

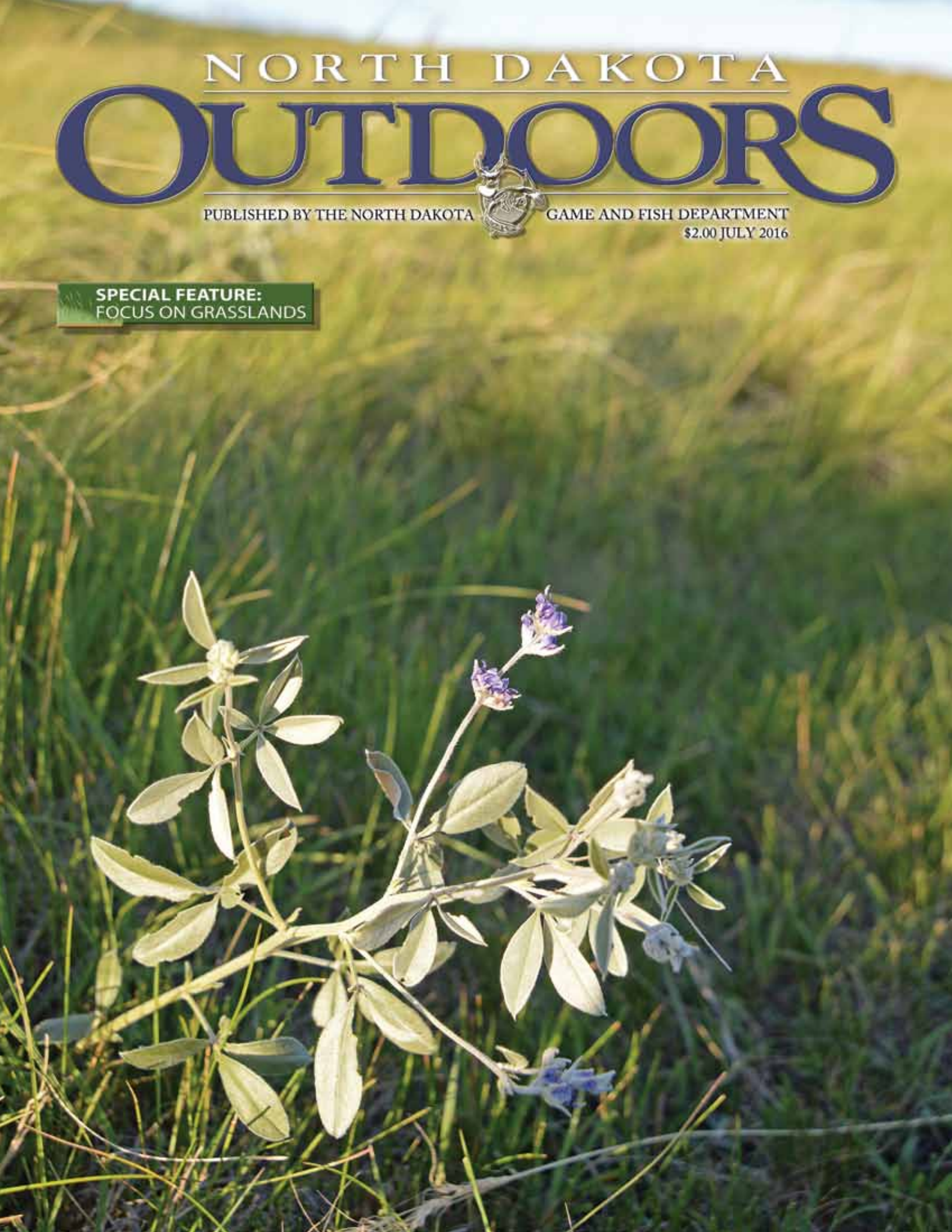
NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA

GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

\$2.00 JULY 2016

SPECIAL FEATURE:
FOCUS ON GRASSLANDS





MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

A quick look at what you'll find in the July issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that a subspecies of moose found in North Dakota and elsewhere could at some time merit protection under the Endangered Species Act. While we respect and understand the process, which could take years to determine if this animal does indeed warrant protection, we feel our stable to increasing moose population is in a good place, and our management and research data will show this.
- Readers of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* understand the importance of habitat in our effort to "protect, conserve and enhance wildlife populations" in the state. This is a topic we touch on often. In the feature that focuses on grasslands in our prairie state, the importance of this type of wildlife habitat is magnified as conservation biologists indicate that more half of the 115 species on the 2015 list of North Dakota Species of Conservation Priority depend on native prairie or other grasslands. That is a telling statistic.
- We applaud everyone, from organizers to student shooters, who participated in the North Dakota High School Clay Target League state tournament in Horace in June. While the goal of the participants was to dust as many flying orange clays as possible, their attention

to safe gun handling techniques were just as significant.

A quick look at something that, because of magazine deadline constraints, wasn't included in the following pages, but deserves mentioning.

- North Dakota is blessed with more fishing waters today than any time in our history. Many of those waters are established and new walleye lakes. In a state where that vast majority of anglers pursue this fish species above all others, it's important to note a record 150-plus lakes across North Dakota were stocked earlier this summer with nearly 11 million walleye fingerlings. This is significant because it demonstrates the importance of our working relationship and support of the two federal fish hatcheries in the state where the fingerlings were raised before release. According to Game and Fish Department fisheries staff, 10.4 million of those fingerlings were produced at Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery, which is probably the most walleye ever produced at a single hatchery anywhere in the country. This is significant and anglers need to understand this.

When you leave these pages of *OUTDOORS*, pause, ponder and look around. What you'll find, I'm certain, are a number of other things to applaud and appreciate about North Dakota's great outdoors. With summer edging in the direction of fall, get outside and enjoy some of it.

Terry Steinwand

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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

Silverleaf scurfpea is a staple of native prairie in North Dakota, not-so-visible from a distance, but worth a closer look. (Photo by Craig Bihrl, Bismarck.)



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Shooting Clays at State

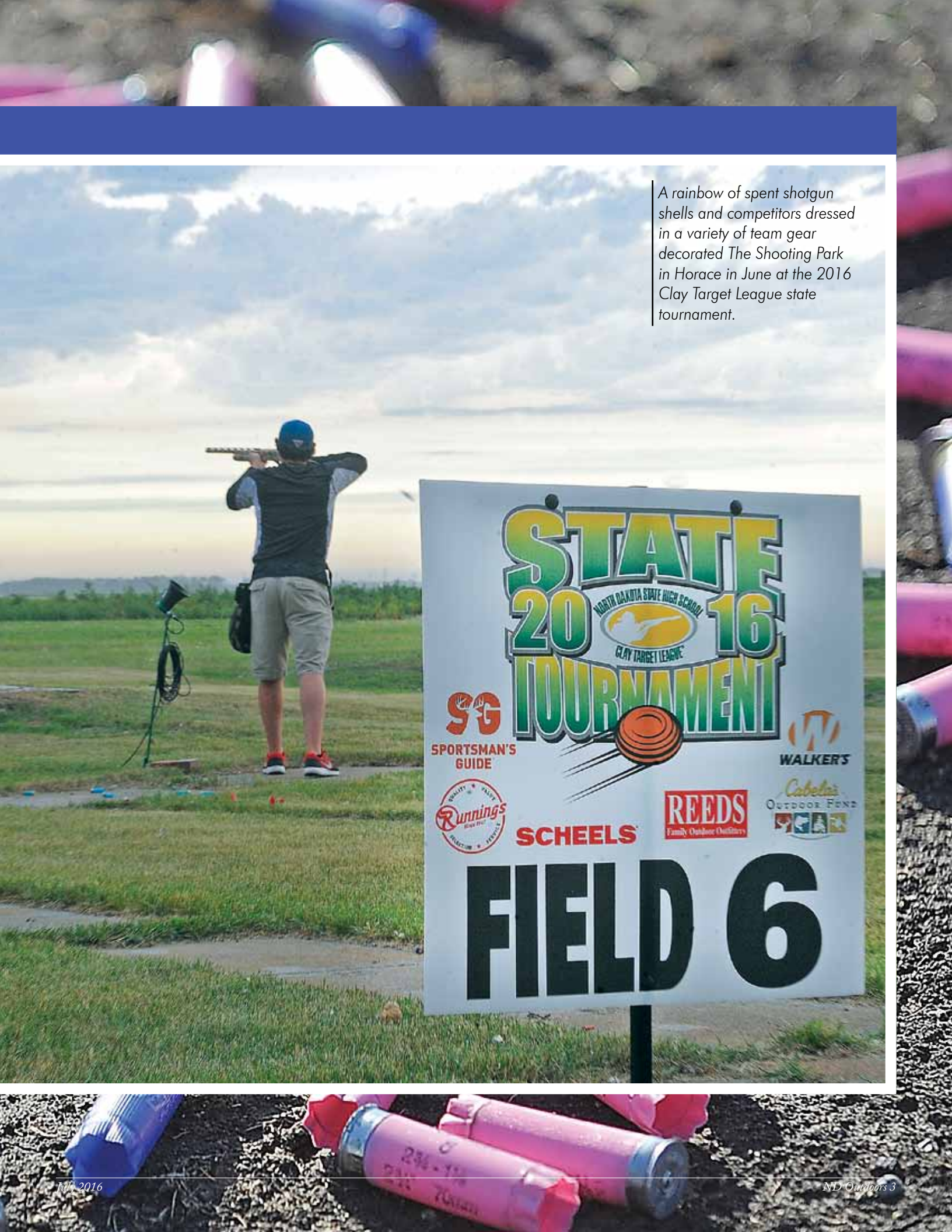
Story by Ron Wilson

Photos by Darren Gibbins

With summer break in full swing, hundreds of North Dakota high school students gathered in June to compete for a state title.

The North Dakota State High School Clay Target League held its season-ending event, the 2016 Clay Target League state tournament June 18 at The Shooting Park in Horace.





A rainbow of spent shotgun shells and competitors dressed in a variety of team gear decorated The Shooting Park in Horace in June at the 2016 Clay Target League state tournament.

Bryar Hanson led Central High School in Grand Forks to the title. The Central sophomore scored 99 out of 100 in the boys varsity division to earn the High Gun Over-all award.

Ambrosia Hettwer of Red River High School in Grand Forks won the girls varsity division with a score of 94. She was the only girl to score in the 90s.

"The turnout for this year's state tournament was amazing," said Jim Sable, the league's executive director, "and we're already seeing interest from other schools around the state."

In 2016, more than 400 student athletes representing 23 high schools competed in the spring season. The state tournament attracted more than 360 participants vying for team

Members of the Enderlin clay target team switch shooting stations.



The North Dakota State High School Clay Target League is co-ed. Boys and girls shoot on the same team and compete by the same rules.





and individual honors. Additionally, more than 1,000 spectators attended the event.

The North Dakota State High School Clay Target League is an affiliate of the USA High School Clay Target League, which is a registered nonprofit organization.

The extracurricular activity operates independently of school programs and funding. Overall, 13,000 student athletes participated in 12 states in spring.

Greg Link, North Dakota Game and Fish Department conservation and communications chief, said the agency is a supporter of the program, having provided a number of grants to teams through its Encouraging Tomorrow's Hunters grant program.

"We see a very obvious opportunity to partner with an extracurricular activity that stimulates an early interest in shooting, while teaching safe gun handling, proper form and improved efficiency," Link said.

The North Dakota State High School Clay Target League state tournament featured more than 360 participants from 23 high school teams, including (top left) Grand Forks Central, (top right) Devils Lake and (bottom) Larimore.



TEAM STANDINGS

- Central High School – 475
- Devils Lake High School – 472
- Red River High School – 468

HIGH GUN BOYS

- Bryar Hanson, Central High School – 99
- Braylen Bruns, Valley City High School – 98
- Warren Blanchfield, Devils Lake High School – 98

HIGH GUN GIRLS

- Ambrosia Hettwer, Red River High School – 94
- Gabby Fischer, Central High School – 87
- Kelsey Stumvoll, Garrison High School – 87

Not to mention, Link added, that every shotgun shell expended directly funds future wildlife conservation and habitat restoration.

“Because the fundamentals and foundations taught and developed as part of clay target league shooting are the very same qualities we want to instill in any young hunter just beginning their lifetime pursuit of wild quarry,” he said, “it only makes good sense the Game and Fish Department sees a natural fit with this activity.”



RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*. **DARREN GIBBENS** is a freelance photographer from West Fargo.

According to the league's website, Shanley High School (top) was one of a number of new teams to join the clay target league in 2016. A participant from Larimore High School (bottom) busts a clay target.



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focus on
GRASSLANDS
in a prairie state

Not every grassland is a prairie, but a prairie is most certainly a grassland, as are pastures, rangelands, hayland and any other large expanse of mostly treeless landscape covered in green. People sometimes see grasslands as empty or unexciting, and it often takes a closer inspection to appreciate all the birds, mammals and insects that depend on grassland for their existence. This special section is a start of that “closer inspection,” focusing on the values and importance of North Dakota’s prairies and other grasslands.

NORTH DAKOTA GRASSLAND HISTORY

Prior to settlement in the late 1800s, North Dakota was described as “great uninterrupted expanses of nearly treeless prairie ... the only extensive tracts of forest were restricted to floodplains and east- or north-facing bluffs along rivers and large creeks to certain prominent hills or escarpments ... and hundreds of thousands of shallow ponds and lakes in the glaciated regions.” (Stewart, 1976).

The landscape described by many early explorers and pioneers has changed considerably, and North Dakota is not the vast expanse of treeless prairie it once was. It is estimated that more than 50 percent

of North Dakota’s original prairie and wetlands have been converted to cropland, urban areas, roads and other infrastructure.

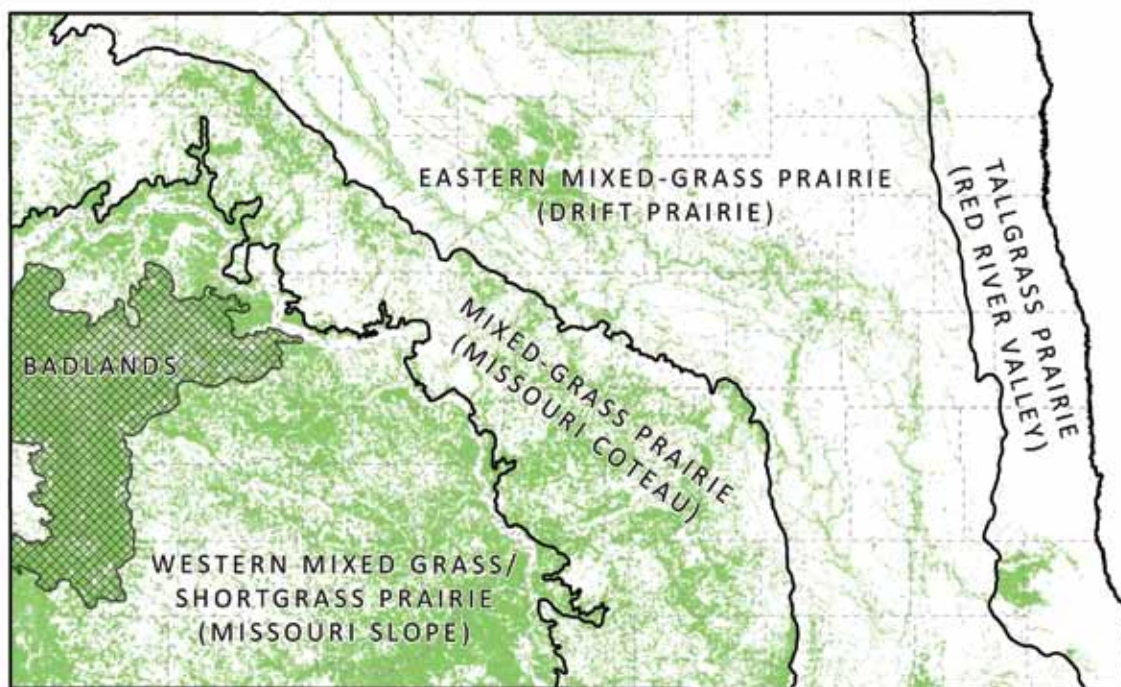
As such, many wildlife and insect species that depend on North Dakota grass as part of their life cycle are not as numerous as they once were.

Some of these species, like the LeConte’s sparrow and Poweshiek skipperling butterfly, are little known outside of the scientific community. However, iconic species like North Dakota’s state bird the Western meadowlark, and the familiar monarch butterfly, are also getting considerable attention.

In late 2015 North Dakota Game and Fish Department biologists completed

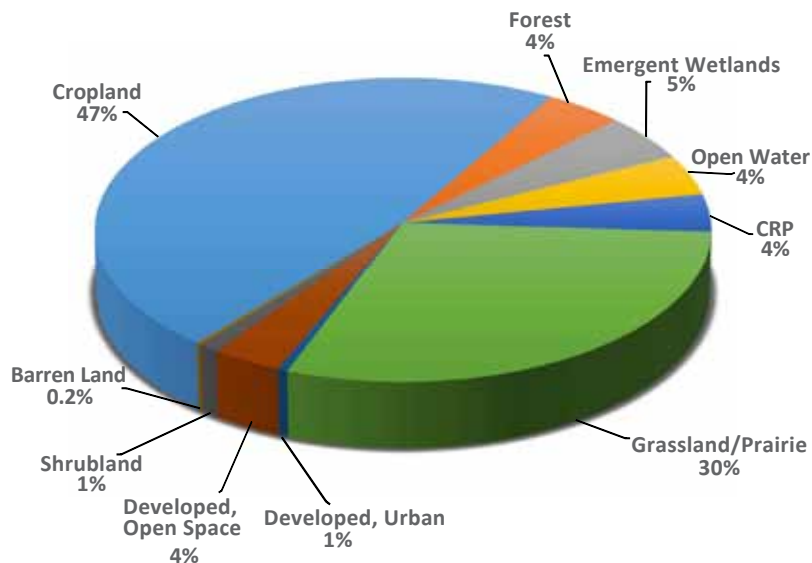
an updated State Wildlife Action Plan, a document that details the status of more than 100 species of birds, mammals, fish and insects that are considered “Species of Conservation Priority.” What that means in general is species that research indicates have declined in population or range in the past decade, or species that probably need further study to document their population level.

The species in question depend on a variety of different habitats, like rivers, lakes, forests and badlands, but more than half of the 115 species on the 2015 list of North Dakota Species of Conservation Priority depend on native prairie or other grasslands.



Types of grasslands in North Dakota differ from east to west because of soil types and annual rainfall amounts.

Native prairie once covered most of North Dakota; this chart shows the current makeup of the state’s landscape.



While that's a significant part of the list, North Dakota does have many large tracts of native prairie and other grasslands that still exist, and there is great potential to protect, conserve or enhance what remains.

NOT ALL GRASSLAND IS THE SAME

Native prairie is generally divided into three main categories; tallgrass, mixed-grass, and shortgrass. Each prairie community is comprised of a unique blend of grasses and forbs. North Dakota has all three grassland types, which are generally differentiated by region of the state.

The following descriptions of North Dakota's prairie regions is excerpted from the 2015 North Dakota State Wildlife Action Plan.

TALLGRASS PRAIRIE (RED RIVER VALLEY)

AREA: 4,464,000 acres or 6,975 square miles

Tallgrass prairie once covered much of the central United States and Canada and occupied roughly the eastern one-fourth of North Dakota. It is estimated only 3 percent of it remains unplowed, and North Dakota's remaining tallgrass prairie is found almost exclusively in the Red River Valley.

Tallgrass prairie developed over much of the exposed lakebed of glacial Lake Agassiz. The flat topography and rich soil of the Lake Agassiz basin provided an ideal growing environment for prairie plants and is now doing the same thing for agricultural crops including potatoes, beans, sugar beets, corn and wheat. It's also worth noting that the tallgrass prairie region on average receives several more inches of precipitation per year than the shortgrass prairie region in western North Dakota.

By the 20th century, within only 20 years after the first wave of homesteaders moved into eastern North Dakota, much of the tallgrass prairie was already converted to farmland. Few tracts of native vegetation remain in this region today.

The largest continuous area of remaining tallgrass is just west of Grand Forks and is sometimes referred to as the Grand Forks County Prairie.

Tallgrass prairie can include more than 200 plant species. The most common and dominant of these are big bluestem, switchgrass, Indiangrass and prairie dropseed.

EASTERN MIXED GRASS PRAIRIE (DRIFT PRAIRIE)

AREA: 16,900,000 acres or 26,400 square miles

Eastern mixed-grass prairie, or Drift Prairie, is the transition zone between the wetter environment where tallgrass prairie grows to the east, and the drier shortgrass prairie region to the west.

Approximately 1.4 million acres of wetland basins are present throughout this region, though many were drained, filled or consolidated.

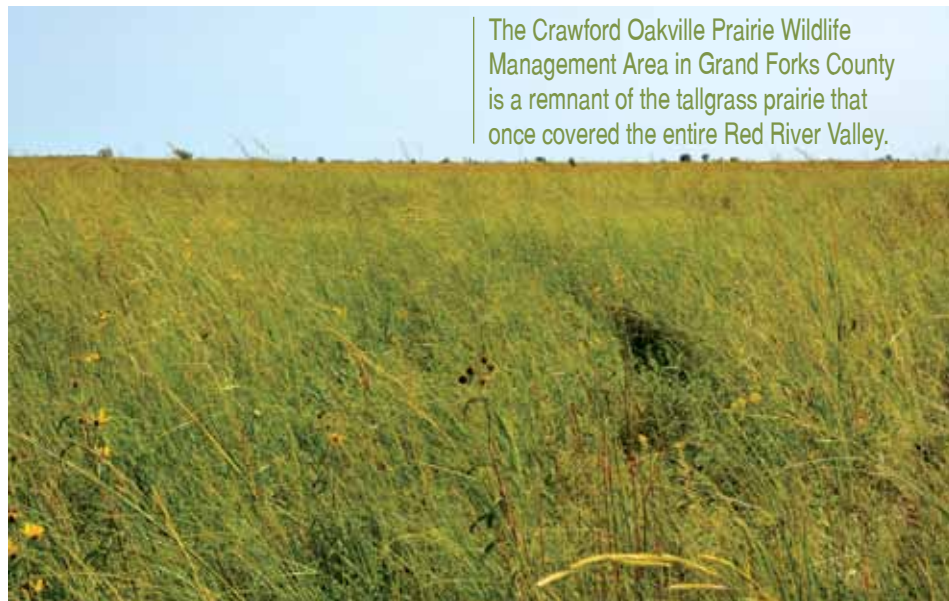
A large area of untilled land, due to its sandy, gravelly soil from a glacial lake delta, exists in and around McHenry County and south of the Turtle Mountains. This focus

area, referred to as "Glacial Lake Deltas" is to a large extent native vegetation with many wetlands remaining.

The Souris River riparian area divides the Glacial Lake Deltas. Another focus area, the "Devils Lake Basin," is the result of glacial ice blockage and includes a high concentration of larger wetlands or lakes and less grassland than the Glacial Lake Deltas. This focus area is extremely important for migrating waterfowl and other waterbirds and shorebirds.

The remainder of the Drift Prairie is generally flat land, much of which is now cropland.

The Drift Prairie is dominated by warm and cool season grasses as well as sedges. Common grass species include prairie junegrass, Western wheatgrass, green needlegrass, needle-and-thread, blue grama, little bluestem and needleleaf sedge.



The Crawford Oakville Prairie Wildlife Management Area in Grand Forks County is a remnant of the tallgrass prairie that once covered the entire Red River Valley.

SANDRA JOHNSON



North Dakota's Drift Prairie is a combination of gently rolling hills and relatively flat terrain.

JOSH KNUTSON

MEADOWLARK

The Western meadowlark, our state bird, is on the list of North Dakota's Species of Conservation Priority.



CRAIG BHRLE

DUCK NEST

Many species of ducks, upland game birds, songbirds, shorebirds and others make their nests in prairie grasslands. This nest, for example, was made by a blue-winged teal.



LARA ANDERSON

SLENDER PENSTEMON

The slender penstemon is just one of dozens of wildflowers that grow in North Dakota grasslands that aren't readily visible from a distance, but reward those who take the time for closer inspection.



CRAIG BHRLE

CROCUS

Pasque flowers or crocus are one of the first wildflowers to bloom in spring on North Dakota's remaining native prairie.



CRAIG BIRKLE

MONARCH BUTTERFLY

Monarch butterfly populations across the country are declining. They depend on milkweeds and other plants and are on the list of North Dakota Species of Conservation Priority.



RENKE HEINLE

GROUND SQUIRREL

Richardson's ground squirrels depend on grasslands, and are on the state's list of Species of Conservation Priority.

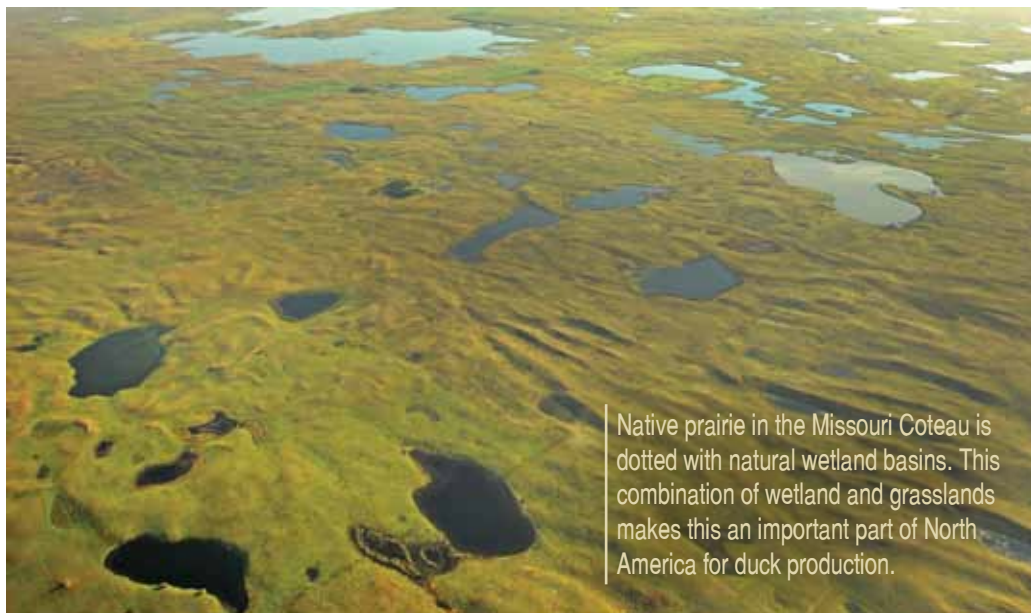


CRAIG BIRKLE



Sharp-tailed grouse are native birds that evolved with the prairie and depend on it for their survival.

CRAIG BIRKLE



Native prairie in the Missouri Coteau is dotted with natural wetland basins. This combination of wetland and grasslands makes this an important part of North America for duck production.

CRAIG BIRNLE

of the Missouri Slope. This semi-arid, unglaciated region of North Dakota includes level to rolling plains with isolated sandstone buttes or badlands formations. Natural wetland basins are minimal, but small creeks and streams are abundant.

Shrub-steppe, or prairie that has a large component of sagebrush, occurs scattered throughout. Land use is predominantly dryland farming of spring and winter wheat, barley, sunflowers and corn, interspersed with cattle grazing. Landcover classifications indicate there is a considerable amount of native vegetation remaining.

Shortgrass prairie grass species mature at 6-12 inches in height and include spikemoss, blue grama, needleleaf sedge, threadleaf sedge, buffalo grass, and needle-and-thread.

PLANTED OR TAME GRASSLAND

AREA: Statewide, estimate 2-5 million acres

This landscape component includes land that at one time was converted to cropland and then was replanted to hayland, tame or native grasses. Approximately 5 percent of North Dakota is considered as hayland, and planted alfalfa is the most common hay crop.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Program

MIXED-GRASS PRAIRIE (MISSOURI COTEAU)

AREA: 10,215,000 acres or 15,960 square miles

This landscape component includes the mixed-grass prairie of the Missouri Coteau and associated wetlands. Combined with the Drift Prairie, most of North Dakota is dominated by mixed-grass prairie.

This region marks the boundary of the western limits of glaciation in North Dakota. The hummocky, rolling hills of the Missouri Coteau dramatically rise 150 to 500 feet above the Drift Prairie. A high concentration of wetlands are present, roughly 800,000 basin acres. A considerable amount of native prairie remains and

there is extensive cattle grazing.

The Coteau is known for supporting some of the highest numbers of breeding ducks in North America. Due to the large amount of grassland and wetlands which remain or have been restored, this area is especially crucial to many species of grassland wildlife and constitutes the focus area "Missouri Coteau Breaks."

WESTERN MIXED-GRASS / SHORTGRASS PRAIRIE (MISSOURI SLOPE)

Area: 10,768,000 acres or 16,825 square miles

This landscape component includes the western mixed-grass and shortgrass prairie



Pronghorn are a key species of the open shortgrass prairie of western North Dakota.

CRAIG BIRNLE



Tame grasslands in North Dakota include land like this tract in Burleigh County, which was enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program and planted back to grass from cropland.

CRAIG BIRHLE

was established in the 1985 Farm Bill as a way for producers to reduce soil erosion by retiring marginal cropland from production for 10-15 years. The CRP also provides stable income for producers and delivers unprecedented wildlife habitat and conservation of soil and water. Larger tracts of CRP, particularly those near other existing native or planted grassland, are more attractive and more productive than smaller tracts of CRP.

These larger tracts, in concert with surrounding landscape features, are a focus area of this landscape component. CRP is generally left idle, although managed and emergency haying and grazing of CRP is periodically allowed. Producers can hay or graze CRP once every three years, keeping outside of the primary nesting season defined as April 15-August 1.

More than half of the CRP contracts in North Dakota have expired since 2007 and new contracts have been limited because of a lower national acreage cap and other factors. The loss of CRP on the North Dakota landscape is detrimental to wildlife populations.

Tame grasslands are widespread throughout the state on wildlife management areas, waterfowl production areas and other publicly owned land.

CONSERVATION ACTIONS

The SWAP provides detailed descriptions of threats and conservation actions for each of the major landscape components, as well as species management recommendations. The focus is on solutions to

preventing species from becoming federally threatened or endangered.

Five recurrent conservation actions identified throughout all major landscape components are designed to make this happen.

1. Offer incentives and programs to protect, enhance and restore habitat. The majority of land in North Dakota is held in private ownership. Numerous federal, state and local programs are available to provide landowners with cost-sharing assistance to protect, enhance and restore wildlife habitat. This is the primary mechanism for ensuring long-term conservation of Species of Conservation Priority and other wildlife in North Dakota. North Dakota Game and Fish staff will work with partners to ensure programs fully encompass the needs to conserve Species of Conservation Priority and expand programs

where necessary, particularly Farm Bill programs, such as the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, and pollinator habitat programs.

2. Urge ecologically responsible ordinances and suitable reclamation standards.

Increasing demand for urban, energy and utility development is heightening the need to minimize impacts to Species of Conservation Priority and other wildlife. Although environmental review is provided by federal and state agencies, ecologically sound ordinances and reclamation standards are needed.

3. Promote and support holistic grazing and work with grass-based agricultural groups. The majority of the Species of Conservation Priority depend on grassland. The key to maintaining grassland as an integral part of the North Dakota landscape is to ensure grassland ranching persists.

Prairies evolved with grazing by large ungulates and cattle grazing is a beneficial tool to maintain native vegetation, particularly if applied in a holistic manner.

4. Use best management practices or ecological site descriptions. Experts in various fields have developed best management practices for a particular habitat component. These valuable tools should be employed when restoring or managing native communities.

5. Public education and outreach. The key to successful implementation of wildlife conservation for public use and enjoyment depends upon awareness, understanding and appreciation of these resources.



Well managed grazing is beneficial to prairies, and one of the key conservation actions for all North Dakota grasslands is to ensure that grassland ranching persists.

CRAIG BIRHLE

What is North Dakota's State Wildlife Action Plan?

The 2015 North Dakota State Wildlife Action Plan replaces the 2005 North Dakota Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy as the principle document for safeguarding rare and declining fish and wildlife species in North Dakota.

This newer "second edition" not only has a different name, but has been revised to include new information generated by State Wildlife Grant studies conducted over the past 10 years.

Examples include, but are not limited to, changes to the species of conservation priority list, focus areas, range/distribution maps, threats and management actions.

The SWAP is built upon eight essential elements, with an overall focus on the "species of greatest conservation need," or as we have labeled them, "Species of Conservation Priority."

The number of Species of Conservation Priority increased from 100 under the old plan to 115 in the current SWAP. While 20 new species were added to the list, five species were removed.

The current list includes 47 birds, two amphibians, nine reptiles, 21 mammals, 22 fish, 10 freshwater muskels and four insects.

Completion of the SWAP marks the 10-year anniversary of the first dedicated program for rare and

declining fish and wildlife species in North Dakota. Although substantial progress was made in the past decade, considerable work remains.

As North Dakota is experiencing widespread habitat threats and challenges, the SWAP will serve as an important tool in dealing with these issues.

Furthermore, preventing species from becoming listed as federally threatened or endangered is important. A listing has the potential to influence how public and private land is managed and used. The cost of protection or restoration of a listed species is far greater than preventing its decline in the first place.

Where to find more information...

NORTH DAKOTA STATE WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN

<http://gf.nd.gov/wildlife/swap>

SPECIES OF CONSERVATION PRIORITY

<http://gf.nd.gov/wildlife/scp>

NORTH DAKOTA STATE WILDLIFE GRANTS

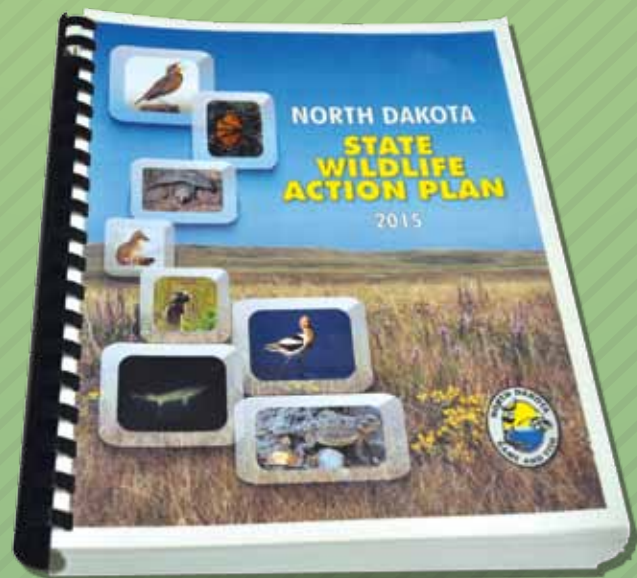
<http://gf.nd.gov/wildlife/swg>

CONTACT THE SWAP AUTHORS:

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Sandra Johnson, Conservation Biologist, 701-328-6382 or sajohnson@nd.gov

Patrick Isakson, Conservation Biologist, 701-328-6338 or pisakson@nd.gov



A bull moose makes its way across a harvested field near Bowdon last fall.



SANDRA JOHNSON

MAY WARRANT FUTURE PROTECTION

By Ron Wilson

In late March, resident hunters applied for a record 202 moose licenses in North Dakota. In June, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that the subspecies of moose found in North Dakota and three other states could eventually warrant federal protection.

Jeb Williams, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife division chief, said news of possible federal protection of North Dakota's moose population is puzzling to people, considering the state has a stable to increasing population.

"North Dakota is included in the petition because we have the same subspecies of moose as those other states," Williams said of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan.

"It's confusing to a lot of people because we feel that we are in one of the better situations. We don't have a large moose population in North Dakota, but we don't believe the species warrants protection under the Endangered Species Act."

Williams said the finding opens a full status review by the USFWS to determine whether moose could be listed under the Endangered Species Act.

"Hopefully the next step in the process will shed some light on North Dakota's moose population

"As a matter of fact, it really is not all that unusual to find a transient moose in most parts of North Dakota nowadays. Our moose population has been building for years, thanks to the influx of animals from established moose populations of Minnesota and Canada. Apparently the younger animals in those populations exhibit dispersal tendencies, move out to new areas, and in the case of North Dakota, have reclaimed former range," North Dakota OUTDOORS, 1978.



JASON SMITH

Dr. Jim Maskey, with the University of Mary, teamed with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department on a three-year moose study in the Kenmare area and the Missouri River bottoms southeast of Williston.

Midwest, and it will not affect any current state regulations in the foreseeable future.

HISTORICAL LOOK

Moose were rare to nonexistent in the state by the early 1900s. These animals, the largest of the deer family, began to move back into North Dakota and sightings were more frequent in the late 1950s and 1960s.

By the late 1960s, a small resident population was established in the Pembina Hills and sightings grew more common as moose dispersed to the south and west.

"By the early 1970s, moose were so common in the Pembina Hills that the Department stopped recording sightings in this area; however, moose sightings elsewhere in the state were still quite rare," according to *North Dakota OUTDOORS*, 1991.

Jason Smith, Game and Fish Department big game biologist in Jamestown, said the moose population in North Dakota benefitted from a range expansion of moose from northwest Minnesota in the 1970s.



LARA ANDERSON

It's not uncommon for moose to wander into urban areas in North Dakota. This young bull took up temporary residence on a Bismarck golf course.

and show that we are in a better situation than the other states where moose are struggling," he said.

Department officials said the recent finding simply initiates a review of moose in the Upper

As the moose population prospered in the Pembina Hills at that time, animals started showing up more frequently in the Turtle Mountains, another area that had traditionally supported moose populations before the turn of the century.

"By the mid-1970s, the moose population had grown to the extent that they were no longer the curiosities they once had been," according to *North Dakota OUTDOORS*, 1991. "The Pembina Hills, the area of greatest moose concentration, was small when it came to supporting a large population of moose. Without controls, moose began to cause problems for local landowners."

North Dakota held its first moose season in 1977 with 10 licenses available to hunters. The season has run uninterrupted since then.

Smith said North Dakota is the only state named in the petition that currently has a moose hunting season. One hundred or more once-in-a-lifetime moose licenses have been made available to hunters every year, beginning in 1985.

MOOSE TODAY

Today the state's highest moose densities are found in the northwest, while numbers in what was once considered traditional moose habitat in the Turtle Mountains and Pembina Hills, remain low. Overall, the statewide population is stable to increasing.

Smith said Department moose survey numbers in the Pembina Hills peaked in 1995 at 260-plus animals.

"The last time we were able to do a count in that area was 2014 and we counted two moose," he said. "We haven't had a moose hunting season in that part of the state (unit M1C) since 2005. The moose in that area are not recovering."



This bull was photographed last fall in northwestern North Dakota where the state's highest moose densities are found.

Changing habitat and disease – brain worm and liver fluke – are the likely reasons, Smith said, that moose numbers have fallen in the northeastern part of the state.

“We don’t see the logging like we once did in that area, which means you don’t have the new growth of trees and clear cuts that the moose like,” Smith said.

Smith said moose in the northwest are in a portion of North Dakota where brain worm is uncommon. And liver fluke has never been documented in that part of the state.

The Game and Fish Department continues to monitor moose in all parts of the state that die from causes other than hunting, to determine any effects of disease and to gain a better understanding of why they died.

Moreover, data analysis is underway on a three-year moose research study in the Kenmare area and the Missouri River bottoms southeast of Williston. The research focuses on annual survival, cause-specific mortality, reproduction rates, annual and seasonal movements and home range use, as well as seasonal habitat selection.

“The value of this research is a great thing as it will have direct management implications on moose in North Dakota,” Williams said. “The research is valuable in that it shows our moose population is stable and increasing. We can show the USFWS this with the research.”

Smith said the take-home from the research in the study area is high adult survival, high pregnancy rates, good recruitment and calf production, which lead to an increasing population.

“We look at this as a process, an opportunity to provide the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with the information they are looking for,” Williams said. “We are confident that in the end that they will find that North Dakota’s moose population is in pretty good shape.”

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.

MAKING THE LIST

The following includes threatened and endangered species known to exist currently or previously in North Dakota and recently petitioned species known to exist in North Dakota.

FEDERALLY LISTED SPECIES

- Whooping crane, bird, endangered.
- Least tern, bird, endangered.
- Black-footed ferret, mammal, endangered.
- Gray wolf, mammal, endangered.
- Pallid sturgeon, fish, endangered.
- Powershiek skipperling, insect, endangered.
- Piping plover, bird, threatened.
- Red knot (rufa), bird, threatened.
- Northern long-eared bat, mammal, threatened.
- Dakota skipper, insect, threatened.
- Western prairie fringed orchid, plant, threatened.

RECENTLY PETITIONED SPECIES

- Monarch butterfly, insect, 2014 (year of petition).
- Regal fritillary, insect, 2013.
- Rusty patched bumble bee, insect, 2013.
- Western bumble bee, insect, 2015.
- Yellow-banded bumble bee, insect, 2015.
- Prairie gray fox, mammal, 2012.
- Plains spotted skunk, mammal, 2012.
- Moose, mammal, 2015.

(Source: Sandra Johnson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department conservation biologist.)

PETITION PROCESS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service initiated a status review for the U.S. population of northwestern moose as a result of a 90-day finding on a petition from the Center for Biological Diversity and Honor the Earth.

The USFWS published a notice of the finding in the Federal Register on June 3, 2016. The notice initiated a 60-day information request period, which closes on August 2, 2016.

Before making a finding on whether listing the U.S. population of northwestern moose is warranted, the USFWS must gather and analyze available information, including new information received during the open information request process.

USFWS officials said they do not have a project date for completing the status assessment. For the past five years, the USFWS has carried out its listing program priorities according to a multi-district litigation settlement.

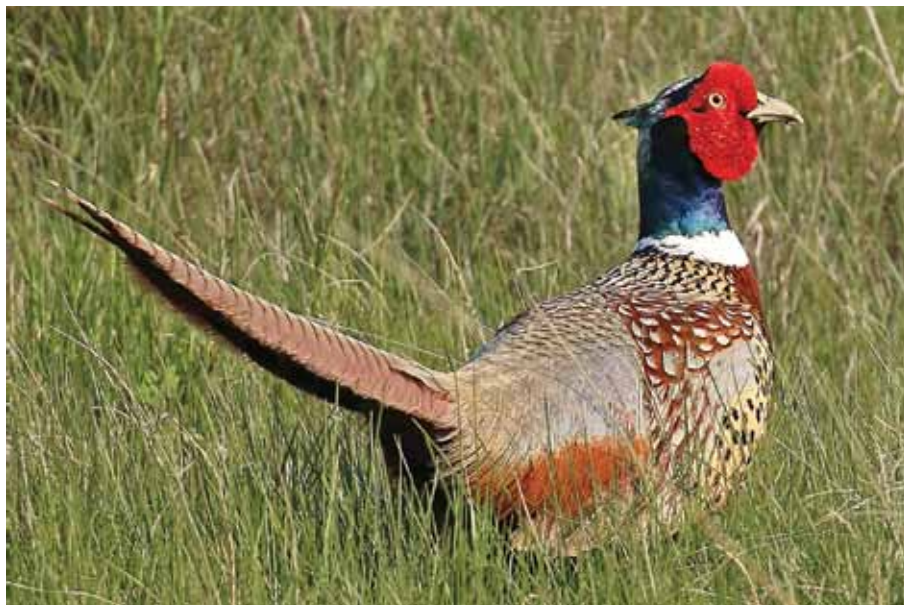
With the work from that settlement ending in 2016, the USFWS is preparing its next 5- to 7-year listing work plan. The agency currently has about 500 petitioned species awaiting 12-month findings.

(Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.)



BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor



CRAIG BIRKLE

Spring Pheasant, Grouse Numbers

North Dakota's spring pheasant population index is up slightly from last year, while sharp-tailed grouse numbers are down slightly, according to recent surveys conducted by State Game and Fish Department biologists.

Aaron Robinson, Department upland game management supervisor, said the number of pheasant roosters heard on the spring crowing count survey was up just about 2 percent statewide. Numbers in the southeast were down from last year, Robinson said, while "the other regions from west to central were up slightly, but not enough to say there's a big increase from last year."

Sharp-tailed grouse counts on spring dancing grounds or leks were down about 6 percent statewide from last year. "We were kind of expecting that," Robinson added. "We had some dry weather last year and production wasn't as good."

While the spring counts provide a good indicator of the number of breeding birds in the two populations, Robinson says it's primarily early

summer weather that influences hunting success in the fall.

"You have to have the right conditions to produce a good hatch," he said. "You don't want really wet, cold years, and you don't want dry years. Dry years don't produce those insects that chicks need to survive those first 10 days."

Game and Fish biologists will start their summer upland game brood counts in mid-July, and Robinson said that will lead to more precise fall population predictions. "That's when we really start to understand what our production was for the year."

Pheasant crowing counts are conducted each spring throughout North Dakota. Observers drive specified 20-mile routes, stopping at predetermined intervals, and counting the number of pheasant roosters heard crowing over a two-minute period during the stop.

Biologists count male sharptails on their dancing grounds in 25 monitoring blocks throughout the state, and numbers within each block are compared from year to year.

SPRING BREEDING DUCK NUMBERS

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual spring breeding duck survey conducted in May showed an index of 3.4 million birds, down 5 percent from last year.

"The spring migration was well ahead of normal as open fields and warm temperatures allowed early migrants to pass quickly through the state," said Mike Szymanski, Department migratory game bird supervisor.

Survey results indicated all species, except ruddy ducks (up 19 percent) and gadwall (up 4 percent), decreased from their 2015 estimates, while shovelers remained unchanged. Mallards were down 9 percent, pintails down 17 percent and canvasbacks down 18 percent. However all species, with the exception of pintails and canvasbacks, were above the long-term average (1948-2015).

Szymanski said the number of temporary and seasonal wetlands was substantially lower than last year, with the spring water index down 50 percent. In the weeks following the survey, however, frequent rains added water to many wetlands that are beneficial for breeding ducks.

The water index is based on basins with water, and does not necessarily represent the amount of water contained in wetlands or the type of wetlands represented.

Szymanski said the July brood survey will provide a better idea of duck production and insight into expectations for this fall.

"The total breeding duck index is still in the top 20 all time, so there is still a lot of potential for good production this year," he said. "Hopefully improved wetland conditions since the May survey will carry through into increased wetland availability for duck broods."

Traveling Boaters Should Check Border State and Provincial ANS Regulations

North Dakota boaters traveling to other states or Canadian provinces should check the aquatic nuisance species regulations of their destination to make sure they are in compliance.

While many of North Dakota's ANS prevention regulations are similar to surrounding states and provinces, Jessica Howell, North Dakota Game and Fish Department ANS coordinator, said there are some subtle differences that could lead to travel interruption or citations depending on the circumstances.

"Removal of all water and vegetation, as well as pulled plugs while traveling, are generally the rule in neighboring states and provinces," Howell said, "but there are some places where 'dry' is also a requirement, meaning no residual water anywhere in the boat."

In addition, mandatory boat inspections may be required based on destination or route taken. For example, Howell said anyone pulling a boat into Canada will likely have it inspected at a border crossing, some states have inspection checkpoints along highways, and some lakes have inspectors at boat ramps. Any boats that are not in compliance will likely get delayed in their travels or be prevented from launching, Howell said.

Boaters should be aware of regulations for not only their destination, but for any states they are traveling through. More information on bordering state and provincial ANS regulations is available at the following web addresses.

- South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks at sdleastwanted.com.
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources at dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/aquatic/index.html.
- Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks at fwp.mt.gov/fishing/guide/ethics.

- Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment <http://environment.gov.sk.ca>.
- Manitoba Department of Sustainable Development, <http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/waterstewardship/stopais/index.html>.

North Dakota ANS regulations are as follows:

- All aquatic vegetation must be removed from boats, personal watercraft, trailers and fishing equipment such as fishing poles, bait buckets, lures and waders before leaving a body of water. That means "vegetation free" when transporting watercraft and/or equipment away from a boat ramp, landing area or shoreline. Time out of the water needed to remove aquatic vegetation at the immediate water access area is allowed.
- All water must be drained from boats and other watercraft, including bilges, livewells, baitwells and motors before leaving a water body.
- All drain plugs that may hold back water must be removed, and water draining devices must be open, on all watercraft and recreational, commercial and construction equipment bilges and confined

spaces, during any out-of-water transport of same.

- Transportation of fish in or on ice is allowed.
- Live aquatic bait or aquatic vegetation may not be transported into North Dakota.
- All legal live aquatic organisms used by anglers, including legal baitfish (fathead minnows), amphibians (salamanders and frogs), invertebrates (crayfish and leeches) and insects must be purchased and/or trapped in North Dakota.
- Anglers may not transport live bait in water away from the Red River (Class I ANS infested waters). All water must be drained from bait buckets as anglers leave the shore, or remove their boat from the water. Anglers must properly dispose of unused bait away from the river, as dumping bait in the water or on shore is illegal.
- In all other waters not infested with Class I ANS species, anglers can transport live bait in water in containers of five gallons or less in volume.



MIKE ANDERSON



Game and Fish at State Fair

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department will host thousands of visitors to its free Conservation and Outdoors Skills Park July 22-30 at the State Fair in Minot.

Visitors will be treated to an array of activities, exhibits and useful information as the park is open from 1-7 p.m. daily. Pathways to Hunting, Fishing, Trapping and Archery are major attractions where interested kids and adults can participate in each outdoor activity.

In addition to hands-on outdoor learning opportunities, the area offers a live fish display, furbearer exhibit and native prairie plantings. Two information centers staffed by Game and Fish Department personnel bookend the Conservation and Outdoors Skills Park, which is located on the north end of the state fair grounds near the State Fair Center.



PRONGHORN AND SWAN APPS

Hunting license applications for fall pronghorn and swan seasons will be on the Game and Fish Department's website (gf.nd.gov) and at vendors by late July.

The pronghorn application deadline is August 3, followed by the swan deadline August 17.

Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest is now open, and the deadline for submissions is September 30.

The contest has categories for nongame and game species, as well as plants/insects. An overall winning photograph will be chosen, with the number of place winners in each category determined by the number of qualified entries.

Contest entries are limited to digital files submitted on disk or via email. Contestants are limited to no more than five entries. Photos must have been taken in North Dakota.

By submitting an entry, photographers grant permission to Game and Fish to publish winning photographs

in *North Dakota OUTDOORS* magazine, and on the Department's website, gf.nd.gov.

Photo disks should be sent to Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest, C/O Patrick T. Isakson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095.

Send emailed digital photos to photocontest@nd.gov. Photographers will need to supply the original image if needed for publication.



Photo disks will not be returned. All entries must be accompanied by the photographer's name, address, phone number and email address if available. Other information such as photo site location and month taken are also useful.

GAME WARDEN EXAM SET

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has scheduled an examination to select candidates for the position of district game warden.

The test is August 5 at 10 a.m. at the Department's main office in Bismarck.

Applicants must register to take the exam no later than August 1 by submitting an online application through the North Dakota State Job Openings website.

Applicants must be at least 21 years of age and have a bachelor's degree

at time of hire (tentative hire date is October 1), have a valid driver's license and a current North Dakota peace officer license, or be eligible to be licensed. Candidates must have excellent interpersonal skills in communications and writing, and must not have a record of any felony convictions.

District game wardens enforce game and fish laws and related regulations in an assigned district and other locations as determined by the department. Wardens normally work alone under varied conditions, at all hours of the

day, night and weekends. In addition to law enforcement duties, wardens assist in the areas of public relations, education programs, and hunter and boat safety education.

Salary through training for a district game warden is \$3,800 per month. Upon successful completion of training, the monthly salary ranges are \$4,260 - \$7,100. Wardens also receive the state benefits package, including travel allowance. Uniforms and other equipment are provided.

Agency Pays Property Taxes

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department recently paid more than \$581,900 in taxes to counties in which the Department owns or leases land. The 2015

in-lieu-of-tax payments are the same as property taxes paid by private landowners.

The Game and Fish Department manages more than 200,000

acres for wildlife habitat and public hunting in 51 counties. The Department does not own or manage any land in Traill or Renville counties.

COUNTY	TAX DUE	COUNTY	TAX DUE	COUNTY	TAX DUE
Adams	\$ 178.95	Grand Forks	\$15,891.83	Pierce	\$ 3,037.46
Barnes	5,133.10	Grant	746.79	Ramsey	16,317.25
Benson	4,338.42	Griggs	99.18	Ransom	1,368.03
Billings	252.06	Hettinger	3,915.87	Richland	15,687.35
Bottineau	5,144.29	Kidder	8,212.44	Rolette	36,484.91
Bowman	1,897.59	LaMoure	9,318.00	Sargent	17,762.90
Burke	1028.39	Logan	340.68	Sheridan	60,578.25
Burleigh	26,701.61	McHenry	1,704.30	Sioux	274.69
Cass	7,236.38	McIntosh	8,007.30	Slope	1,322.90
Cavalier	26,386.44	McKenzie	33,015.92	Stark	185.65
Dickey	13,467.12	McLean	81,924.00	Steele	8,532.79
Divide	1,591.49	Mercer	14,568.11	Stutsman	4,757.36
Dunn	6,473.05	Morton	19,270.51	Towner	2,127.15
Eddy	6,368.50	Mountrail	7,109.62	Walsh	10,951.17
Emmons	3,368.81	Nelson	5,792.29	Ward	99.93
Foster	795.55	Oliver	2,834.38	Wells	59,530.09
Golden Valley	153.05	Pembina	15,886.62	Williams	3,733.44



STAFF NOTES

Fred Ryckman, recently retired Department fisheries biologist, was honored with the Fisheries Management Section's Award of Excellence for 2016.

Greg Power, Department fisheries chief, said Ryckman exemplified the true essence of a fisheries professional.

"His career accomplishments are diverse and noteworthy, and should serve as a template for every new employee entering the fisheries profession," Power said.

The Award of Excellence is given for inspirational leadership in the fishery profession and substantial achievements for the American Fisheries Society and the fisheries resource. It is given for cumulative accomplishments rather than a singular effort as recognized by the Award of Merit.



Fred Ryckman

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

WILLISTON

KUMV - Saturday - 6 pm
KXMD - Sunday - 10 pm;
Monday - Noon

GRAND FORKS

WDAZ - Wednesday - 5 pm

MINOT

KMOT - Saturday - 6 pm
KXMC - Saturday - 10 pm

DICKINSON

KQCD - Saturday - 6 pm (MT)
KXMA - Saturday - 6 pm (MT)

BISMARCK

KFYR - Saturday - 6 pm
KXMB - Saturday - 6 pm
CATV - Saturday - 9:30 am

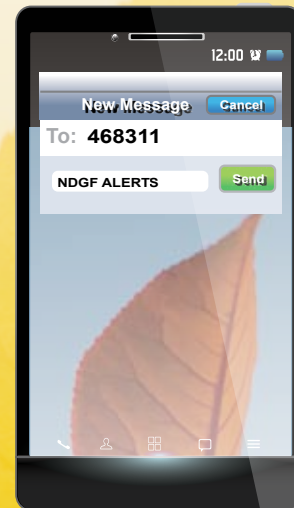
FARGO

KVRR - Sunday - 9 pm

ON

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TO: **468311**



RECEIVE:

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

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



back cast



By Ron Wilson



If you haven't read the article beginning on page 17 regarding the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's announcement that the subspecies of moose found in North Dakota and three other states may warrant protection, please do.

I'll wait.

The way I understand it, it will take a number of years for federal wildlife officials to make their call about the fate of this subspecies here and elsewhere. Yet, in the interim, things are unlikely to change with moose in North Dakota anytime soon, if at all.

Meaning: North Dakota will hold a moose hunting season this fall, with a record 202 licenses being allotted to hunters, and the fall after that.

Business as usual.

My father-in-law, Jim, drew a cow moose tag in Unit M9 in 2007. We felt like it was a big deal then, and that opportunity to hunt one of the state's three once-in-a-lifetime big game animals remains a big deal today.

We started scouting weeks before the moose season opener in early October, basing out of a campground at Lonetree Wildlife Management Area.

We spent the first two weekends of the sharp-tailed grouse season chasing birds with dogs, and glassing areas in early morning and evenings where we were told moose liked to frequent.

The grouse opener was a wet mess. It rained most of the day, and hustling up any game was difficult. By day's end, our tally was one dead grouse and one small bull spotted in the distance.

If you read the harvest statistics of moose hunters in North Dakota, no matter the year, really, you quickly realize that the majority of hunters who were lucky enough to draw a license, also went home with their license notched and slipped through an ear or wrapped around a palmate antler.

Understanding this does a couple things: It gives you hope that a good opportunity to shoot a moose will come for the hunter in your party holding the license. Yet, it also gets you to wondering that if the stars don't align if he will fall into the minority.

Jim landed in the majority on opening morning. He shot an adult cow 4 miles east of camp as the crow flies.

The cow had a yellow tag in her right ear, indicating that she was part of a movement study of the resident moose population at Lonetree. Her number was 26. She was one of five cows marked for the study.

Turned out, we wished her movement would have taken her a lot closer to the road in the end. We quartered the moose and made five trips to a dirt road with a one-wheel game cart. The head and hide came out last.

It's something we'll never forget, from the scouting to the skillet. And with a "stable to increasing" moose population in the state, maybe someone else in our hunting family will get to pull the trigger on a moose someday.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.



NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT ARCHIVE PHOTOS

A Look Back

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has been involved in the state's fair scene for years. In this photograph, dated 1933, Department personnel staffed a booth at the "North West Agricultural, Livestock and Fair Association in Minot."

Don't confuse the "North West" fair, simply because of its location, with what is today's North Dakota State Fair in Minot.

According to archives of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, before the creation of the State Fair Association in 1965 and naming Minot as its home, a number of fairs and fair associations were authorized by lawmakers to sponsor a state fair.

For example, beginning in 1905, "the State Legislature authorized a state fair to be held in Grand Forks in odd numbered years and in Fargo in even numbered years."

The Game and Fish Department ramped up its presence at the State Fair in Minot in 1993 with the Pathway

to Fishing program.

"The Game and Fish Department saw the potential of the Pathway program and sponsored it as part of a multi-phased approach to recruit new anglers by offering beginners the information and the opportunity to sample fishing first hand," according to an article in *North Dakota OUTDOORS*, June 1994.

A pond located on the north end of the fairgrounds was key to the program's success.

Improvements were later made to the pond to enhance water quality and fish survival. Game and Fish also added permanent structures to provide a staging area, casting boardwalk and additional fencing to allow better traffic control.

Along with these and other improvements, the Department's home on the state fairgrounds was named the North Dakota Conservation and Outdoor Skills Park. Also added were outdoor education programs and

shooting opportunities.

"Hopefully, participants will leave with an appetite for more, which they can satisfy in the outdoors near their home communities. We now have the facilities to introduce both youngsters and adults to hunting and fishing, activities we believe are the original, wholesome, outdoor family pastimes," according to *North Dakota OUTDOORS*, July 1995.

With continued improvements at the Conservation and Skills Park, interest in outdoor activities has grown.

Yearly, during the nine-day state fair, more than 10,000 youngsters and adults participate in activities free of charge. An additional estimated 20,000 people simply visit the park to see the exhibits or to find a cool spot out of the sun.

North Dakota State Fair dates for 2016 are July 22-30.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.