

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

While fall officially begins on September 22, to me and many, many others in North Dakota, it kicks off earlier than that.

Some will argue that autumn is ushered in on September 1 with the dove season opener. If not then, it certainly arrives on September 13 when sharp-tailed grouse, Hungarian partridge and ruffed grouse become fair game.

No matter, what's important is that hunting season is, as I write this column, nearly here.

This issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* is our annual look at what the fall may hold for hunters and trappers. Game and Fish Department biologists from around the state have provided inside looks at those animals – from ducks to deer and pheasants to furbearers – that provide incentive for thousands of North Dakotans to get outdoors during one of the best times of the year.

While deer numbers are down, yet showing some signs of rebounding in parts of the state, we anticipate plenty of good, or better, hunting opportunities. Waterfowl populations, for instance, remain high and biologists predict a fall flight of ducks from North Dakota to be similar to those of 2007 through 2011.

For the first time since 2009, there will be a limited pronghorn season in southwestern North Dakota as these speedy mammals are making a comeback after difficult winters of 2008-11 nearly decimated the population.

As you'll read in the following pages, the hunting outlook for upland game birds in North Dakota is encouraging, at least in the short term, as spring bird numbers were higher than last year.

In addition, in the time since biologists turned in their written forecasts to meet publication deadlines, reports from the Department's late-summer roadside brood counts have been filtering in, providing

even more encouragement for the upcoming season.

From what we are hearing, hunters will likely see increases in sharp-tailed grouse and pheasant numbers compared to last fall.

With more sharptails on the landscape, I encourage those hunters asked to participate in our upland wing survey (see story on pages 20-23) to send in those feathers requested by wildlife managers. The information gleaned from the wing survey goes a long way in managing our upland game bird populations.

Participation by grouse hunters in recent years has fallen, so be mindful to send in wings. For those hunters who did not receive wing packets in the mail, simply visit our website at gf.nd.gov and look for the page where you can request wing envelopes, or call Department headquarters in Bismarck (701-328-6300) and we'll make sure to promptly mail a packet to you.

As you'll also see in this special fall outlook issue, the Department's popular Private Land Open To Sportsmen program basically held its own in terms of the number of acres this year compared to last year.

While I've heard from many hunters and landowners over the years applauding this walking-access-only program, I still encourage hunters to knock on landowner doors to seek permission to hunt on private land. This strategy not only makes sense because more than 90 percent of the land in North Dakota is under private ownership, I believe it's important for hunters to meet, with their hat in hand, those people who make a living off the land.

Remember, when you do venture outdoors during what is shaping up to be a bountiful fall, take a kid, neighbor, or family member. As hunters, it's important that we part the curtain just a bit and introduce newcomers to North Dakota's great outdoors.

Terry Steinwand

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NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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Front Cover

A limited pronghorn season will be held in south-western North Dakota this fall for the first time since 2009. Photo by Robert Fenstermacker, 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
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A photograph of a sunset over a field. The sun is a bright yellow-orange orb in the upper right, casting a red and orange glow across the sky. The sky transitions to a deep blue. In the foreground, several geese are visible in a field of tall grass. One goose is prominently featured in the lower right, with its head turned back. Another goose is partially visible on the left. The overall scene is serene and captures a moment of natural beauty.

It has been my privilege as wildlife division chief the last 20 years to provide North Dakota hunters with an overview of what the upcoming fall seasons will bring. This is my 20th and final fall outlook article, as I plan to retire at the end of August. Over the years we have covered many subjects in this space. We've

An early morning goose hunt is a good bet for some action in North Dakota as resident and migratory Canada goose numbers remain high.

2014

HUNTING OUTLOOK

By Randy Kreil

considered what makes a good tailgate lunch, how musical memories are tied to favorite hunting days, the sadness that comes with burying a loyal hunting dog, and routinely the critical importance of habitat to wildlife populations and hunting opportunities.



The author, who retired in August, and his Labrador, Sage, will have more time this fall to hunt waterfowl and upland birds in North Dakota.



THE
SONG
REMAINS
THE
SAME:

HABITAT IS THE KEY

CRAIG BIRBLE

The Northern Great Plains is a highly variable and dynamic ecosystem, where weather patterns play a large role in wildlife population trends. Even with these unpredictable, yet expected highs and lows in weather patterns, we have learned that with a solid and secure habitat base, wildlife populations can quickly rebound. However, recent and continuing trends in habitat loss across North Dakota may soon reach a point where wildlife populations will not have that foundation from which they can rebuild.

The loss of nearly 2 million acres of CRP, an increasing amount of native prairie converted to cropland, an increase in energy development, removal of hundreds of miles of tree belts and plantings, and acceleration of wetland drainage, are all reasons for concern about the future of wildlife habitat and hunting opportunities in this state.

But there are ways to stem the tide of these losses.

A key consideration in this discussion is the reality that more than 90 percent of the land in North Dakota is privately owned. Therefore, if we are to make any progress in slowing or reversing the loss of habitat and wildlife populations, it has to involve private landowners.

To accomplish this, people who make their living from the land need to have viable and economically competitive conservation options available to them. After personally dealing with private landowners for the past 20 years, it is clear that many are interested in wildlife and hunting, and are willing to “farm the best and leave the rest” if they are assured a reasonable economic return on “the rest.”

It will take a strong and committed cooperative effort on all fronts – from our congressional leaders, state political leaders, conservation agencies and organizations, local governmental entities, and most importantly, individual hunters who are willing to work with these groups to encourage the offer of options that producers will use.

We have no time to lose. The loss of habitat is happening rapidly, and we must collectively roll up our sleeves and get to work immediately if we want to maintain the wildlife populations and hunting opportunities we have experienced in the past several decades.

RANDY KREIL, the Game and Fish Department's wildlife division chief since 1994, retired at the end of August, 2014.

UPLAND AND SMALL GAME

Ring-necked Pheasants

Regular Season Opens: Oct. 11

Delayed Opener: Oct. 18

Regular Season Closes: Jan. 4, 2015

Delayed Season Closes: Jan. 4, 2015

Daily Limit: 3

Possession Limit: 12

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

The weather in spring 2013 was terrible for upland nesting birds and pheasant production was not good. But last winter, though blistering cold, didn't seem to cause any major problems for pheasants as snow depth, at least in the southern half of the state, was minimal.

Because of poor production in 2013, Game and Fish Department biologists felt the number of adult birds in spring 2014 would decline. However, this spring's crowing count survey proved us wrong, as the number of rooster pheasants heard crowing was actually up 6 percent statewide from 2013.

Even though the breeding population isn't as high as the mid-2000s, spring weather was good for nesting hens, and nesting cover on the landscape was better than expected.

The number of pheasant hunters in recent years has been hanging around 85,000, with a total harvest running between 600,000-650,000 roosters. 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.

Unfortunately, these harvest numbers will eventually decline as more Conservation Reserve Program and native grassland acres are removed from the landscape. While this is occurring in all areas of

Game and Fish Department biologists hope for a rise in fall pheasant numbers compared to 2013.



the state, when it happens in the heart of North Dakota's pheasant range, the loss of nesting and brooding habitat will surely negatively influence the pheasant population.

At this writing, summer brood surveys were still in progress, so it is too early to make any predictions about spring production, or numbers and distribution of young birds. Even so, weather and habitat conditions, which affect juvenile recruitment every year, were mostly favorable this spring.

However, several areas of the state were inundated with spring and summer rains, and it's unknown how this might affect survival of young.

The Department's late summer roadside brood count allows biologists to better estimate production, and provides a preview of what the pheasant population might look like for the hunting season.

Right now, the hope is for an improvement in fall pheasant numbers compared to 2013.

Stan Kohn, Upland Game Management Supervisor, Bismarck

Wild Turkeys

Opens: Oct. 11

Closes: Jan. 4, 2015

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Wild turkey numbers remain low in several areas in the state where the

population was previously high, a result of poor production four of the last five years.

The last good production year was 2012, but things went sour again in 2013. The result is a lower wild turkey population in the west, north and northeast. Because of poor production, Game and Fish has reduced the number of spring and fall licenses.

In addition, major flooding within the Missouri, Little Missouri and Souris River bottomlands in 2011 resulted in the loss of some major nesting habitat.

At present, knowing the breeding population is low, we desperately need a good production year in 2014. Habitat conditions appear favorable in most areas and spring weather conditions were more conducive for nesting and brooding hens than in 2013.

To allow for more summer production information in the fall season-setting process, last year the Game and Fish Department changed the fall turkey application deadline from early July to early September.

Though Game and Fish reduced the number of licenses again this fall, from 4,120 last year to 3,805 this year, with some preseason scouting and contacts in your hunting unit, hunters should be able to locate birds, especially along wooded river bottoms, drainages and forested areas.

Stan Kohn

Ruffed Grouse

Opens: Sept. 13

Closes: Jan. 4, 2015

Daily Limit: 3

Possession Limit: 12

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Ruffed grouse are the only native woodland grouse species in North Dakota, and are found in the native aspen woodlands in Rolette, Bottineau, Pembina, Walsh and Cavalier counties.

These birds provide an interesting touch to the North Dakota landscape, are most enjoyable to hunt, and provide superb table fare.

North Dakota's native aspen forest habitat continues to shrink, but ruffed grouse are doing their best to adapt to what is available. As with all species, habitat is the key to the success of ruffed grouse and any land use changes that permanently remove aspen forest from the landscape will affect grouse populations.

In 2010, it seemed ruffed grouse were slowly moving out of the low point in their population cycle. However, spring drumming counts in both 2011 and 2012

were lower than in 2010.

This spring, census information from the Turtle Mountains indicated drumming count numbers similar to 2012, with approximately 0.8 drums heard per survey stop. This is down about 30 percent from 2010-11, but up from 2013. In the Pembina Hills, drumming count numbers were down about 65 percent from 2010-12, indicating a continued low population.

We anticipate another low population this fall, so hunters can expect to spend more time walking trails before encountering flushes. But even then, it is always enjoyable to hike through North Dakota's native aspen woodlands in fall in pursuit of ruffed grouse.

Stan Kohn

Sharp-tailed Grouse

Opens: Sept. 13

Closes: Jan. 4, 2015

Daily Limit: 3

Possession Limit: 12

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Sharp-tailed grouse hunters will likely

have improved opportunities this fall compared to 2013.

Over-winter survival was relatively high as indicated by the Game and Fish Department's spring dancing ground census. Statewide populations increased by roughly 5-10 percent. Winter snow cover was minimal, allowing for improved survival.

Late fall moisture combined with ample early spring rains produced excellent nesting and brood-rearing cover. Preliminary indications from the summer brood survey suggest that grouse have responded favorably to the improved habitat conditions in all areas of the state.

While the summer brood survey was still in progress as this was written, it looks like hunters should find more grouse this year than in 2013.

Aaron Robinson, Upland Game Management Biologist, Dickinson

Hungarian Partridge

Opens: Sept. 13

Closes: Jan. 4, 2015

Daily Limit: 3

Possession Limit: 12

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

This fall, hunters will see slightly higher numbers of Hungarian partridge in the field compared to last year.

Partridge are often shot by opportunistic sharp-tailed grouse and pheasant hunters, so keep a lookout for areas such as abandoned farmsteads and native prairie on the edge of small grain crops.

Pockets of decent hunting may be found in these areas, but hunters will need to spend some time in the mornings scouting out potential areas.

Aaron Robinson

Sage Grouse, Pinnated Grouse

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

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

Game and Fish Department biologists counted a record low 31 males on six active



Hungarian partridge populations have been slow to rebound in North Dakota. However, persistent hunters who put in the time to scout for these birds could find some decent hunting.

DARCY KRAMLICH

strutting grounds. Last year, 50 males were counted on 11 active leks.

This is the seventh year in a row that North Dakota won't have a sage grouse season, and the fifth year in a row for a closed season on pinnated grouse, or prairie chickens, in the northeastern and southeastern parts of the state.

Aaron Robinson

Tree Squirrels

Opens: Sept. 13

Closes: Jan. 4, 2015

Daily Limit: 4

Possession Limit: 12

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

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



CRAIG BHRLE

deer numbers throughout much of North Dakota. Currently, only hunting units 3F1, 3F2 and 4F in extreme southwestern North Dakota are at whitetail population management objectives.

For the 2014 deer hunting season, Game and Fish allocated 48,000 licenses, 11,500 fewer than 2013, and the lowest license total since 1980. Hunters will be allowed only one license for the gun season.

Reducing the number of licenses, particularly those for antlerless deer, will hopefully reverse the trend of declining deer numbers.

Changes in available licenses from 2013 are as follows:

- Any-antlered licenses reduced by 3,900.
- Any-antlerless licenses reduced by 6,550.
- Antlered white-tailed deer licenses reduced by 250.
- Antlerless white-tailed deer licenses reduced by 1,000.

Deer hunting opportunities in 2014 will also include:

- 932 muzzleloader licenses available in 2014 – 466 antlered white-tailed deer licenses and 466 antlerless white-tailed deer licenses – a reduction of 270 muzzleloader licenses from 2013.
- 134 “T” licenses available for the youth deer hunting season, up 19 from 2013. These licenses are limited in number and are valid for any deer, except antlerless mule deer, in units 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E, 4F, 3B1 and 3B2. There are unlimited “H” youth deer hunting licenses valid for any deer statewide, except mule deer in the aforementioned restricted units.
- 172 nonresident any-deer archery licenses available for 2014, eight fewer than 2013. The number of nonresident any-deer archery licenses will increase to 202 in 2015.

Bill Jensen, Big Game Management Biologist, Bismarck

Mule Deer

Archery Opens: Aug. 29

Archery Closes: Jan. 4, 2015

Regular Gun Season Opens: Nov. 7

Regular Gun Season Closes: Nov. 23

BIG GAME

BIG GAME

White-tailed Deer

Archery Opens: Aug. 29

Archery Closes: Jan. 4, 2015

Regular Gun Season Opens: Nov. 7

Regular Gun Season Closes: Nov. 23

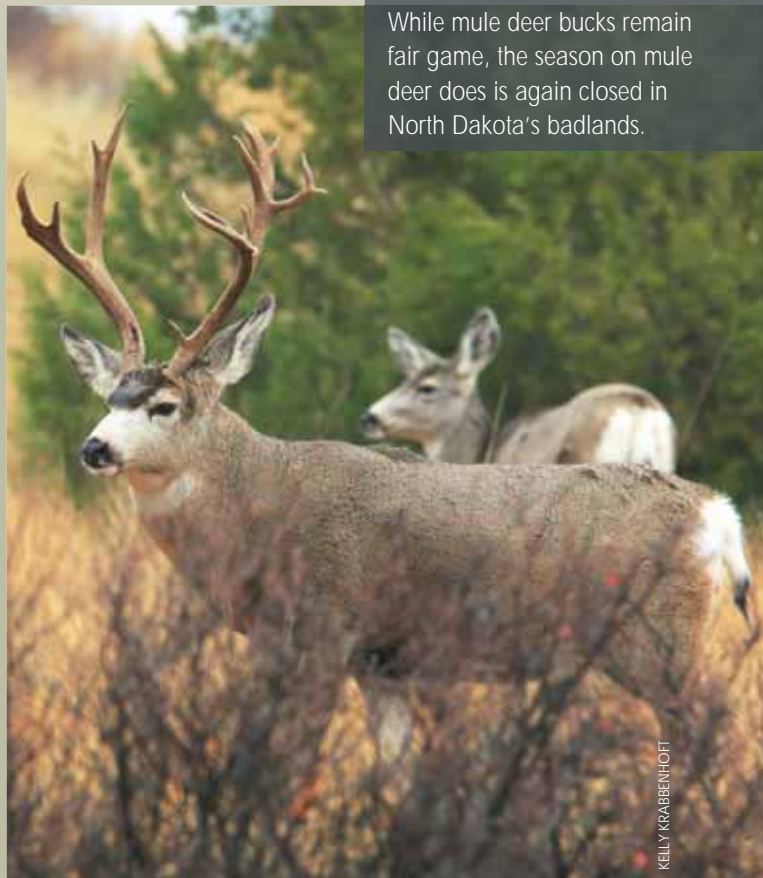
Muzzleloader Opens: Nov. 28

Muzzleloader Closes: Dec. 14

While last winter was not particularly snowy – only northeastern North Dakota had enough snow to allow the Game and Fish Department to fly winter surveys – temperatures were brutally cold from mid-November through mid-March.

Months of cold can be tough on animals. Evaluations of the Department's historical database shows that severe winter cold can reduce fawn production and survival rates.

Loss of habitat throughout the state – in CRP, native grasslands, wetland drainage, removal of tree rows and abandoned farmsteads – and severe winter conditions in the northern and eastern portions of the state, have applied downward pressure on



While mule deer bucks remain fair game, the season on mule deer does is again closed in North Dakota's badlands.

KELLY KRABENHOF

Mule deer in North Dakota's badlands continue to show signs of recovery following the severe winters of 2008-11, when deer numbers had declined by nearly 50 percent since 2007.

This is the second consecutive year since 2007 that the spring mule deer index was higher than the previous year. The 2014 spring index was 19 percent higher than 2013, but still 7 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 and 2013 hunting seasons, a more moderate winter over much of the state's primary mule deer range, and improved fawn production in 2013.

The fawn-to-doe ratio of 74 fawns per 100 does last year was the highest since 2009, but still well below the long-term average of 91 fawns per 100 does.

While another year of a population increase is encouraging, many factors could influence future mule deer population growth potential, including encroachment of juniper in mule deer habitat, direct and indirect habitat loss due to energy development, predators and weather.

Mule deer hunting opportunities this fall will be similar to 2013, with 1,350 antlered mule deer licenses available, an increase of 200 from 2013. Game and Fish is again not allowing any antlerless mule deer hunting units 3B1, 3B2, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E and 4F.

With fewer mule deer licenses, the chance of drawing a license in 2014 was low, but for those hunters lucky enough, it should result in a high-quality hunt due to less crowded hunting conditions.

Bruce Stillings, Big Game Management Supervisor, Dickinson

Pronghorn

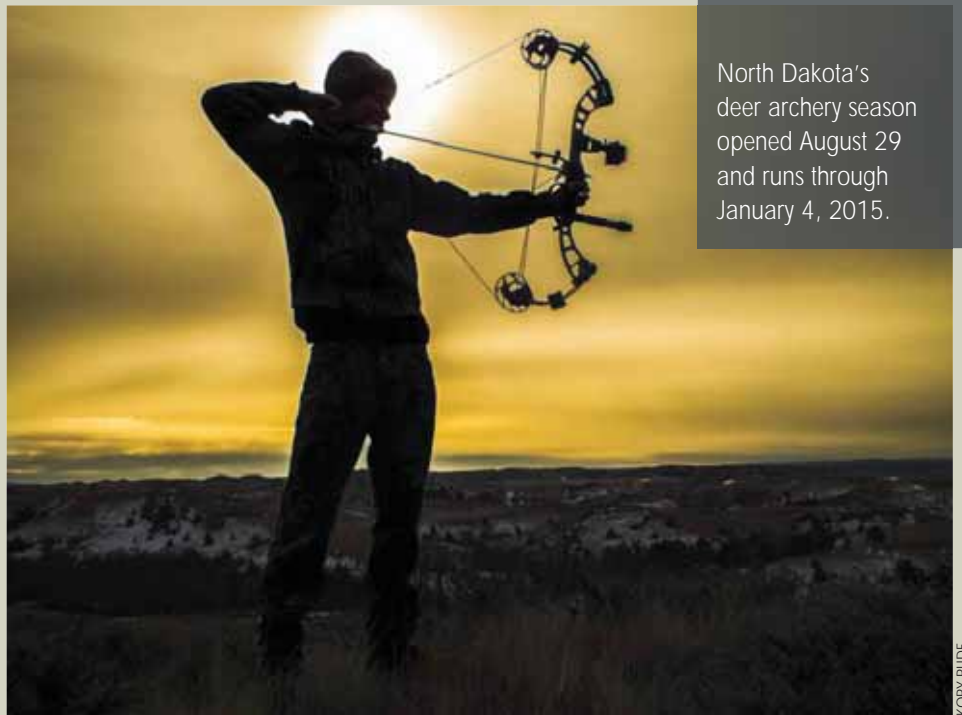
Archery Opens: Aug. 29

Archery Closes: Sept. 28

Gun Season Opens: Oct. 3

Gun Season Closes: Oct. 19

Pronghorn continue to show signs of recovery after a population decline of nearly 75 percent following the brutal winters of 2008-11. However, for the second consecutive year, pronghorn in the state have increased following more moderate winter conditions in 2011-13, and



North Dakota's deer archery season opened August 29 and runs through January 4, 2015.

KORY RUDE

closed hunting seasons from 2010-13.

Pronghorn in their primary range increased by 16 percent in 2014, while the overall population estimate was up 7 percent. Pronghorn in the western Bowman management region increased by 15 percent and were within the Game and Fish population objective needed to support a hunting season.

A limited season will be held this year for the first time since 2009, with 250 any-pronghorn licenses issued for hunting unit 4A. These lottery licenses can be used during an archery-only portion of the season (August 29-September 28), and hunters who still have valid licenses can use a legal firearm or archery equipment during the rifle portion of the season (October 3-19).

The limited season will provide hunting opportunities for surplus pronghorn bucks in the region, while still encouraging continued population growth. Another moderate winter should provide conditions needed for continued pronghorn population growth to support more hunting opportunities in 2015.

Bruce Stillings

Moose

For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, or the 2014 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.

Moose numbers remain low in what was once considered traditional habitat in the Turtle Mountains and Pembina Hills. However, numbers statewide remain stable, with the best densities found in the northwestern portion of the state.

Moose unit M1C, located in the Pembina Hills region, has been closed since 2006 and will remain closed this year. Moose unit M4, which encompasses the Turtle Mountains, was closed in 2013 and will also remain closed this fall.

The Department continues to monitor reported moose that have died from nonhunting related reasons to determine any effects of disease, and to gain a better understanding of why they died.

A three-year research study for moose was also initiated in March in the Kenmare area and within the Missouri River bottoms southeast of Williston, with the capture of 40 adult cows. The focus of the research is on annual survival, cause-specific mortality, reproduction rates, annual and seasonal movements and home range use, as well as seasonal habitat selection.

Game and Fish allocated 111 licenses for North Dakota's 2014 moose season, the same as in 2013. Expectations for the season are high as hunter success for moose historically runs above 90 percent.

Jason Smith, Big Game Management Biologist, Jamestown

Elk

For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, or the 2014 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.

North Dakota's 2014 elk season features 261 licenses, the same as 2013. Hunter success will likely look similar to last year as well. Elk numbers in southwestern North Dakota continue to remain low due to a successful herd reduction effort in Theodore Roosevelt National Park in 2010-11.

Units E3 and E4 will have 60 any-elk licenses this season, which is the same as 2013. Elk numbers in units E1 and E2 remain stable, and the number of licenses issued is the same as last year.

Making landowner contacts and preseason scouting prior to the season opener is recommended and is an essential component to a successful hunt.

Jason Smith

Bighorn Sheep

For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, or the 2014 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.

The Department's 2013 bighorn sheep survey revealed a minimum of 293 sheep in western North Dakota, virtually unchanged from 297 in 2012.

In total, biologists counted 85 rams, 159 ewes and 49 lambs. Not included are 24 bighorn sheep introduced from Alberta in February, and approximately 30 bighorns in the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

The count in the northern badlands was the highest on record, beating the previous mark set in 2012, but the southern badlands population declined 15 percent.

Rams and lambs showed a slight decline, but adult ewes increased. About 75 percent of lambs counted during last summer's survey survived winter, which is about average, but the recruitment rate of 37 percent was above average. Biologists count and classify all bighorn sheep in late summer, and then recount lambs the following March as they approach one year of age, to determine recruitment.

Biologists were encouraged by another year of healthy lamb numbers. Moreover, adult mortality was low last winter, and thus far it appears last spring yielded a



DARCY KRAMLICH

good crop of lambs. The 2014 summer survey was not complete prior to publication.

The Department allocated five bighorn sheep hunting licenses for 2014, one more than 2013.

During February 2014, the Department translocated 24 bighorn sheep from Luscar Mine, Alberta to the badlands of North Dakota. The Alberta bighorns stayed very near the release site until April when they began to explore a bit. Biologists will continue to keep a close eye on their status as telemetry flights are made weekly.

Brett Wiedmann, Big Game Management Biologist, Dickinson

To make the most of a once-in-a-lifetime elk license in North Dakota, scouting before the season opener and talking to landowners before venturing into the field is recommended.

The Game and Fish Department translocated 24 bighorn sheep from Luscar Mine, Alberta to western North Dakota in February 2014.



LARA ANDERSON

Biologists say that white-fronted geese often migrate at night and can be identified by their distinctive bark-like call.



CRAIG BIHRLE

MIGRATORY BIRDS

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Ducks and Geese

Excellent wetland conditions and high waterfowl numbers were found again during the Game and Fish Department's 67th annual breeding duck survey.

This is 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.

Winter was cold and generally dry, with below average snowfall. However, spring rains again improved pond conditions throughout much of the state. The 2014 water index was the second highest on record, up 110 percent from 2013 and 134 percent above the 1948-2013 average.

This year's breeding duck index was also the second highest on record, up 23 percent from last year and 110 percent above the long-term average.

All species, except canvasbacks (minus 8 percent), had improved numbers from 2013. Ruddy ducks were unchanged. Mallards were up 8 percent from 2013 for the third highest count on record. Scaup increased 28 percent, while gadwall and shovelers (both plus 20 percent) and redheads (plus 64 percent) also showed increases.

All species are also above the long-term average – mallards (plus 146 percent); pintails (plus 55 percent); shovelers (plus 165 percent); scaup (plus 165 percent); gadwall (plus 88 percent); canvasbacks (plus 41 percent); wigeon (plus 96 percent); and blue-winged teal (plus 88 percent).

Duck numbers in North Dakota have remained high since 1994 because of exceptional water conditions and abundant nesting cover provided by CRP. However, as CRP acres and native grasslands continue to decline across the state, biologists expect duck production to decline.

The number of broods observed during the Department's July brood survey was up 58 percent from 2013, and 100 percent above the 1955-2013 average. The average brood size

was 6.4 ducklings, down 0.8 ducklings. July water conditions were down 19 percent from 2013, but were 42 percent above the long-term average.

In addition, because of a late spring, duck nesting was delayed in 2014. There are strong indications of an exceptional late hatch. We are predicting that a fall flight of ducks from North Dakota this year will be similar to those of 2007 through 2011.

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.

Last fall, ducks, especially mallards, seemed to arrive late in the season.

However, good numbers of snow geese were found across the state for much of fall. Hunting opportunities for ducks and geese should again be good, but as always, weather conditions and migration patterns will dictate waterfowl hunting opportunities come fall.

Mike Johnson, Game Management Section Leader, Bismarck

Youth Waterfowl Season

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

Opens: Sept. 20

Closes: Sept. 21

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

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

Early Canada Goose Season

Opens: Aug. 15 (statewide)

Closes: Sept. 7 (Missouri River zone),



CRAIG BIHRLE

Sept. 15 (statewide)
Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.
Daily Limit: 15
Possession Limit: 45

Canada Geese Regular Season

Opens: Sept. 27 (residents only), Oct. 4 (nonresidents)
Closes: Jan. 2 (Missouri River zone), Dec. 25 (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. 27 (residents only), Oct. 4 (nonresidents)
Closes: Dec. 7
Daily Limit: 2
Possession Limit: 6

Light (Snow) Geese (Statewide)

Opens: Sept. 27 (residents only), Oct. 4 (nonresidents)
Closes: Jan. 4
Daily Limit: 50, no possession limit
Shooting Hours for all Geese: Half-hour before sunrise to 1 p.m. each day through Nov. 1. Starting Nov. 2, 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 Nov. 27, all-day hunting is also allowed on Sundays through the end of each season.

Regular Duck Season

Low Plains Unit
Opens: Sept. 27 (residents only), Oct. 4 (nonresidents)
Closes: Dec. 7
Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.
High Plains Unit
Opens: Sept. 27 (residents only), Oct. 4 (nonresidents)
Closes: Dec. 7
Opens: Dec. 13
Closes: Jan. 4
Shooting-hours: Half-hour



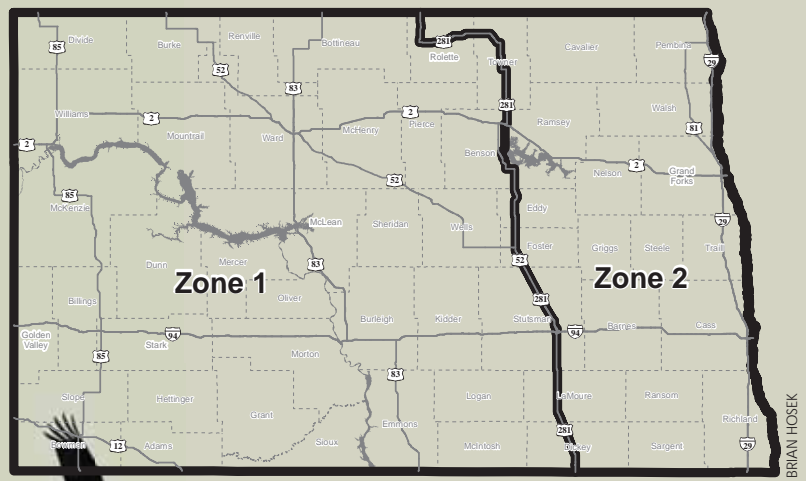
before sunrise to sunset.
Daily Limit: Six ducks, which may include no more than five mallards (two of which may be hens), two redheads, three wood ducks, one canvasback, two pintails, three scaup. In addition to the daily bag limit of ducks, an additional two blue-winged teal may be taken from Sept. 27 through Oct. 12.
Possession Limit: Three times the daily limit.

Sandhill Cranes

Open Zone 1: Sept. 20
Zone 2: Sept. 20
Closes Zone 1: Nov. 16
Zone 2: Nov. 16
Daily Limit Zone 1: 3
Daily Limit Zone 2: 2
Possession Limit Zone 1: 9
Zone 2: 6
Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to 1 p.m. daily through Nov. 1; to 2 p.m. Nov. 2 until the end of season.
 The Mid-continent Sandhill Crane Population is in good shape heading into the fall hunting season. The 2014 spring index will most likely be in the top 10 highest indices for the population after numbers are finalized.

This year's spring migration was slightly later due to a colder than average spring. Staging areas should be abundant as





SANDHILL CRANE ZONES

CRAIG BIRHLE

BRIAN HOSEK

waters recede from spring's wet weather. Overall, sandhill crane hunting opportunities should be good statewide this fall.

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

Nonresident sandhill crane hunters can pursue sandhill cranes with either a non-resident 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 be sure of their target before shooting, as federally endangered whooping cranes may be present throughout North Dakota during 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



ED BRY

Doves

- Opens:** Sept. 1
- Closes:** Nov. 9
- Daily Limit:** 15
- Possession Limit:** 45
- Shooting Hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

North Dakota's mourning dove breeding population changes relatively little from year to year. That's good since we generally have a sizeable population of breeding doves.

Challenges for hunters this year will simply be finding the time to get out hunting and then finding the right mix of conditions that are conducive to concentrating birds.

Dove hunters should experience good opportunities again during the first two weeks of September. Thus far, reproductive efforts by mourning doves look good. North Dakota's late, wet and windy spring limited breeding early on, but birds nesting later in

summer appear to have done well.

Hunters should look for areas with abundant small grain or oil seed fields that have been harvested and are also near shelterbelts or other diverse stands of trees.

Eurasian collared doves continue to expand throughout the state and can be found in almost every small town and city. However, these birds are not often found outside of municipalities and have rarely shown up in hunter harvests. Eurasian collared doves and white-winged doves, which are typically found in southern Texas, but have been expanding their range, are included with mourning doves in the dove bag limit of 15 birds per day and 45 in possession.

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 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

- Fall Season Opens:** Aug. 9
- Closes:** Oct. 26
- Spring Season Opens:** March 14
- Closes:** April 26

Daily Limit: 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.

Snipe

Opens: Sept. 20

Closes: Dec. 7

Daily Limit: 8

Possession Limit: 24

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.



CRAIG BIRBLE

Woodcock

Opens: Sept. 27

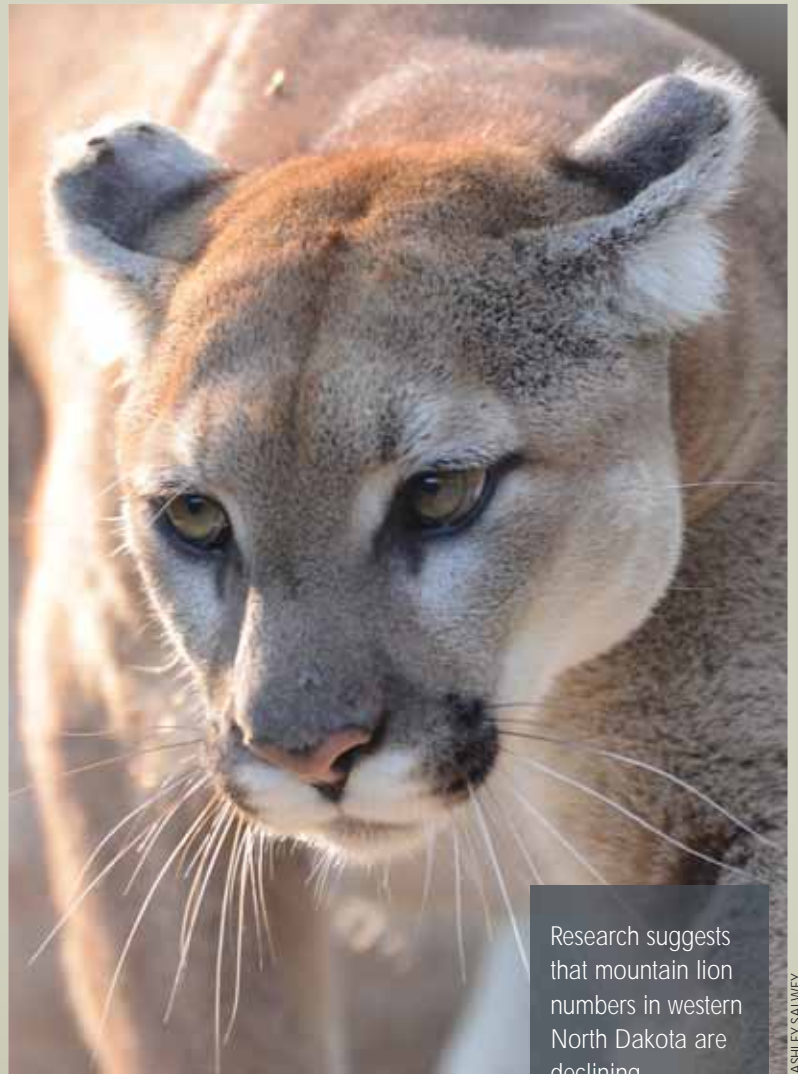
Closes: Nov. 10

Daily Limit: 3

Possession Limit: 9

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

FURBEARERS



ASHLEY SALWEY

Research suggests that mountain lion numbers in western North Dakota are declining.

FURBEARERS

For season details, refer to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, or the 2014-15 furbearer hunting and trapping guide.

All wildlife populations naturally fluctuate to a degree depending on habitat and food availability and interactions with other wildlife species. Add in influences of weather and interactions with humans, and the result is either more or less pronounced.

One of the aims of wildlife management is to dampen extreme fluctuations in population size via hunting and trapping. However, some populations do not receive enough harvest pressure to have noticeable effects on population size, as is the case with many furbearer species. Therefore, it should not come as much of a surprise that after several years of increasing numbers,

most furbearer species are now trending downward again.

Despite these downward trends, fur harvesters will still find good numbers of coyotes, raccoons and skunks in central and eastern North Dakota. Conversely, spring surveys indicate numbers of muskrats remain low throughout the state, similar to last year.

Game and Fish received positive feedback on the elimination of a season quota for fishers last year. Additionally, the number of fishers taken during the one-week season was what was anticipated. Trappers can expect a similar season structure for fishers this year.

Trappers and hunters harvested 32 bobcats last season, which is 44 percent fewer than the previous season and 76 percent below the 20-year average.

Trend information and research suggests that the mountain lion population in

western North Dakota is declining as well.

Hunters are reminded that taking kittens, or females with kittens is prohibited. Unlike many wildlife species, mountain lions can give birth any time of year. And, even though a female may have dependent kittens during the hunting season, those females will spend only about half of the time in a day in the company of her kittens.

Mountain lions are solitary, so multiple sets of tracks usually indicate an area frequented by a female and her kittens. Therefore, to avoid taking female mountain lions that have dependent kittens, hunters should refrain from pursuing mountain lions where multiple sets of tracks are present.

Cable device (e.g. snare) users will be required to register on the Department's website (gf.nd.gov) prior to going afield this year. Mandatory registration will help Game and Fish better communicate with cable device users with surveys and educational materials.

Cable devices are an effective and efficient tool for trapping furbearers in North Dakota. However, misuse or careless behavior by trappers can lead to nontargeted catches. Therefore, it is important that trappers are aware of the Department's cable device requirements and use them responsibly.

Mountain Lions

Zone 1 (early) Opens: Aug. 29

Closes: Nov. 23

Zone 1 (late) Opens: Nov. 24

Closes: March 31, 2015

Zone 2 Opens: Aug. 29

Closes: March 31, 2015

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.

Of the three weasel species in North Dakota, the long-tailed weasel is the largest.



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 2014-15 furbearer hunting and trapping guide.

Fisher Trapping or Cable Devices

Opens: Nov. 24

Closes: Nov. 30

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 2014-15 furbearer hunting and trapping guide.

Weasel Trapping

Opens: Oct. 25

Closes: March 15, 2015

Weasel Hunting or Cable Devices

Opens: Nov. 24

Closes: March 15, 2015

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

Muskrat and Mink Trapping or Cable Devices

Trapping Opens: Oct. 25

Cable Devices Opens: Nov. 24

Closes: April 30, 2015

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, 2015, 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 used in water can have no more than 2 inches of the trap above the water or must have a protective covering.

Muskrat and Mink Hunting

Opens: Nov. 24

Closes: April 30, 2015

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

Bobcat Hunting or Trapping

Opens: Nov. 8

Closes: March 15, 2015

Beginning Nov. 24, bobcats may also be hunted by pursuing with dogs.

Bobcat Cable Devices

Opens: Nov. 24

Closes: March 15, 2015

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 2014-15 furbearer hunting and trapping guide.

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

Open year-round – officially from April 1, 2014–March 31, 2015.

In addition, red fox, gray fox and coyote may be hunted at any hour from Nov. 24, 2014, through March 15, 2015. Any hunter who engages in the hunting of red fox, gray fox or coyote during the time from a half-hour after sunset to a 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. 24

Closes: March 15, 2015



Fur harvesters are expected to find good numbers of coyotes in central and eastern North Dakota this fall and winter.

DARCY KRAVILICH

Beaver and Raccoon Hunting, Trapping or Underwater Cable Devices

Open year-round – officially from April 1, 2014–March 31, 2015. For more information, see the North Dakota 2014-15 furbearer hunting and trapping guide.

Muskrats in North Dakota hit a high in 2010-11, but their numbers have since fallen.

Beaver and Raccoon Cable Devices on Land

Opens: Nov. 24

Closes: April 30, 2015

From March 16, 2015, through April 30, 2015, cable devices must be within 50 feet of water; they must be no more than 4 inches off the ground and 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.



RENAE HEINLE

PLOTS

Acres Remain Steady



People often associate the Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program with upland game bird hunting. The walking access-only program is also popular with waterfowl hunters willing to haul decoys some distances to out-of-the-way marshes.

By Ron Wilson



CRAIG BIRBLE

During a time of continuous landscape changes across North Dakota, the Game and Fish Department's popular walking-access-only hunting program remains nearly the same.

Last fall, hunters could access about 760,000 Private Land Open To Sportsmen acres, down from a peak of about 1 million acres from 2008-10. This fall, that total sits at about 735,000 acres.

Kevin Kading, Game and Fish Department private land section leader, said there was little movement in PLOTS in terms of acres gained or lost because private land staff spent much of the last year retooling parts of the program.

"It was a work-over year," Kading said. "We took a long look at programs, reviewed and significantly increased rental rates, and improved and simplified the working lands program to ensure higher quality habitat was part of the agreement."

Kading said the majority of the acres lost from 2013 to 2014 were in the working lands program, which is a short-term program based on wildlife value of lands actively farmed or ranched while providing public access.

Kading said not having a farm bill in 2013 also hurt promotion of the PLOTS program.

"With the farm bill stalled out last fall, and it still didn't get passed until after the first of the year, that held up a lot of things," he said. "When it came to farm bill programs, producers were waiting just like we were waiting. So, there wasn't any promotion on our end for programs in PLOTS tied to the farm bill."

In January, Kading said the Game and Fish Department's PLOTS program was awarded \$1.5 million from the Outdoor Heritage Fund, which is designed to enhance habitat, public access, hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation in the state. The Outdoor Heritage Fund is supported by funding from a slice of the state's oil and gas production tax.

"However, we did not receive those funds until June, so we couldn't promote or sign up anything," he said. "It wasn't until July that we were able to notify producers of those additional dollars, but we fully expect to have those funds obligated rather quickly."

The number of acres in the Game and Fish Department's PLOTS program held fairly steady. Last fall, hunters could access about 760,000 acres. This fall, the total number of PLOTS acres is about 735,000.



RENAE HEINLE

Kading said \$1.5 million equals about 3,000 to 4,000 high quality PLOTS acres over 6-10 years.

Kading said the Department has since submitted a \$3 million grant to the Outdoor Heritage Fund, which would use the money, along with existing PLOTS funds, as a match for a large conservation reserve enhancement program that would bring about \$34 million in federal money to the state.

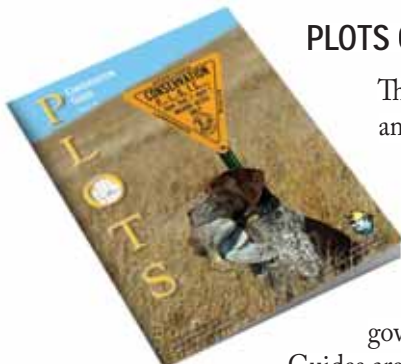
Kading said the large conservation reserve enhancement program would be targeted in the state's prime pheasant counties.

Considering that 2013 was a work-over year, combined with the negative influence of a stalled farm

bill, Kading said the PLOTS program fared pretty well, and he anticipates these changes will result in an increase in quality habitat and increased PLOTS acres in the future.

"The program still has a lot of support from hunters," he said. "And despite what a few people may think, there are still many landowners who are interested in the program, as PLOTS remains an effective and attractive option for producers to consider when making management decisions."

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.



PLOTS Guide Available Online

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen Guide for 2014 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 734,700 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.

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 map sheets from the website.

Changes to Signs

Kevin Kading, North Dakota Game and Fish Department private land section leader, said the Department isn't phasing out the familiar yellow PLOTS signs, but some of the wording found on the signs is changing starting this fall.

Kading said all PLOTS property is open only for public walk-in access for the purpose of hunting within legal hunting seasons, or as signed.

Understanding this, hunters may occasionally encounter PLOTS signs that indicate the land is open only from September 1 – April 1. These are older signs that were placed on the property prior to current administrative rules going into effect.

Kading said the September 1 – April 1 dates are no longer valid, and the Department continues to phase out these older signs and replace them with signs that read "Open To Hunting," which better reflects the new administrative rule that defines PLOTS areas as open to access for hunting during any open season.



PLOTS Photo Contest

A photo contest will again decide the cover of the 2015 Private Land Open To Sportsmen Guide.

Perry Masotti of Gardiner, New York won the first contest initiated last year. His photo of a bird dog holding a sharp-tailed grouse graces the cover of the 2014 PLOTS 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 2015 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, 2015. Log on to the Game and Fish Department's website, gf.nd.gov, to learn more about contest prizes, rules and entry information.

Participation Sought in Upland Wing Survey

By Ron Wilson



LARRY KRUCKENBERG

Participation in the Game and Fish Department's upland game wing survey from pheasant hunters is typically strong, but Department biologists hope to get a better showing from sharp-tailed grouse hunters.



MIKE ANDERSON

Ryan Herigstad (left), Game and Fish Department waterfowl technician, and Stan Kohn, Department upland game management supervisor, sort through envelopes containing ring-necked pheasant wings and feet as part of the upland game wing survey in February 2013.

The upland game wing survey continues today, about a half-century or so after its inception.

Feathers and feet of upland game birds make for thin soup, but examination of these parts help biologists better manage North Dakota's bird populations.

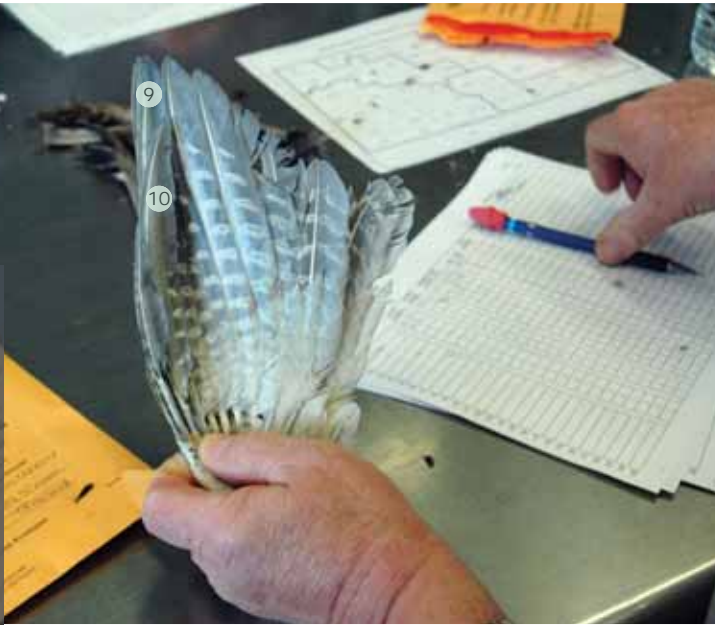
Starting sometime in the 1960s, North Dakota Game and Fish Department biologists sought the assistance of hunters to collect an assortment of feathers and feet, depending on the species, from harvested birds.



Lowell Tripp, retired Department biologist, is one in a long line of biologists who have participated in the Game and Fish Department's upland wing survey since its start in the 1960s.

GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT PHOTO

Department biologists determine the age of a ring-necked pheasant rooster by looking at the number 9-10 primary feathers.



MIKE ANDERSON

Measuring the molting primary wing feather of a juvenile ring-necked rooster to determine the age of the bird in weeks.



MIKE ANDERSON

This practice, simply called the upland game wing survey, continues today, about a half-century or so after its inception. Birds included in the survey are ring-necked pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse, Hungarian (gray) partridge, turkeys and ruffed grouse.

Stan Kohn, Department upland game management supervisor, said hunters asked to collect sharptail and partridge feathers were selected because they indicated on the Department's small game questionnaire that they hunted these species the previous year. Participants for the pheasant survey indicated they shot three or more birds the previous year.

One thousand pheasant survey packets will be sent to hunters this fall, compared to 600 sharp-tailed grouse and Hungarian partridge packets.

Included in the packets are pre-addressed, pre-stamped wing envelopes containing instructions for proper use.


"The instructions are simple to follow, but we need to remind hunters to make sure and record on the envelope the date and county where the bird was harvested," Kohn said. "Without this information, we can't use any of the feathers in the envelope."

Participation in the survey from pheasant hunters has been good, Kohn said, probably because the state harbors more hunters who pursue the non-natives as compared to grouse hunters.

"Participation from sharp-tailed grouse hunters has been going down, so we need a real strong effort from those folks who do harvest sharptails or partridge," Kohn said.

Avid grouse and partridge hunters who do not receive a wing survey packet in the mail can contact the Game and Fish Department at 701-328-6300 and request harvest survey envelopes.

"Hunters are vital in managing upland game birds," said Aaron Robinson, Department upland game management biologist. "We cannot successfully manage game bird populations without their help."



“Participation from sharp-tailed grouse hunters has been going down, so we need a real strong effort from those folks who do harvest sharptails or partridge,” Kohn said.

Robinson said data biologists get from feathers provides valuable information about upland game populations.

“We determine age ratios from wings and tail feathers and it can inform us about sex ratios, survival, nesting success, hatch dates and overall production,” Robinson said.

Biologists can then take this data and correlate it to habitat loss such as CRP and other variables such as weather to create predictive models about future hunting opportunities.

“Without the support from hunters sending us wings, we have no way to gauge true production,” Robinson said. “Sample size is very important in determining these metrics, and over the past few years the number of wings that have been sent in by sharp-tailed grouse hunters has decreased significantly.”

For grouse, the process is simple, Robinson said. Remove one wing, two central tail feathers and several head feathers, enclose in the postage-paid envelope and return.

For pheasants, it’s a little bit different, Kohn said, as biologists ask hunters to also cut off one pheasant leg at the first joint above the spur.

Each hunter participating in the wing survey initially receives five envelopes. If this number is not enough, hunters can indicate on the survey they want more.

“We go through the envelopes daily during the upland game bird season, and if a hunter checks the box that they want more, we’ll send them out immediately,” Kohn said.

Wings sent in by hunters are typically examined starting the end of January, following the closure of North Dakota’s upland game bird season.

“Again, the information we get from this survey is very valuable,” Kohn said, “which is why participation from hunters is important.”

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

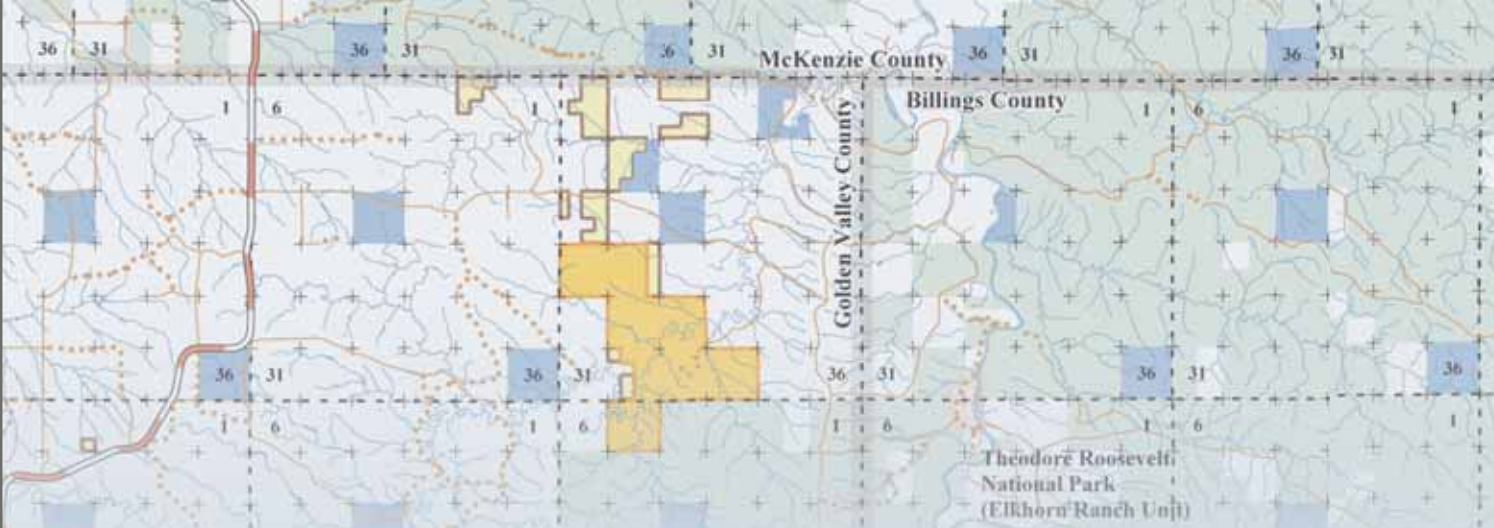
Upland Game Season Dates:

Sharp-tailed grouse, Hungarian partridge and ruffed grouse

- Opens – Sept. 13
- Closes – Jan. 4, 2015

Ring-necked pheasants

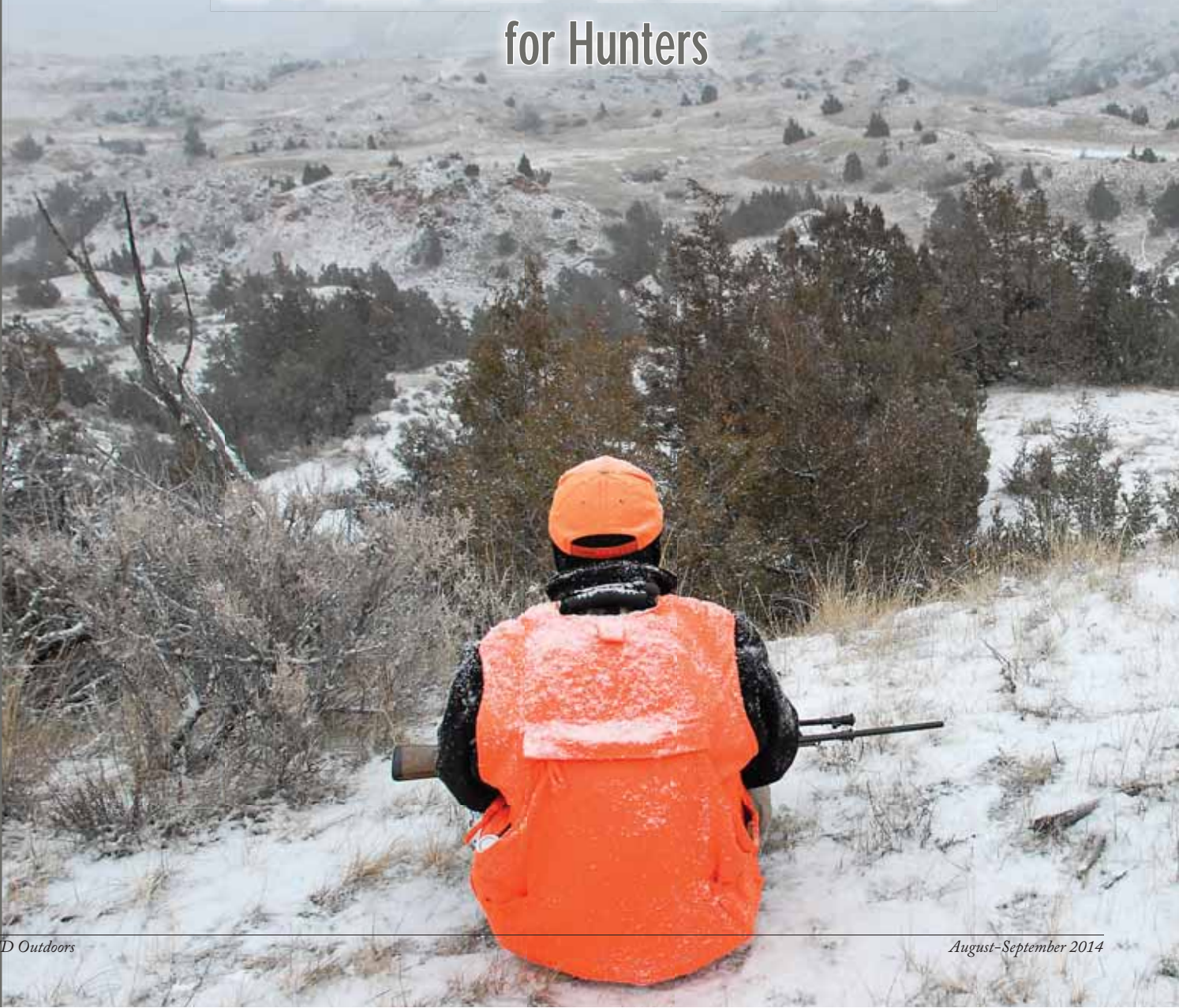
- Regular Season Opens – Oct. 11
- Delayed Opener – Oct. 18
- Regular Season Closes – Jan. 4, 2015
- Delayed Season Closes – Jan. 4, 2015



Simple to Sophisticated

MAP APPS

for Hunters





By Luann Dart

Map applications found on the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website can help take hunters places they've never been before in the field.



CRAIG BIRRE



RON WILSON

The Game and Fish Department's website also includes maps to upload on GPS units, offering information on PLOTS and hunting units. Install the ESRI ArcGIS app available on the website for location services on a smartphone.

Hunters can enhance their time in the field by accessing various map applications from their desktops, smartphones or other mobile devices by visiting the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website.

Software applications, or apps, for Web-based maps, designed to operate on either desktop computers or smartphones, tablet computers or other mobile devices with Internet access, can be accessed for free from the Department's website, providing information on everything from species ranges and hunting units, to the location of the nearest shooting range.

"As hunters, we sometimes get stuck in a rut. We typically hunt the same area, walk the same tree row and sit in the same deer blind," said Greg Gullickson, Game and Fish Department outreach biologist in Minot. "If you want to explore your unit a little bit, you'll know where those boundaries are with these maps."

Various hunting-related maps are available on the website, ranging from simplistic downloadable PDFs, to interactive maps.

"It's kind of a matrix," said Brian Hosek, Department GIS manager. Each has options, with users able to choose desktop or mobile versions, or simplified maps versus more interactive services.

For example, a user browsing from a computer could simply view or download PDF maps for informational purposes. But using the more advanced interactive map services for mobile devices, users can turn features on or off, add their own information, or overlay a topographical map to explore an area further.

"It has a lot of rich tools that you can interact with, so it's giving you a more customized experience with what you want to make," Hosek said.

Mobile options allow users to download an application and view services with the application. The Department's apps conform to whatever device they are downloaded onto.

"It's nice to have those maps," said Gullickson, who regularly uses the information in the field. "I have those loaded onto a GPS in my pickup and you can find an area where there's a lot of state land, public land or federal land, and it lets you know where you're at."

Transfer the GPS from the dashboard into the hunting vest and users will be able to navigate in unfamiliar areas, such as the badlands or even open prairie. Pinpoint your location and use certain shaded colors on the map to help identify public versus private lands.

Start at <http://gf.nd.gov/maps>, the Game and Fish Department's website.

There, the Department offers a variety of Web-based maps. Other than the traditional browser experience, these maps are also available on smartphone apps in the Apple app store, Google Play store and Windows phone store. These apps offer additional features, including location GPS services.

For a quick look at the maps most utilized, click on "Map Index" and scroll down. First, you'll find maps of Private Lands Open To Sportsmen and Department-managed wildlife management areas in North Dakota.

Then, you'll find a list of hunting/management units for 13 wildlife species, ranging from bighorn sheep to turkey. All of these maps offer a quick view, a printable PDF, an interactive version, or a downloadable Web application. In this section, you'll also find habitat maps for a variety of species, such as mountain lion, fisher and greater prairie chicken.

For example, click on the big game species range Web map to find primary and secondary mule deer ranges in western North Dakota. The interactive map will share more details. Click on an area and learn that Cedar River National Grassland includes 4,893 acres.

These maps also assist hunters in staying within their hunting units if they are unfamiliar with the boundaries.

The Game and Fish Department's interactive maps services provide a vast amount of data and functionality all through the Web browser. Users can customize maps using the various tools provided in the application, or simply just display or print their desired map.

"A huge advantage of these tools is being able to explore in further detail," Hosek said.

Click on “Map Service Applications” and “ND Game and Fish ArcGIS Online Site.” Go to the top of the page and click on “Gallery,” where you’ll find about 15 hunting-related Web-based maps and interactive maps viewable on mobile devices or a desktop, including:

- Wildlife Management Area Shooting Ranges – This Web map identifies public shooting ranges managed by the Game and Fish Department. The ranges, located in central and western North Dakota, offer various yardages for rifle, pistol and shotgun. Click on the features to get details on range specifications and operating hours.
- PLOTS Guide – The Game and Fish Department’s PLOTS Guide Web map provides users access to the digital version of the annual publication. This service includes state and federal lands, as well as PLOTS tracts that may assist hunters with accessibility. This information is updated regularly and offered in real-time.
- Wildlife Management Areas – Click the search icon to locate a specific WMA. The unit name and number of acres and county are listed. Zoom in to find specific borders.
- Big Game Species Range – This Web map includes species range information for moose, elk, bighorn sheep, white-tailed deer and mule deer. These ranges represent generalized range information that may be applicable to various or multiple life cycles of each species.
- Upland Game Range – This Web map includes species information for ring-necked pheasant, sharp-tailed grouse, wild turkeys, Hungarian partridge and doves.
- Furbearer Range – This Web map includes species information for bobcat, mountain lion, coyote, fox, raccoon, badger, fisher, mink, beaver and muskrat.
- Waterfowl Species Range – This Web map includes species range information for ducks, Canada geese, white-fronted and snow geese.

- Nongame Species Range – This Web map includes species range information for black-tailed prairie dogs, golden eagles, plovers and terns.

Individual maps depicting hunting units are also online for spring turkey, sharp-tailed grouse, sandhill crane, ruffed grouse, pronghorn, nonresident waterfowl, moose, fall turkey, elk, deer and bighorn sheep.

Using the interactive tools, users can interact with the map features and customize the maps they desire. Note your favorite hunting spots or layer topographical maps to provide more details.

Use the maps to locate PLOTS in the area, measure the distance to the nearest PLOTS tract, or use satellite images to scope the terrain.

And the information is available 24/7 – and in real-time.

The traditional PLOTS guide offers a snapshot of information at the time it’s printed, Hosek points out. With real-time applications, the PLOTS guide is always up-to-date.

“If there’s something ever going on in that program, those tracts are going to be in or out. So folks using the digital version of that, they can count on having the up-to-date information for those lands,” he said.

The website also includes maps to upload onto GPS units, offering information on PLOTS and hunting units. Install the ESRI ArcGIS app available on the website for location services on a smartphone.

So, hunters driving in an area can get details on the immediate area.

“Those location services in the field can be very handy to give you a sense of direction of where other features are at out there,” Hosek said.

While the maps range from simple to sophisticated, they all lead to better experiences in the field.

LUANN DART is a freelance writer from Elgin, North Dakota.



<http://gf.nd.gov/maps>



BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor

Record Number of Lakes Stocked

North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel stocked walleye in a record 133 lakes across the state this summer.

Jerry Weigel, fisheries production and development supervisor, said thanks to the excellent walleye fingerling production from the Garrison Dam and Valley City national fish hatcheries, these waters received nearly 10 million fingerlings.

“With a record number of fishing waters across the state, the demand to stock these new waters with hatchery fish has greatly increased,” Weigel said. “We’ve increased our efforts to make sure we meet the record production demands.”

Game and Fish works with both federal hatcheries, providing operational funding and temporary staff, as well as collecting all the eggs and transporting fish to all the fishing waters across the state.

Most recently, the Department partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

to make improvements to the 50-year-old Valley City hatchery, which resulted in a hatchery record 2.5 million walleye fingerlings produced this year.

Stocking conditions were optimal this year, Weigel said, with cooler weather and increasing water levels at many lakes. The stocked 30-day-old fingerlings averaged about 1.25 inches in length.

“They should find lots of food and good survival conditions which bodes well for future fishing,” Weigel added. “Later this fall fisheries personnel will sample walleye lakes to assess the success of this year’s walleye stocking, as well as what Mother Nature provides.”

One common observation fish haulers noted while traveling across the state,



ASHLEY SALWEY

Weigel said, was the amount of fishing taking place, both from shore and from a boat. “There has never been a better time to fish for walleye,” he added. “Statewide, there are a lot of great opportunities, and a very good chance of success.”



RON WILSON

ANOTHER YEAR OF RECORD FISHING LICENSE SALES

The number of anglers buying fishing licenses in North Dakota continues to increase, as 2013-14 is the second consecutive year a new record for license sales has been established.

Statistics compiled by the Game and Fish Department revealed more than 219,000 fishing licenses were sold last year, an increase of 1,000 from 2012-13. A record total of 160,100 resident and 59,300 non-resident fishing licenses were sold last year.

In terms of actual individuals participating in fishing, the past year was again record-setting with more than 203,000

active anglers. Ice fishing activity experienced a substantial increase, while open water angler days took a slight dip.

A record number of fishing lakes (many at all-time elevations) and aggressive fish management in North Dakota have helped produce record fishing license sales.

Lake Sakakawea, Devils Lake and Lake Oahe/Missouri River remained the top three fisheries in the state.

Transporting Big Game

Big game 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 of 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 3C west of the Missouri River, 3E1, 3E2, 3F1 and 3F2.

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 2014-15 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.

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 the portion of 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.



ROW WILSON



RON WILSON

Electronic License Reminder for Bowhunters

Bowhunters are reminded that deer bow licenses and accompanying tags are only available through electronic purchase.

Licenses can be purchased 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.

County auditors and all their authorized license vendors that are part of the Game and Fish Department electronic licensing system are: Adams, Barnes, Benson, Bottineau, Bowman, Burleigh, Cass, Dickey, Grand Forks, Grant, McIntosh, Mercer, Morton, Ramsey, Ransom, Rolette, Sargent, Stark, Steele, Stutsman, Walsh, Ward and Williams.



BILL HASSE

NWTF Funding Helping Wildlife

The ongoing effort to establish and enhance wildlife habitat on Oahe Wildlife Management Area south of Bismarck following historic flooding in 2011 will receive another boost in 2015 from the National Wild Turkey Federation.

Bill Haase, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife resource management supervisor, said the NWTF has provided funding every year following the flood for habitat projects on Department-managed lands along the Missouri River.

Game and Fish will receive \$2,000 from the conservation group

in 2015 for a tree planting project at MacLean Bottoms.

"Combining funding from the Game and Fish Department and the National Wild Turkey Federation allows us to maximize the size of our tree planting projects in order to put habitat on the ground quicker," Haase said.

Haase said since flooding in 2011 the Department has planted thousands of trees, including cottonwoods, along with block plantings of deciduous and coniferous shrubs, which provide good winter cover for wildlife.

LICENSE FEES CHANGES

North Dakota hunters will notice an increase in license fees for this fall, which were established and set by the 2013 state legislature.

The general game and habitat license is \$20, the resident small game license – required for ages 16 and older – is \$10, the resident furbearer license – required for ages 16 and older – is \$15, and the resident combination license, which includes general game and habitat, small game, furbearer and fishing, is \$50.

In addition, the nonresident small game license, and the nonresident zoned waterfowl license, increased to \$100. The nonresident statewide waterfowl license is \$150.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is self-funded and only receives revenue from license sales and federal funds.

For more information, visit the Game and Fish website at gf.nd.gov.



CRAIG BIRRE

SANDHILL CRANE PERMITS

North Dakota's sandhill crane season opens September 20 and continues through November 16.

In addition to other licenses required, resident hunters need a \$10 crane permit, while nonresidents need a \$30 permit. Hunters can apply online, or print out a resident or non-resident application for mailing, at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov. Harvest Information Program certification is required. To get HIP certified, access the Department's website, or call 888-634-4798.

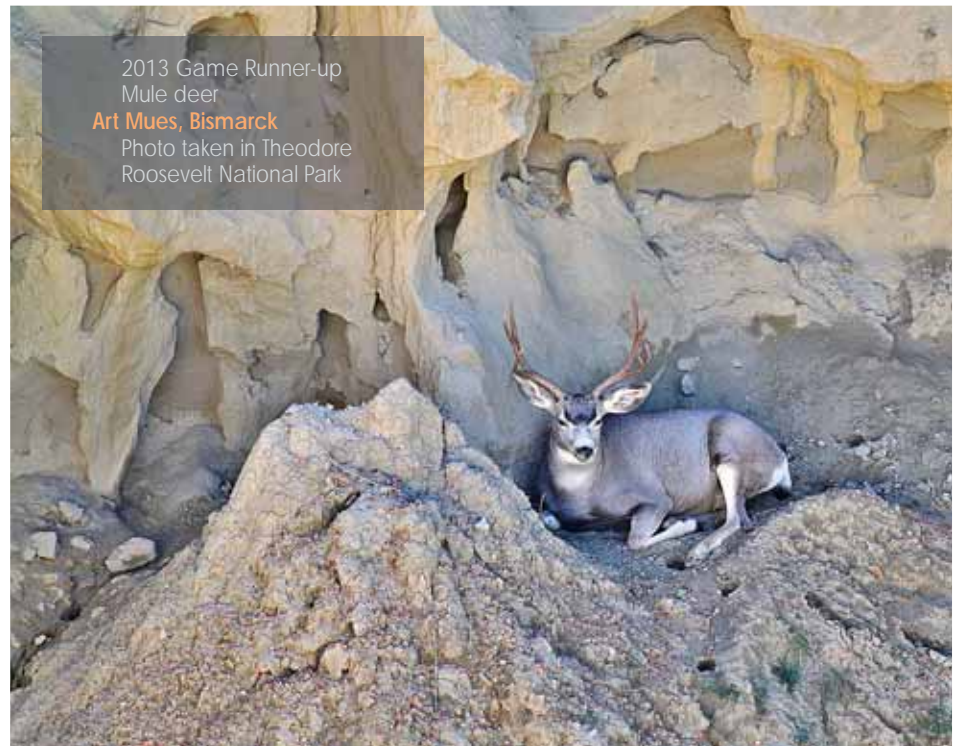
Hunters can also send the permit fee, along with personal information, including height, weight, social security number, date of birth, color of hair and eyes, and hunter education number and state issued, to Crane Permit, NDGF, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501.

Use Caution on Rural Roads

North Dakota hunters are reminded to be cautious of farm, ranch and other traffic when traveling on rural roads.

Fall is a busy time in the state as farmers and ranchers are harvesting crops, moving cattle, hauling bales and moving heavy machinery. Knowing this, hunters driving around on country roads should slow down when meeting another vehicle and pull well to the right when topping a hill.

To maintain positive landowner/hunter relations, Game and Fish Department officials said hunters should move to the right side of the road to allow wide farm vehicles to pass, park vehicles in a place that will not block a roadway, field approach or gate, pick up trash and empty shells, and not clean game in the road ditch or approach.



Watchable Wildlife 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 2014 issue of this magazine. They are also available at gf.nd.gov.



HIP Certification Required

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

HIP certification is required for hunting ducks, geese, swans, mergansers, coots, cranes, snipe, doves or woodcock. Registration provides the Game and Fish 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. 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.



Dean Hildebrand



Gene Van Eeckhout

Van Eeckhout, Hildebrand in Fishing Hall of Fame

State Game and Fish Department employee Gene Van Eeckhout, and the late Dean Hildebrand, former agency director, were recent inductees into the North Dakota Fishing Hall of Fame.

Van Eeckhout, southeast district fisheries supervisor and 38-year veteran of the Department, was recognized for his unselfish dedication to his job and community.

"It is truly special to be recognized with this group of people," Van Eeckhout said. "I have known or had the pleasure of working with 18 out of the 23 who are in the Hall of Fame."

Hildebrand, a life-long ambassador of the state's natural resources, was Game and Fish director from 1996 until his retirement in 2005. One of the major accomplishments he was instrumental in developing during his tenure was Save Our Lakes, a program that focuses on restoring at-risk fisheries.

Dean's wife, Joey, said, "I feel extremely honored because I know he's looking down at this and enjoying every minute of it."

The North Dakota Fishing Hall of Fame is located in Garrison.

STAFF NOTES



Blake Schaan



Andrew Ahrens

SCHAAN, AHRENS FILL WILDLIFE POSTS

Blake Schaan and Andrew Ahrens are recent additions to the Game and Fish Department staff.

Schaan is the new wildlife resource management supervisor at the Lone-tree field office near Harvey. He has a degree in fish and wildlife management from the University of North Dakota.

Ahrens fills the private land biologist position in Devils Lake. He has a degree in wildlife and fisheries science from South Dakota State University.



back cast

By Ron Wilson



Sorting gear the night before the sharp-tailed grouse opener last fall, there wasn't any talk of rain, we didn't even consider it. We expected the wind to blow at some point because it typically does no matter the season, no matter the day. But rain? Certainly not.

Early-season sharptails are hunted in short sleeves, maybe a flannel in the morning while the sun burns off the dew. That's the way it is, the way it should be. Raingear just isn't part of the getup, not in the first days of September when some of the best days of the year are counted on, almost guaranteed.

Early-season grouse hunting offers the promise of sweat sliding south down the back of your neck during the day's first walk, accompanied by frequent stops to squirt water from plastic bottles at thirsty bird dogs, whose tongues rhythmically bob from the corner of their mouths in time with heavy panting.

Early-season grouse hunting also offers the promise of early lunch because it's too warm to hunt the dogs anywhere near noon. They protest when shotguns are unloaded and folding chairs are placed in hard-to-find shade, but get over it once they learn that food is involved.

It's drizzling the next morning when we load the dogs and leave home. We'll outrun it in our 30-plus mile drive, we tell ourselves, or possibly outmaneuver the low, dark ceiling as we head northeast over blacktop and gravel roads.

We are alone. We have the countryside to ourselves, not another hunter in sight. What started as a drizzle, but has grown into a full-on rain, has everything to do with it.

If it weren't the grouse opener, we'd bag it and wait for a better day. But it is the opener, something we have been talking about, anticipating for some time.

Ten minutes into our first walk and we're wet, our shotguns are slick with rain. Hunting grouse in this is certainly a fool's errand, a long shot.

Twenty minutes into our first walk and we're holding our first dead bird, a young grouse the dogs seemingly bumped by happenstance, rather than having scented and pinpointed with pretty good noses.

The bird fell after just one shot. That, just like the chance of it raining on grouse opener in September, doesn't happen very often.

Minutes later, we're holding two more grouse. These birds, like the first, flush when we don't expect them, but they do it close.

We could argue back home after we change clothes, clean birds and oil shotguns that the sharptails were hard earned, considering the weather. But they don't feel that way. It's as if we just happened to luck in to them.

In the end, it really doesn't matter.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT PHOTO

A Look Back

By Ron Wilson

North Dakota held its first statewide archery season for deer 60 years ago.

Yet, before that groundbreaking opener in 1954, an experimental bowhunting season was held at Arrowwood National Wildlife Refuge near Jamestown in 1945. It's been reported that Dr. Harry A. Wheeler of Mandan, who died in 2007, and friends were instrumental in convincing the refuge manager to host the experimental season.

The black and white photo above shows Nelius Nelson (seated), manager at Arrowwood National Wildlife Refuge, and Wheeler before the experimental season.

"The hunt was held in November and on the first morning we woke up to 40 mile per hour winds, 11 degrees below zero and 14 inches of fresh snow. We couldn't use our

vehicles, but we still went out and hunted," Wheeler said in an article in *North Dakota OUTDOORS* in 2005.

The experimental season continued for several years as North Dakota archers continued to lobby for a statewide season. Wheeler was one of the biggest advocates for doing so.

"Field and hunting archery is a new sport. Not new to the world or to history, but a new idea to the modern outdoorsman. A sport in which many pleasant hours are spent in practice and preparation, and in safety and fellowship in the field. Hours spent in studying the habits and characteristics of the game and the terrain to enable the hunter to approach the game to a favorable spot and short enough distance to release the arrow," according to Wheeler.

About 1,200 licenses were sold to

archers for the first statewide season six decades ago. Fewer than 110 hunters harvested a deer.

"The brightest point brought out in this initial season was that the archery season certainly did not harm the deer population in any way and that the hunters were extremely enthusiastic, whether they obtained their deer or not," wrote John Hewston, chief of the Department's public relations division, in *North Dakota OUTDOORS* in 1955. "As for the Game and Fish Department's viewpoint, a good many lessons on how to properly conduct and set up archery seasons were learned by having the first bow and arrow hunt on big game."

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.