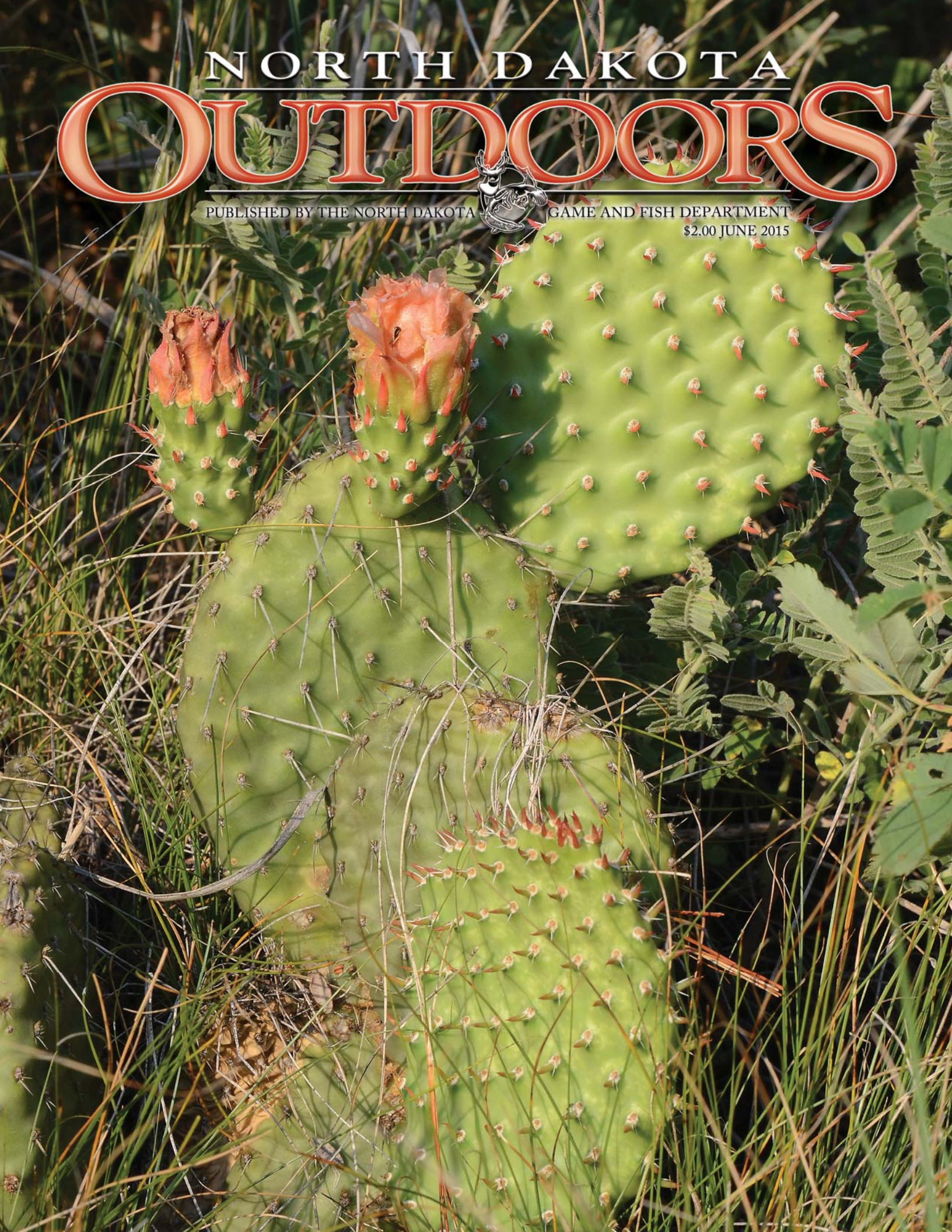


NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA

GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

\$2.00 JUNE 2015





MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

I know it's not true across North Dakota, but we finally received some much-needed rain.

Fire concerns aren't currently that high on the list and the grasslands that I've seen look good. I know there are areas of the state that are probably a little short on precipitation and some that are probably wishing they had a little less.

While we don't know, and can't control what future weather will bring, I'm certainly hoping for a relatively dry and warm cycle through the end of June. That will allow the majority of the ground-nesting birds like pheasants to pull off a successful hatch and not have to endure cold, wet weather that is so deleterious to their survival. If that occurs, we can look forward to a good fall upland game bird hunting season.

But right now most of us are more interested in fishing and the other activities associated with it. From what I've heard, but have not been able to enjoy, is fishing has been very good across the state.

There are usually anomalies associated with a statement like that, but overall it's a continuation of the last open water season. This is a tribute to our fisheries staff who assesses lakes and determine what management scheme works best to either perpetuate or enhance a fishery, and work hard to make sure access is available.

While Mother Nature may determine a different path for some of those recreational fisheries, it's the work of those people who do all they can to provide enjoyment for all.

That work isn't guess work, either. It's based on information gathered from netting

results on a given lake and, many times, some intensive research to answer questions they may have as to what influences fish populations.

One of these fact gathering studies is currently ongoing on the Missouri River/Lake Oahe and is a collaborative effort with South Dakota State University and the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks. Given that Lake Oahe is a shared resource between the Dakotas, there are many issues of common interest. These kinds of collaborative efforts are invaluable.

Given that I just mentioned collaborative efforts, featured in this issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* is an article that celebrates the 50th anniversary of the North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department. While we are different state agencies with different missions, we have cooperated on a number of projects over time, from developing a trout fishery at Turtle River State Park that is unique to North Dakota to hunts within state parks.

I fully expect this collaboration to continue in the future and, once again, the end result will be more and better experiences for the public.

Fall may be the most anticipated time for people who enjoy the outdoors, but summer provides equally enjoyable opportunities.

Take a trip into the quiet countryside and listen for the melodic call of our state bird, the Western meadowlark, or look for the untold number of bird species we have in the state. The list of things we all can do to enjoy what we have to offer in the great North Dakota outdoors is certainly a long one.

Terry Steinwand

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NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS
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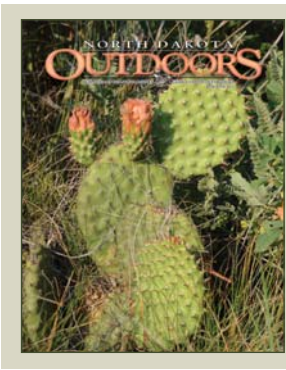
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Front Cover

The plains prickly pear is North Dakota's most common cactus. This specimen was photographed near Beaver Bay in Emmons County. (Photo by Craig Bibrle, Bismarck.)



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100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095
Website: gf.nd.gov • email: ndgfd@nd.gov
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Hunter Education 701-328-6615 • Licensing 701-328-6335
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Mysteries of Lake Oahe

Walleye

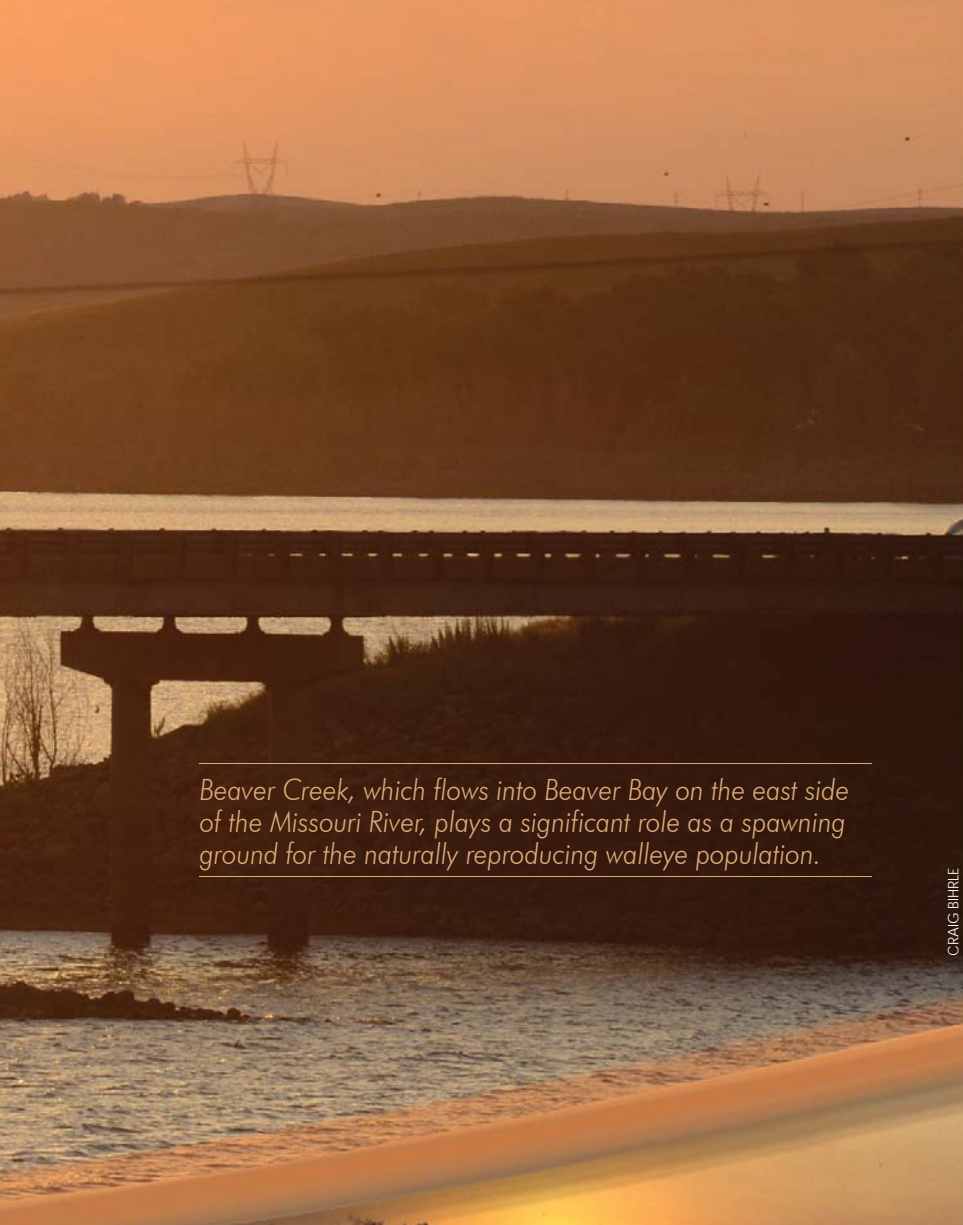
USING EAR STONES TO DECODE SPAWNING AND MOVEMENT

*By Andrew K. Carlson
and William J. Radigan*

A catastrophic flood ravaged the Missouri River basin in 2011, generating incredible hardship for many in its wake. Fueled by late-melting snow and delayed spring rainfall, record water releases caused citizen evacuations as floodwaters damaged residential, corporate, industrial, agricultural and transportation infrastructure. However, effects of the flood on Missouri River ecology – the study of the interactions among organisms and their environment – remain largely unknown.

As graduate students at South Dakota State University, we are researching effects of the 2011 flood on Missouri River fishes. Floodwaters caused millions of rainbow smelt, gizzard shad, walleye and other species to move through hydroelectric dams, a phenomenon called entrainment.

These species are important forage fish and predators in Lake Oahe, so it is important that researchers quantify the magnitude and extent of entrainment during the 2011 flood and develop tools that managers can use to estimate fish passage during future disturbances.



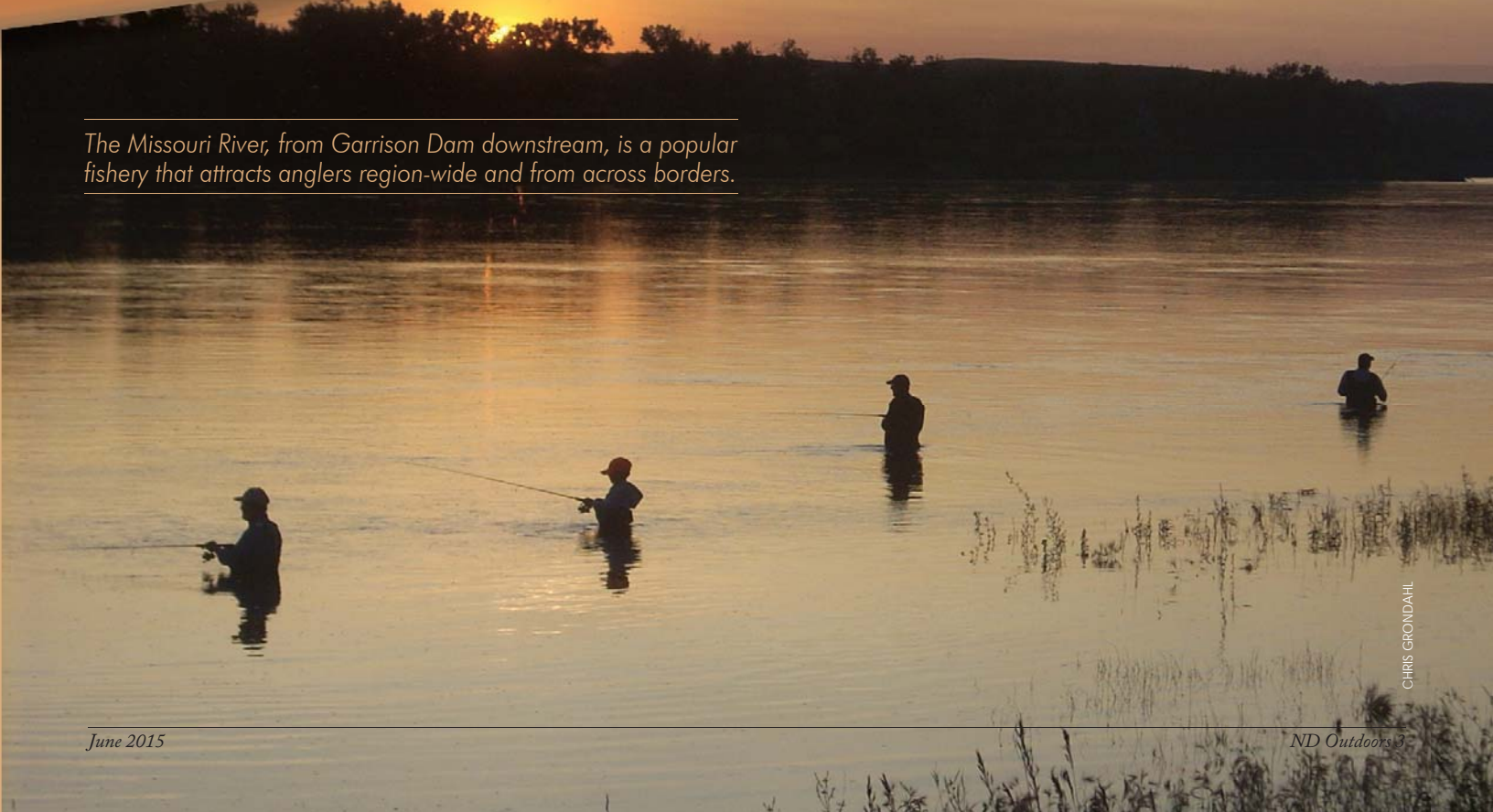
Beaver Creek, which flows into Beaver Bay on the east side of the Missouri River, plays a significant role as a spawning ground for the naturally reproducing walleye population.

CRAIG BIRHLE

We are using a cutting-edge technique called otolith microchemistry to study walleye environmental history in the Missouri River. Otoliths, or fish ear stones, deposit annual rings (called *annuli*) much like trees. In addition, they accumulate depositions of elements such as strontium, barium, magnesium and sodium in proportion to their concentration in the water column. Because water chemistry reflects river basin geology, and varies within and among Missouri River tributaries, embayments, and mainstem locations, walleyes from different locations have unique otolith signatures.

By measuring otolith elemental concentrations at each annulus and select locations in between, we can identify where walleyes hatched, when and where they moved, and when and where they were entrained.

This powerful technique yields important insights for walleye management in Lake Oahe. Walleye otolith elemental signatures vary among Lake Oahe locations in proportion to spatial differences in water chemistry.



The Missouri River, from Garrison Dam downstream, is a popular fishery that attracts anglers region-wide and from across borders.

CHRIS GRONDAHL



CRAIG BIRHLE

Fisheries work on the Missouri River is ongoing during the open water months. In this instance, personnel employ an electro-fishing boat during fall reproduction sampling.

Hence, we can identify walleye natal origins and quantify movement patterns with high accuracy.

Tributaries such as the Cannonball River and Beaver Bay in North Dakota, and Moreau River in South Dakota, contribute disproportionately high numbers of walleye to Lake Oahe.

The overall contribution of South Dakota hatching sites to the North Dakota population (47.62 percent) and North Dakota hatching sites to the South Dakota population (48.33 percent) are similar, indicating each state subsidizes the other in a relatively balanced manner.

Annual movement patterns also provide

additional information about Lake Oahe walleye. From 2009-13, the cumulative percentage of North Dakota-hatched walleye that moved downstream to South Dakota (58.93 percent) was greater than the percentage of South Dakota-hatched walleye that moved upstream to North Dakota (33.01 percent).

From spring 2010 to the flood in 2011, the majority of walleye moved downstream to reproduce or remained in the same spawning location. After the flood, a large percentage (41.94 percent) of North Dakota walleye returned to North Dakota to reproduce. Overall, these results indicate

When the walleye bite on the Missouri River from Garrison Dam to the South Dakota border heats up, it's no secret. Word quickly spreads and anglers gather in numbers on the self-sustaining fishery that is arguably one of the top walleye fisheries on the Northern Plains.



MIKE ANDERSON

an interconnected, interjurisdictional walleye population in Lake Oahe and suggest large, ecosystem-scale management approaches may be important.

For example, managers in North Dakota and South Dakota may collaborate on reservoir-scale habitat conservation programs and cooperative human dimensions research to protect walleye in Lake Oahe and ensure healthy fisheries in the future.

In the midst of social and economic adversity caused by floods, it is also important to examine ecological effects. Natural resources connect us as humans and inspire us with their beauty. The aquatic world should stimulate our wonder and passion, striving for improving our environmental ethics. For these and many other reasons, it is critical to understand how the 2011 flood affected the Missouri River ecosystem. Our research provided important pieces to solve this puzzle and promoted future research to examine long-term effects of the flood.

ANDREW K. CARLSON AND WILLIAM J. RADIGAN are graduate research assistants at South Dakota State University.



Paul Bailey, a Game and Fish Department fisheries supervisor, with a nice walleye captured during a fishing sampling effort on Lake Oahe.

TRIBUTARIES VITAL TO WALLEYE REPRODUCTION

By Ron Wilson

Fisheries managers have long believed the Missouri River System tributaries downstream of Garrison Dam are valuable contributors to the reproductive success of the self-sustaining walleye fishery.

Now, following a multi-year study that traced the biological beginnings and movements of walleye within the fishery, fisheries managers have some more scientific data to support their long-held position.

“The most valuable piece of information we got from this study is where walleye are being successfully reproduced between Garrison and Oahe dams,” said Paul Bailey, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries supervisor. “That’s important information because we rely on natural reproduction to sustain the fishery.”

The Game and Fish Department hasn’t stocked northern pike or walleye in the Missouri River System from Garrison Dam and downstream for more than 30 years, relying instead on the natural productivity of the fish and the whims of Mother Nature.

“All the walleye and northern pike that anglers catch are the product of natural

reproduction,” Bailey said. “A very high quality fishery is being maintained based entirely on natural reproduction.”

Understanding the fishery – all 317 miles from Garrison to Oahe Dam – is important because, year in and year out, the reach within North Dakota’s border is the number three fishery in the state in terms of participation and fishing effort.

When the fish are biting and word spreads, it’s a popular place.

“In April 2015, for example, the Department documented 98,000 hours of angling effort just in the Missouri River, not Oahe,” said Greg Power, Department fisheries chief.

Major tributaries to the Missouri River in North Dakota include the Knife, Heart and Cannonball rivers on the west side and Beaver and Apple creeks on the east.

Fisheries managers say that while walleye spawn in all the Missouri River tributaries, the findings by South Dakota State University researchers demonstrated that Beaver Creek and the Cannonball River had much higher proportions of walleye than the other tributaries.

“Knowing where the walleye are coming from has always been a great question to us,” said Scott Gangl, Department fisheries management section leader. “The research gives a better idea of the significance of these tributaries, especially Beaver Creek and the Cannonball River.”

Bailey said knowing which tributaries the self-sustaining walleye population prefers will also help fisheries managers prioritize future habitat protection projects.

“We need to maintain the quality of these spawning areas,” Bailey said. “Understanding how important Beaver Creek, the Cannonball and some of these other tributaries are, if we ever do start seeing issues with natural reproduction, we’ll know where to go to start looking for answers.”

“With further research,” Power added, “one would hope that this information would provide us and other water groups some important data to assist in protecting high priority spawning areas.”

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.

DRESSED FOR COURTSHIP

By Ron Wilson



Adult male and female eared grebes split incubation duties, which takes about 22 days.

CRAG BIHRE

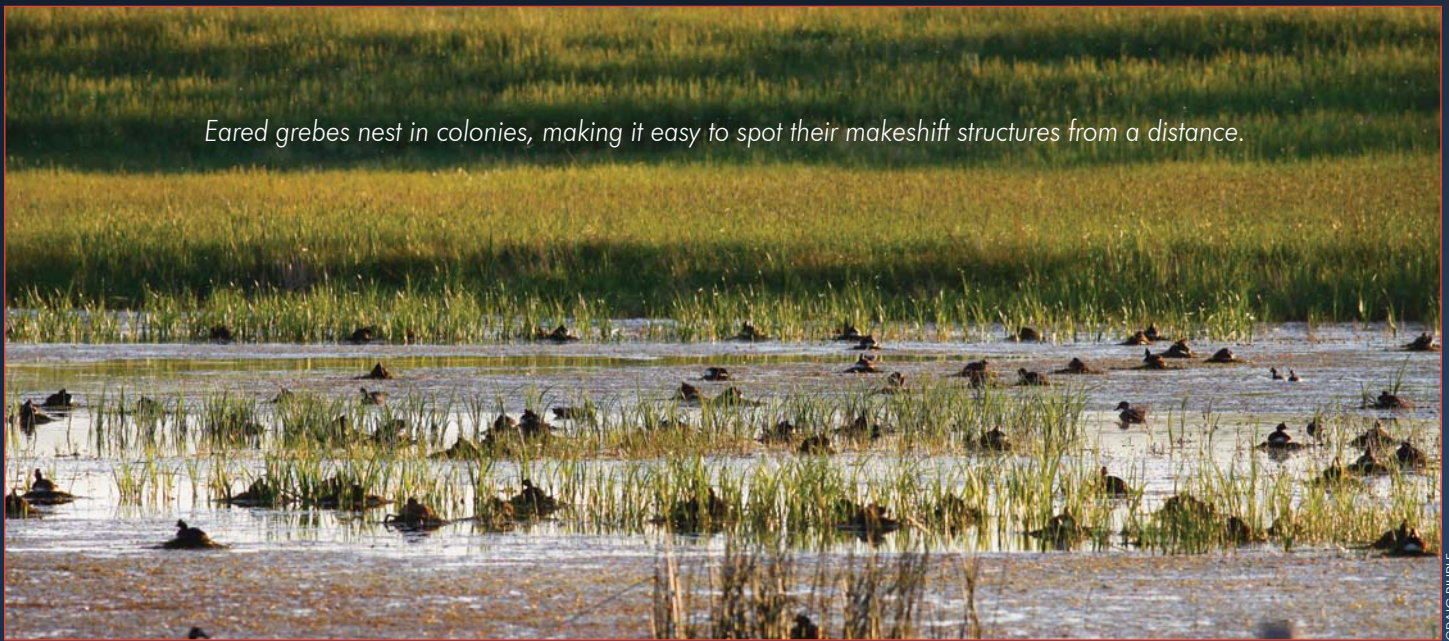
In North Dakota, we get eared grebes at their most handsome.

It's here, during the breeding season that both males and females display long, golden ear feathers that fan out behind mischievous-looking red eyes. Add to that chestnut-colored backs and flanks, and the birds look little like they did on their wintering grounds.

Six species of grebes nest in North Dakota. Pied-billed and eared grebes are the most numerous, the latter arriving about mid-April.

These small waterbirds, which measure from 12 to 14 inches in length, collect on permanent and semi-permanent wetlands.

Eared grebes nest in colonies, making it easy to spot their makeshift structures from a distance.



CRAIG BIRLIE

While eared grebes do breed farther north, North Dakota remains for a time a favored destination for many because of the number of wetlands decorating the landscape.

“They are a waterbird and North Dakota has the water,” said Sandra Johnson, Game and Fish Department conservation biologist.

Eared grebe courtship, biologists say, begins during the spring migration north and elevates once they arrive. While facing one another, grebes tread water, then rise breast to breast, shake their heads and call, which sounds similar to the mellow peeping of frogs.



Male and female eared grebes in breeding plumage sport unmistakable long, golden ear feathers.

CRAIG BIRLIE

While the courtship display of eared grebes has been described as elaborate, the nests the birds build are not. Grebe nests look unconvincing. They appear as if a good prairie thunder and rainstorm would render them useless.

Nests are made of floating vegetation and mud anchored to cattails, reeds and other emergent vegetation. But as often as not, once construction is complete, the birds apparently have second thoughts, abandon their work and build another.



LARA ANDERSON



CRAIG BIHRLE

As pictured in these three photographs, eared grebe chicks ride on the backs of adults for about two weeks following hatching.



LARA ANDERSON

Eared grebe nests, which are made of floating vegetation and mud, attached to cattails and reeds, are nothing to marvel at, yet they get the job done. In the inset photograph, an adult grebe covers eggs with vegetation to keep them warm while her or she is away foraging for food.



CRAIG BIRHLE

CRAIG BIRHLE

With legs set far back on its body, walking on land is almost impossible for the eared grebe. Yet, in the water the bird is at home.

Eared grebes forage on the water's surface and dive for their food, mostly invertebrates and small crustaceans, but they will also eat small fish and insects. They are able to swim under water because of the lobes on their toes.

Female eared grebes lay a handful of eggs in their flimsy nests. Incubation, which is carried out by both males and females, lasts about 22 days.

Newly hatched chicks spend their time riding on a parent's back for the first couple weeks, often hiding under

an adult's feathers to stay warm. The parents not giving piggyback rides are tasked with the duty of foraging and diving for food for the chicks.

Eared grebes spend the entire summer and into fall in North Dakota. Biologists say they are one of the last waterbirds to leave on their southern migration, sometimes staying in the state until mid-November.

When it's time to head to wintering grounds in the southern United States and Mexico, you likely won't see the birds leave as they only migrate at night.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.

Inventory of Nesting Waterbirds

Researchers with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory in South Dakota will complete an inventory of breeding waterbird colonies in North Dakota later in summer.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department awarded a State Wildlife Grant to RMBO in 2014, the first year of the two-year inventory.

"Researchers are collecting baseline information for the Department on the distribution and breeding populations of colonial nesting waterbirds in North Dakota," said Sandra Johnson, Game and Fish conservation biologist.

Some of the species researchers are focusing on include herons, egrets, cormorants, gulls, terns and grebes.

"Last summer researchers concentrated mostly in the south central and southeastern parts of the state," Johnson said. "This summer their focus will mostly be in the northern half of the state."



MIKE ANDERSON

NEW ANS SIGNS, SAME IMPORTANT MESSAGE

By Ron Wilson

An old ANS sign with the same message.



Educating and informing boaters, anglers and other water users on the fallout of introducing and spreading aquatic nuisance species in North Dakota is ongoing.

Fundamental in that years-long effort are metal ANS signs posted at public boat ramps reminding anglers and others to **INSPECT** (watercraft for ANS), **REMOVE** (plants and ANS) and **DRAIN** (all water).

While the message to inspect, remove and drain hasn't changed, the signs that urge boaters to do so have.

"Those older, metal ANS signs were fading and some you could hardly read," said Fred Ryckman, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries supervisor.

Ryckman said the goal is to have 350-400 new ANS signs in place at every public boating access site in the state by early June.

“Public boat ramps are a good point of contact because those sites are the origin of where most of the movement of aquatic nuisance species could occur,” he said. “Virtually everyone out recreating and using public sites will see them and understand the message.”

Looking for ANS

As the number of managed fisheries continues to climb in North Dakota, so too does the tally of waters inspected by Game and Fish Department personnel for aquatic nuisance species.

In 2014, waters sampled by Department fisheries supervisors and personnel topped 200, up from 2012-13.

“Fisheries supervisors are monitoring their own districts, vigilantly looking for ANS plants and anything else that is unusual,” Ryckman said. “These fisheries supervisors and their crews also spend thousands of hours every year netting and sampling fish, and while they’re doing that, they are always on the lookout for anything unusual.”

Ryckman said that while only about half of the state’s managed waters were sampled for aquatic nuisance species in 2014, the effort was intense and thorough.

“You always think you can do more to monitor and do more to prevent the spread of ANS,” he said. “Yet, collectively, we have been committing a fair amount of time and effort monitoring existing ANS infestations and searching for any new ones.”

In each of the last three years, Ryckman said, only a single water body has been noted as newly infested by existing ANS (curly leaf pondweed) in North Dakota, the last of which was Raleigh Reservoir in 2014.

“Frankly, we are the envy of most state’s because we have so few ANS infestations,” Ryckman said. “I’m pretty confident that we have very few ANS infestations that we’re not aware of.”

Mussels and Carp

After going undetected for two years prior, zebra mussel young were found in 2014 in the Red River in eastern North Dakota near Wahpeton.

Zebra mussel larvae have been found in the area before, and considering adult populations are established upstream in the Otter Tail River in Minnesota, finding a few young in 2014 wasn’t surprising.

“As we continue to sample the Red River for zebra mussels, we’ve yet to find any adults,” Ryckman said. “We have others looking for adults



Game and Fish Department personnel search the James River for silver carp.

CRAIG BIRLE

attached to fishing piers, boat docks and lifts, but so far, nothing.”

Silver carp, an exotic fish that jumps from the water when alarmed by passing boats, made their way up the James River from South Dakota during extremely high flows in 2011.

According to Game and Fish Department length/weight data of silver carp sampled from the James, Ryckman said the limited population is made up of just one year-class (2009) of fish.

“There is no sign of silver carp reproduction in the James River, none whatsoever,” he said. “The literature

on silver carps says the James is too small of a river for silver carp reproduction. We’re certainly hoping that this is the case.”

Ryckman added that the silver carp population in the James at present appears to be fairly limited. “If they aren’t able to successfully reproduce and recruit in the James River, then there is a lot less concern about them moving into other North Dakota waters,” he said. “But since silver carp are well established in the James River in South Dakota, they will likely continue to move upstream into North Dakota during future high flow events.”

In each of the last three years, only one water body has been noted as newly infested by existing ANS (curly leaf pondweed) in North Dakota. The last, as pictured here, was Raleigh Reservoir in 2014.

Fishing Across Borders

North Dakota annually hosts anglers from other states. When visiting, anglers are expected to adhere to the state’s aquatic nuisance species regulations.

The same can be expected when North Dakota anglers travel elsewhere to fish. Before traveling to neighboring states, become familiar with their ANS regulations as they sometimes differ from what’s expected at home.

For ANS regulations in South Dakota, visit the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks website at sdeastwanted.com.

For ANS regulations in Minnesota, visit the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources website at dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/aquatic/index.html.

For ANS regulations in Montana, visit the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks website at fwp.mt.gov/fishing/guide/ethics.



ANS Enforcement

Ryckman said the period of simply warning anglers, boaters and other water users who don't follow ANS regulations in North Dakota is over.

In 2013 and 2014, more than 30 ANS violations were reported in North Dakota, compared to just 12 in 2012.

"I think that most who are found to not be in compliance know the ANS rules; they just decide not to do so,"

Ryckman said. "By not following the ANS regulations in North Dakota, the potential is there for severe consequences. I sure wouldn't want to be the person who introduces silver carp into the Missouri River or zebra mussels into Devils Lake."

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.



FRED RYCKMAN

North Dakota ANS Regulations

Water must be drained from watercraft prior to leaving a water body, including livewells.

Bait buckets and/or any container of 5 gallons or less in volume can be used to transport legal live baitfish or other bait in water.

All other fish species may not be held in water and/or transported in bait buckets/containers when away from a water body.

Transportation of fish in or on ice is allowed.

No aquatic vegetation, or parts thereof, shall be in or on watercraft, motors, trailers and recreational equipment when out of water.

Time out of the water needed to remove aquatic vegetation at the immediate water access area is allowed.

All built-in structures to boats, including livewells and bait compartments, and containers (bait buckets) used to transport legal live bait, must also be free of aquatic vegetation.

All legal live aquatic organisms used by anglers, including legal baitfish (fathead minnows), amphibians (salamanders and frogs), invertebrates (crayfish and leeches) and insects must be purchased and/or trapped in North Dakota.

Lewis and Clark State Park in northwestern North Dakota, like a number of parks in the state, offers fishing, swimming and other outdoor activities.



A Half-Century and Counting

By Gordon Weixel

STATE PARKS DEPARTMENT MARKS 50 YEARS

This year the North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department is celebrating its 50th anniversary and is busy telling its story statewide, which often includes a shout-out to its longtime partner, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

While the two state agencies have different missions and goals, they are linked by the commonality of their working environment – North Dakota’s great

outdoors – and have worked together on many projects throughout the years that have greatly benefitted the public.

Most of North Dakota’s 13 state parks are located adjacent to public fishing waters and have shore-fishing access and/or boat ramps that are partially funded by Game and Fish dollars.

State parks also provide some unique fishing experiences in North Dakota. Each year Game and Fish



CRAIG BIRKLE



ASHLEY SALWEY

Lake Metigoshe (top) and Grahams Island (bottom) are two of 13 state parks found across North Dakota.



CRAIG BIRKLE

stocks trout in the lazy Turtle River at Turtle River State Park, making it a trout angler's paradise and the state's only trout stream outside of the Missouri River below Garrison Dam.

"Both agencies are involved in very outdoor-oriented activities," said Game and Fish Department Director Terry Steinwand. "I don't think you could count the number of people over the last 50 years who've spent a day fishing at a state park and then

shared their stories around a campfire that night."

Game and Fish management activities have also helped turn Devils Lake – home of Graham's Island State Park – into one of the best walleye, perch and northern pike fisheries in the nation.

Grahams Island is also one of four state parks where the two agencies have worked together to provide deer hunting opportunities. The others are Fort Ransom, Fort Stevenson and Lake Sakakawea.



SANDRA JOHNSON

Becoming an Outdoors-Woman participants (top) prepare for a canoe outing on Lake Metigoshe. A picturesque view (bottom) from a prairie hilltop at Lewis and Clark State Park.



CRAIG BIRBLE

“We’ve always gotten along with Game and Fish,” said Henry Duray, Grahams Island State Park manager. “We work with the game wardens who are usually in the parks and handle law enforcement when it comes to fishing and boating. There have been some differences, but basically we’ve always worked together, especially in the field.”

Brad Pozarnsky, Parks and Recreation Department field manager, explained that some of the park managers and rangers will also help enforce Game and Fish laws and are always available in times of emergency.

Two other projects the agencies have worked on together involve the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program and the Pembina Gorge State Recreation Area.

Providing trails for motorized off-highway vehicles is a growing public demand and a priority of the Parks and Recreation Department’s recreation division. For several years, the Parks and Recreation Department looked for ways to provide a managed trail in the Pembina Gorge, to replace an existing trail that wasn’t regulated, much to the chagrin of many landowners.

With the help of Game and Fish and the North Dakota Forest Service, a land swap was worked out that, along with property owner agreements, let North Dakota Parks and Recreation stitch land together to provide that trail. It took more than a year of negotiating, but a plan was finalized. Today the trail is open to motorized OHVs, hikers, bikers and horseback riders.

“The only way providing a trail in the Pembina Gorge was going to happen was trading land management on 900 acres,” said Mike Duerre, Pembina Gorge State Recreation Area manager. “After all was said and done, we worked out an acre for acre swap for land in the gorge – gorge land for gorge land. We were able to make the trails continuous throughout the gorge, 22 miles from start to finish.”

One of the more successful collaborative efforts between the two agencies is Becoming an Outdoors-Woman, an educational workshop designed specifically for women. The summer edition provides up to 30 classes over a three-day weekend designed to acquaint and broaden women’s outdoor experiences.

“In 1995, North Dakota Park and Rec’s

Donna Schouweiler (former public information officer) and I checked out a similar program in South Dakota,” said Nancy Boldt, Game and Fish BOW coordinator. “We looked for a venue that could handle up to 100 women and came upon Lake Metigoshe State Park with its dorms and dining facilities. I visited with the park’s manager, Larry Hagen, and talked to him about bringing 100 women up to do all these activities. He never missed a beat and said ‘sure.’ It’s been a wonderful relationship.”

Traditionally, BOW is held every summer in August, though there have been 10 winter programs at Metigoshe as well. Game and Fish has tried other venues, but never with the success that Lake Metigoshe State Park has had, according to Boldt.

Kathy Duttenhefner, Parks and Recreation Department natural resources management coordinator, has been a part of BOW since its inception.

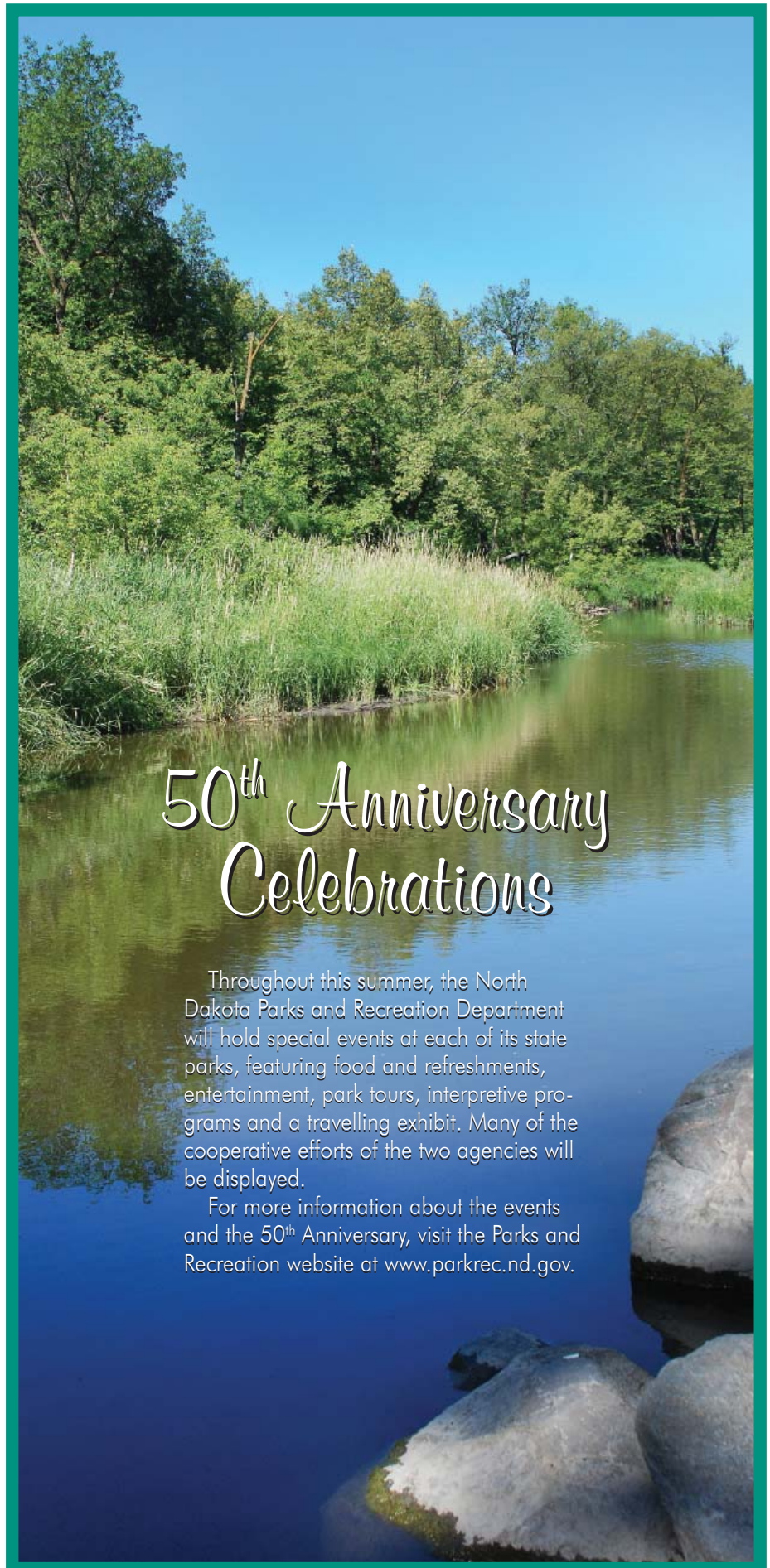
“It’s a very popular program,” Duttenhefner said. “I think it’s because of the variety of classes that are offered. There’s kayaking, canoeing, archery, fishing, trapping, basics of shotgunning, plant identification, camping, geocaching ... the list just goes on and on. We usually get 10 to 12 people per session and they get individual attention, which I think is part of BOW’s success. The park staff always treats participants really well. We get a lot of people who come back year after year and they’re all ages.”

BOW starts on a Friday and ends Sunday (August 7-9 in 2015, but the summer session is already full).

“My big take away from this is watching people come together. The first three years, participants would come in not knowing what to expect,” Boldt said. “Now they come in, hunt and fish together and find like-minded people who do what they like to do. They meet the most wonderful people and make fast friends.

“I can’t say enough about Lake Metigoshe State Park and the park staff that I’ve worked with over the years. The people involved have had the foresight to see something and run with it. It’s been a great partnership.”

GORDON WEIXEL is the public information specialist for North Dakota Parks and Recreation.



50th Anniversary Celebrations

Throughout this summer, the North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department will hold special events at each of its state parks, featuring food and refreshments, entertainment, park tours, interpretive programs and a travelling exhibit. Many of the cooperative efforts of the two agencies will be displayed.

For more information about the events and the 50th Anniversary, visit the Parks and Recreation website at www.parkrec.nd.gov.



BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor

Rare Grouse Hybrids in North Dakota

Sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse hybrids are rare. Yet, in the last three years North Dakota Game and Fish Department biologists discovered two, one in 2012 in Slope County and another this year in Bowman County.

Typically sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse establish individual courtship areas, or leks, during the spring breeding season. These leks may be in close proximity, but rarely are the two species found on the same lek.

In recent years the discovery of mixed leks has been more common as the sage grouse population in North Dakota has declined to a historic low. The prevalence of this occurring in North Dakota is unknown, but as the density of sage grouse decreases the chances of finding mixed leks increases.

Sharp-tailed grouse are found in every county in North Dakota, whereas sage grouse only occur in Bowman, Slope and Golden Valley counties in the southwestern part of the state.

The first documented sage-sharptail hybrid was discovered in 1969 in Montana. During a routine hunter check station near Lewistown, Montana, game wardens checked a hunter with three grouse. One was a sage grouse and the other two had characteristics of both sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse. Further examination discovered that both were male hybrids and were likely hatched from a female sage grouse as they were harvested in the same brood covey.

In 1983 another hybrid was discovered, but this time in North Dakota. Game and Fish Department biologists observed a hybrid displaying with 24 male sage grouse in Slope County. The bird was collected and external measurements indicated the

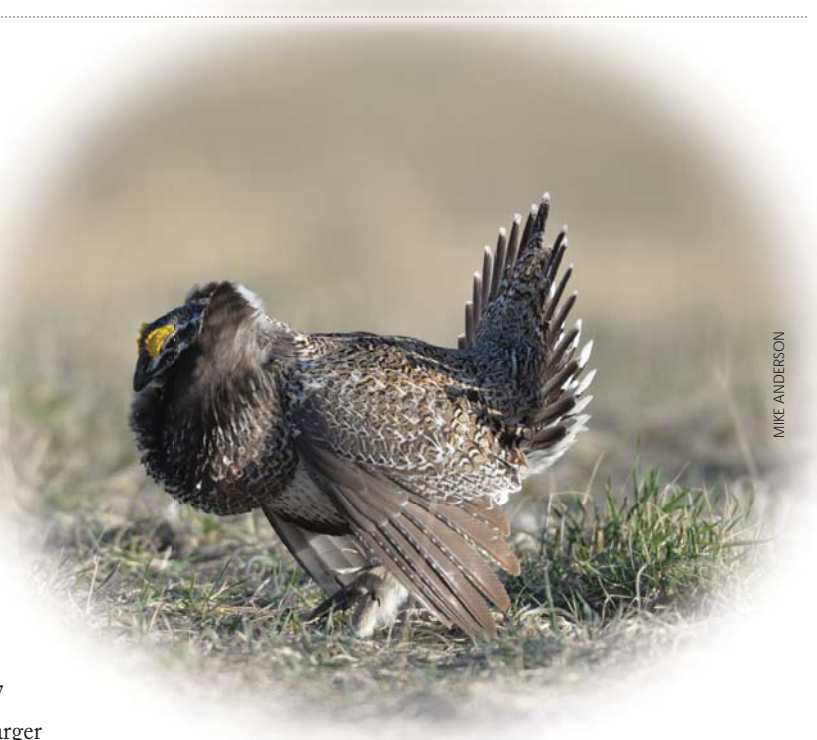
bird was approximately 47 percent larger than an average male sharptail and 30 percent smaller than an average male sage grouse.

This was only the second documented hybrid discovered in North America. The specimen was given to the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. for display.

The next documented hybrids occurred in Alberta, Canada in 1999 and 2000. Both birds were trapped and blood and feathers were collected for genetic analysis. Results indicated that both were male hybrids that had maternal sage grouse genes, indicating that a male sharp-tailed grouse bred a female sage grouse.

In terms of biology this makes sense because the density of sage grouse in Alberta is low and sharp-tailed grouse are relatively abundant. Additionally, male sharp-tailed grouse are aggressive and are more likely to breed with other species.

There have been other anecdotal records of hybrids including birds found on sharp-tailed grouse leks in Wyoming, Saskatchewan and most recently in South Dakota.



MIKE ANDERSON

Additionally, a female sage grouse was discovered on a sharp-tailed grouse lek in North Dakota in 2014. The prevalence of this occurring more frequently suggests that female sage grouse are not able to find males of their species to breed with, resulting in more hybrids.

Sage grouse populations across their range have decreased by 45-80 percent since the early 1950s. In North Dakota the decline has been much more drastic. From the early 1960s to 2015, the sage grouse population has decreased by 92 percent. With decreasing numbers, hybridization may become more common and poses a major threat to the conservation of sage grouse.

Interbreeding and successful backbreeding of hybrids to sage grouse will decrease the already low genetic diversity in North Dakota's small population.

AARON ROBINSON is a North Dakota Game and Fish Department upland game management biologist.

SAGE GROUSE COUNTS REMAIN LOW

Results from North Dakota's spring sage grouse survey indicate the number of strutting males observed remained well below management objectives. Therefore, the sage grouse hunting season will remain closed in 2015.

Aaron Robinson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department upland game bird biologist, said the count of 30 males on six active strutting grounds was a record low. Last year, 31 males were counted on the same leks in the southwest.

Sage grouse are a long-lived species with low reproductive output, which makes population recovery slow. Currently, Robinson said, natural reproduction cannot keep up with natural mortality, and the densities of active leks may be limiting hens from finding males to breed.

However, Robinson said the potential for a successful nesting season is good this year due to abundant residual grass cover brought about by last summer's rainfall, plus recent spring rains.

"The outlook for a favorable hatch this year looks optimistic for the limited number of birds we have in the state," he added.

Sage grouse management in North Dakota follows a specific plan developed by a diverse group of participants. With the threats facing the species and the decline in population, Game and Fish Department biologists do not foresee a hunting season in the near future.

Sage grouse are North Dakota's largest native upland game bird. They are found in extreme southwestern North Dakota, primarily in Bowman and Slope counties.

Boat Ramp Reminders

Boaters are reminded to exercise patience and plan accordingly when heading to a lake or river this summer.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department receives a number of complaints every year about overly aggressive behavior at boat ramps. A few simple reminders will help ensure a fluent transition when launching and loading a boat.

Launching:

- Don't pull onto the ramp until your boat is ready to launch.
- Prepare for launching in the parking area. Remove covers, load equipment, remove tie downs, attach lines and put in drain plug before backing onto the ramp.
- When ready, pull into line to launch. Wait

your turn. Be courteous.

- It takes at least two people to efficiently and courteously launch a boat: one to handle the boat and one to take care of the tow vehicle.

Loading:

- Don't block the loading area with your boat until your tow vehicle is ready to load. Wait until you are clear of the launch area to unload gear.
- As soon as your trailer is in the water, load and secure your boat to the trailer.
- Remove boat and trailer from the water as quickly as possible.
- Get clear of the ramp. Pull into the parking area to finish securing your boat and unload gear.

LEAVE WILDLIFE ALONE, WATCH FOR DEER

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department emphasizes a simple message to well-intentioned humans who want to pick up and rescue what appear to be orphaned baby animals – don't touch them. Whether it is a young fawn, duckling, cottontail rabbit or a songbird, it is better to just leave them alone.

More often than not young animals are not abandoned or deserted, and the mother is probably nearby watching. Young animals are purposely placed into seclusion by their mothers to protect them from predators.

Anytime a young wild animal has human contact its chance for survival decreases significantly. It's illegal to take wild animals home, and captive animals later returned to the wild will struggle to survive because they do not possess learned survival skills.

The only time a baby animal should be picked up is in cases such as if a young songbird is found on a doorstep. If that is the case, the young bird should be moved nearby to suitable habitat.

People should also steer clear of adult wildlife, such as deer or moose that might



LARA ANDERSON

wander into urban areas. Crowding stresses animals, and this could lead to a potentially dangerous situation.

In addition, motorists are reminded to watch for deer along roadways. June is one of the peak months for deer-vehicle accidents because young animals are dispersing from their home ranges. With deer more active during these months, the potential for car-deer collisions increases.



Family Fishing Days at Bismarck OWLS

Family fishing days return to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Outdoor Wildlife Learning Site.

The catch-and-release only fishery is stocked with trout, bluegill, largemouth bass and other species.

Family fishing days are Saturdays and Wednesdays through the end of August. Fishing equipment can be checked out at the OWLS Pond, located adjacent to the Department's Bismarck office, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Fishing rods and basic tackle are available for use free of charge.

Trained volunteers or Game and Fish staff will be in the area to answer questions and check out equipment, but there will be little or no direct supervision. Children

who aren't old enough to get to the pond on their own should not be left unattended.

The OWLS area is fairly primitive, but includes a picnic shelter and benches upon entering the site, and a portable restroom. The area has no running water. Users should bring water, sunscreen, folding chairs and appropriate clothing.

The Game and Fish Department is seeking volunteer instructors to assist with the program. Individuals at least age 18 with an interest in teaching kids to fish should contact the Department at 701-



RON WILSON

328-6300.

The OWLS pond is open to fishing year-round during daylight hours. There are no bait restrictions and anglers must practice catch-and-release. The area is designed for wheel chair accessibility. Pets, glass bottles and alcohol are not permitted on the site.

SUMMER SAFETY ON THE WATER

Failure to wear a personal flotation device is the main reason people lose their lives in water recreation accidents.

North Dakota Game and Fish Department boat and water safety coordinator Nancy Boldt said safety begins with wearing a personal flotation device, and knowing what's below the surface of the water.

"Water recreationists need to be alert and safe," Boldt said. "Swimmers need to know the water's depth, as serious injuries can occur from diving into water. Large objects hidden below the water's surface can lead to significant injury."

North Dakota law requires all children ages 10 and younger to wear a personal flotation device while in boats of less than 27 feet in

length. The law also requires all personal watercraft users to wear a life jacket, as well as anyone towed on skis, tubes, boards or other similar devices.

Water users should make sure to wear life jackets that are the appropriate size, and in good condition. It is also important that children wear a PFD while swimming.

Water skiers and tubers should wear a life jacket with four nylon straps rather than one with a zipper, because straps are stronger than zippers upon impact with water. Anyone paddling a canoe should opt for a PFD that is comfortable enough to wear for an entire outing.

Water skiers and tubers are reminded it

takes three to ski and tube. When a person is towed on water skis or a similar device, an observer other than the operator is required on the vessel.

North Dakota boaters also are reminded that marine VHF radios are an important part of boat safety that should not be improperly used by operators. These radios are intended for boat operators who are in distress and facing an emergency situation.

Regulations to help ensure safe boating are found in the 2014-16 North Dakota Fishing Guide. A more comprehensive listing is available in the North Dakota Boat and Water Safety Guide or the Boat North Dakota education book. These guides are available online at the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov, by email at ndgf@nd.gov, or at a local Game and Fish Department office.



CRAIG BIRHLE

Legal Live Baitfish Reminder

Anglers are reminded that fathead minnows, sticklebacks, and creek chubs are the only legal live baitfish species that can be used in most North Dakota waters.

The only exceptions are the Red and Bois de Sioux rivers where white suckers are allowed, and 23 state waters where it is illegal to use any live baitfish.

Greg Power, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries chief, said for years the Department has worked with the wholesale and retail bait industry to help ensure anglers are buying clean and legal minnows at their local bait shops.

“While today’s bait is much cleaner than what may have been purchased years ago, it remains the angler’s responsibility to possess only legal live baitfish when fishing in North Dakota,” Power said.

For specific regulations regarding bait use and all other fishing regulations, refer to the 2014-16 North Dakota Fishing Guide.

Solseng Named to Advisory Board

Governor Jack Dalrymple has appointed Joe Solseng of Grand Forks to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department’s advisory board.

Solseng, an avid hunter and angler, fills the vacant position in District 4, which is made up of Grand Forks, Nelson, Walsh and Pembina counties.

The governor appoints eight Game and Fish Department advisors, each representing a multi-county section of the state, to serve as a liaison between the

Department and public.

Four members of the advisory board must be farmers or ranchers and four must be hunters/anglers. Appointments are for a term of four years. No member can serve longer than two terms.

Advisory board members host two public meetings, held each spring and fall, to provide citizens with an opportunity to discuss fish and wildlife issues and ask questions of their district advisors and agency personnel.



STEVIE STILSETH

Spencer Brockman, the overall male winner of the North Dakota Archery in the Schools Program state tournament held in Minot in March, continues to move on. Brockman, of North Sargent High School, competed in the national tournament in Kentucky in May where he finished fifth for high school males.

With his fifth-place finish, Brockman earned a spot on the NASP all-star team and will compete in the NASP World Tournament and All-star Championship in Nashville, Tennessee in July.



CRAIG BHIRLE

Fireworks Prohibited on Wildlife Management Areas

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department reminds citizens that possession or use of fireworks on state wildlife management areas is prohibited.

The primary objective of a wildlife management area is to enhance wildlife production, provide hunting and fishing opportunities, and offer other outdoor recreational and educational uses. Only activities that would not disrupt the intentions of how these areas are managed are encouraged, and a fireworks display is not compatible.

Excessive noise and commotion that come with fireworks disturbs wildlife, and their explosive nature is a potential source of wildfires. Chances of a wildfire developing are greatly enhanced when explosives, such as fireworks, come in contact with tall grasses in rural areas.

A complete list of the WMA regulations is available on the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov.

PUT GARBAGE WHERE IT BELONGS

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department reminds outdoor recreationists to keep it clean this summer by packing out all trash, including fireworks.

All garbage, including used fireworks, should be placed in the proper trash receptacle. If trash cans aren't available, or are full, take the trash and dispose of it at home.

It is not uncommon to see garbage piling up around trash containers after they become full. Styrofoam containers are not biodegradable, but yet are often found wedged in cattails, drifting or washed up on shore.

Worn tires, old mattresses and kitchen appliances have found their way to public use areas. This illegal dumping is costly to clean up and takes a significant toll on the environment. Not only does it spoil the beauty of the land, it destroys habitat, has the potential to pollute North Dakota waters and can injure wildlife.

Littering violations should be reported by calling the Report All Poachers telephone number at 800-472-2121.



CHRIS GRONDAHL

Staff Notes

Game and Fish Retirements

Three longtime Game and Fish employees retired this spring after spending at least 30 years with the agency.

Mike Johnson, migratory game bird management supervisor in Bismarck, retired in May after more than 33 years with the Department. He started in 1981.

Morgan Johnson, wildlife technician at the Lonetree district office near Harvey, who also worked at the Bismarck district office for many years, retired in March. He was employed with the Department since 1982.

Kurt Aufforth, district game warden in Cando, retired in May, after beginning his career with the agency in 1985. He was first stationed in Gackle and then Watford City before taking over the Cando district in 1997.



Mike Johnson



Morgan Johnson



Kurt Aufforth



Jaden Honeyman

PLI Biologist Named

Hettinger native Jaden Honeyman was hired earlier in spring as a private land biologist in Dickinson.

Honeyman has years of experience working with landowners in southwestern North Dakota, and has worked as a seasonal employee in the wildlife division in Riverdale and Dickinson.

Game Warden Pilot Exam Set for July 17

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

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.

Game warden pilot applicants must have a commercial pilot's license for a single engine land with an instrument rating, and hold an FAA Class II medical certificate.

Candidates also must have a minimum of 500 hours total flying time and have a clean record without any felony convictions. Applicants must be at least 21 years of age, have a valid driver's license and a current North Dakota peace officer license, or be eligible to be licensed.

Job duties include day and night flights, involving enforcement and administrative flight activities. Responsibilities also include enforcing game and fish laws and other related regulations.

Salary through training is \$3,800 per month. Upon successful completion of training, the salary is \$4,136 - \$6,894 per month. Wardens also receive the state benefits package, including travel allowance. Uniforms and other equipment are provided.

NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH ONLINE

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NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
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Bismarck, ND 58501-5095
701.328.6300
Email: ndgf@nd.gov



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PLANTS AND ANS



DRAIN

ALL WATER



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

back cast



By Ron Wilson

It's early May and I'm picking ticks off my arms, legs and neck and flicking them out the open driver's side window between bites of a tuna sandwich.

I'm parked next to a nondescript, wind-blown lake 134 miles from home that's small enough to walk around, which I did earlier this morning without much effort.

It took me an hour or more to make it around, but I stopped often, casting again and again between stands of cattails, off grassy points, rock riprap, or where the wind allowed.

If anyone has fished here anytime since ice-out, they didn't leave behind any sign to prove it. And unless my back was turned and I couldn't hear over the wind, no one has driven by on the gravel road all morning.

Aside from a single sharp-tailed grouse flushed from the trail-side grass, rooster pheasants I can hear, but can't see, a few cormorants and a disturbing number of ticks, I have the place to myself.

With 420-plus lakes in North Dakota, this is not extraordinary. Put the Missouri River System, Devils Lake or wherever word has leaked of the latest hot walleye bite in your rearview, it's not that

difficult to get purposefully lost.

Blumhardt Dam (or Blumhardt Lake according to the green highway sign) is just 16.5 acres and has been managed as a trout lake since it was first stocked in 1964.

It's not unusual that this McIntosh County lake was initially stocked with trout. A half-century ago when the Game and Fish Department was managing far fewer waters than today, trout were one of the go-to fish species to plant in newly established fisheries.

What's unique is that while fisheries managers eventually added bass and other species to provide some diversity in these other lakes, Blumhardt has for years remained a trout-only lake.

According to Department records, Blumhardt has never suffered a fish kill, which means some trout are over-wintering and growing. (Note: The biggest Whopper Club entry from Blumhardt was a 7-pound rainbow caught in 2009. While that's a big trout in any body of water, it sounds even bigger coming from such a small fishery.)

If you look on a map, Blumhardt is located within driving distance of several waters that hold walleye, yellow perch and northern

pike. Considering that these three species command the interest of most North Dakota anglers, it's not surprising that I'm fishing alone.

I'm done with my sandwich and I'm hiking around the lake again, casting from spots that I overlooked or neglected the first time around. I've changed artificial baits several times, going from black to chartreuse and colors in between, and I've yet to hook a fish.

I don't get it. Maybe I should have gotten here earlier or should plan to stay later. Maybe I'm not casting out far enough and my bait is running too shallow, too fast. Maybe I should have packed my float tube, fought the persistent wind and dredged the middle of the lake.

What I do get is that Blumhardt, like any of the other record number of lakes on the North Dakota landscape, simply provides me and other anglers the opportunity to wet a line.

Catching fish from a unique fishery with some history behind it, or from anywhere else for that matter, is not a guarantee.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.



NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT ARCHIVE PHOTO

A Look Back

By Ron Wilson

It's 1975, or thereabouts we figure, when this photograph was taken. "JAWS" was popular in movie theaters, "Saturday Night Live" debuted on NBC and gas was about 44 cents per gallon.

In North Dakota, the Game and Fish Department was managing about 150 fishing waters (roughly 275 fewer than today) and some big fish were caught.

"Except for the total number of Whopper fish reported in 1975, compared to 1974, most of the news ... was good news," according to the Whopper Club report in *North Dakota OUTDOORS*. "Four records were broken in 1975, including the biggest fish ever caught on hook and line in North Dakota ... a 78-pound paddlefish taken by Donald Moe of Minot from

Sanish Bay on Lake Sakakawea. Moe landed the monster fish on six-pound line, adding to a unique accomplishment, as paddlefish are seldom caught on bait."

It's in the mid-1970s that the number of licensed boats in the state began to increase. "That was the time when some good, area walleye fishing was coming on the radar screen," said Greg Power, Game and Fish Department fisheries chief.

Boat license numbers in the 1970s jumped from 10,500 (1971) to about 30,000 by the end of the decade. License numbers started nearing 40,000 in the early to mid-1980s in reflection, Power said, to the good walleye fishing and new chinook salmon fishery on Lake Sakakawea.

Then an extended drought settled

in over the Northern Plains.

"From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, there was really no growth in the industry at all during that bad drought," Power said.

In 2013, the third year of the Department's three-year boat registration cycle, nearly 70,000 boats were registered in the state.

"From about 2000 until now, North Dakota has featured a record number of lakes, good fishing on the state's big systems and water-based recreation (pontoon traffic) increased significantly on the Missouri River," Power said. "There have been some big changes since the mid-1970s."

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.