

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

It may seem a little bit cliché, but for a lot of people and organizations, the start of a new year is a moment in time for assessing the past, and looking forward to what might lie ahead.

Elsewhere in this magazine, Game and Fish Department Deputy Director Scott Peterson takes care of the assessment part with the agency's annual review. And 2014 was certainly a year of extremes. We had record fishing license sales and the fewest number of deer licenses since 1980.

Duck and goose populations remain at close to record levels, and pheasant numbers are down by about half from what they were in 2006 and 2007. We have the highest number of managed fishing lakes in the state's history, and the Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program is down more than 300,000 acres since it first surpassed a million acres in 2007.

If you look carefully at these extremes from last year, it becomes pretty clear where our challenges lie for 2015 and beyond: Maintain the high points and bring up the low ones.

Of course, that's easier said than done because one of the major factors in all of these record highs and recent lows – the weather – is beyond our control. Lots of snow typically benefits fish and waterfowl and hurts deer and pheasants. If I could choose for this one winter, I guess I'd opt for a continuation of the relatively benign conditions we've experienced up to the first of the year.

We had early cold and some snow, but by Christmas most of the state was brown and that's generally a good thing for resident wildlife.

I'd like to see deer and pheasants come through winter in good shape because we've got a new program almost ready to launch that will help these species well into the

future. Midway through 2014, Game and Fish received its second Outdoor Heritage Fund grant. We are using this grant to tie into a U.S. Department of Agriculture Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program that could mean millions of dollars that will go into creating new habitat or improving existing habitat in roughly the southern one-third of the state.

All of the details aren't quite final yet, but this plan will be able to offer attractive and competitive incentives to landowners on a large scale. It won't replace all the acres that were once under CRP contract, but it is large enough that in time we should see gains from where we are today. It will also mean more acres in the PLOTS program.

And with a continued mild winter, we'll have more wildlife to start with when we roll out this CREP program in the coming months.

A winter that favors resident wildlife probably wouldn't hurt our fishing scene much in 2015. We'll still have lots of fish and about the same record number of managed waters in the spring. With normal ups and downs in weather, North Dakota's fishing prospects will likely hold at a high level for years to come.

Dry winters almost always send the arrow down for waterfowl, especially ducks, but in the short term, North Dakota's wetland conditions are in good shape to buffer a short dry spell.

In my 30-plus years with the Department, North Dakota has experienced times when most game and fish species were riding a high, and times when pretty much everything was on the low side. Heading into 2015 I look forward to pursuing the good fishing and hunting opportunities, and to collectively roll up our sleeves and work to improve the prospects for those species that are not where we want them to be.

Terry Steinwand

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Governor Jack Dalrymple

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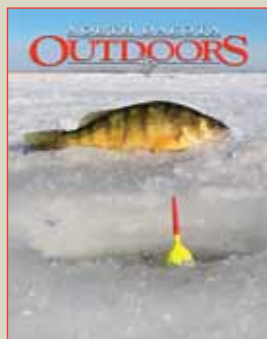
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Front Cover

Many ice anglers in North Dakota spend winter chasing the hot perch bite from lake to lake. Photo by Craig Bihrl, Bismarck.



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Deer hunting in North Dakota was a hot topic of conversation with hunters and wildlife managers in 2014.



2014 2014 2014 2014

YEAR IN REVIEW

By Scott Peterson, Game and Fish Deputy Director



DARCY KRAMLICH

pursuits are forever changing and outdoor enthusiasts often find themselves shifting efforts or adjusting preferences to take advantage of new opportunities.

The North Dakota landscape continues to change as well. It's hard for even the casual observer not to notice that wildlife habitat is not as abundant as it was just a few years ago. The quality of hunting and fishing in North Dakota is mostly determined by the quantity and quality of available habitat.

To be as effective as possible in facing the challenge of reduced habitat, we must be willing to adjust. We need to adapt new strategies, partnerships, attitudes and possibly even new expectations.

Some of my friends have undoubtedly heard me say how fortunate I am to have lived, and hunted, through the glory days of the Conservation Reserve Program. While I would like to think that we can get back to those conditions someday, I also know it's not likely to happen quickly.



No matter the year, providing hunting opportunities and places to hunt remains a priority for the Game and Fish Department.

CRAIG BIHRE

2014 was a year of some big changes for me personally. After 22 years at the Game and Fish Department's Lonetree district office near Harvey, I accepted the deputy director position in Bismarck.

While my wife and I lived in Bismarck in the late 1980s before moving to Lonetree, the city we left is not the same city we find ourselves living in today. Understandably, things have changed.

Hunting and fishing are like that too, as these

Game and Fish Director Terry Steinwand talks about deer hunting in North Dakota at an advisory board meeting in Bismarck.



CRAIG BIRRIE

What the Game and Fish Department can do is look for opportunities to leverage our resources to maximize benefits for hunters and anglers through our private lands program and elsewhere, and we are optimistic that we will increase the habitat acres available through Game and Fish programs in 2015.

With our recent Outdoor Heritage Fund grant, tied in with a federal Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, the Game and Fish Department, along with many cooperating private landowners, will likely begin development of thousands of acres of new habitat in the next year or two, and that's a step in the right direction.

On another positive note, we are still reaping the benefits of a wet cycle that started more than 20 years ago. Our fisheries staff is currently managing about 425 lakes, which is an all-time high for North Dakota. The opportunities that exist out there for the casual and ardent angler are almost endless. Whether your interest is in spearing northern pike from a darkhouse, pitching jigs for walleyes, or sitting in a comfortable fish house waiting for your bobber to bob, there is something out there for everyone.

One of the issues that required a considerable amount of time and energy of Department employees this past year was a performance audit conducted by the State Auditor's Office. While the Department is subject to a fiscal audit every two years, this is the first true performance audit the agency has undergone. The results of the audit were published in early June.

Performance audits are intended to identify deficiencies in an agency. Given the fact that this was the first of its kind conducted within the Department,

perhaps we shouldn't be surprised of some shortcomings.

We've taken the results of the audit seriously and have already corrected the vast majority of the audit recommendations, and the remaining few will be resolved soon. However, there were aspects of the audit that, if taken out of context, could lead spectators to believe that Game and Fish employees are something less than the hard-working, dedicated and professional people that they are. Rest assured, Department employees continue to work tirelessly on your behalf to maximize outdoor recreation opportunities in this great state.

Deer License Plan

With deer populations the lowest in years, but demand among hunters to secure a deer license still high, the possibility of changing how licenses were allocated in the future was debated often in 2014.

In December, Game and Fish Director Terry Steinwand announced that the Department would not implement its proposal to limit deer hunters to only one license for the 2015 season.

While it is still months before the 2015 season is set, that means deer hunters will again be able to apply for deer gun and muzzleloader lottery licenses, and also purchase an archery license.

Steinwand said the decision involved several factors, including substantial public input both for and against the proposal, and significant costs needed to put the new system in place.

Steinwand said one of the Department's goals is to increase the deer population statewide, and wildlife

managers can still work toward that under the current system.

Under the proposal that Game and Fish offered in early November, deer hunters who received a lottery deer gun or muzzleloader license, or a gratis license, would not have been able to purchase an additional archery license.

Game and Fish drafted the proposal based on public input and comments following eight special deer meetings held in February 2014. The meetings were set up to encourage public input on options for changing the way deer licenses are distributed, because of a significant reduction in the state's deer population.

In 2014 Game and Fish allocated 48,000 deer gun season licenses, compared to more than 140,000 licenses as recently as 2008.

In addition, Game and Fish used the recent fall round of district advisory board meetings to further discuss the resulting proposal. Over the past year, the discussion concerning the Department's role in providing deer hunting was thorough and healthy.

For instance, in 2013 about 10,000 hunters had both gun and bow licenses, while just over 20,000 prospective hunters who applied for a gun license did not receive any type of deer license.

This was a social issue more than it was a biological issue, Steinwand said, but it is Game and Fish's responsibility to address how our policies and regulations affect hunters as well as wildlife. He said Game and Fish will continue to look at all feasible alternatives for future years that will provide opportunity for the most hunters possible.

Outstanding Fishing Opportunities

With a record 425 or so managed waters dotting the landscape, many of which held record northern pike populations, fishing opportunities in North Dakota in 2014 were never better.

Anglers took notice, too. Fishing license sales for the second consecutive year reached new highs in 2013-14, as 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 nonresident fishing licenses were sold last year.

With three months to go before the end of the 2014-15 licensing year, it looks like another record is in the works.

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.

Even with a number of "new" prairie walleye fisheries on the landscape, Lake Sakakawea, Devils Lake and Lake Oahe/Missouri River remain the top three fisheries in the state, accounting for about half of the annual statewide fishing effort.

Good habitat and forage conditions in Lake Sakakawea have helped produce abundant rainbow smelt and other alternative forage, which in turn contribute to excellent condition and growth of game fish. Walleye numbers were high, and recruitment of several strong year-classes in recent years bodes well for the future.

Overall health of the Devils Lake fishery is good, and walleye abundance is strong. Northern pike are still plentiful, with a nice average weight of about 4 pounds. The number of catchable-sized perch was down from 2013, but was still considered good.

The Missouri River between Garrison Dam and Lake Oahe is still under the influence of habitat changes caused by the flood in 2011. Walleye numbers remain low, and walleye reproduction and forage fish production were poor in recent years.



With a record number of lakes on the landscape, fishing opportunities were at a premium in North Dakota in 2014.

LIZ BIRNIE

The number of duck broods observed in North Dakota during July survey work was up significantly in 2014.



CRAIG BHIRLE

However, the outlook is greatly improved for Lake Oahe, especially near the South Dakota border where recovering forage populations have led to improvements in walleye condition and growth. In addition, northern pike are in good shape, with many of trophy size.

Across the state, Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel stocked nearly 10 million walleye fingerlings in a record 133 lakes. Stocking conditions in 2014 were optimal, with cooler weather and increasing water levels at many lakes.

During fall surveys, fisheries biologists found that catches varied, depending on the lake or fish species. On a lot of the smaller lakes, catch rates of young-of-the-year fish was extremely high, but disappointing in others. Overall, though, reproduction and stocking success in North Dakota was about average.

With good water levels and abundant spawning habitat, Lake Sakakawea produced good catches of virtually all young-of-the-year fish. Walleye were most abundant in the upper and middle sections of the reservoir, with good numbers of perch and pike throughout.

Devils Lake and Stump Lake reported fair to good numbers of young-of-the-year walleye, while yellow perch reproduction was much lower than the strong reproduction year of 2013.

Lake Oahe is starting to show signs of recovery from the flood of 2011, although smelt numbers are still very low, reproduction of other forage fish, mostly white bass and crappie, was very

good in 2014. Young-of-the-year walleye displayed their highest catch rate since the dominant year-class in 2009.

The Missouri River isn't showing such signs of recovery, as catch rates of forage fish and young-of-the-year game fish remain low upstream from Lake Oahe. The 2011 flood scoured and changed the river channel so dramatically, it's going to take a much longer time to recover.

Pheasants and Waterfowl

North Dakota's roadside pheasant survey indicated total birds and number of broods were up statewide from 2013.

The survey showed total pheasants were up 30 percent from last year. In addition, brood observations were up 37 percent, while the average brood size was down 4 percent.

Excellent wetland conditions and high waterfowl numbers were found again during the annual breeding duck survey. The 2014 water index was the second highest on record, up 110 percent from 2013. All species, except canvasbacks, had improved numbers from 2013.

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

Numbers of resident Canada geese, Western Prairie Canada geese and arctic nesting Tallgrass Prairie Canada geese all remained high.

Limited Pronghorn Season

North Dakota held a limited pronghorn hunting season last fall for the first time since 2009.

The season was open only in unit 4-A, the far southwestern corner of the state. A total of 250



Pronghorns continued to show signs of recovery in 2014 after their numbers were drastically reduced following the brutal winters of 2008-11.

LARA ANDERSON

any-pronghorn licenses were available, and the season was split into an early “bow-only” portion, and a later gun/bow season.

The season in unit 4-A was opened to take advantage of a surplus number of bucks in that area, and to provide hunting opportunities while still encouraging population growth. While there weren't any statewide pronghorn archery licenses in 2014, hunters who did draw a license could use a rifle, bow or both, depending on their preferences.

Game and Fish biologists surveyed more than 11,000 square miles, 100 percent of the 21 survey units in the state, in early July. Statistics indicated a statewide population estimate of 5,700 pronghorn, with 1,650 in the area open to hunting.

In addition, unit 4-A had a high buck-to-doe ratio, which is typical of a population that has not been hunted. The fawn-to-doe ratio is also the highest since 2007.



The season on mule deer does in North Dakota's badlands was closed once again in 2014.

LARA ANDERSON

Mule Deer Rebound

The Game and Fish Department's fall mule deer survey indicated production in 2014 bodes well for the future.

Biologists counted 1,969 (1,761 in 2013) mule deer in the aerial survey in October. The buck-to-doe ratio of 0.50 (0.46 in 2013) was slightly above the long-term average of 0.43 bucks per doe, while the fawn-to-doe ratio of 0.95 (0.74 in 2013) was the highest since 1999, and above the long-term average of 0.90 fawns per doe.

Bighorn Sheep Survey

Results from summer's bighorn sheep survey indicated the population in western North Dakota is lower than 2013.

The July-August survey showed a minimum of 287 bighorn sheep, down 4 percent from 2013. Results revealed 82 rams, 153 ewes and 52 lambs.

Due to an ongoing disease event in the northern badlands, Game and Fish biologists verified more than 20 bighorn sheep deaths over summer. The



Disease killed a number of bighorn sheep in western North Dakota in 2014.

DARCY KRAWILICH

Jackie Lundstrom, Game and Fish warden, inspects a boat for aquatic nuisance species.



MIKE ANDERSON

Zebra mussel larvae were also present in the same area in both 2010 and 2011, but were not found in 2012 and 2013.

Since zebra mussel young have been found in this area before, and because there are established adult populations upstream in the Otter Tail River in Minnesota, finding a few young in 2014 really didn't come as a surprise.

Despite reports of new and expanding zebra mussel infestations in Minnesota, to date adult zebra mussels have not been found in any

North Dakota waters. Young zebra mussels have only been found in North Dakota at this single site on the Red River.

There was just one new ANS discovery in North Dakota in 2014. Curly leaf pondweed was found in Raleigh Reservoir in Grant County in late June.

Finding pondweed in Raleigh didn't come as a surprise because of the reservoir's proximity to the Missouri River, which has the invasive species.

While some silver carp remain in the James River, Game and Fish Department biologists have yet to document any natural reproduction.

survey, biologists said, was a tale of two segments of the state's population. The four herds in the northern badlands not affected by the die-off increased 28 percent from last year, with the lamb count increasing 46 percent. However, the eight herds impacted by disease declined 25 percent, with the lamb count declining by 66 percent.

Impacts will be more apparent when females and lambs are recounted in March, but the full extent of the outbreak likely will not be realized until the 2015 survey is completed.

Sage Grouse, Prairie Chicken Seasons Closed

Hunting seasons for sage grouse and pinnated grouse were closed again in fall.

Game and Fish Department biologists counted a record low 31 male sage grouse on six active strutting grounds, while in 2013, 50 males were counted on 11 active leks.

2014 marked the seventh consecutive year the sage grouse season was closed in western North Dakota, and the fifth year in a row for a closed season on prairie chickens in the northeastern and southeastern parts of the state.

ANS Efforts

Aquatic nuisance species surveillance efforts along the Red River in eastern North Dakota again detected the presence of zebra mussel young at Wahpeton.

SCOTT PETERSON is the Game and Fish Department's Deputy Director.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT JULY 1, 2013 TO JUNE 30, 2014

INCOME	\$29,324,161
EXPENSES	\$28,720,091

FUND BALANCES, FIXED ASSETS AND LONG-TERM DEBT

GAME AND FISH GENERAL FUND	\$30,444,254
HABITAT AND DEPREDATION FUND	\$408,530
NONGAME WILDLIFE FUND	\$102,677
TOTAL ALL FUNDS	\$30,955,461
FIXED ASSETS	\$45,591,210
DEPARTMENT NET WORTH	\$76,546,671

2014 Statistics, Surveys and Highlights

2013-14 LICENSES AND PERMITS ISSUED

	RESIDENT	NONRESIDENT
FISHING	58,406	20,901
HUSBAND/WIFE FISHING	14,090	3,897
SENIOR CITIZEN FISHING	11,386	
DISABLED FISHING	374	
SHORT-TERM FISHING		
10-DAY		6,236
3-DAY		24,380
PADDLEFISH TAGS	2,896	1,289
COMMERCIAL TAGS	15	
RETAIL BAIT VENDOR	242	
WHOLESALE BAIT VENDOR	24	7
FISH HATCHERY	3	
2013 BOAT REGISTRATIONS (THIRD YEAR OF 3-YEAR DECAL)	7,568	
BOAT RENTALS	15	
GENERAL HUNTING	39,639	45,045
SMALL GAME HUNTING	19,959	26,830
COMBINATION LICENSE	61,774	
WATERFOWL HUNTING		24,295
FURBEARER HUNTING/TRAPPING	13,279	4,572
FUR BUYER	37	3
DEER GUN HUNTING	49,094	261
DEER GUN HUNTING (GRATIS)	13,880	258
DEER BOWHUNTING	21,335	2,104
MOOSE HUNTING	96	
MOOSE HUNTING (PREFERENTIAL LANDOWNER)	14	
ELK HUNTING	220	
ELK HUNTING (PREFERENTIAL LANDOWNER)	51	
BIGHORN SHEEP	3	
TURKEY HUNTING (SPRING)	5,692	
TURKEY HUNTING (FALL)	3,812	
TURKEY HUNTING (GRATIS SPRING)	361	
TURKEY HUNTING (GRATIS FALL)	254	
HABITAT STAMP	84,684	
SHOOTING PRESERVE	9	
FISHING/HUNTING GUIDE	236	23
TAXIDERMIST	226	
FALCONRY	4	
SCIENTIFIC COLLECTOR	39	14
SWAN	1,281	919
SANDHILL CRANE	3,013	6,072

2014 SPECIAL BIG GAME LICENSES

	LICENSES AVAILABLE	APPLICATIONS RECEIVED
MOOSE	110	12,776
ELK	273	11,114
BIGHORN	4	9,860

- Game and Fish Department fisheries crews reached their salmon spawning goal on the Missouri River System by collecting roughly 1.3 million eggs. The average size of Lake Sakakawea females was 8.5 pounds, almost 3 pounds larger than 2013 and among the highest weights documented since the inception of the salmon program. The Missouri River females, which are typically larger than the lake fish, averaged 10.4 pounds.
- More than 500 archers, up 20 percent from 2013, registered to compete in the North Dakota National Archery in the Schools Program state tournament in Bismarck in April.
- The Game and Fish Department's annual spring mule deer survey in April in western North Dakota showed that the mule deer population increased 19 percent from 2013.
- From opening day May 1 of the paddlefish snagging season until the season closed May 22, Game and Fish Department game wardens issued a record 190 citations as part of an annual saturation effort in Williams and McKenzie counties.
- Going into fall hunting seasons, the Game and Fish Department reported about 735,000 Private Land Open To Sportsmen acres across the state. In 2013, hunters were able to access about 760,000 acres.
- In fall, Game and Fish opened to the public 729 acres at Coal Lake Wildlife Management Area in eastern McLean County.
- A goldeye caught in July from Lake Audubon set the new standard for the species in the state. The new state record goldeye – 4 pounds, 3 ounces – was caught by Brayden Selzler of Velva. It broke the previous record by 6 ounces.
- For the first time in more than a decade, all deer gun licenses were issued to hunters before opening day. In 2014, 48,000 licenses were made available to hunters, 11,500 fewer than 2013 and the lowest license total since 1980.
- Despite colder-than-average winter temperatures, not many lakes experienced winterkill in 2014. Department fisheries biologists investigated winterkills at about a dozen lakes, with only a few considered significant enough to affect the quality of fishing in spring. Lakes that appear to have suffered a significant kill include Leland Dam (McKenzie County), Island Lake (Rolette County) and the State Fair Pond (Ward County). These waters were restocked with hatchery raised fish, or fish transported from another lake.
- The Game and Fish Department's annual midwinter waterfowl survey indicated 71,500 birds were in the state in early January.

WATCHABLE W

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest has come a long way in 25 years.

Initially, the seed that has grown into the contest was planted in 1989 as a way to encourage support of the Department's program to conserve and manage the state's nongame wildlife. Back then, like today, citizens were asked to donate on their tax forms to the Nongame Wildlife Fund. A photograph of a burrowing owl, with its head tilted to the side, suggested to readers of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* 25 years ago that the nongame fund was "A Brilliant Deduction."

The first photo contest, where the public was invited to submit photographs of North Dakota's nongame wildlife, was held in 1990. While the format for the contest underwent some changes over the years, it wasn't until 2008 that

photographers were able to submit images of the state's game animals.

For the first time since 2008, the overall winner in the contest is a game animal. The sharp-tailed grouse in flight was taken in April by John Arthur Anderson of Minneapolis, Minnesota at Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge near Foxholm.

The sharp-tailed grouse is an icon of North Dakota and its wide open spaces and remaining prairie landscape. A native to the Northern Plains, this enduring bird plays host to one of state's grandest spring spectacles, when males gather on dancing grounds to bob and strut for female onlookers.

This courtship ritual, like it has for eons, will begin on prairie hilltops and flat spots around the state starting in late March.

PATRICK T. ISAKSON is a Game and Fish Department conservation biologist.

WILDLIFE

2014 PHOTO CONTEST

By Patrick T. Isakson



Overall Winner

Sharp-tailed grouse

John Arthur Anderson

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Canon 5D Mark II

Photo taken at Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge





Game 1st Place
Elk
Brad Starry, Fargo
Nikon D300S
Photo taken at South
Unit of Theodore
Roosevelt National Park



Game Runner-up
Bighorn sheep
Brad Starry, Fargo
Nikon D300S
Photo taken at North Unit of
Theodore Roosevelt National Park



Game Runner-up

Moose

Richard Craig, Cando

Photo taken near Rolla

Game Runner-up

White-tailed deer fawn

Nick Ziegler, Minot

Apple iPhone 5

Photo taken near Butte



Game Runner-up

Sharp-tailed grouse

DeVane Webster, Bismarck

Canon 7D

Photo taken at Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge





Nongame 1st Place
Long-eared owl
Cindy Nagle, Fargo
Nikon D7100
Photo taken near Marmarth



Nongame Runner-up
Juvenile Cooper's hawk
Sharon Watson, Buxton
Canon 7D
Photo taken in Buxton



Nongame Runner-up
Purple martin
Sharon Watson, Buxton
Canon 7D
Photo taken in Buxton

Nongame Runner-up
American avocet
Mike LaLonde, Bismarck
Nikon D7100
Photo taken near Menoken



Nongame Runner-up
Wilson's phalarope
DeVane Webster, Bismarck, ND
Canon 7D
Photo taken near Granville



Plant and Insect 1st Place
Green sweat bee
Kelly Krabbenhoft, West Fargo
Canon 1D X
Photo taken in McLean County



Plant and Insect Runner-up
Flower spider on purple coneflower
Kelly Krabbenhoft, West Fargo
Canon 1D X
Photo taken near Zap

Plant and Insect Runner-up
Blister beetles on purple coneflower
Nancy Secrest, Hettinger
Canon PowerShot SX260 HS
Photo taken near Hettinger



Plant and Insect Runner-up
Bees on crocus
Mary Craft, Spiritwood
Panasonic DMC-FZ200
Photo taken near Spiritwood



Plant and Insect Runner-up
Monarch butterfly
Brad Starry, Fargo
Nikon D300S
Photo taken in Lindenwood Park, Fargo



A winter creel survey will take a look at angler demographics in the south central part of the state.

Survey to follow the

HOT BITE

By Ron Wilson

CRAIG BIHRLE

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has initiated a winter creel survey in the south central part of the state to learn, among other things, who is fishing and what they're catching.

Unlike other creel surveys during the open water season or in winter, this assessment won't concentrate on just one lake. Instead, Department survey clerks will follow the hot bite, maximizing encounters with as many anglers as possible.

"In the past, we've done lake specific surveys, but with this one we are concentrating on geographic areas," said Scott Gangl, Department fisheries management section leader. "Our guys will be hitting various small district lakes scattered throughout south central North Dakota, primarily in Logan, McIntosh and northern Kidder County, where you find clusters of lakes."

Many of these waters are "newer" managed fisheries. Some are home to yellow perch, while others have blossoming walleye populations.

This region-specific creel survey is a joint effort between the Department's south central and southeastern fisheries districts. The survey could last for several weeks, running into March.

"Department employees who are doing the creel work in the field don't have a set schedule ... they'll work mostly weekends when most people are fishing," Gangl said. "What we want is a lot of interviews with anglers and lots of fish being measured."

While it's difficult to predict where the hot bite will be, Gangl said creel clerks will likely be working where fishing has been good recently, say, Marvin Miller Lake in Logan County, Diamond Lake in LaMoure County, Round Lake in Kidder County, the list goes on.

"In the Wishek and Lehr area, where there are a bunch of lakes, our guys may hit three lakes, or six to 10 lakes, depending how many anglers they run into," Gangl said.

There are three important components when it comes to managing a fishery, Gangl said, which include habitat, fish and the consumer.

"The angler information from creel surveys tell us about the harvest, what anglers are catching and taking home," Gangl said. "Understanding the harvest and how that contributes to mortality is an important piece of information. It's important to measure that from time to time to see what we can do differently as fisheries managers to improve success rates, because we put fish in the lakes so people can catch them."

Gangl said the information from the winter-long survey will provide some insight on the species and size of fish that anglers are keeping.

"What we're after is the size, catch rates, species and the quality of the fishing experience," he said. "Are anglers keeping medium-sized fish, small fish, only big fish, and what is their preference?"

Just as important as what anglers are harvesting is where anglers are coming from. "We want to know how far they've traveled to get to a lake and does the distance they've traveled influence the size of fish they are harvesting," Gangl said.

While some of this information can be gathered in quick interviews with anglers, survey workers are getting just part of the story, as anglers interviewed in the middle of a fishing trip are often hours from packing up and heading home.

To fill this informational gap, anglers will be given a creel card during the initial interview to quickly fill out once they've called it a day.

The card asks five simple questions, concerning fish species, harvest and catch-and-release. One of the beauties is that the cards don't have to be mailed.

"When you combine the angler interviews with the cards that are filled out, then we have a completed trip," Gangl said. "The information from a completed trip is more valuable to us than an incomplete trip."

Where creel surveys are being conducted, completed cards can be deposited in the portable blue boxes stationed at major lake access points.

"Anglers may see the blue boxes and not get interviewed while fishing, but that's OK," Gangl said. "There is no need to stop at a box unless you are returning a card."

A portable creel card return box at Green Lake in McIntosh County.



PAUL BAILEY

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.



BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor



LARA ANDERSON

Tentative 2015 Season Opening Dates

To help North Dakota hunters prepare for hunting seasons in 2015, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department annually provides its best estimate for opening dates for the coming year.

Dates become official when approved by governor's proclamation. Tentative opening dates for 2015 include:

SPRING TURKEY	APRIL 11
DOVE	SEPTEMBER 1
DEER AND PRONGHORN BOW, MOUNTAIN LION	SEPTEMBER 4
SHARPTAIL, HUN, RUFFED GROUSE, SQUIRREL	SEPTEMBER 12
YOUTH DEER	SEPTEMBER 18
YOUTH WATERFOWL	SEPTEMBER 19
EARLY RESIDENT WATERFOWL	SEPTEMBER 26
PRONGHORN GUN	OCTOBER 2
REGULAR WATERFOWL, YOUTH PHEASANT	OCTOBER 3
PHEASANT, FALL TURKEY	OCTOBER 10
MINK, MUSKRAT, WEASEL TRAPPING	OCTOBER 24
DEER GUN	NOVEMBER 6
DEER MUZZLELOADER	NOVEMBER 27

COYOTE CATALOG AVAILABLE FOR HUNTERS, LANDOWNERS

The Coyote Catalog, a statewide effort connecting coyote hunters and trappers with landowners who want fewer coyotes in their areas, has been reopened by the North Dakota Department of Agriculture and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

"I encourage landowners, especially farmers and ranchers who have problems with coyote depredation, to sign up for the Coyote Catalog," said Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring. "Hunting and trapping are valuable tools in managing these predators."

This past season, 74 landowners signed up for the Coyote Catalog, a more than 50 percent increase over the previous year. Nearly 900 hunters and trappers also signed up.

State agriculture officials estimate livestock producers in North Dakota lost more than \$1 million last year to coyotes. At the same time, coyotes are a popular furbearer species for hunters and trappers.

"This can be a good way for hunters and trappers to locate new places to go,"

said Game and Fish Director Terry Steinwand. "We've also had some positive feedback from landowners as well."

Goehring and Steinwand said the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services should be the first contact for landowners experiencing coyote depredation of livestock.

Landowners can sign up on the NDDA website at www.nd.gov/ndda/coyote-catalog. Required information includes county and contact information.

Hunters and trappers can sign up on the Game and Fish Department's website, gf.nd.gov.

Throughout winter, hunters or trappers will receive information on participating landowners, and they can then contact landowners to make arrangements.

Anyone who registered for the Coyote Catalog in the past must register again to activate their names on the database.

The Coyote Catalog will remain active through March 31, 2015.

For more information, contact Stephanie Tucker, Department furbearer biologist, at 701-220-1871 or satucker@nd.gov; or Jamie Good at the Department of Agriculture, at 701-328-2233 or jgood@nd.gov.



CRAIG BIRBLE



LARA ANDERSON

Winter Anglers Reminded to Clean Up Ice

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department reminds winter anglers to clean up the ice after fishing. This not only applies to trash, such as aluminum cans and Styrofoam containers, but fish as well.

It is not only unsightly, but it is illegal to leave fish behind on the ice. According to the fishing proclamation, when a fish is caught anglers must either immediately release the fish back into the water unharmed, or reduce them to their daily possession.

It is common practice for some anglers to fillet fish on the ice, but if they don't clean up after themselves, it's a problem.

FISH HOUSE REGULATIONS

Winter anglers are reminded that any fish house left unoccupied on North Dakota waters must be made out of materials that will allow it to float.

A popular question this time of year is if campers qualify as legal fish houses. The answer is the same for any structure taken on the ice – if it's left unattended, it must be able to float; if it's not able to float, it must be removed when the angler leaves the ice.

Other fish house regulations include:

- Fish houses do not require a license.
- Occupied structures do not require identification. However, any unoccupied fish house must have the owner's name, and either address or telephone number, displayed on its outside in readily distinguishable characters at least three inches high.
- Fish houses may not be placed closer than 50 feet in any direction to another house without consent of the occupant of the other fish house.
- Fish houses shall be removed from all waters by midnight, March 15, of each year. They can be used after March 15 if they are removed daily.

Anglers should refer to the 2014-16 North Dakota Fishing Guide for winter fishing regulations.

Hunter Education Classes in 2015

Students interested in taking a hunter education class in 2015 should visit the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website at gf.nd.gov for a statewide list of courses. 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 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.



MIKE ANDERSON



Park Board Honored

The Game and Fish Department recognized the Morton County Park Board in 2014 for its ongoing efforts to develop and enhance public boating and fishing facilities in Morton County

Each year the Department's fisheries division presents a "Certificate of Appreciation" award to an organization that has a history of accomplishments as a cooperating partner in local fisheries projects.

Bob Frohlich, Department fisheries development supervisor, said the Morton County Park Board is an outstanding example of the difference an organization can make on their local fisheries.

"I can honestly say that Morton County continues to set the standard for park boards throughout the state,"



SUBMITTED PHOTO

From left to right, Tony Goetzfried, Morton County Park Board, Bob Frohlich, Game and Fish Department fisheries development supervisor, Tim Nilsen, Morton County parks director, and Andy Zachmeier, Morton County commissioner.

Frohlich said.

The park board has cooperated with Game and Fish on the development and maintenance on a variety of public facilities on area lakes and the Missouri River. Some of the work includes the construction and

installation of boat ramps, courtesy docks, toilets, fishing piers and cleaning stations, shoreline access, roads and parking.

"The board has assumed the critical role of operation and

maintenance of the majority of these facilities," Frohlich said.

"As we know, maintaining anything is as important as the initial construction, and the board does an outstanding job in performing this task."



CRAIG BHRLE

Hosek Named Game and Fish Employee of the Year

Brian Hosek, IT section supervisor and GIS coordinator for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in Bismarck, received the agency's Director's Award for professional excellence during the Department's annual winter meeting.

Terry Steinwand, Game and Fish director, said Hosek produces high quality work on a consistent basis. "Brian's expertise and creative thinking has led to many practical, efficient and effective advances with the Department," he said.

Hosek was mentioned for his ability to understand and visualize problems and opportunities, and then develop and integrate the most reasonable approach using the available resources. "He can squeeze out the most effective, cost-efficient and thorough analysis possible," Steinwand said.

Howard Named Wildlife Officer of the Year

Alan Howard, North Dakota Game and Fish Department district game warden in Minot, is the state's 2014 Wildlife Officer of the Year.

Howard was honored in December by the Shikar-Safari Club International, a private conservation organization that annually recognizes outstanding wildlife officers in each state.

In a nomination letter sent to Shikar-Safari, chief warden Robert Timian said Howard's district has seen a population growth, which has led to increased pressure on wildlife.

"Warden Howard handles each incident in a very prudent and professional manner," Timian said. "His appetite for protecting the resource is fed by his work ethic and positive attitude, which reflects positively on the Department. The communities within his district are fortunate to have him as their district warden."



CRAIG BHRLE



Lara Anderson

Game and Fish Recognizes Employee Efforts

North Dakota Game and Fish Department Director Terry Steinwand honored a number of employees with performance-based awards in December.

- Lara Anderson, Bismarck, received the Special Projects award, given to an individual who implemented a successful new project. She was recognized for working on the Department's customer portal project, which is designed to simplify record keeping for numerous projects. "Her professional experience and familiarity with databases and programming has been extremely valuable for this task and the overall coordination of the project," Steinwand said.
- Arvid Anderson, Riverdale, received the Solid Foundation award, presented to an employee who demonstrates exemplary work in their field. He was recognized for his willingness to take on additional tasks. "Arvid jumps in and gets it accomplished whenever something unexpected needs to get done," Steinwand said. "He is a classic example of a dedicated employee."
- Dale Repnow, Bismarck, received the Public Outreach award, presented to an employee for showing significant effort, ability or accomplishment in interacting with the public while promoting the Department's programs. Repnow was recognized for his professionalism, dedication and efficiency. "Dale is the consummate employee," Steinwand said. "He is always respectful, courteous and understanding."
- Jim Houston and Tom Crutchfield of Bismarck were presented with the Innovations award, which recognizes staff for implementing a process to improve Department goals and objectives. They were recognized for their efforts in improving the quality of wildlife food plots within their district. "Jim and Tom are always willing to work long hours to make sure everything is seeded and sprayed in a timely fashion," Steinwand said. "The last few years they have transitioned to planting a diverse crop rotation, which has led to many positive public comments."



Arvid Anderson



Dale Repnow

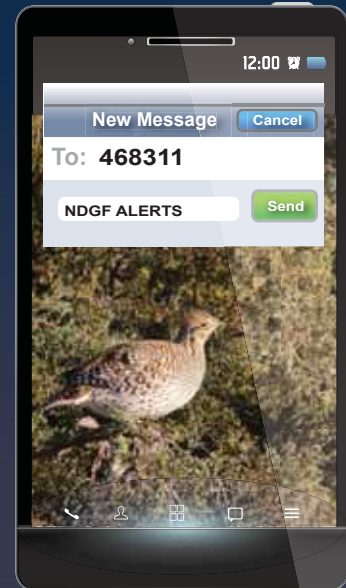


Jim Houston



Tom Crutchfield

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Jackie Lundstrom

Lundstrom Earns Boating Officer Award

Jackie Lundstrom, Bismarck, was named North Dakota's Boating Officer of the Year. Chief warden Robert Timian said Lundstrom is active with boat patrols, boat ramp checks and boat safety equipment checks.

"Warden Lundstrom is skilled in the detection, apprehension and prosecution of boaters who are operating while under the influence of drugs or alcohol," he said. "In addition, she is often called upon to assist in the search for missing or stranded boaters."

LONG-TERM EMPLOYEES

Long-term employees were recognized for their service to North Dakota at the Department's annual staff meeting in December.

- 40 years – Raymond Parsons, procurement officer, Bismarck.
- 35 years – George Lee, administrative officer, Bismarck.
- 30 years – Jerry Weigel, production and development section supervisor, Bismarck; and Kurt Aufforth, district warden, Cando.
- 20 years – Dan Hoenke, district warden supervisor, Dickinson; Alan Howard, district warden, Minot; Pat John, fisheries technician, Jamestown; Jackie Lundstrom, district warden, Bismarck; and Sally Sorensen, IT coordinator, Bismarck.

STAFF NOTES



Brandon Kratz

KRATZ FILLS SUPERVISOR POST

Brandon Kratz, longtime southeast district fisheries biologist, is the new supervisor in the Jamestown district office. Kratz replaces Gene Van Eeckhout, who retired in September after 38 years with the Department.



Tracy Price

PRICE HIRED IN BISMARCK

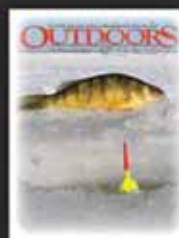
Williston native Tracy Price was hired in fall to fill a licensing clerk position in the Department's main office in Bismarck.

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back cast



By Ron Wilson

BY THE TIME you read this, it will likely be over. The crazy good fishing will be old news. The crush of anglers, enough on some days to equal the size of small town North Dakota, has moved on.

Then again, maybe not.

That's the way it is with fishing for yellow perch through the ice in winter. Predicting how things will play out and for how long, is only a guess. What's certain is that word of a hot perch bite will eventually leak. And when it does, little gets in the way as it races from angler to angler, some of whom claim to have been there when the bite started and are quick to say that you should have been here yesterday.

I don't know if we came in on the tail end of things on this nondescript prairie lake in Wells County, but we did miss, according to reports, 100-fish days, five-gallon buckets filled with 13- to 14-inch perch.

When we arrive on the last day of 2014, there are maybe 30 ice houses dotting the west end of the lake. A manageable crowd compared to accounts of 300 or more a few days earlier.

As we hurriedly unload gear – portable ice house, auger, grain shovel, buckets, bait and camp chairs – the day comes to life as the sun paints the eastern horizon orange, nearly the color of the pectoral and pelvic fins of the adult perch we hope to catch.

With four holes drilled and slush shoveled out the door, we check depths with a clip-on, lead depth finder. We're fishing old school, my fishing partner announces.

The whereabouts of his battery-powered flasher is sort of a mystery. The bigger puzzle, as wind buffets the sides of his ice house, is why the heater won't light. The glorious hiss

of propane lasts just long enough to get our hopes up, before dying out.

Fishing old school is cold.

Without the aid of an underwater camera or other space-age device, it's wholly unclear if we're set up over fish, if our bait, hovering somewhere about six inches off the bottom, is at the correct depth.

You can brood over this sort of stuff forever if you're not catching fish, but the contemplation ends quickly. The two yellow, foam bobbers in the south end of the ice house dance and slowly sink.

By the time I can unzip my coat and unearth a camera hanging around my neck, a foot-long yellow perch is flopping on the ice. It's joined by another, a twin in length, with a small chartreuse lure anchored in the corner of its mouth.

The perch are fat, solid, with some measuring longer than 12 inches. Nice fish. Keepers.

It goes like this for an hour or more – bobbers sinking and perch flopping – before the fishing slows and then shuts off altogether.

When the fishing was hot, when we were busy untangling lines and checking and rechecking depths with the shared, clip-on depth finder, there was no talk about the unforgiving heater. Sitting in camp chairs with hands stuffed in pockets and the fish not biting, we cuss it a bit and pledge to bring a spare next time.

And there will be a next time, as a hot yellow perch bite will play again and again on other lakes in other counties. And just as certainly, you'll eventually hear about it.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.



A Look Back

By Ron Wilson

With snow on the ground and birds bunched in the best available cover, winter is a good time for wildlife biologists to count ring-necked pheasants in North Dakota.

At this time of the year under the right conditions, the brilliantly colored male pheasants and the unadorned females are easily distinguished.

North Dakota Game and Fish Department biologists have conducted winter sex ratio counts for years. It's uncertain when the first winter survey was conducted, but it's believed the black and white photo above was taken sometime in the early 1960s.

"Back in the day, biologists would take snow machines and push shelterbelts and other big blocks of winter habitat to guys posted on the other end doing the counting," said

Stan Kohn, Game and Fish Department upland game management supervisor.

Kohn said winter pheasant survey work involving biologists on snow machines flushing birds is a thing of the past in North Dakota.

"We stopped doing that sometime in the 1980s," he said. "We don't have the man-power or the time to do those kinds of big winter pushes today."

Even so, Kohn said biologists today still count roosters and hens during winter.

"Biologists will do sex ratio counts on pheasants when they are out in the field in winter doing other field work," he said. "We're not counting as many pheasants as they did back in the day, but we're counting our share during these roadside, drive-by counts."

Counting roosters and hens in winter, Kohn said, provides wildlife managers with an idea of how many males carried over from the fall hunting season.

Also, by counting males and females, biologists can determine if winter mortality will be severe. In addition, combining winter sex ratios to spring crowing count data, wildlife biologists get a decent handle on breeding population indices in the spring.

There are a number of tools that go into managing the state's most popular upland game bird, and the winter survey, while not as intensive today as it once was, is one of them.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota *OUTDOORS*.