

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

For 20 years now, the February issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* has carried a recap of the deer license lottery drawing results. It started back in 1994 as way to keep hunters informed as to how the new “preference point” system applied to the deer license lottery was working.

It’s a popular article that many hunters pore over with a fine-tooth comb to see how their luck in the license drawing compares with statistical averages in all the units.

Game and Fish implemented the current point system for the first time for the 1993 deer gun season lottery drawing as a response to increasing hunter demand for doing something different that would more fairly distribute high-demand licenses. That is the same type of input Game and Fish is receiving these days as we are coming off a season with the fewest licenses available in three decades, and a high number of potential hunters who were not able to get a gun season license.

The circumstances were a little different 20 years ago. Most of the feedback related to mule deer buck licenses, which at the time were managed with a one-year waiting period for hunters, which meant if you got a mule deer buck license one year, you couldn’t even apply for a mule deer buck license the next year.

Over time, however, so many hunters started applying for mule deer licenses that one could expect to beat the odds on average only about once every four or five years. With generally a growing whitetail population in much of the state, and increasing hunter interest, by the early 1990s the Department started to hear about licensing issues in other units as more people applied for buck licenses. All of a sudden, people who were accustomed to getting a buck license every year were occasionally getting turned down.

The Game and Fish Department, and North Dakota hunters, are experiencing a somewhat similar situation now. The root cause is that North Dakota has significantly fewer deer than it did even six years ago, when Game and Fish issued a record number of

licenses. Even then, not everyone could get a buck license in their unit of choice, but in 2013 we were looking at thousands of prospective deer hunters who did not get a buck or doe license in any unit.

And so, we are hearing from a lot of concerned deer hunters. They are concerned about low deer numbers, and they are concerned about allocation of licenses that are available.

Already last fall, we started talking internally about how we might address some of those concerns about licenses. Of course, we are also talking about how to improve the deer population as well, but that is more of a long-term strategy while license allocation is something that could be done as early as this year, depending on the option.

Instead of addressing this complicated issue in-depth at the regular fall district advisory meetings, we decided to hold a series of focused “deer management” meetings across the state this winter. Those meetings will take place later this month, starting on February 17. The complete schedule is listed on page 6 of this issue.

We are hoping for good public participation at these meetings, and for anyone who cannot attend we are going to provide a version of our presentation on our website. We are also encouraging comments and questions via email, phone, letter or online form well into March.

We’ll need to make a decision by April 1 on whether we are going to make any changes, and if we are, whether we can accomplish them in 2014, or would have to wait until next year.

We need public participation to help us develop good policy. When we switched to the preference point system 20 years ago, it actually took two years from the time we first started looking at options for change, until we identified what we thought was the best solution for the long term.

I encourage everyone who has an interest in North Dakota deer hunting to attend one of our meetings, or let us know what you’re thinking.

Terry Steinwand

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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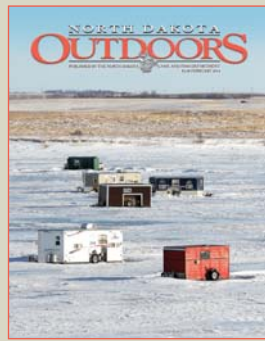
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Front Cover

Ice houses on Lake Audubon in McLean County.

Photo by Craig Bihrl.



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Deer Lottery

By Ron Wilson

KELLY KRABENHOF

Fewer mule deer buck licenses were available in 2013 compared to 2012, yet the number of hunters who applied for a buck license last fall went up.

A deer gun license was a tough draw in North Dakota in 2012. It was an even bigger deal to score one in 2013.

The Game and Fish Department made available just 59,500 licenses for the regular gun season last year – the lowest since 1983 and down from 109,550 in 2011.

In 2013, nearly 75,000 hunters applied for a regular deer gun season license, up from about 66,000 in 2012.

With mule deer showing signs of recovery, the Game and Fish Department continued to hold off from issuing mule deer doe licenses again in 2013 in eight badlands hunting units.

2013 was the first year since 2007 that the spring mule deer index was higher than the previous year, but still 22 percent lower than the long-term average. Game and Fish biologists attribute the rise, in part, to not harvesting antlerless mule deer in 2012.

Beginning in 2001 and lasting about a decade, getting a deer license in North Dakota wasn't that difficult as the Department made available more than 100,000 licenses to hunters. License numbers topped out at 149,400 in 2008, but later that year the first of three consecutive hard winters hit the state, making life difficult for deer and other wildlife game.

Team the weather with a steady decline in wildlife habitat on the landscape, and it's not surprising that deer license numbers fell to 1980s-like levels.

Randy Kreil, Department wildlife division chief, said it's difficult to imagine deer license numbers climbing above 100,000 again anytime soon, considering the loss of about 2 million Conservation Reserve Program acres, large-scale conversion of native grasslands and the destruction of miles and miles of tree belts.

"It wasn't that long ago hunters used accumulated bonus points in order to get a buck license," Kreil

said. "If we continue down this same path, however, bonus points will be needed to simply draw a deer license."

Randy Meissner, Department licensing manager, said drawing a buck license in North Dakota in 2013 wasn't easy. He said that after 14,118 gratis licenses and 595 nonresident licenses were deducted from the overall license allocation, only 20,905

buck licenses remained for the 62,654 hunters who applied for them as their first choice in the lottery.

And for the second year in a row, hunters in North Dakota were allowed only one license for the 2013 deer gun season.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

More hunters applied for deer licenses in North Dakota in 2013 than 2012.



How it Works

Despite fewer licenses in 2013, the lottery process did not change. Even so, with new hunters venturing afield every year, there are always questions concerning how the lottery system works. Using deer as the example, though turkey works the same way, here is a reminder.

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

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

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

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

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

2013 Turkey License Lottery Results

Percent of applicants who received their first choice of license in the 2013 spring turkey drawing.

LICENSE TYPE	POINTS									OVERALL
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
02 S	91.8	100	100							92.1
03 S	100	100								100
04 S	55	75								56.3
06 S	100									100
13 S	100	100	100							100
17 S	70.6	66.7								70.4
19 S	100	100								100
25 S	87.5	100								87.6
27 S	53.1	84.5	60							56.9
30 S	89.6	100	100							89.9
31 S	100									100
37 S	54.4	90.9	100	100						61.4
40 S	76.4	100								78.2
44 S	93.2	100								93.3
45 S	100	100								100
47 S	100	100								100
50 S	44.9	81.2	71.4	100						51.3
51 S	100	100								100
53 S	55.8	75		100						58.3
98 S	63.3	87.2								65.2
99 S	100	100								100

Percent of applicants who received their first choice of license in the 2013 fall turkey drawing.

LICENSE TYPE	POINTS									OVERALL
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
02 F	25	56.3	0							29.4
03 F	100									100
04 F	63.4	85.7								65
06 F	40.7									40.7
13 F	100	100								100
17 F	62.9	80	100							64.8
19 F	80.5	100								80.8
25 F	100	100								100
27 F	59.7	82.4	100							61.5
30 F	100									100
31 F	100									100
37 F	52.9	91								57.6
40 F	41.8	100								46.6
44 F	100	100								100
45 F	100									100
47 F	65	100								65.6
50 F	51.6	87.1								55
51 F	100									100
98 F	81.3	100								81.5
99 F	100									100

2013 Lottery Stats

- 59,500 deer licenses were available, down from 65,300 in 2012 and 109,550 in 2011.
- 1,150 mule deer buck licenses were available in 2013, down from 1,200 in 2012. Hunters who applied for these licenses increased from 7,009 in 2012 to 7,667 in 2013.
- 74,789 people applied for deer gun season licenses, up from 66,042 in 2012.
- 62,654 applicants applied for buck licenses as their first choice; 20,905 buck licenses were available in the drawing after 14,118 gratis and 595 nonresident licenses were withheld. There were no doe licenses available for the drawing in units 2A, 3A1 and 3B1 after gratis licenses were withdrawn, making it the second time that gratis licenses took all the licenses of a particular type.
- All buck licenses were issued in the first unit/first choice drawing.
- The highest number of points accumulated by any hunter in the 2013 drawing was 12.
- 5,828 applicants had four or more bonus points, and 1,627 drew their first license choice.
- Applicants who applied for a mule deer buck license accounted for 23 percent of applicants with four or more bonus points, and those applying for a muzzleloader buck accounted for an additional 63 percent.
- The number of people with four or more bonus points increased again this year from 3,737 to 5,007, reflecting the lower number of licenses available in the drawing. Allowing hunters to sit out a year without losing their bonus points also contributed to this increase.
- A buck license in 3A1 was the most difficult license to draw, with more than 20 times more applicants than licenses available. A muzzleloader buck license was a close second, with almost 20 times more applicants than licenses.
- There was no pronghorn season again in 2013.
- 5,930 spring turkey licenses were available in 2013, while 5,745 were available in 2012. The number of applicants increased from 5,710 in 2012 to 6,476 in 2013.
- The number of fall turkey licenses available in 2013 decreased from 4,145 to 4,020. The number of applicants increased from 2,964 in 2012 to 3,482 in 2013.



CRAIG BIRRE

2013 Deer License Lottery Results

Percent of applicants who received their first choice of license in the 2013 deer drawing.

POINTS												POINTS											
LICENSE TYPE	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	OVERALL	LICENSE TYPE	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	OVERALL		
1 A Any Buck	40.4	78	77.8	100	100					52.9	3C A Any Buck	7.4	20.5	41.9	48.8	100	100				20.3		
1 B Any Doe	98.3	100	100							98.4	3C B Any Doe	84.7	100	100	100							87.6	
2A A Any Buck	3.8	12.7	14.6	21.7	84.6			100		10.4	3C C WT Buck	66.3	94.7	94.2	95.2	100	100	100				73.5	
2A B Any Doe	0	0	0	0	0					0	3C D WT Doe	98	100	100	100							98.3	
2B A Any Buck	15.3	41.4	49.1	75	100	100	100			25.2	3D1 A Any Buck	9.3	35.5	55.4	62.5	100						27.3	
2B B Any Doe	88.1	85.6	81.8	100						87.8	3D1 B Any Doe	97.6	100	100								97.8	
2C A Any Buck	11.1	30.8	54.3	80	100					20.6	3D1 C WT Buck	71.2	100	100	100							81.1	
2C B Any Doe	91.7	96.2	100	100						92.3	3D1 D WT Doe	100										100	
2D A Any Buck	37.2	77.2	100	100						47.2	3D2 A Any Buck	3.3	10.8	13.5	23.2	75		100				10.4	
2D B Any Doe	97.8	100								97.9	3D2 B Any Doe	90.3	92.3	66.7		100						90.1	
2E A Any Buck	5.8	15.7	23.6	39.5	100	100	100			12.8	3D2 C WT Buck	18.6	31	53.8	100	100	100					28.2	
2E B Any Doe	90.2	86	100	100		100				89.9	3D2 D WT Doe	94.1	100	100								95.7	
2F1 A Any Buck	43.7	85.4	100	100	100					55.4	3E1 A Any Buck	16.4	48.1	68.6	68.2	100	100					29.6	
2F1 B Any Doe	97.9	100	100							98.1	3E1 B Any Doe	96.6	85.7		100	100						95.8	
2F2 A Any Buck	17	41.8	68.1	73.7	100					29.1	3E1 C WT Buck	67.1	100	100	100							73.6	
2F2 B Any Doe	92.3	88.2	100							92.1	3E1 D WT Doe	100	100									100	
2G A Any Buck	11.1	38.7	45.6	33.3	100					23.4	3E2 A Any Buck	37.1	83.6	91.4	92.9	100	100					51.9	
2G B Any Doe	86.8	100	75							87.9	3E2 B Any Doe	93.8	100	100								94.3	
2G1 A Any Buck	8.1	26.9	37.7	49.2	100					19.3	3E2 C WT Buck	94.2	100	100	100	100						94.9	
2G1 B Any Doe	86.7	86.7	93.8	100						86.9	3E2 D WT Doe	100	100									100	
2G2 A Any Buck	13.4	38.2	63.9	79.5	100					28.3	3F1 A Any Buck	24.7	70.5	82.5	100	100						39.4	
2G2 B Any Doe	91.4	95.8	87.5	100						91.9	3F1 B Any Doe	93.1	100	100	100							93.8	
2H A Any Buck	30.7	63.4	82.6	93.9	100	100	100			46.5	3F1 C WT Buck	98.2	100	100								98.3	
2H B Any Doe	100	94.4	100							99.5	3F1 D WT Doe	100										100	
2I A Any Buck	18.2	46.4	58.3	72.3	100					32.9	3F2 A Any Buck	27.9	64.6	83.5	100	100	100					43.6	
2I B Any Doe	92.8	94.4	100	100						93	3F2 B Any Doe	97.2	100			100						97.4	
2J1 A Any Buck	6.1	13.9	22.3	39.7	97.3	100	100			19.9	3F2 C WT Buck	98.8	100	100	100	100						98.9	
2J1 B Any Doe	90.5	100	100	100	100					92.6	3F2 D WT Doe	95.7	100									96	
2J2 A Any Buck	26.7	60.7	79.8	100	100	100				40.7	4A C WT Buck	14.4	22.2	45.2	64.7	100		100				28.2	
2J2 B Any Doe	95	100	100	100						95.5	4A D WT Doe	100	100	100	100							100	
2K1 A Any Buck	9.6	28.7	43.1	52.8	97.4	90	100			25	4A E MD Buck	1.7	2	4.5	10.7	55.2	89.5	100	100			12.2	
2K1 B Any Doe	93.9	96.4	88.9	100						94.1	4B C WT Buck	24	55.6	83.3	80	100						40.8	
2K2 A Any Buck	19	46	61	77.1	100	100				32.8	4B D WT Doe	91.7	100	66.7								90.5	
2K2 B Any Doe	98.9	100	100	100	100					99	4B E MD Buck	0.6	2	1.6	5.3	27.3	58.3	66.7	100			7.6	
2L A Any Buck	45.1	81.3	91.7	100						51.8	4C C WT Buck	42.4	67.4	66.7	100	100						52	
2L B Any Doe	97.3	100	100							97.4	4C D WT Doe	100	100	100	100							100	
3A1 A Any Buck	0.8	1.3	3.3	4.4	38.9	46.2	100			4.6	4C E MD Buck	0.2	1.1	0.6	2.8	16.9	37	56.8	100	0		7.3	
3A1 B Any Doe*	0	0	0	0	0	0				0	4D C WT Buck	69.5	95.5	75	25	100	100					74.9	
3A2 A Any Buck	37.7	76.1	88.4	100	100	100				50.8	4D D WT Doe	90.5	100									91.3	
3A2 B Any Doe	99.3	96.6	100							99.1	4D E MD Buck	1	1.8	3.1	6	28.4	45.5		66.7			6.9	
3A3 A Any Buck	4.3	10.8	20.9	25.8	89.8	100	100			15.8	4E C WT Buck	89.8	94.4	75	100							90.3	
3A3 B Any Doe	90.4	91.9	87	50	100					90.1	4E D WT Doe	100										100	
3A4 A Any Buck	27.8	60.6	78.1	88.6	100	100				41.3	4E E MD Buck	1.5	12.2	10.4	20.9	92.9	75					13.7	
3A4 B Any Doe	96.6	100	100	100						96.9	4F C WT Buck	92.9	100	100	100							94.3	
3B1 C WT Buck	0.6	3.8	5.6	12.6	68.4	92.3	100			9.6	4F D WT Doe	93.3	100	100								95.2	
3B1 D WT Doe	0	0	0	0		0				0	4F E MD Buck	13.4	28.6	50	87.5	100						28.6	
3B1 E MD Buck	4.9	22.6	18.8	44.4	90	100			0	16.8	MUZ C WT Buck	0.2	0.5	0.5	1.1	9.4	17.5	28.9	38.1	77.8		5.1	
3B2 C WT Buck	22.6	52.5	71	100	100	100				36.8	MUZ D WT Doe	41.4	80	92.9	100	100	100					55.9	
3B2 D WT Doe	93.8	100	100	100						94.6													
3B2 E MD Buck	18.4	35.4	57.1	75	100	100				28.6													
3B3 A Any Buck	7	21	34.1	38.5	100		100			19													
3B3 B Any Doe	82.3	100								83.7													
3B3 C WT Buck	61.6	92.8	100	100	100	100	100			69													
3B3 D WT Doe	97.2	100								97.3													

Series of 2014 February Deer Meetings 7 p.m. Local Time

Devils Lake
Lake Region
Community College
Auditorium

Feb.
17

Casselton
City Fire Hall

Feb.
17

Dickinson
Ramada Grand
Dakota Lodge

Feb.
18

Anamoose
VFW Club

Feb.
18

Tioga
Farm Festival
Building

Feb.
24

Fordville
Community
Center

Feb.
24

Bismarck
North Dakota
Game and Fish
Department

Feb.
25

Jamestown
The Bunker

Feb.
25

Deer Management Meetings to Explore License Distribution Options

North Dakota deer hunters will have a chance to provide input on how the State Game and Fish Department should distribute deer licenses in the future.

The Game and Fish Department has scheduled eight public meetings in February to discuss deer population status and future management, and part of that discussion is whether the agency should change its current process for allocating licenses, and if so, what options make the most sense.

License distribution is on the drawing board because the state's deer population has gone from an all-time high to a 30-year low in just the last six years.

Game and Fish reduced its deer gun season license allocation from nearly 150,000 in 2008, to 59,500 in 2013. Interest in deer hunting, however, hasn't changed much.

Even during the deer population peak, Game and Fish couldn't provide enough buck licenses for everyone who wanted one. But whitetail doe licenses were readily available, and pretty much any one of the 100,000 or so potential deer hunters in North Dakota could have received one or more doe licenses in a unit fairly close to home.

"Most hunters understand that they may have to make sacrifices while we work to

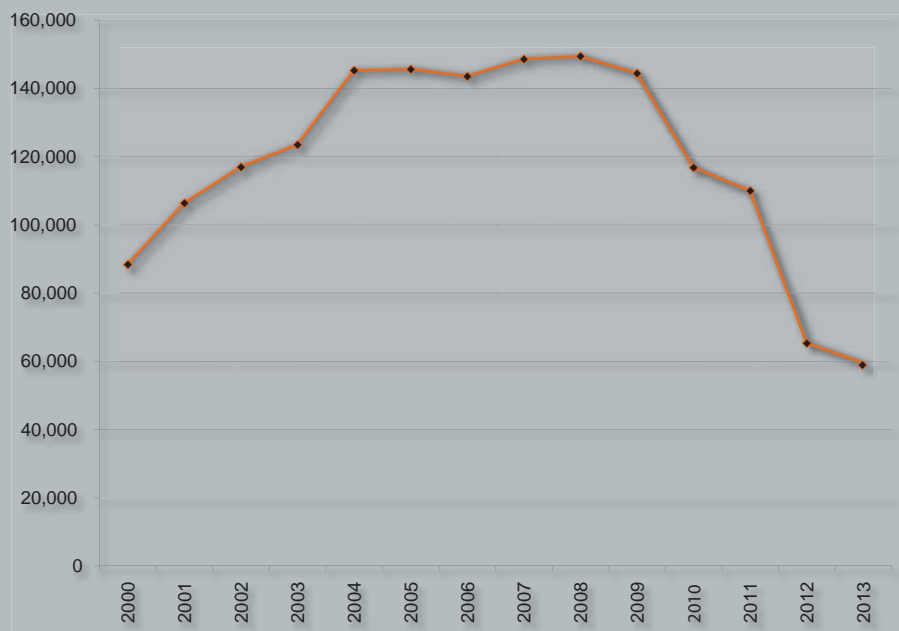
get the deer population headed in the right direction," said Game and Fish Department wildlife chief Randy Kreil. "At the same time, we're hearing from a lot of people who don't think it's fair that anyone should have two licenses while thousands of hunters went without any license last fall."

The meetings will allow Game and Fish to spend some time explaining possible options that might spread out the opportunity somewhat, and what those options would mean for opportunity.

"Right now we have a high public interest in deer hunting in North Dakota," Kreil added. "We're hoping to come up with some solutions to help us maintain that."

Each meeting will begin at 7 p.m. local time.

- Feb. 17 – Devils Lake, Lake Region Community College Auditorium
- Feb. 17 – Casselton, City Fire Hall
- Feb. 18 – Dickinson, Ramada Grand Dakota Lodge
- Feb. 18 – Anamoose, VFW Club
- Feb. 24 – Tioga, Farm Festival Building
- Feb. 24 – Fordville, Community Center
- Feb. 25 – Bismarck, North Dakota Game and Fish Department
- Feb. 25 – Jamestown, The Bunker



The dramatic decline in the number of deer gun season licenses available in North Dakota has prompted a series of special meetings across the state this month. Game and Fish wildlife managers will discuss the factors involved in that decline, and look for input on solutions for providing more hunting opportunities given current deer numbers.

AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES

ANS PREVENTION IN WINTER

TRANSPORTING LIVE BAIT

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

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



OTHER ANS PREVENTION MEASURES

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

KEEP ANS OUT OF OUR WATER

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



While the Northern saw-whet is an infrequent visitor to North Dakota, the owl is easily discernible because of its small size and yellow eyes.



night owls

By Ron Wilson

Photos by Sandra Johnson



Northern saw-whet owls are almost entirely nocturnal. Under the cover of darkness, the owl becomes a hunter, preying on small rodents.

While there may be a breeding record or two in North Dakota, the Northern saw-whet owl is mainly a transitory whisper passing through on seasonal migrations to who knows where.

Last fall, researchers with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory in South Dakota gathered in the South Unit of North Dakota's Theodore Roosevelt National Park in hopes of capturing and banding saw-whet owls.



All saw-whet owls captured in western North Dakota last fall were fitted with leg bands.

Using mist nets and game callers heralding the owl's territorial call, researchers working under the cover of darkness caught, banded and released 106 migrating saw-whets in 31 nights from October 1 through November 7.

It turns out that the Little Missouri River area in the badlands is a major migration corridor for saw-whets. Researchers believe the dense vegetation along the river's winding route is attractive to the birds that favor this kind of habitat for roosting and replenishing during their travels.

"The number of birds we catch in North Dakota is two to three times that of what we catch in South Dakota," said Nancy Drilling, RMBO biologist.

The Northern saw-whet owl gets its name from one of its calls that birders say sounds like a saw

blade being sharpened by a file.

What immediately strikes you about the saw-whet is its size. It's a diminutive bird, as far as owls go, measuring about 7 inches or so. Drilling said saw-whets are small enough that researchers put them in empty frozen orange juice containers to weigh them after capture.

"Male saw-whets are smaller than females," she said. "These birds are basically just a fist full."

Another interesting thing about the small, yellow-eyed owls is their nonchalance. Saw-whet owls come across as incredibly tame, and are easily approached in the wilds.

"If you find one sitting in a tree, you can walk right up to it," Drilling said. "Their defense mechanism is to freeze and hope that you don't see them. They are probably frightened, but come across as docile."

Saw-whets feed on insects, but their main food source, Drilling said, is mice. While other bigger predators will eat a mouse in one gulp and move on in search of another, the saw-whet eats just part of its catch, caching the remainder for later.

After saw-whet owls are rescued from mist nets by researchers, they are banded, aged and checked to see what kind of shape they're in.

"To check their health condition, we look at the body fat on the owls," Drilling said. "We do this by blowing on the feathers to see how much fat is underneath."

Eight owls captured in Theodore Roosevelt National Park last fall were already banded. Three were originally banded in Saskatchewan and one in Duluth, Minnesota. Another bird was banded in 2010 on the shores of Lake Ontario. That's about 1,300 miles from southwestern North Dakota as the owl flies.

In her 2013 report, Drilling wrote: "Biologists had no idea that owls in the east and east-central parts of the continent would travel so far west. In addition, Saskatchewan banders assumed that some of their owls migrated south, but until this year had no confirmation of that hunch."

Where saw-whet owls are headed when they migrate through North Dakota's badlands in fall is unknown.

"That's the big mystery," Drilling said. "That's one of the reasons we are doing this research."

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

Helpful Research

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's involvement in the Northern saw-whet owl banding effort in the western part of the state was to provide a scientific collection permit to researchers.

Yet, interest in what researchers from the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory in South Dakota are doing in the badlands doesn't end with a signature on the permit.

"Very little, if any, research has been done on Northern saw-whet owls in North Dakota," said Sandy Johnson, Department conservation

biologist. "Any information we can learn from this study is helpful in how we manage these and other nongame animals that go mostly unnoticed."

While it's likely saw-whet owls depend on North Dakota simply as a place to rest and replenish during their migration, that's something wildlife managers, tasked with the duty of managing many game or nongame species, need to know.

"No matter how big or small, breeding birds or those just passing through, we must look out for all of them, even if they see us, but we don't see them," Johnson said.

Keith Bagnall, left, and Rheanna Fraser, both with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory in South Dakota, age and record data of a Northern saw-whet owl captured in North Dakota.





CRAIG BIERLE

Tom Jensen, left, and Mike Anderson, produce the North Dakota Outdoors weekly broadcast news feature that airs on 11 television stations in the state.

1,000

and Counting

Outdoors Weekly News Eyes Milestone

By Ron Wilson

The North Dakota Outdoors weekly broadcast news feature will hit a milestone sometime this month with little more than a shrug from the program's creators.

While producing 1,000 weekly television features since the program's inception two decades ago is certainly noteworthy, too long of a pause to celebrate this signpost doesn't get show number 1,001

filmed, written, narrated, edited and put to bed.

"When you do 52 news programs a year, it gets to be more and more of a challenge to come up with story ideas, especially as we get closer to 1,000 shows," said Tom Jensen, Game and Fish Department video news director since 2001. "We brainstorm a lot, collect story ideas from staff ... After we do a show, it's time to move on to the next one."

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has had an on-again, off-again presence on television since the early 1950s when broadcast TV arrived in the state. Much of what was seen by viewers in the early years was Game and Fish personnel in-studio at a television station to discuss wildlife issues and management. Game and Fish also had a video news presence in the late 1970s and early '80s.

It wasn't until 1994 with the advent of North Dakota Outdoors, a weekly, Department-produced show, that this presence became uninterrupted. "Young Hunter," which aired in early November of that year, was the program's first show.

Today, the Department's two-minute weekly news feature airs on 11 television stations in North Dakota and the Game and Fish website at gf.nd.gov. KXMC in Minot has carried the show without pause since its beginning.

Jim Olson, KXMC news director, said the program is a longtime staple because viewers love to see what's going on in North Dakota's outdoors.

"We are a state full of hunters and fishermen, and those who want to be, so the program really has an appeal," Olson said. "Beyond that, there is some really good video of wildlife and the outdoors. It really hits home with the majority of the people."

Mike Anderson, Department videographer, joined Game and Fish in December 1995 at about show 53. One of his first assignments was to film the release of bighorn sheep on a cold January day in the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

"I had never seen, let alone filmed, anything like that," Anderson said. "And I'm guessing it was a first for many of the people who later watched it on television."

This behind-the-scenes presence in the outdoor world is one of the program's hooks.

"The program provides a peek behind the curtain," Jensen said. "Most people don't get to see wildlife biologists netting wild turkeys, putting ear tags on mountain lion kittens or trapping and transporting bighorn sheep with a helicopter. If people relate to the outdoors, which a lot of people do in North Dakota, they relate to the program."

Terry Steinwand, Game and Fish Department director, said the 20-year-old Outdoors weekly news feature is especially important in today's society, considering the public's thirst for audio/visual entertainment.

"While people are interested in what the Game and Fish Department is doing, Tom and Mike do a nice job of providing viewers with human interest stories, as well," Steinwand said. "We thank the TV

stations that run the program because getting this information to the public is important."

Jensen said the program offers the opportunity to provide a deeper look into what is going on outside.

"It's important, for example, to understand the vital role quality habitat plays in helping deer, pheasants and other animals survive North Dakota's difficult winters," Jensen said. "We want to provide the answers to questions that some people haven't even thought to ask."

Like most other things electronic, technology in the video news industry is ever-changing. From 1994-2000, Anderson said the program was edited at the North Dakota Department of Transportation because Game and Fish didn't have the editing equipment.

"We'd take boxes and boxes of tape over to DOT and spend the entire day editing one show," Anderson said. "When we got our nonlinear editing equipment at Game and Fish in 2000, the time to edit a show was cut in half or more, plus it opened the door to so many more opportunities, such as public service announcements and in-house training videos."

While television stations didn't start broadcasting in high definition until 2011, Anderson said he started shooting video in HD in 2006 to meet the demand when the time came.

"We got a big jump in HD because we knew there were going to be changes and we had to get ahead of the game," Anderson said. "The old video wouldn't meet today's standards because the quality just isn't there."

Mike Anderson, Department videographer, films an ice fishing event for youngsters on a lake in McLean County.



GREG GULLICKSON

Changes have also come in the gear carried into the field, be it aboard a helicopter, on a boat or on foot hiking in rough terrain.

Anderson said their old camera weighed about 30 pounds, or roughly the same weight as the tripod it sat on. Plus, extra camera batteries were the size of VHS tapes.

“Changes in technology have certainly made things easier as cameras have gotten much smaller,” he said. “Now you can hike 5 miles into

the badlands carrying one of the smaller cameras and not be dead when you get there.”

Jensen said being a hunter, angler and having interest in most things outdoors helps to come up with story ideas that will likely appeal to viewers. But every now and again, a story that was done some years ago gets a new face, a little twist.

“We piggyback on stories from time to time,” he said. “If we did a story five years ago on wintering waterfowl, we might do a similar story, but

Outdoors Weekly Broadcast

All Game and Fish video programming is available online at gf.nd.gov, and also on the Game and Fish channel at vimeo.com/gnf.



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT PHOTO

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has had an off-and-on television presence (top) in North Dakota since the early 1950s. (Right) Tom Jensen, Department video news director, left, interviews Stan Kohn, Department upland game management supervisor, for Outdoors Online, a weekly online video news program, which is in its seventh year.



ASHLEY SALWEY

give it a different angle.”

No matter, the goal remains the same: to entertain and educate.

When you're 1,000 shows into it, it's difficult to pick one that stands out, that jumps to the front as a favorite for whatever reason.

Anderson said when he first started nearly two decades ago, most assignments were novel, nearly every trip outdoors an adventure.

“One of the neatest things, and it still remains so, was when I was involved in netting paddlefish years ago. I think it was so memorable because I was getting to film this prehistoric fish that I had never seen before,” he said. “Then that same day we packed up and drove from the Williston area to Marmarth to film sage grouse on their leks the following morning. That was the first time I'd ever seen that. That was a pretty cool two days.”

Jensen said he favors those video pieces that show people, who have been sidelined because of

injuries or other disabilities, returning to the field to hunt pheasants, for example, thanks to the assistance of a specially designed wheelchair and caring people.

“Those stories stick with me,” he said.

As does the one from 2012 when Jensen and Anderson filmed a sharp-tailed grouse/sage grouse hybrid in southwestern North Dakota. Aaron Robinson, Department upland game management biologist, tipped them to the story.

“We got a call from Aaron and left at 2 a.m.,” Jensen said. “Turns out, Aaron said Mike and I are two of maybe a half-dozen people in the world to have ever seen a sharptail/sage grouse hybrid in person. That sort of thing makes you feel kind of privileged.”

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

A map of North Dakota with various television stations and their broadcast schedules marked on it. The stations and their schedules are:

- WILLISTON:** KUMV - Tuesday - 10 pm; KXMD - Monday - noon
- MINOT:** KMOT - Tuesday - 10 pm; KXMC - Saturday - 6 & 10 pm; Monday - Noon
- GRAND FORKS:** WDAZ - Wednesday - 5 pm
- DICKINSON:** KQCD - Tuesday - 9 pm (MT); KXMA - Sunday - 9 pm (MT)
- BISMARCK:** KFYZ - Tuesday - 10 pm; KXMB - Sunday - 10 pm; CATV - Saturday - 9:30 am
- FARGO:** KVRR - Sunday - 9 pm

on Television

Outdoors Online Weekly Webcast

North Dakota Outdoors Online, a weekly web-based news broadcast, is in its seventh year and is available at the State Game and Fish Department's website at gf.nd.gov. Outdoors Online is also available on the following community access channels:

- Grand Forks – GFTV Channel 2, Saturday, 10 p.m.; UND Studio One, Channel 3, Monday, 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.
- Dickinson – Consolidated Channel

- 18, Monday, 6 and 8 p.m.
 - Fargo – TV Fargo Channel 12, Thursday, noon, and Sunday, 7 p.m.
 - Bismarck – Community Access Cable Channel 12, Thursday, 9:30 p.m.
 - Jamestown – Cable Services, The Replay Channel, CSi Channel 10.
 - Minot – Cable Channel 19, Thursday, 6 p.m.
- The program is hosted and produced by Tom Jensen and Mike Anderson, the

Game and Fish Department's video team. The webcast focuses on current news and issues that appeal to people who hunt, fish, trap and enjoy North Dakota's outdoors. Each week Jensen hosts a studio guest, and also keeps viewers up-to-date on what they need to know to better enjoy their outdoor activities.

A new program is posted to the Game and Fish Department's website each Thursday. Each weekly webcast runs approximately 10 minutes.

A woman wearing a black winter jacket with pink accents and a fur-lined hood is using a hand saw to cut a hole in the ice. She is leaning forward, holding the wooden handle of the saw with both hands. The saw has a blue blade with a serrated edge. The background shows a vast, flat expanse of snow and ice under a clear sky.

Darkhouse Spearfishing Participation, *Pike Harvest Climb*

By Ron Wilson

There is a bit of work involved before you can ease into a day of darkhouse spearfishing. A participant at a Becoming an Outdoors-Woman event last winter preps a spearing hole by sawing through ice.

With never-seen-before numbers of northern pike swimming in North Dakota waters, the Game and Fish Department opened most of the state to darkhouse spearfishing in 2012.

The results, while good to see, weren't surprising.

According to Greg Power, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries chief, 2,582 people registered last winter to spearfish, which was a record. Of those nearly 2,600 participants, 86 percent were residents.

"We went from about 50 pike lakes to slightly more than 200, which provided more opportunities to spear and more opportunities for some people to spear closer to home," Power said.

Not surprisingly, the rise in darkhouse spearfishing participants led to a record jump in the number of northern pike taken through the ice.

In winter 2012-13, about 18,500 pike were harvested, or more than nearly double the number speared in 2011-12, which stood as a record at the time.

Northern pike and nongame fish are the only legal species for darkhouse spearfishing, which runs from December 1 through March 15. Last winter, just 4.7 percent of the participants reported spearing a nongame, or rough fish.

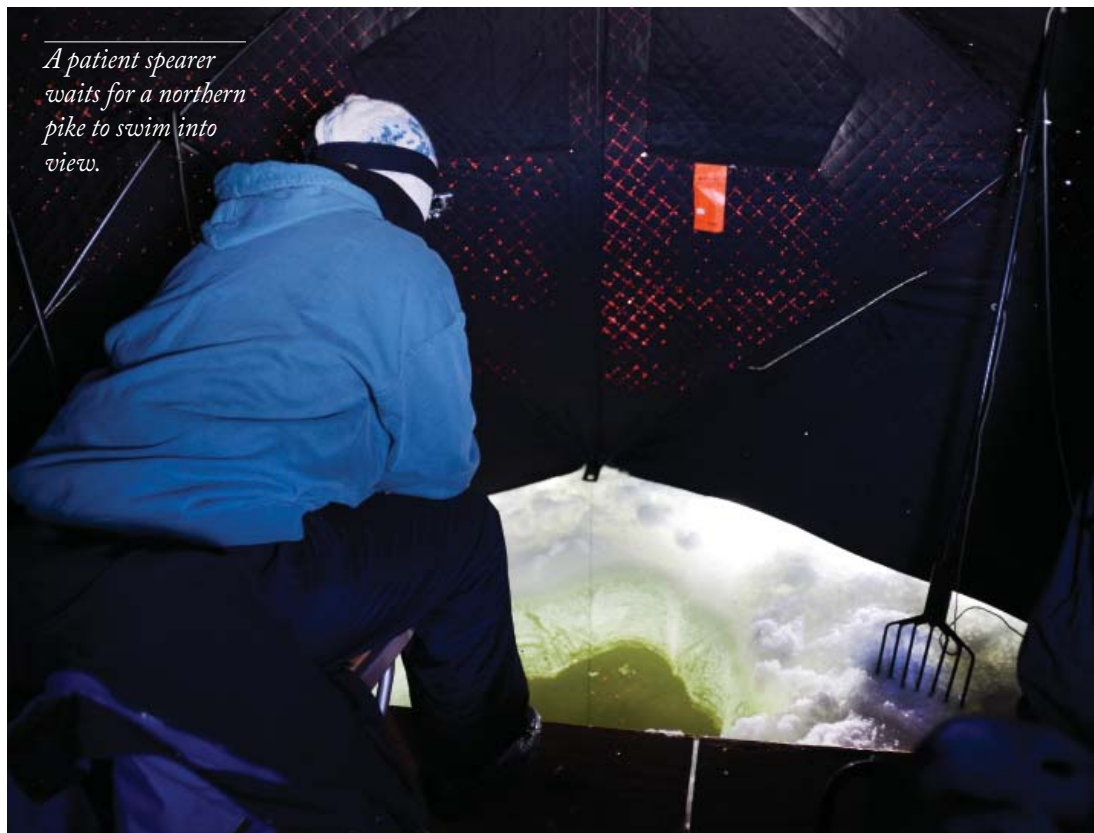
Power said the number of spearing days also jumped dramatically, from 6,895 in 2011-12 to 12,084 in 2012-13.

"North Dakota has a core group of people who regularly darkhouse spearfish year in and year out," Power said. "By opening up nearly the entire state to spearing, hopefully we exposed a new group of people to spearing and they'll want to go out and do it again."



According to North Dakota darkhouse spearfishing regulations, the spear head can't exceed 12 inches in width.

ASHLEY SALWEY



A patient spearer waits for a northern pike to swim into view.

ASHLEY SALWEY

Pike Limit

Whether darkhouse spearfishing or fishing with hook and line through an ice hole, participants are reminded that the daily limit for pike is five fish and the possession limit is 10.

A five-pike daily limit was instituted in North Dakota in 2012 for both the open water and ice fishing seasons.



LARA ANDERSON

Decoys used to lure northern pike into spearing range.

Darkhouse Spearfishing

Darkhouse spearfishing is legal from December 1 through March 15. All waters open to hook and line fishing are open to darkhouse spearfishing except the following waters:

- Braun Lake, Logan County
- East Park Lake, McLean County
- Heckers Lake, Sheridan County
- Lake Audubon, McLean County
- McClusky Canal
- New Johns Lake, Burleigh County
- Red and Bois de Sioux rivers
- Red Willow Lake, Griggs County
- Sweet Briar Dam, Morton County
- West Park Lake, McLean County

In addition to possessing a valid fishing license, all darkhouse spearfishing participants must first register on the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, or through any Game and Fish Department office.

Last winter, with nearly the entire state open, participation was reported on 102 waters. Five of the top 10 lakes, in terms of pike harvest, were new waters: Twin Lakes, (LaMoure County); Souris River; Boom (Marion) Lake, (LaMoure County); Willard Lake, (Richland County); and Pipestem Dam, (Stutsman County).

Power said the top three lakes in 2012-13, Sakakawea, Darling and Silver, accounted for 40 percent of the state-wide harvest. Lake Sakakawea, which accounted for 21 percent of the state's pike harvest, was the number one lake. And for the first time in more than a decade of darkhouse spearfishing in North Dakota, Devils Lake did not make the top 10.

"For this winter, we do know that pike numbers are as strong, or stronger than last winter, and access has been generally good," Power said. "We fully anticipate a record, or near-record year for participation and harvest."

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

Darkhouse Spearfishing Numbers

- Average darkhouse spearfishing participant in 2012-13 was 45 years old and 87 percent were male.
- 79 percent of 2012-13 Game and Fish Department survey respondents indicated that they also ice fished.
- Average weight of the largest pike harvested during the 2012-13 darkhouse spearfishing season was 8.2 pounds. The lowest was 4.7 pounds in 2009-10.
- The number of water bodies open to darkhouse spearfishing climbed from 28 in 2002-03 to all but a handful of waters across the state today.
- Since 2001, Lake Sakakawea has been one of the top five lakes in terms of northern pike harvest eight times, while Devils Lake has been in the top five 10 times.



An ice auger makes the task of creating a spearing hole that much easier.

LARA ANDERSON



BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor

Spring Light Goose Licenses Available

Light goose hunters planning to hunt during North Dakota's spring season can purchase a license online at the state Game and Fish Department's website. The season opens February 15 and continues through May 18.

Residents can hunt during the spring season by having last fall's 2013-14 bird licenses. Otherwise, hunters will need to purchase either a 2014-15 combination license; or a small game, and general game and habitat license.

Nonresidents, regardless of age, need a 2014 spring light goose season license. The cost is \$50 and the license is good statewide. Nonresidents who hunt the spring season remain eligible to buy a fall season license. The spring season does not count against the 14-day fall hunting season regulation.

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

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

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

Hunters must obtain a new Harvest



CRAIG BIRLIE

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

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

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

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

There are no waterfowl rest areas designated for the spring season. Hunters should note that private land within waterfowl rest areas closed last fall may be posted closed to hunting.

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

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

All regular hunting season regulations not addressed above apply to the spring season. For more information on regulations refer to the 2014 Spring Light Goose Hunting Regulations and the 2013 North Dakota Waterfowl Hunting Guide.



Remove Permanent Fish Houses

State law requires permanent fish houses to be removed from North Dakota waters by midnight March 15.

Nancy Boldt, water safety coordinator for the State Game and Fish Department, said anglers should exercise caution because mild weather conditions can quickly result in unstable ice conditions.

“It is always important to check ice thickness, as warm temperatures with a high sun will rapidly deteriorate ice conditions this time of the year,” Boldt said.

Fish houses may be used after March 15 if they are removed daily.



CRAIG BIRHLE



CRAIG BIRHLE

Midwinter Waterfowl Survey

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department’s annual midwinter waterfowl survey in early January indicated 71,500 birds were in the state.

Mike Szymanski, migratory game bird biologist, said an estimated 40,700 Canada geese were observed on the Missouri River, and another 12,000 were scattered on Nelson Lake. Lake Sakakawea, declared iced-over on December 14, had no geese on the lake itself. Szymanski said after summarizing the numbers, a total of 52,700 Canada geese and 18,700 mallards were tallied statewide.

“Conditions leading up to this year’s survey were colder than normal, resulting in fewer birds in the state compared to the past couple winters,” Szymanski said. “Most waterfowl were pushed from North Dakota just prior to Thanksgiving, with the exception of those using the Missouri

River System.”

According to Szymanski, early December cold temperatures and strong winds pushed most Missouri River birds from the state. Conditions remained the same through most of January, essentially causing all waters in the state to freeze by the time of the survey, with the exception of a few places with fast moving, or warm water.

Overall, Szymanski said although the counts are lower than those observed during the past couple years, numbers of birds remaining in the state were surprisingly large given the harsh weather conditions experienced thus far.

“Snow cover was probably borderline for allowing birds to feed without too much trouble,” he added. “If more snow had fallen in December, this year’s count would have been even lower.”

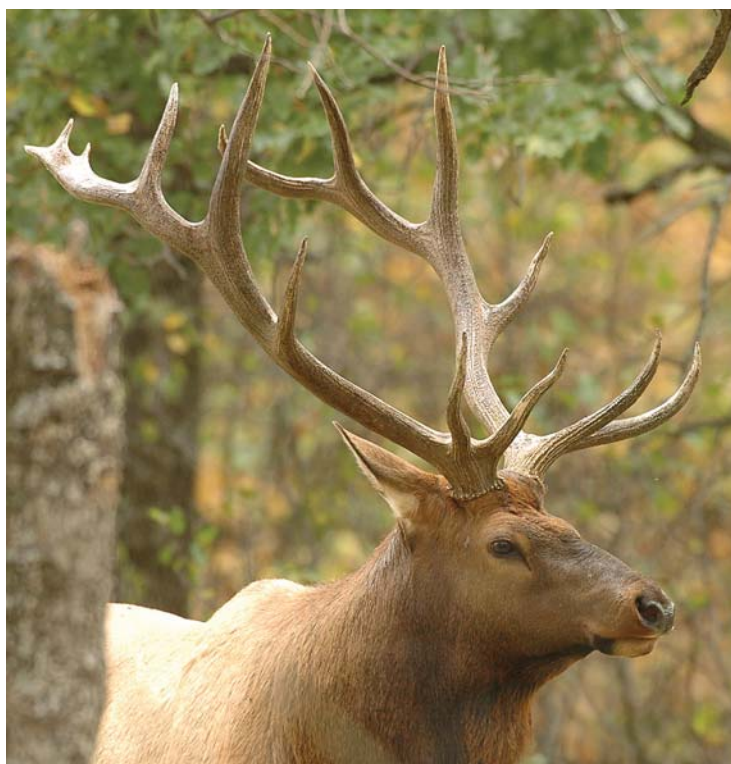
HUNTER ED INSTRUCTOR WORKSHOPS SCHEDULED

North Dakota Game and Fish Department hunter education instructors are invited to attend regional workshops scheduled in 2014.

The workshops are March 15 at the Holiday Inn in Fargo and March 29 at the Riverside Holiday Inn in Minot.

Conference invites, workshop topics and registration information will be mailed out to all certified instructors. Instructors are asked to preregister by returning the registration form.

Hunter education instructors are men and women who volunteer their expertise and time. Anyone interested in becoming a volunteer hunter education instructor should call John Mazur, hunter education coordinator, at 701-328-6316.



CRAIG BIRKLE

Moose, Elk and Bighorn Sheep Apps

Hunters interested in applying for a 2014 moose, elk and bighorn sheep license should watch the Game and Fish website in early March for applications. The deadline for applying is March 26.

Applicants can apply online at gf.nd.gov. Application forms will also be available at license vendors, county auditors and Game and Fish offices.

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



NORTH DAKOTA EARTH DAY PATCH CONTEST

The State Game and Fish Department's annual Earth Day awareness campaign is accepting entries for design of a 2014 Earth Day patch. North Dakota students ages 6-18 are eligible to participate. The deadline to submit entries is March 15.

The Game and Fish Department will announce a winner in three age categories – 6-9, 10-13, and 14-18. Each winner will receive a pair of 10x42 binoculars. The final patch design will be chosen from the three winners.

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

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

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

Earth Day contest rules and entry forms are available on the Game and Fish Department's website, gf.nd.gov. For more information, contact Pat Lothspeich by email at ndgf@nd.gov, or call 701-328-6332.



SANDRA JOHNSON

Game and Fish has used some funds from the Watchable Wildlife tax checkoff to help gain access to tracts of private property that are unique and offer great wildlife viewing opportunities. A PLOTS sign with a binocular sign below it indicates that the land is not only open to hunters, but also to wildlife viewers.

WATCHABLE WILDLIFE CHECKOFF ON STATE TAX FORM

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

The 2013 state income tax form gives wildlife enthusiasts an opportunity to support nongame wildlife like songbirds and birds of prey, while at the same time contributing to programs that help everyone enjoy all wildlife.

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

To learn more about Watchable Wildlife program activities, visit the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website at gf.nd.gov.

GAME WARDEN SCHOLARSHIP

The North Dakota Game Wardens Association has a \$300 scholarship available for a graduating high school senior entering college in fall 2014 who enrolls in fisheries or wildlife management with an emphasis on law enforcement.

Applicants must be North Dakota residents and have maintained a 3.25

grade point average. The scholarship will be awarded to the student upon proof of enrollment in college.

Applications are available by contacting the North Dakota Game and Fish Department at 701-328-6604; or email ndgf@nd.gov. Applications must be postmarked no later than May 9, 2014.

DARKHOUSE SPEARFISHING SEASON CLOSES MARCH 15

Anglers are reminded that North Dakota's darkhouse spearfishing season closes March 15.

Individuals who would still like to get out for the first time this year must register with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

Registration is available through the Department's website, gf.nd.gov, or through any Game and Fish Department office.

March 15 is also the deadline for anglers to remove permanent fish houses from state waters.



MIKE ANDERSON

2014 HUNTER EDUCATION CLASSES

Some hunter education classes for 2014 are underway with more to follow.

To register for a hunter education course, students need to sign up online at the Game and Fish Department's website, gf.nd.gov. Many classes will be added over the next several weeks, and the rest will be added throughout the year as they are finalized.

To register, click on the online services tab, and "online course enrollment" under the hunter education heading. Classes are listed by city, and can also be sorted by start date. To register for a class, click on "enroll" next to the specific class, and follow the simple instructions. Personal information is required.

Those who do not have access to the

Internet and want to sign up for a class can call the hunter education program in Bismarck at 701-328-6615.

Individuals interested in receiving a notice by email when each hunter education class is added can click on the "subscribe to news, email and text alerts" link found below the news section on the department's home page. Check the box labeled "hunter education class notification" under the education program updates.

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

Game and Fish Volunteers Recognized

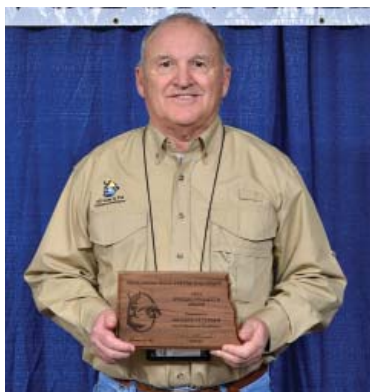
Volunteer instructors for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department were recognized in January at the annual banquet in Bismarck.



Skip Balzer, Bismarck, received the Volunteer of the Year award.



Clair Huwe, Bismarck, was named Instructor of the Year.



Richard Peterson, Bismarck, received the Special Projects award.

Skip Balzer, Bismarck, received the Volunteer of the Year award. Balzer was mentioned for volunteering thousands of hours at rifle ranges and wildlife management areas, Family Fishing Days, Becoming an Outdoors-Woman, state fair and fish camps.

Clair Huwe, Bismarck, was named Instructor of the Year. Huwe was recognized for his work with the Hooked on Fishing program, including Family Fishing Days, fish camps and the state fair.

Richard Peterson, Bismarck, received the Special Projects award. Peterson was instrumental in securing a new trailer for the Hooked on Fishing program, including writing the grant, purchasing the trailer, outfitting the inside and designing the wrap.

The following volunteers were honored for their years of service:

- **35 years** – Karl Broeren, Northwood; Melvin Bruhn, Elgin; John Buresh, Towner; Richard Cheatley, Riverdale; Ken Fischer, Park River; Marlowe Grindler, Rogers; Chris Hansen, Napoleon; Colin Hoffert, Harvey; Ron Hunsberger, Larimore; Ronald Koenig, Elgin; Noel Podoll, Velva; Mike Voglewede, Northwood; and Kurt Wagner, Wimbledon.
- **30 years** – Dale Brewster, Stanley; Donald Brewster, Bowbells; Clyde Grosz, Beulah; James Hastings, Courtenay; Don Meyer, Devils Lake; Mark Montgomery, Center; David Rensch, Garrison; and Rick Suckut, Bowdon.
- **25 years** – James Boley, Minot; Dick Brewster, Washburn; Douglas Crosby, Williston; Ralph Danuser, Marion; Keith Domke, Jamestown; Myron Hanson, Souris; Rick Jorgenson, Devils Lake; Mike McEnroe, Bismarck; Todd Parkman, Hope; Kenneth Schwandt, Cavalier; Rod Stark, Kennedy; Gary Stefanovsky, Bismarck; and Gary Symanowski, Scranton.
- **20 years** – Ottmar Barth, Mandan; Mary Barth, Mandan; Kevin Bishop, Kathryn; Patsy Croke, Mandan; Roger Dienert, Hankinson; Darwin Gebhardt, Oakes; Terry Gray, Cooperstown; Garry Hillier, Thompson; Eddy Larsen, Larimore; Francis Miller, Mandan; Gregory Odden, Rugby; Rick Olson, Underwood; Rodney Parrill, Bottineau; Gene Paupst, Larimore; Duane Reinisch, Valley City; Allen Schirado, Bismarck; John Schlieman, Grand Forks; Melvin Sivertson, Bowman; and Mark Vickerman, Minot.
- **15 years** – Adnan Aldayel, New Rockford; William Bahm, Almont; Jack Carlson, Mandan; Randy Christensen, Hettinger; Stan Cox, Jamestown; Mark Engen, Anamoose; Mark Entzi, Watford City; Gary Grosz, Kulm; Gary Hagness, Fordville; Matthew Herman, Ashley; Leon Hiltner, Wales; Morris Hummel, Coleharbor; Lynn Kieper, Bismarck; Steven Kilwein, Hettinger; Bruce Krabseth, Alamo; Jeffrey Lemer, Anamoose; Richard Liesner, Ray; Barry McCleary, Napoleon; Curt Miller, Tioga; Marvin Neumiller, Washburn; Loran Palmer, Wahpeton; Randy Palmer, Bismarck; Richard Petersen, Bismarck; Mark Pfeifer, Lidgerwood; Joel Puffe, Bismarck; Scott Rehak, Williston; Craig Roe, Kindred; Claude Sheldon, Park River; Trever Speidel, West Fargo; Shawn Tennyson, Fargo; Doug Thingstad, Jamestown; Clayton Thompson, West Fargo; Cindie Van Tassel, Breckenridge, Minn.; and Brian Vose, Devils Lake.
- **10 years** – Craig Bjur, Fargo; Karl Blake, Park River; Benjilee Boll, Wahpeton; Robert Concannon Jr., Las Vegas, Nev.; Troy Enga, Berthold; Nathan Fitzgerald, Cooperstown; Gregory Gerou, Wahpeton; Judy Haglund, Garrison; Tim Hendrickson, Bisbee; Terry Kassian, Wilton; Steven Kukowski, Minot; Arlen Kurtti, Hazen; Kimberly Murphy, Williston; Dustin Neva, Hatton; Charles Oien, Elgin; John Paulson, Bismarck; Kent Reiersen, Williston; Myron Schaff, Hebron; Scott Thorson, Towner; and Daniel Vollmer, Rolla.

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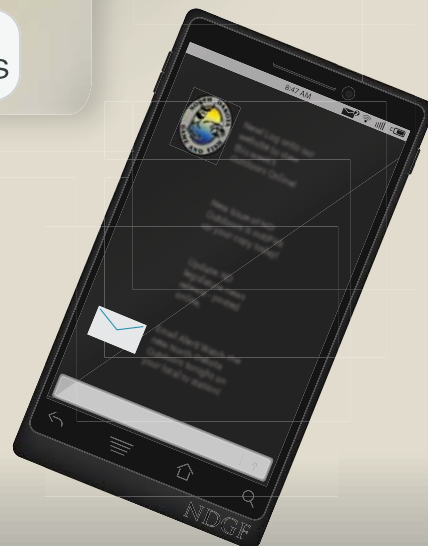
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back cast

By Ron Wilson

I've been walking hunched over like someone looking for a lost contact lens and crawling on hands and knees through a tangle of low-hanging branches and deadfall for what seems like an hour, but is likely only half of that.

Sweat runs out of my stocking cap and down the back of my neck, working its way south beneath two layers of fleece and Under Armour as I sit against a tree to rest and give this little adventure some more thought.

It's nice in here. Where the mixture of Western red cedars and Rocky Mountain junipers grow close together, the ground is mostly free of snow thanks to overhead branches that interlace like fingers. While a 25-mile-per-hour wind out of the northwest hustles through the canopy and bends tree tops in the direction of South Dakota, I can barely feel it against my face.

If I were a cottontail rabbit, this is where I'd hang out – out of the wind, out of the snow, and somewhat veiled by vegetation from the keen eye of the great horned owl we flushed awhile ago.

Wildlife biologists will tell you that cottontail rabbit populations are cyclic, meaning they build from low to high, before going back the other way. I don't know where we currently are in the cycle, but judging by the number of fleeing rabbits we've taken shots at, they're somewhere on the low end.

Sitting here out of the wind against a tree and contemplating the population of an overlooked animal that we want to shoot and stew feels good. Not a bad way to spend a Sunday afternoon in January with a .22-caliber rifle resting on my lap.

Patience, however, is a virtue my 10-year-old hunting partner doesn't have.

He hollers into the trees, questioning when I plan on continuing the hunt. His rump is getting wet, he hollers again, from sitting and waiting in the snow. Like a good rabbit dog, I sling my .22 over my left shoulder and get back to work.

While I've passed the random cluster of small round pellets, signaling that there's a rabbit or two around here somewhere, droppings increase as I claw my way through thicker cover.

I stop often, sit on my heels and look through, around and under the maze of limbs and downfalls for movement, anything that will give a nervous cottontail away. My hope is that any rabbit I push from hiding will break from the trees and offer my son, armed with a 20-gauge and light loads, a shot.

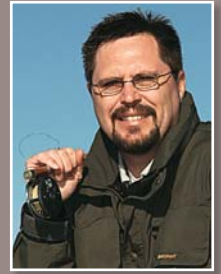
When I look closely into the maze of dormant grasses and fallen, dead evergreen branches, I can make out in places the network of narrow trails the cottontails travel between resting places. It's like looking at sign left behind by white-tailed deer on the move, but on a smaller scale.

Maybe my mistake is tip-toeing through the evergreens and ground clutter as if we're hunting deer, quietly looking for the horizontal body of an animal in a mostly vertical world of trees.

I pick up the pace and literally kick every promising-looking brush pile as I pass. On my fourth or fifth brush pile, it happens.

Two rabbits break from their hideout, split and race in opposite directions in a seemingly choreographed retreat. It takes me longer to thumb the rifle's safety with a gloved-hand than it does for the rabbits to disappear.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



PHOTOS BY RON WILSON



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT PHOTO

A Look Back

By Ron Wilson

For years, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries biologists have been taking dissolved oxygen samples to determine how fish are surviving winter.

This photograph, taken in February 1967 on Lake Upsilon in the Turtle Mountains, pictures Royce Johnston, Department fisheries technician, driving the snowmobile. His passenger is Alven Kreil, Department northeast fisheries biologist. The wooden sled behind them holds an auger, equipment to take water samples and a heater to keep the samples from freezing.

It turns out that winter 1967 was tough in terms of how it was affecting the state's fisheries. "Indications from winter oxygen analysis, however, point to the most severe losses in many years. Hardest hit was the northeastern part of the state, with many lakes undoubtedly

suffering severe mortalities," according to May 1967 *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

Fast forward nearly 50 years and interest in dissolved oxygen levels in North Dakota fishing waters still exists, as biologists sample as many waters as possible to give anglers an idea how fish are overwintering in their favorite waters.

The difference between determining dissolved oxygen levels today compared to 1967 is night and day, said Greg Power, Department fisheries chief.

Back in the day, fisheries biologists would hit a handful of waters in a day before having to head back to their district office and spend yet another full day in the laboratory.

"It was very labor intensive because biologists back then had to run through a number of procedures to determine dissolved oxygen levels of the

waters they tested," Power said.

With today's electronic technology, water quality sampling provides instant information and a higher degree of accuracy. In addition, 10-12 lakes can be sampled each day.

Just getting to the deepest part of the lake where biologists often like to take water samples is much easier today than nearly a half-century ago.

"With our lakes being mapped and with the use of GPS today, our biologists don't have to drill a bunch of holes in the ice to find the deepest part of the lake," Power said. "They can go right to the spot ... it's so much more time efficient."

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.