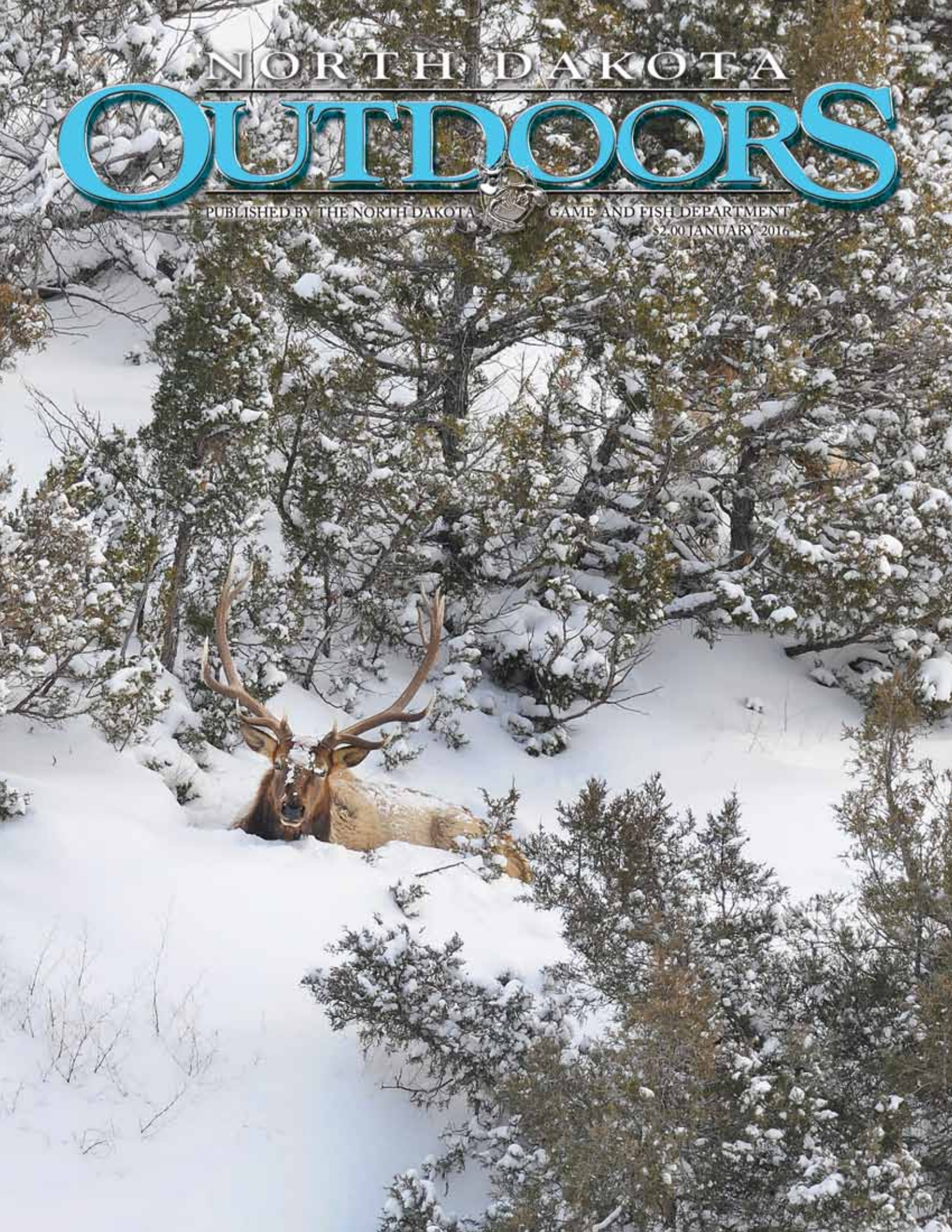


NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA

GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

\$2.00 JANUARY 2016





MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

We're well into winter and it hasn't been all that bad, compared to some past years and what other parts of the country have been experiencing. In North Dakota, we accept the reality that our grass will turn brown, the landscape will turn white and the water will freeze for a portion of the year.

Yet, those are just some of the many reasons I love North Dakota. I've often heard people say they choose to live in North Dakota because of the many outdoor recreational opportunities provided during all seasons. While the majority of hunting seasons have come to an end, there are still many activities to enjoy, including coyote hunting, ice fishing, skiing, bird watching, the list goes on.

One of the features in this issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* is the 2015 Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest. North Dakota is blessed with having a wide variety of fish and animals. We may not have the number of species found in warmer climates, but we have some that are year-round residents, some that just stop by during migration for short periods of time, and some that journey here to nest and raise young. Whatever the case, people who take and submit photographs for the contest have a special talent that I certainly appreciate. The images capture a very special part of North Dakota that some would never have the opportunity to view without the cooperation of these photographers.

Another *OUTDOORS* article talks of the changes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has implemented for future waterfowl seasons. Like every other state in the nation, North Dakota has input into how the regulations for duck and goose hunting are set. But the final say goes to the USFWS.

Over the course of a week, seldom a day goes by without a call or letter asking about migratory bird seasons, limits or regulations. These questions and comments are greatly appreciated and we encourage them since they

provide us with some valuable input and, at times, give us the opportunity to explain why we implement certain actions or why we can't comply with certain requests.

As mentioned, regulations regarding migratory birds are set by the federal government while others are set by North Dakota lawmakers. Yet others can be set by administrative rule and others by proclamation. A good example and a common question is, "Why does North Dakota start deer gun season at noon on a Friday? Why don't we just start in the morning on opening day like every other season?"

The reason is because the Friday noon opener is set by state law. I've never researched the reason behind the law, but it's become a tradition and a change to this would have to come through the legislature.

Game and Fish Department staff fields a number of questions like this and we can likely answer all of them. Through them we're able to communicate with the public in a number of ways and adapt to what the public desires.

There are always challenges to tackle, but that's life. A couple that we're going to emphasize in the coming year is aquatic nuisance species, primarily zebra mussels, and endangered species issues. If you care about your water supply, you should pay attention to the zebra mussel issue. Zebra mussels are currently contained in the Red River and our intent is to prevent this invasive species from moving anywhere else in North Dakota. The Game and Fish Department is also intently interested in the endangered species issue since it, like zebra mussels, has the potential to affect everyone throughout the state if a species is listed.

We still have a few months to go before we start seeing the green of spring and hear the call of geese as they move north. Even so, there are still plenty of reasons to venture outside. All you have to do is put on a couple layers of clothes and enjoy what North Dakota has to offer.

Terry Steinwand

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Governor Jack Dalrymple

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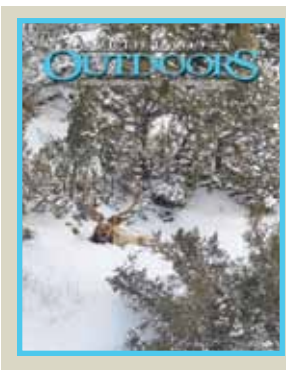
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Front Cover
A bull elk in winter in North Dakota's badlands.
(Photo by Craig Bihrl, Bismarck.)



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2015 2015 2015 2015 YEAR



A

s another year comes to a close, it's time to reflect.

The 64th Legislative Assembly wrapped up in late April 2015, and by all accounts, the number of bills that determine how the Game and Fish

Department does business was down slightly from past sessions. Most would agree that North Dakota hunters and anglers fared pretty well through the latest round of lawmaking.

As I try to assess the kind of year we had, my

IN REVIEW

By Scott Peterson,
Game and Fish Deputy Director



Ryan Park Pond in Grand Forks is one of the many urban fisheries found around the state.

JOHN HENNINGSON

mind takes me outdoors to the times I spent hunting or fishing. I suspect that most *North Dakota OUTDOORS* readers, hunters and anglers alike, tend to do the same thing at year's end.

It also occurs to me that we may not always focus on some of the other things that play into a quality outdoor experience, such as preparation, camaraderie, or simply enjoying a beautiful day outdoors. Many of my



CRAIG BIRBLE

The Game and Fish Department's late summer roadside pheasant survey indicated that pheasant numbers were up 30 percent going into the fall hunting season.

more memorable hunting and fishing excursions over the years did not end with a limit of game or fish. My fishing buddies would probably tell you the reason for that is because of my lack of fishing skills, and there may be some truth to that.

The Game and Fish Department's fisheries division continues to work hard to ensure that fishing opportunities continue to abound in North Dakota. While we had a relatively dry summer and fall across much of the state, water conditions still remain good most everywhere. A wet cycle that has lasted more than 20 years has resulted in excellent fishing opportunities in a record 400-plus waters.

The next time you are out enjoying that bountiful harvest, with a shotgun in hand or a fishing rod, pause to appreciate the fact that most of your hunting and fishing opportunities would not be possible if not

for the generous cooperation of private landowners willing to allow access.

The eight Game and Fish Department advisory board members recently held public meetings in their respective districts across North Dakota and comments concerning the fall hunting seasons were mixed. Many people are advocating for more deer, particularly whitetails, in most areas of the state, but even that sentiment is not universal. At those meetings, the Department unveiled our new five-year deer management goals for each hunting unit. Generally speaking, our plan is to grow the deer herd over the next five years in a slow, steady and responsible manner. Given current conditions on the landscape, we cannot portray unrealistic expectations about growing a deer herd similar to that of a few short years ago.

As I write this in early December, I understand that we likely have a lot of winter weather in front of us, but by all accounts, winter has been nonexistent so far. All big game and upland game species will benefit if the current weather pattern continues.

Record Fishing Licenses

Once again, finding a place to fish in North Dakota in 2015 – whether on a growing number of prairie walleye lakes or the 200-plus waters holding high northern pike populations – wasn't a problem.

Having access to abundant quality fishing opportunities in the state wasn't lost on anglers, either. The number of anglers buying fishing licenses in North Dakota during the 2014-15 season established a new record for the third consecutive year.

Statistics compiled by the Game and Fish Department revealed more than 222,000 fishing licenses were sold last year, an increase of 3,000 from 2013-14. Resident license sales were down slightly from last year's record, but the number of nonresident licenses issued grew by 5,000, establishing a new mark of nearly 65,000.

More than 201,000 anglers actively participated, and ice fishing accounted for 25 percent of all fishing activity.

A record number of fishing lakes and aggressive fish management in North Dakota have helped produce record fishing license sales. Department fisheries personnel stocked a record 131 waters in 2015 with 8.5 million walleye fingerlings.

The growth in the number of walleye lakes is directly correlated to the rapid increase in the number of public fishing waters in the state. In the last five years alone, Game and Fish has stocked more than 48 million walleye fingerlings, in addition to salmon, trout, pike, bass and panfish.

As was the case for decades, Lake Sakakawea, Devils Lake and Lake Oahe/Missouri River remained the top three fisheries in the state.

During fall fish survey work, when fisheries biologists evaluated fish spawning and stocking success, it was noted that Lake Sakakawea produced good catches of walleye and yearling perch. A good perch hatch was recorded in 2014 and many of those fish were showing up in nets in 2015. The walleye catch was above average, attributed to a combination of stocking and natural reproduction. Smelt numbers weren't compiled yet, but other forage fish remain fairly stable when compared to prior years.

The Missouri River in 2015 was beginning to show slow signs of recovery, as more adult game fish were showing up between Garrison Dam and Bismarck. The habitat is starting to rebuild, but it still lacks the productive capacity necessary for fish to reproduce and survive.

Lake Oahe smelt numbers remained low. White bass, walleye and crappie numbers were fair for young-of-the-year fish, but down from a good year in 2014.

The Devils Lake basin had lower numbers of young-of-the-year walleye, but white bass were plentiful. Last

winter was relatively dry, and generally the best reproductive years coincide with good water levels and spring in-flows.

Statewide, on many of the newer lakes where fish were introduced for the first time, Department catches were generally good. However, in other lakes with existing fish populations, catches tended to be lower than average, which is not unusual when there already is an established population.

Mule Deer Recovery, Statewide License Numbers Decline

The Game and Fish Department's fall mule deer survey indicated the population continues to recover in the badlands.

Biologists counted 2,157 (1,958 in 2014) mule deer in the aerial survey in October. The buck-to-doe ratio of 0.42 (0.50 in 2014) is similar to the long-term average of 0.43 bucks per doe, while the fawn-to-doe ratio of 0.84 (0.95 in 2014) is slightly below the long-term average of 0.90 fawns per doe.



CRAIG BIRLIE



LARA ANDERSON

A record number of fishing licenses were sold in 2014-15, and walleye (left) continued as the fish species most sought by anglers. Mule deer (right) in North Dakota's badlands continue to show signs of recovery following severe winters from 2009 to 2011.

Overall, the mule deer numbers are encouraging, biologists report, following another good year of fawn production and a stable buck-to-doe ratio.

Again, for the fourth season in a row, no antlerless mule deer licenses were issued in eight badlands hunting units.

Statewide, the Game and Fish Department issued 43,275 deer gun licenses in 2015, the lowest total since 1978. The majority of the license cuts the last couple of years have been in the eastern part of the state where white-tailed deer populations have struggled through some tough winters and changing habitat conditions.

For the first time in a decade, the Department's statewide deer management plan in 2015 called for increasing the statewide deer population, not reducing it.

The Department's deer management plan is designed to reach a goal of 75,000 licenses in five years.

Pheasants and Waterfowl

North Dakota's roadside pheasant survey indicated total birds and number of broods were up statewide from 2014.

The survey showed total pheasants were up

30 percent from last year. In addition, brood observations were up 23 percent, while the average brood size was up 9 percent.

Roadside counts indicated more birds in the southern half of the state this fall, with the southwest having the strongest population of young pheasants. Statistics from southwestern North Dakota indicated total pheasants were up 34 percent and broods observed up 31 percent from 2014.

Good wetland conditions and high waterfowl numbers were found again during the annual breeding duck survey.



CRAIG BIRKLE

Ring-necked pheasants (top) aren't native to North Dakota, but the birds have been here long enough that they've become an essential part of the landscape in the minds of upland game bird hunters. North Dakota was again blessed in 2015 with plenty of ducks (right – lesser scaup hen and brood) and geese.



CRAIG BIRKLE

The number of broods observed during the July brood survey was down 28 percent from 2014, but still 28 percent above the long-term average.

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

Adult Zebra Mussels Found in Red

Three adult zebra mussels were found in the Red River in late September on Sorlie Bridge in Grand Forks by U.S. Geological Survey staff.

Following that, Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel found without difficulty many adult zebra mussels throughout the Red, from Wahpeton up through the Drayton/Oslo reaches.

The discoveries came as no surprise, as early last summer one zebra mussel adult was found in Fargo, and many young were found along the entire length of the Red River.

Game and Fish implemented two new emergency rules because of the findings along the Red, each designed to prevent the spread of zebra mussels outside the river.

The emergency rules are as follows:

- Anglers may no longer transport live bait in water away from the Red River. That means all water must be drained from bait buckets as anglers leave the shore, or remove their boat from the water. Anglers must properly dispose of unused bait away from the river, as dumping bait in the water or on shore is illegal. In the rest of the state, anglers can transport live bait in water in containers of 5 gallons or less in volume.
- All boats and other watercraft must have their plugs pulled when exiting the river, and plugs must remain pulled when the watercraft leaves the access area. In addition, all boats entering North Dakota must have their plugs pulled. This rule would also apply on any other waters where Class I ANS, including zebra mussels, are discovered in the future.

Bighorn Sheep Survey

Results from 2015 summer bighorn sheep survey indicated North Dakota's bighorn population increased from last year, despite the ongoing presence of pneumonia.

The number of sheep lost to pneumonia was significant enough, however, to move Game and Fish Department officials to close the bighorn hunting season, which had run uninterrupted for 30 years, in 2015.

The July-August survey showed a minimum of 304 bighorn sheep, an increase of 6 percent from 2014. Results revealed 87 rams, 159 ewes and 58

Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel search the Red River in 2015 for zebra mussels. Inset: An adult zebra mussel found in the Red River.



CRAIG BIRHLE

lambs.

The slight increase was attributed to better-than-expected lamb recruitment over the past couple of years, prior to the disease outbreak of 2014. However, the pneumonia-related die-off appears to have resurfaced again last summer.

Bighorns showing evidence of disease last summer were from the same herds that were most affected in 2014. Animals showing signs of the disease are not expected to survive winter.

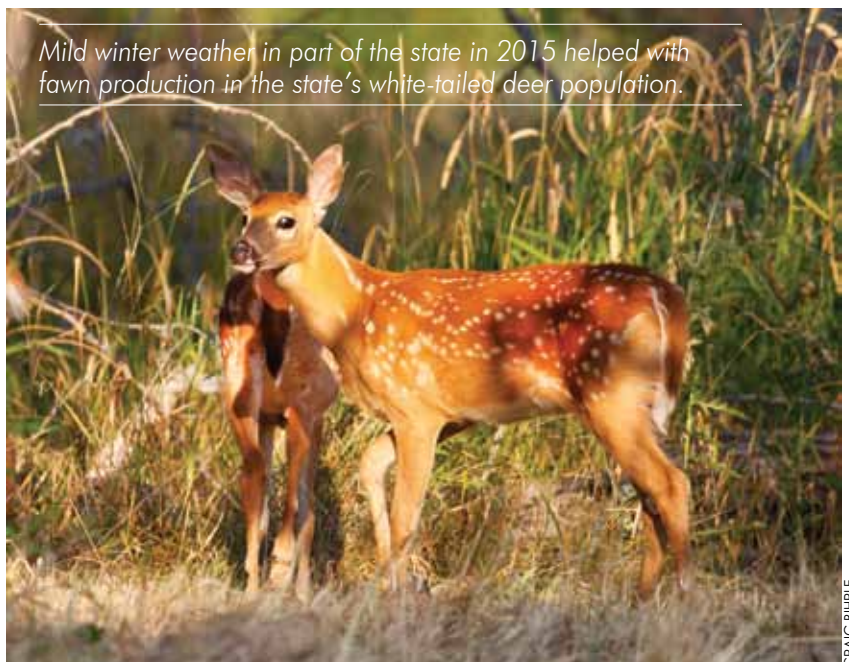
CWD Surveillance Ongoing

Game and Fish continued its Hunter-Harvested Surveillance program during the 2015 hunting season, by sampling deer for chronic wasting disease and bovine tuberculosis from 17 units in North Dakota.



CRAIG BIRHLE

Mild winter weather in part of the state in 2015 helped with fawn production in the state's white-tailed deer population.



CRAIG BIRHLE



LARA ANDERSON

While North Dakota held a limited pronghorn hunting season for the second year in a row, it's been about a decade since Game and Fish has allowed a sage grouse season in southwestern North Dakota.



MIKE ANDERSON

Samples from hunter-harvested deer taken in the western portion of the state were tested. In addition, all moose and elk harvested in the state were eligible for testing.

Pronghorn Rebound Slow Going

Aerial survey results indicated recovery of the state's pronghorn population remained a slow process.

The survey revealed that the number of pronghorn in the state declined slightly from 2014, due in large part to poor fawn production last summer. Fawn production was 52 fawns per 100 does. Potential causes for the decline were a cold and wet fawning season and multiple hail storms in southwestern North Dakota.

Although overall numbers declined, pronghorn numbers in three units remained the same or increased in 2015. These units had high buck-to-doe ratios, allowing for some pronghorn hunting licenses, while still encouraging overall population growth. Statewide pronghorn numbers were 45 percent higher than the low reached in 2012, but nearly 60 percent below near-record numbers in 2008.

A limited pronghorn season was offered for a second consecutive year in 2015, with 410 any-pronghorn licenses.

Sage Grouse Decline

A conservation effort across North Dakota and 10 Western states to better protect sage grouse convinced federal authorities that the bird does not need protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Sage grouse are native to southwestern North Dakota, which is the eastern edge of the species' range. The state's population has been in decline the last decade, and in 2015, Department biologists counted a record low 30 males on six active strutting grounds.

North Dakota hasn't had a sage grouse hunting season in nearly a decade.

CRP Anniversary

The Conservation Reserve Program, the largest private lands conservation program in the United States, was signed into law in 1985, marking 2015 as its 30th anniversary.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Program was primarily designed to reduce soil erosion on highly erodible cropland, and reduce grain surpluses so commodity prices would increase.

Turns out, CRP proved its worth over and over as wonderful wildlife habitat for ground-nesting birds, such as pheasants and ducks, and other game and nongame species. North Dakota topped out at 3.4 million CRP acres in 2007. In 2015, acre numbers had fallen to less than half that.

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

2014-15 LICENSES AND PERMITS ISSUED

	RESIDENT	NONRESIDENT
INDIVIDUAL FISHING	60,376	22,546
HUSBAND/WIFE FISHING	13,618	4,628
SENIOR CITIZEN FISHING	11,872	
DISABLED FISHING	351	
SHORT-TERM FISHING		
10-DAY		7,167
3-DAY		25,942
PADDLEFISH TAGS	2,501	989
COMMERCIAL TAGS	19	
RETAIL BAIT VENDOR	262	
WHOLESALE BAIT VENDOR	26	5
FISH HATCHERY	3	
2014 BOAT REGISTRATIONS (FIRST YEAR OF 3-YEAR DECAL)	51,134	
BOAT RENTALS	56	
GENERAL HUNTING	38,744	45,021
SMALL GAME HUNTING	21,077	27,302
COMBINATION LICENSE	57,282	
WATERFOWL HUNTING		24,252
FURBEARER HUNTING/TRAPPING	11,787	3,672
FUR BUYER	41	5
DEER GUN HUNTING	34,533	267
DEER GUN HUNTING (GRATIS)	12,844	222
DEER BOWHUNTING	21,564	1,962
MOOSE HUNTING	95	
MOOSE HUNTING (PREFERENTIAL LANDOWNER)	9	
ELK HUNTING	224	
ELK HUNTING (PREFERENTIAL LANDOWNER)	50	
TURKEY HUNTING (SPRING)	5,660	
TURKEY HUNTING (FALL)	4,267	
TURKEY HUNTING (GRATIS SPRING)	344	
TURKEY HUNTING (GRATIS FALL)	260	
HABITAT STAMP	83,756	
SHOOTING PRESERVE	10	
FISHING/HUNTING GUIDE	228	26
TAXIDERMIST	218	
FALCONRY	4	
SCIENTIFIC COLLECTOR	36	33
SWAN	1,271	927
SANDHILL CRANE	2,534	2,169
2015 SPECIAL BIG GAME LICENSES		
	LICENSES AVAILABLE	APPLICATIONS RECEIVED
MOOSE	104	12,781
ELK	274	11,121

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

JULY 1, 2014 TO JUNE 30, 2015

INCOME	\$36,785,922
EXPENSES	\$32,317,569
FUND BALANCES, FIXED ASSETS AND LONG-TERM DEBT	
GAME AND FISH GENERAL FUND	\$32,044,345
HABITAT AND DEPREDATION FUND	\$408,326
NONGAME WILDLIFE FUND	\$125,826
TOTAL ALL FUNDS	\$32,578,498
FIXED ASSETS	\$46,894,796
DEPARTMENT NET WORTH	\$79,473,294

2015 Statistics and Highlights

- The Game and Fish Department's annual midwinter waterfowl survey indicated 145,000 birds – 26,500 mallards and 118,500 Canada geese – were in the state in early January.
- Jack Fletcher of Fargo caught a state record cisco in late February in Lake Oahe's Beaver Bay. His 2-pound, 9-ounce fish broke the record that stood for nearly 15 years, by 1 ounce.
- Twelve outdoor-related bills were passed by lawmakers during the 64th legislative assembly.
- The Game and Fish Department's annual spring mule deer survey in western North Dakota indicated the population increased by 24 percent from 2014.
- Nearly 550 archers competed in the North Dakota National Archery in the Schools Program state tournament in March in Minot.
- Sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse hybrids are rare. Even so, Game and Fish Department biologists discovered one during spring counts in Bowman County.
- Going into fall hunting seasons, the Game and Fish Department reported about 730,000 Private Land Open To Sportsmen acres across the state. In 2014, hunters were able to access about 735,000 acres.
- In winter, 69,000 residents and 32,000 nonresidents went ice fishing in North Dakota. Also, the Game and Fish Department indicated that about 2,600 participated in darkhouse spearfishing, logging about 14,000 days of spearing.
- Game and Fish Department fisheries crews collected about 500,000 eggs during their annual salmon spawning operation on the Missouri River System.

2015

Watchable Wildlife

PHOTO CONTEST

By Patrick T. Isakson

The first North Dakota Game and Fish Department Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest was in 1989.

By contest rules, the focus for years was on the state's nongame wildlife. In 2008 that changed as participants were then able to submit images of North Dakota's game animals, such as deer and ducks.

For just the second time in more than two decades – the first being last year's contest – a game animal, a mule deer buck taken by Kelly Krabbenhoff of West Fargo, is the overall winner.

While mule deer, found mostly in the rugged badlands of western North Dakota, are familiar animals, what this buck is doing in Krabbenhoff's image may be a bit unfamiliar.

When a buck tilts its head back, wrinkles its nose and exposes its teeth, it's performing what wildlife biologists have dubbed "flehmen" behavior. This, as it turns out, is just one of the many acts a buck will perform that is associated with the fall breeding season, or rut.

The purpose of what is also called the lip curl is to expose the scent from doe urine to an olfactory organ called the vomeronasal, located on the roof of the buck's mouth near the nasal passage. This organ aids the buck in his evaluation of the doe's reproductive stage and willingness to mate.

While a picture is worth a thousand words, as they say, it's not often that the word we're looking at is "flehmen."

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



Overall Winner

Mule deer

Kelly Krabbenhoff, West Fargo

Canon EOS-1D X

Photo taken in South Unit of
Theodore Roosevelt National Park

Game Runner-up

Common merganser

Kevin Hice, Washburn

Canon EOS 5D Mark III

Photo taken at Fort Mandan State Historic Site



Game 1st Place

Moose

Steve Oehlenschlager, Elk River, Minnesota

Nikon D800

Photo taken near Noonan





Game Runner-up
Ring-necked pheasant
Steve Oehlenschlager, Elk River, Minnesota
Nikon D800
Photo taken near Valley City



Game Runner-up
Northern pike
Cindy Nagle, Fargo
Go Pro Hero 3
Photo taken at Grass Lake in Richland County



Game Runner-up
Northern pintail
Ross Warner, Bismarck
Nikon D800
Photo taken at Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge



W
W

Nongame 1st place
Red-bellied woodpecker
Sharon Watson, Buxton
Canon EOS 7D
Photo taken in Buxton



Nongame Runner-up
American robin
Sharon Watson, Buxton
Canon EOS 7D
Photo taken in Buxton



Nongame Runner-up

Long-billed curlew

Douglas Emerson, Bismarck

Nikon D700

Photo taken at Buffalo Gap Campground near Medora



Nongame Runner-up

White-faced ibis

Mike LaLonde, Bismarck

Nikon D7100

Photo taken near Menoken



Nongame Runner-up

American white pelican

Ross Warner, Bismarck

Nikon D800

Photo taken at Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge



Plant and Insect 1st Place

Ambush bug
Jack Lefor, Dickinson
Nikon D7100
Photo taken in western
North Dakota



Plant and Insect Runner-up

Spider on a web
Nancy Secrest, Hettinger
Canon PowerShot SX260 HS
Photo taken near Hettinger





Plant and Insect Runner-up
Bee on purple coneflower
Kelly Krabbenhoff, West Fargo
Canon EOS-1D X
Photo taken near Underwood

Plant and Insect Runner-up
Prairie Coneflower
Nancy Secrest, Hettinger
Canon PowerShot SX260 HS
Photo taken near Hettinger

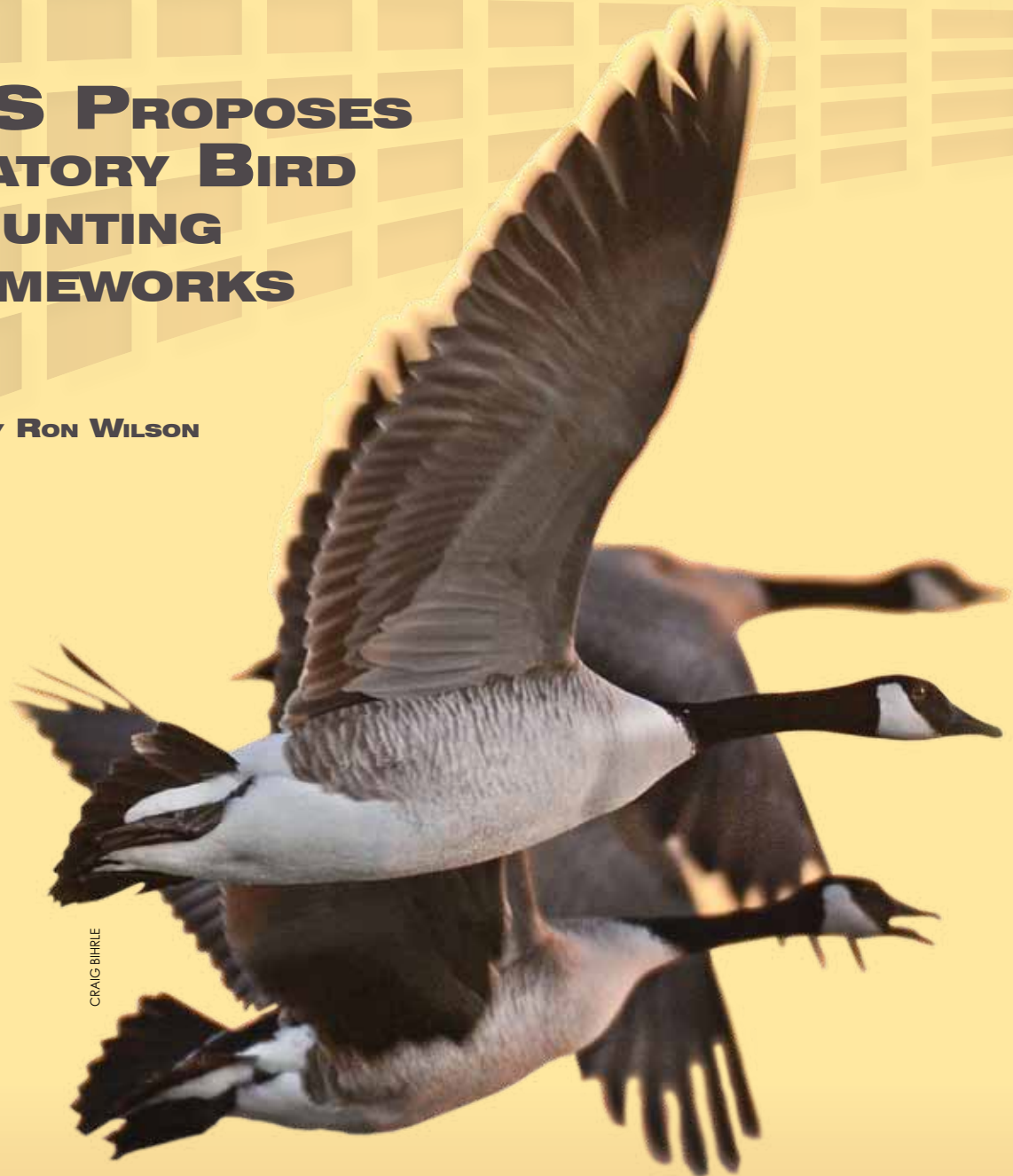


Plant and Insect Runner-up
Yellow goatsbeard
Katherine Plessner, Verona
Sony SLT-A65V
Photo taken near Verona

USFWS PROPOSES MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING FRAMEWORKS

By **RON WILSON**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has streamlined the process by which it sets annual migratory game bird hunting seasons and bag limits.



CRAIG BIRLIE

Duck season in western North Dakota's high plains unit officially ended earlier this month, yet the proposed federal frameworks for the coming season have already been announced.

This is a new way of doing business as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has changed the way waterfowl hunting seasons are decided.

Starting with the 2016-17 hunting seasons, according to the USFWS announcement, the previous two-cycle regulatory practice is now compressed into a single, annual process.

Federal officials said the biological data from the

past year is now used to set hunting season dates and to project appropriate harvest limits for each game species.

Mike Szymanski, North Dakota Game and Fish Department migratory game bird management supervisor, said the streamlined process to set migratory game bird hunting seasons and bag limits provides more time for public comment on proposed rules, and gives biologists more time to analyze population and harvest data.

"We will still need to collect information like we've always done," Szymanski said. It's just that

surveys will be used to set regulations for future situations, a year in advance. It is worth noting, though, that if major red flags are shown in the data, current year information could be used to make emergency changes to regulations.

According to the proposed framework, 2016-17 waterfowl hunting seasons in North Dakota will mirror those of 2015, including season length and bag limits. While season dates won't be finalized until April, those dates will be set well ahead of past years when dates became official in early September.

"For the agency, this new process allows us to have the waterfowl regulations set much earlier, which will allow hunters to make hunting plans much earlier than before," Szymanski said.

Szymanski said waterfowl officials are able to streamline the previous two-cycle regulatory process because they have a half-century of data to reference when setting the season frameworks.

"We have many, many years of data and experience

in tracking waterfowl populations and knowing what is going to happen," he said.

The Game and Fish Department, for instance, has conducted its breeding duck survey for nearly 70 years. The survey may be the longest-running breeding waterfowl survey in the world, covering 2,000 miles to assess spring wetland conditions and the number of waterfowl in the state.

Szymanski said determining the season frameworks well in advance won't be detrimental to the resource as hunting doesn't have that great of an influence on waterfowl populations.

"It could get difficult if waterfowl populations drop down to those experienced in the later 1980s and early 1990s when we had such extreme drought," he said.

Waterfowl populations today are described by biologists as steady or improving.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.

Old Process

- February 2014 – Determine fall 2013 mourning dove population size.
- March 2014 – Flyways recommend 2014 dove regulations.
- May 2014 – Determine 2014 waterfowl breeding status.
- June (late) 2014 – USFWS finalizes 2014 dove regulations.
- July (early) 2014 – States finalize 2014 dove regulations.
- July (late) – Analyze 2013 waterfowl harvest data; flyways recommend 2014 waterfowl regulations.
- July (very late) 2014 – USFWS finalizes 2014 waterfowl regulations.
- August (late) 2014 – States finalize 2014 waterfowl regulations.
- September 2014 – 2014 dove seasons open.
- September 2014 – 2014 waterfowl seasons open.

New Process

- April 2016 – Determine fall 2015 mourning dove population size.
- May 2016 – Determine 2016 waterfowl breeding status. (In late 2015, the USFWS moved into the new regulation setting process. Flyways met with the USFWS last October to make 2016 season recommendations and Game and Fish will be finalizing 2016 dove and waterfowl regulation selections in April 2016.)
- June (late) 2016 – In very rare occasions, the USFWS will make emergency changes to current year regulations for upcoming (fall 2016) hunting seasons.
- July (very late) 2016 – Analyze harvest data from 2015 waterfowl seasons.
- September 2016 – 2016 dove seasons open; flyways recommend 2017 dove and waterfowl regulations.
- September (late) 2016 – 2016 waterfowl seasons open.
- October (late) – USFWS finalizes 2017 dove and waterfowl regulations.
- April 2017 – States finalize 2017 dove and waterfowl regulations.



BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor



LARA ANDERSON

Tentative 2016 Season Opening Dates

To help North Dakota hunters prepare for hunting seasons in 2016, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department annually provides its best estimate for opening dates for the coming year.

Dates aren't official until approved by governor's proclamation. Tentative opening dates for 2016 include:

- Spring Turkey - April 9
- Dove - September 1
- Deer and Pronghorn Bow, Moun-

tain Lion - September 2

- Sharptail, Hun, Ruffed Grouse, Squirrel - September 10
- Youth Deer - September 16
- Youth Waterfowl - September 17
- Early Resident Waterfowl - September 24
- Regular Waterfowl, Youth Pheasant - October 1
- Pronghorn Gun - October 7
- Pheasant, Fall Turkey - October 8
- Mink, Muskrat, Weasel Trapping - October 22
- Deer Gun - November 4
- Deer Muzzleloader - November 25

HUNTER EDUCATION CLASSES IN 2016

Students interested in taking a hunter education class in 2016 should visit the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website at gf.nd.gov for a statewide list of courses. Many classes will be added over the next several weeks, and the rest will be added throughout the year as they are finalized.

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

Those who do not have access to the Internet and want to sign up for a class can call the hunter education program in Bismarck at 701-328-6615.

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

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

CLEAN UP THE ICE

Winter anglers are reminded to clean up the ice after fishing. This not only applies to aluminum cans, containers and other trash, but fish as well.

It is not only unsightly, but it is illegal to leave fish behind on the ice. According to the fishing proclamation, when a fish

is caught, anglers must either immediately release the fish back into the water unharmed, or reduce them to their daily possession.

It is common practice for some anglers to fillet fish on the ice, and all fish parts must be taken to shore for proper disposal.



GREG GULLICKSON

Helping With CRP Enrollment Offers

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department may have some program options that could help landowners who want to enroll land in the federal Conservation Reserve Program.

For the first time in more than two years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has opened a general CRP enrollment period that runs through February 26. Like the last general enrollment, applications received during the signup period will be ranked against others according to an Environmental Benefit Index.

Kevin Kading, Game and Fish private land section leader, said there are some EBI factors that producers can influence. "Cost-share is where we can help," he said. "Landowners can offer a higher diversity grass mix, like pollinators, which can improve the EBI. We can help with the costs associated with that higher diversity mix and offer additional incentives if producers are willing to enroll the land into the Department's Private Land Open to Sportsmen walk-in access program."

Currently, North Dakota has about 1.2 million active CRP acres, with about 39,000 acres set to expire in 2016, and 345,000 acres expiring in 2017.

Game and Fish Department private land biologists and conservation partners, such as Pheasants Forever farm bill biologists and county Soil Conservation District farm bill specialists, can help landowners find the best possible combination of factors that could positively influence their EBI score and increase the likelihood of acceptance into the program.

Several workshops for landowners will be scheduled through various conservation partners around the state in late January and early February. More information on those workshops will be available on the Game and Fish website at gf.nd.gov.

Again this year, Game and Fish can make arrangements with contractors to assist producers with land preparation, grass seeding and CRP management.

The following biologists can provide for more information about the general signup,



Pollinator grass mixes can improve EBI scores, and Game and Fish can help with costs associated with such a higher diversity mix. Inset: Pollinator mixes that include wildflowers are designed to attract bees and other beneficial insects.

and opportunities with the Department's PLOTS program.

Game and Fish Private Land Biologists

- Jaden Honeyman, Dickinson – 701-260-3546 (Adams, Hettinger, Grant, Sioux, Stark, Slope, Bowman and Golden Valley counties).
- Levi Jacobson, Bismarck – 701-527-3764 (Burleigh, Emmons, Kidder, Oliver and Morton counties).
- Andrew Ahrens, Devils Lake – 701-662-3617 (Bottineau, Rolette, Towner, Cavalier, Ramsey, Pembina, Walsh, Grand Forks and Nelson counties).
- Todd Buckley, Williston – 701-774-4320 (Divide, Burke, Williams, Mountrail and McKenzie counties).
- Terry Oswald, Jr., Lonetree – 701-324-2211 (Sheridan, Wells, Eddy, Foster, Benson and Pierce counties).
- Renae Heinle, Jamestown – 701-253-6480 (Stutsman, Barnes, Lamoure, Dickey, Sargent, Griggs, Cass, Richland, Ransom, Steele, Traill, McIntosh and Logan counties).
- Ryan Huber, Riverdale – 701-654-7475 (McLean, Mercer, McHenry,

Ward and Renville counties).

- Todd Gallion, Lake Ilo National Wildlife Refuge – 701-548-8110 (Dunn and Billings counties).

Soil Conservation Districts Farm Bill Specialists

- Adam Haut, Napoleon – 701-754-2234 (Kidder, Logan, McIntosh and Emmons counties).
- Cody Hoggarth, Jamestown – 701-252-2521 (Stutsman, Barnes and LaMoure counties).
- Luke Gilbert, Turtle Lake – 701-448-2474 (Burleigh, McLean and Sheridan counties).
- Position vacant, Hettinger – 701-567-2661 (Adams, Bowman, Slope and Hettinger counties).

Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologists

- Justin Edwards, Mandan – 701-667-1163 Ext. 3 (Mercer, Morton, Oliver and other western counties).
- Jordan Croatt, Forman – 701-724-3247 Ext. 114 (Sargent, Richland, Ransom and Dickey counties).
- Brandon Meyer, Devils Lake – 701-662-4088 (Benson, Nelson and Ramsey counties).



Linking Coyote Hunters, Landowners

The Coyote Catalog, a statewide effort designed to connect coyote hunters and trappers with landowners who are dealing with coyotes in their areas, is open for the winter.

A partnership between the North Dakota Department of Agriculture and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, the Coyote Catalog can be a good way for hunters and trappers to locate new places to go, according to Terry Steinwand, Game and Fish director.

Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring encourages landowners, especially farmers and ranchers who have problems with coyotes, to sign up for the Coyote Catalog.

“Hunting and trapping are some of the many tools available to mitigate predator risk,” Goehring said.

This past season, nearly 50 landowners participated in the Coyote Catalog, along with about 650 hunters and trappers.

Landowners can sign up on the NDDA website at www.nd.gov/ndda/coyote-catalog. County and contact information is required.

Hunters and trappers can sign up at the NDGF website, gf.nd.gov.

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

Throughout winter, hunters or trappers may receive information on participating landowners, and they should contact landowners to make arrangements.

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

The Coyote Catalog will remain active through March 31, 2016. For more information, contact Stephanie Tucker, NDGF, at 701-220-1871; satucker@nd.gov; or Jamie Good, NDDA, at 701-328-2233 or jgood@nd.gov.



MIKE ANDERSON

Fish House Regulations

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

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

Other fish house regulations:

- Fish houses do not require a license.
- Occupied structures do not require identification. However, any unoccupied fish house must have the owner’s name, and either address or telephone number, displayed on its outside in readily distinguishable characters at least 3 inches high.
- Fish houses may not be placed closer than 50 feet in any direction to another house without consent of the occupant of the other fish house.
- Fish houses on Lake Alice must be removed daily.
- Fish houses shall be removed from all waters by midnight, March 15, of each year.

They can be used after March 15 if they are removed daily.

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

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

Region	Channel	Schedule
WILLISTON	KUMV 8	Tuesday - 10 pm
WILLISTON	KXMD 11	Sunday - 10 pm; Monday - Noon
MINOT	KMOT 10	Tuesday - 10 pm
MINOT	KXMC 13	Saturday - 10 pm; Monday - Noon
DICKINSON	KQCD 7	Tuesday - 9 pm (MT)
DICKINSON	KXMA 2	Sunday - 9 pm (MT)
BISMARCK	KFYR 5	Tuesday - 10 pm
BISMARCK	KXMB 12	Sunday - 10 pm
BISMARCK	CATV	Saturday - 9:30 am
GRAND FORKS	WDAZ 8	Wednesday - 5 pm
FARGO	KVRR FOX	Sunday - 9 pm

on Television

STAFF NOTES



Dan Halstead Named Game and Fish Employee of the Year

Dan Halstead, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife resource management supervisor in Riverdale, received the agency's Director's Award for professional excellence during the Department's annual winter meeting.

Terry Steinwand, Game and Fish director, said Halstead is known for his professional networking, project creativity and resourcefulness. "Dan's unwavering commitment to the agency and resource are to be commended," he said.

Halstead was mentioned for his dedication, eye for detail and management approach. "His aggressive management philosophy includes establishment of high quality food plots, tree and shrub plantings, grass and forb seedings, haying and grazing rotations, as well as the use of prescribed burning to enhance habitat for wildlife production and hunting opportunities," Steinwand said.

RIEWER NAMED WILDLIFE OFFICER OF THE YEAR

Blake Riewer, North Dakota Game and Fish Department district game warden in Grand Forks, is the state's 2015 Wildlife Officer of the Year.

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

In a nomination letter sent to Shikar-Safari, chief warden Robert Timian said Riewer promotes safety by working diligently to be in the right place at the right time.

"Warden Riewer consistently takes on extra duties, which proves his dedication to his chosen profession," Timian said. "He is constantly trying to improve his skills and tactics, which bodes well for the Department and citizens of North Dakota. He is most deserving of this recognition."



Patrick Isakson



Sandra Johnson



Russ Kinzler



Corey Wentland



Aaron Robinson



Wes Erdle



Kyle Hoge

Game and Fish Recognizes Employees

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

- Patrick Isakson and Sandra Johnson, Bismarck, received the Special Projects award, given to individuals who implemented a successful new project. They were recognized for successfully revising the State Wildlife Action Plan. "Completing this effort required extensive coordination and communication responsibilities," Steinwand said. "The effort and skill displayed in accomplishing this most difficult task is exemplary and worthy of appreciation."
- Russ Kinzler, Riverdale, and Corey Wentland, Bismarck, received the Solid Foundation award, presented to staff who demonstrate exemplary work in their field. Kinzler was recognized for his work with the Missouri River System, while Wentland was noted for his efforts with federal aid and grants. "Russ possesses an incredible work ethic, positive attitude, strong mechanical skills and field expertise, and maintains a great working relationship with angling groups," Steinwand said. "Corey sifts through mounds of proposals, applications and reports, and has the answers to all the difficult questions."
- Aaron Robinson, Dickinson, received the Public Outreach award, presented to an employee for showing a significant effort, ability or accomplishment in interacting with the public while promoting the Department's programs. Robinson was recognized for his work involved with the proposed listing of sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act. "The coordination effort which Aaron undertook with private landowners, agencies and other states was significant," Steinwand said.
- Wes Erdle and Kyle Hoge of Bismarck were presented with the Innovations award, which recognizes staff for implementing a process to improve Department goals and objectives. They were recognized for their work statewide in fisheries development projects. "Wes and Kyle are challenged with the unprecedented task of dealing with access issues on a statewide basis, and have tackled these responsibilities with energy and pride," Steinwand said. "Each project is accomplished to the highest standard."



Jonathan Tofteland

Tofteland Earns Boating Officer Award

Jonathan Tofteland, Bottineau, was named North Dakota's Boating Officer of the Year. Chief warden Robert Timian said Tofteland's district boasts one of the most sought-after recreational lakes in the state.

"Warden Tofteland spends a great amount of time patrolling in and around Lake Metigoshe by vehicle, boat, snowmobile and ATV," Timian said. "His enthusiasm for boat and water safety enforcement is readily apparent."

Long-term Employees

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

- 40 years – Stan Kohn, upland game management supervisor, Bismarck.
- 35 years – Arvid Anderson, wildlife resource management biologist, Riverdale; Jerry Gulke, survey coordinator, Bismarck; and Doug Olson, district warden supervisor, Riverdale.
- 30 years – Bob Frohlich, fisheries development supervisor, Bismarck; Bruce Kreft, conservation biologist, Bismarck; Dan Morman, wildlife technician, Riverdale; Greg Power, fisheries chief, Bismarck; and Robert Timian, enforcement chief, Bismarck.
- 25 years – Alexis Duxbury, conservation biologist, Bismarck; Jeff Hendrickson, district fisheries supervisor, Dickinson; Jason Lee, district fisheries supervisor, Riverdale; and Randy Meissner, licensing manager, Bismarck.
- 20 years – Mike Anderson, videographer, Bismarck and Rodd Compson, wildlife resource management biologist, Jamestown.



Brian Schaffer

Education Coordinator Hired

Brian Schaffer has filled the education coordinator position previously held by Nancy Boldt, who retired in fall. Schaffer has a bachelor's degree in wildlife biology from Unity College in Maine, and a master's degree in wildlife sciences from South Dakota State University.



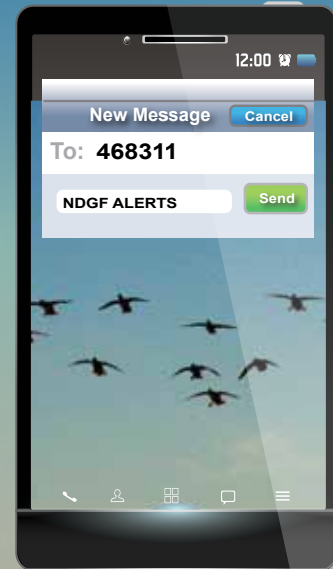
Justin Mattson

Mattson Hired in Bismarck

Mandan native Justin Mattson was hired to fill a new administrative position. Some of his responsibilities include procurement, contracts and risk management.

Mattson has a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of North Dakota, and a master's degree in business from the University of Mary.

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back cast



By Ron Wilson

We opened the 2015 pheasant season in a bowling alley to celebrate a belated birthday for my youngest.

It was the first pheasant opener I'd missed in nearly 30 years. It seemed like kind of a big deal at the time, chasing six soda-pop-fueled kids instead of roosters. But in hindsight, it wasn't.

Family first.

We end the pheasant season today, the last week in December, in Burleigh County. Five of us meet on a gravel road, park in a snow-blown approach, add layers, snug down stocking caps and release four bird dogs.

While I've never hunted this particular spot before, but have driven past it many times, it's hardly recognizable. With no sun and a blanket of snow, there is little definition to the landscape, save for a course of cattails running roughly northwest.

After we cross the fence and wade through the ditch, we part without instruction, acting as if we have done this before, and jump into the cover. Two hunters flank the cattails and our progress, dodging areas where the snow has drifted to about knee-high in places.

It's clear we are in the right spot. With each step, with each scuff in the snow in insulated hunting boots, we erase a confusion of pheasant tracks that seem to have no end.

What isn't clear is whether the birds are hidden here, buried in cat-

tails, or hiding where the grass bends and creates mini lean-tos, pheasant snow caves. Or are they out feeding, scratching in the nearby stubble field for forgotten grain and weed seeds.

Nothing really prepares you for hunting late-season pheasants in snow. There isn't a contraption at the gym that people stand in line to use that mimics breaking through a hard crust that you must continually and clumsily wade out of. Then again, there is likely an exercise, with weights involved, that sort of copycats the motion of bending and lifting the rear end of an old, tired bird dog that repeatedly gets high-centered in deep snow.

And on we hunt.

As is the case with wild birds that have been hunted for nearly three months, the majority know the drill, hear us coming, and flush out of shotgun range. At that distance, under a leaden sky that offers no hint of color, the hens and roosters all look the same.

Save for two unforgiveable shots at a rooster passing left to right and a gorgeous point at our feet on a hen by a young bird dog that keeps getting better, we are at our end, out of cover.

While the season won't be remembered for this, I mentally note on the hike out that it ended like it started.

Thank goodness for all the days in between.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT ARCHIVE PHOTOS



A Look Back

By Ron Wilson

According to Game and Fish Department records, rainbow trout were first stocked in North Dakota in 1955 in a small ranch pond in the southwestern part of the state.

Yet, it's wholly unclear when anglers first took to rolling out old sleeping bags and blanketing their heads to catch trout through the ice.

For certain, anglers were covering their heads and looking through ice holes, creating a simplistic version of today's darkhouses used for spearing pike, sometime in the 1960s because that's when these black and white photographs were taken.

"We'd do that when we went ice fishing for trout as kids," said Chris Grondahl, Game and Fish Department education supervisor. "A new world, an underwater world, was opened up by doing this. It was fun because we could see the fish."

And likely effective for catching fish as the angler, with a good view of life below the ice, could jig his or her bait when trout swam into view.

People have been ice fishing in North Dakota for about 100 years. Methods to catch fish and gear used to cut holes in the ice and lure fish to bite, as you can imagine, have varied over time.

So, seeing a photograph of grown, shrouded men ice fishing for trout in this manner comes as no surprise.

From what we understand, this face-down fishing method was used mostly for trout. Considering the suspected date of the photographs, again, sometime in the 1960s, this makes sense.

Greg Power, Game and Fish Department fisheries chief, said because anglers at the time didn't have as many options as today's

anglers in terms of fish species, trout were popular in the 1960s.

"In the mid-1960s, trout popularity was right up there with walleye and northern pike," Power said. "At the time, there were more trout fishing opportunities than there were walleye fishing opportunities."

This fish species preference, as we know, has taken a dramatic shift over time in North Dakota. According to a Game and Fish Department fish preference survey in 2013, 81 percent of anglers preferred walleye, while just .7 percent preferred trout.

"Times and preferences have changed," Power said. "And so have the methods of fishing, with underwater cameras replacing laying face-down on the ice."

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.