountering flushes. Even so, it is always enjoyable to hike through North Dakota's native aspen woodlands in fall.

Stan Kohn

Hungarian Partridge

Opens: Sept. 14

Closes: Jan. 5, 2014

Daily Limit: 3

Possession Limit: 12

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Hunters will see fewer Hungarian partridge this fall in the field compared to 2012.

Weather during nesting was wet and cold, causing hens to abandon nests. Overall partridge numbers will be down.

According to summer roadside counts, the statewide Hungarian partridge population is down 34 percent from last year, and the number of broods observed is down 31 percent.

Hungarian partridge are a bonus, often harvested by sharp-tailed grouse or pheasant hunters, so keep a look out for areas such as abandoned farmsteads and native prairie that is on the edge of small grain crops. Pockets of birds may be found in these areas, but hunters will need to spend some time in the mornings scouting out potential areas.

No matter the duration of the Hungarian partridge's stay in North Dakota – more than 90 years thus far – the bird will always be an exotic species to the Northern Plains. Even so, the native of northern Europe has adapted to North Dakota, providing hunting opportunities for upland hunters for years. Hungarian partridge are a bonus, often harvested by sharp-tailed grouse or pheasant hunters.

Aaron Robinson

Sage Grouse, Pinnated Grouse

Hunting seasons for sage grouse and pinnated grouse are closed again this fall.

Results from the Game and Fish Department's spring sage grouse survey indicated the number of strutting males observed in southwestern North Dakota remained well below management objectives.

Biologists counted a record low 50 males on 11 active strutting grounds in spring. In 2012, 72 males were counted on 12 active leks.

This is the sixth year in a row that North Dakota won't have a sage grouse season, and the fourth year in a row for no season on pinnated grouse, or prairie chickens, in the northeastern and southeastern parts of the state.

Aaron Robinson

Tree Squirrels

Open Area: Statewide

Opens: Sept. 14

Closes: Jan. 5, 2014

Daily Limit: 4

Possession Limit: 12

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Tree squirrels may be taken with firearms loaded with shot, rimfire rifles, or with bow and arrows legal for taking upland game.

BIG GAME

White-tailed Deer

Archery Opens: Aug. 30

Archery Closes: Jan. 5, 2014

Regular Gun Season Opens: Nov. 8

Regular Gun Season Closes: Nov. 24

Muzzleloader Opens: Nov. 29

Muzzleloader Closes: Dec. 15

It is good to periodically stop and glance back at where we've been, and take a long look at where we're going.

With a series of relatively mild winters from 1998 through 2008, the Game and Fish Department struggled to keep deer numbers within the tolerance levels of landowners. Since 2004, when the first statewide management goals were set in all units, antlerless license numbers were systematically and steadily increased. In 2010, deer management goals were re-evaluated and updated for each hunting unit in the state. The statewide goal at that time was set for the next five years at 124,800 deer licenses.

Starting in November 2008 and running through April 2011, North Dakota hosted three "real winters" characterized by early and persistent snow cover, coupled with cold temperatures. The Department continued to aggressively issue antlerless deer licenses, finally reaching management goals for most of the state by spring 2011. During fall 2011, a severe epizootic hemorrhagic disease outbreak killed a significant number of white-tailed deer in the western portion of the state.

Winter 2012 was moderate in much of the state, followed by another hard winter in 2013 throughout the Red River Valley and northern tier hunting units along the Canadian border.

Recent years have brought dramatic changes for wildlife habitat throughout the state, including loss of CRP, wetland drainage, habitat fragmentation, removal of tree rows and abandoned farmsteads.

As such, Game and Fish allocated 59,500 licenses for the 2013 deer

The Game and Fish made available 59,500 licenses for the 2013 deer hunting season, 5,800 fewer than 2012. The regular deer gun season opens on November 8 and closes November 24.



CRAIG BIRRE

hunting season, 5,800 fewer than 2012 and the lowest number since 1983. Hunters can receive only one license for the gun season.

After a significant reduction in gun licenses in 2012, harvest and survey data revealed that deer populations are still below management objectives in most units. Statewide hunter success in 2012 was 63 percent, which was better than 2011 (52 percent), but still lower than the goal of 70 percent.

Winter aerial surveys showed that deer were down from 2011 levels in units 3A1, 1, 2K1, 2K2, 2C, 2D and 2B. Although deer are still below the management objective in 2A, 2F1 and 2F2, winter aerial surveys showed that numbers were slightly above levels recorded in 2011 (2F1 and 2F2) or 2012 (2A).

Deer numbers overall remain below objectives due to prolonged effects of severe winters during 2008-10, which not only increased adult mortality, but also reduced fawn production. The extreme winter conditions followed nearly a decade of aggressive deer management that featured large numbers of antlerless licenses in most units.

Winter 2012-13 was severe in the northern and eastern portions of the state, which will slow population recovery in those areas. Further loss of high quality deer habitat statewide

will also limit potential for population recovery.

Currently, all hunting units in the state are below management goals set in 2010, except in 3E2, 3F1, 3F2 and 4F. Fewer licenses in 2013 is necessary to allow deer populations to increase toward management goals.

Deer hunting opportunities in 2013 include:

- Total licenses available for the 2013 regular season are 59,500, 5,800 fewer than 2012. Antlered licenses were reduced by 1,850 and antlerless licenses were reduced by 3,950.
- 47 percent of the total reduction in licenses comes from the Red River Valley management region (2A, 2B and 2C) with nearly 25 percent coming from 2C alone.
- Increased white-tailed buck licenses by 550 in the southwestern portion of the state due to improved hunter success rate.
- 1,166 muzzleloader licenses are available in 2013, 583 antlered and 583 antlerless white-tailed deer licenses, a reduction of 116 muzzleloader licenses from 2012.
- 180 nonresident any-deer archery licenses are available for 2013, 502 fewer than in 2012. The number of nonresident any-deer archery licenses will further decline to 172 in 2014.

- All resident and nonresident deer archery licenses will be issued via electronic means only, through the Department's Bismarck office, Game and Fish website at gf.nd.gov; by calling (800) 406-6409; or at license vendors participating in the Game and Fish online licensing system. Currently, select vendors in more than 20 counties are part of the Game and Fish system.

Bill Jensen, Big Game Management Biologist, Bismarck

Mule Deer

Archery Opens: Aug. 30

Archery Closes: Jan. 5, 2014

Regular Gun Season Opens: Nov. 8

Regular Gun Season Closes: Nov. 24

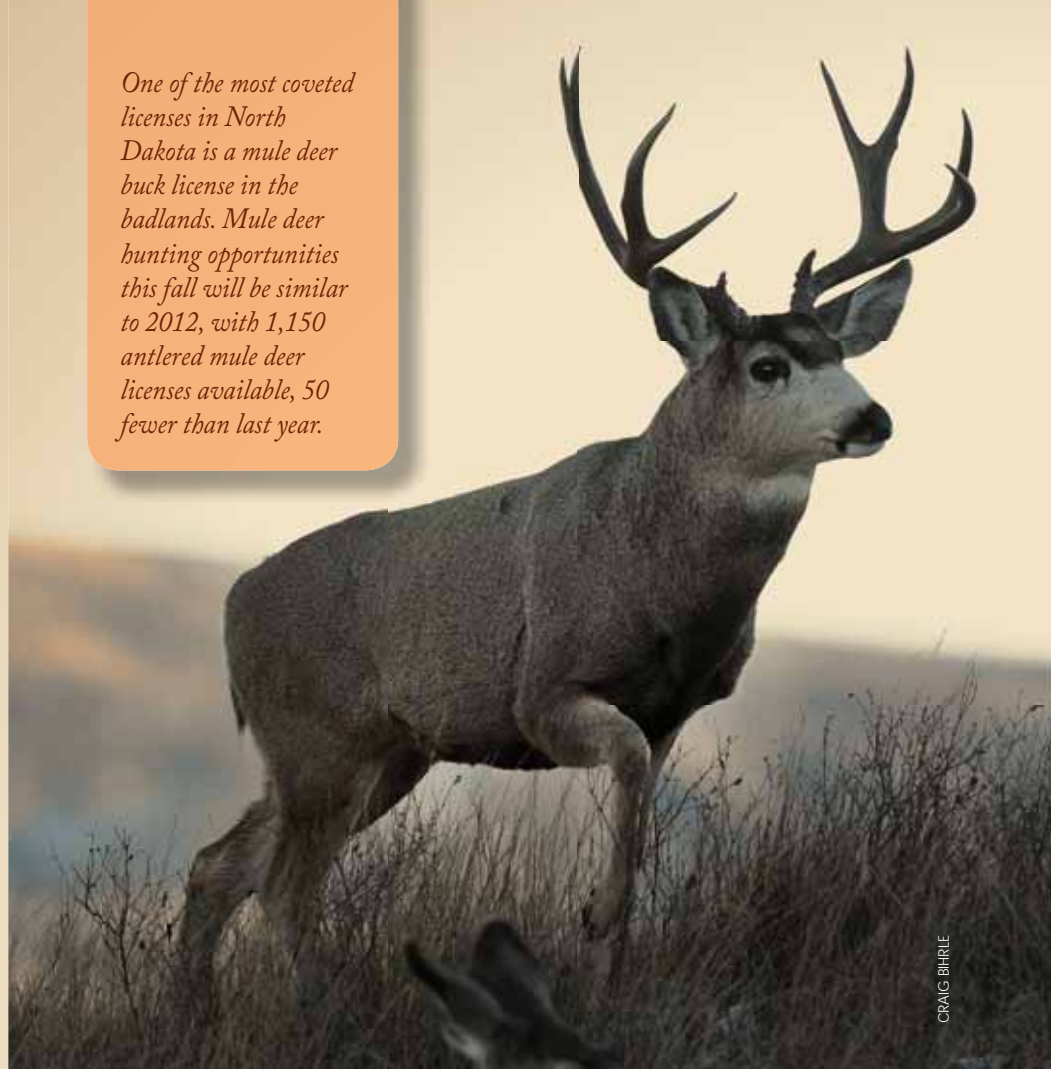
Mule deer in North Dakota's badlands are showing signs of recovery following record low fawn production after the severe winters of 2008-10, when deer numbers declined by nearly 50 percent from 2007.

This is the first year since 2007 that the spring mule deer index was higher than the previous year. The 2013 spring index was 15 percent higher than 2012, but still 22 percent lower than the long-term average. The population increase can be attributed to not harvesting antlerless mule deer in the badlands during the 2012 hunting season, and a relatively mild winter over much of the primary mule deer range.

Although fawn production was not great in 2012, mild winter conditions across much of the core mule deer range led to good adult and fawn winter survival. Mule deer in core badlands habitat, which encompasses hunting units 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E, increased 23-30 percent from 2012. While this year's population increase is encouraging, there are many challenges facing the future population growth in the badlands. Encroachment of juniper in mule deer habitat, direct and indirect habitat loss due to energy development, predators and weather are all challenges facing future population recovery.

Mule deer hunting opportunities this fall will be similar to 2012, with 1,150 antlered mule deer licenses available, 50 fewer than last year. Game and Fish is not issuing any antlerless mule deer licenses

One of the most coveted licenses in North Dakota is a mule deer buck license in the badlands. Mule deer hunting opportunities this fall will be similar to 2012, with 1,150 antlered mule deer licenses available, 50 fewer than last year.



CRAIG BIRRIE

once again in hunting units 3B1, 3B2, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E and 4F.

With fewer mule deer licenses, the chances of drawing a license in 2013 were low, but for those lucky few, it should result in a high-quality hunt due to less crowded hunting conditions similar to 2012.

Bruce Stillings, Big Game Management Supervisor, Dickinson

Moose

For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, or the 2013 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.

Moose continue to fare well in what is considered nontraditional habitat for this species, and the phenomenon of prairie moose continues with the best densities found in northwestern North Dakota.

Winter aerial surveys indicate that densities remain low in traditional habitat in northeastern and north central North Dakota. Moose unit M1C, located in the Pembina Hills region, will remain

closed this year. Moose unit M4, which encompasses the Turtle Mountains, is also closed this fall due to a low hunter success rate (29 percent) last year, and low moose numbers observed during aerial surveys.

Game and Fish has made a few changes to the moose hunting season format this fall.

In years past the moose rifle season has opened about the same time as the peak of the moose rut, but this year the rifle opener was moved back one week to alleviate some of the hunting pressure during the rut.

This came about because biologists have found evidence of open or late-bred cows, in addition to other documentation of late-born moose calves.

Also, with declining moose numbers across much of the state, with the exception of the northwest, no any-antlerless licenses were issued, which takes the pressure off cows as most moose hunters with a once-in-a-lifetime tag focus on bulls.

Game and Fish allocated 111 moose licenses for North Dakota's 2013 season,



KELLY KRABBENHOF

A successful, coordinated volunteer herd reduction effort in Theodore Roosevelt National Park in 2010-11 has reduced the number of elk in southwestern North Dakota.

down from 143 licenses last year. The reduction in overall license numbers is primarily related to the closure of hunting unit M4, and slight reductions in licenses in M9 and M10 due to the shift to all any-moose licenses.

Jason Smith, Big Game Management Biologist, Jamestown

Elk

For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, or the 2013 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.

North Dakota's 2013 elk season features 261 licenses, down from 301 licenses last year. Season prospects, however, are good, with anticipated hunter success similar to last year.

Elk numbers in southwestern North Dakota are low due to a successful, coordinated volunteer herd reduction effort in Theodore Roosevelt National Park in 2010-11. Units E3 and E4 will have 60 any-elk licenses this season, compared to 100 in 2012. In units E1 and E2, elk numbers are stable and the number of licenses issued is the same as last year.

The boundary of elk unit E1 in the northeast has been expanded to encompass an increasing elk herd in the Turtle Mountain area.

Making landowner contacts and pre-

season scouting prior to the season opener is recommended and is an essential component to a successful hunt this fall.

Jason Smith

Bighorn Sheep

For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, or the 2013 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.

North Dakota's bighorn sheep continue to show resiliency in a changing landscape, as the 2012 population survey revealed a minimum of 297 animals, the second highest on record and 5 percent above the 2011 count. The population in the northern badlands set a new record, but the southern population declined slightly.

Biologists counted 87 rams, 156 ewes, and a record 54 lambs. The lamb recruitment rate was also a record 38 percent, and almost all lambs observed during the summer survey survived winter. A relatively mild winter last year bodes well for further population increases.

The 2012 survey does not include approximately 30 bighorn sheep that inhabit the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

Despite an encouraging count in 2012, the male segment of the population, and the number of mature rams, remains below objectives. Consequently, four licenses were

issued in 2013, the same as 2012. However, the future looks promising as a large number of young rams were observed.

Due to an increasing number of roadkill mortalities on U.S. Highway 85 near the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park, Game and Fish and National Park Service personnel collaborated to translocate 14 bighorn sheep from that area to a more secluded site in the badlands. Sixteen animals were also translocated from the same area in 2010.

Brett Wiedmann, Big Game Management Biologist, Dickinson

Pronghorn

North Dakota's pronghorn population is finally growing after five years of steady decline. However, pronghorn numbers are still below population objectives and not high enough to warrant a hunting season.

Summer survey results revealed the statewide population is 5,400 pronghorn, 49 percent higher than 2012, but still 62 percent below 2008, the last year a hunting season was held. Department big game biologists expected to see a population increase due to another year without a hunting season and a mild winter across much of our pronghorn range, which led to high adult and fawn survival.

This year, fawn production was average to below average in all management regions. Another mild to average winter in 2013 should encourage future population growth, but challenges remain with pronghorn habitat in the west.

Fragmentation of habitat due to energy development and loss of Conservation Reserve Program acres in the secondary range are challenges facing future pronghorn recovery in the state.

Biologists will continue to monitor pronghorn numbers in the future, and will reopen the season when the population returns to a level capable of withstanding a harvest.

The 2013 pronghorn season will be closed to both gun and archery hunters. Applicants who have accumulated preference points will maintain their current points.

Bruce Stillings

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Ducks and Geese

Wetland conditions and waterfowl numbers remain good in North Dakota.

This is according to the Department's 66th annual breeding duck survey, perhaps the longest running operational breeding waterfowl survey in the world, covering nearly 2,000 miles to assess spring wetland conditions and the number of waterfowl in the state.

While winter was fairly mild and snowfall was minimal, late winter and early spring snows and rains again restored pond conditions throughout much of the state. The 2013 water index was up 17 percent from 2012 and was 12 percent better than the 1948-2012 average. Also, wetland conditions improved significantly the week following the survey, when much of the state received significant rain.

Breeding duck numbers decreased from last year, but were still well above the 65-year average. Numbers of breeding ducks in 2013 were the 12th highest on record, but down 17 percent from 2012, which was the third highest index on record. The

2013 duck index was 73 percent above the long-term average.

Changes from 2012 for individual duck species were highly variable. Mallards were up 6 percent and were the fifth highest on record. Scaup increased 23 percent. Numbers of pintails (plus 2 percent), canvasbacks (plus 2 percent) and shovelers (minus 1 percent) were basically unchanged.

All other species were down from 2012, including green-winged teal (minus 56 percent), ruddy duck (minus 52 percent), blue-winged teal (minus 38 percent), redhead (minus 30 percent) and gadwall (minus 28 percent). Some of the declines are not surprising after last year's record high for green-winged teal and near record high for blue-winged teal.

The large number of ducks tallied during the survey is consistent with the well-above-average populations North Dakota has carried since 1994, because of wet conditions and exceptional nesting cover provided by CRP. However, as CRP acres continue to decline across the state, biologists expect duck production will also decline.

The number of broods observed during the Department's July brood survey was down 48 percent from

2012, but the average brood size was up .3 ducklings. July water conditions were up 60 percent from last year and were the eighth highest on record. However, there was considerable drying in much of the state since the survey.

In addition, because of a late spring, duck nesting was delayed in 2013. There are strong indications of an exceptional late hatch. We are predicting a fall flight of ducks from North Dakota this year similar to those of 2007-11.

Numbers of resident Canada geese, Western Prairie Canada geese and arctic nesting Tallgrass Prairie Canada geese, snow geese and Ross's geese all remain high. Hunting opportunities for all these birds should again be good, but are highly dependent, as always, on fall weather conditions, especially for migrant birds.

Last fall, ducks and geese arrived early and stayed until nearly mid-November, providing one of the better hunting seasons in recent memory. Similar weather patterns this fall would help hunters to enjoy our abundant waterfowl populations.

Mike Johnson, Game Management Section Leader, Bismarck



Resident giant Canada goose numbers are high. The season for the Missouri River Zone closes December 27. For the rest of the state, the season closes December 19.

CRAIG BIHRE



Youth Waterfowl Season

(For legally licensed residents and nonresidents ages 15 and younger.)

Opens: Sept. 14

Closes: Sept. 15

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Daily Limit: Ducks and geese – same as regular seasons.

Early Canada Goose Season

Opens: Aug. 15 (statewide)

Closes: Sept. 7 (Missouri River Zone), Sept. 15 (statewide)

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Daily Limit: 15

Possession Limit: 45

Canada Geese Regular Season

Opens: Sept. 21 (residents only), Sept. 28 (nonresidents)

Closes: Dec. 27 (Missouri River Zone), Dec. 21 (rest of state)

Daily Limit: 8 (5 in Missouri River Zone)

Possession Limit: 24 (15 in Missouri River Zone)

White-Fronted Geese (Statewide)

Opens: Sept. 21 (residents only), Sept. 28 (nonresidents)

Closes: Dec. 1

Daily Limit: 2

Possession Limit: 6

Light (Snow) Geese (Statewide)

Opens: Sept. 21 (residents only), Sept. 28 (nonresidents)

Closes: Dec. 29

Daily Limit: 50, no possession limit

Shooting Hours for all Geese: Half-hour before sunrise to 1 p.m. each day through Nov. 2. Starting Nov. 3, shooting hours are a half-hour before sunrise to 2 p.m. each day.

Exception: Shooting hours are a half-hour before sunrise to sunset on all Saturdays and Wednesdays through the end of each season. Starting Dec. 1, all-day hunting is also allowed on Sundays through the end of each season.

Regular Duck Season

Low Plains Unit

Opens: Sept. 21 (residents only), Sept.

28 (nonresidents)

Closes: Dec. 1

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

High Plains Unit

Opens: Sept. 21 (residents only), Sept. 28 (nonresidents)

Closes: Dec. 1

Opens: Dec. 7

Closes: Dec. 29

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

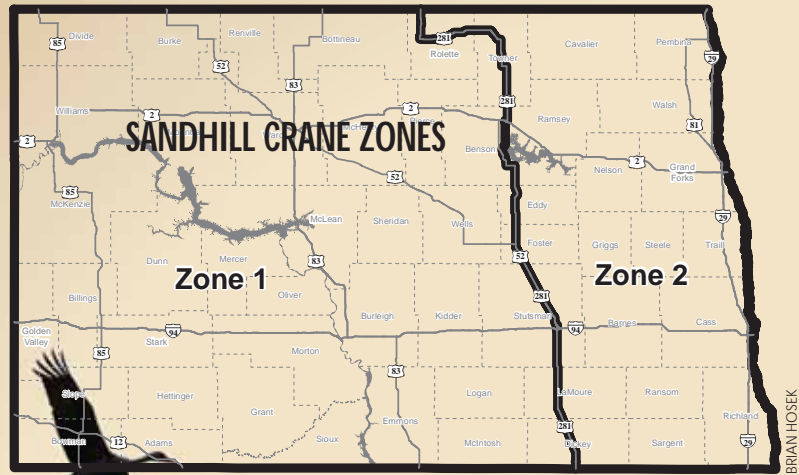
Daily Limit: Six ducks, which may include no more than five mallards (two of which may be hens), two redheads, three wood ducks, two canvasbacks, two pintails, three scaup.

Possession Limit: 18 (including no more than three times the daily limit for each individual species).





CRAIG BIRHLE



BRIAN HOSEK

Sandhill Cranes

Opens Zone 1: Sept. 14

Zone 2: Sept. 14

Closes Zone 1: Nov. 10

Zone 2: Nov. 10

Daily Limit Zone 1: 3

Zone 2: 2

Possession Limit Zone 1: 9

Zone 2: 6

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to 1 p.m. daily through Nov. 2; to 2 p.m. Nov. 3-10.

The Mid-continent Sandhill Crane Population remains in good shape heading into the fall hunting season. The 2013 spring index will most likely hit a record high after survey numbers are finalized.

This year's spring migration was later due to a late winter and frequent spring blizzards. As a result, many cranes remained in the Platte River Valley during the survey, providing what may be one of best assessments of this population's status.

Staging areas are abundant, but some areas may still be flooded during fall from this spring's wet weather. Overall, sandhill crane hunting opportunities should be good statewide this fall.

The two zone structure – Zone 1 west of U.S. Highway 281 and Zone 2 east of U.S. Highway 281 – for sandhill cranes will continue. This year the two zones will have the same season lengths (58 days) and dates, but will still have different bag limits. Zone 1 has a daily bag limit of three cranes; in Zone 2 the daily bag limit is two.

Another regulation change is an increase in possession limits to three times the daily bag limit, which means a possession limit of nine in Zone 1, and six in Zone 2.

Nonresidents can pursue sandhill cranes with either a nonresident small game or waterfowl license, in addition to a crane permit. Hunters using a nonresident waterfowl license are reminded that they are required to hunt only in the waterfowl zones designated on their license.

Hunters are also reminded to make sure of their target before shooting, as federally endangered whooping cranes may be present in North Dakota during the fall. Please report all whooping crane sightings to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in Bismarck at (701) 328-6300.

Mike Szymanski, Migratory Game Bird Biologist, Bismarck

Doves

Opens: Sept. 1

Closes: Oct. 30

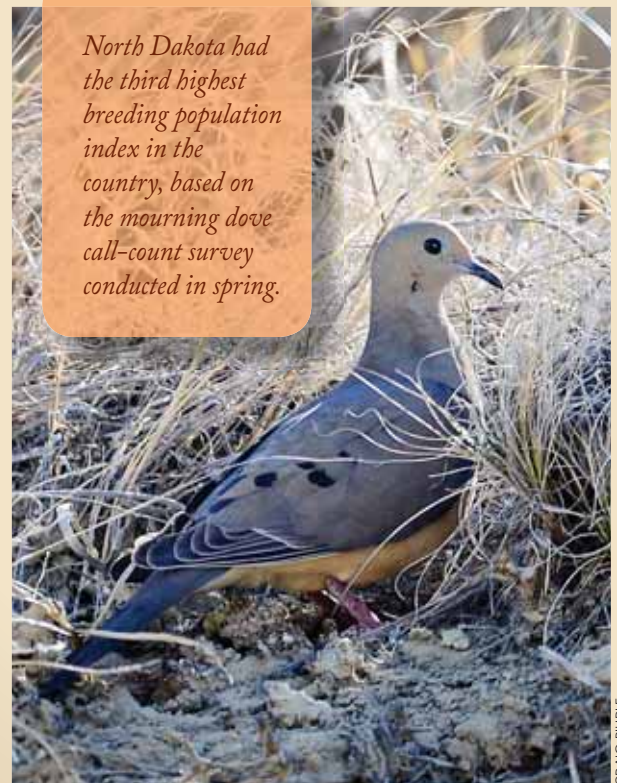
Daily Limit: 15

Possession Limit: 45

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

The breeding population of mourning doves in North Dakota changes relatively little from year to year. That's good since the state generally has a sizeable population of breeding doves.

Challenges for hunters in 2013 may relate to habitat conditions, and a smaller fall flight of doves that might result in difficulties finding concentrations of birds. A change to dove regulations this year is that the possession limit has increased from 30 to 45 birds.



North Dakota had the third highest breeding population index in the country, based on the mourning dove call-count survey conducted in spring.

CRAIG BIRHLE

Dove hunters should experience fair to good opportunities during the first two weeks of September. North Dakota had the third highest breeding population index in the country, based on the mourning dove call-count survey conducted in late May.

The wet, windy spring likely limited breeding success for doves at that time, but birds nesting later in the summer appear to have done well.

On the plus side, the wet spring will provide more watering holes. Also, many agricultural fields were left unplanted in parts of the state, and depending on individual circumstances, those fields may hold doves feeding in weedy areas.

Eurasian collared doves continue to expand throughout the state and are found in almost every small town and city. However, collared doves are not often found outside of municipalities and rarely show up in hunter harvests. Eurasian collared doves and white-winged doves, which are

normally found in southern Texas, but have been expanding their range, are included with mourning doves in the daily bag limit of 15 birds.

Some dove hunters may be contacted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to participate in a wing survey, which involves clipping one wing from each dove shot early in the season to send in for analysis.

Hunters are also reminded to take a look for banded mourning doves in their bag and report bands directly to the Bird Banding Laboratory at (800) 327-BAND (2263), or on the web at: www.reportband.gov.

Mike Szymanski

Crows

Open Area: Statewide

Fall Season Opens: Aug. 10

Closes: Oct. 20

Spring Season Opens: March 8, 2014

Closes: April 20, 2014

Daily Limit: There is no limit on crows.

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

In addition to the crow season, crows may be taken when committing or about to commit depredations as specified in federal law (50CFR21.43)

Snipe

Open Area: Statewide

Opens: Sept. 14

Closes: Dec. 1

Daily Limit: 8

Possession Limit: 24

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Woodcock

Open Area: Statewide

Opens: Sept. 21

Closes: Nov. 4

Daily Limit: 3

Possession Limit: 9

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.



Common snipe are fairly abundant during a North Dakota fall, but few hunters pursue them.

CRAIG BIRNLE

FURBEARERS

For season details, refer to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, or the 2013-14 furbearer hunting and trapping guide.

Spring surveys indicate coyote, raccoon and skunk numbers increased statewide from 2012, with coyotes and skunks experiencing the largest increases in central North Dakota and raccoons increasing more dramatically in the eastern part of the state.

Numbers of all three species remain well above their long-term averages. Additionally, badgers remain relatively abundant statewide, with the higher numbers also in eastern North Dakota.

After experiencing the highest muskrat numbers in a decade during 2010-11, surveys show the population has now crashed statewide and is currently 84 percent below the 20-year average. Trappers and hunters were already feeling the effects of a declining population last season when the number of muskrats harvested was down 57 percent compared to the previous season. However, a late spring thaw may have contributed to some of the harvest decline.

Survey results are mixed for beavers, fox and mink depending on the region. All three furbearers are well below their long-term averages, although fox numbers are higher than in recent years. Central North Dakota has the largest numbers of these species.

Trappers and hunters harvested 55 bobcats, and hunters took 14 mountain lions last season, which was down 26 percent and 18 percent, respectively, compared to the previous season. Data and research suggests mountain lion numbers peaked in 2011-12, with fewer on the landscape this coming season.

Trappers will continue to have an opportunity to capture a fisher in eastern North Dakota this fall. The Game and Fish Department removed the trapping quota for fishers this year,

instead establishing a one-week season, with the bag limit still one fisher per trapper.

Hunters and trappers are reminded to review regulations and practice good hunter and trapper ethics while enjoying the pursuit of North Dakota furbearers.

Mountain Lions

Zone 1 (early) Opens: Aug. 30

Closes: Nov. 24

Zone 1 (late) Opens: Nov. 25

Closes: March 31, 2014

Zone 2 Opens: Aug. 30

Closes: March 31, 2014

There is a quota of 14 mountain lions in Zone 1 early season. If the quota is reached, the early season in Zone 1 will close immediately. The quota in the late season is seven lions. If that quota is reached, the late season in Zone 1 will close immediately.

There is no mountain lion harvest quota in Zone 2.

Mountain lions may be hunted statewide by residents using legal firearms or archery equipment during regular hunting hours. Beginning Nov. 25, mountain lions may also be hunted by pursuing with dogs. Cable devices and traps are not allowed. The limit is one lion per hunter per season. Kittens (lions with visible spots), or females accompanied by kittens, may not be taken. Any lion taken must be reported to the Department within 12 hours and the entire intact animal must be submitted for analysis. Legally taken animals will be returned to the hunter.

For more

information, see the North Dakota 2013-14 furbearer guide.

Fisher Trapping or Cable Devices

Opens: Nov. 25

Closes: Dec. 1

Fishers may be harvested by North Dakota residents only in the open area east of U.S. Highway 281 and ND Highway 4. The limit is one animal per trapper per season. Any fisher taken must be reported to the Department within 12 hours. The pelt must be removed from the carcass prior to presenting the animal to the Department for tagging. The carcass shall remain with the Department.

For more information, see the North Dakota 2013-14 furbearer guide.

Weasel Trapping

Opens: Oct. 26

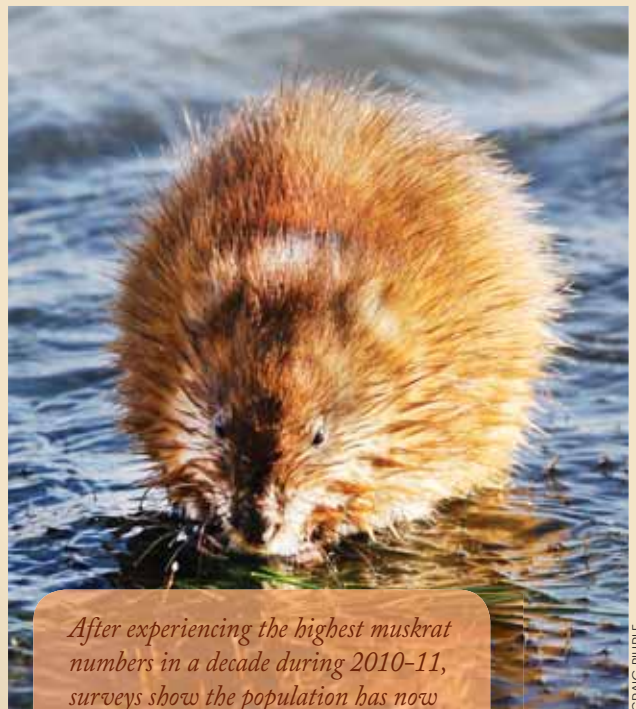
Closes: March 15, 2014

Weasel Hunting or Cable Devices

Opens: Nov. 25

Closes: March 15, 2014

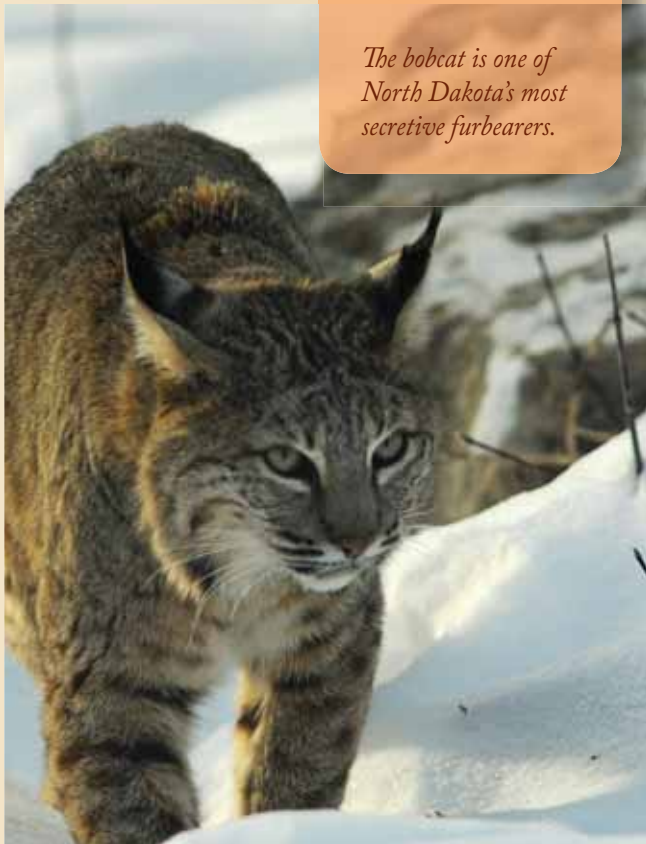
Weasels may be hunted statewide with .22 caliber rimfire rifles or pistols, muzzleloaders of .45 caliber or smaller, longbows and crossbows.



After experiencing the highest muskrat numbers in a decade during 2010-11, surveys show the population has now crashed statewide and is currently 84 percent below the 20-year average.

CRAIG BHRLE

The bobcat is one of North Dakota's most secretive furbearers.



CRAIG BIRHLE

smaller, longbows and crossbows.

Bobcat Hunting or Trapping

Opens: Nov. 9

Closes: March 15, 2014

Beginning Nov. 25, bobcats may also be hunted by pursuing with dogs.

Bobcat Cable Devices

Opens: Nov. 25

Closes: March 15, 2014

Open only in the area south and west of the Missouri River.

The pelt and carcass of each bobcat must be presented to Department personnel for inspection and tagging prior to sale or transfer of possession,

but no later than 14 days after the close of the season. No bobcat pelt will be tagged until the animal is skinned and presented with the intact carcass. The carcass shall remain property of the Department. No fur dealer shall possess or purchase an untagged bobcat.

For more information, see the North Dakota 2013-14 furbearer guide.

Red Fox, Gray Fox, Coyote and Badger Hunting or Trapping

Open year-round (Officially from April 1, 2013 – March 31, 2014)

In addition, red fox, gray fox and coyote may be hunted at any hour from Nov. 25, 2013, through March 15, 2014. Any hunter

who engages in the hunting of red fox, gray fox or coyote during the time from half-hour after sunset to half-hour before sunrise, must hunt exclusively on foot and use a predator call. The use of a spotlight or any other artificial light is prohibited.

Red Fox, Gray Fox, Coyote and Badger Cable Devices

Opens: Nov. 25

Closes: March 15, 2014

Beaver and Raccoon Hunting, Trapping or Underwater Cable Devices

Open year-round (Officially from April 1, 2013 – March 31, 2014)

For more information, see the North Dakota 2013-14 furbearer guide.

Beaver and Raccoon Cable Devices on Land

Opens: Nov. 25

Closes: April 30, 2014

From March 16, 2014, through April 30, 2014, cable devices must be within 50 feet of water; they must be no more than 4 inches off the ground and they must have a stop restricting loop size to 12 or less inches in diameter.

Beaver dams may be dismantled when their presence causes property damage.

Muskrat and Mink Trapping or Cable Devices

Opens: Nov. 25

Closes: April 30, 2014

Muskrat huts may be opened for insertion of traps or cable devices; however, the huts must be restored to their approximate original condition to prevent freeze-up.

Beginning March 16, 2014, colony traps must be under at least 2 inches of water, and trapping or using cable devices on the outside of any muskrat house or structure of any size is prohibited. Traps may be placed completely inside a muskrat house or structure of any size. Foothold traps must have at least 2 inches of water over the entire trap pan or must have a protective covering. Body-gripping traps and cable devices used in water can have no more than 2 inches of the trap or cable above the water or must have a protective covering.

Muskrat and Mink Hunting

Opens: Nov. 25

Closes: April 30, 2014

Mink and muskrat may be hunted statewide with .22 caliber rimfire rifles or pistols, muzzleloaders of .45 caliber or



CRAIG BIRHLE

Spring surveys indicate raccoon numbers increased statewide from 2012, especially in the eastern part of the state.

THE FUTURE OF PLOTS

*North Dakota Game and Fish Department
Private Land Open To Sportsmen tracts
are popular with all ranks of hunters, from
waterfowlers, to deer hunters, to those who pursue
upland game.*





By Kevin Kading

Photos by Renae Heinle

The landscape is changing in North Dakota. As the agency responsible for managing the state's wildlife, the Game and Fish Department is concerned over the loss of habitat in the state.

Elsewhere in the magazine, within the hunting season outlook, you will read about how this habitat loss, including expired Conservation Reserve Program contracts, wetland drainage and conversion of native grassland to cropland, is influencing wildlife populations.

When you head out into the countryside this fall, most hunters will also likely notice further fallout from habitat changes: fewer places to hunt. This is especially evident for Private Land Open To Sportsmen acres in 2013, as the program features its fewest acres since 2004, and is down nearly a quarter-million acres in just the last two years.

Much of this acreage loss is directly related to the return of CRP grasslands to cropland, as thousands of contracts have expired over the past five years. If the expiring CRP is also enrolled in the PLOTS program, the PLOTS contract also expires. And in the last two years Game and Fish has lost about 250,000 acres of CRP from PLOTS.

Statewide since 2007, CRP acres have fallen from 3.4 million acres to 1.5 million acres. Coupled with increased conversion of native grasslands and wetland resources, it's clear that North Dakota's habitat base is under tremendous pressure.

If this trend continues, access to quality habitat for hunters will decline along with wildlife populations.

PLOTS Changes

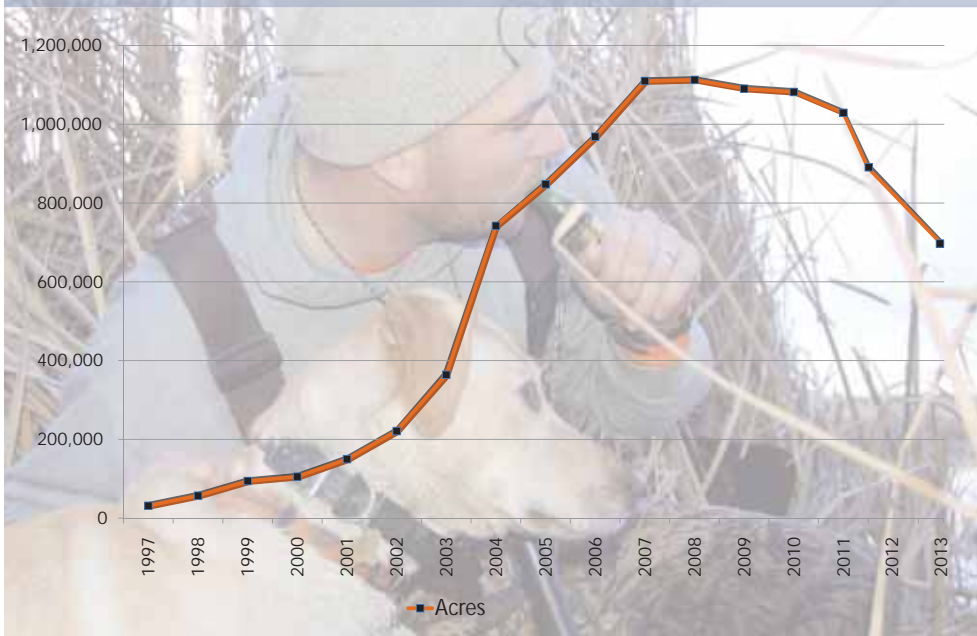
This fall, 760,000 acres are available in the PLOTS program, down from a peak of about 1.1 million acres from 2008-10. About half of that was high-quality CRP habitat. That number is closer to 250,000 CRP acres in PLOTS today.

There is still a lot of interest in PLOTS from producers, and Game and Fish could readily add more non-CRP acres to the program, but the trade-off would often be accepting a tract with less habitat, in a part of the state with fewer options for multiple species.

As CRP contracts expire, producers are faced with options to re-enroll land back into CRP, or return to active crop production. In most cases, the financial decision is simple, as CRP rental payments don't compete with cash rents in today's agricultural world. In other cases, many producers have tried to enroll or re-enroll CRP in two open signups in the past two years, but were not accepted. It's important to understand the circumstances that landowners face.

If all current CRP contracts in North Dakota are left to expire, and no new acres are enrolled over the next five years, the state will have fewer than 1 million acres in CRP on opening day of pheasant season in 2018. In a worst case scenario, the number of acres enrolled in PLOTS could fall to around 200,000 by that time. That may seem like a startling prediction, but hunters need to be aware that this landscape change in North Dakota is the most dramatic since the arrival of the first settlers and their horse-drawn plows.

ANNUAL PLOTS ACRES



Both the graph (above) and photograph (below) are, unfortunately, signs of the times as PLOTS acres continue to decline in North Dakota. The photograph shows signs taken from PLOTS tracts that expired in southeastern North Dakota in 2012.



Expectations, PLOTS Priorities

The Department's PLOTS program has been around since the late 1990s, and most hunters are familiar with the triangular yellow signs. They expect at least some good habitat on these areas when they arrive to hunt. If the current trend continues, the PLOTS program will not be able to sustain the quality habitat the hunting public demands.

PLOTS originally came along in response to CRP and the pheasant population increase that followed. As CRP acreage expanded, so did PLOTS acreage. Over time, the program branched out into other parts of the state that were not traditional pheasant country.

PLOTS tracts eventually included badlands, crop fields for waterfowl hunting, and woody draws and native pastures for white-tailed deer and sharp-tailed grouse. Hunters liked all

these options, but the priority of the PLOTS program has always been CRP acres and pheasant hunting opportunities in North Dakota's primary pheasant range.

Department surveys show that pheasants are still the most sought after species on PLOTS. If tougher times are coming over the next five years, and the PLOTS program is to maintain quality pheasant hunting, Game and Fish, in conjunction with state hunters, may have to make choices about where to direct existing funds.

For instance, should Game and Fish reduce PLOTS funding from parts of the state where pheasants are not a primary species, to provide more funding to secure more CRP tracts or other habitat in the main pheasant range?

Put another way, as a hunter, would you rather have 250,000 PLOTS acres, all tied to good quality CRP habitat in the pheasant range, or 1 million PLOTS acres distributed around the state that provide access, but not the same type of quality hunting prospects?

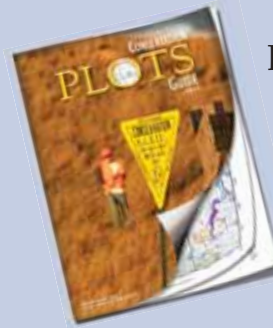
Surveys point to loss of access as one of the key reasons that hunters drop from the ranks. While Game and Fish has always encouraged hunters to develop contact with private landowners and not rely solely on PLOTS acres, we know that most hunters find themselves on PLOTS tracts one or more times in a given fall.

While the access is important, the quality of those acres must be good enough so that the hunting public will continue its support.

North Dakota is at a crossroads with habitat changes, but there are still opportunities to address the problem, but it will take money, time and energy from hunters to do so.

Now more than ever, hunters need to rise to the occasion and help protect the things we enjoy.

KEVIN KADING is the Game and Fish Department's private land section leader.



PLOTS Guide Available Online

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen Guide for 2013 is available online at the Department's website, gf.nd.gov. In addition, PLOTS

Guides are available at most license vendors throughout the state.

The guide will feature about 760,000 PLOTS acres. Because the guide is printed in mid-August, some PLOTS tracts highlighted in the guide may have been removed from the program since the time of printing. There will also be some PLOTS tracts where the habitat and condition of the tract will have changed significantly. Conversely, Game and Fish may have added new tracts to the program after the guide went to press.

To minimize possible confusion, Game and Fish will update PLOTS map sheets weekly on its website.

The PLOTS Guide features maps highlighting these walk-in areas, identified in the field by inverted triangular yellow signs, as well as other public lands.

In addition, a one-page advertisement announces a photo contest for the cover of the 2014 PLOTS Guide. For more information on the contest, see the Buffaloberry Patch section in this magazine.

PLOTS Guides are free, and available at county auditor offices and license vendors in the state; by walk-in at the Game and Fish Department's Bismarck office; and at district offices in Riverdale, Harvey (Lonetree), Williston, Dickinson, Jamestown and Devils Lake.

The guides are not available to mail, so hunters will have to pick one up at a local vendor, or print individual maps from the website.





BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor

2012 Deer Bow Statistics

North Dakota bowhunters compiled what is likely a record archery deer harvest during the 2012 season.

The Game and Fish Department issued 19,940 resident and 2,336 nonresident bow licenses last year, 245 more than the previous record bow license sales in 2010. Approximately 19,300 of those license buyers actually hunted, taking an estimated 6,856 deer, for an overall hunter success rate of 35.4 percent.

The total harvest included 6,440 whitetails and 416 mule deer. About 71 percent of the whitetail harvest was adult bucks, and 96 percent of the mule deer taken were adult bucks.

“As an agency, we are not surprised by the high number of archery hunters during a season in which deer gun license numbers were down considerably from previous years,” said Randy Kreil, Game and Fish Department wildlife chief. “Based on the high success rate, the archery harvest may become a significant factor in future deer management, particularly if habitat conditions continue to deteriorate and deer populations remain low.”

The 2013 archery deer season started August 30 and runs through January 5, 2014.



RON WILSON

AGENCIES PROHIBIT HUNTING OVER BAIT

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

The governor's proclamation relating to chronic wasting disease also includes a provision that prohibits hunting big game over bait on both public and private land in deer units 3E1, 3E2, 3F1, 3F2 and 3C west of the Missouri River.

In addition, any firearms, equipment or accessories used by hunters on Private Land Open To Sportsmen acreage may not be left unattended and must be removed when the hunter leaves the area. This includes, but is not limited to, guns, blinds, stands, baits, scents and decoys. This means a hunter cannot place bait on PLOTS prior to or during the season and leave it there. Any bait would have to be brought to the PLOTS with the hunter the same day and taken out with the hunter the same day he/she leaves.

Hunting over bait is defined as the placement and/or use of baits for attracting big game and other wildlife to a specific location for the purpose of hunting. Bait, in this case, includes grain, seed, mineral, salt, fruit, vegetable nut, hay or any other natural or manufactured food placed by an individual. Bait does not include agricultural practices, gardens, wildlife food plots, agricultural crops, livestock feeds, fruit or vegetables in their natural location such as apples on or under an apple tree, or unharvested food or vegetables in a garden.

ELECTRONIC LICENSE REMINDER

Bowhunters are reminded that this year for the first time, deer bow licenses and accompanying tags are only available through electronic purchase.

Licenses can be purchased either online at the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov; by calling (800) 406-6409; or at license vendors in counties that are linked to the Game and Fish Department's online licensing system.

In counties that are not on the Game and Fish system, deer bow licenses will not be available at the usual license vendors. In addition, hunters who purchase bow licenses online from a personal computer should allow for several days to receive their tag in the mail.

For a current list of county auditors and all their authorized license vendors that are part of the Game and Fish Department electronic licensing system, refer to the Department's website.

Record Number of Walleye Stocked

Excellent walleye fingerling production from the Garrison Dam (9.7 million) and Valley City (1.3 million) national fish hatcheries resulted in a record 11 million walleye fingerlings stocked into state waters this summer.

Jerry Weigel, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries production and development section leader, said with a record number of walleye waters across the state, there has never been a larger demand for walleye production. "We are fortunate to have the production capability of the two federal hatcheries to help address this demand," he said.

Altogether, 110 lakes and rivers were stocked in North Dakota, including 4.3 million fingerlings in Lake Sakakawea, 863,000 in Stump Lake, 495,000 in Lake Darling,



ASHLEY SALUWEY

329,000 in Lake Ashtabula, 321,000 in Heart Butte Reservoir, 218,000 in Paterson Lake, 205,000 in Bowman-Haley Reservoir and 200,000 in Lake Metigoshe.

"There has never been a better time to fish for walleye," Weigel added. "Statewide, there are a lot of great opportunities, and a very good chance of success."

Big Game Transport Rules

Hunters are reminded of requirements for transporting deer, elk and moose carcasses and carcass parts into and within North Dakota as a precaution against the possible spread of chronic wasting disease.

Hunters harvesting a big game animal this fall in North Dakota deer unit 3F2 cannot transport a carcass containing the head and spinal column outside of the unit unless it's taken directly to a meat processor. The head can be removed from the carcass and transported outside the unit if it is to be submitted to a State Game and Fish Department district office, CWD surveillance drop-off location or a licensed taxidermist.

If the deer is processed in the field to boned meat, and the hunter wants to leave the head in the field, the head must be legally tagged and the hunter must be able to return to or give

the exact location of the head if requested for verification.

In addition, hunting big game over bait is prohibited in deer units 3E1, 3E2, 3F1, 3F2 and 3C west of the Missouri River.

Hunters are prohibited from transporting into North Dakota the whole carcass, or certain carcass parts, of deer, elk, moose or other members of the cervid family from areas within states and provinces with documented occurrences of CWD in wild populations, or from farmed cervid operations within states and provinces that have had farmed cervids diagnosed with CWD.

Only the following portions of the carcass can be transported:

- Meat that is cut and wrapped either commercially or privately.
- Quarters or other portions of meat with

no part of the spinal column or head attached.

- Meat that has been boned out.
- Hides with no heads attached.
- Clean (no meat or tissue attached) skull plates with antlers attached.
- Antlers with no meat or tissue attached.
- Upper canine teeth, also known as buglers, whistlers or ivories.
- Finished taxidermy heads.

Hunters should refer to the 2013-14 CWD proclamation on the Game and Fish Department's website, gf.nd.gov, for game management units, equivalent wildlife management units, or counties in other states that have had free-ranging deer, moose or elk diagnosed with CWD. Importation of harvested elk, white-tailed deer, mule deer, moose or other cervids from listed areas are restricted.



FALL TURKEY LICENSES

The fall turkey lottery is scheduled for mid-September. Any remaining licenses will be issued on a first-come, first-served basis. Hunters are allowed a maximum of 15 licenses for the fall season.

Refer to the Game and Fish website in late September for more information on the application process for remaining licenses, including an update of licenses available.

PLOTS Photo Contest

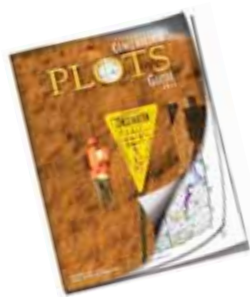
A photo contest will decide the cover of the 2014 Private Land Open To Sportsmen Guide.

From end-of-day hunting shots, to scenic action or landscape shots, the Game and Fish Department wants to feature hunter photos on the 2014 PLOTS cover and elsewhere that showcase North Dakota's strong hunting heritage.

The Department's free PLOTS Guide, which highlights walk-in hunting areas across the state, was first published in 1999.

The only real contest guideline is that photos must include a PLOTS sign, front-facing or silhouette.

The contest deadline is April 30, 2014. Log on to the Game and Fish Department's website, gf.nd.gov, to learn more about contest prizes, rules and entry information.



HIP for Migratory Bird Hunters

All migratory game bird hunters, regardless of age, are reminded that Harvest Information Program registration is required starting September 1.

HIP certification is required for hunting ducks, geese, swans, mergansers, coots, cranes, snipe, doves or woodcock. Mike Johnson, Game and Fish Department game management section leader, said HIP registration provides the Department with a database of names and addresses of migratory bird hunters, and a sample of these hunters will receive a questionnaire regarding hunting activity and number of birds harvested.

"This information allows us to make sound decisions concerning hunting seasons, bag limits and population management," Johnson said. "Hunter compliance is essential in order to obtain reliable estimates of the annual harvest of all migratory game bird species."

Hunters who purchase a license through the Department's electronic licensing system (gf.nd.gov) or instant licensing telephone number at (800) 406-6409 can easily get HIP certified.

Otherwise, hunters can access the Game and Fish website, or call (888) 634-4798 and record the HIP number on their fishing, hunting and furbearer certificate.

Those who registered to hunt the spring light goose season in North Dakota do not have to register with HIP again, as it is required only once per year. However, hunters must HIP register in each state for which they are licensed before hunting migratory game birds.



CRAIG BIRLE

SANDHILL CRANE PERMITS

Hunting permits for North Dakota's 2013 sandhill crane season, opening September 14, are available from the Game and Fish Department.

As in past years, prospective hunters need a crane permit, regardless of age. The permit cost \$5 and is available through the Game and Fish Department's Bismarck office.

Hunters can purchase their crane permit

online on the Department's website, gf.nd.gov. Another option is to send the permit fee, along with personal information, including height, weight, social security number, date of birth, color of hair and eyes, and hunter education number and state issued, to Crane Permit, NDGF, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501.



CRAIG BHIRLE

Hunting Signs Available

“Ask Before You Enter” and “Walking Hunters Welcome” signs are available to North Dakota landowners who encourage hunting on their land.

Landowners can order quantities of four, eight or 12. The signs are free and sponsored by the North Dakota Landowner-Sportsman Council.

To order, contact the North Dakota Game and Fish Department at (701) 328-6300, or email ndgf@nd.gov. Signs can also be ordered or printed online at the Department’s website, gf.nd.gov.



CRAIG BHIRLE

NORTH DAKOTA RECORD FISHING LICENSE SALES

Years of rising water, a record number of fishing lakes and aggressive fish management in North Dakota have helped produce a record number of anglers.

Greg Power, Game and Fish Department fisheries chief, said virtually every license category established a record high in 2012-13, or at the least had a substantial increase. “Even more impressive, this was spread throughout the state, and not just in the rapidly growing counties of western North Dakota,” he said.

Game and Fish Department statistics revealed more than 218,000 fishing licenses were sold last year, 20 percent higher than the previous record set in 1982. A total of 159,500 resident fishing licenses were sold last year, also breaking the record set 30 years ago. In addition, nearly 59,000 nonresident fishing licenses were purchased last year, easily surpassing the previous high set two years ago.

“North Dakota remains near the top in the country in terms of per capita residents who fish,” Power said.

In terms of actual individuals participating in fishing, the past year was again record-setting with more than 200,000 active anglers and about 2 million days of fishing. Both open water and ice fishing activity experienced substantial increases. Lake Sakakawea, Devils Lake and Lake Oahe/Missouri River remained the top three fisheries in the state.

PHOTO CONTEST DEADLINE

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

Contest entries are limited to digital files submitted on disk or via email. 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 photo-contest@nd.gov.

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.

Full contest rules were published in the July 2013 issue of this magazine. They are also available at gf.nd.gov.



**White-tailed deer fawn
photo taken at
Lostwood National Wildlife Refuge
by Steve Oehlenschlager**



WATERFOWL HUNTERS

ANS

**AQUATIC
NUISANCE
SPECIES**



LAWS NOW IN PLACE

Remove plants and plant fragments from decoys, strings and anchors.

Remove plant seeds and plant fragments from waders, other equipment and dogs before leaving hunting areas.



Remove all aquatic plants from boats and trailers before leaving a marsh or lake. (Does not include cattails or bulrushes used for camouflaging boats.)

Remove all water from decoys, boats, motors, trailers and other watercraft.

**ANS CAN SEVERELY DEGRADE
WATERFOWL HABITAT AND
FISHING WATERS**

NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
100 North Bismarck Expressway
Bismarck, ND 58501-5095

(701) 328-6300
Email: ndgf@nd.gov
Web: gf.nd.gov



back cast

By Ron Wilson



ASHLEY SALWEY

My retriever's face is growing white, and his older running mate, a pointer, has a slight hitch in his step, sort of a limp if you watch closely, that comes and goes depending on the day.

Now that I consider it, that's how either dog would likely describe their owner if they were able and asked to do so.

Don't misunderstand. We're still game and in better than decent shape. It's just that if we were forced to take stock as another hunting season nears, this is what we'd see.

Wildlife biologists, on the other hand, examine upcoming seasons differently, blending science, trends, numbers, gut feelings and other ingredients to make the most honest appraisals possible of what hunters can expect.

Yet, no matter their predictions, good or otherwise, we take to the prairie each autumn with renewed urgency. Sometime in August, despite the arrival of the hottest temperatures of summer, we start gearing up for fall, talk about the sharp-tailed grouse opener and other seasons that will follow, and summon memories of hunting trips past.

On a gorgeous big-blue-sky morning in late September in 2012, the kind of morning you wish you could bottle and uncork on demand when the weather turns down the road, my dogs run noisy hot laps around the vehicle while we fill water bottles and dump shotgun shells into vest pockets. They whine and whimper as if their carrying-on will send us over the barbed-wire fence and into the field that much quicker.

What little wind there is this morning, it eases in from the northwest, lightly brushing the boot-high grasses and cattail heads the color of pancakes. We shoulder shotguns, point our noses into the breeze

and let the dogs work.

It's two weeks since the opener and we've worried this piece of property more than once, working the edge of a mostly dried wetland during the heat of the day and the shorter grasses on mornings like this one. I don't know how many birds we've taken from here so far this season because we haven't been counting. But I do know that we've yet to circle, weave and wander in this barbed-wire square without pulling triggers at least once apiece.

You'd think the grouse would have us figured out by now, go on full alert when we park the vehicle, slam doors and climb the squeaky fence.

As it goes most often, the pointer figures things out first, catching the scent of birds hiding somewhere upwind. After creeping for a handful of yards, he stops hard, as if his next step would take him over a cliff.

The grass in places isn't tall or thick enough to hide a pop can, certainly not a handful of grouse. But the pointer, with a front leg lifted from the ground, "tells" us the birds are there and to trust him.

This is one of the best parts of the hunt. Even with the early warning from a red-and-white-haired dog on point, it's impossible to fully calm yourself, to slow a racing heart in anticipation of what happens next.

A half-dozen birds flush in a confusion of clucks and beating wings. Shotguns are fired and the number of hulls smoking just briefly in the short grass at our feet outnumber the birds that have fallen to the ground with an audible thump.

By day's end, season's end, we'll wade into this situation a number of times more, with the results varying. The one constant is our attendance no matter the forecast, no matter the year.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

A Look Back

By Ron Wilson

If you're a ruffed grouse hunter, the birds spread across the trunk of the car in this 60-year-old photo is what catches your envious eye.

Ruffed grouse hunters in North Dakota today, and there are only about 1,000 of them most autumns, would be the first to tell you how tough it is to flush a limit of grouse in the Turtle Mountains or Pembina Hills, let alone shoot a limit. According to Game and Fish Department statistics, the harvest average for the last several years is about one to two birds per hunter.

The hunters in this black and white photo are Ernest Sarrazin and his son, Gary. The ruffed grouse were shot in the Pembina Hills.

The photo was taken by the late Ed Bry, longtime editor of

North Dakota OUTDOORS and Department game warden before that. Bry became a warden in 1949 and worked closely with the elder Sarrazin.

Bry wrote: "My first trip into the Pembina Hills was with a veteran warden ... We went to Walhalla and met Ernest Sarrazin who was concerned with all the violations and volunteered to help, serving as a special warden with no salary. That evening we went out into the sandhills and it wasn't long until we saw a vehicle driving a trail with spotlight working the fields and timber. We made chase but lost contact on a winding road through the hills. The first deer shiner I had ever seen escaped."

In an article in 1953, Bry touted the value of ruffed grouse to readers of the *OUTDOORS*:

"The ruffed grouse is a game bird well worth hunting. He offers a type of hunting that no other bird can provide. When it comes to eating, the ruffed is king of all. The eating quality is so good that it causes one to wonder how a diet of berries, leaves, seeds and buds can create such wonderful meat."

Back in the early 1950s, it appears Bry, Sarrazin and others shot plenty of birds for the pot. "I was fortunate to have been able to go on some good grouse hunts this last fall ... Four of us hunted along the Little North River west of Walhalla. We only bagged seven, but if we had gotten our limit I don't believe we would have had any more fun."

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.