

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

\$2.00 MAY 2016





MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

After a pretty mild winter and an early spring, I'm still in the "get ready" mode and not quite mentally prepared for late spring and summer weather. But based on what I've seen on the Missouri River and other waters across the state during my travels, many of you were totally ready to enjoy the open water season.

In this issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*, there's an article that explains a walleye tagging study on the Missouri River and Lake Oahe that we are working on with South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks and South Dakota State University.

These types of research projects provide valuable information on how we can better manage North Dakota's resources. One of the key features of this research project is the valuable role the public plays in providing accurate and timely information on tagged fish they catch.

The walleye tagging study is one of several that we have going on right now, with others investigating mule deer, moose, elk and white-tailed deer, and nongame species like Baird's sparrow, chestnut-collared longspur and others.

Most of these projects are designed to answer specific questions on that particular population, while others are meant to gather information on animals for which we have little knowledge. The common theme is to gain a better understanding to help guide future decisions.

It's no secret that adult zebra mussels were discovered in the Red River in 2015. The Game and Fish Department has monitored the Red for this nuisance species since a population was discovered in a Minnesota lake in the Red River drainage.

Department fisheries biologists had infrequently found zebra mussel young in surveys

in the past, but until last year, they had yet to document any adults.

Now that we have and established adult zebra mussel presence in the Red, we're taking all reasonable precautions to prevent spread into other North Dakota waters. (See the ANS article in this issue for more information.)

Some people are saying we're going too far, while others are saying we aren't going far enough in our ANS regulations. I'm of the mindset that we'll do what we have to do to prevent further spread, but we don't want to grossly hinder public opportunity to enjoy any of our fisheries.

You'll likely hear much more on the ANS issue throughout summer and fall.

It may sound a bit early to be thinking of hunting season, but if you're a future hunter out there, it's never too early to be prepared. One of the first things to help with that is the Department's hunter education course.

Game and Fish has a cadre of excellent volunteers across the state that take their own time and effort to teach hunter education classes, and they do a great job.

Every year I get phone calls from parents who tried to sign their kids up for hunter education classes, but couldn't because the classes were full. My advice is to always register for one of these classes early since they do have a tendency to fill up quickly.

Additionally, if you sign up for a class, make sure you attend. It can be frustrating for the instructors to have a full class signed up and only half show up. And it's equally frustrating for those parents who wanted to get their child into a class, but were told it was full.

Whether you're fishing, camping, boating or simply taking a hike, enjoy summer in our great state. Whatever you do, be safe and have fun in North Dakota's outdoors.

Terry Steinwand

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NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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.

· Editor: Ron Wilson · Graphic Designer: Constance Schiff · Circulation Manager: Dawn Jochim

MAY 2016 • NUMBER 9 • VOLUME LXXVIII

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Front Cover

What you're seeing here is more than just one adult black tern trying to feed another. Biologists will tell you what you're seeing is part of a mating ritual, where the male tern tries to feed large food items to a female as a way to prove his worthiness. (Photo by Lara Anderson, Bismarck.)



Official Publication of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (ISSN 0029-2761)
100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095

Website: gf.nd.gov • email: ndgfd@nd.gov

• Information 701-328-6300 • Administration 701-328-6305

• Outdoors Circulation 701-328-6363

• Hunter Education 701-328-6615 • Licensing 701-328-6335

• 24-Hour Licensing by Phone: 800-406-6409

• The TTY/TTD (Relay ND) number for the hearing or speech impaired is 800-366-6888

North Dakota OUTDOORS is published 10 times a year, monthly except for the months of April and September. Subscription rates are \$10 for one year or \$20 for three years. Group rates of \$7 a year are available to organizations presenting 25 or more subscriptions. Remittance should be by check or money order payable to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. Indicate if subscription is new or renewal. The numbers on the upper right corner of the mailing label indicate the date of the last issue a subscriber will receive unless the subscription is renewed.

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Periodical Postage Paid at
Bismarck, ND 58501
and additional entry offices.
Printed in the United States

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:

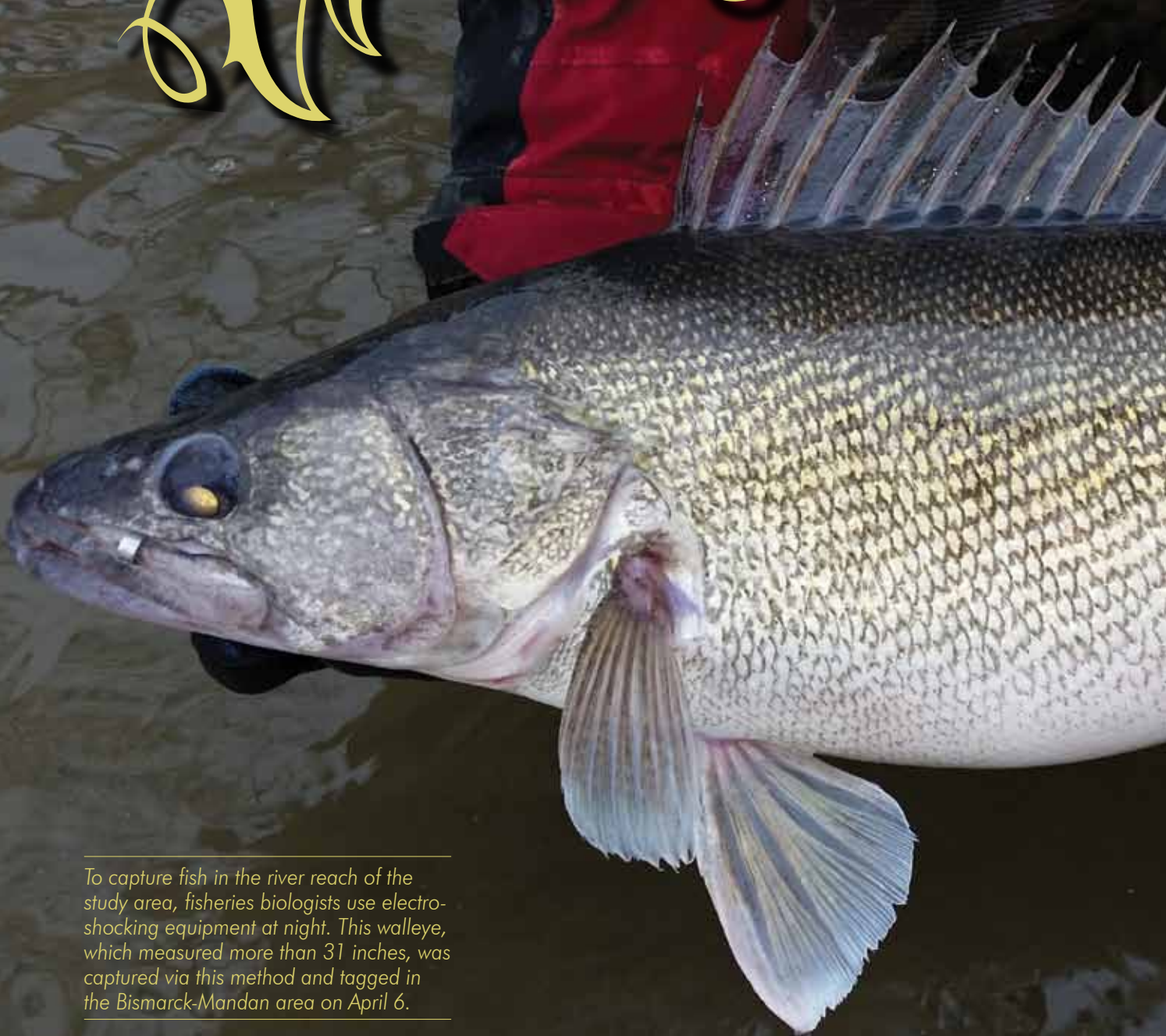
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Walleye

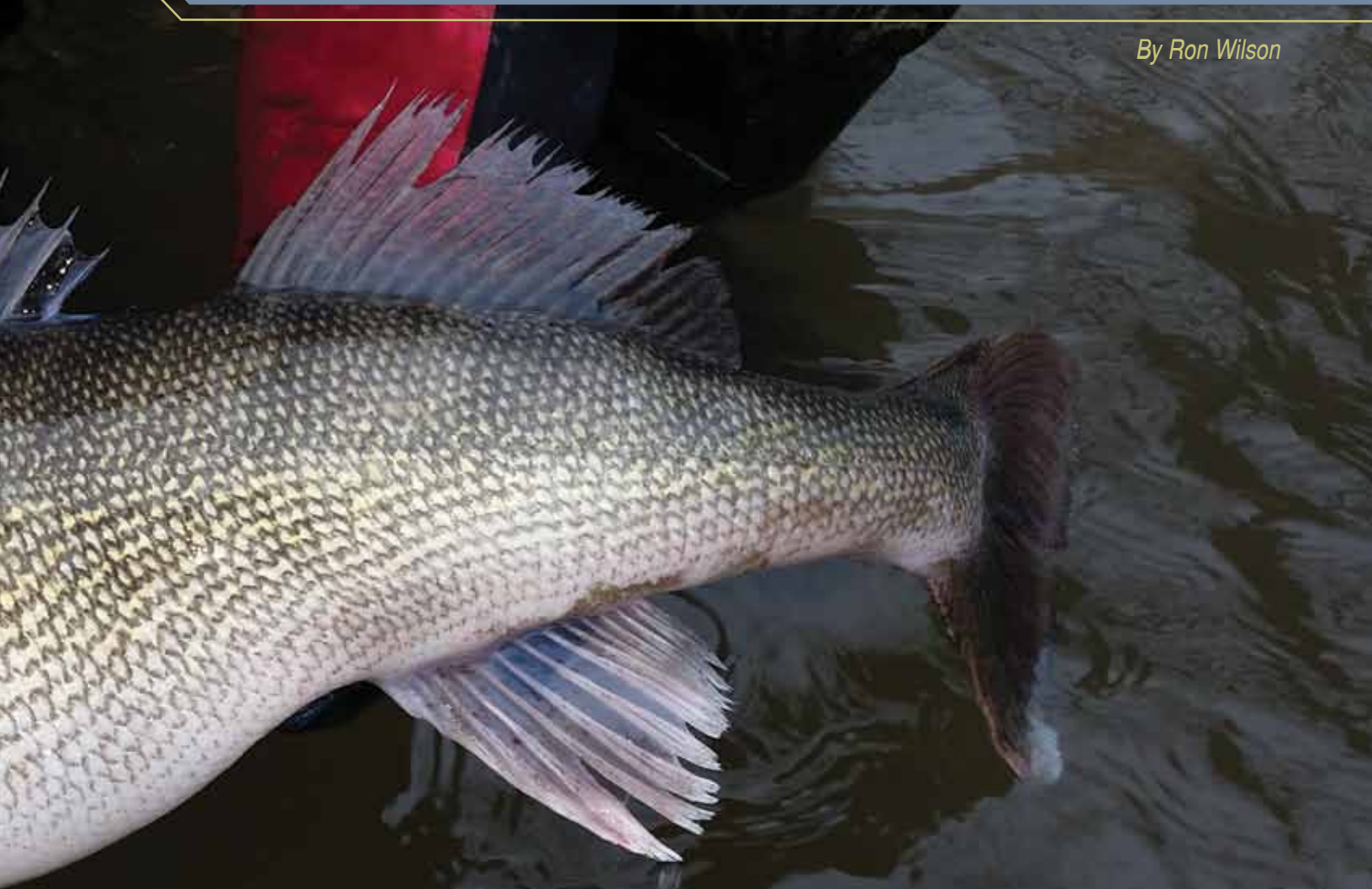


To capture fish in the river reach of the study area, fisheries biologists use electroshocking equipment at night. This walleye, which measured more than 31 inches, was captured via this method and tagged in the Bismarck-Mandan area on April 6.

PAUL BAILEY

TAGGING STUDY DELIVERS ANSWERS

By Ron Wilson



On a cold, windy April morning better suited for telling fishing stories indoors, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries biologists tagged and released 21 walleye caught in trap nets anchored in Lake Oahe's Cattail Bay.

The 21 fish, plus an additional 166 from Beaver Bay later that same day, were welcomed as

biologists worked closer to meeting this spring's goal of tagging 4,000 adult walleye from Cattail Bay to Garrison Dam, located 140-plus river miles upstream.

The fish were fitted with metal jaw tags as part of a multi-year tagging study on the Missouri River System from Garrison Dam to Oahe Dam in South Dakota.



Russ Kinzler (left), Game and Fish Department fisheries biologist, fits a walleye netted in Cattail Bay with a metal tag.



The metal tags used in the study are stamped with unique numbers to identify fish. The tags also have a South Dakota phone number to report information.

The study is a shared effort between biologists and researchers from North Dakota Game and Fish, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks, and South Dakota State University.

Initiated in 2013 and entering its last year, the tagging study is designed to assess fish movements, mortality and what proportion of the population is harvested annually by anglers.

In early April, with the tagging effort ongoing in both states, it was estimated there would be around 36,000 tagged fish between Garrison and Oahe dams.

“One of the main reasons we are doing the study is to gather more information on walleye mortality rates, which is really an important piece of information to have to properly manage this fishery,” said Paul Bailey, Game and Fish Department fisheries supervisor.

Bailey said annual walleye mortality rates across North America are typically from 40-55 percent, and the percentage of fish dying in the Missouri River System study area are well within acceptable rates for the long-term good of the fishery.

With this study, biologists are able to differentiate natural mortality – old age, disease and so on – from angling mortality, which is the



MIKE ANDERSON

While anglers will be able to report tagged walleye for years, Game and Fish Department biologists finished tagging fish this year.

influence anglers have on the fishery.

"The angling mortality rate that we've seen in the first three years of the study has been about 17-27 percent, depending on the region of Lake Oahe and the Missouri River that we are in," Bailey said. "Those are all acceptably low rates of mortality that basically says that anglers are not having a negative impact on the fishery at the present time."

Three years into the study, biologists have also learned some interesting information about walleye movement patterns, or lack thereof, between the dams.

"I think a lot of anglers are under the impression that there is a walleye migration that occurs here every spring, sort of like a spawning run," Bailey said. "The information that we are getting suggests that this really isn't the case. What anglers are seeing is really an illusion, based on water temperatures."

Because the cold water released from Garrison Dam continuously warms as it moves downstream past Washburn, Bismarck and farther south, the warmest temperatures of spring that fisheries biologists typically see are in the Hazelton/Fort Rice area.

"Then as you go from the Hazelton area downstream toward Oahe Dam, you encounter colder, deeper water that is slower to warm up," Bailey said.

"Understanding this, it's no coincidence that you see the fishing first pick up in spring between MacLean Bottoms and the Hazelton/Fort Rice area."

Then as spring creeps into summer, the colder, deeper water in Oahe warms, as does the river much farther upstream.

"That leads to good fishing in, say, mid-June at both Washburn and Langeliers Bay due to water temperatures being right for walleye to cooperate with anglers," Bailey said. "So what anglers are seeing is the result of the temperature influence on walleye and their willingness to bite what anglers offer."

For the most part, the study has shown that the walleye between Garrison and Oahe dams are homebodies.

"Of the fish that we have tagged thus far that anglers have reported back to us, about 55 percent have moved 10 miles or less from where they were tagged," Bailey said. "The rule is that these fish aren't moving very far, but for every rule, there are some exceptions."

For instance, some walleye tagged in the Garrison Dam area have been caught by anglers near Oahe Dam.

"While some fish have undergone large movements, as a rule walleye are not highly mobile in the Missouri River and Lake Oahe," Bailey said.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota *OUTDOORS*.



REPORTING TAGS



The metal jaw tags used in the study are stamped with unique numbers to identify fish, and a South Dakota phone number to report the tags. Tag information can also be registered on the tag reporting page on the Game and Fish Department's website (gf.nd.gov), or by calling 701-328-6300.

"We have to give a thanks to all anglers who've reported tags," said Paul Bailey, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries supervisor. "A crucial component of this study is getting feedback from anglers on the tagged fish they are catching so we can gain an understanding of angling mortality, and to make sure that we have the best regulations in place for the long-term good of the fishery."

Anglers should record the date and location for tagged fish they keep or release, tag number and weight and length if the fish was measured.

Anglers who report tagged fish can keep the tag, and will receive a letter providing some history on the fish.

A small portion of the tags offer a reward to anglers. These tags are clearly marked "Reward."

Reward tags must be physically turned in to Game and Fish offices in Riverdale or Bismarck, or a Game, Fish and Parks office in South Dakota.

"We will wrap up the tagging this year, but anglers can continue to report tagged fish for years to come," Bailey said.



John Mazur (far right), Department hunter education coordinator, talks to a group of veteran instructors at a hunter education academy held in April in Medora.

VOLUNTEER

CONTINUE TO FUEL HUNTER EDUCATION

By Ron Wilson

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's hunter education program graduated its 200,000th student in 2015.

The milestone, reached in the program's 37th year, didn't go entirely unnoticed within the agency. Yet, with the demand to provide courses across the state and retain and recruit enough instructors to teach the

Department's largest volunteer-led program, there was no pause to celebrate.

State law requires anyone born after December 31, 1961 who wants to hunt in North Dakota to pass a certified hunter education course. Since the first classes in 1979, more than 205,000 students have graduated.



BRIAN SCHAFER



“Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of thinking sportsmen around the state herald the new (hunter education) law as a landmark decision destined to contribute positively toward the improvement and continuance of their most beloved sport,” from the December 1977 issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

nteers

Putting a total to the number of volunteer instructors who have helped with the program over the years is more difficult.

Two thousand, maybe? It's only a guess.

What's not a guess, said John Mazur, Department hunter education coordinator, is that Game and Fish currently has roughly 700 volunteer instructors teaching classes across the state. And, in North Dakota's most populated urban areas, there are never enough courses to meet the demand.

“We could run a course every week in our bigger population areas and fill them every time,” Mazur said.

In 2015, Mazur said 210 traditional classroom courses were held around the state, and an additional 30 home-study courses were taken online.

“The bulk of our hunter education courses run from January through the end of May,” he said. “We get most of them done before the deer application deadline in June.”

The hunter education program's foundation is its volunteer instructors.

“Without the volunteers – sometimes it takes two, three or more to teach a course – there wouldn't be a program,” Mazur said. “On average, the volunteer



RON WILSON

Brian Schaffer, Department education coordinator, teaches at a hunter education class in January in Bismarck.



CRAIG BIRKLE

One of the ten commandments of the hunter education program is to never climb a fence with a loaded firearm. This rule applies to all hunters, no matter their age.

instructors are dedicating 35 hours per year of their time, and some are doing way more than that by teaching several courses per year.”

Greg Link, Department conservation and communications chief, said for some students, their first exposure to the state’s natural resources and rich hunting heritage is in a hunter education class.

“We want to captivate those students,” Link said. “By having kids and other older students that are engaged in hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities, then they have a connection, an understanding of what we do. They are the building blocks, the citizenry of what we do.”

In time, Link said this citizenry understands that they have something to gain and something to lose when it comes to the state’s natural resources. To effectively carry out the Department’s mission of protecting, conserving and enhancing the state’s wildlife resources for public use and enjoyment, he said the agency needs public support. A public that cares and understands what it takes to keep healthy wildlife populations on the landscape.

“Hunters have been passionate supporters of conservation efforts. They’ve been instrumental in forging and lobbying for legislation that provided both protection and funding necessary to restore wildlife populations,” Link said. “License dollars and a federal excise tax on firearms and ammunition purchased by hunters have funded key research, annual surveys and habitat establishment, which are all essential ingredients in wildlife restoration. Hunters, through prescribed harvesting of surplus wildlife, have played an important role in keeping these restored populations in check.”

Link said the hunter education program was developed to teach new hunters the fundamentals of firearm safety, develop shooting skills and provide a basic understanding of firearms and ammunition components and functions. It also provides students with a foundation of hunter ethics, wildlife management and habitat conservation.

“While it’s essential that new hunters go afield in a safe and responsible manner, it’s equally important that they strive to be ethical hunters, understand fair chase and respect the land, landowners and the public’s wildlife,” Link said. “Hunter education instructors have the opportunity to instill in them the passion of the hunt and the privilege of joining the ranks of a rich heritage.

“At the same time, we need students to

understand that becoming a hunter is not just about picking up a gun and pursuing their favorite wild game,” he added. “Along with the right of passage to hunt comes a heavy responsibility to be an advocate for wildlife and its management, a steward of the land and the resources that sustain wildlife populations.”

Mazur said the Department’s volunteer portion of the hunter education program needs to grow to keep pace with the increasing demand of those wanting to take classes. He would like to see the number of instructors climb from today’s roughly 700, to 1,000.

Is it a tall order?

“When you consider how small a percentage that is in terms of the state’s overall population, I don’t think it is,” Mazur said. “I understand that there is turnover every year. Even so, we’d like to get to that number and maintain it.”

Game and Fish has started a concentrated effort, with a campaign slogan of “Pass on the Passion and Continue the Heritage” to recruit hunter education and other agency program volunteers.

Mazur said a youth hunter education mentor program is also in the works to help welcome new recruits into the fold.

With this program, in short, hunter education graduates age 14 and older can help instruct in hunter education classes under



For many students, their first exposure to the fundamentals of firearm safety is in a hunter education class.

RON WILSON

A hunter education class taught outside in 1987 near Buxton.



CRAIG BIRKLE

Hunter Education History

- 1977 – State lawmakers passed the hunter safety bill. North Dakota became the 25th state, at the time, to do so.
- 1979 – Law goes into effect and classes in North Dakota begin.
- In the 15 years prior to 1979 there were 49 hunting-related fatalities in the state.
- 1996-2010 – Six hunting-related fatalities in the state.
- 2011-16 – Two hunting-related fatalities in the state.
- 1979-95 – 100,000 students certified through hunter education program.
- 1996-2016 – Another 105,000 students certified through hunter education program.

NORTH DAKOTA HUNTER EDUCATION MANUAL



A CHUM SPORT

based association for the Ten Commandments used in the North Dakota Hunter Education program



- 1. ALCOHOL** - Avoid the use of alcohol or other mood altering drugs before or while shooting.
- 2. CLIMB** - Never climb a fence or tree, or jump a ditch or log, with a loaded firearm.
- 3. HARD** - Never shoot a bullet at a flat, hard surface or water.
- 4. UNLOAD** - Unload firearms when not in use.
- 5. MUZZLE** - Control the direction of your firearm's muzzle.
- 6. STORE** - Store firearms and ammunition separately.
- 7. POINT** - Never point a firearm at anything you do not want to shoot.
- 8. OBSTRUCTION** - Be sure the barrel and action are clear of obstructions and that you have only the ammunition of proper size for the firearm you are carrying.
- 9. RESPECT** - Treat every firearm with the same respect due a loaded firearm.
- 10. TARGET** - Identify your target and what is beyond it.

(A CHUM SPORT created by Neal Drummond, Glenfield, North Dakota)



The traditional hunter education course is offered as a classroom course and requires a minimum of 14 hours. Classes are taught by certified volunteers who determine the location and time of classes within their communities.



RON WILSON

proper guidance. And once they turn 18 and meet all the requirements, they become master instructors.

"I hope this is an attractive program for kids in North Dakota," Mazur said. "We need to get them interested when they are young and hopefully they'll decide to stick with the program."

While the process to become a hunter education instructor hasn't changed much (visit the Department's website at gf.nd.gov to get the process rolling), adjustments are ongoing in the Department's continuing education effort with current instructors.

Starting in 2015, Game and Fish has hosted instructor academies to discuss new teaching methods and strategies to bring continuity to the courses throughout the state. This year, academies were held in Devils Lake and Medora.

"Because our instructors are doing such an important job, we want to empower them and give them the best tools to be the best teachers they can be," Link said. "That's what the academy is really about."

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



Volunteer hunter education instructor Eric Viall, Ray, sent this unsolicited letter to the Game and Fish Department in summer 2015.

Dear Outdoorsmen and Women,

The youth of the state have a milestone to complete if they want to stride in the footsteps of their ancestors.

Hunter education has been a rite of passage in the state since it was required, starting in 1979. I took the class back in 1998, and still remember the excitement.

I worked through the hunter's ten commandments that first night and bombed the quiz the second night. We watched survival videos on how to get water from desert plants, remaining calm in survival situations, and when to hold back on an unsafe shot. I practiced my carries at home with Dad and practiced crossing an imaginary fence.

The crowning moment was not the night I passed the test, but the day I came home from school to find an envelope waiting with my name on it. I opened the envelope, saw the orange hunter education graduate card, and held the ticket to the outdoors in my hand. The card represented my promotion from bird dog to hunter.

I was an avid hunter throughout high school and my first couple years of college. However, the demands of graduate school pulled me away from the outdoors. I missed my time in the field and wanted to rediscover my passion.

Three years ago I decided to become a North Dakota hunter education instructor. Seeing the faces of the young people who enter those doors on the first day of class brings back the excitement of the outdoors. The students beam with eagerness to learn the correct methods for outdoor safety. During class, I witnessed the passion these young men and women have for exploring the outdoors and spending time with friends and family, which reignited the passion I once held for outdoor sports.

I always considered myself a safe hunter, but now I feel an even greater responsibility to set a good example for the next generation. Moreover, I have become a student again. I find myself reading more conservation and hunting articles to stay one step ahead of those random questions that are so often fired off in class.

I encourage anyone to become an instructor, to reignite that passion for the outdoors. I learn with my students and, more importantly, from my students. The questions students ask challenge one to think quickly and admit that you do not know it all.

Being an instructor provides an opportunity to work with the next generation of hunters. One can feed off the energy that can only reside in the mind of a 12-year-old on the cusp of leaving behind the ranks of "bird dog" and entering the ranks of "hunter."

Sharing your knowledge will stir a new fire for your passion, and you will open the doors to the next generation of hunters. You will not regret the decision for a moment.

Sincerely,

Eric Viall

Eric Viall

A close-up photograph of a man's face in the background, looking down at a large, dark, textured rock in the foreground. The rock is covered in numerous small, dark, oval-shaped zebra mussels. One larger, more prominent mussel is visible on the right side of the rock. The background is blurred, showing a natural outdoor setting.

BLOCKING Zebra Mussel MOVEMENT

CRAIG BIRLE

Adult zebra mussels found on a rock in the Red River in fall of 2015.

By Ron Wilson

T

he Red River has long been known as the longest north-flowing river in North America that, besides that fun fact, also harbors an abundant trophy channel catfish population.

Added to the Red's profile in 2015 was the discovery of adult zebra mussels along the river's meandering course from Wahpeton to Drayton.

While the ecological fallout of having these adult invasive species in the Red River is uncertain, what's clear is the unmistakable effort to keep anglers and other water users, unwittingly or otherwise, from transporting zebra mussels to other waters in the state.

Oftentimes, the penalty for aquatic nuisance species getting traction in waters where they don't belong is severe. Biologists have been clear in telling us for years that ANS can greatly degrade or ruin habitats, and compete with native species for food and space.

Moreover, not only can fisheries suffer, but so too can communities and industries that rely on lakes or rivers for their water supply. The cost of controlling established aquatic nuisance species far exceeds the cost of keeping them from spreading into and across North Dakota.

Greg Power, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries chief, said because of the Red's water chemistry and sediment load, the ecological influence zebra mussels have on the river may not be significant.

"The verdict, however, is really unknown at this time," Power said. "So too is the economic impact zebra mussels may have on municipal, residential and industrial water intake structures that feed into the Red River. Is it going to be like they saw decades ago in Lake Erie where zebra mussels literally clogged pipes?"

While the situation in this eastern North Dakota river will be closely monitored, of great concern for Game and Fish Department officials is preventing the spread of zebra mussels elsewhere in the state.

"We don't want to know the ecological impact that zebra mussels would have on, say, Lake Sakakawea or Devils Lake," Power said. "That's why prevention is the key."

Following the discovery of zebra mussels in the Red River in 2015, Game and Fish implemented two new emergency rules to prevent the spread of the exotic.

Effective April 1, one of these rules applies statewide. According to the 2016-18 North Dakota Fishing Guide:

- *All drain plugs that hold back water must be removed, and all draining devices must be open on all watercraft and recreational bilges and confined spaces, during any out-of-water transport of same.*

This new rule complements a regulation that has been in place for a number of years, which mandates that all water must be drained from boats and other watercraft, including bilges, livewells and motors before leaving a water body or entering the state.

"There are so many different conduits and risks when it comes to the transportation and spread of

aquatic nuisance species," Power said. "What we can do something about is the trafficking of water by people."

Power said it's all about compliance.

"Really, what we're asking anglers and other waters

The ecological influence zebra mussels will have on the Red River, a celebrated fishery for trophy channel catfish, is unclear at this time.



CRAIG BIRLE

While it's clear that zebra mussels have gained some footing in the Red River, state wildlife officials want to make sure these invasive species aren't spread elsewhere in the state.



CRAIG BHRLE



users to do is minor ... pull their plugs and leave them out," Power said. "It may be an inconvenience for some, but in the scheme of things, it's some very affordable insurance that will protect all of North Dakota."

Power said a number of anglers he's talked to about the no-plug regulation understand the significance of preventing the spread of ANS.

"They said they get it, that they understand what's at stake, but some also said that it's a habit to drain their boat and then put the plug back in," he said. "It's a habit they know they'll need to break."

In addition to the new statewide rule of pulling your boat's drain plugs, the other emergency rule implemented in 2015 for the Red River is:

- *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 waters. Anglers must properly dispose of unused bait away from the river, as dumping bait in the water or on shore is illegal.*

"Concerning the Red River and bait water, anglers can't ignore this," Power said. "Given the infestations we saw last year in the Red, there were estimates of six to eight live veligers (zebra mussel young) per 5 gallon bucket."

Elsewhere in the state, Power said anglers can transport live bait in water in containers of 5 gallons or less in volume.

Department fisheries supervisors and personnel have for a number of years inspected waters across the state for all aquatic nuisance species. While these efforts will continue, Power said there will be an emphasis on monitoring fisheries in the eastern third of the state for zebra mussel young.

"Early detection is important," Power said. "If we discover zebra mussel veligers in a specific lake, maybe we can prevent further spreading by not allowing anglers to transport live bait in water away from that fishery like we are doing on the Red."

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

A rule that applies statewide calls for all drain plugs that hold back water to be removed from boats during any out-of-water transport.



MIKE ANDERSON

AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES ALERT
ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS APPLY

ANGLERS MUST:
Remove all water from bait buckets or bait containers when leaving this water, or any of its tributaries up to the first vehicular bridge or crossing.

BOATERS MUST:
Pull all drain plugs, drain water, and leave plugs out when watercraft is transported anywhere in the state.

INSPECT - REMOVE - DRAIN
WATERCRAFT FOR ANS PLUGS, PLANTS AND ANS ALL WATER

For more information, visit www.gf.nd.gov
NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

Signs like this will be placed along the North Dakota side of the Red River to alert anglers to the new rules.

ANS on the Internet

To learn more about aquatic nuisance species, ANS regulations in North Dakota, or see a list of infested waters in the state, visit the Game and Fish Department's website at gf.nd.gov.

ANS Education at Boat Ramps

North Dakota Game and Fish Department officials want to know what anglers and other waters users already know about aquatic nuisance species, while encouraging compliance in a statewide effort to prevent the introduction and spread of harmful exotics.

Jessica Howell, Department ANS coordinator, said these particular tasks and others fall into the hands of four summer employees hired by Valley City State University, through a grant provided by Game and Fish.

"They will be working primarily at high use boat ramps throughout summer, talking to boaters about what they know about aquatic nuisance species and where they learned it from," Howell said. "They'll also talk to boaters about North Dakota's ANS regulations."

Howell said a crew of two summer employees will work boat ramps at Devils Lake, while another crew will work lakes in southeastern and south central North Dakota.

The crews will work mostly weekends from the end of May until about mid-August.

"They are also going to show boaters how to conduct ANS inspections," Howell said. "While we talk about cleaning, draining and drying your equipment, the summer employees will show boaters how to do those things. They'll be looking for aquatic vegetation, anything attached to a hull or prop, and they'll be looking for water in boats and make sure drain plugs are pulled."

The inspections, Howell said, are voluntary.

"This is an educational tool for us," she said. "We just want boaters to understand how important this issue is and how harmful aquatic nuisance species can be to our resources."



BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor

Deer Season Set, Online Apps Available

North Dakota's 2016 deer season is set with 49,000 licenses available to hunters this fall, 5,725 more than last year.

Jeb Williams, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife chief, said population and harvest data indicate the state's deer population is stable to increasing, primarily due to seven years of reduced gun licenses combined with mild winters.

"Consequently, a small increase in deer licenses will provide increased hunting opportunities, while continuing to encourage population growth," Williams said. "Most of the additional licenses are for antlered deer."

The mule deer population in the badlands increased for the fourth consecutive year, with numbers showing the spring mule deer index is up 21 percent from last year.

Williams said a conservative management approach will remain in the badlands, and for the fifth consecutive year, Game and Fish will not issue any antlerless mule deer licenses in units 4A, 4B and 4C. However, for the first time since 2011, mule deer doe licenses are available in units 3B1, 3B2, 4D, 4E and 4F.

"Mule deer numbers are above the population objective and long-term average in certain areas, therefore a limited number of antlerless mule deer licenses are available in these units," Williams said.



MIKE LALONDE

The number of licenses available for 2016 includes 2,550 for antlered mule deer, an increase of 675 from last year; 928 for muzzleloader, an increase of 100 from last year; and 225 restricted youth antlered mule deer, an increase of 38 from last year.

North Dakota's 2016 deer gun season opens November 4 at noon and continues through November 20. Online applications for regular deer gun, youth, muzzleloader, and resident gratis and nonresident landowner licenses are available through the Game and Fish Department's website at gf.nd.gov. Also, paper applications are available at vendors and other locations throughout the state. The deadline for applying is June 1.

State law requires residents age 18 or older to prove residency on

the application by submitting a valid North Dakota driver's license number or a North Dakota nondriver photo identification number. Applications cannot be processed without this information.

Gratis applications received on or before the regular deer gun lottery application deadline (June 1) will be issued an any-legal-deer license. As per state law, gratis applications received after the deadline will be processed based on licenses remaining after the lottery – generally only antlerless licenses remain.

Total deer licenses are determined by harvest rates, aerial surveys, depredation reports, hunter observations, input at advisory board meetings, and comments from the public, landowners and Department field staff.

REFUNDS CAN HELP PLOTS

Unsuccessful applicants to North Dakota's 2016 deer lottery can donate their refund to the Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program.

The option to donate to the PLOTS program is new this year. The North Dakota State Legislature created this option in 2015 with nearly unanimous support. Donations are not tax deductible.

Kevin Kading, Game and Fish Department private land section leader, said proceeds from donations will focus on deer habitat and hunting access to deer habitat.

Camping Restrictions on Some WMAs

Some state wildlife management areas in western North Dakota and along Lake Sakakawea will continue to have camping restrictions this summer.

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

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

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

In addition, the following WMAs are closed to camping on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, but open to camping Thursday-Monday: Bull Creek in Billings County; Alkali Creek and Spring Creek in Bowman County; Smishek Lake and Short Creek Dam in Burke County; Apple Creek in Burleigh County; Harris M. Baukol in Divide County; Killdeer Mountains in Dunn County; Camels Hump Lake in Golden Valley County; Audubon, Custer Mine, Deepwater Creek, deTrobriand, Douglas Creek and Wolf Creek in McLean County; Beaver Creek and Hille in Mercer County; Crown Butte Lake and Storm Creek in Morton County; Cedar Lake and Speck Davis Pond in Slope County; and McGregor Dam in Williams County.

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

The Game and Fish Department will lift the Tuesday-Wednesday camping restriction for the week of Memorial Day, May 30 – June 3. This same waiver will allow camping on those WMAs on Tuesdays and Wednesdays during all state-recognized holiday weeks throughout the year, including 4th of July week (July 4-8), and Labor Day (September 5-9).

Glass bottles are prohibited on all WMAs. Other camping restrictions at all WMAs are posted at entry points. Additional WMA rules and regulations are available on the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov.

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



LARA ANDERSON

SPRING MULE DEER SURVEY COMPLETE

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department completed its annual spring mule deer survey in April, and results indicate western North Dakota's mule deer population has increased 21 percent from last year.

Bruce Stillings, Department big game supervisor, said the increase is a result of higher adult doe survival in 2015, three consecutive years of good fawn production, and good overwinter survival.

"These factors, along with no harvest of antlerless mule deer during the past four deer hunting seasons, have resulted in mule deer numbers doubling since we experienced our low in 2012," Stillings said.

Biologists counted 2,880 mule deer in 306.3 square miles during this year's survey. Overall mule deer density in the badlands was 9.4 deer per square mile, which is up from 7.8 deer per square mile in 2015.

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

Pronghorn Hunters Successful in 2015

Hunter success during last fall's pronghorn hunting season was 81 percent, according to statistics provided by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

The season was held in units 3B, 4A and 4C. Game and Fish issued 409 licenses (266 lottery and 143 gratis), and 385 hunters took 312 pronghorn, consisting of 286 bucks, 15 does and 11 fawns. Each hunter spent an average of 2.4 days afield.

The 2016 pronghorn hunting season will be determined in early July.



BIGHORN SHEEP POPULATION INCREASES

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual spring bighorn sheep survey revealed a minimum of 292 bighorn sheep in western North Dakota, up 8 percent from last year and 3 percent above the five-year average.

Biologists counted 88 rams, 160 ewes and 44 lambs, not including approximately 30 bighorns in the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

Brett Wiedmann, Department big game biologist, said the survey is good news after an all-age die-off that began in 2014.

"This year's number was encouraging given the ongoing effects of bacterial pneumonia throughout most of the badlands," Wiedmann said.

The northern badlands population, which was hit the hardest from the die-off, increased 13 percent from last year. However, the southern badlands population was down 19 percent.

"Overall, rams, ewes and lambs all increased from last year," Wiedmann said. "We were also pleased to see that 76 percent of lambs counted during last summer's survey survived the winter, which is above average. The recruitment rate of lambs per adult ewes was 31 percent, equal to the long-term average."

Game and Fish Department biologists count and classify all bighorn sheep in late summer, and then recount lambs the following March, as they approach one year of age, to determine recruitment.

"Adult mortality slowed significantly in 2015, and we had a good number of lambs survive in 2014 and 2015 to compensate for most of the adult losses," Wiedmann said. "The bad news is that many bighorns are still showing signs of pneumonia, so next year's survey will be important in determining if the state's population is continuing to recover from the disease outbreak, or if the pathogens are likely to persist and cause a long-term population decline."

Dr. Dan Grove, Department veterinarian, said disease testing last winter revealed that deadly pathogens were still present in 16 of 22 bighorns tested. He said animals continue to succumb to pneumonia, albeit at a much slower rate.

A bighorn sheep hunting season is tentatively scheduled in 2016, unless there is a recurrence of bacterial pneumonia. The status of the bighorn sheep season will be determined September 1, after summer population surveys are complete.



CRAIG BIRLE

2015 Deer Season Summarized

A total of 39,470 North Dakota deer hunters took approximately 26,700 deer during the 2015 deer gun hunting season, according to a post-season survey conducted by the State Game and Fish Department.

Game and Fish made available and issued 43,275 deer gun licenses last year. Overall hunter success was 68 percent, with each hunter spending an average of 4.3 days in the field.

Hunter success for antlered white-tailed deer was 70 percent, and antlerless whitetail was 64 percent.

Mule deer buck success was 86 percent. No mule deer doe licenses were issued in 2015.

Hunters with any-antlered or any-antlerless licenses generally harvest white-tailed deer, as these licenses are predominantly in units with mostly whitetails. Buck hunters had a success rate of 75 percent, while doe hunters had a success rate of 67 percent.

Game and Fish issued 826 muzzleloader licenses in 2015, and 745 hunters who participated harvested 348 white-tailed deer (194 antlered, 154 antlerless). Hunter success was 47 percent, with each hunter spending an average of 5.9 days in the field.

A record 25,703 archery licenses (23,710 resident, 1,993 nonresident) were issued in 2015. In total, 21,680 bow hunters harvested 7,527 deer (6,777 whitetails, 750 mule deer), for a success rate of 35 percent. Bucks accounted for 75 percent of the deer harvested with a bow. Archers spent an average of 10.7 days afield.

In addition, 4,004 youth licenses were issued in 2015. During the youth season, 3,487 hunters harvested 1,832 deer (393 bucks, 1,439 does). Hunter success was 52 percent, and each hunter spent an average of 2.9 days in the field. Youth hunters in the regular deer gun season harvested an additional 240 deer (196 bucks, 44 does) for an overall success rate of 59 percent.

NASP State Tournament Results

A total of 530 archers competed in the North Dakota National Archery in the Schools Program state bull's-eye tournament March 18-19 in Minot.

Hankinson students claimed top team honors in the elementary (grades 4-6) and middle school (grades 7-8) divisions. North Sargent claimed first place in the high school team (grades 9-12) division.

Overall male and female winners were Spencer Brockman of North Sargent and Kate Loewen of Hankinson.

Winning teams and the top 10 individuals qualify for the national tournament, scheduled for May in Louisville, Kentucky. The Game and Fish Department and North Dakota Youth Archery Advisory Council contribute \$3,000 in travel assistance to the first place team in each division, and \$1,000 to the overall male and female individual winners. In addition, \$20,000 in college scholarships were awarded by the NDYAAC to the top five overall scorers for both boys and girls.

Qualifying for nationals in each division are:

- **High school boys** – 1) Brockman; 2) Kyle Andres, Medina; 3) Dawson McKeever, North Sargent; 4) Mark McFarland, North Sargent; 5) Steve Dudas, North Sargent; 6) Cheyne Meyer, Hankinson; 7) Dylan Jost, Wahpeton; 8) Alex Huff, Medina; 9) Chase Bladow, Hankinson; 10) Jonathan Goroski, Wahpeton.
- **High school girls** – 1) Loewen; 2) Lisa Buckhaus, Hankinson; 3) Cassie Boelke, Wahpeton; 4) Jaidyn Sander, Hankinson; 5) Kayla Hiam, Hope-Page; 6) Kailee Klein, Wahpeton; 7) Maddie Weigum, Twin Buttes; 8) Mary Goroski, Wahpeton; 9) Sara Hatlewick, Gackle-Streeter; 10) Brinley Mathern, Edgeley.
- **Middle school boys** – 1) Avery McFarland, North Sargent; 2) Braxtyn Hamann, North Sargent; 3)



CRAIG BIRNIE

Tate Zerface, Hope-Page; 4) Tavon Stadler, Griggs County Central; 5) Brady McKenna, North Sargent; 6) Austin Bladow, Hankinson; 7) Derrick Zietlow, Hankinson; 8) Brennan Wiederrich, Edgeley; 9) Will Peckham, Montpelier; 10) Bronson Haugen, Barnes County.

- **Middle school girls** – 1) Sadie Keller, Hankinson; 2) Grace Neameyer, Mt. Pleasant; 3) Alicia Biewer, Hankinson; 4) Olivia Balch, Pingree-Buchanan; 5) Nadia Post, Glenburn; 6) Jaden Gilje, North Sargent; 7) Olivia Prochnow, Hankinson; 8) Abby Helm, Medina; 9) Tenley Evans, Hankinson; 10) Kendra Landsiedel, Wilton.
- **Elementary boys** – 1) Dylan Carlson, Edgeley; 2) Ethan Millner, Hankinson; 3) Aiden Bladow, Hankinson; 4) Jonathan Hill, Wahpeton; 5) Carter Spitzer, Kensal; 6) Matthew Wehseler, North Sargent; 7) Maxin Walock, Oakes; 8) Riley Christensen, North Sargent; 9) Max Fronk, St. John's; 10) Kendal Sondrol, Wilton.
- **Elementary girls** – 1) Jaycee Brown, Hankinson; 2) Lily Wiek, Oakes; 3) Reagan Teske, Edgeley; 4) Abi Bronson, Wahpeton; 5) Ariana Onchuck, Hankinson; 6) Kennedy

Faber, North Sargent; 7) Hannah Neameyer, Mt. Pleasant; 8) Kaydence Brummond, Oakes; 9) Kirstan Loewen, Hankinson; 10) Madison Sitzman, Edgeley.

In addition, 288 archers competed in a NASP 3-D Challenge, run simultaneously with the bull's-eye tournament.

Top performers were:

- **High school boys** – 1) Brockman; 2) David Loegering, Central Cass; 3) McKeever; 4) Garrett Ponzer, North Sargent; 5) Ted Mandt, Wahpeton.
- **High school girls** – 1) Loewen; 2) Boelke; 3) Laura Kielb, North Sargent; 4) Olivia Waswick, North Sargent; 5) Sabyl Hunt, Dunseith.
- **Middle school boys** – 1) McKenna; 2) McFarland; 3) Hamann; 4) Logan Stirling, Hankinson; 5) George Ringuette, Montpelier.
- **Middle school girls** – 1) Neameyer; 2) Post; 3) Biewer; 4) Tavi Hirschert, Wilton; 5) Landsiedel.
- **Elementary boys** – 1) Hill; 2) Sondrol; 3) Christensen; 4) Bladow; 5) Noah Skroch, Hankinson.
- **Elementary girls** – 1) Wiek; 2) Faber; 3) Loewen; 4) Lily Walth, North Sargent; 5) Estella Prochnow, Hankinson.



Agency Sponsors Earth Day Project

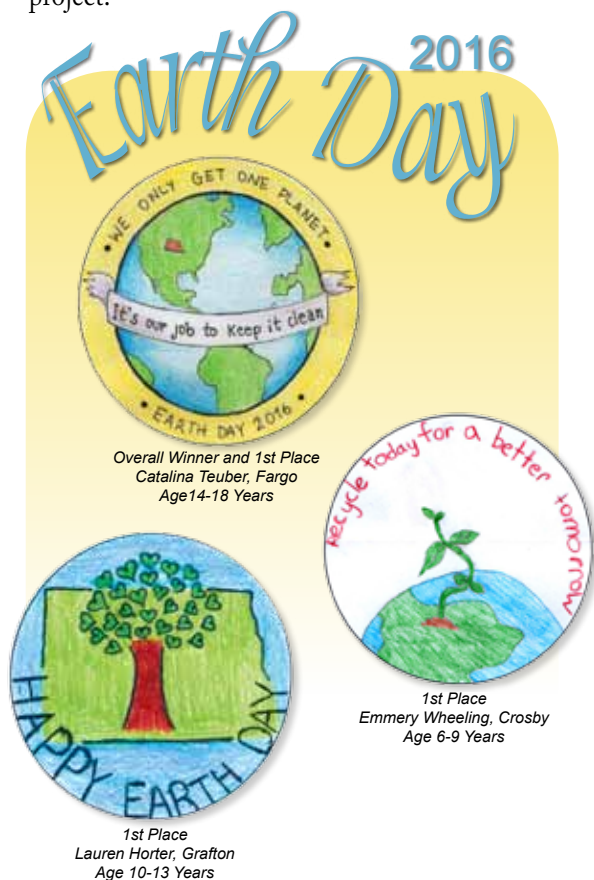
The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is again celebrating Earth Day by sponsoring clean-up days on public-owned or managed lands.

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

Last winter the Game and Fish Department sponsored a contest for students ages 6-18 to design a North Dakota Earth Day patch. Winners in the three age categories were Emmery Wheeling of Crosby (6-9), Lauren Horter of Grafton (10-13), and Catalina Teuber of Fargo (14-18). Teuber's design was chosen the contest winner, and is depicted on this year's Earth Day patch.

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

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



Tennessee Man Cited for Guiding Without License

A Tennessee man has lost his hunting privileges for 18 months and was fined more than \$4,000 for acting as a hunting outfitter in North Dakota without a license.

Robert "Adam" Whitten, 40, of Counce, Tennessee, was charged October 24, 2015, by Erik Schmidt, district game warden, Linton, after he followed up on a complaint of unlawfully placed "No Hunting" signs on private property.

Through his investigation, Schmidt determined Whitten, who had acted as an outfitter in the past in Tennessee, was staying on a rented farmstead in southwestern Emmons County for most of October. Prior to his arrival in North Dakota, Whitten took money from nonresident hunters for what he was advertising as a place to stay and access to 5,000 acres of hunting land for waterfowl and upland game.

In North Dakota it is illegal to act as a guide or outfitter without first securing a license through the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. Licensed outfitters in North Dakota are required to pass a written test, be certified in first aid, and carry liability insurance, among other requirements. The definition of outfitting in North Dakota includes providing facilities or services and receiving compensation from a third party for the use of land for the conduct of outdoor recreational activities including hunting.

Schmidt charged Whitten with two counts of outfitting without a license, both Class A misdemeanors. The maximum penalty for a Class A misdemeanor in North Dakota is a \$3,000 fine and one year imprisonment.

Under a plea agreement approved by South Central District judge Thomas Schneider, Whitten was required to pay \$3,325 in fines and court costs, with \$1,000 suspended for a period of two years for the first count and \$3,025 in fines and court costs with \$1,000 suspended for a period of two years for the second count.

In addition to fines and fees, Whitten had his hunting privileges suspended for 18 months and was placed on unsupervised probation for one year. Because North Dakota is a member of the North American Wildlife Violator Compact, Whitten could potentially lose hunting privileges in other compact states.

SUMMER VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has many opportunities for volunteers to help out with education efforts this summer.

Anyone interested in helping Game and Fish's conservation education efforts, and volunteering time to sustain the state's outdoor heritage, can call Game and Fish at 701-328-6615.

Volunteer fishing camp instructors must become an official Game and Fish Department volunteer, become a Lure 'Em For Life member (\$10 annually) and pass a background check. Contact Jeff Long, Department education coordinator, at 701-328-6322 to begin this process.

Some other volunteer opportunities coming this summer include:

- National Guard Fish Camp, June 5-8, at Camp of the Cross, Garrison. The camp is conducted as a partnership between Lure 'Em For Life, North Dakota Game and Fish, and the North Dakota National Guard and is open to kids ages 9-14 whose parent or parents are active North Dakota National Guard members. Volunteers are needed to teach classes such as knot tying, fish identification and shore-fishing. Volunteers with boats are also needed to take kids on the water.
- Camp of the Cross Ministries Fish Camp, June 20-23, at Camp of the Cross, Garrison. The camp is organized and run by CCM, but volunteers

are needed to help with fishing. This three-day camp was developed by CCM as a "specialty camp," focusing on one of three areas, including fishing.

- Summer Fish Camp, August 7-12, at Lakewood Bible Camp, Devils Lake. Similar to the June camp in Garrison, but this four-day camp is open to anyone ages 8-14.
- North Dakota State Fair, Minot. The Game and Fish Department operates an outdoor skills area during the State Fair where kids of all ages have an opportunity to fish, and shoot pellet guns and bows. There is also a furbearer and many other educational displays. The Outdoors Skills Park is open 1-7 p.m. daily and is operated by volunteers and Game and Fish staff. Lodging and per diem are provided to volunteers working two or more consecutive days.
- Volunteer Recognition Event, August 27, MacLean Rifle Range, Bismarck. Certified Volunteers are encouraged to attend this recognition event. In addition to a picnic meal and awards ceremony, instructors and their families will be able to choose from an array of outdoor activities like rifle and black-powder shooting, shore-fishing, trapping demonstrations and archery. Registration packets will be mailed in early July.

FREE *Fishing* WEEKEND



Free Fishing Weekend

North Dakota's free fishing weekend is June 4-5. Resident anglers may fish that weekend without a license, except for paddlefish. All other fishing regulations apply.

BOAT NORTH DAKOTA COURSE

Boat owners are reminded that children ages 12-15 who want to operate a boat or personal watercraft alone this summer must first take the state's boating basics course.

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

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

While the home-study course is free, there is a fee for the online course. The online provider charges for the course, not the Game and Fish Department.

Upon completion of the online test,

students can print out a temporary certification card, and within 10 days a permanent card will be mailed.

The course covers legal requirements, navigation rules, getting underway, accidents and special topics such as weather, rules of the road, laws, life saving and first aid.

For more information contact Brian Schaffer, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, by email at ndgf@nd.gov; or call 701-328-6300.



Best of Show ★



Valley City Youth Wins Best of Show

An American wigeon was chosen the 2016 Best of Show in the North Dakota Junior Duck Stamp Contest.

Cassidy Fulton, an 18-year-old high school student from Valley City, used acrylic paints for her presentation of a drake wigeon. Her artwork was selected from more than 1,300 entries from across North Dakota.

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

Other first place winners in the four age categories were:

- Grades K-3 – Holdyn Jacobson, Leeds; Gabriel Coleman, Baldwin; and Victoria Crotty, Neche.
- Grades 4-6 – Ella Wallock, Hankinson; Jake Cargo, Towner; and Lucas Hunsakor, Newburg.
- Grades 7-9 – Fischer Ackerson, Sherwood; Rose Zeltinger, Valley City; and Daniel Schumacher, Linton.
- Grades 10-12 – Megan Tichy, Towner and Noelle Thompson, Valley City.

1st Place
Megan Tichy, Towner



LIVE WHITE SUCKER RESTRICTIONS

The State Game and Fish Department reminds anglers that live white suckers are not legal baitfish anywhere in North Dakota, except for the Bois de Sioux and Red rivers.

Greg Power, Department fisheries chief, said the regulation has been in place for most water bodies in the state for more than 20 years, but every spring Game and Fish still gets questions from anglers who wonder if they can use live white suckers for early ice-out northern pike fishing.

“White suckers can and have caused a lot of problems when they get introduced into waters where they were not present,” Power said. “Since we adopted that regulation in 1993, the number of new lakes with introduced white suckers is near zero.”

Although anglers can use live white suckers on the Bois de Sioux and Red rivers and tributaries up to the first vehicular bridge, they are illegal elsewhere. Fathead minnows, sticklebacks and creek chubs are the only legal live baitfish outside of the Bois de Sioux and Red rivers. Dead white suckers that have been preserved by freezing, salting or otherwise treated to inactivate reproductive organs, are legal bait.

Anglers are also reminded that live baitfish or other live aquatic bait such as leeches, cannot be transported from another state into North Dakota.

STAFF NOTES

HENDRICKSON HONORED

Jeff Hendrickson, Game and Fish Department southwest district fisheries supervisor in Dickinson, was recently honored by the Dakota Chapter of the American Fisheries Society, with the Robert L. Hanten Distinguished Professional Service Award for 2016.



Jeff Hendrickson

Hendrickson was recognized for his work with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department and his efforts in enhancing the resource and the benefits this brought to anglers; and for his contributions to the American Fisheries Society, including serving on numerous committees and holding several elected positions, most recently serving as chapter president in 2011.

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NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

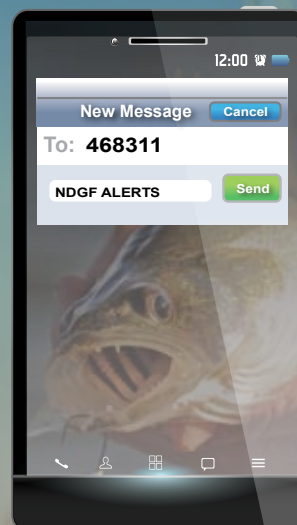
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back cast



By Ron Wilson

I unrolled a foam sleeping pad borrowed from a spare bedroom that hadn't been slept on in months. It didn't fit perfectly and there was some temptation to trim some of the excess, but I decided against it, mostly because I didn't want to run into the house and find a pair of scissors.

With the backseats of my vehicle folded down and the pad in place, it looked doable. Having read a number of stories about adventurous (read: younger) people traveling around the country for weeks at a time, sleeping in the backs of their vehicles and cooking meals on camping stoves sitting in the dirt, I figured we could do it for one night. Not a problem.

It was the last weekend in March and we'd caught a break in the weather – 70 degrees for the high, and 28 for the overnight low. My youngest kid, 12, didn't have school on Monday, so we decided to use the window of freedom to hit the road.

We loaded sleeping bags, pillows, a cooler, spinning rods, fly rods, two tackle boxes, .22-caliber rifle and ammunition. While we didn't have much of a plan, we weren't running screaming into the night, either.

We were thinking of camping at Coal Mine Lake in Sheridan

County and fishing for pike along the way. We brought the .22 because Jack was determined to shoot a cottontail rabbit, cook it over a campfire and make a winter hat out of the pelt when we got home.

Fair enough.

We pulled off and parked at what looked like the only turnout on the paved county road that ran arrow-straight through Lake Harriet and Arena Lake.

We cast spinning gear – red and white Dardevles, hooked to wire leaders – without so much as a bump. I imagined the pike in that cool, late March water, sluggishly hugging the bottom, waiting for things to warm up.

Soon we're joined by two anglers who understood the recipe for early-season pike, bobbers and dead smelt fished on the bottom.

When we left, three pike swung heavy from a metal stringer attached to the side mirror of their pickup. The biggest fish was about 7 pounds.

About an hour north, we turned east off of ND Highway 14 down a gravel road in the direction of Coal Mine Lake.

In the next 5 miles, we saw two bald eagles perched in a lone cottonwood that was weeks away from leafing out, several pheasants, a handful of sharp-tailed

grouse and three moose.

If we were keeping score, we'd decided, the moose scored highest, just because you don't see them every day in North Dakota.

Sitting around the campfire later, eating cold store-bought chicken and recounting an unsuccessful (but not uneventful) cottontail hunt, we'd occasionally lean our heads back and look between cottonwood branches and through wood smoke for what was familiar – big dipper, little dipper, north star

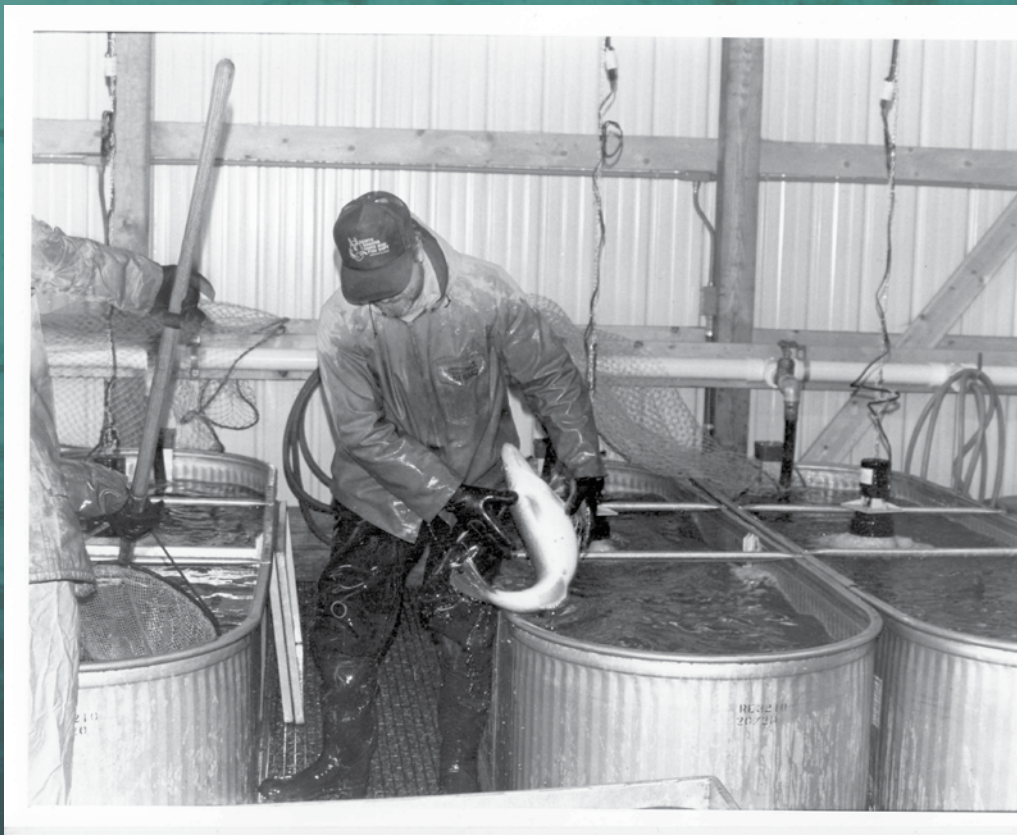
When it was time to turn in, I flipped up the window and swung open the rear door to my Jeep and spread two sleeping bags on top of the foam pad.

In what little illumination the campfire and the vehicle's overhead light offered, our sleeping space looked smaller, a lot smaller, really, than it did in the driveway at home.

Turns out, I hadn't thought the whole sleeping-in-the-back-of-the-rig thing all the way through. That's on me. I'll take the blame for a horrible night's sleep, but I won't apologize for it.

If I'd have stopped and thought everything through over the years, it's unlikely we'd have gotten off the couch.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT ARCHIVE PHOTOS

A Look Back

By Ron Wilson

The peak of the walleye spawn typically occurs when water temperatures are between 48-54 degrees Fahrenheit. In North Dakota, that's sometime between mid-April and early May, depending on the weather and location.

While it's impossible to tell what the weather is doing in this photograph taken in 1989, we know that it's May 3, because Harold Umber, former *North Dakota OUTDOORS* editor, wrote the date on the back of the black and white image.

The photograph was taken in a Game and Fish Department "spawning shack," located at White Earth Bay on Lake Sakakawea.

The White Earth spawning shack – the Game and Fish Department constructed three over the years, two on Sakakawea and one on Lake Oahe – was built in 1985.

According to an article in *North Dakota OUTDOORS* in 1992, the shack was built "to take advantage of the good walleye runs that occurred there and to maximize the egg take from a

walleye population whose future was clouded from a lack of reliable natural reproduction."

Like the others, the spawning shack at White Earth Bay has been out of operation for years, said Greg Power, Department fisheries chief.

"The White Earth Bay shack is still standing and we're in the process of turning it over to a local government entity," Power said. "We haven't turned on the electricity there in years."

When the facility was up and running, it was a busy place in spring for Department fisheries personnel and was a draw to area schools.

"The White Earth shack was a very good instructional tool as busloads of kids would come and watch us spawn fish," Power said. "Having the building got the kids out of the elements because on any given spring day it could be blowing and snowing."

While the shack provided a respite from the weather for fisheries biologists and visitors, hauling fish netted from the lake up to the shack, and moving walleye not quite ready to

spawn from tank to tank, was a lot of work.

"There were instances where we would handle fish several times before they were ready to give up their eggs," Power said. "The way we do it today, we're handling fish two, maybe three times."

Today, instead of being tied to a spawning shack site, fisheries biologists are more mobile.

"We're fortunate to have areas with large concentrations of spawning walleyes and our fisheries biologists are going where the fish are," Power said. "We learned that we had to be mobile. It's all about efficiency."

While walleye spawning operations have changed over time, the goal of gathering enough eggs to meet hatchery requests remains the same.

"We're spawning more fish than a decade ago," Power said. "We also have 59 new walleye lakes that didn't exist a decade ago."

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.