

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

As I write this, I periodically look out the window at the sunny skies and waving flags, knowing the forecast is for warmer weather for the foreseeable future. This is certainly a welcome relief.

Only in North Dakota can we say that 30 degrees is a welcome relief, but it is. It's really not that the winter has been that bad so far. Sure, we've had some brutally cold temperatures, but we've had them in the past. And we've also had record-setting snowfalls, which seemed in jeopardy after this December. As one of staff said, "it's not that we've had a really bad winter, it's just that December was pretty bad."

We've become a little spoiled the last two years with relatively little snow and mild temperatures, but the winter of 2016-17 has brought us back to reality. Deer depredation isn't at an all-time high, but certainly much more prevalent than in recent years. There is concern from the public that deer and pheasant populations are going to see some negative impacts and it's likely that will occur to some extent. But animals in North Dakota are pretty similar to the residents, in that they're tougher than given credit, and are able to withstand quite a bit.

Undoubtedly the pheasant population is going to take a larger "hit" than deer, but we really won't know until spring. And while deer are actually doing better than we anticipated, there is plenty of winter left.

I have to throw out a huge thank you to the many farmers and ranchers out there who have taken it upon themselves to help out wildlife without asking for assistance. I've heard numerous stories and talked to enough of them to know that they really care about North Dakota's wildlife.

It reminds me of when I was much younger when my father would worry about cattle and wildlife on a similar level. Did

they have enough shelter? Did they have enough to eat? To me, it's heartening to see that attitude still exists on the landscape, and hopefully we never lose that.

Even though we're a couple months away from some open-water fishing, we should enjoy another great year. There should be plenty of moisture to fill up any lakes that were low going into the fall.

And much like the farmers and ranchers and their concerns about wildlife, many anglers really care about ensuring the fishing stays good for as long as possible. And as a result, we're asked many times to put length restrictions, primarily for walleye, on some lakes in the state. In this issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*, our biologists discuss those restrictions and provide good information on how restrictions can sometimes actually have the opposite effect of what's desired.

Also within this issue is an article regarding the 30-year anniversary of the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust. As with many other organizations across the state, Game and Fish partners with the Trust on activities that are beneficial to wildlife and landowners. They've been a great partner over the past number of decades and hopefully we can continue that working relationship.

We're on the downhill slide of winter, at least I hope so, and we can look forward to another great summer and fall in North Dakota. There will always be variability in game and fish populations, and we'll always have some weather events like harsh winters and droughts that affect humans and wildlife alike. But we always endure, and we're usually better for it. As always, no matter the season, there's always something to do in the great outdoors of North Dakota, so get out and enjoy.

Terry Steinwand

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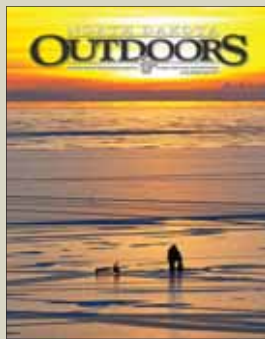
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Front Cover

Ice fishing on Lake Sakakawea. (Photo by Steve Silseth, Minot.)



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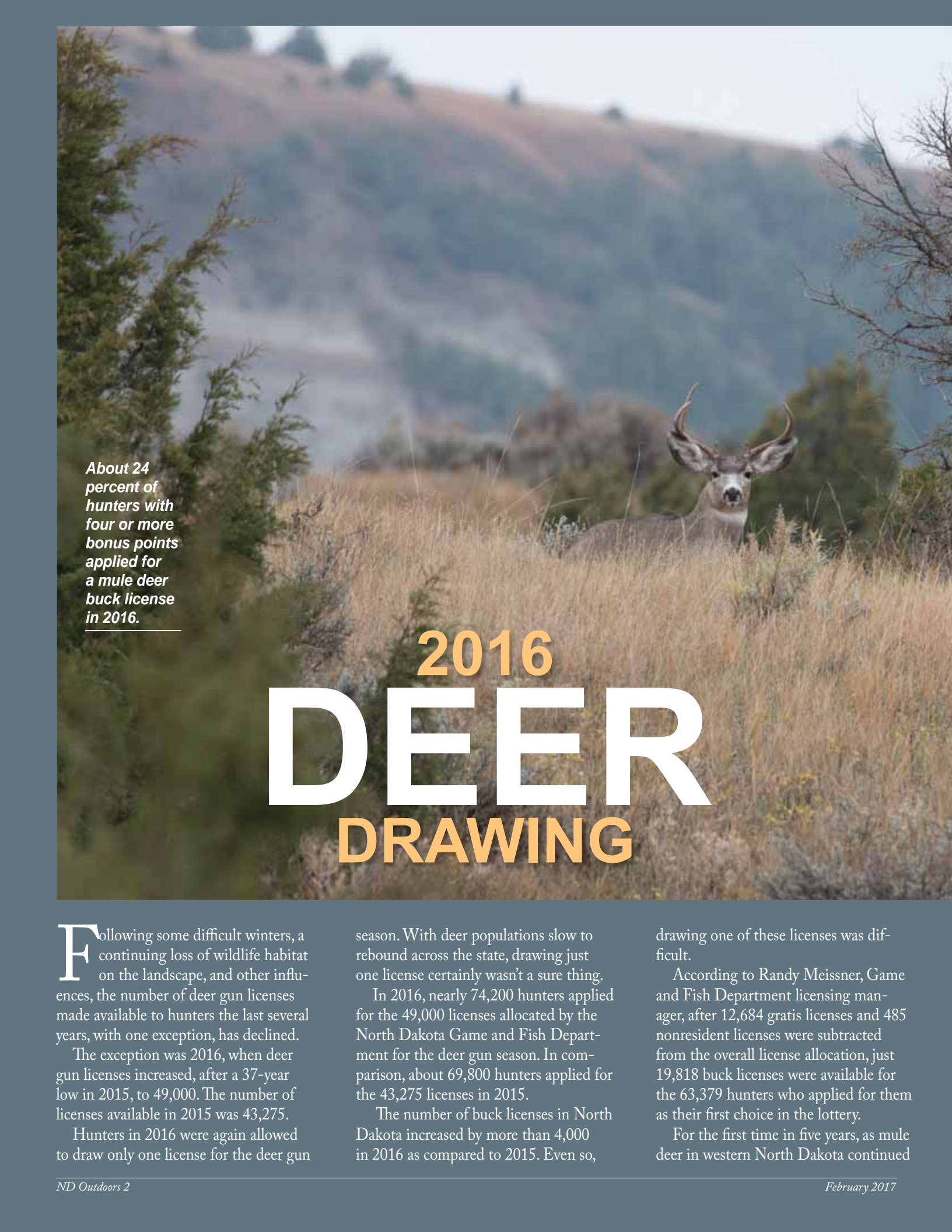
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About 24 percent of hunters with four or more bonus points applied for a mule deer buck license in 2016.

2016 DEER DRAWING

Following some difficult winters, a continuing loss of wildlife habitat on the landscape, and other influences, the number of deer gun licenses made available to hunters the last several years, with one exception, has declined.

The exception was 2016, when deer gun licenses increased, after a 37-year low in 2015, to 49,000. The number of licenses available in 2015 was 43,275.

Hunters in 2016 were again allowed to draw only one license for the deer gun

season. With deer populations slow to rebound across the state, drawing just one license certainly wasn't a sure thing.

In 2016, nearly 74,200 hunters applied for the 49,000 licenses allocated by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department for the deer gun season. In comparison, about 69,800 hunters applied for the 43,275 licenses in 2015.

The number of buck licenses in North Dakota increased by more than 4,000 in 2016 as compared to 2015. Even so,

drawing one of these licenses was difficult.

According to Randy Meissner, Game and Fish Department licensing manager, after 12,684 gratis licenses and 485 nonresident licenses were subtracted from the overall license allocation, just 19,818 buck licenses were available for the 63,379 hunters who applied for them as their first choice in the lottery.

For the first time in five years, as mule deer in western North Dakota continued



LARA ANDERSON

By Ron Wilson

to show signs of recovery, the Department allowed limited hunting of antlerless mule deer in three of eight badlands hunting units. The 2016 spring mule deer index was 21 percent higher than 2015, and 38 percent higher than the long-term average. This was the fourth consecutive year the index was higher than the previous year.

Also in 2016, the Game and Fish Department allowed a limited pronghorn hunting season for the third year in a row.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.

HOW IT WORKS

No matter if you're new to North Dakota's deer gun season, or a veteran of wearing fluorescent orange each November, there are always questions on how the Game and Fish Department's lottery system works.

Using deer as the example, though turkey works the same way, this is how it works.

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

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

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

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

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

2016 SPRING TURKEY LOTTERY RESULTS

Percent of applicants who received their first choice of license.

LICENSE TYPE	POINTS									OVERALL
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
2 S	98	97.7	100							90.3
3 S	82	100								94.1
4 S	100	100	100							100
6 S	83.3									83.3
13 S	87.6	75								85.4
17 S	100	100	100	100						100
19 S	94.8	100								96.4
25 S	97.7	88.9								83.8
27 S	100	100	100							100
30 S	93.7	84.6	100							86
31 S	70.6									70.6
37 S	100	100	100	100						100
40 S	90.2	100		100						90.5
44 S	100	100								100
45 S	94.4	100								87.8
47 S	83	100								90.9
50 S	100	100	100	100						100
51 S	97.3									97.3
53 S	100	100	100							100
98 S	100	100	100	100						100
99 S	77.6	50								85.3

2016 FALL TURKEY LOTTERY RESULTS

Percent of applicants who received their first choice of license.

LICENSE TYPE	POINTS									OVERALL
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
2 F	100	100	100	100						100
3 F	91.2									91.2
4 F	100	100	100							100
6 F	100	100								100
13 F	90.5	60								85.3
17 F	100	100	100							100
19 F	100									100
25 F	95.5	100								92.4
27 F	100	100	100	100						100
30 F	96.1	83.3								88.5
31 F	66.7									66.7
37 F	100	100	100	100						100
40 F	100	100								100
44 F	100	100								100
45 F	89.7	100								88.4
47 F	85.2									85.2
50 F	100	100	100							100
51 F	95									95
98 F	100	100	100							100
99 F	100									100

2016 PRONGHORN LOTTERY RESULTS

Percent of applicants who received their first choice of license in the 2016 pronghorn lottery drawing.

LICENSE TYPE	POINTS									OVERALL
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
01A A	0.1	0.2	0.6	0	3.9	8.4	21.4	26.1	37.5	2.4
02A A	0	4	3.5	4.9	34.6	45.5	71.4	100	0	8.8
02B A	0	0	0	3.3	17	41.2	42.9	0	0	5.1
03A A	0	6.5	2.2	0	25	63.2	75	50	100	16.7
03B A	0	0.4	1.6	0	4.9	12.7	37.5	47.6	50	5.3
04A A	0.2	2.4	2.1	3.5	31.2	43.4	60	47.8	60	9.2
04C A	0.5	0	1.4	3.7	24.3	42.1	45.5	25	100	7.4

2016 LOTTERY BULLET POINTS

- 49,000 deer licenses were available, up from 43,275 in 2015.
- 74,179 people applied for deer gun season licenses, up from 69,791 in 2015.
- 63,379 applicants applied for buck licenses as their first choice; 19,818 buck licenses were available in the drawing after 12,684 gratis and 485 nonresident licenses were withheld.
- Mule deer doe licenses were available for the first time in five years in three hunting units in the badlands.
- The highest number of bonus points accumulated by any hunter in the 2016 deer drawing was 14.
- Applicants who applied for a mule deer buck license accounted for nearly 24 percent of applicants with four or more bonus points.
- About 7 percent of applicants with four or more bonus points applied for a muzzleloader buck license.
- A buck license in unit 2E was the most difficult license to draw. The second most difficult was a buck license in unit 3C.
- The number of spring turkey licenses (5,815) available to hunters in 2016 was the same as 2015. The number of applicants decreased from 5,880 in 2015 to 5,601 in 2016.
- The number of fall turkey licenses available decreased from 3,655 in 2015 to 3,510 in 2016. The number of applicants increased from 3,040 in 2015 to 3,078 in 2016.
- A limited pronghorn season was offered for the third consecutive year, with 730 licenses, 320 more than 2015.

2016 DEER LICENSE LOTTERY RESULTS

Percent of applicants who received their first choice of license in the 2016 deer drawing.

POINTS										
LICENSE TYPE	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	OVERALL
1 A Any Buck	5.8	23.4	29	41.9	89.5	100				24.1
1 B Any Doe	92.1	100	87.5	100						93.3
2A A Any Buck	2	12.4	18.1	18.1	79.8	76.5		100		24.5
2A B Any Doe	35.1	65.5	72	80.6	84.2					76
2B A Any Buck	2.7	8.5	14	20	74.8					14.8
2B B Any Doe	27.4	58.3	60.6	52.8	80	100				42.3
2C A Any Buck	1.4	3.3	5.5	8.7	51.8	56.4				11
2C B Any Doe	2.7	11.5	17.9	12.9	75	100				15.3
2D A Any Buck	6.8	12.3	20.1	33	67.9					20.4
2D B Any Doe*	0	0	0	0	0	0				0
2E A Any Buck	0.5	1.6	1.7	3.3	27.4	41.7				9
2E B Any Doe	3.6	16.7	25.7	50	71.4					20.1
2F1 A Any Buck	31.9	63.2	77.1	85.7						53.9
2F1 B Any Doe	98	84.1	76.5							93.5
2F2 A Any Buck	9.8	29.8	43.8	55.2	91.3					31
2F2 B Any Doe	93.3	86.5	77.3	80		100				90.9
2G A Any Buck	11.9	28.6	40.2	48.3	91.8					38.3
2G B Any Doe	15.6	25.4	36.4	40	66.7					25.8
2G1 A Any Buck	4.3	9.7	15.1	20.9	76.9	85.7				18.7
2G1 B Any Doe	52.8	87	72.5	56.2	77.8					76.8
2G2 A Any Buck	15.2	32.1	51	52.5	80.7					33.8
2G2 B Any Doe	95.2	75	88.2							90.8
2H A Any Buck	26.8	60.3	75.1	86						49.7
2H B Any Doe	96.8	93.8	87.5		100	100				95.3
2I A Any Buck	11.6	34.1	51.5	60.4	93.8					34.7
2I B Any Doe	93.8	84.2	100			100				92.5
2J1 A Any Buck	11.2	35.3	44.2	59.7	93	85.7		100	100	37.1
2J1 B Any Doe	97.1	94.1	100	100						97
2J2 A Any Buck	23.3	54.2	71.3	70.3	72.2					45.6
2J2 B Any Doe	95.7	93	87.5	100			100			95.2
2K1 A Any Buck	6.4	16.2	19.7	29.6	85.1	81.2	100		100	22
2K1 B Any Doe	91.5	73.1	85.7	80	100					89.3
2K2 A Any Buck	14.8	38.1	49.2	59.6	75.3					34.9
2K2 B Any Doe	92.7	86.8	84	80	100	100				91.1
2L A Any Buck	21.5	50	64.6	82.1						48
2L B Any Doe	97.5	85.7	100							95.9
3A1 A Any Buck	1.1	4.6	10.4	12.6	69.5	76.8	84.4			20.7
3A1 B Any Doe*	0	0	0	0	0	0				0
3A2 A Any Buck	22.1	51.9	68.7	71.1	91.7					44.9
3A2 B Any Doe	95.5	84.3	100	100						93.8
3A3 A Any Buck	2	6.8	9.8	16.3	74.9	86.5				18.4
3A3 B Any Doe	86.1	76	84.6	70	66.7	100				93.3
3A4 A Any Buck	8.2	21	33.9	38.7	84				100	23.1
3A4 B Any Doe	93.1	81.2	61.5	80			100			89.5
3B1 C WT Buck	2.4	4.8	6.8	12.7	59.3	79.4			100	14.4
3B1 D WT Doe	90	81.2		100		100				83.8
3B1 E MD Buck	6.6	21.4	24.6	40.5	95.9	100	100			28.4
3B1 F MD Doe	100	100	66.7	100	100					89.5
3B2 C WT Buck	19.4	45.7	71.2	60	100	100				43.8
3B2 D WT Doe	91.1	100		100						93
3B2 E MD Buck	35.6	67.7	78.6	66.7	100	100				58.7
3B2 F MD Doe	100	100	100							100
3B3 A Any Buck	12.5	30.8	37.3	56.2	100	100				28.3
3B3 B Any Doe	68.1	85	100							84.2

POINTS										
LICENSE TYPE	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	OVERALL
3B3 C WT Buck	53.2	87	82.7	100	100	100				72.3
3B3 D WT Doe	98.9	100	100							99.3
3C A Any Buck	2.7	10.3	15.6	28.3	50	66.7	100			11.9
3C B Any Doe	49.5	86.5	100	100						70
3C C WT Buck	43.4	81.5	85.8	87.9						64.7
3C D WT Doe	96.9	95.2	100	100						96.3
3D1 A Any Buck	14.8	39.6	59	81.1	94.1			100		38.8
3D1 B Any Doe	92.2	60	100							90
3D1 C WT Buck	94.2	97.2	60	100	100			100	100	94
3D1 D WT Doe	66.7	100								75
3D2 A Any Buck	8.7	24.8	36.9	60	94.6		100			29.6
3D2 B Any Doe	94.6	80	83.3	100		100				92.8
3D2 C WT Buck	74.2	96.9	96	100		100				88.2
3D2 D WT Doe	100	100								100
3E1 A Any Buck	16.5	40.2	61	74.1				100		35.3
3E1 B Any Doe	94.7	88.9	100	100						94.1
3E1 C WT Buck	50.5	81.5	85.2	100						66.4
3E1 D WT Doe	83.3	100								90.5
3E2 A Any Buck	36.4	69.3	73.2	76.2	77.8	100				56.6
3E2 B Any Doe	95	82.4								93.7
3E2 C WT Buck	98.3	92.1								96.1
3E2 D WT Doe	96.2	100								96.6
3F1 A Any Buck	22.5	52.8	56	63.2	100					42.3
3F1 B Any Doe	96.6	92.9	100							95.9
3F1 C WT Buck	95.1	89.2	100	100		100				94.4
3F1 D WT Doe	89.9									89.9
3F2 A Any Buck	25.3	55	78.5							45.5
3F2 B Any Doe	98.2	100	100							98.5
3F2 C WT Buck	97.5	89.1	72.7							94.4
3F2 D WT Doe	100	100								100
4A C WT Buck	28.4	64.1	80	82.8	80	100			100	56.8
4A D WT Doe	94.4	100		100						95.8
4A E MD Buck	3	6.3	8.6	17.3	70.7	77.1				20.3
4B C WT Buck	42.9	81.8	91.7	80	100	100				67.2
4B D WT Doe	100	100	100							100
4B E MD Buck	0.8	1.3	3.6	7.4	28.6	50.9	65.1			16.6
4C C WT Buck	71.5	90.7	85			100	100			82.9
4C D WT Doe	100	100	100							100
4C E MD Buck	0.5	1.9	2.5	1.9	23.8	38.4	52	55.3		15.4
4D C WT Buck	85.3	89.7	88.9	100	100		100			95.5
4D D WT Doe	83.3	100	100							85.7
4D E MD Buck	1.3	2.3	2.1	4	28.3	52.4	72.3	69.7		14.4
4D F MD Doe	82.1	78.6	100		100		100			83.1
4E C WT Buck	97.6	100	88.9	100	100					97.3
4E D WT Doe	100	100								100
4E E MD Buck	7.9	17.1	38.3	50.7	84.6		83.3			34.4
4E F MD Doe	95	100								95.6
4F C WT Buck	97.3	75	100		100			100		94.4
4F D WT Doe	92.3	100	100							95
4F E MD Buck	31.1	60.6	56	80	77.8					55.2
4F F MD Doe	100			100						100
MUZ C WT Buck	0	0.3	0.3	0.3	2.4	4.7	8.9	15	23.9	4.1
MUZ D WT Doe	31.9	69	78.9	96.9	100	100	100	100	100	52.5

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

Big Water Walleyes

A man wearing a grey beanie, sunglasses, and a dark jacket is holding a large walleye fish. He is standing on a sandy beach next to a body of water. The fish is large and has a greenish-brown patterned body. The background shows a calm lake and distant hills under a clear blue sky.

Assessing the Need for Regulation Changes

By Paul Bailey, Randy Hiltner and Todd Caspers

As winter finally begins to loosen its grip on North Dakota, anticipation for open water fishing on the Missouri River, south of Bismarck-Mandan, and the upper reaches of Devils Lake, grows for thousands of anglers.

And as sure as the eventual appearance of Canada geese above the North Dakota prairies, so too will come the questions/concerns expressed by some people regarding spring fishing regulations.

Regulation Philosophy

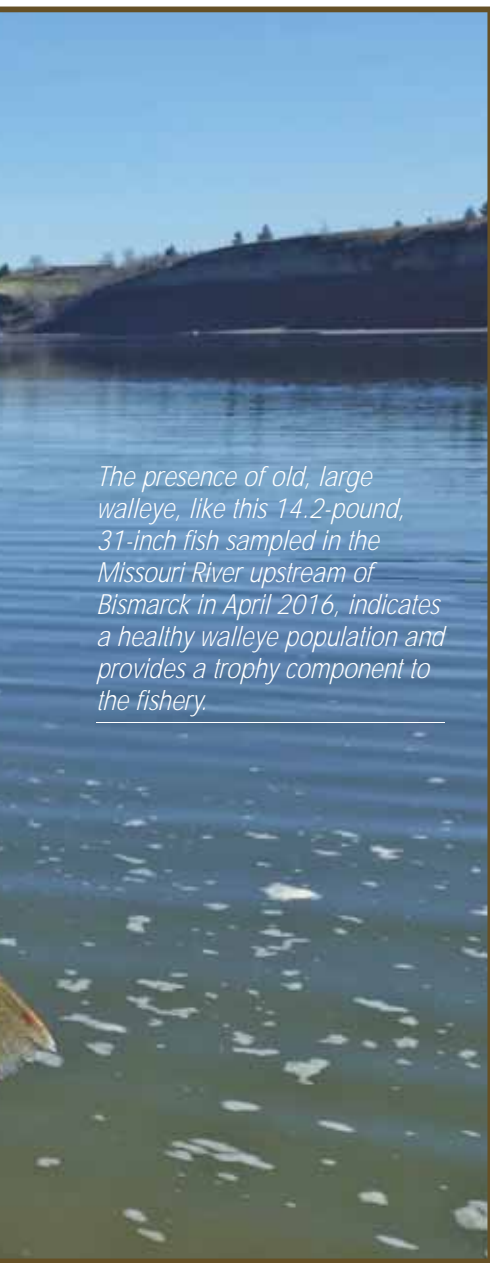
The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's focus is to maintain the highest quality fisheries, while at the same time keeping fishing regulations as simple as possible.

Fishing across the state is arguably the best it's ever been, and 99 percent of anglers who purchased a fishing license last year agree that the fishing regulations are easy to understand, according to recent surveys.

These surveys also indicated that North Dakota's anglers are "satisfied," to "very satisfied," with the state's fishing regulations.

However, most years a few anglers express an interest in having additional restrictions on walleye fishing in spring, which would have the intent of protecting female walleye during spawning.

This issue has generated discussion off and on since the early 1990s, when Game and Fish decided to expand the year-round open season for gamefish on



The presence of old, large walleye, like this 14.2-pound, 31-inch fish sampled in the Missouri River upstream of Bismarck in April 2016, indicates a healthy walleye population and provides a trophy component to the fishery.

PAUL BAILEY

the Missouri River System to all waters statewide.

Prior to that, the fishing season outside of the Missouri River System closed in mid-March and opened again in late April or early May, on the premise that northern pike and walleye would complete their respective spawning runs during this closed period.

This year-round season statewide has served North Dakota anglers well, while at the same time there is no fisheries survey data that suggests the open season

has negatively influenced natural walleye reproduction on any water.

What follows is background information on current Game and Fish regulations, and the factors that could influence changes in those regulations in years to come.

Lake Oahe / Missouri River Walleye Fishery

More than 50,000 different anglers, with most targeting walleye, fish the Missouri River and Lake Oahe annually.

The Missouri River and Lake Oahe walleye fishery has for years provided outstanding opportunities to this diverse group, including fish for the fryer, trophies for the wall and countless memories.

Two things are inevitable every spring on the Missouri River and Lake Oahe in south central North Dakota. One, eager anglers will launch their boats at the first possible moment a river ramp is free of ice to search for walleye.

Two, Department fisheries biologists charged with managing this nationally renowned resource will field inquiries from a handful of anglers questioning whether more restrictive regulations, such as a closed season or fish size restrictions, primarily for walleye, would benefit the fishery.

To answer this, fisheries biologists routinely conduct netting and electrofishing surveys to monitor the health of the Missouri River fishery; assesses walleye age structure and growth rates; conduct creel surveys to gain an understanding of how anglers use the fishery; and periodically engage in special projects that provide additional information.

The current walleye tagging study, a cooperative project between North Dakota Game and Fish, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks, and South Dakota State University, is one example.

Based on all this scientific information, fisheries biologists can analyze the Missouri River walleye population from two perspectives. First, would more restrictive regulations improve the biological health of the walleye population? And second, would more restrictive regulations increase

the number of larger walleye available for anglers to (possibly) catch?

Biological Perspective

It is important to note that the Missouri River and Lake Oahe walleye fishery is maintained entirely through natural reproduction. North Dakota Game and Fish has not stocked walleye in its portion of the lake since 1981, and the last time South Dakota stocked walleye in its portion of Oahe was 1998.

Thus, maintaining an adequate number of sexually mature walleye, especially females, is a crucial consideration. It is also important to have an understanding of the species' reproductive strategy in determining how many females are necessary for maintaining the fishery.

For example, Lake Oahe's Beaver Bay is an important site for walleye reproduction. In spring 2016, the Department netted, tagged and released 758 mature female walleyes in Beaver Bay. Since a mature female walleye may carry 130,000 eggs, these 758 fish, in all likelihood, deposited close to 100 million eggs in the bay last spring.

Considering these 758 walleye represent only a small portion of fish in Beaver Bay, let alone all of the Missouri River and Lake Oahe, this population has the potential to produce many billions of offspring annually.

The amount of water Mother Nature provides, and how that water is managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, remains the primary factor governing the quality of this walleye fishery. Floods (1997 and 2011) and droughts (1988-92 and 2001-08) have periodically influenced this walleye fishery by reducing available habitat and causing forage shortages. Conversely, environmental conditions and water level management that favor forage fish production, walleye reproduction, growth and survival, have produced extraordinary results.

This is where the walleye's reproductive strategy is clearly effective on the Missouri River and Lake Oahe. Walleye are capable of producing many more offspring than are needed so they can quickly increase in

numbers when environmental conditions are favorable. Even if environmental conditions are poor, and the number of sexually mature walleyes declines, they still have the ability to rebound quickly. On some occasions, the Missouri River and Lake Oahe have seen walleye reproduction that was too good for the available forage base to support.

Another important biological consideration is maintaining a healthy length and age structure in this population. A healthy walleye population contains many more younger, smaller fish than large, older fish. However, the presence of large, older fish is a good indicator of a healthy population.

Game and Fish netting and electrofishing surveys indicate a balanced walleye population in the Missouri River and Lake Oahe. While small fish are abundant, fish 20 inches and longer are common, and fish living into their teens and measuring longer than 30 inches are sampled annually.

Social Perspective

Would some form of length regulation or more restrictive harvest lead to anglers encountering, but not necessarily harvesting, larger walleye?

Game and Fish has used different length restrictions for walleye fisheries at times, including minimum length limits, maximum or "one-over" length limits, protected slot length limits (no harvest allowed on 15- to 20-inch fish, for example), and reverse slot length limits (harvest only allowed on 15- to 20-inch fish, for example).

After a half-century or more of experimenting with these various regulations on walleye fisheries across North America, biologists have pretty much defined the biological and social conditions that must be present for such regulations to yield positive results. Game and Fish biologists evaluate the utility of each of these regulation types annually to determine if they could help improve the present condition of any given fishery.

More anglers approach Game and Fish with questions regarding a one-over 20-inch length restriction than any other type of regulation. Again, the biological answer is that the Missouri River has

plenty of mature female walleyes to maintain this naturally reproducing population. But from a social perspective, would a one-over 20-inch length restriction enable anglers to catch more big fish?

A Game and Fish Department creel survey of Missouri River and Lake Oahe anglers in 2015 provides some insight as to how a one-over 20-inch regulation would influence angler use of these fish.

Creel clerks interviewed 1,126 individual anglers (498 fishing parties) between Garrison Dam and the South Dakota border, and measured the lengths of walleye harvested by anglers whenever possible. Sixty five percent of harvested walleye were between 15 and 20 inches, 34 percent were under 15 inches, and less than 1 percent were 20 inches or longer.

None of the parties interviewed had more than one walleye 20 inches or longer per angler. Thus, a one-over 20-inch regulation would not have prevented the harvest of a single walleye 20 inches or longer among the 1,126 anglers surveyed.

Creel clerks clearly did not interview every single angler who fished the Missouri River or Lake Oahe in 2015. However, the survey information does provide overwhelming confidence that a one-over 20-inch regulation would have virtually no impact on this walleye fishery.

Moving Forward

Currently, the five-walleye daily limit, with no length restrictions, is maintaining a biologically healthy walleye population in the Missouri River and Lake Oahe. More restrictive harvest regulations at this time are biologically unnecessary, and would not likely lead anglers to catch more large walleye. Needlessly complicating regulations, without benefiting the fishery or anglers, is not the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's philosophy.

However, that doesn't mean the current situation will last forever, and Game and Fish biologists will continue to monitor and study this walleye population, and the anglers who use it, to ensure that effective harvest regulations are in place for maintaining the highest quality fishing possible for years to come.

Devils Lake and Its Upper Basin

Spring fishing is popular in the Devils Lake region because it gives shore-anglers their best opportunity of the year to catch a large walleye.

Although the good fishing usually only lasts a few weeks, Devils Lake region anglers often express concern that too many large walleye, fish longer than 20 inches, are harvested during this time, which will lead to poor walleye reproduction.

Biological Perspective

Biologists monitor the Devils Lake walleye population annually to determine if any conditions exist that would warrant a special regulation, such as a maximum length limit, or the commonly requested one-over limit.

The first thing to look at is if the lake has enough female walleyes to carry out a successful reproduction effort.

Spring fishing in the upper Devils Lake basin was very good from 2009-13, with the exception of 2012. In spite of this harvest, three of the four largest year-classes ever were produced since 2008, with the largest ever documented at Devils Lake in 2009.

Additionally, in 2012 the percentage of walleye longer than 15 inches was well below average, yet the second largest year-class ever was produced that year. This is pretty good evidence that the spring walleye harvest has not limited reproduction, and Devils Lake continues to maintain ample brood stock to produce good year-classes when conditions are favorable.

When evaluating whether a new harvest restriction is appropriate, biologists look for some evidence that harvest is actually having a negative effect on the population.

At Devils Lake, the total walleye mortality rate, which includes harvest and natural mortality, has in recent years been below what biologists across North America consider the normal range of about 40-55 percent.

Additionally, creel surveys indicate that anglers harvest large walleye at a lower rate than smaller fish. For example, test netting in 2013 showed that walleye longer than 20

inches made up more than 9 percent of the Devils lake walleye population. However, during a creel survey that summer, only about 3 percent of the fish that anglers caught and kept were longer than 20 inches, indicating that either these large walleye were harder to catch, or perhaps anglers were more likely to release them.

Social Perspective

With all this scientific research and angler activity surveys to draw on, Game and Fish biologists are confident that the Devils Lake basin walleye population does not meet the biological criteria that would warrant a maximum length type limit to protect fish for spawning.

In addition, the Game and Fish Department also considers whether further regulation could provide some social benefit, such as increasing the amount of larger walleyes for anglers to catch. Creel surveys in the Devils Lake region over the years provide some insight into whether regulation changes might have generated positive results.

During summer 2013, when only 3 percent of harvested walleye were longer than 20 inches, a one-over 20-inch limit would have required anglers to release

1,345 walleyes out of the total harvest of about 383,000 fish.

While that sounds like a lot of fish, tagging studies at Devils Lake have shown that only 9 percent of tagged walleye were ever caught again after their first release. That means about 121 of those large walleye in 2013 may have been caught again.

Looking at it a different way, if a regulation had required the release of 1,345 walleye that summer, anglers would probably not catch 1,224 of those fish again, meaning they would likely die of natural causes.

This would create a scenario where a lot of large walleyes would be wasted in an effort to enhance the fishing experience of a limited few. Game and Fish does not believe it is worth restricting anglers who are lucky or skilled enough to catch those large fish the first time, even if they choose to keep more than one per day.

Department fisheries biologists also measured walleyes harvested in May of 2013 from the coulees that flow into the Lake Irvine and Lake Alice complex, which eventually empties into Devils Lake. This survey found that about 59 percent of the harvested walleye were

20 inches or longer, and that a one-over 20-inch regulation would have required the release of about half of those fish.

Because fewer fish overall were harvested in spring, released fish would have numbered in the hundreds, instead of the thousands observed during the summer survey on Devils Lake. Most of these hundreds of fish would have returned to Lake Irvine or Lake Alice, where they would have found refuge due to difficult summer access to Lake Irvine, and no summer fishing allowed on Lake Alice.

Considering the vast expanse of water in the upper Devils Lake basin, the only time many of these fish are vulnerable to anglers is for a short time in spring.

A more serious threat to the walleye (and other fish) population in the upper portions of the Devils Lake system is a decrease in water levels. These upper basin lakes are relatively shallow and declining water levels could eventually lead to serious winterkill.

Moving Forward

Game and Fish assessment of current conditions at Devils Lake indicates that there is really no biological or social



The Missouri River and Lake Oahe walleye fishery has for years provided outstanding opportunities for thousands of anglers annually.

MIKE ANDERSON

benefit to gain from restricting harvest of large walleye in the Devils Lake region. Any new maximum length or one-over regulation would needlessly restrict angler opportunities, and would not benefit the walleye population or anglers.

However, as with the Missouri River System, if conditions change, Game and Fish is committed to establishing new regulations if there is a reasonable likelihood of protecting the fishery for biological reasons, or enhancing fishing experiences.

PAUL BAILEY is the Game and Fish Department's south central district fisheries supervisor in Bismarck. **RANDY HILTNER**, is the Department's northeast district fisheries supervisor in Devils Lake and **TODD CASPERS** is a Department fisheries biologist in Devils Lake.

Fueled by Natural Reproduction

By Greg Power

The Missouri River/Lake Oahe is one water body in North Dakota that has a walleye population fully supported by natural reproduction. Since this valuable fishery developed in the 1970s, strong year-classes of naturally reproduced walleye have occurred at regular 4-6 year intervals (1978, 1982, 1986, 1995, 2001, and 2009, for example). Due to drought conditions, there was little water in Lake Oahe between 1989-93 and 2002-07.

These strong year-classes dominate the fishery for 4-8 years thereafter and have historically provided angler catch rates far higher than noted at most other walleye fisheries across the country.

On the surface, knowing that Lake Oahe regularly produces more than enough walleye to support a great fishery is wonderful news. However, other than a lack of water during drought conditions, the largest issue that has faced this fishery in the past 40 years is too many walleye during times of poor forage populations.

In a good year, young-of-the-year white bass, yellow perch, crappie and some minnow species are abundant and provide needed groceries for the walleye population. In addition, during years of warmer than normal winters, gizzard

shad can also be abundant and are an excellent forage source.

Yet, there are years when there simply isn't enough forage to support the strong predator base, which also includes northern pike and channel catfish. And if one bad year of forage production is followed by another, the condition of the walleye fishery declines dramatically, as fish become skinny and basically quit growing. If forage problems persist, the overall walleye population dwindles rapidly due to high natural mortality.

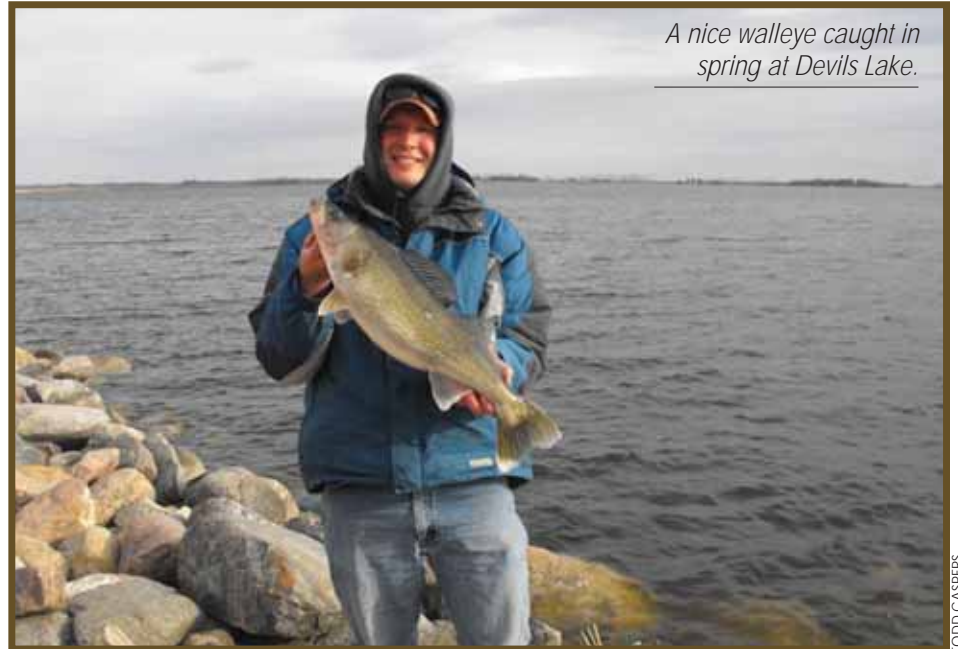
Anglers who fished Lake Oahe/Missouri River from 2003-08 observed an unhealthy fishery, with numerous skinny fish. The cause was too many walleye and not enough forage. The 2001 walleye year-class was strong, but years of low lake levels, with poor forage production, followed. As a result, these fish essentially quit growing. For example,

a 14-inch, 4-year-old walleye caught in 2005 was typically still just 14 inches in 2007.

In 2009, higher water levels returned to Lake Oahe/Missouri River and so did the forage. For those 2001 year-class walleye that did survive the lean years of little food, there was an immediate and positive response demonstrated by a remarkable growth spurt. Walleye again grew, resulting in many happy anglers.

Over the past 40-plus years, most of the time Lake Oahe and the Missouri River has supported a healthy walleye harvest. Only on a couple of occasions did biologists feel additional size restriction regulations were needed. When these regulations were no longer needed, they were removed.

GREG POWER is the Game and Fish Department's fisheries chief.



A nice walleye caught in spring at Devils Lake.

TODD CASPERS

Too Many Walleye?

By Greg Power

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's approach to walleye management across the state over the years has served anglers well.

A strong stocking program, developing and maintaining access, and consistent, straightforward regulations have helped produce an annual statewide harvest of 1-2 million walleye, while providing needed protection to ensure strong populations year-after-year.

In nearly all North Dakota water bodies, periodic stocking is needed to maintain walleye populations, as natural reproduction is generally not sufficient. What typically limits natural reproduction is the lack of good walleye spawning substrate, high salinity levels in many lakes, and water level fluctuations usually caused by strong winds during the egg incubation period.

Since 1999, fisheries managers have transformed more than 60 prairie wetlands into new walleye lakes, totaling 65,000 acres. With few exceptions, these lakes are the result of stocking decisions based simply on the balance of predator (walleye) and prey (mainly fathead minnows).

Department fisheries managers closely monitor fathead minnow abundance through netting surveys. When minnow numbers are high, walleye stocking rates are increased, and when minnow numbers are low, walleye stocking rates are decreased.

It's all about the groceries in the lake.

When a given lake has a high fathead minnow population, anglers sometimes believe the walleye are "fished out" because they are not easily caught. In reality, when there's simply a lot of easy meals for existing predators, it's more difficult for anglers to compete with all the free groceries.

The upside of maintaining a lake by



PAUL BAILEY

The upside of maintaining a lake by stocking walleye is that fisheries managers can change stocking rates based on forage conditions, such as the fresh water shrimp and young-of-the-year fish above.

stocking walleye is that fisheries managers can change stocking rates based on forage conditions. The goal is to maintain a strong walleye population that is just hungry enough to provide a good bite for eager anglers.

The new prairie walleye lake phenomenon over the last 20-plus years has given fisheries managers a chance to study walleye and forage populations in relation to angler success. Over time, these observations have produced a "recipe" for management that is working well for anglers and biologists alike.

Even on the big waters of Lake Sakakawea and Devils Lake, the decision of whether to stock walleye and how many is based on the strength of the respective forage bases. Fortunately, current forage conditions are excellent in Sakakawea (rainbow smelt) and good in Devils Lake (yellow perch, white bass and freshwater shrimp), and both waters are being stocked annually to supplement natural reproduction.

As a general rule, walleye and most predator fish grow well in North Dakota when forage allows. However, appropriate management is never static, and finding that right balance between predator and prey is sometimes challenging.

Water levels in North Dakota lakes, especially reservoirs, fluctuate dramatically between years, and often within a year. The difference in Lake Sakakawea over time, for example, is nearly 50 feet, while Jamestown and Pipestem reservoirs can fluctuate

up to 20 to 40 feet per year. Our weather is extreme and the wind constant. Snowpack on lakes can vary from almost none to a few feet, sometimes leading to winterkill.

Yes, there are places and times when a North Dakota water could have too many walleyes, resulting in a suppressed forage base. The pendulum, however, can swing rapidly, and water bodies that were suffering from too few groceries can rebound dramatically, meaning that stunted fish growth can move toward rapid growth when forage conditions improve.

North Dakota fishing lakes will continue to be monitored for negative impacts caused by overexploitation. However, Department fisheries biologists generally support angler walleye harvest when a good bite is ongoing in a given lake. To a large extent, these fish cannot be stockpiled due to common and dramatic shifts in forage base.

If anglers don't harvest these fish, Mother Nature will eliminate them. That's just the harsh reality of survival on the Northern Plains. A walleye in the frying pan is preferred to a dead fish on the bottom of the lake.

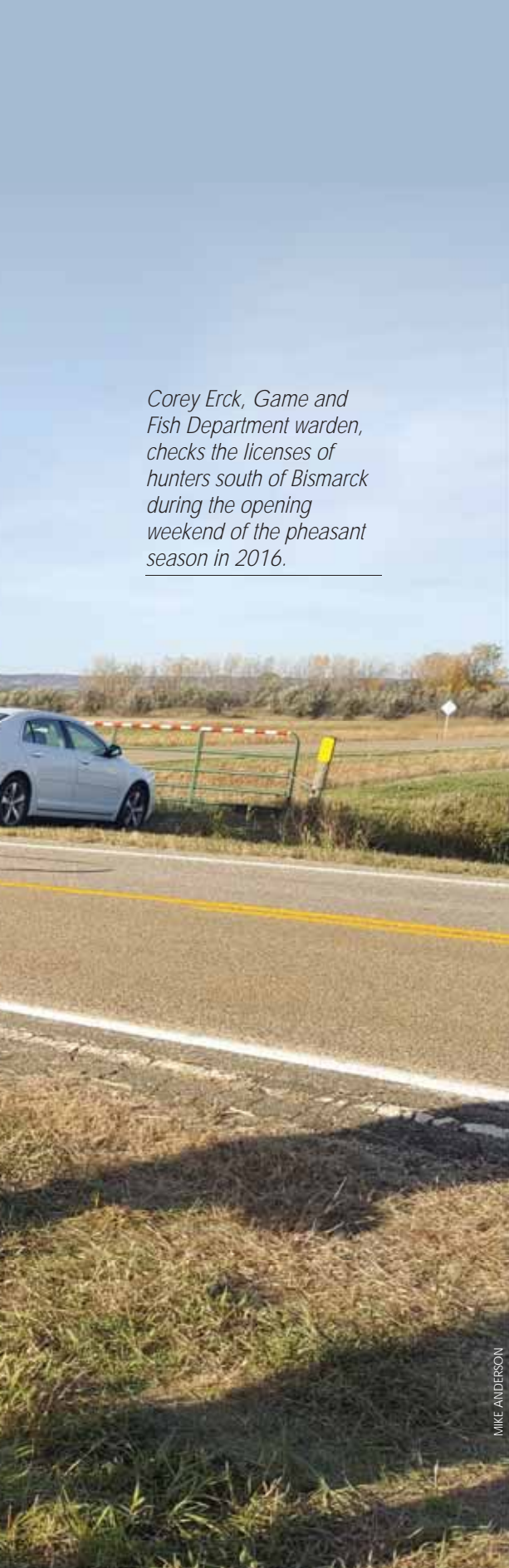
On the whole, the past decade has offered the best walleye fishing ever in North Dakota. And Department fisheries biologists will continue to tweak walleye stocking recipes to ensure a bright future.

GREG POWER is the Game and Fish Department's fisheries chief.

2016 ENFORCEMENT DIVISION REVIEW

By Robert Timian





Corey Erck, Game and Fish Department warden, checks the licenses of hunters south of Bismarck during the opening weekend of the pheasant season in 2016.

MIKE ANDERSON

Game and Fish violations handled by state game wardens are many and varied, from hunting and fishing without a license, to boating under the influence.

The number of violations handled by North Dakota Game and Fish Department wardens were down in 2016 (2,286 violations) compared to 2015 (2,428 violations).

Under the circumstances, this doesn't surprise me.

At full force, the Game and Fish Department's enforcement division has 29 district game wardens stationed across the state. In 2016, the division was short three wardens for much of the year.

When a warden is hired by the Game and Fish Department, successful applicants aren't just assigned to a station and turned loose. New wardens must first complete 12 weeks at the Law Enforcement Training Academy in Bismarck, followed by a minimum of 12 weeks of internal field training. Basically, from the day a warden is hired, it takes roughly six months before that warden is working his or her assigned district on their own.

So, over an extended period of time in 2016, essentially three enforcement districts in the state were not fully staffed.

Also in 2016, the Game and Fish Department dedicated three game wardens, working on a rotating basis, to the Dakota Access Pipeline protest response in Morton County. This assignment, which takes wardens from their districts for five days or so at a time, began in October and continues yet today.

Through the end of January, state game wardens had contributed more than 3,900 regular and overtime hours to the protest response, with salary and operational costs of more than \$300,000 that will be reimbursed by the state.

While enforcement of game and fish related laws is the primary duty of the Department's game wardens, these men and women provide assistance to other law enforcement efforts within the state, especially when assistance is related to public safety.

This has always been the way, with officers helping each other when summoned, regardless of agency or department, especially in areas away from major population centers where law enforcement resources are limited.

No matter the circumstances, Game and Fish Department enforcement division will continue to do the best it can with the resources provided for the state's hunters, anglers and general public.

This year, lawmakers are gathered in Bismarck at the 65th Legislative Assembly. As I write this in late January, there are 28 hunting and fishing related bills that, depending on their outcome, determine how the Game and Fish Department does business for the next two years.

While the legislative process can seem intimidating to some people, it is designed to allow public input.

Understanding this, it is important for hunters, anglers and other recreationists to make their views known. *OUTDOORS* readers have a vested interest in the process, and a responsibility to monitor legislation bills and provide informed input to local legislators.

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

2016 SUMMARY OF VIOLATIONS

BIG GAME	
Hunting in closed season	2
Failure to wear fluorescent orange	4
Tagging violations	18
Exceeding limit	6
Killing wrong species or sex	4
Other big game violations	11
Total	47
SMALL GAME	
Using gun able to hold more than 3 shells	60
Hunting in closed season	4
Illegal possession/taking	2
Exceeding limit	24
Failure to leave identification or sex of game	38
Killing wrong sex or species	2
Nontoxic shot violation	4
Failure to carry federal waterfowl stamp	13
Hunting in unharvested fields	10
Other small game violations	38
Total	195
BOATING	
Use of unlicensed or unnumbered boat	41
Failure to display boat registration	63
Operating without lights at night	45
Inadequate number of PFDs	228
Water skiing violations	57
Reckless or negligent operation	4
Operating vessel under influence/intoxicated	21
Other boating violations	80
Total	539
FISHING	
Fishing with excessive lines	57
Exceeding limit	119
Fishing in closed/restricted area	7
Failure to attend lines	16
No identification on fish house	5
ANS violation	115
Paddlefish violations	2
Other fishing violations	55
Total	376
FURBEARER	
Shining (using artificial light)	11
Illegal possession/taking	3
Harassing furbearers with motor vehicle	4
Other furbearer violations	15
Total	33

GENERAL	
Use of motor vehicle off established trail	10
Use of motor vehicle in restricted area	45
Harassing wildlife with motor vehicle	1
Hunting on posted land without permission	41
Hunting before/after legal hours	5
Wanton waste	4
Aid in concealment of unlawful game	1
Hunting in wrong unit/closed area	3
Loaded firearm in motor vehicle	50
Discharge of firearm within/on motor vehicle	2
440 yard violation	4
Littering	48
Other general violations	19
Total	240
LICENSING	
Failure to sign/affix stamp	19
Hunting/fishing/trapping without proper license	226
Failure to carry license on person	317
Misrepresentation on license or application	41
Other licensing violations	19
Total	240
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS/REFUGE	
Failure to obey posted regulations	59
Camping	11
Tree stand violations	13
Baiting on WMA	1
Prohibited uses of motor vehicles	16
Unlawful use of firearms	6
Other WMA/refuge violations	4
Total	142
MISCELLANEOUS	
Possession of controlled substance	8
Possession of drug paraphernalia	6
Open container	14
Minor in possession	34
Criminal trespass	14
Other miscellaneous	15
Total	91
COMMERCIAL	
Other commercial	5
Total	5

Incidents 2016 – Top 10 Counties

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

- Burleigh – 315
- McLean – 225
- Morton – 216
- Cass – 199
- Richland – 199
- Ward – 191
- McKenzie – 176
- Ramsey – 175
- Williams – 153
- Mountrail – 127

Citations 2016 – Top 10 Counties

- Ramsey – 199
- McKenzie – 184
- Williams – 159
- Burleigh – 138
- McLean – 106
- Benson – 89
- Mountrail – 80
- Morton – 73
- Ward – 64
- Sargent – 62



RON WILSON

Erik Schmidt, Game and Fish Department warden, Linton, inspects a turkey found dead in the field.



MIKE ANDERSON

Game and Fish Department wardens spend a considerable amount of time during the state's open water season patrolling the Missouri River and other waters that attract anglers and water enthusiasts.

NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST

CELEBRATES

30 YEARS



STORY BY *ANGELA MAGSTADT*

PHOTOS BY *CRAIG BIHRLE*

WHAT BEGAN AS A “HAIL MARY”

by then-Governor George Sinner and a handful of water leaders to help curb animosity between wildlife and agriculture interests in the 1980s, is now celebrating 30 years of on-the-ground programs designed to benefit both agriculture

producers and wildlife conservation efforts.

The North Dakota Natural Resources Trust, as it is now called, was born from controversy over the Garrison Diversion Unit, a massive federal government project that promised 250,000 acres of irrigation in North Dakota as the state's repayment

for giving up 400,000 acres of Missouri River bottomland, pasture and cropland for the creation of the Garrison Dam and its reservoir, Lake Sakakawea.

Construction of Lake Audubon and the Garrison Diversion Canal, which was originally intended to carry Missouri River

The Joliet Ferry Wildlife Management Area, a Natural Resources Trust project of more than 900 acres, borders the Red River in eastern Walsh County. Inset: The signs at Joliet Ferry WMA indicate the many partners, including local landowners, who helped make the project a reality.



water to the headwaters of the Sheyenne River, from where it could be distributed throughout the Red River watershed, began in the 1960s. Along the way, however, adjoining states, Canadian provinces, conservation organizations and others began raising issues, which included:

- The project's environmental impacts, such as wetland inundation, wetland drainage.
- Acquisition of land to build it.
- Economics of irrigation on lands that weren't suitable.
- Canadian concerns about the quality of the water, and organisms in the water, flowing from the Missouri River Basin into the Hudson Bay Basin.

These controversies eventually served to halt construction of the original project not long before the first pulse of water was scheduled to descend from the Garrison Diversion Canal into the upper Sheyenne River in Sheridan County.

The Wetland Wars

At the same time GDU construction was ongoing, wildlife interests and farmers, especially in the Devils Lake Basin, were at odds with each other regarding draining of wetlands. Farmers were draining wetlands on their farms, which allowed them to farm as much land as possible, and wildlife groups and federal regulators, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, were attempting to stop apparently illegal drain projects. The North Dakota Chapter of the Wildlife Society actually sued the State Water Commission on a number of drainage projects happening in the state.

It got to the point that some banks in Devils Lake even refused to cash or accept payroll checks from Fish and Wildlife Service employees.

In the midst of all this sometimes-heated conflict, then-Governor Sinner, after a meeting in Washington, D.C., with various water and wildlife interests, looked at all of them, and told them to, "just figure it out," says Mike McEnroe, former project leader with the FWS. "He told us to work together to find solutions to the wetland problems. And that was the beginning of what developed as the North Dakota Wetlands Trust."

Creation of the Trust

The Wetlands Trust was part of the 1986 Garrison Diversion Reformulation Act, passed by Congress and signed by

then-President Ronald Reagan, which transformed the original Garrison Diversion Unit into a multipurpose project that focused largely on municipal, rural and industrial water supply rather than irrigation for crop production. Construction on the Garrison Diversion Canal basically stopped at that point.

The Wetlands Trust's original mission was to preserve, restore, manage and enhance wetlands and associated wildlife habitat in North Dakota. To ensure its success, Congress originally authorized \$12 million in federal funding, with a \$1.2 million state match. Only the interest from trust funds can be spent.

In 2000, that mission was broadened to include grassland conservation and riparian areas with the passage of the Dakota Water Resources Act, in which Congress also added \$25 million in funding. Along with the additional scope and funding came a name change to the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust.

The Trust is governed by a board of six directors, three appointed by the North Dakota governor and one each representing the National Audubon Society, the National Wildlife Federation and the North Dakota Chapter of the Wildlife Society. Because of the equal representation on both sides, conservation and agriculture organizations had to work together to achieve benefits for agriculture, water, conservation and wildlife.

Trust Accomplishments

Over the last 30 years, the Natural Resources Trust has worked on a variety of projects, from short-term landowner agreements to large land acquisitions. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the Trust was operated by the board without any staff members, many of its programs were land acquisitions, and there was a great deal of support for this. Some of these early land acquisition projects, which helped further the Trust's mission, are:

- **Kenner Marsh** is a wetland mitigation site in Ramsey County that serves as a water storage site for farmers in the upper watershed who want to drain wetlands on their property. The Trust continues to own the

Kenner Marsh property under a long-term lease and management agreement with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

- **Chase Lake Wildlife Project** is a North American Waterfowl Management Plan flagship wetland and grassland conservation project in Stutsman County. It is a partnership that includes many state agencies and is supported by agriculture and conservation interests.

- **The Maple River properties** were lands the Trust purchased to serve as a test site for conservation practices. Landowners could rent land on this property to experiment with new conservation practices they were considering for their own land.

The Trust installed a grazing system and purchased equipment such as a no-till drill for this purpose. This program helped reduce the risk for farmers who wanted to implement conservation practices on their land.

In addition, the Trust has also played the role of project coordinator on some large acquisition projects, such as:

- **The Joliet Ferry and Walhalla wildlife management areas** are properties that were severely damaged by Red River flooding. The Trust worked with the owners of these properties, and federal, state and local partners, to facilitate purchase of the land, which could no longer be used for farming. Large wetlands were restored on these lands, as well as restoration of tall-grass prairie. Both these areas are now public-access properties

- The land surrounding the **Missouri and Yellowstone River confluence** in McKenzie County is prone to flooding and has high wildlife values and enormous historical significance. The Trust facilitated a large, complex partnership that worked for more than 10 years to acquire nearly 2,857 acres that are now owned and managed by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

This area is popular for public activities such as fishing, hunting, canoeing



Wetland management at Joliet Ferry Wildlife Management Area.

and birdwatching. The Missouri-Yellowstone Confluence Interpretive Center, managed by the State Historical Society of North Dakota, overlooks this protected land.

The Trust has also created and managed several voluntary private land programs throughout its existence, including:

- **The Create-a-Wetland Program** was created during the drought period of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Under this program landowners could plug drains that were created to empty wetland basins, trapping water until the following spring when the structures were removed so the water was drained off the a field so it could be cropped. Because this was a form of flood irrigation, these areas would produce crops, even during drought. The Create-a-Wetland Program was well

received by Bottineau County landowners who participated in it.

- **The Beginning Farmer Program** was the only one of its kind in North Dakota. In this program, the Trust assisted beginning farmers with securing loans, helping them lower their down payments, and suggesting practices that were both agriculture and conservation friendly, such as rotational grazing, grass seeding, conservation tillage and cover crop planting. This project remains a Trust focus under a state Outdoor Heritage Fund Grant received in 2015.
- **Ongoing habitat projects** include grass seeding as part of the Conservation Reserve Program, wetland restoration, wetland creation, conversion of marginal cropland to grass and grassland restoration. These voluntary private land conservation projects are

popular among North Dakota farmers and ranchers.

• **The Working Grassland Partnership** is a new program recently approved by the Outdoor Heritage board, with funding and delivery support from the North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts, Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever. WGP provides landowners with funding assistance to install the infrastructure needed to transition expired or expiring CRP contracts into healthy grazing grasslands. The program promotes livestock grazing for retaining and improving grassland habitat. A 60 percent cost-share grant is available through this program to assist

landowners with installing livestock and grassland-bird-friendly development practices, including livestock watering systems and fencing.

In addition to all the programs the Trust has facilitated and managed, it has also provided more than \$5 million in grants for education; wetland and grassland restoration projects; habitat conservation projects; and sustainable agriculture projects, such as grazing systems and conservation agriculture equipment like no-till drills.

ANGELA MAGSTADT is the former editor of the North Dakota Water magazine, produced by the North Dakota Water Education Foundation, where an expanded version of this article originally appeared.



30th Anniversary Thoughts

By Keith Trego, Executive Director

It is not uncommon to consider 30 years as a generation. In that context, the Trust has now been around for a full generation.

The Trust is a one-of-a-kind venture, the product of the fertile minds and exemplary leadership of a small group of organizational and political leaders who figured out how to turn controversy into compromise. The organization was designed to be innovative and flexible – to invest in partnerships and conservation solutions agencies or other nongovernmental organizations were not well equipped to handle.

The Trust has partnered with federal and state agencies; nongovernmental organizations in agriculture, water, energy and conservation; political subdivisions across the state; and hundreds upon hundreds of private landowners to bring practical solutions to landscape needs. But perhaps the most rewarding aspects of the Trust's first 30 years have been addressing the nearly insatiable appetite for voluntary private land conservation expressed by North Dakota's farmers and ranchers.

It is impossible to predict what the next 30 years will bring for the Trust, but one thing is certain. The needs of the state, its farmers and ranchers, as well as its water and energy partners, will evolve. The Trust will respond to and change with those needs, working with partners at all levels and in all venues. I have no doubt the Trust will be as valuable an entity for protecting the state's natural resources and bringing common sense solutions to both public policy and on-the-ground conservation needs in 2046 as it has been over the past 30 years.

KEITH TREGO has served as executive director of the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust since 1998.



North Dakota Natural Resources Trust Current Board of Directors

- Randy Renner, North Dakota Chapter of the Wildlife Society
- Dave Dittloff, National Wildlife Federation
- Marshall Johnson, National Audubon Society
- Duane Hauck, governor's appointment
- Gary Melby, governor's appointment
- Jerry Doan, governor's appointment
- Terry Steinwand, North Dakota Game and Fish Department Director (non-voting member)



In 2005, the Natural Resources Trust helped finalize the first land acquisition at the Missouri and Yellowstone river confluence. Pictured at the dedication of that project in April 2005 are, from left, Terry Allbee, current business manager biologist; Keith Trego, current executive director; and Merle Bennett, former biologist.



BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor



CRAIG BIRLE

Spring Light Goose Season Opens

North Dakota's spring light goose season opens February 18 and continues through May 14.

Residents must have a valid current season 2016-17 (valid through March 31) or 2017-18 (required April 1) combination license; or a small game, and general game and habitat license. The 2017-18 license is available for purchase beginning March 15.

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

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

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

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

Availability of food and open water dictate when snow geese arrive in the state and how long they stay. Early migrants generally start showing up in

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

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

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

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

Shooting hours are 30 minutes before sunrise to 30 minutes after sunset. There is no daily bag limit or

possession limit. Electronic and recorded calls, as well as shotguns capable of holding more than three shells, may be used to take light geese during this season.

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

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

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

All regular hunting season regulations not addressed above apply to the spring season. For more information on regulations refer to the 2017 Spring Light Goose Hunting Regulations and the 2016 North Dakota Waterfowl Hunting Guide.



LARA ANDERSON

Two Deer Test Positive for CWD

A mule deer doe and buck taken during the 2016 deer gun season from unit 3F2 in southwestern North Dakota tested positive for chronic wasting disease, according to Dr. Dan Grove, wildlife veterinarian for the State Game and Fish Department.

Since 2009, the total now stands at nine deer to test positive for CWD and all were from within unit 3F2.

CWD affects the nervous system of members of the deer family and is always fatal. Scientists have found no evidence that CWD can be transmitted naturally to humans or livestock.

In addition to the 350 samples tested for CWD from unit 3F2, another 1,050 were tested from deer harvested last fall by hunters in the eastern third of the state, and from any moose or elk taken during the hunting season. In all, more than 1,400 samples were tested.

Since the Game and Fish Department's sampling efforts began in 2002, more than 30,000 deer, elk and moose have tested negative for CWD.

The hunter-harvested surveillance program annually collects samples taken from hunter-harvested deer in specific regions of the state. In 2017, deer will be tested from the central portion of the state.

The Game and Fish Department also has a targeted surveillance program that is an ongoing, year-round effort to test animals found dead or sick.

Permanent Fish House Deadline

State law requires removal of permanent fish houses from North Dakota waters by midnight March 15.

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

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

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

Registration Reminder

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

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

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

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

All waters open to hook-and-line fishing are open to darkhouse spearfishing except East Park Lake, West Park Lake and Lake Audubon, all McLean County; Larimore Dam, Grand Forks County; Heckers Lake, Sheridan County; McClusky Canal; New Johns Lake, Burleigh County; and Red Willow Lake, Griggs County.

Anglers should refer to the 2016-18 North Dakota Fishing Guide for more information.

Midwinter Waterfowl Survey Numbers Down

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual midwinter waterfowl survey in early January indicated 26,360 Canada geese in the state, down from a record 222,890 in 2016.

Andy Dinges, Department migratory game bird biologist, said above average snowfall and below average temperatures that began in late November, continued up until the survey, which created poor wintering conditions for Canada geese and mallards.

"We saw a significant drop in the number of birds that wintered in the state, but that's because wintering conditions were excellent last year, as little snow accumulation and moderate temperatures allowed birds to remain," Dinges said.

An estimated 23,100 Canada geese were observed on the Missouri River, and another 700 were scattered on Nelson Lake in Oliver County. Lake Sakakawea had nearly 500 on the lake itself. Dinges said after summarizing the numbers, an additional 3,160 mallards were tallied statewide.

The 10-year average (2008-17) for the midwinter survey in North Dakota is 95,410 Canada geese and 27,310 mallards.



CRAIG BIRLE



LARA ANDERSON

Tax Checkoff for Wildlife

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

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

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

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

HUNTING AND FISHING LEGISLATION ON WEBSITE

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is tracking hunting and fishing issues during the 2017 legislative session.

Interested outdoor enthusiasts can follow proposed outdoors-related bills by logging onto the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov.

A brief description of each bill will be included, along with the bill sponsor and hearing schedule.

Nonresident Any-Deer Bow Licenses

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department will have 382 any-deer bow licenses available to nonresidents in 2017.

The deadline for applying is March 1. A lottery will be held if more applications are received than licenses available. Any remaining licenses after March 1 will be issued on a first-come, first-served basis. Applicants can apply together as a party. A separate check is required for each application.

The nonresident any-deer bow application is available at the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov. The application must be printed and sent in to the Department.

The number of nonresident any-deer bow licenses available is 15 percent of the previous year's mule deer gun license allocation. The Game and Fish Department issued 2,550 mule deer licenses in the 2016 deer gun license lottery.



CRAIG BIRRE

NASP Tourney March 17-18

The North Dakota National Archery in the Schools Program state tournament is March 17-18 at the State Fair Center in Minot.

The tournament will feature team and individual categories in elementary, middle school and high school, including awards and prizes, and up to \$20,000 in college scholarships available to the top 10 boys and girls in each grade division.

Additionally, the top 10 boys and girls qualify for NASP nationals in Louisville, Kentucky.

The state tournament and all other local and regional NASP tournaments are open to any student in grades 4-12

who attend a school that offers NASP lessons during the school day. If a school has an afterschool club, third-graders are also welcome, with permission from the coach and principal.

For a complete listing of tournaments in North Dakota, go to the official NASP tournament website at <http://www.nasptournaments.org/>.

A certified NASP archery instructor must register your child for all NASP tournaments.

For more information, or to find out if your child's school participates in NASP, contact Jeff Long, North Dakota state coordinator, at jrlong@nd.gov or call 701-328-6322.

EARTH DAY



PATCH CONTEST 2017

North Dakota Earth Day Patch Contest

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual Earth Day awareness campaign is accepting entries for design of a 2017 Earth Day patch.

North Dakota students ages 6-18 are eligible to participate. The deadline to submit entries is March 15.

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

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

North Dakota in April and May.

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

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



BRUCE KRETT

Youth Grant Program Application Deadline

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

The maximum grant allowed is \$3,000. The program currently helps fund approximately 40 club and organizational events and projects, with an average grant of \$1,550.

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

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

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

The deadline to apply for a 2017 grant is April 20.



STAFF NOTES



Nate Harling

Harling Received PF Award

Nate Harling, private land field operation coordinator, Bismarck, received the state Pheasants Forever Wildlife Professional of the Year award for his work in coordinating efforts among various conservation partners involved in the Richards Angus Ranch PLOTS tract enrollment. The Richard's tract, located in Golden Valley County, is the largest in the state at more than 20,000 acres.



Jerry Gulke

Wildlife Division Fills Positions

Longtime employee Jerry Gulke retired in October 2016 after more than 35 years with the Department.

Chad Parent, an East Grand Forks, Minnesota, native was hired to fill Gulke's survey coordinator position. Parent received his bachelor's and Master's degrees from the University of North Dakota. He earned his Ph.D in wildlife science from Texas A&M University.



Chad Parent



Heidi Belohlavek

Belohlavek Fills Post

Heidi Belohlavek has been hired as the Department's administrative assistant in the wildlife division.

Game Management Position Filled

Ryan Herigstad has accepted the Department's game management technician position in Bismarck. Herigstad has been the agency's waterfowl management technician since 2014.



Ryan Herigstad

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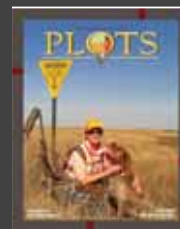


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NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

100 North Bismarck Expressway
Bismarck, ND 58501-5095
701-328-6300
Email: ndgf@nd.gov

back cast



By Ron Wilson



MIKE ANDERSON

Snow and cold changes things. A lot of one or the other, or worse, both, leaves you wondering who you ticked off.

While at this writing, early February, it's too early to say if winter will go down as one of note, we can be certain that we'll remember how it got rolling.

In November, the opening weekend of the deer gun season, we skinned and quartered my son's doe sometime after lunch in T-shirts. We stored the quarters in a big cooler loaded with two blocks of ice, and wondered if the ice would hold for another day or two.

It was hot, sweaty work, unusual for that time of year, but better than the alternative. Friends hunting deer, and others chasing pheasants, said at the time and days after, that it was too warm to get the deer moving and tough on their bird dogs.

Even so, most agreed that every nice day in November would make winter, which was certainly coming, a little shorter.

When it started snowing after Thanksgiving, it seemed to never let up. Schools

and businesses closed, and my avid across-the-street pheasant hunting neighbor, armed with a snow shovel and not his shotgun, yelled that he held no hopes for the ringnecks having to deal with all this.

On my side of the street, an immature, fruit-bearing tree, heavy with ice and snow that we planted in summer for songbirds, fox squirrels and our enjoyment, looked like an old man, bent at the waist trying like mad, but without success, to touch his toes.

It's a mistake, or simply a misuse of time, to sit and hope for a change – for access to open up on area ice fishing lakes, for roads to clear where we like to hunt cottontails with .22s when little else is in season. With 50-plus inches of snow so far this winter, and more than a foot remaining on the level, it is what it is.

In mid-January in a heated garage, some friends and I mixed with pork and ground into sausage the doe we quartered in T-shirts weeks earlier.

Broken down, the step-by-step, from-field-to-table process is fundamental, but it didn't appear as such at first glance. You

couldn't toss a hind shank without hitting two or three plastic tubs; two vacuum sealers and rolls of plastic bags; electric grinder and attachments; stuffer and attachments; hand-crank mixer; premeasured bags of spices; premeasured bags of pork; pork casings soaking in a bucket of water; and a touch-screen tablet monitoring the temperature of the meat hanging in the propane-fired smoker outside.

I showed up with two knives, sharpener and cash, all of which fit into my pants and coat pockets.

I was enlivened by the experience, not only because the smoked meats and spices smelled so darn good, but because it got me out of the house and nearer to what I enjoy.

We weren't hunting, but we were closer to it than we had been for much of the winter. Some photos were shared and old deer hunting stories told, most of which sounded almost true.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



A Look Back

North Dakota's spring crow season opens March 11. It's unlikely anyone will skip school or work to open the season on a bird that is so pedestrian it hardly earns a second look while picking at flattened roadkill or parking lot litter.

Yet, back in the day, say, from the late 1930s to early 1950s – killing crows in North Dakota, and across the country, was a big deal.

It was understood at the time that crows were tough on game birds prized by hunters.

"It has been estimated by scientists that the crows reduce the duck population by one-third, and the toll taken in upland bird life is extremely large. Entire clutches of partridge, grouse and pheasant eggs have been cleaned out by the black marauders," according to the March 1939 issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

For many years, the Game and Fish Department sponsored a crow control contest. According to a historical look back at "The Crow Wars" in the March 1990 issue of *OUTDOORS*, the contest coincided with the crows' annual spring migration.

The trophy pictured on this page was awarded to the first-place 4-H club in the crow control contest in 1947. The trophy was passed along to a Department game warden earlier this winter, and was the inspiration for this Look Back.

It was reported that the Game and Fish Department sponsored its first crow control contest in 1937. Contests were held most years through the 1940s. Trophies and prizes were awarded to wildlife clubs and individuals taking the most crows and crow eggs. Some clubs split into two teams, with the losing team at the end

of the contest putting on a banquet for the winning team.

Crows were shot on roosts after sunset and nests were robbed of eggs. Other methods of take, which would certainly be frowned upon today, were also employed.

In 1949, for example, the crow control contest accounted for 34,225 dead crows. Not many years later, the war on crows began to subside.

Eventually, the crow was protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It still is today, though North Dakota and many other states have classified it as a game bird.

Today, North Dakota's spring crow season is also followed by a fall season.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.