

NORTH DAKOTA
OUTDOORS

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GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

We're on the heels of another legislative session, and once again I've come to the conclusion that it's a thankless job to be a legislator.

While there are certainly some philosophical differences, all legislators try to do what they feel is best for North Dakota and the people who live here. In that process they actively listen to all sorts of testimonies and are provided varying opinions and side conversations by lobbyists. And, in the end, they must make a decision that only half the people will favor.

I've seen legislators put in long days and nights and still have the energy and time to discuss issues. Their dedication to public service is admirable.

In this issue of *North Dakota OUT-DOORS*, Scott Peterson, Game and Fish Department deputy director, summarizes the list of bills Department staff dealt with during the 64th assembly. The outcome, I believe, was as favorable as could be expected.

Since it's that time of year when most people are thinking fishing, this issue also provides some insight into one of the mainstays of North Dakota fisheries, the Missouri River. It wasn't that long ago (at least in my mind) that we were battling the floodwaters of 2011, which not only affected people living along the river, but radically reshaped the fishery and the habitat on which it depends.

Any river is really a living thing and will change depending on the amount and duration of the flow. With these changes come positive or negative impacts to the fishery.

We are in an unprecedented time for fishing in North Dakota. We've never managed as many lakes as we do now. These are the good times for fishing and that will continue

for some time, unless we go into a major drought pattern.

Given the number of lakes across the state, anglers have a number of fishing opportunities available. Year in and year out, however, Lake Sakakawea, Lake Oahe/Missouri River and Devils Lake provide the bulk of the fishing use. While these waters might take turns some years providing the most use, they are always at the top of the list.

Many anglers likely don't remember when we had a closed fishing season on all water bodies in the state, and it was only about 20 years ago that Game and Fish Department officials decided that it wasn't needed.

Looking at it from a biological perspective, the purpose of the closure was to protect spawning females. Fisheries biologists found that the "protection" wasn't needed since natural reproduction was more than adequate when environmental conditions were present.

In addition, when conditions weren't just so in down years, our stocking capabilities could make up the difference. So, rather than continuing to take away fishing opportunities from the public through a closed season, the decision was made to embrace year-round fishing. Monitoring by Department fisheries crews over the years has shown it hasn't hurt any fishery by having a year-round season. And until biological information shows differently, we shouldn't need to abandon the current setup.

With a full summer to enjoy North Dakota's great outdoors, whether you fish or not, please stay safe and respect the land you're on. If it remains dry, please don't leave a fire unattended and make sure it's completely out when you leave. Also, pick up your trash and take it with you. Lastly, have fun.

Terry Steinwand

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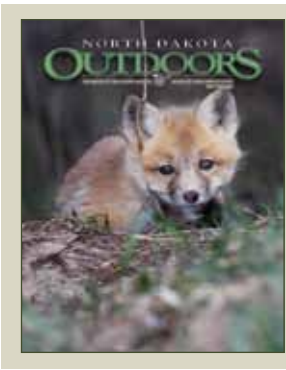
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Front Cover

Red fox pups are weaned about five weeks after birth. Like this young red fox photographed in Burleigh County, this is also about the same time they emerge from the den for the first time. (Photo by Craig Bihrlle, Bismarck.)



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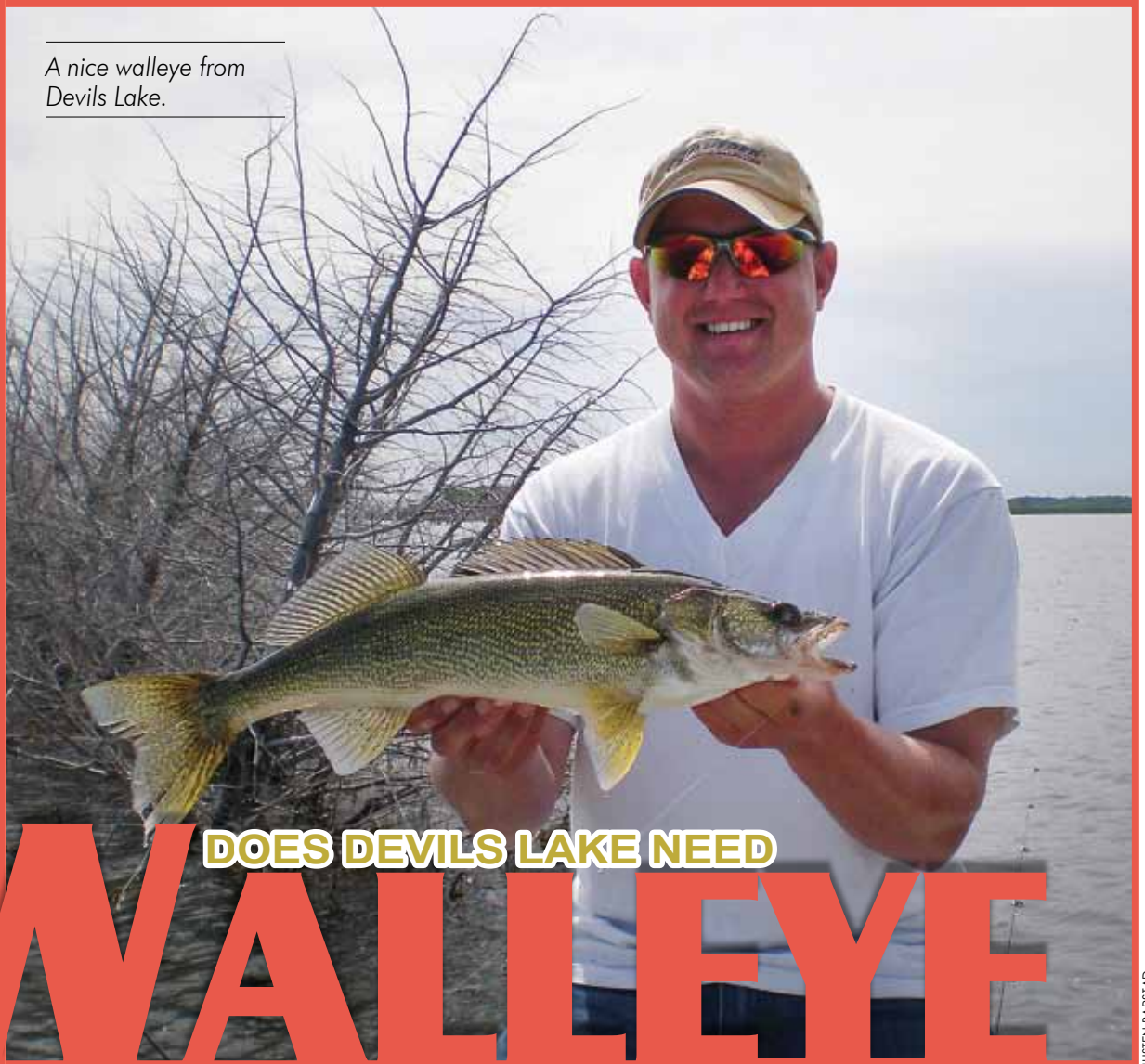
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A nice walleye from Devils Lake.



JUSTEN BARSTAD

DOES DEVILS LAKE NEED WALLEYE LENGTH LIMITS?

By Todd Caspers and Randy Hiltner

Walleye anglers care about the resource and often express concern when they believe their peers are keeping too many small or big fish.

These anglers often think a length limit will solve the problem, and sometimes they are correct. Length limits, if applied appropriately, can help improve or protect a fishery.

However, a length limit can harm the population it's meant to help, and also needlessly restrict angler opportunities, if the regulation is inappropriate for the fishery.

We frequently get questions about Devils Lake, one of the region's top walleye fisheries,

related to whether a length limit would protect its walleye population?

First, some background. The three basic types of length limits used to manage walleye populations are minimum, maximum and slot.

Minimum length limits are designed to protect small fish until they reach a certain size. Maximum size mostly protects large fish so they will be available to spawn in adequate numbers. The "one-over" limit – only one fish over a certain length within a daily limit – employed in some waters is also a type of maximum size limit.

There are two types of slot limits. Harvest slot limits direct angler harvest to a certain size-

group of fish, while protecting fish outside the slot. For example, with a 15-20-inch slot regulation, only walleye from 15-20 inches can be kept and all others must be released. A harvest slot limit is basically a combination of a minimum and a maximum length limit.

There are also protected slot limits meant to safeguard a certain group of fish, while allowing harvest of smaller and larger fish. An example would be that all 15- to 20-inch walleyes must be released and only fish shorter than 15 inches or longer than 20 inches can be kept.

What follows is a list of conditions that must be met for the various length limits to be effective.

Minimum length limits are likely to benefit fisheries that meet all of the following:

- Low reproductive or stocking success.
- Good growth.
- Low natural mortality.
- High angling mortality (fish dying from harvest or after release).

Maximum length limits (one fish longer than 20 inches, for example) are likely to benefit fisheries that meet all of the following criteria:

- Reproduction is limited by the number of adult fish.
- High angling mortality of large fish.

Harvest slot length limits must meet all of the requirements for a minimum length limit and a maximum length limit, since they are basically a combination of the two.

Protected slot length limits are likely to benefit fisheries that meet all of the following criteria:

- Good natural reproduction.
- Slow growth, especially for small fish.
- High natural mortality of small fish.
- High angling effort.

Does the Devils Lake walleye population meet the criteria for any of these length limits? Let's investigate.

Minimum Length Limit

Currently, the Devils Lake walleye population does not meet many of the criteria necessary to benefit from a minimum length limit.

In 2008, walleye growth was similar to the North American average, but in 2014, growth was slower. The population has produced young fish consistently in recent years, and tagging studies and walleye aging data show that total mortality (natural and fishing mortality combined) is on the lower end of typical mortality rates in North America.

Additionally, with high numbers of 10- to 15-inch walleye in the lake, a minimum length limit would needlessly restrict harvest opportunities for anglers, and could further decrease growth due to increased competition if some fish were protected by a minimum size limit.

Maximum Length Limit and One-over Limits

Today, Devils Lake's walleye population does not meet any of the criteria necessary to see a benefit of a maximum length limit.

Large walleye hatches of late indicate that current regulations are maintaining sufficient numbers of adults in the lake. Three of the four largest hatches, in fact, have been produced since 2008. While the percentage of adults longer than 15 inches in 2012 was relatively low at 24 percent, the second largest walleye hatch ever was recorded, indicating there are ample adults in the lake to produce a good hatch if conditions are favorable.

A one-over 20-inch limit would probably not have much impact, as few anglers harvest more than one large walleye per fishing trip. Moreover, creel surveys showed that less than 6 percent of walleye harvested were 20 inches or longer in 2007-08 and about 3 percent in 2013-14.

Anglers who fish during the spring spawning run in certain portions of the lake (upper basin coulees and current areas near bridges) tend to catch bigger fish. A 2010 creel survey during this time showed that 18.9 percent of harvested walleye were 20 inches or longer.

However, this percentage still equates to less than one in five fish (with the daily bag limit being five fish) 20 inches or longer, so most spring anglers probably do not harvest more than one walleye this size per trip. Therefore, a one fish over 20-inch limit would likely not prevent the harvest of many large fish, even during spawning when anglers are most likely to harvest larger fish. Even so, we will continue to use creel survey data to evaluate the effectiveness of a one-over 20-inch limit.

A length limit can harm the fish population it's meant to safeguard if the regulation is inappropriate for the fishery.





Recent creel surveys show that Devils Lake receives more than 1 million angler hours annually, which, considering the size of the big lake is only about seven angler hours per acre.

Additionally, recent walleye population modeling on Devils Lake by Jason Breggeman, as part of his doctorate research for South Dakota State University, indicates that a one-over 20-inch limit would do nothing to improve the size structure of the walleye population as a whole. This is because a one-over 20-inch limit will not increase the number of walleye that survive to attain 20 inches, and fish saved by such a regulation will not stockpile due to natural mortality.

Even if a regulation prohibited harvest of all walleye longer than 20 inches, only about 10,000 fish would have escaped harvest during the 2007 and 2008 seasons.

While this sounds like a lot of fish, recent tagging studies in North Dakota have demonstrated that relatively few released walleye will be caught again.

In Lake Audubon, for example, only 19 percent of tagged walleye that were caught and released were caught again. The percentage of tagged walleye released and caught again was only 9 percent in Devils Lake. Even if we assume a high recapture rate of 20 percent, then about 2,014 of the “saved” walleye would be caught again. The total angling effort in 2007-08 was more than 1 million hours, so the expectation is that one of the “saved” walleye might be caught again for every 508 hours of fishing effort. The average fishing trip is typically about five hours, so it would take an angler about 101 fishing trips to catch one additional walleye of 20 inches or longer.

Repeating these calculations using data from the 2013-14 creel survey (12,687 saved fish and about 1.3 million hours of angler effort) would result in an angler catching an additional walleye of 20 inches or

longer about once in 105 fishing trips.

These small gains in catches of large walleye are not worth restricting angler opportunity to harvest large fish. Additionally, many anglers who fish Devils Lake do not necessarily want more large walleyes. The 2013-14 creel survey showed that about 83 percent of anglers said that they would rather keep five 15-inch walleyes than two 20-inch fish.

Since the Devils Lake walleye population does not meet the criteria for either a minimum or a maximum length limit, a harvest slot limit would not be appropriate or effective.

Currently, the Devils Lake walleye population meets some of the criteria necessary to see benefits from a protected slot length limit.

Reproduction has been good in recent years. The walleye hatch has exceeded the long-term average in five of the past eight years, and the two largest hatches were produced in the past

six years.

Fish in 2008 were growing at roughly the same rate as the North American average, but growth has since slowed. Despite a slowed growth rate, stunting of small walleye is not a problem today, it’s just that fish are growing at a slower pace.

Another criterion needed for a successful slot limit is high angling effort. Past creel surveys indicate that Devils Lake receives more than 1 million angler hours annually, or over 10 hours per acre in 2007-08, which is relatively high for a large lake.

However, the 2013-14 creel survey still showed more than 1 million hours of angler effort, but due to the larger size of the lake, there were about seven hours of angler effort per acre.

One of the criteria for a successful slot length limit is that small fish have high natural mortality. It appears that mortality rates among younger walleye could be higher than for the entire population, but these possibly higher rates are still on the lower end of the normal range for populations across North America.

Also, Devils Lake has produced good numbers of 15- to 20-inch walleye recently without any length limits. This indicates that fish can grow into the 15- to 20-inch range without any length limits.

For example, test netting showed that numbers of 15- to 20-inch walleye were very high from 2006 to 2010 before dropping back to more typical levels. A portion of the decline in fish this size is likely due to the rarity of 9- to 11-year-old fish (due to weak hatches from 2003-05) and also to possible emigration to connected waters.

Numbers of 15- to 20-inch walleye should begin

to increase in the next few years as fish from the abundant 2009 year-class continue to grow.

From a biological standpoint, the Devils Lake walleye population does not need a slot length limit right now. However, recent walleye population modeling did indicate that a slot length limit could potentially produce more large walleye in the lake.

For example, a protected slot limit of 16-20 inches could result in about 5-10 percent more adult walleyes that are 20 inches or longer. A protected slot limit of 18-22 inches could result in about a 3-5 percent increase.

However, as with most things in life, there is no “free lunch.” In the case of the 16- to 20-inch slot limit, the down-side is no harvest of those 16- to 20-inch fish, which are highly desirable fish for anglers. During the 2013-14 creel survey, about 14.5 percent of walleye harvested were between 16-20 inches, and 5.5 percent between 18-22 inches. These are significant amounts of harvest for anglers to give up.

For example, walleyes of that size were more abundant in Devils Lake in 2007-08 and the creel survey that year found that about 41.5 percent of walleye harvested were between 16-20 inches, and 19 percent between 18-22 inches. Also, as mentioned before, the 2013-14 creel survey indicated that about 83 percent of Devils Lake anglers prefer to harvest a greater number of medium-sized walleye as opposed to fewer, larger fish.

In effect, using a protected slot limit just to slightly improve the number of large walleye would be forcing anglers to give up a larger number of fish they want, in order to produce a smaller number of fish that most people don't want as much.

With more large walleye in the lake because of a slot limit, there is another “lunch” to consider.

Smaller walleye seem to be perfectly happy eating scuds, but larger fish typically want a bigger and better “lunch.” If the number of larger walleye were to increase, this could impact recruitment of walleye and other fish such as yellow perch because of increased predation.

The current walleye population is closest to meeting the criteria for a slot length limit. However, the mortality criterion is not being met, and others such as growth and fishing effort are questionable.

A slot length limit could become a valid management strategy for Devils Lake walleye in the future, especially if growth continues to slow and natural mortality increases. However, current conditions do not warrant putting a slot length limit in place as modeling indicates that anglers would have to give up a large amount of harvest to produce a relatively small increase in the number of larger fish. Additionally, a slot limit would have negative impacts to other areas of the fishery.

We have seen that the current walleye population is not really suited to any of the length limits. However, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department will continue to monitor the fishery, and if conditions change will likely implement whatever regulation is deemed necessary to protect this valuable resource.

Since the Devils Lake walleye population does not meet the criteria for either a minimum or a maximum length limit, a harvest slot limit would not be appropriate or effective.

TODD CASPERS is a Game and Fish Department fisheries biologist and RANDY HILTNER is a fisheries supervisor, both in Devils Lake.



MANDY THOMAS

As one of the best walleye lakes in the region, biologists often get questions about whether a length limit would be appropriate on Devils Lake.

A CHANGED RIVER

By Paul Bailey

More than 200 years have passed since Lewis and Clark made their famous journey up the Missouri River. Today, the river would be largely unrecognizable to the Corps of Discovery, as damming, development and shoreline stabilization have changed the way the Missouri looks and responds to flood events.

The 2011 flood substantially changed the Missouri River and its fish community, and these changes are still impacting this fishery four years later. This is especially true for the reach from Garrison Dam to the headwaters of Lake Oahe.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has continued to monitor this fishery and assess Missouri River habitat changes to determine the degree to which this fishery is capable of regaining its world-class quality.

Historical Response to Flooding

Prior to the completion of Garrison Dam in 1953, flooding was a common springtime occurrence on what we now know as the Garrison Reach. Spring flows of 100,000 cubic feet per second occurred more often than not and flows surpassing 250,000 cubic feet per second were common.

A peak flow of 500,000 cfs recorded April 6, 1952 makes the 155,000 cfs flows during the 2011 flood seem modest in comparison.

The undammed Missouri River responded to these floods much differently than our modern river. Historically, the Missouri moved laterally across the floodplain, as seen in aerial photographs (*Figure 1*) of the Hoge Island area, located about 6 miles upstream of the Interstate 94 bridge in Bismarck.

In 1938, the river's main channel passed on the east side of Hoge Island. However, in response



The flood of 2011 radically changed the river. This massive sandbar on the west side of the river at MacLean Bottoms was created by flood waters not seen in years.

to numerous floods over the next 12 years, the main channel moved approximately 1.5 miles across the floodplain to the west side of the island. It is important to note that even though the river moved great distances, habitat that the river offered to fish and wildlife remained largely unchanged.

Modern Response to Flooding

Construction of the dam drastically changed the Garrison Reach. The warm, turbid waters that once flowed through Bismarck became cold and clear. Under the protection of flood control, extensive floodplain development occurred.

Floodplain development (especially agriculture and residential) and shoreline armoring that came with it (riprap, jetties, sheet piling and other means of preventing shoreline erosion), no longer allowed the river to move laterally across the landscape during flooding.

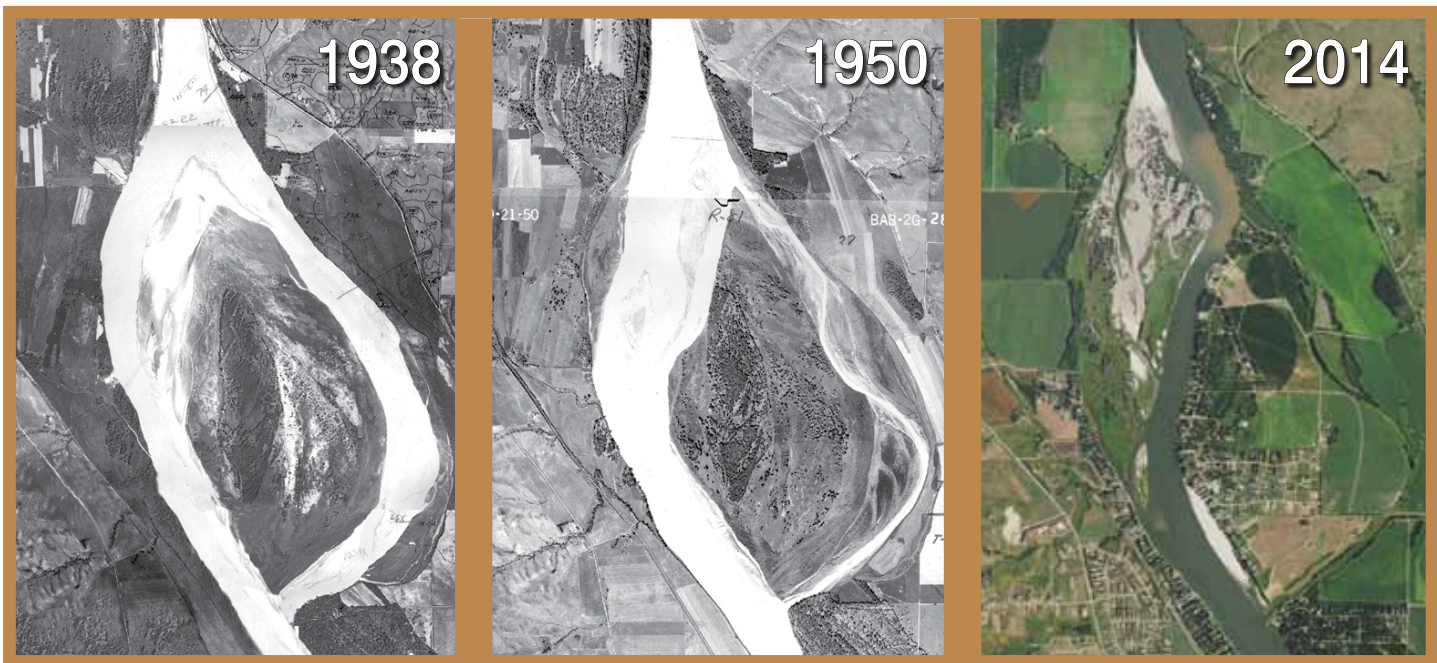


CRAIG BIRLE

The Missouri River continues to draw a lot of interest from anglers. In this case anglers converged on a stretch of river near Hazelton, south of Bismarck-Mandan earlier this spring.



SANDRA JOHNSON



(Figure 1) Aerial photographs of the Missouri River and Hoge Island near Bismarck in 1938, 1950 and 2014.



CRAIG BIHRLE

The flood of 2011 significantly altered the river along its course, including this stretch south of Bismarck-Mandan near Huff. The top photograph was taken in 2006 and the bottom photograph in 2011.



CRAIG BIHRLE

As a result, Missouri River habitat experienced the most dramatic changes in decades during the 2011 flood.

Anglers and boaters familiar with the Garrison Reach quickly noticed that the river was reshaped by the 2011 flood. Department biologists also noticed what appeared to be a substantial loss of habitat diversity, and were concerned how these changes would negatively influence this important fishery (Figure 2).

To better understand how the 2011 flood impacted fish habitat, we assessed three habitat features using pre- (2010) and post-flood (2013) aerial photographs. The habitat features include main channel length, river width, and channel braiding. Both sets of aerial photographs were taken when flows were approximately 15,000 cfs.

Main Channel Length

As the 2011 flood progressed, powerful flows began to carve a more efficient channel for moving water downstream. The portion of river just upstream of Stanton serves as a good example of this reshaping.



(Figure 2) Fallout of the 2011 flood, fisheries biologists note, is a substantial loss in the diversity of habitat. These aerial photographs of a portion of the Missouri River approximately 4 miles downstream from the Steckel boat ramp were taken before and after the flood.

What was a sharp bend in the river before the flood became a gentle curve after. The net result of this and many other subtle “straightenings” is that the main channel between Garrison Dam and the MacLean Bottoms boat ramp decreased in length by 1.7 miles.

While a straighter river may be easier for boaters to navigate, one with lots of curves and sharp bends provides better fish habitat and better places for anglers to fish.

River Width

As the Missouri River was carving a straighter channel during the 2011 flood, it was also carving a deeper channel and depositing sand at much higher elevations along its banks, which resulted in a narrowing of the river by an average of 246 feet. A narrower, deeper river with swifter currents provides less desirable fish habitat than a wide, shallow river with slower current.

Channel Braiding

The quality of the fishery is directly tied to the quality of the habitat. Fish rely on different habitats at different life stages, from spawning and egg development, to newly hatched fish, to juveniles and adults. Also, different species of fish may require

vastly different habits. Thus, maintaining a diversity of quality habitat types such as riffles, runs, pools, backwaters, side channels, current breaks and eddies is essential for producing a high quality fishery.

Unfortunately, much of the habitat diversity in the Garrison Reach was lost in 2011 as the river became more channelized and ditch-like. Measuring how much channel braiding occurs in a river is one way of assessing this habitat diversity. A braided river is characterized as having a network of smaller channels separated by temporary islands or sandbars. In other words, rivers with more channel braiding tend to have more diverse and higher quality fish habitat.

The 2011 flood significantly reduced the amount of channel braiding in the Garrison Reach. Before the flood, there was an average of 2.67 channel braids per mile between Garrison Dam and the MacLean Bottoms boat ramp. Following, there were only 1.78 braids per mile.

Summary

Following the 2011 flood, the Garrison Reach has become shorter, narrower, deeper, swifter, less braided, and currently offers poorer quality fish habitat than it did before. As a result, the Game and Fish Department has documented declines in

forage fish populations, as well as impacts to the walleye fishery.

Missouri River walleye have been declining in abundance since the flood, are currently in poor condition, not growing well, and have not experienced good reproductive success in recent years. It’s unlikely that we will see improvements to the quality of this fishery until we see improvements in the quality and diversity of fish habitat.

The pressing question is whether the Garrison Reach will be able to reestablish the quality and diversity of fish habitat that existed before 2011. Unfortunately, this is uncharted territory. If the four years that have passed since the flood are any indication, improving fish habitat will be a slow process, if it occurs at all.

Fortunately, for the first time since the 2011 flood, sampling by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in fall 2014 indicated improved forage fish abundance in Lake Oahe. This has resulted in improved walleye condition, growth and reproductive success, and we are optimistic that further improvements will be seen in 2015.

PAUL BAILEY is the Game and Fish Department’s south central fisheries district supervisor.

A large channel catfish is swimming in the Red River of the North. The fish is the central focus, shown from a side profile as it moves through the water. The water is a murky, brownish-green color. In the background, there is a riverbank with green vegetation and trees.

A GUIDE TO CATCHING CATS

IN THE RED

PHOTOS BY CRAIG BIHRLE

In terms of quantity and quality, the Red River of the North is considered a world-class channel catfish fishery.



Author Jay Leitch with a channel catfish from the Red River.

North Dakota anglers have a preference and it hasn't shifted in decades.

In 1974, walleye topped the list of species anglers prefer to pursue. In 2014, according to Game and Fish Department records, that hadn't changed any.

Channel catfish, which inhabit a number of North Dakota lakes and rivers, most notably the Missouri and Red, are found farther down the angler's preference list.

This is not a knock on catfish, it's just the way it is in this walleye-crazed state.

To anglers in the know and the agency leaders who manage the fishery, fishing for channel catfish in the Red River is often overlooked and underappreciated.

"In terms of quantity and quality of channel catfish, the Red River is a unique, world-class fishery," said Greg Power, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries chief.

In their book, "Relaxed Anglers Guide to Catfishing on the Red River of the North," authors Jay A. Leitch and Tom DeSutter encourage readers to give this distinctive

fishery a shot. Their easy-to-read handbook wades through a number of topics including equipment, baits and where to cast.

What follows are excerpts from their 130-plus page guide.

Red River of the North

The Red River of the North starts in Breckenridge, Minnesota, and Wahpeton, North Dakota where the Otter Tail and Bois de Sioux rivers flow together. From Headwaters Park in Breckenridge, the Red River winds a sinuous 548.7 miles to Lake Winnipeg, a straight line distance of 286 miles.

When the Red crosses the international border north of Pembina it still has 155 miles to go before it empties into Lake Winnipeg. The Red River watershed is about 45,000 square miles in size (about the size of Ohio or the country of Malawi), excluding the Assiniboine River basin (about 70,000 square miles). The Assiniboine, the largest of more than 25 named tributaries, joins the Red in Winnipeg, coming in from the west.

Not really sure what kind of fishing gear a person needs to catch a channel catfish from the Red River. "Relaxed Anglers Guide to Catfishing on the Red River of the North" explains what is needed.



Catching a Copy

"Relaxed Anglers Guide to Catfishing on the Red River of the North" costs \$18.95 plus shipping and handling and is available from River Keepers at riverkeepers.org.

A handful of organizations and agencies, including the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, supported publication of this catfishing guide.



The Red River Valley's surface is made up of some of the most productive soils in the world. These soils are very fine, are easily picked up and transported by runoff, and stay suspended in the river's moving water. Thus, the "Red" River.

Channel Catfish

All anglers need to know about channel catfish in order to catch them regularly is that they have more taste buds than almost any other animal. Less is known about

catfish is around 24 years old and could live for several more years, so take a picture and let it go.

Their habitat preference includes lower stream velocities, higher cover density, and proximity to cover. They prefer deeper water and low velocity when cover is scarce. They prefer cooler, deeper, cleaner water than bullheads, but are often found co-located with bullheads in the Red River.

Deep holes in the Red River are important habitat for foraging and winter habitat.

Almost any bait will catch smaller catfish, but more attention needs to be paid to what works and what doesn't when it's the big ones you're after.

their sense of smell, but it too is very good. They can't see worth a darn in the Red River due to high turbidity.

Once a catfish reaches about 16 inches it feeds primarily on fish, but it remains omnivorous (plants and animals) and opportunistic (whatever is handy and tastes good). Catfish are first, top of the aquatic food chain predators, and second, opportunistic scavengers.

Channel catfish grow slow but live long in the Red River. Red River channel catfish can live to around 24 years, or more, and grow to over 30 pounds. A 10-pound Red River catfish is about 17 years old, a good reason to release it. A 24-pound, 38-inch

Equipment and Bait

Catfishing is about as basic as recreational fishing gets. A hook and weight attached to a simple rod and reel and some bait are all that's needed to catch catfish. Routinely catching trophy channel catfish requires that a little more thought goes into the equipment, but it's still pretty basic. Almost any bait will catch smaller catfish, but more attention needs to be paid to what works and what doesn't when it's the big ones you're after.

In general, our equipment suggestions will work anywhere in the river. However, the river changes from a narrow,

shallow channel full of snags in the south, to a wide, deep channel as it nears Lake Winnipeg. Use lighter equipment upstream and heavier equipment downstream.

There has probably been more written about catfish bait than about any other aspect of catfishing. Suggested baits for channel catfish include everything from fresh-cut sucker to chicken livers to hot dogs to commercial stink baits.

What works best will depend somewhat on water temperature and river stage. Generally, baits fall into six categories (1) stink, (2) fish or fish parts, (3) nonfish live/fresh bait, (4) meat and misc., (5) artificial, and (6) weird.

The most important criteria for catfish baits are (1) size of fish sought, (2) water temperature (relates to season), and (3) having it in the right place, and (4) be sure it's legal to use. The only limitation on what a catfish will eat is if they can get it into their mouth. Bigger baits generally catch bigger fish and discourage small fish from robbing your bait. Take a variety of bait along to improve your chances.

Fishing and Catching

With some fresh cut bait in hand, it is time to go for the big ones. Don't bury the hook in a big chunk of bait, leave plenty of hook point exposed for good hook setting.

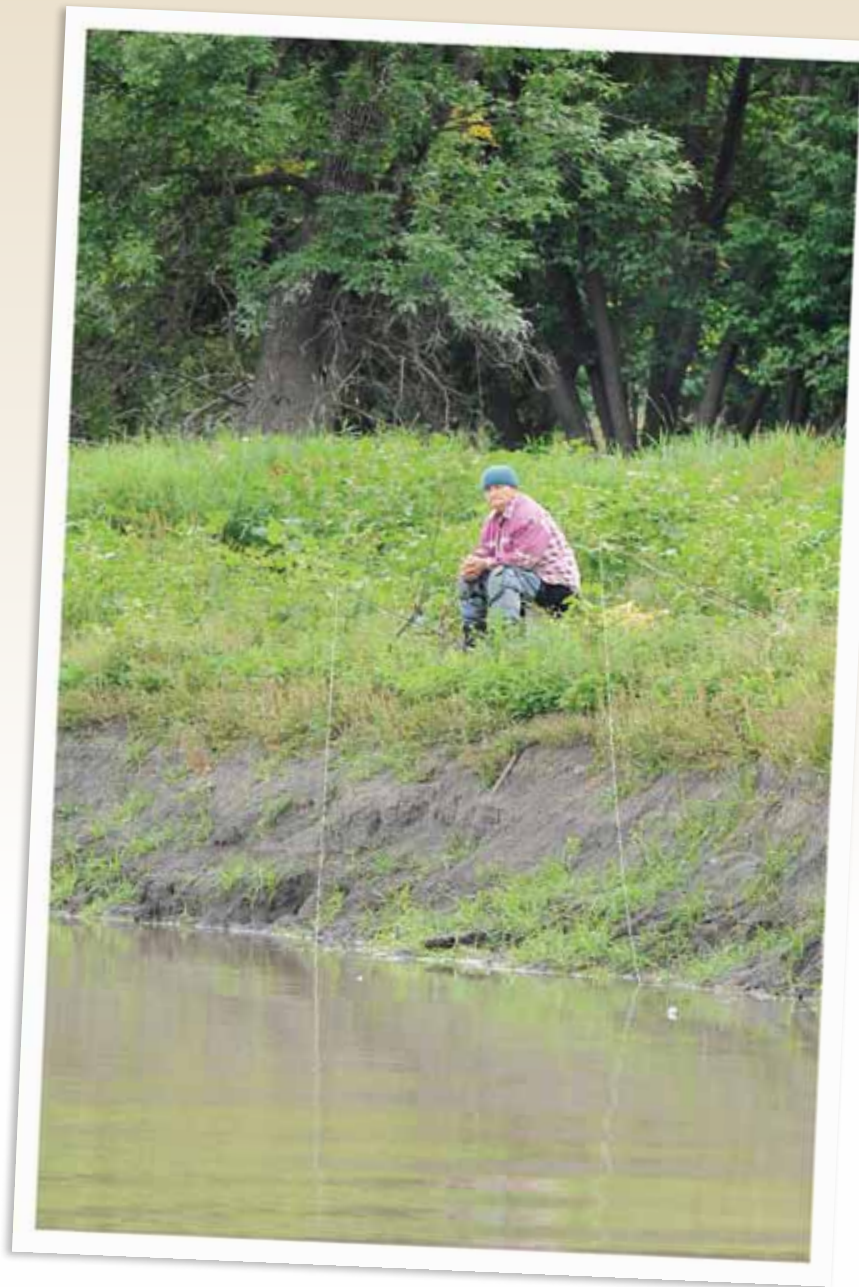
Skillfully place the bait where you think it will end up AFTER a ride in the current. That may be downstream as little as 10 or 15 feet away. Don't cast across the river, you'll very likely get snagged up. Cast with the current. Secure the rods in a good rod holder and wait.

Every 15 to 25 minutes the baits should be checked. There are three reasons for this. First, the constant flushing of the current washes out the bait's smell, and it should be replaced with fresh or dipped in a stinky solution. Second, the bait may be snagged on something or laying in a poor place on the bottom, which might be why nothing has taken it. Finally, there may be a small fish, or even a turtle, on the hook and it isn't taking out line.

When the rod tip begins to twitter a little, it is most often just a small fish trying to get a bite of the bait. As difficult as it might be, just let it twitch. However, when the rod tip doubles over under the pull of a trophy catfish on the other end (or when the fish starts taking line out if you're fishing from shore), it is time to pick the rod up and start reeling. There is no need to vigorously "set" the circle hook – this may only pull the bait and hook right out of the fish's mouth.

Riverbank Fishing

For a variety of reasons, shore, or bank, fishing is popular along the Red River. The river bank is easy to access. Fish can be caught from shore as easily as from a boat.



An angler, with bait cast close to shore, waits for a catfish to take notice.

Try to find a few spots to fish along the bank with different downstream structure. One spot might have a huge oak tree fallen into the river. Another spot might have a small tributary or storm sewer drain. There may be a deep hole in a sharp bend in the River. Places where the current changes are good spots to look for catfish.

Most fish are caught within 10 feet of the bank – the same bank you're fishing from, not the one on the other side. Let the angler on the opposite bank catch the fish on that side.

In short, finding a place to fish from shore along the Red River should not be a problem. Remember to clean up after yourself and keep noise levels appropriate.





ASHLEY SALWEY

2015 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

By Scott Peterson, Game and Fish Deputy Director

North Dakota lawmakers adjourned in late April, setting the stage for how the State Game and Fish Department does business for the next two years.

Now that the dust has settled, it's time to consider

how the state's sportsmen and women fared in the 64th assembly.

Some bills, no matter the year, demand more staff time than others, as hunting and fishing related bills can and sometimes do attract a lot of attention. This

interest is certainly due to the fact that people are passionate about the quality of their hunting and fishing opportunities in North Dakota.

Understanding that, the Department tries to stay focused on the big picture, namely supporting those bills which will ultimately have a positive impact on the state's hunting and fishing.

While the legislative process can seem intimidating or cumbersome to the casual observer, it is designed to allow public input. You don't have to be a registered lobbyist to voice your opinion and your elected officials are there to represent you.

By all accounts, it was a relatively quiet session in terms of the number of bills that would have had an influence on how the Department provides service to its constituents.

When all was said and done, 23 outdoors-related bills were tracked, 12 of which were passed by both chambers and signed into law.

OUTDOOR-RELATED BILLS THAT PASSED

- **HB 1081** – Makes available to the Outdoor Adventure Foundation up to two spring turkey, one any-elk, one any-moose, seven deer and two pronghorn licenses for youth who have been diagnosed with cancer or a life-threatening illness. In addition, provides for a study, during the 2015 interim, of Game and Fish Department licenses provided to entities for the purpose of fundraising. Passed House 92-0. Passed Senate 46-0.
- **HB 1156** – Beginning in 2016, allows an unsuccessful applicant in the deer gun lottery to donate the refund to the Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program. Passed House 90-2. Passed Senate 43-2.
- **HB 1158** – Effective April 1, 2016, county auditors will no longer be responsible for allocating and tracking hunting and fishing license sales within their respective counties. That responsibility will become the Department's. A county auditor upon request, may continue to sell hunting and fishing licenses. Passed House 92-0. Passed Senate 46-0.
- **HB 1197** – Prohibits a government agency from providing funds to a nonprofit organization for the purpose of holding any interest in real property or an easement for wildlife or conservation purposes. Does not apply to a

state government agency in partnership with a nonprofit organization if the state agency also benefits. Passed House 66-25. Passed Senate 43-3.

- **HB 1241** – Makes a short-barreled rifle legal for hunting. Passed House 74-19. Passed Senate 45-2.
- **HB 1356** – Clarifies Century Code language pertaining to wildlife depredation. This bill allows the Director to authorize individual landowners to carry out certain hazing practices to help alleviate (or prevent) wildlife depredation to livestock forage supplies. Passed House 93-0. Passed Senate 46-0.
- **HB 1381** – Prohibits a drone from being used to intentionally harass hunters and anglers. Passed House 93-0. Passed Senate 47-0.
- **HB 1409** – Provides direction on finances provided through the Outdoor Heritage Fund, with \$20 million available in a fiscal year and \$40 million for the biennium. Passed House 81-10. Passed Senate 40-7.
- **HB 1456** – Encourages Congress to pass federal legislation to return uplands of the Oahe Reservoir in Emmons and Morton counties above 1,620 feet above mean sea level to the state of North Dakota. Passed House 91-1. Passed Senate 40-7.
- **SB 2017** – Appropriates \$77,231,739 to the Game and Fish Department for the 2015-17 biennium. In addition, provides for one elk license for raffle to Annie's House at Bottineau Winter Park. Passed Senate 47-0. Passed House 87-4.
- **SB 2077** – Regulates criminal history record checks for Game and Fish volunteers and final applicants for employment. Passed Senate 89-4. Passed House 45-0.
- **SB 2093** – Guide and outfitter licenses expire March 31 if issued after March 31 of the previous year. Passed Senate 92-0. Passed House 47-0.

BILLS THAT FAILED

- **HB 1088** – Would have required an applicant

Jeb Williams, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife division chief, testifies at the 64th assembly.



to be a North Dakota resident for the preceding three years before applying in the bighorn sheep, elk and moose lotteries. Failed House 8-86.

- **HB 1175** – Would have required a person to obtain a permit for dredging a body of water. Passed House 87-6. Failed Senate 8-39.
- **HB 1177** – Would have made one mule deer license available for raffle to the North Dakota Chapter of Society for Range Management. Failed House 23-69.
- **HB 1196** – Would have allowed a current or retired North Dakota National Guard member to purchase a fishing license for \$5 and a combined general game, habitat, small game and furbearer license for \$3. Failed House 30-62.
- **HB 1224** – Would have allowed a nonresident to hunt waterfowl for three consecutive seven-day periods. Failed House 8-82.
- **HB 1249** – Would have created a Missouri River advisory council to coordinate communication among stakeholders regarding the use and management of the Missouri River, and advise the governor and legislative assembly on issues concerning the Missouri River. Passed House 82-6. Failed Senate 13-34.
- **HB 1252** – Would have allowed a nonresident to hunt waterfowl for three consecutive five-day periods. Failed House 15-75.
- **HB 1269** – Would have required the State Water Commission to adopt rules listing waters and waterways that are navigable. Failed House 9-81.
- **SB 2146** – Would have required the nonresident muskrat trapping season to begin at least nine days after the start of the season for residents, with a season ending date for nonresidents set for March 15. Passed Senate 46-1. Failed House 24-66.
- **SB 2297** – Would have appropriated \$10 million to the Game and Fish Department's private land habitat and access improvement fund during the 2015-17 biennium. Failed Senate 15-32.
- **SB 2376** – Would have allowed a North Dakota resident to purchase a lifetime small game and habitat license. The one-time fee would have been \$160 for youth under age 4; \$270 for youth age 4-15; \$400 for ages 16-49; and \$190 for ages 50 and older. In addition, legislative management would have considered during the 2015-16 interim, other resident and nonresident lifetime fishing and hunting licenses, including furbearer and combination licenses, and report findings and recommendations to the 65th legislative assembly. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee amended to change this bill to a study. Failed Senate 0-46.

ANS

AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES

REGULATIONS: **INSPECT**

WATERCRAFT FOR ANS

REMOVE

PLANTS AND ANS



DRAIN

ALL WATER



NORTH DAKOTA
GAME AND FISH
DEPARTMENT

FOR A COMPLETE LIST
OF REGULATIONS
VISIT GF.ND.GOV



BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor



LARA ANDERSON

Spring Mule Deer Survey

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department conducted its annual spring mule deer survey in April, and results indicate western North Dakota's mule deer population has increased 24 percent from last year.

Bruce Stillings, Department big game supervisor, said the increase is a result of less severe winters the past couple of years, no harvest of antlerless deer during the past three deer hunting seasons, and improved fawn production. The 2015 index is 16 percent higher than the long-term average.

"In order to maintain further population growth we need to maintain a

conservative management approach, with no antlerless mule deer harvest again in 2015," Stillings said.

Biologists counted 2,376 mule deer in 306.3 square miles during this year's survey. Overall mule deer density in the badlands was 7.8 deer per square mile, which is up from 6.3 deer per square mile in 2014.

The spring mule deer index is used to assess mule deer abundance in the badlands. It is conducted after the snow has melted and before the trees begin to leaf out, providing the best conditions for aerial observation of deer. Biologists have completed aerial surveys of the same 24 study areas since the 1950s.



DEER DRAWING, FREE FISHING

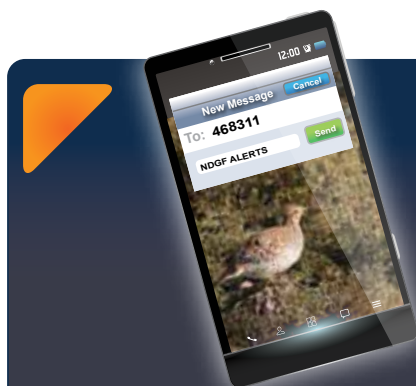
Hunters and anglers need to be aware of a few important dates in June.

The application deadline for the 2015 deer gun and muzzleloader season is June 3. Applicants can access the Game and Fish Department's website at gf.nd.gov to submit a lottery application online, or to print an application for mailing.

Paper applications will also be available at Game and Fish offices, county auditors and license vendors. You can also apply by calling 800-406-6409.

North Dakota's free fishing weekend June 6-7. Resident anglers may fish that weekend without a license, except for paddlefish. All other fishing regulations apply.

TEXT ALERTS



JUST TEXT: **NDGF Alerts**
TO: **468311**

For more options to receive Game and Fish news and information, visit the Game and Fish website at gf.nd.gov.



RECEIVE:

- Application Deadlines
- Season Opening Dates
- Maximum Harvest Quotas
- Other Timely Updates

Game Warden Exam

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has scheduled an examination to select candidates for the position of district game warden. The test is at 10 a.m., July 17, at the Department's main office in Bismarck.

Applicants must register to take the exam no later than July 13, by submitting an online application through the North Dakota State Job Openings website.

Applicants must be at least 21 years of age and have a bachelor's degree. Other requirements are a current North Dakota peace officer license, or eligibility for a license, and a valid driver's license. Candidates must have excellent interpersonal skills in communications and writing, and must not have a record of any felony convictions.

Game wardens enforce game and fish laws and related regulations in an assigned district and other locations as determined by the department. Wardens normally work alone under varied conditions, at all hours of the day, night and weekends. In addition to law enforcement duties, wardens assist in the areas of public relations, education programs, and hunter and boat safety education.

Selection procedures following the test may include an evaluation of the application, a structured oral interview, background and reference checks, and psychological and medical examinations.

The salary for beginning game wardens through training is \$3,500 per month. Upon successful completion of training, the salary is \$4,016 - \$6,693 per month. Wardens also receive the state benefits package, including travel allowance. Uniforms and other equipment are provided.

CAMPING RESTRICTIONS ON SOME WMAS

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department will continue to implement camping restrictions on some wildlife management areas in western North Dakota and along Lake Sakakawea.

Overnight camping is prohibited on the following WMAs: Antelope Creek, Lewis and Clark, Big Oxbow, Ochs Point, Neu's Point, Overlook, Sullivan and Tobacco Garden in McKenzie County; Van Hook in Mountrail County; and Hofflund Bay and Trenton in Williams County.

Lewis and Clark and Trenton WMAs are closed from one hour after sunset to one hour before sunrise unless users are legally engaged in fishing, hunting or trapping.

However, camping is allowed for paddlefish snaggers only during the open paddlefish season, at the Lewis and Clark WMA Pumphouse area, and by boat access only at Neu's Point WMA.

In addition, the following WMAs are closed to camping on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, but open to camping Thursday-Monday: North Lemmon Lake in Adams County; Bull Creek in Billings County; Alkali Creek and Spring Creek in Bowman County; Smishek Lake and Short Creek Dam in Burke County; Harris M.

Baukol in Divide County; Killdeer Mountains in Dunn County; Camels Hump Lake in Golden Valley County; Audubon, Custer Mine, Deepwater Creek, deTrobriand, Douglas Creek and Wolf Creek in McLean County; Beaver Creek and Hille in Mercer County; Crown Butte Lake and Storm Creek in Morton County; Cedar Lake and Speck Davis Pond in Slope County; and McGregor Dam in Williams County.

On those WMAs where camping is allowed Thursday through Monday, all equipment must be removed on Tuesday and Wednesdays when camping is not allowed.

The Game and Fish Department will lift the Tuesday-Wednesday camping restriction for the week of Memorial Day, May 25-29. This same waiver will allow camping on those WMAs on Tuesdays and Wednesdays during all state-recognized holiday weeks throughout the year, including 4th of July week (June 29-July 3), and Labor Day (September 7-11).

Glass bottles are prohibited on all WMAs. Other camping restrictions at all WMAs are posted at entry points.

These rules ensure that WMAs are available for hunters and anglers.

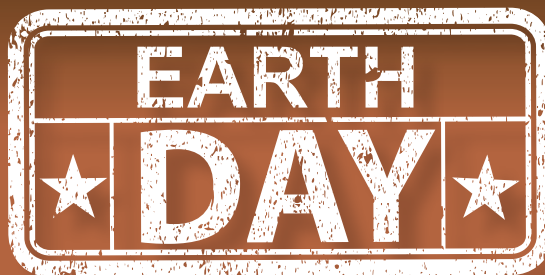


CRAIG BHIRLE



LARA ANDERSON

Wing, North Dakota students participated in a clean-up project in late April as part of the Game and Fish patch program, picking up litter from road ditches in all four directions of this rural community in northeastern Burleigh County. Wing School students have been involved in keeping their countryside clean for many years.



Game and Fish Sponsors Earth Day Project

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department once again celebrated Earth Day by sponsoring clean-up days on public-owned or managed lands.

With Earth Day recognized April 22, each member of a school, Girl Scout, Boy Scout, 4-H club or youth organization who participates in cleaning up public lands through May will receive a specifically designed conservation patch.

Last winter the Game and Fish Department sponsored a contest for students ages 6-18 to design a North Dakota Earth Day Patch. Winners receiving a pair of binoculars in the three age categories were Dakota Skaro of Bismarck (6-9), Alexis Golberg of Bismarck (10-13) and Ayana Kovash of Manning (14-18). Kovash's design was chosen the contest winner, and will be used on this year's Earth Day patch.

Groups participating in the Earth Day project are encouraged to take the following precautions to ensure safety: keep young people away from highways, lakes and rivers; and only allow older participants to pick up broken glass.

Interested participants are asked to contact Pat Lothspeich, Department outreach biologist, at 701-328-6332 to receive a reporting form for their project.



Overall Winner
Ayana Kovash
14-18 Years



1st Place
Dakota Skaro
6-9 Years



1st Place
Alexis Golberg
10-13 Years



A ring-necked duck (top) by Emery Dobitz, Killdeer, won Best of Show in the 2015 North Dakota Junior Duck Stamp Contest. Fischer Ackerson, Sherwood, received Runner-up Best of Show honors for her green-winged teal (right).



Killdeer Youth Wins Best of Show

A ring-necked duck was chosen the 2015 Best of Show in the North Dakota Junior Duck Stamp Contest.

Emery Dobitz, 17, a high school student from Killdeer, used acrylic paints for her presentation of the diving duck in a wetland habitat. Her artwork was selected from a record of nearly 1,400 entries from across North Dakota.

Dobitz's drawing will represent North Dakota at the National Junior Duck Stamp Contest. The winner of the national contest will have their entry made into a stamp.

Other first place winners in the four age categories were:

- Grades K-3 – Gabe Dawson, Bismarck; Emma Sabo, Leeds; and Hannah Dorrheim, Bismarck.
- Grades 4-6 – Tyson Tomlinson, Sawyer; Daniel Schumacher, Linton; and Isabel Sieg, Kenmare.
- Grades 7-9 – Fischer Ackerson, Sherwood; Kaitlynn Kinkead, Sherwood; and Tanner Thomsen, Valley City.
- Grades 10-12 – Lance Apalacio, Valley City; and DJ Elstrom, Valley City.



SANDRA JOHNSON

Reporting Occupied Eagle Nests

While there are likely 125 more active bald eagle nests in the state than 15 years ago, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department continues to monitor this bird that once flirted with extinction.

Sandra Johnson, Game and Fish conservation biologist, said the Department is looking for locations of nests with eagles present, not individual eagle sightings.

Johnson said eagles are actively incubating eggs in spring, and it's easy to distinguish an eagle nest because of its enormous size.

"While bald eagles were removed from the Endangered Species List in 2007, it's still important to keep an ongoing list of nesting birds to make sure they are not heading back the way they came," Johnson said.

Historically, Johnson said eagle nests were found along the Missouri River. Now, they have been observed in more than half of the counties in the state, mostly near streams and mid- to large-sized lakes. However, they are also found in unique areas such as shelterbelts surrounded by cropland or pasture.

Johnson estimates the state has around 140-150 active bald eagle nests.

Nest observations should be reported to Johnson at 701-328-6382, or by email at ndgf@nd.gov.

Observers are asked to not disturb the nest, and to stay away at a safe distance. "It is important not to approach the nest as foot traffic may disturb the bird, likely causing the eagle to leave her eggs unattended," Johnson said.



NASP State Tournament Results

Nearly 550 archers registered to compete in the North Dakota National Archery in the Schools Program state tournament in March in Minot.

Winning back-to-back titles in the high school (grades 9-12) and middle school (grades 7-8) divisions were Hankinson and Wahpeton. Taking top honors in the elementary school (grades 4-6) division was Hankinson.

Overall male and female winners were Spencer Brockman of North Sargent and defending champion Lisa Buckhaus of Hankinson.

Winning teams and the top 10 individuals qualify for the national tournament, scheduled for May in Louisville, Kentucky. The Game and Fish Department and North Dakota Bowhunters Association contribute a total of \$3,000 in travel assistance to the first place team in each division, and \$1,000 to the overall male and female individual winners.

National qualifiers include:

- **High school boys** – 1) Brockman; 2) James Nadeau, Dunseith; 3) Race Kath, Hankinson; 4) Kyle Andres, Medina; 5) Michael McKenna, North Sargent; 6) Mark McFarland, North Sargent; 7) Dalton Dockter, Medina; 8) Jonathan Goroski, Wahpeton; 9) Steve Dudas, North Sargent; 10) Brody Graff, Medina.
- **High school girls** – 1) Buckhaus; 2) Deena Monson, Griggs County; 3) Theresia Thompson, Hankinson; 4) Kate Loewen, Hankinson; 5) Olivia Waswick, North Sargent; 6) Jada Stone, Hankinson; 7) Bridget Henderson, Edgeley; 8) Kailee Klein, Wahpeton; 9) Cassie Boelke, Wahpeton; 10) Danielle Schuler, Wilton.
- **Middle school boys** – 1) Dawson McKeever, North Sargent; 2) Brady McKenna, North Sargent; 3) Jaden Payne, Glenburn; 4) Brayden Wehsele, North Sargent; 5) Will Peckham, Montpelier; 6) Tavon Stadler, Griggs County Central;
- 7) Brodie Crandall, North Sargent; 8) Ryan Kath, Hankinson; 9) Ty Wixo, Wahpeton; 10) Cole Homes, Pingree-Buchanan.
- **Middle school girls** – 1) Jaidyn Sander, Hankinson; 2) Mary Goroski, Wahpeton; 3) Desi Parsons, Griggs County Central; 4) Kayley Ceroll, Wahpeton; 5) Alicia Biewer, Hankinson; 6) Melonie Lee, Barnes County North; 7) Kayla Hiam, Hope-Page; 8) Olivia Prochnow, Hankinson; 9) Maddie Weigum, Twin Buttes; 10) Avery Trittin, Wahpeton.
- **Elementary boys** – 1) Casey Everson, Barnes County North; 2) Braxtyn Hamann, North Sargent; 3) Aubrey Prochnow, Hankinson; 4) Bronson Haugen, Barnes County North; 5) Adam Nitschke, Edgeley; 6) Ruston Kath, Hankinson; 7) Avery McFarland, North Sargent; 8) Howie Neustel, North Sargent; 9) Dalton Madcke, Edgeley; 10) Ethan Millner, Hankinson.



STEVE SILBETH

- **Elementary girls** – 1) Maddie Foertsch, Hankinson; 2) Sheridan McKeever, North Sargent; 3) Sadie Keller, Hankinson; 4) Lorelei McIver, Glenburn; 5) Jenna Larson, Griggs County Central; 6) Jaicee Birch, St. John's Academy; 7) Kirstan Loewen, Hankinson; 8) Tenley Evans, Hankinson; 9) Morgan Grabinger, Medina; 10) Trinity Brandenburg, Edgeley.

In addition, archers had the option of participating in a NASP 3-D challenge, which ran simultaneously with the bulls-eye tournament. Nearly half the registrants participated in the event.

Top performers in the high school 3-D challenge were Seth Jansen, Montpelier, and Buckhaus (top overall score); middle school winners were Brady Walth, North Sargent, Kath, and Ella Leidy, Wilton; and taking top honors in the elementary division were Jace Jochim, Wahpeton, and Allie Bopp, North Sargent.

BOAT NORTH DAKOTA COURSE

Children ages 12-15 who want to operate a boat or personal watercraft this summer must take the state's boating basics course.

State law requires youngsters ages 12-15 to pass the course before they operate a boat or personal watercraft with at least a 10 horsepower motor. In addition, major insurance companies give adult boat owners who pass the course a premium discount on boat insurance.

The course is available for home-study from the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Bismarck office. Two commercial providers also offer the course online, and links to those sites are found on the department's website at gf.nd.gov.

While the home-study course is free, students will be charged a fee to take it online. The online provider charges for the course, not the Game and Fish Department. The fee stays with the online provider.

Upon completion of the online test, and providing a credit card number, students will be able to print out a temporary certification card, and within 10 days a permanent card will be mailed.

The course covers legal requirements, navigation rules, getting underway, accidents and special topics such as weather, rules of the road, laws, life saving and first aid. For more information contact Nancy Boldt, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, by email at ndgf@nd.gov; or call (701) 328-6300.



Summer BOW Dates

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program is accepting registrations for the annual summer workshop August 7-9 at Lake Metigoshe State Park, Bottineau.

Enrollment is limited to participants age 18 or older. Workshop fees of \$150 cover instruction, program materials, use of equipment, all meals and lodging.

Participants can choose from a number of different activities, including archery, firearms, fishing, hunting, paddling sports, wildlife and plants, cooking and outdoor knowledge.

BOW workshops are designed primarily for women with an interest in learning skills associated with hunting, fishing and outdoor endeavors. Although open to anyone age 18 or older, the workshops are tailored primarily to women who have never tried these activities or who are beginners hoping to improve their skills.

Women interested in attending the summer workshop can register online, or print and mail an information brochure and enrollment form at the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov. More information is available by contacting Alegra Powers at 701-527-3075, or email ndgf@nd.gov.

HUNTING GUIDE AND OUTFITTER TEST SET

The next guide and outfitter written examination is May 16 at 1 p.m. at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department office in Bismarck. The test is given periodically to anyone interested in becoming a hunting guide or outfitter in the state.

In addition to passing a written exam, qualifications for becoming a guide include a background check for criminal and game and fish violations; certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and standard first aid; and employment by or contract with a licensed hunting outfitter.

Hunting outfitter eligibility requirements include the guide qualifications, as well as an individual must have held a hunting guide license for two years; and must have proof of liability insurance.

Those interested are required to preregister by calling the Game and Fish Department's enforcement office at 701-328-6604.



FIRST FISH CERTIFICATE

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is reminding parents to capture their little angler's first catch on a specially designed First Fish certificate.

First Fish has no qualifying weights or measurements. The only requirement is the successful landing of a North Dakota fish. Certificates are available to all who request them, and have ample room for important information, such as name, age, lake and a short fish story, plus a blank space for a photograph.

Free certificates are available by contacting the Game and Fish Department at 701-328-6300, or send an email to ndgf@nd.gov.

Staff Notes



Alexis Duxbury



Renae Heinle

North Dakota Game and Fish Department employees Alexis Duxbury, Renae Heinle and James Myhre were recently recognized by the North Dakota Chapter of the Wildlife Society.

Duxbury received the Chapter's Professional award, Heinle the Wildlife Habitat award and Myhre Case of the Year award.

Duxbury is a resource biologist in Bismarck, Heinle a private land biologist in Jamestown and Myhre a district game warden in New Rockford.

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back cast



By Ron Wilson



Record 1968 Northern Pike
Tom Weinand, Raub (left)
and Melvin Slind, Roseglen (right)

We went fishing when we published a nearly 50-year-old photograph of two unidentified anglers holding North Dakota's record northern pike on the back cover of the March-April magazine. Unable to identify the anglers ourselves prior to publication, we cast the photograph to readers with the idea that Melvin Slind, the Roseglen man whose name is in the record book, would finally be identified. And, as a bonus, maybe we'd learn the identification of the other gentleman.

Publishing the photograph without proper identification isn't something we did without thought. Initially we argued that it didn't feel right. We also argued that we had a pretty decent idea who Slind was based on the evidence we'd gathered, but we weren't 100 percent and that wasn't good enough. And the other guy? We had no clue.

Yet, as we nosed closer and closer to deadline, we decided to run the photograph as is.

According to a number of unwavering emails, phone calls, messages and two office visits, Melvin Slind is pictured on the right and Tom Weinand of Raub on the left.

Melvin, or Pat, as most people called him, passed away in 1986. And Tom, or "Tomcat" as he was known, died in 1998.

One of the phone calls I fielded was from Ricky Weinand, 52, an air traffic controller in New York. Turns out, Ricky, Tomcat's son, was there on that June day

in 1968 when the record fish was landed south of Deepwater Bay.

"I was just a kid, about 5 ½, and we were fishing from an area on Lake Sakakawea called Tommy's Point, named after my dad," he said. "I can't remember if other kids were along, there must have been, but what I can remember so vividly is that fish looked like a whale to me ... I was scared.

"I remember Dad and Pat getting pretty excited, too, once they were able to see the fish in the shallows," Ricky added. "Holy cow, that was a big fish ..."

Fishing and hunting were a way of life for Ricky and his seven siblings. "We hunted and fished a lot ... we were up early in the morning on the weekend and spent all day outdoors with dad," he said. "With that many kids, I guess it was a good way to keep us out of trouble."

Today, the record pike is simply a memory. Years after being mounted, the fish was lost in a bar fire near New Town, Ricky said.

A handful of the people I heard from also said that Tomcat caught a tagged walleye from Sakakawea that was part of a Minot TV station's promotion of the fishing on the big lake. The reward for the tagged fish was reportedly \$100,000.

"That was in the early 1980s, but I wasn't along when he caught the walleye, my sister, Janet, was," Ricky said. "Dad said he needed to put new tires on the car or the pickup, I don't remember which, so he said he was going to catch that fish. And that's exactly what he did."

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.



NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT ARCHIVE PHOTO

A Look Back *By Ron Wilson*

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's breeding duck survey is perhaps the longest-running operational breeding waterfowl survey in the world, covering 1,800 miles to assess spring wetland conditions and the number of waterfowl in the state.

In 1954, when this black and white photograph was taken, the survey wasn't quite a fledgling, but it hadn't been around that long, either.

In the first few years, the survey was comprised of both aerial and ground routes, with today's ground routes starting in 1950.

Every May, for the last six-plus decades, Game and Fish Department biologists have driven the same routes, counting waterfowl and water areas. The survey provides an annual comparison of habitat conditions and breeding pair numbers, and offers an early indicator of what waterfowl hunters might expect in the fall.

What biologists saw in 1954 was wholly different from what biologists experienced from the front seat of their vehicles in 2014.

In 1954, one of the driest survey years on record, just 239,874 wetlands were estimated from the counts, compared to 1.4 million in 2014, the second wettest survey year on record.

With little water on the landscape, the number of ducks estimated in 1954, about 893,000 birds, made it one of the lowest tallies in survey history. In 2014, nearly 4.9 million ducks were counted, the second highest number on record.

Mike Johnson, a longtime Game and Fish Department waterfowl biologist, will run his 34th breeding duck survey in May. He's experienced the radical wet and dry, ups and downs that are the nature of the northern prairie.

In the late 1980s in the heart of a terrific drought, Johnson said biologists could run their survey routes from the South Dakota border to the Canadian border and back in two days, with not many stops in between.

"With an unprecedented amount of water in North Dakota the last 20 years, there have been times where we barely got done in five or more days, working long, 10- to 12-hour days," Johnson said. "With thousands of stops, your foot would get sore from pushing on the brake."

With a mostly open winter and little precipitation this spring in North Dakota, Johnson predicts that sore feet for biologists won't likely be a concern.

"It's dry out there," he said.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota *OUTDOORS*.