

NORTH DAKOTA
OUTDOORS

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GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

On December 14, 2015, the Game and Fish Department closed the late mountain lion hunting season in Zone 1. On that day, the zone's late season quota of seven lions was filled when the final cat was taken.

This, as wildlife managers, we know is not unusual, as in each of the last three hunting seasons the late season quota of seven lions was filled.

After a decade of hunting, and findings from an ongoing two-phase research project, what Game and Fish Department biologists have learned about mountain lions in North Dakota is substantial.

At three public meetings later this month (see page 8 for meeting details) Game and Fish staff will share what we've learned since the state's first mountain lion season in 2005, and discuss what the future holds for managing these elusive animals.

Elsewhere in this issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*, you'll also find an article detailing a law that requires hunters and anglers to purchase licenses through an electronic licensing system that goes into effect April 1.

With the majority of hunters and anglers already buying their licenses electronically, and Department staff working hard to pave the way for this change, we expect the transition to be smooth for those we serve.

Also in the following pages, *OUTDOORS* readers will find the Game and Fish Department's enforcement division review for 2015, and the roundup for the 2015 turkey, pronghorn and deer drawings.

In 2015, Game and Fish made available just 43,275 deer licenses. We haven't seen numbers that low in nearly 40 years, and I

know this fact isn't lost on the many, many hunters who care deeply about the long-standing tradition of hunting deer in North Dakota with family and friends.

As previously announced in 2015, our agency has proposed a plan that will support issuing 75,000 deer licenses. To get there, it will take time, a positive adjustment in the amount of wildlife habitat on the landscape, a helping hand from Mother Nature, and other influences.

So far this winter, Mother Nature has been kind to wildlife across much of the state. While we all understand that things can change outdoors in a big hurry in this neck of the Northern Plains, you have to imagine that with little snow this late in the winter, and days of temperatures near or above freezing, deer and other animals are less stressed than they rightfully could be.

Of course, we've benefited from what so far is a pretty mild winter. Ice fishing opportunities, thanks to access to many waters, has been good around much of the state. Last year, a familiar weather scenario led to a record number of people drilling holes in pursuit of North Dakota's banquet of game fish. It will be interesting, if winter continues on its current path, what we'll remember about 2016.

If you haven't been out ice fishing or darkhouse spearfishing this winter, get out and give it a try. Take a kid, family member or a neighbor. Teach those who have never participated to embrace our frozen waters because that's what we do this time of year in North Dakota's great outdoors. But with the mild winter also comes less ice so we always advise caution when venturing on the ice.

Terry Steinwand

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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The mission of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department is to protect, conserve and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitats for sustained public consumptive and nonconsumptive use.

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Front Cover

The black-capped chickadee is a year-round resident in North Dakota. (Photo by Lara Anderson, Bismarck.)



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Hunters who applied for a mule deer buck license in 2015 accounted for 28 percent of applicants with four or more bonus points.

CRAIG BURBLE

DRAWING FOR DEER

IN 2015

BY RON WILSON

The number of deer gun licenses the Game and Fish Department made available in 2015 was the lowest total in 37 years.

Also in 2015, wildlife officials unveiled the Department's new five-year deer management plan that calls for slowly, but steadily building the state's deer herd.

Considering changing habitat conditions on the landscape, and the unknowns of winter weather, increasing deer numbers across the state will take time.

In 2015, for the third year in a row, hunters in North Dakota were allowed only one license for the deer gun season. Drawing just that one license, no matter the year, wasn't easy.

In 2014, Game and Fish made available 48,000 licenses for the regular gun season, and 68,248 hunters applied for those licenses. In 2015, fewer licenses (43,275) were made available, but more hunters (69,791) applied than the year before.

Getting a buck license in 2015 or the year before was, as you might expect, difficult.

According to Randy Meissner, Department licensing manager, after 13,219 gratis licenses and 432 nonresident licenses were subtracted from the overall license allocation, just 15,714 buck licenses were available for the 58,681 hunters who applied for them as their first choice in the lottery.

Again in 2015, for the fourth year in a row, the Department did not allow hunting for antlerless mule deer in eight badlands hunting units. The population is showing signs of rebounding, as spring 2015 marked the third consecutive year that the mule deer index was higher than the previous year.

Also in 2015, the Department allowed a limited pronghorn hunting season for the second year in a row in three units in southwestern North Dakota.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.

How it Works

While the number of deer gun licenses changes from year to year, the one constant is that the deer season annually attracts new hunters.

Understanding this, there are always questions concerning how the current lottery system works. Using deer as the example, though turkey works the same way, here is a reminder.

If you fail to draw your first license choice in any given year, but apply within the next two years, you receive a bonus point. You do not have to apply in the same unit, or for the same deer type, to qualify. You get an additional bonus point each year you apply and do not receive your first license choice, as long as you have applied in the first drawing at least once in the previous two years.

You receive additional chances in the drawing for each bonus point accumulated. For points one through three, you are entered in the drawing two times the number of points you have. So, if you have two points you would get four additional chances to be drawn, compared to a person who got his or her first choice the previous year. If you're both competing for the same

license, you have five chances, he or she has one.

When you accumulate four or more points, the number of additional chances is determined by cubing your bonus points. So, when you have four points, you will be in the drawing 64 additional times, 125 times if you have five points, and so on. Bonus points are accumulated as long as you do not draw your first license choice and apply in the first drawing at least every other year. You do not receive bonus points in years you do not apply.

Each drawing is still random, but the more bonus points you have, the better your odds. When you receive your first license choice, you lose your bonus points and start over. Bonus points can only be earned, or used, in the first drawing for each species in each year.

The license lottery consists of four separate drawings, one for each choice on the application. First, we hold a drawing for the first unit/first deer choice. When those have been issued, we draw for the first unit/second deer choice, then the second unit/first deer choice, and finally the second unit/second deer choice.

2015 Spring Turkey Lottery Results

Percent of applicants who received their first choice of license.

LICENSE TYPE	POINTS									OVERALL
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
02	S	81.9	96.2	100						82.9
03	S	100								100
04	S	49.5	78.8	100						57.5
06	S	100								100
13	S	100	100							100
17	S	52.2	77.8	100	100					55.8
19	S	100	100							100
25	S	100	100							100
27	S	47.9	89.3	100	100					55.9
30	S	99	100							99
31	S	100	100							100
37	S	47.4	79.9	96	100					57
40	S	100	100							100
44	S	100	100							100
45	S	100	100							100
47	S	100								100
50	S	43.1	83.8	95.5						54.8
51	S	100								100
53	S	50	62.5	100						53.1
98	S	53.6	84.9	100						60.2
99	S	100	100							100

2015 Fall Turkey Lottery Results

Percent of applicants who received their first choice of license.

LICENSE TYPE	POINTS									OVERALL
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
02	F	33.8	47.1	75	100					38.9
03	F	100	100							100
04	F	54.9	93.3	100						62.4
06	F	35.7	100							55
13	F	100	100							100
17	F	39.3	85.2							48.5
19	F	100	100							100
25	F	100	100							100
27	F	43.8	82.1	83.3						50.4
30	F	100	100							100
31	F	100								100
37	F	54	85.7	100	100					61
40	F	100	100							100
44	F	82.4	100							82.6
45	F	100	100							100
47	F	100	100							100
50	F	68.5	100	100						74.4
51	F	100								100
98	F	77	94.9	100						79.5
99	F	100	100							100

2015 Pronghorn Lottery Results

Percent of applicants who received their first choice of license in the 2015 pronghorn drawing.

LICENSE TYPE	POINTS									OVERALL	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
03B	A	0.4	0.1	0.3	1.2	6.6	10.9	16.7	30	33.3	2
04A	A	0.5	1.4	2.1	3.3	20.9	46.3	68.3	66.7	100	5.4
04C	A	0	0.4	0	2.2	20.9	28.6	52.6	0		3.7

2015 Lottery Statistics

- 43,275 deer licenses were available, down from 48,000 in 2014 and 59,500 in 2013.
- 69,791 people applied for deer gun season licenses, up from 68,248 in 2014.
- 58,681 applicants applied for buck licenses as their first choice; 15,714 buck licenses were available in the drawing after 13,219 gratis and 432 nonresident licenses were withheld. There were no doe licenses available for the drawing in units 2A, 3A1 and 3B1, and there were no buck licenses available for the drawing in unit 2E after all gratis licenses were withheld.
- All buck licenses were issued in the first unit/first choice drawing.
- The highest number of bonus points accumulated by any hunter in the 2015 deer drawing was 13.
- 8,946 applicants had four or more points, and 2,655 drew their first license choice.
- Applicants who applied for a mule deer buck license accounted for 28 percent of applicants with four or more bonus points, and those who applied for a muzzleloader buck license accounted for an additional 32 percent.
- The number of people with four or more bonus points increased 1,636 from 2014.
- A buck license in unit 2C was the most difficult license to draw, with 50 times more applicants than licenses available. A buck license in unit 2D was next with more than 30 applicants for each available license. Muzzleloader buck licenses followed with more than 20 applicants for each license available.
- There was a limited pronghorn season in three hunting units.
- 5,815 spring turkey licenses were available in 2015, while 5,880 were available in 2014. The number of applicants decreased from 6,052 in 2014 to 5,880 in 2015.
- The number of fall turkey licenses available decreased from 3,805 in 2014 to 3,655 in 2015. The number of applicants decreased from 3,272 in 2014 to 3,040 in 2015.

2015 Deer License Lottery Results

Percent of applicants who received their first choice of license in the 2015 deer drawing.

		POINTS										
LICENSE TYPE		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	OVERALL	
1	A Any Buck	4.3	10.4	30.6	27.8	100					11.8	
1	B Any Doe	91.2	78.3	100	100						89.7	
2A	A Any Buck	0	4.5	5.9	11.6	71.7	100				9.9	
2A	B Any Doe*	0	0	0	0	0	0				0	
2B	A Any Buck	5.1	15.4	20.1	31.1	100	100				14.7	
2B	B Any Doe	28.3	65.2	70.3	68.8	100					42.8	
2C	A Any Buck	0.2	0.9	2.8	3.6	11.4	100	100			1.9	
2C	B Any Doe	5.5	16	26.5	35.3						12.6	
2D	A Any Buck	0.8	3.6	5.2	0	25					2.9	
2D	B Any Doe	4.3	12.1	0							5.8	
2E	A Any Buck	0	0	0	0	0	0				0	
2E	B Any Doe	2.5	10.9	24	42.9	100					8.5	
2F1	A Any Buck	27.5	55.3	76.4	81.3	100					42.7	
2F1	B Any Doe	97.3	100	100							97.7	
2F2	A Any Buck	11.6	27.2	44.5	50.3	100	100				25.6	
2F2	B Any Doe	92.6	81.5	82.6	100						90.9	
2G	A Any Buck	4	8.1	15.7	17.2	83.3	100				11.5	
2G	B Any Doe	21	37.9	0	0						23.5	
2G1	A Any Buck	3.8	9.8	21.5	22.8	92.2	100	100			15.5	
2G1	B Any Doe	53.1	83.1	71.4	100	100					63	
2G2	A Any Buck	10.7	31.6	52.2	64.6	100					30.3	
2G2	B Any Doe	94.1	92.7	92.9	100						93.9	
2H	A Any Buck	24.1	57.8	72.8	87.5	100			100		41.7	
2H	B Any Doe	94.3	88.9	100	100						93.7	
2I	A Any Buck	12.6	30.3	48.5	56.5	97.8	100	100			28	
2I	B Any Doe	95.2	96.1	100	100						95.6	
2J1	A Any Buck	7.2	15.5	29.9	38.2	97.6	100	100			22.1	
2J1	B Any Doe	93.8	93.2	60	100	100					92.4	
2J2	A Any Buck	25	52.7	75.9	97.8	100					41.8	
2J2	B Any Doe	94.6	97.6	90	100						94.8	
2K1	A Any Buck	5.6	11.4	20.6	28.2	91.4	100	100		100	15.9	
2K1	B Any Doe	93.6	82.9	100	100	100					92.6	
2K2	A Any Buck	16.5	38.9	56.4	68	100	100				33.8	
2K2	B Any Doe	94.6	90	100	100						94.2	
2L	A Any Buck	16.1	34.7	35.5	57.1	100					26.3	
2L	B Any Doe	94.4	80	100							93.8	
3A1	A Any Buck	0.6	2.5	6.5	7.6	49.1	71.3	85.7			14.7	
3A1	B Any Doe*	0	0	0	0	0	0				0	
3A2	A Any Buck	21.9	54.9	77	72.7	100					37.5	
3A2	B Any Doe	94.2	97.1	100	100	100					94.7	
3A3	A Any Buck	2.1	3.7	9.6	11.7	52.8	72.7	100			10.3	
3A3	B Any Doe	90.1	86.1	80.6	80	71.4	100				88.2	
3A4	A Any Buck	8.9	24.1	40	46.6	100					19.5	
3A4	B Any Doe	91.4	81.1	81.8	100						89.6	
3B1	C WT Buck	1.4	4.2	4.9	12.3	57.3	81.8	100	100		12.4	
3B1	D WT Doe*	0	0	0	0	0	0				0	
3B1	E MD Buck	4.9	16.8	6.7	19.7	93.9	100				18.2	
3B2	C WT Buck	18.2	40	53.6	68.8	100					34.2	
3B2	D WT Doe	95.2	88.9	75	100						93.4	
3B2	E MD Buck	11.1	67.1	66.7	66.7	100					44	
3B3	A Any Buck	8.7	18.3	31.9	63.6	100	100				20.6	

		POINTS										
LICENSE TYPE		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	OVERALL	
3B3	B Any Doe	32.2	56.3	100							38.2	
3B3	C WT Buck	55.9	91.8	100	100	100					65.7	
3B3	D WT Doe	99.5	100	100							99.5	
3C	A Any Buck	3.8	15.1	15.6	24.1	87.5	100	100			12.2	
3C	B Any Doe	53.5	100	0							60.6	
3C	C WT Buck	49	83.3	94	100	85.7					61.8	
3C	D WT Doe	99.5	100	100	100	100					99.6	
3D1	A Any Buck	14.7	33.1	52.7	45	100	100				27.5	
3D1	B Any Doe	94.6	100	100							95.5	
3D1	C WT Buck	75.6	100	100	100	100					81.4	
3D1	D WT Doe	85.7									85.7	
3D2	A Any Buck	5.2	19.6	31.3	36.2	100	100				21.7	
3D2	B Any Doe	92	100	100	100	100					93.5	
3D2	C WT Buck	29.9	61.2	76.5	100	100					50.7	
3D2	D WT Doe	100	100	100							100	
3E1	A Any Buck	14.2	45.2	51.9	75	100	100	100			30.5	
3E1	B Any Doe	92	100		100						92.5	
3E1	C WT Buck	50.4	90	100	100						58.5	
3E1	D WT Doe	100	100								100	
3E2	A Any Buck	38.9	72.2	93.5	95.2	100					52.1	
3E2	B Any Doe	95.3	90	100							94.8	
3E2	C WT Buck	80.1	100	100	100						82.2	
3E2	D WT Doe	100	100								100	
3F1	A Any Buck	19.5	53.5	65.5	85.7	100					35	
3F1	B Any Doe	91	100	100							92.1	
3F1	C WT Buck	99.4	100	100	100						99.5	
3F1	D WT Doe	93.3	100	100	100						94.4	
3F2	A Any Buck	28.3	57.5	86.5	100	100	100				42.4	
3F2	B Any Doe	98	75	100							97.2	
3F2	C WT Buck	99.5	100	100	100						99.5	
3F2	D WT Doe	100	100								100	
4A	C WT Buck	14.1	50.6	62.8	84.6	100					37.2	
4A	D WT Doe	87.5	66.7	100							86.7	
4A	E MD Buck	0.8	4.4	5.8	12.2	74	73.5	100			17.3	
4B	C WT Buck	27.8	68.8	76.9	100	100	100				46.4	
4B	D WT Doe	100	100	100	100						100	
4B	E MD Buck	0.4	1.2	2.6	4.5	37.6	46.6	77.6	100	100	14.1	
4C	C WT Buck	67.5	84.3	90	0	100					73.2	
4C	D WT Doe	100									100	
4C	E MD Buck	0.6	0.2	1.1	1.4	22.2	39.3	58.6	60.5	75	11.9	
4D	C WT Buck	85.9	100	81.8	100	100					88.2	
4D	D WT Doe	96	100	100							96.4	
4D	E MD Buck	0.2	3.9	2.9	4.5	32.3	50	68.1	88.2		15.2	
4E	C WT Buck	100	100	66.7	100	100					99.2	
4E	D WT Doe	100	100								100	
4E	E MD Buck	4.7	8.1	27	31.4	85.1	100	100			25.4	
4F	C WT Buck	96.4	100	100							96.6	
4F	D WT Doe	100	100								100	
4F	E MD Buck	25	65.3	75	87.5	100					47.5	
MUZ	C WT Buck	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.3	4.5	6.6	9.5	18.2	33.9	3.6	
MUZ	D WT Doe	26.7	60.9	71.6	86.7	100	100	100	100	100	47.3	

*All available doe licenses were issued to gratis applicants prior to the lottery drawing.

MANAGING MOUNTAIN LIONS



A Look at the Past and Future

By Ron Wilson



ASHLEY SALWEY

An adult mountain lion at the Dakota Zoo in Bismarck.

Game and Fish Department officials will host three public meetings this month to discuss what has been learned since the state's first mountain lion season.

North Dakota's mountain lion population has declined over the past several years, according to a two-phase research project and biological findings from animals harvested over the last decade.

"From what we've learned over time, the information is indicating the mountain lion population in the badlands has been in decline," said Jeb Williams, Game and Fish Department wildlife division chief.

Game and Fish Department officials will host three public meetings this month to discuss what has been learned since the state's first mountain lion season.

"We want to share with the public at these meetings what we've learned about managing mountain lions in North Dakota over the last 10 years," Williams said. "Considering what we knew about mountain lions in North Dakota prior to 2005, which was very little, the information gathered in the last decade is significant."

North Dakota held its first mountain lion hunting season in 2005, and it's ran uninterrupted since. The Game and Fish Department, in conjunction with researchers from South Dakota State University, launched the first part of a two-phase research project in 2011.

Stephanie Tucker, Game and Fish Department furbearer biologist, said Phase I objectives included survival and cause-specific mortality and mountain lion food habits.

Tucker said researchers trapped mountain lions, mostly in the northern badlands, in foot-hold traps and foot snares, marking a total of 22 with ear tags. Fourteen of those animals were also fitted with radio-collars.

"While that's not a large sample size, I think it's a lot considering the number of mountain lions we have in North Dakota," she said. "Dave Wilckens (SDSU researcher) also spent a lot of time investigating over 500 kill sites (prey killed by mountain lions) in rugged country. They weren't 500 walks in the park, by any means."

Of the 12 species found eaten by mountain lions, 77 percent were deer.

Tucker said the research also indicated, based on carcasses and mortality of radio-collared lions, that mountain lions in the badlands have a 42-48 percent survival rate.

"That's about 30 percent lower than needed to sustain the current population of this size," she said. "The majority of the mortality on our lions is driven by hunting, more specifically the late hunting season, and hunting is something we can control."

Tucker said immediately after Phase I of the research project was finished in 2014, Phase II kicked in and is expected to be completed in 2017. She said researchers continue to capture and mark lions, with the objective being mountain lion survival and validating habitat and population models.



MIKE ANDERSON



Stephanie Tucker (left), Game and Fish Department furbearer biologist, with a mountain lion kitten captured in the badlands as part of a two-phase research project. Mountain lion tracks (top) are often mistaken for other wild or domestic animals.

“We have made amazing headway in the last four years and by the time Phase II is done, we will have a really good handle on this population,” Tucker said. “But we understand that there is always more we can learn.”

Since North Dakota’s first mountain lion hunting season, the Game and Fish Department has documented harvest of 97 animals in the badlands (Zone 1), where the majority of the state’s population lives and breeds. Nine lions have been killed east of there (Zone 2) over the same time period, but those lions were believed to be on the move, looking for new habitat.

The lion harvest quota the first three seasons was five. It increased from there to eight, 10 and 14, before topping out at 21 cats beginning in 2012.

In each of the last three hunting seasons, seven lions – the established late season quota – have been harvested during the state’s late season. It’s during the late season, starting in late November after the deer gun season is over, that hunters can use dogs to pursue mountain lions.

The success of hound hunters and the overall quota are important factors when considering how to manage the state’s mountain lion population in the future, Williams said.

“Whatever number we put in the late season quota, we are 99 percent sure that quota is going to get filled because the hound hunters are very efficient,” he said.

Mountain Lion Meetings

Dates and locations for the public meetings to discuss what state wildlife managers have learned about mountain lions since North Dakota’s first hunting season in 2005:

- **February 23** – Game and Fish Department headquarters, Bismarck, 7 p.m.
- **February 24** – Fargo Holiday Inn, 7 p.m.
- **February 29** – Killdeer Cobblestone Hotel and Suites, 7 p.m.





MIKE ANDERSON



MIKE ANDERSON

The Game and Fish Department teamed with researchers from South Dakota State University in 2011 to launch a two-phase research project on mountain lions in North Dakota's badlands. The second phase of the project is expected to be completed in 2017.

"We aren't saying that the hound hunters are doing anything wrong, because they are playing within the rules we set up, it's just that they are very good at what they do."

Since the mountain lion season was split into an early and late season in 2011, Tucker said the early season quota has not been met in any of those years. On the other hand, the late season quota has been met in each year.

"That's simply a testament to how good the hound hunting is during the late season," she said.

Despite the badlands' rugged appearance and apparent vastness, Tucker said this country doesn't have considerable sections of wilderness that allow mountain lions to really secret themselves away.

"Every time a lion crosses a snow-covered road in late season, it is risking getting noticed by leaving behind a fresh set of tracks," Tucker said. "Considering that male lions have a home range of 80 square miles and female lions have a home range of 40 square miles, they are crossing roads at some given time."

There are a number of things to consider, Williams said, if the lion quota does need adjustment. One question may be how to distribute hunting opportunities amongst an increasing number of individuals who would like to participate in the late season. He said when the snow flies, creating good tracking opportunities during late season, individuals who can

immediately participate are usually successful.

"If you're a hunter who doesn't have that kind of flexibility, and we get 3 inches of snow in the badlands but you can't get there until the next weekend, the quota is likely already filled," Williams said. "So, do we, as an agency, look at some kind of scenario where we try to spread out that opportunity so hunters don't feel rushed when the first significant late season snow hits the ground?"

Tucker said she expects the feedback at the public meetings to be varied as some people believe a declining mountain lion population is a good thing, while others take a different view.

"That being said, I think that the majority of North Dakotans believe that mountain lions should be managed in a sustainable way," she said.

Williams agreed, saying he expects the public response to be mixed.

"The peak mountain lion population was maybe higher than many people were comfortable with," Williams said. "Our objective was to reduce that population somewhat, and that has happened. The upcoming meetings will be part of the process that will help Game and Fish determine at what level we will try to maintain mountain lions in the future."

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



ALL-ELECTRONIC LICENSING STARTS APRIL 1

Paper License Books Will No Longer Be Used

By Greg Freeman

No 588171

\$1.00 No 588172

READ BEFORE SIGNING

2015-2016 NORTH DAKOTA RESIDENT FISHING, HUNTING, AND FURBEARER CERTIFICATE

ND Game & Fish Department
100 N. Bismarck Expressway
Bismarck, ND 58501
701-328-6300

***Migratory Bird Harvest Information Program (HIP) Verification Number**
To register call 1-888-634-4798

This copy to be retained by selling agency for files of the Game and Fish Department.

(Last Name, First Name, Middle Initial) _____
 (Street Address) _____
 (City and State) _____ (Zip) _____
 (AREA CODE) _____ PHONE NUMBER _____ Social Security No. (Last 4 digits only) _____ Birthdate (mo.) (day) (yr.) _____

REQUIRED: ND Driver's License No. _____ or non-driver photo ID No. _____

HEIGHT (ft.) _____ (in.) _____ WEIGHT _____ EYE COLOR _____ HAIR COLOR _____

I certify that I am a bona fide resident and have actually resided in or maintained my legal residence in North Dakota for the past six (6) months and agree to comply with all laws and regulations relating to fishing and hunting. I certify that I am either exempt or have met the requirements of the North Dakota Hunter Safety laws.

The applicant described above is hereby licensed to fish, hunt or trap in North Dakota under the provisions and conditions of the 2015-2016 North Dakota Game and Fish Laws and Regulations. This certificate is a prerequisite to securing any fishing, hunting, or furbearer license.

Hunter Education Cert. No. _____ Issuing State _____ Your Signature _____
 Dated at _____ N.D. Dist. _____ City of _____

By Order of: **GAME AND FISH DIRECTOR** _____
 (NON-TRANSFERABLE)
All Stamps Must Be Signed In Ink By The Licensee

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services.

HUNTER EDUCATION REQUIREMENT: Persons born after 1961 must complete a certified Hunter Education course, and present the certificate earned to the licensee vendor to purchase a hunting license. Certificates from other states or Canada are valid. Exemptions: Persons who hunt only on land they own or operate; persons under 12 years of age (those under 12 may hunt if they have the appropriate license and are accompanied by parent or guardian); and are accompanied by parent or guardian.
 *Required before hunting ducks, geese, swans, mergansers, coots, cranes, snipe, doves, and woodcock.

VALIDATE BY SIGNING IN INK

Resident Youth Fishing License (place stamp here)

Resident Small Game License (place stamp here)

This is Not Your Federal Waterfowl Stamp

Resident General Game and Habitat License Required for all hunting, except furbearing. (place stamp here)

CRAIG BIRRE
SANDRA JOHNSON

Beginning April 1, the paper licensing booklets familiar to many anglers and hunters will no longer be in circulation.

A law that requires hunters and anglers to purchase licenses through an electronic licensing system takes effect April 1. That means paper licensing booklets will no longer be used at any license vendors in North Dakota.

Randy Meissner, North Dakota Game and Fish Department licensing manager, said most people won't even notice the change, as more than 70 percent of hunters and anglers already buy their licenses electronically.

"It's the walk-in customer who will see a difference, but only if their vendor of choice is not part of our electronic licensing system," Meissner said.

Elimination of paper licenses sold at vendors has been in the works since 2013, when the state legislature passed a law requiring each county auditor to implement a computerized online licensing system by March of last year, and each agent or vendor appointed by a county auditor by March 1, 2016.

"The initial change began in fall of 2013 when deer bow and early Canada goose licenses were only available through electronic purchase, either through a personal computer, the Game and Fish website, or at license vendors in counties that were linked to the Department's online licensing system," Meissner said.

At the time, less than half the counties and their license vendors were part of the Department's electronic licensing system.

"There were some growing pains, but most of the issues were resolved fairly quickly," Meissner said. "Obviously, there were hunters who wanted to continue going to a vendor to purchase a license, but more than half of the counties were not ready to participate in online sales as they were not linked with the Game and Fish licensing system. So we worked with those individuals and offered options through the instant licensing telephone number or our website."

As Meissner mentioned, hunters and anglers can still buy a license by walking into a retail establishment, but not every vendor that sold licenses in the past will still sell licenses this year.

"Those vendors that choose to be a part of our electronic licensing system will continue to sell hunting and fishing licenses for their customers," Meissner said. "The purchase will be recorded electronically via computer, with licenses printed onsite. The only real difference is paper license books will be eliminated."

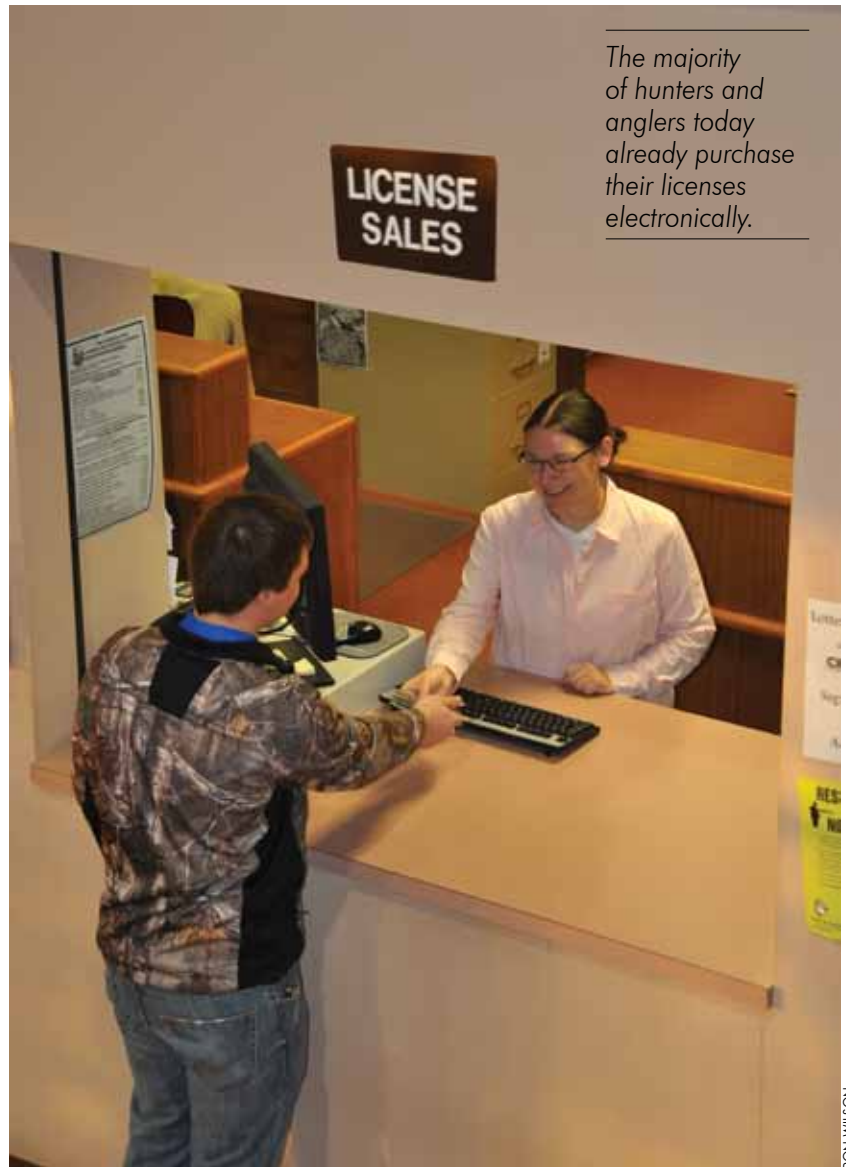
While Game and Fish supports and maintains the licensing website, Meissner said vendors who want

to be part of the electronic system are responsible for obtaining a computer or laptop with Internet access, and a printer for printing licenses.

"All licenses are to be printed on standard white printer paper," he said.

Even though the paper license booklet will become obsolete, lottery applications in paper form will continue to be available at many of the same locations as in the past, even though they may not be part of the electronic system.

"We are still using paper applications for lottery licenses, and many vendors will continue to receive them," Meissner said.



The majority of hunters and anglers today already purchase their licenses electronically.

RON WILSON

A man wearing a brown beanie, a camouflage vest over a light-colored long-sleeved shirt, and camouflage pants is sitting on a black metal tree stand. He is looking upwards and to the right. The stand is attached to a large tree trunk on the left. The background is filled with the branches and leaves of other trees, some with yellowing leaves, suggesting an autumn setting. The sky is visible through the branches.

Early season Canada goose hunters and deer bowhunters are familiar with the new system, as participants have been able to only buy their licenses through electronic purchase since 2013.

And similar to the number of people who already buy their licenses electronically, more than 70 percent of hunters already apply for lottery licenses online.

“We encourage people to apply online,” Meissner said. “It is so much more efficient because there is less chance of error and less staff time spent on inputting data, which ultimately speeds up the entire process.”

In addition to eliminating the paper license booklet, another change beginning in April that was passed by the 2015 state legislature is that county auditors are no longer responsible for allocating and tracking hunting and fishing license sales within their respective counties. Meissner said Game and Fish will assume that responsibility.

Amanda Anstrom, Game and Fish license vendor specialist, who is now responsible for tracking all the license sales for the Department, said a county auditor may still continue to sell hunting and fishing licenses like any other retail vendor if they choose to do so. As of early February, there were about 100 vendors set up to sell hunting and fishing licenses for the 2016-17 season.

“Unfortunately, we lost around 60 vendors with this change, with most simply saying they did not want to go online,” Anstrom said. “In addition, about one-third of the counties in North Dakota do not yet have a vendor signed up. Our goal is to have at least one vendor in each county by the end of March. We want to maintain the convenience of a hunter or angler being able to

LARA ANDERSON

buy a license within a reasonable distance of their home, if they aren't able to buy their licenses online from their own computer or phone."

Anstrom said if a vendor wants to opt-in and sell licenses, they simply need to contact her to get the process started.

"Signing up is as simple as providing your contact information and having a valid email address," she said.

Game and Fish plans to activate license vendor accounts by early March, just in time to start selling new licenses for the 2016-17 license year. Anstrom said on-site training and 24/7 phone support will be available for all license vendors.

"The feedback during this transition has been positive, as our online licensing system is simple and very user friendly," she said. "This change makes their job easier and there is less room for mistakes. A vendor will no longer have to handwrite certificates, therefore hunters and anglers will not have to wait for the certificate to be filled out."

Meissner said the ability to reprint multiple copies of a license, or to replace lost or damaged licenses, from any license vendor or a personal computer is a big improvement over the handwritten paper license.

"Replacing a handwritten license with stamps is a time-consuming process, involving a replacement fee and a notarized form, followed by waiting on the mail for the forms to be received and a new license to be delivered.


"In addition, vendors will be able to issue licenses much more quickly, especially if the customer has purchased electronic licenses in the past," Meissner continued. "All the pertinent information is already in the system so it becomes a quick and easy process to select the new licenses, collect the license fee and print out the new license."

According to Meissner, the electronic licensing system is a big boost for the Game and Fish Department because it allows the Department to obtain more accurate information on license sales in a timely manner.

"The entire Department will benefit from receiving licensing data more quickly," Meissner said. "Currently, all license books and stamps need to be collected by the counties and then returned to Game and Fish with payment, as well as any unsold books and stamps. All of these are numbered and have to be accounted for, which is a tedious and time-consuming process that involves counting each individual book."

A complete list of license vendors participating in electronic licensing sales is available on the Game and Fish Department's website at gf.nd.gov/licenses/electronic-licensing-requirements.

GREG FREEMAN is the Game and Fish Department's news editor.



An easy way to purchase North Dakota hunting and fishing licenses is to log on to the Game and Fish Department's website at gf.nd.gov.



The screenshot shows the website's navigation menu with tabs for Licensing, Hunting/Trapping, Fishing, Boating, Wildlife, and Education. The 'Licensing' tab is active, displaying a sidebar with links such as 'Purchase Licenses Online', 'Electronic Licensing Retailers', 'Licensing by Telephone', 'Printable Applications', 'Resident Licenses and Requirements', 'Nonresident Licenses and Requirements', 'Licensing Requirements Quick Reference', 'Apprentice Hunting License', 'Licensing FAQs', 'License Availability', and 'Laws and Regulations'. The main content area is titled 'Licenses' and features a photograph of a hunter in a field. Below the photo, text explains that retail license vendors and county auditors sell resident and nonresident fishing, and resident small game, combination and furbearer licenses. It also notes that licenses are available electronically at the Game and Fish Department website, by phone at (800) 455-5409, and at license vendors in counties connected to the electronic system. A list of licenses available only through the Department is provided, including resident and nonresident deer archery licenses, resident and nonresident early Canada goose season licenses, and nonresident waterfowl and small game licenses. At the bottom, it states that auditors, located in courthouses around the state, sell licenses during business hours, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m., Monday - Friday, and carry fishing, small game and furbearer licenses.



2015 ENFORCEMENT DIVISION REVIEW



Tim Phalen, Department game warden, inspects a waterfowl hunter's chest waders for aquatic nuisance species at an ANS checkpoint in eastern North Dakota in 2015.

LARA ANDERSON

By Robert Timian

The enforcement division annually releases the number of citations issued for the previous year.

When we review the numbers, we ask many questions so that we can anticipate future trends and plan how to deal with them.

The total number of citations in 2015 was down from the record high of 2014, and they are comparable to 2013 numbers. Some movement up or down from one year to the next is expected, as many variables affect the number of citations issued in a given year.

For instance, one example is did we have a full complement of game wardens on staff, or were we missing some for part of the year due to retirements or other reasons?

In the enforcement division, we look for trends over time, or spikes in specific types of violations.

In 2015, we observed one of these spikes in illegal hunting at night with lights, commonly called shining. Several years ago when I was a new game warden, shining was all too common and we spent a lot of enforcement time and effort on this. Over the years shining, while never gone, seemed to decline to the point where we were not finding the number of violators, and those we did find were typically in localized areas.

Shining cases more than doubled from 2014 to 2015, and generally occurred across the state. Why did this happen? Is this a one-year anomaly or the new normal? At this time we don't have the answers, but we're asking the questions and trying to find the answers.

Fishing without a license is one of those violations that remains an issue across the state. Again, the question for enforcement is why?

We don't believe it's a money issue as both resident (\$16) and nonresident (\$45) annual fishing licenses are a bargain for 12 months of fishing.

Incidents 2015 – Top 10 Counties

(An incident is defined as any situation that requires a response from a game warden. It does not have to be a crime, the situation could be, for example, a lost hunter.)

- McKenzie – 239 (Down 54 from 2014)
- Morton – 233 (Up 30)
- Burleigh – 206 (Down 60)
- Stark – 187 (Down 6)
- McLean – 179 (Up 19)
- Richland – 170
- Ward – 157
- Williams – 151
- Ramsey – 150
- Cass – 142

Citations 2015 – Top 10 Counties

- McKenzie – 267 (Down 132 from 2014)
- Ramsey – 165 (Up 25)
- Williams – 140 (Down 50)
- Morton – 131 (Up 39)
- Stark – 124 (Up 16)
- Burleigh – 112
- McLean – 97
- Mountrail – 74
- Ward – 71
- Stutsman – 67

Game and Fish Department wardens patrol the Missouri River System and other waters visited by anglers and boaters during the state's open water season.



ASHLEY SALWEY



MIKE ANDERSON

Fishing licenses are also not of limited number, or restricted to a specific area, like deer gun licenses. We are researching why, and what different approaches may work to increase compliance and decrease fishing without a license violations.

Sometimes the cause of a change in citation numbers, up or down, for a specific violations is simply a change in enforcement priority. A decade ago, aquatic nuisance species weren't a top priority for game wardens, yet today enforcing laws related to transport and distribution of unwanted invasive species is a major focus.

In the end, change is the constant, and numbers go up and down. The challenge, if change produces a negative result, is to identify the cause and the remedy. And, considering that enforcement resources are not unlimited, what is the cost versus the benefit.

As the Game and Fish Department's enforcement division, we continue to do everything we can with the resources we have.

***ROBERT TIMLAN** is the Game and Fish Department's enforcement division chief.*

Game and Fish Department wardens (top) are essential in the statewide effort to prevent the spread and transportation of aquatic nuisance species. Jeff Violett, Department game warden (right), visits with a hunter during the state's popular deer gun season.



MIKE ANDERSON

2015 SUMMARY OF VIOLATIONS

BIG GAME	
FAILURE TO ACCOMPANY/TRANSPORT OTHER'S GAME	2
FAILURE TO WEAR FLORESCENT ORANGE	10
TAGGING VIOLATIONS	18
EXCEEDING LIMIT	5
KILLING WRONG SPECIES OR SEX	4
OTHER BIG GAME VIOLATIONS	11
TOTAL	50

SMALL GAME/WATERFOWL	
USING GUN ABLE TO HOLD MORE THAN 3 SHELLS	65
HUNTING IN CLOSED SEASON	6
ILLEGAL POSSESSION/TAKING	5
EXCEEDING LIMIT	19
FAILURE TO LEAVE IDENTIFICATION OR SEX OF GAME	64
KILLING WRONG SEX OR SPECIES	8
FAILURE TO ACCOMPANY/TRANSPORT OTHER'S GAME	7
NONTOXIC SHOT VIOLATION	7
FAILURE TO CARRY FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP	5
HUNTING IN UNHARVESTED FIELDS	5
OTHER SMALL GAME VIOLATIONS	46
TOTAL	237

BOATING	
USE OF UNLICENSED OR UNNUMBERED BOAT	45
FAILURE TO DISPLAY BOAT REGISTRATION	42
OPERATING WITHOUT LIGHTS AT NIGHT	47
INADEQUATE NUMBER OF PFDs	215
WATER SKIING VIOLATIONS	66
RECKLESS OR NEGLIGENT OPERATION	3
OPERATING VESSEL UNDER INFLUENCE/INTOXICATED	13
OTHER BOATING VIOLATIONS	51
TOTAL	482

FISHING	
FISHING WITH EXCESSIVE LINES	63
EXCEEDING LIMIT	103
FISHING IN CLOSED/RESTRICTED AREA	9
FAILURE TO ATTEND LINES	16
NO IDENTIFICATION ON FISH HOUSE	11
ANS VIOLATION	78
PADDLEFISH VIOLATIONS	9
OTHER FISHING VIOLATIONS	46
TOTAL	335

FURBEARER	
SHINING (USING ARTIFICIAL LIGHT)	20
ILLEGAL POSSESSION/TAKING	2
HARASSING FURBEARERS WITH MOTOR VEHICLE	4
OTHER FURBEARER VIOLATIONS	14
TOTAL	40

GENERAL	
USE OF MOTOR VEHICLE OFF ESTABLISHED TRAIL	2
USE OF MOTOR VEHICLE IN RESTRICTED AREA	43
HARASSING WILDLIFE WITH MOTOR VEHICLE	2
HUNTING ON POSTED LAND WITHOUT PERMISSION	56
HUNTING BEFORE/AFTER LEGAL HOURS	19
WANTON WASTE	18
AID IN CONCEALMENT OF UNLAWFUL GAME	2
HUNTING IN WRONG UNIT/CLOSED AREA	16
LOADED FIREARM IN MOTOR VEHICLE	13
DISCHARGE OF FIREARM WITHIN/ON MOTOR VEHICLE	1
440 YARD VIOLATION	4
LITTERING	51
OTHER GENERAL VIOLATIONS	88
TOTAL	315

LICENSING	
FAILURE TO SIGN/AFFIX STAMP	9
HUNTING/FISHING/TRAPPING WITHOUT PROPER LICENSE	247
FAILURE TO CARRY LICENSE ON PERSON	328
MISREPRESENTATION ON LICENSE OR APPLICATION	19
OTHER LICENSING VIOLATIONS	2
TOTAL	605

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS/REFUGE	
FAILURE TO OBEY POSTED REGULATIONS	91
CAMPING	8
TREE STAND VIOLATIONS	2
POSSESSION OF GLASS BEVERAGE CONTAINERS	49
BAITING ON WMA	6
POSSESSION/DISCHARGE OF FIREWORKS	3
PROHIBITED USES OF MOTOR VEHICLES	18
UNLAWFUL USE OF FIREARMS	2
OTHER WMA/REFUGE VIOLATIONS	4
TOTAL	183

MISCELLANEOUS	
POSSESSION OF CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE	19
POSSESSION OF DRUG PARAPHERNALIA	17
OPEN CONTAINER	26
MINOR IN POSSESSION	42
CRIMINAL TRESPASS	21
OTHER MISCELLANEOUS	34
TOTAL	159

COMMERCIAL	
GUIDE/OUTFITTER WITHOUT A LICENSE	9
OTHER COMMERCIAL	13
TOTAL	22



BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor



CRAIG BIRLE

Spring Light Goose Season Opens

North Dakota's spring light goose season opens February 20 and continues through May 15.

Residents must have a valid current season 2015-16 (valid through March 31) or 2016-17 (required April 1) combination license; or a small game, and general game and habitat license. The 2016-17 license is available for purchase beginning March 15.

Nonresidents need a 2016 spring light goose season license. The cost is \$50 and the license is good statewide. Nonresidents who hunt the spring season remain eligible to buy a fall season license. The spring season does not count against the 14-day fall waterfowl season regulation.

In addition, nonresident youth under age 16 can purchase a license at the resident fee if their state has youth reciprocity licensing with North Dakota.

A federal duck stamp is not required for either residents or nonresidents.

Resident and nonresident licenses are available only from the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Bismarck office, the Department's website at gf.nd.gov, by calling 800-406-6409, or at any vendor linked to the Department's electronic licensing system.

Availability of food and open water dictate when snow geese arrive in the state.

Early migrants generally start showing up in the southeast part of the state in mid-to-late March, but huntable numbers usually aren't around until the end of March or early April. Movements into and through the state depend on available roosting areas and the extent of the snow line.

Hunters must obtain a new Harvest Information Program registration number before hunting. The HIP number can be obtained online or by calling 888-634-4798. The HIP number is good for the fall season as well, so spring hunters should save it to record on their fall license.

The Game and Fish Department will provide hunters with migration updates once geese have entered the state. Hunters can access the department's website, or call 701-328-3697, to receive generalized locations of bird sightings in North Dakota until the season ends or geese have left the state. Migration reports will be updated periodically during the week.

The spring season is only open to light geese – snows, blues, and Ross's. Species identification is important because white-fronted and Canada geese travel with light geese. The season is closed to whitefronts, Canada geese, swans and all other migratory birds.

Shooting hours are 30 minutes before

sunrise to 30 minutes after sunset. There is no daily bag limit or possession limit. Electronic and recorded calls, as well as shotguns capable of holding more than three shells, may be used to take light geese during this season.

There are no waterfowl rest areas designated for the spring season. Hunters should note that private land within waterfowl rest areas closed last fall may be posted closed to hunting.

Nontoxic shot is required for hunting all light geese statewide. Driving off established roads and trails is strongly discouraged during this hunt because of the likelihood of soft, muddy conditions, and winter wheat that is planted across the state. Sprouted winter wheat is considered an unharvested crop. Therefore, hunting or off-road travel in winter wheat is not legal without landowner permission.

To maintain good landowner relations, hunters are advised to seek permission before hunting on private lands or attempting any off-road travel during this season.

All regular hunting season regulations not addressed above apply to the spring season. For more information on regulations refer to the 2016 Spring Light Goose Hunting Regulations and the 2015 North Dakota Waterfowl Hunting Guide.

BOAT REGISTRATION REMINDER

Boat owners purchasing watercraft from private individuals this winter are reminded to register it in their name with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

Registering a used watercraft purchased from an individual must include proof of transfer of ownership, such as a photocopy of the previous owner's registration card, a canceled check or a signed note from the previous owner stating transfer of ownership.

The prorated price to register motorboats under 16 feet in length, and all canoes, is \$6, motorboats from 16 feet to less than 20 feet in length, \$12, and motorboats at least 20 feet in length, \$15.

The current three-year boat registration cycle runs through December 31, 2016.

In addition, boat owners who need to renew their registration can renew online at the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov, by clicking Buy and Apply, and "watercraft registration and renew-



CRAIG BIHRLE

als" under the watercraft heading.

Also, anyone buying a new or used watercraft can register online and generate a 10-day temporary permit that is valid until the registration is processed.

Regulations require the boat number to be in contrasting color to the hull in plain vertical block letters at least 3 inches in height, excluding any border, trim, outlining or shading, and must be maintained in a legible condition so the number is clearly visible in daylight hours. The number must read from left to right, and groups of numbers and letters must be separated by a space or hyphen equivalent in width to the letter "M."

In addition, a validation sticker issued by the Game and Fish Department must be displayed on the boat within 6 inches of the number toward the rear of the boat. No other numbers should be displayed in this area.



LARA ANDERSON

Reminder to Register

Darkhouse spearfishing season is open through March 15, and all participants, regardless of age, are reminded to register with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

Free registration is available at the Department's website, gf.nd.gov, or through any Game and Fish Department office.

Darkhouse spearing is allowed for all residents with a valid fishing license and for residents under age 16.

Nonresidents may darkhouse spearfish in North Dakota if they are from states that offer the same privilege for North Dakota residents. Legal fish are northern pike and nongame species.

All waters open to hook-and-line fishing are open to darkhouse spearing except the following waters: Braun Lake, Logan County; East Park Lake, West Park Lake, Lake Audubon, McLean County; Heckers Lake, Sheridan County; McClusky Canal; New Johns Lake, Burleigh County; Red Willow Lake, Griggs County; and Sweet Briar Dam, Morton County.

Anglers should refer to the 2014-16 North Dakota Fishing Guide for more information.

WARDENS ASSOCIATION SCHOLARSHIP

The North Dakota Game Wardens Association has a \$300 scholarship available for a graduating high school senior entering college in fall 2016 who enrolls in fisheries or wildlife management, with an emphasis on law enforcement.

Applicants must be North Dakota residents and have maintained a 3.25 grade point average. The scholarship will be awarded to the student upon proof of enrollment in college.

Applications are available by contacting the North Dakota Game and Fish Department at 701-328-6604; or email ndgf@nd.gov. Applications must be postmarked no later than May 9, 2016.





Permanent Fish House Reminder

State law requires permanent fish houses to be removed from North Dakota waters by midnight March 15.

Anglers are advised to use caution because mild weather conditions can quickly result in unstable ice conditions.

Fish houses may be used after March 15 if they are removed daily.

In addition, it is illegal to leave fish houses on any federal refuge land or on any state-owned or managed land after March 15.



CRAIG BIRKLE



ASHLEY SALWEY

NASP Tourney Returns to Minot

North Dakota's National Archery in the Schools Program state tournament is March 18-19 at the North Dakota State Fair Center in Minot.

In 2015, the tournament featured a record 530-plus student archers. Jeff Long, NASP state coordinator for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, said the event continues to grow and he expects last year's attendance to be easily eclipsed.

"More and more schools are being added to the NASP program every year," Long said. "As more kids come to the event in Minot and see the excellent venue, experience the excitement and get a taste for how much fun it is, it's easy to see why this is growing."

Winning state tournament teams and the top 10 individual winners qualify for the national tournament in Louisville, Kentucky. Of the many North Dakota student archers who competed in Kentucky in 2015, Spencer Brockman of North Sargent High School had the highest (fifth-place) finish. Brockman, a senior, will be in Minot in March to defend his state title.

Long said only schools offering NASP lessons during school hours as part of their standard curriculum are eligible to participate in the state tournament. Schools that don't meet this

requirement are encouraged to contact Long to get the program started.

The list of North Dakota schools involved in NASP can be found on the Game and Fish Department's website at gf.nd.gov.

Schools enter teams and individuals in the following grade level divisions: elementary (4-5), middle (6-8), and high school (9-12). Teams must have 12-24 members, with a minimum of four from each gender. If smaller schools wish to form a team, archers may participate up one grade division for team competition, but they would compete individually in their appropriate age category.

Recognition is given to the top placing team in each division, the top five males and females in each division, and the top scoring male and female regardless of division. For the first time, Long said college scholarships will be awarded to some of the top finishers at the state event. Scholarships are provided through funds raised by the North Dakota Youth Archery Advisory Council, with matching funds from NASP.

For more information regarding the tournament, schools should contact Long by email at ndgf@nd.gov, or call 701-328-6615. To learn more, visit the Game and Fish website at gf.nd.gov.

Midwinter Waterfowl Survey

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual midwinter waterfowl survey in early January indicated a record 222,890 Canada geese in the state.

Andy Dinges, Department migratory game bird biologist, said an estimated 109,820 Canada geese were observed on the Missouri River, and another 25,370 scattered on Nelson Lake in Oliver County.

Lake Sakakawea, which is typically iced-over in early January but had substan-

tial open water during this year's survey, had 87,395 geese.

Dinges said after summarizing the numbers, an additional 15,440 mallards were tallied statewide.

"Little snow accumulation occurred up to the survey date and the availability of food should have been good," he said. "Overall, wintering conditions were excellent."

Dinges said the first large waves of

migrating waterfowl occurred during the first two weeks in November. Cold conditions in late November pushed many waterfowl through the state.

"After that short cold spell, moderate temperatures, with little snow accumulation, allowed birds to remain in the state on the Missouri River System up until the survey, and on a few larger wetlands in the northwest and south central portions of the state until mid-December," he said.

2016 EARTH DAY PATCH CONTEST

The Game and Fish Department's annual Earth Day awareness campaign is accepting entries for design of a 2016 Earth Day patch. North Dakota students ages 6-18 are eligible to participate. The deadline to submit entries is March 15.

The Game and Fish Department will announce a winner in three age categories – 6-9, 10-13, and 14-18. Each winner will receive a pair of binoculars. The final patch design will be chosen from the three winners.

The winning design will be used on a patch given to members of Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, 4-H clubs and any school participating in Earth Day cleanup projects on state-owned or managed lands in North Dakota in April and May.

The patch should incorporate some aspect of Earth Day – celebrated April 22 – or keeping North Dakota clean. It must be round and three inches in diameter. There is a limit of five colors on the patch, and lettering must be printed. Name, address, age and phone number of the contestant must be clearly printed on the entry form. Only one entry per person is allowed.

Earth Day contest rules and entry forms are available on the Game and Fish Department's website, gf.nd.gov. For more information, contact Pat Lothspeich, Department outreach biologist, by email at ndgf@nd.gov, or call 701-328-6332.





RON WILSON

Youth Grant Program Application Deadline

Wildlife, shooting, fraternal and nonprofit civil organizations are urged to submit an application for the Encouraging Tomorrow's Hunters program, a State Game and Fish Department grant program developed to assist recruitment of the next generation of hunters and shooters.

The maximum grant allowed is \$3,000. The program currently helps fund more than 40 club and organizational events and projects, with an average grant of \$1,250.

Grant funds help cover event expenses, including promotional printing; event memorabilia such as shirts, caps or vests; ammunition and targets, and eye and ear protection.

Past funding has enabled several groups to conduct youth pheasant and waterfowl hunts, while others have sponsored trap and other shooting events, including archery and rifle shooting.

Any club or organization interested in conducting a youth hunting or shooting event can get more information, including a grant application, from the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, or by contacting outreach biologist Pat Lothspeich at 701-328-6332.

The deadline to apply for a 2016 grant is April 20.

STAFF NOTES



Stan Kohn

Kohn Retires, Robinson Fills Position

Stan Kohn, longtime upland game management supervisor, retired recently after more than 40 years with the Game and Fish Department. Aaron Robinson, Department upland game biologist, Dickinson, has filled Kohn's position.



Aaron Robinson



2015 Watchable Wildlife Contest Nongame Runner-up American white pelican Ross Warner, Bismarck



Checkoff for Watchable Wildlife

North Dakota citizens with an interest in supporting wildlife conservation programs are reminded to look for the Watchable Wildlife checkoff on the state tax form.

The state income tax form gives wildlife enthusiasts an opportunity to support nongame wildlife like songbirds and birds of prey, while at the same time contributing to programs that help everyone enjoy all wildlife.

The checkoff – whether you are receiving a refund or having to pay in – is an easy way to voluntarily contribute to sustain this long standing program. In addition, direct donations to the program are accepted any time of year.

To learn more about Watchable Wildlife program activities, visit the Game and Fish Department website at gf.nd.gov.

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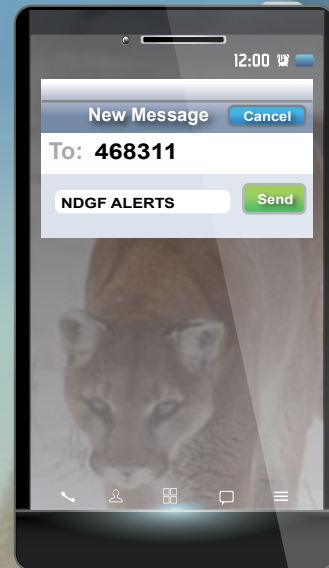
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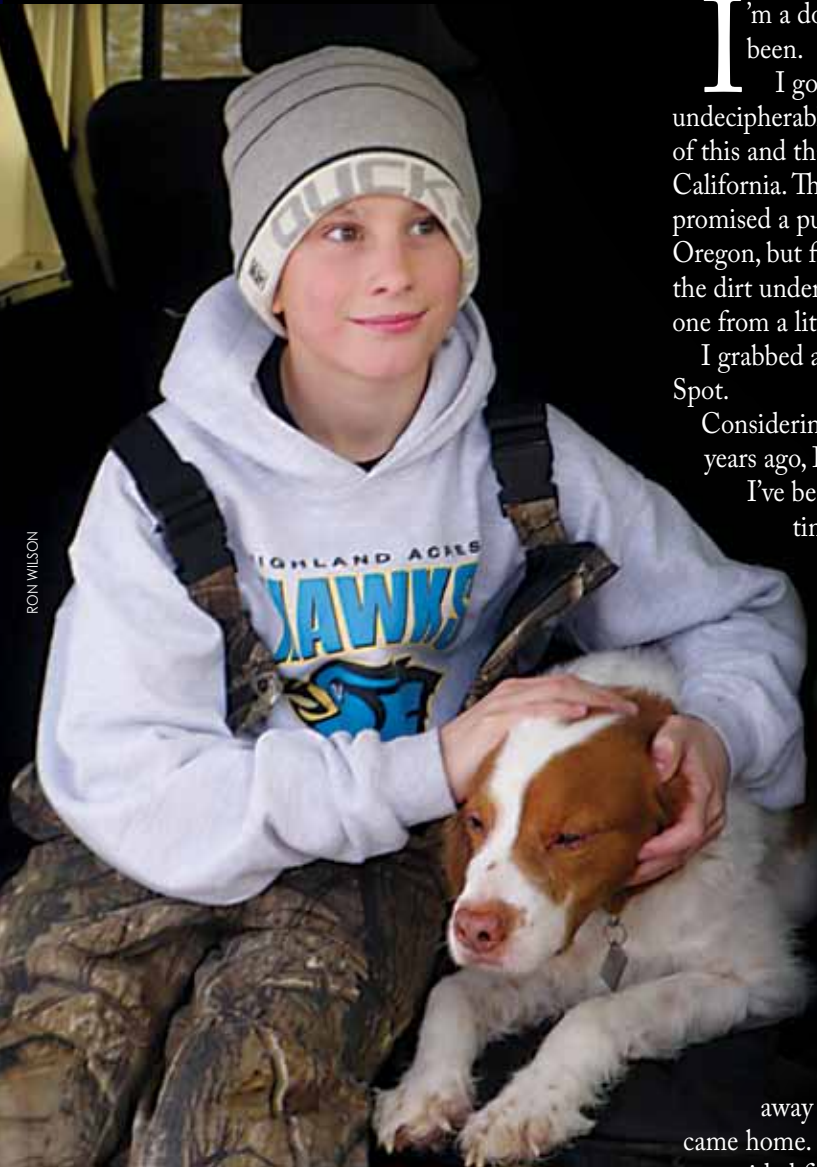
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By Ron Wilson



RON WILSON

I'm a dog guy, always have been. I got my first dog, an undecipherable black-and-white mix of this and that, in Shasta County, California. The story goes that I was promised a puppy to take back to Oregon, but first I had to crawl in the dirt underneath a shed and pluck one from a litter.

I grabbed a male and named him Spot.

Considering that was nearly 50 years ago, I'm just going by what

I've been told by family over time. What I do remember, years later, is

shooting my first rooster flushed by Spot, with a single-shot .410 shotgun.

Looking back, neither of us had any reason to do what we did. Spot didn't have a lick of hunter in him and I was a long way from becoming one.

Spot went missing when I was away at college. Just walked away one day and never came home. Dad, who was losing a one-sided fight against pancreatic cancer at the time, told me over the phone that he'd looked and looked for Spot. He said it was a shame because Spot was a good, old dog, and family shouldn't die alone.

Only one of them did.

I've been thinking a lot about dogs lately because some close friends lost their dogs in January. Murphy died on a Monday and

Carter on a Friday, respectively.

It's not my place to say any more than I saw how hard it was on the families, and I get it.

I've lived in North Dakota for nearly 30 years, and besides one short stretch in the beginning, we've always had a dog, most often two, in the house. The roll call, dominated by bird dogs, includes a springer spaniel, golden retriever, three Brittans and a basset-terrier-lhasa mix that didn't hunt, but often went along for the lunch.

While I've had to apologize to hunting partners for my dogs in the field on occasion, and once for Deke (Brittany No. 2) for jumping out of the boat on Devils Lake, I don't often apologize for them away from it.

From the first dog, they all have glommed onto the furniture as if they shopped and paid for it. Any attempt to apologize to company for this behavior would come off as half-hearted, so I don't often bother.

It's February and there is little to offer my dogs. It's a lean time, with nothing to hunt. The spring turkey season in early April comes next, but that means nothing to them. If my son and I draw licenses, the dogs stay home.

In the meantime, we'll wander the countryside without shotguns and little intent. If anyone were to stop and ask, I'd tell them we're hunting for sheds.

It wouldn't be a total lie, yet it sounds better than saying we're just looking for an excuse to get us off the couch.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



Former North Dakota Game and Fish Department pilot, Tyler Hendrickson, and an unidentified passenger, fly a white-tailed deer survey along the Missouri River bottoms between Washburn and Bismarck sometime in the late 1950s.



NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT ARCHIVE PHOTOS

A Look Back

By Ron Wilson

North Dakota's first statewide aerial big game survey, and the first of its kind in the country, was flown nearly three-quarters of a century ago.

The aerial census was made possible by the passage of the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, commonly known as the Pittman-Robertson Act, which raises funds through a dedicated excise tax on sporting guns and ammunition.

Spotters in the plane were biologists with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's federal aid division, or Pittman-Robinson personnel. The pilot in those initial aerial surveys was Bruce Wright of Bottineau.

"Perhaps some the readers of this magazine remember seeing a small red airplane flying systematically back and forth at low altitudes over certain areas of North Dakota during January, February and March,"

read the June 1941 issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*. "Some may have wondered what it was all about. The secret is now out ... and we can now give our readers an authoritative account of the activities of this mysterious low-flying plane and the crew it carried."

One of the crew was Roy Bach, North Dakota's first Pittman-Robertson biologist. "It was difficult to obtain even a little information regarding the use of a plane in big game census work and it seemed that, for the most part, what little work had been done on this method tended to show that for most areas it was not practical," Bach wrote decades ago.

Even so, Wright and his plane were hired for \$4 an hour, and biologists counted deer and pronghorn across the state, and made note of everything else they saw. The first Pittman-

Robertson aerial census produced an estimated 7,000 whitetails, 952 mule deer and 582 pronghorn.

"It would seem the aerial survey as now being run is an answer to long-standing problems of censusing big game," Bach wrote in 1941.

When the biologists were readying to launch the first big game aerial survey, they noted in a report the need for an experienced pilot.

"Any pilot with a series of 'crack-ups' to his record had perhaps better be passed up," the report read.

Also of note: A standard accessory at the time when flying was a 40-foot rope "... to permit the crew to escape from the plane if it ever happened to be suspended in the tops of some trees."

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.