

# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
\$2.00 MAY 2017







# MATTERS OF OPINION



**Terry Steinwand**  
*Director*

Every season in North Dakota has its own appeal. As North Dakotans, I don't think we'd change any of them, including winter blizzards and summer thunderstorms that rumble across the prairie.

But even the most ardent snowbirds or heat haters have to agree that spring in our great state is the most anticipated and appreciated time of year.

While I certainly love summer for open water fishing and fall for the seemingly endless hunting opportunities, spring brings about the rebirth of everything we cherish on the Northern Plains.

Having grown up in a rural setting, I tend to listen to sounds and enjoy the fragrant aromas when I go outside. I can't imagine what life would be without the sound of robins, cooing of doves, the harsh shrill of a blue jay flitting around, or the smell of spring rains and blooming flowers.

We shouldn't take any of this for granted since it's a special part of what and who we are in a state known for diverse and numerous resources.

Many of the birds we have the privilege of seeing and hearing in spring don't spend the year in North Dakota. Some are passing through to places farther north to mate and nest, stopping only to rest and refuel before continuing on. Others stop to make North Dakota their summer home, to raise young in the natural and diverse native grasslands, before it's time to migrate south to wintering grounds elsewhere.

This issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* takes a closer look at the many species of shorebirds that migrate through North Dakota, or stay here to nest.

As spring progresses, North Dakota Game and Fish Department personnel are again embarking on what we consider a normal course of business. Activities like collecting fish to stock in fishing lakes that need a "boost," gathering fish eggs for hatcheries and subsequent stocking in lakes

across the state, pheasant crowing counts and waterfowl counts are just some of the routine activities that occur on an annual basis.

There are, however, always some unique activities that occur and this issue covers one of them – a sage grouse transport.

Department biologists have monitored sage grouse in southwestern North Dakota for decades. And in the last 10 years, they've documented a steady decline in the population. For approximately three years, we've worked on a project that is intended to boost the population and this spring that work came to fruition.

The project involves translocating male and female sage grouse from Wyoming to southwestern North Dakota. I have to add that the project wouldn't have been possible without the assistance and cooperation from our colleagues from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Director Scott Talbott and his staff in Wyoming deserve a big thank you for their help.

As we move from spring into the summer boating season, always be aware of what you're carrying with you when you take your boat out of the water. We've been fortunate, for the most part, that we've been able to keep aquatic nuisance species out of North Dakota. That is, in large part, a function of the importance the public places on the precautions necessary when moving from water body to water body.

We thank you for that, but we can't let our guard down now. Check your boat trailers for vegetation when moving out of a lake. Make sure your livewells are drained to prevent potential movement of those critters that aren't easily seen, but are still there. The continued diligence of everyone is required and appreciated.

With all that in mind, we have quite a bit to be thankful for in our great state. So get out and enjoy spring and the great outdoors in North Dakota.

*Terry Steinwand*

## DEPARTMENT DIRECTORY

Governor Doug Burgum

### ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION

Game and Fish Director: Terry Steinwand

Deputy Director: Scott Peterson

Chief, Administrative Services: Kim Kary

Business Manager: Corey Wentland

Administrative Staff Officer: Justin Mattson

Administrative Assistant: Lynn Timm

Administrative Officer/Building Maint. Supvr: George Lee

Building Maint. Tech: Charlie Matthies

Accounting Manager: Angie Krueger

Accountants: Kelly Wike, Melissa Long, Ashley Baker

IT Section Supervisor/GIS Specialist: Brian Hosek

IT Coordinators: Alan Reile, Larry Gross

Programmer Analyst: Tiffany Qyast

Licensing Manager: Randy Meissner

Assistants: Gail Mosset, Katherine Mernitz, Amanda Anstrom, Tracy Price,

Tana Bentz

Administrative Assistant – Dickinson: Janel Kolar, Stephanie Richardson

Administrative Assistant – Devils Lake: Lisa Tofte

Administrative Assistant – Jamestown: Tonya Kukowski

Administrative Assistant – Riverdale: Sally Sorensen

Administrative Assistant – Williston: Samantha Oster

### CONSERVATION AND COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION

Division Chief: Greg Link, Bismarck

Communications Supervisor: Craig Bihle, Bismarck

Editor, *North Dakota OUTDOORS*: Ron Wilson, Bismarck

Website Editor: Lara Anderson, Bismarck

News Editor: Greg Freeman, Bismarck

Video News Director: Tom Jensen, Bismarck

Videographer: Mike Anderson, Bismarck

Outreach Biologists: Doug Leier, West Fargo; Greg Gullickson, Minot; Marty

Egeland, Grand Forks; Pat Lothspeich, Bismarck

Information Specialist: Dawn Jochim, Bismarck

Graphic Artist: Connie Schiff, Bismarck

Education Coordinators: Jeff Long, Brian Schaffer, Bismarck

Hunter Education Coordinator: John Mazur, Bismarck

Conservation Supervisor: Steve Dyke, Bismarck

Resource Biologists: John Schumacher, Bruce Kreft, Bismarck

Conservation Biologists: Sandra Johnson, Patrick Isakson, Elisha Mueller, Bismarck

Administrative Assistant: Brandon Diehl, Bismarck

### ENFORCEMENT DIVISION

Division Chief: Robert Timian, Bismarck

Investigative Supervisor: Scott Winkelman, Bismarck

Operations Supervisor: Jackie Lundstrom, Bismarck

Warden Pilot: Jeff Sieger, Bismarck

Region No. 1 Warden Supvr: Mark Pollert, Jamestown

District Wardens: Corey Erck, Bismarck; Jerad Bluem, Steele; Michael Sedlacek, Fargo; Tim Phalen, Wyndmere; Andrew Dahlgren, Edgeley; Erik Schmidt, Linton; Greg Hastings, Jamestown

Region No. 2 Warden Supvr: Paul Freeman, Devils Lake

District Wardens: Jonathan Tofteland, Bottineau; Jim Job, Devils Lake; James Myhre, New Rockford; Blake Riewer, Grand Forks; Alan Howard, Cando; Peter Miley, Cavalier; Jonathan Peterson, Rugby

Region No. 3 Warden Supvr: Doug Olson, Riverdale

District Wardens: Jim Burud, Kenmare; Tim Larson, Turtle Lake; Ken Skuza, Riverdale; Michael Raasakka, Stanley; Brian Updike, Minot; Joe Lucas, Watford City; Shawn Sperling, Keenan Snyder, Williston

Region No. 4 Warden Supvr: Dan Hoenke, Dickinson

District Wardens: Kaylor Johnston, Hazen; Art Cox, Bowman; Courtney Sprenger, Elgin; Zane Manhart, Gola; Jake Miller, Killdeer; Jeff Violett, Mandan; Zachary Schuchard, Richardson

Administrative Assistant: Lori Kensington, Bismarck

### WILDLIFE DIVISION

Division Chief: Jeb Williams, Bismarck

Assistant Division Chief: Casey Anderson, Bismarck

Game Mgt. Section Leader: Stephanie Tucker, Bismarck

Pilot: Jeff Faught, Bismarck

Upland Game Mgt. Supvr: Aaron Robinson, Dickinson

Upland Game Mgt. Biologist: Rodney Gross, Bismarck

Migratory Game Bird Mgt. Supervisor: Mike Szymanski, Bismarck

Migratory Game Bird Biologist: Andrew Dinges, Bismarck

Big Game Mgt. Supvr: Bruce Stillings, Dickinson

Big Game Mgt. Biologists: Bill Jensen, Bismarck; Brett Wiedmann, Dickinson;

Jason Smith, Jamestown

Survey Coordinator: Chad Parent, Bismarck

Wildlife Veterinarian: Dr. Daniel Grove, Bismarck

Game Management Technician: Ryan Herigstad, Bismarck

Wildlife Resource Management Section Leader: Kent Luttschwager, Williston

Wildlife Resource Mgt. Supvrs: Bill Haase, Bismarck; Brian Prince, Devils Lake;

Brian Kietzman, Jamestown; Dan Halstead, Riverdale; Blake Schaan, Lonetree

Wildlife Resource Mgt. Biologists: Arvid Anderson, Riverdale; Randy Littlefield,

Lonetree; Rodd Compson, Jamestown; Judd Jasmer, Dickinson; Jacob Oster, Williston

Wildlife Techs: Tom Crutchfield, Jim Houston, Bismarck; Dan Morman, Robert Miller, Riverdale; Ernest Dawson, Jamestown; Cordell Schmitz, Joshua Odden, Lonetree; Scott Olson, Devils Lake

Private Land Section Leader: Kevin Kading, Bismarck

Asst. Private Land Coordinator: Doug Hovic, Bismarck

Private Land Field Operation Coordinator: Nathan Harling, Bismarck

Private Land Biologists: Colin Penner, Levi Jacobson, Bismarck; Curtis Francis, Jaden

Honeyman, Dickinson; Ryan Huber, Riverdale; Renae Schultz, Jamestown; Terry

Oswald, Jr., Lonetree; Todd Buckley, Williston; Andrew Ahrens, Devils Lake

Procurement Officer: Dale Repnow, Bismarck

Administrative Assistant: Heidi Belohlavek, Bismarck

Lonetree Administrative Assistant: Diana Raugust, Harvey

### FISHERIES DIVISION

Division Chief: Greg Power, Bismarck

Fisheries Mgt. Section Leader: Scott Gangl, Bismarck

Fisheries Supvrs: Jeff Hendrickson, Dickinson; Jason Lee, Riverdale; Paul Bailey, Bis-

marck; Randy Hiltner, Devils Lake; Dave Fryda, Riverdale; Brandon Kratz, Jamestown

Fisheries Biologists: Russ Kinzler, Riverdale; Todd Caspers, Devils Lake; Aaron

Slominski, Williston; Mike Johnson, Jamestown

Fisheries Techs: Phil Miller, Devils Lake; Pat John, Jamestown; Justen Barstad,

Bismarck; Brian Frohlich, Riverdale; Jeff Merchant, Dickinson

Production/Development Section Supvr: Jerry Weigel, Bismarck

Aquatic Habitat Supvr: Scott Elstad, Bismarck

Aquatic Nuisance Species Coordinator: Jessica Howell, Jamestown

Fisheries Development Supvr: Bob Frohlich, Bismarck

Fisheries Dev. Proj. Mgr: Wesley Erdle, Bismarck

Fisheries Development Technician: Kyle Hoge, Bismarck

Administrative Assistant: Janice Vetter, Bismarck

### ADVISORY BOARD

District 1 ..... Jason Leiseth, Arnegard

District 2 ..... Robert Gjellstad, Voltaire

District 3 ..... Thomas Rost, Devils Lake

District 4 ..... Joe Solseng, Grand Forks

District 5 ..... Duane Hanson, West Fargo

District 6 ..... Joel Christoferson, Litchville

District 7 ..... David Nehring, Bismarck

District 8 ..... Dwight Hecker, Fairfield

# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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

• Editor: Ron Wilson • Graphic Designer: Connie Schiff • Circulation Manager: Dawn Jochim

MAY 2017 • NUMBER 9 • VOLUME LXXIX

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### FEATURES

North Dakota's Shorebird Connection .....	2
Spreading the Aquatic Nuisance Species Message .....	8
Sage Grouse Recovery Effort Underway .....	12
2017 Legislative Review .....	16
Game and Fish Announces Habitat Projects Designed for Wildlife .....	18

### DEPARTMENTS

Buffaloberry Patch .....	20
Back Cast .....	25



### Front Cover

A marbled godwit in upland nesting habitat in McKenzie County. (Photo by Lara Anderson, Bismarck.)



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

Website: [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov) • email: [ndgfd@nd.gov](mailto:ndgfd@nd.gov)

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

• Outdoors Subscriptions 701-328-6363

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

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

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

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

Permission to reprint materials appearing in *North Dakota OUTDOORS* must be obtained from the author, artist or photographer. We encourage contributions; contact the editor for writer and photography guidelines prior to submission.

The NDGFD receives federal financial assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the NDGFD joins the U.S. Department of the Interior and its bureaus in prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex (in education programs or activities) and also religion for the NDGFD. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or you desire further information, please write to: N. D. Game and Fish Department, Attn: Chief Administrative Services, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095 or to: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Attn: Civil Rights Coordinator, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Mail Stop: MBSP-4020, Arlington, Virginia 22203.

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

**POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:**  
***North Dakota OUTDOORS***  
100 North Bismarck Expressway  
Bismarck, ND 58501-5095

***Report All Poachers (RAP) 800-472-2121***

In cooperation with North Dakota Wildlife Federation and North Dakota State Radio.



# North Dakota's

# Shore co

*The long-legged American avocet, with its black, white and rust coloration, is one unmistakable shorebird that frequents North Dakota.*

**O**f the 50 or so shorebird species that migrate through North America in spring, roughly 36 have ties to North Dakota.

The link to this neck of the Northern Plains for the majority is brief, yet vital, as birds touch down to rest and refuel, before pointing their bills north and continuing on.

For some, approximately 12 species, North Dakota is their northern terminus. It's here where mature birds court, breed, build nests and raise young.

The story for these small- to medium-sized birds, with slender, probing bills and long legs, however, begins earlier, weeks before on wintering grounds in Central and South America,

and stops in between.

To get to North Dakota, or farther north to Arctic breeding grounds, shorebirds must fly incredible distances.

"Some of the shorebirds, the long-distance migrants, may travel more than 8,000 miles from wintering to breeding grounds," said Sandra Johnson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department

# Shorebird Connection

By Ron Wilson



Wilson's snipe.

CRAIG BIRRE



Least sandpiper.

CRAIG BIRRE

nongame biologist. "While some of the short-distance migrants are traveling about 3,000 miles."

No matter how you cut it, these birds, all of these birds, are champion migrators.

Depending on the weather and other hurdles shorebirds encounter en route to North Dakota and beyond, most of

the birds arrive here sometime in late April to late May.

It's here, in a state riding a wet cycle for the better part of two decades, that the birds find what is so fundamental to their journey, to their survival.

"Because we are blessed with so many lakes, permanent wetlands, temporary wetlands, or simply shallow water

pooled in farm fields, North Dakota plays an important role as stopover habitat, places for the birds to wade in the shallows, rest and feed during the migration," Johnson said. "These waters are so full of invertebrates and other foods that the birds are able to gorge themselves before moving on."

Because the Arctic nesting season is





CRAIG BIRKLE



CRAIG BIRKLE



CRAIG BIRKLE

A willet (top) shows its black and white wing pattern that helps to identify it in flight. The marbled godwit (middle) is one of the largest shorebirds. The lesser yellowlegs (bottom) bobs its head up and down when approached by intruders.

short, Johnson said it's important the birds arrive there healthy and in breeding shape.

"If these shorebirds weren't able to take advantage of the vital habitat that North Dakota provides during their migration, some simply wouldn't make it or be able to breed," she said. "North Dakota is just one little piece in the big habitat puzzle for these birds. Because they travel so far in spring to breeding grounds and in fall to wintering grounds, there are many key places they rely on twice a year."

The 12 shorebirds known to nest in North Dakota in spring include the piping plover, killdeer, black-necked stilt, American avocet, willet, spotted sandpiper, upland sandpiper, marbled godwit, long-billed curlew, Wilson's snipe, American woodcock and Wilson's phalarope.

Understanding this, Johnson said other habitat components come into play.

"Some of the birds that nest in North Dakota, such as marbled godwits and willets, are looking for the same grassland habitat that many of our waterfowl species are seeking out," she said. "With the continued loss of native prairie and other grasslands, this nesting habitat for all of these birds is harder to come by."

Other shorebird species, such as upland sandpipers and long-billed curlews, seek out the more dry upland, grazed, short-grass habitat.

“The ranchlands in North Dakota are important nesting sites for these species,” Johnson said.

Of all the itinerant shorebird species with another destination in mind, or the birds that nest in North Dakota, to Johnson, one bird signals that it’s spring in shorebird country.

“When I first hear the upland sandpiper and its distinctive ‘wolf whistle’ call, I know that the prairie is coming alive,” she said.

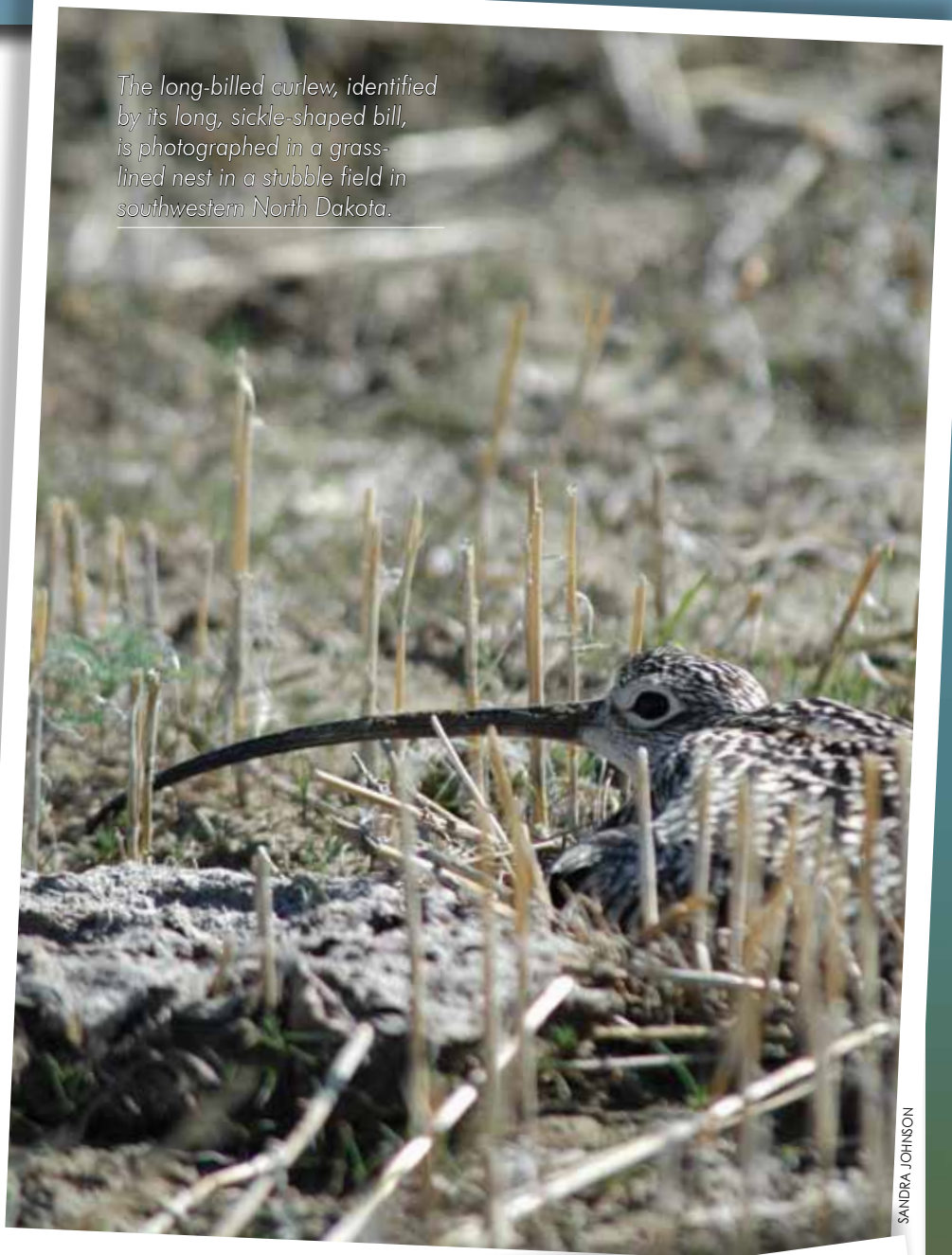
Biologists describe the upland sandpiper as dove-sized, with a long neck and tail, small head, short bill and long yellow legs. The sandpiper’s plumage is straw-colored, with dark streaks and a white belly.

To passersby, we know when we see one, as upland sandpipers are often found perched atop wooden fence posts, or other elevated locations, surveying their surroundings.

When shorebirds arrive in spring, they are typically dressed in their finest plumage to woo suitable mates. Like many birds in nature, it’s the mature males that are the best dressed for the occasion, as it is their role to attract a mate and initiate courtship.

Then again, there are exceptions in nature, even in the shorebird’s world.

*The long-billed curlew, identified by its long, sickle-shaped bill, is photographed in a grass-lined nest in a stubble field in southwestern North Dakota.*



SANDRA JOHNSON



CRAIG BIRKLE

*The piping plover is a threatened species.*



The Wilson's phalarope is one bird for which the roles are reversed. For one, female phalaropes are bigger than the males. The females are also brightly colored, with a brownish-red and gray back and a striking black streak running from the eyes down to a light cinnamon neck. A snowy white throat and belly accent the colorful getup.

Male phalaropes have two colors – light gray and white.

This role reversal continues into courtship as females are the aggressors, defending males from other potential suitors.

The females lay the eggs, of course, but it's in a nest built by the males. The latter also take care of the incubation duties and raise young after hatching.

"Whether it's Wilson's phalaropes, American avocets or ruddy turnstones, spring in North Dakota is the best time to get out and look for shorebirds because they are a lot easier to identify," Johnson said. "When the birds turn and migrate back through in fall, their breeding plumage, for the most part, is gone."

---

**RON WILSON** is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



CRAIG BIRRE

A pair of Wilson's phalaropes (top), with the female on the left. Upland sandpipers (bottom) commonly frequent wooden fence posts as a perch.



SANDRA JOHNSON

## North Dakota Connection

Thirty-six shorebird species, give or take, make an appearance in North Dakota during spring and fall migrations. Some of those birds even nest here.

What follows is a roll call of those birds with North Dakota connections. They are listed by the distance (short, intermediate and long) of their migration.

- **Short** – Piping plover, killdeer, black-necked stilt, American avocet, willet, long-billed curlew, marbled godwit, Wilson's snipe and American woodcock.
- **Intermediate** – Black-bellied plover, semipalmated plover, greater yellowlegs,

lesser yellowlegs, solitary sandpiper, spotted sandpiper, upland sandpiper, whimbrel, ruddy turnstone, Western sandpiper, semipalmated sandpiper, least sandpiper, sanderling, dunlin, long-billed dowitcher, short-billed dowitcher, Wilson's phalarope, red phalarope and red-necked phalarope.

- **Long** – American golden plover, Hudsonian godwit, pectoral sandpiper, Baird's sandpiper, white-rumped sandpiper, rufa red knot, buff-breasted sandpiper and stilt sandpiper.



## Species of Concern

North Dakota has 115 wildlife species the state Game and Fish Department has identified as species of conservation priority.

These animals, and a few insects, made the list, in short, because of declining status in North Dakota or across their range due to habitat loss or other influences.

Of the 115 wildlife species, eight are shorebirds, seven of which nest in North Dakota. The rufa red knot nests in the Arctic.

The shorebird species are as follows:

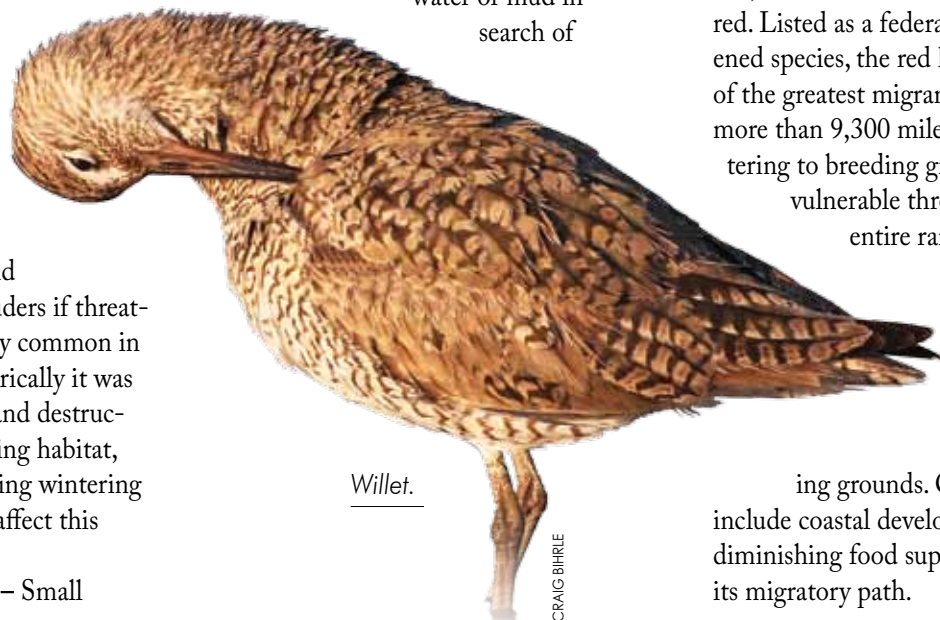
- **Long-billed curlew** – The largest shorebird in North America, measuring 26 inches from tail to tip of its long, down-curved, 8-inch bill. Overall, a buffy color, but striking pink-cinnamon underwings visible in flight. Curlews numbered much higher during the 1800s, and were more widely distributed. The curlew population is declining nationwide from loss of short-grass breeding habitat and other factors on wintering grounds.
- **Marbled godwit** – The largest godwit in North America. It is buff-brown, with barring underneath, sports a long, up-turned, flesh-colored bill with a dark tip, and orangish underwings distinctive in flight. Cries *god-WHIT*, *godWHIT* and will fly to meet intruders if threatened. Although fairly common in North Dakota, historically it was even more so. Loss and destruction of prairie breeding habitat, along with diminishing wintering grounds, negatively affect this species.
- **Wilson's phalarope** – Small

shorebird for which sex roles are reversed. Females are brightly colored, with a brown-red and gray back, black streak from eyes down to a light cinnamon neck, and a white throat and belly. Males are light gray and white. Winters as far south as the southernmost tip of South America. Phalaropes face many challenges during long migrations. In addition, loss of breeding habitat is a concern.

- **Piping plover** – White belly and a narrow, black breast band adorn this small shorebird. When agitated, whistles a soft *peep peep peep*. Listed as a federally threatened species in 1985. Alteration of natural stream flows of the Missouri River negatively affect plover habitat. Also vulnerable to pesticides, accidental trampling and predators.
- **American avocet** – An unmistakable shorebird, featuring a bold body of black and white, orange head and neck, a long, thin, up-curved bill, and long, pale blue legs. Often seen sweeping its bill from side-to-side through water or mud in search of

crustaceans. North Dakota provides important shorebird habitat for many species, including the avocet, which is showing a slow decline.

- **Upland sandpiper** – A medium-sized shorebird, with a short, yellow bill, long yellow legs, small head, long slender neck, and a long tail. Commonly seen standing on wooden fence posts in pastures. Upland sandpipers prefer native prairie, which is at risk because of conversion, destruction and degradation.
- **Willet** – Although a rather dull gray when standing, its striking black and white wings are obvious in flight. At 15 inches long, it's a relatively large shorebird. Particularly gregarious during breeding season, willets can be very vocal, bellowing a piercing *pill-will-willet* if threatened. Loss, destruction, or degradation of both wetland and prairie habitat is negatively affecting this species.
- **Rufa red knot** – This chunky shorebird is about the size of a robin. During the breeding season, its chest is a striking shade of red. Listed as a federally threatened species, the red knot is one of the greatest migrants, traveling more than 9,300 miles from wintering to breeding grounds. It's vulnerable throughout this entire range. Predators eat its eggs and chicks in its Arctic breeding grounds. Other risks include coastal development and diminishing food supplies along its migratory path.



Willet.

CRAIG BIRNLE

# SPREADING THE AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES MESSAGE

*By Jessica Howell*

*Reminders concerning the steps that need to be taken to prevent the spread of aquatic nuisance species are prominent at boat ramps across the state.*





Anglers not only have to be concerned with their boats and trailers when it comes to aquatic nuisance species, but they should also check their fishing rods and lures for unwanted hitchhikers.



GREG GULLICKSON

By now, most everyone who regularly uses North Dakota's lakes and rivers for fishing or hunting has heard about aquatic nuisance species. North Dakota currently has only five of these invasive species, and those five are not widespread or causing many problems ... yet.

Most anglers and hunters appreciate the high quality fishing and hunting opportunities in North Dakota, and would like to make sure the few ANS currently here stay contained and that new ones stay out.

Since it is nearly impossible to completely remove ANS once they establish populations, the best option is to prevent ANS from getting into a lake or river in the first place. Whether it's for fishing, boating, hunting or other purposes, there are common guidelines to prevent the introduction or spread of ANS. These include not moving organisms, such as plants or animals, and not moving water or mud that may harbor organisms from one lake to another.

So how do people know to follow these guidelines?

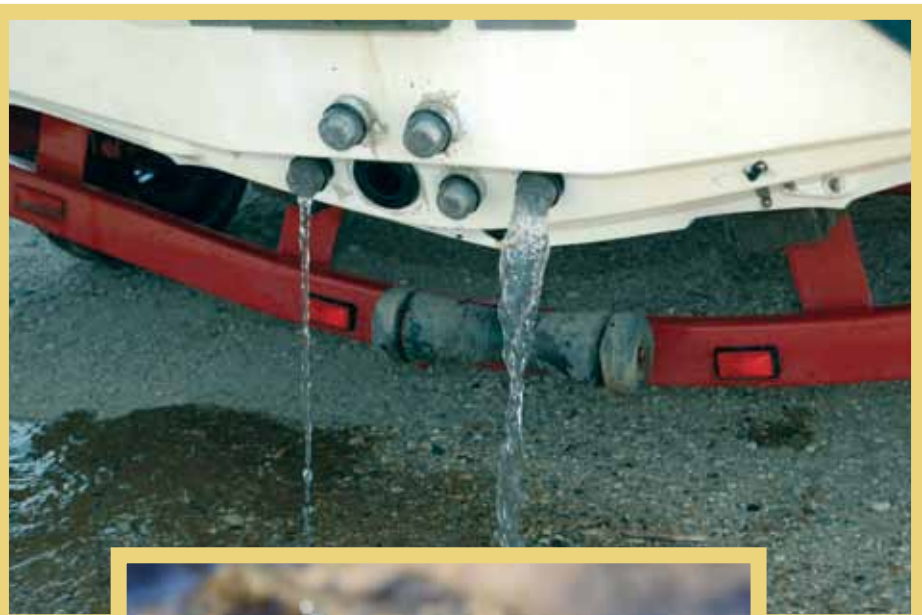
The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has regulations in place that help, and the agency's effort to provide information about those regulations has been comprehensive and widespread for the past decade or so.

In addition, most other states and Canadian provinces have similar laws, but methods for spreading the word can vary. For instance, anyone traveling in other states may have seen the slogans "Clean Drain Dry," "Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers," "Play Clean Go," "Clean Drain Dispose," or several others.



The Game and Fish Department is going to start incorporating a couple of those slogans into future communications efforts. “Clean Drain Dry” is widely recognized and addresses the important additional step of drying or disinfecting boats and other equipment. This step has not been included in the “Inspect Clean Drain” message that Game and Fish has used for years.

While clean and drain are legal requirements, it is important to point out that drying is not a law, just a strong recommendation that greatly reduces the likelihood of transporting live organisms that might have been missed in the cleaning and draining process.



GREG GULLICKSON



CRAIG BIRLE



MIKE ANDERSON

*Draining water (top) from a boat. An adult (middle) zebra mussel. Curly leaf pondweed (bottom) taken from a lake.*

## ANS Regulations

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is committed to protecting the state’s natural resources, while still providing opportunities to enjoy those resources, as reflected in the ANS regulations:

- All aquatic vegetation must be removed from all equipment before leaving a body of water.
- Live aquatic bait, or aquatic vegetation, may not be transported into North Dakota.
- All water must be drained from boats and other watercraft, including bilges, livewells, baitwells and motors before leaving a water body.
- All drain plugs and water draining devices must be open on all watercraft and equipment during any out-of-water transport.
- Anglers may not transport live bait in any water away from Class I ANS infested waters (currently only the Red River). In all other waters, live bait may be transported in containers of 5 gallons or less. Remember that dumping bait in the water, or on shore, is illegal at any water body.



Game and Fish is also going to start using the “Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers!” logo on North Dakota ANS educational materials. This national campaign supports the use of “Clean Drain Dry” and is recognized across the country.

North Dakota Game and Fish is not proposing any new regulations at this time.

If all North Dakota water users – anglers, boaters, waterfowl hunters and swimmers – follow these three simple steps, we can protect our waters from the impacts of ANS:

- **Clean** – Inspect all recreational and commercial equipment (boats, trailers, fishing gear, waders, duck decoys, etc.) and remove any plants or animals that may be present. It is illegal to have ANS or vegetation on your equipment when leaving a waterbody.
- **Drain** – Remove all water. Not only is this a regulation, but water can hold microscopic organisms that may grow and damage your equipment over time. Leave drain plugs out and draining devices open during transport in North Dakota to avoid a citation.
- **Dry** – Although not required by North Dakota law, it’s a good idea to allow equipment to dry completely or disinfect with high pressure hot water (140 degrees Fahrenheit for 10 seconds of contact) before using again. For reference, hot tap water is usually about 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Hand washing with hot tap water also disinfects, but requires 5 minutes of continuous contact for each surface.

Other simple steps you can take include using native species for ponds or water gardens, not releasing unwanted pets or aquarium plants into the wild, and reporting any new findings to the Game and Fish Department.

For more information on ANS, regulations, or to report a species, visit [gf.nd.gov/ans](http://gf.nd.gov/ans).

---

*JESSICA HOWELL is the Game and Fish Department’s aquatic nuisance species coordinator.*



Silver carp removed  
from the James River.

JESSICA HOWELL

## ANS in North Dakota

Aquatic nuisance species are nonnative species that live in or near water and can threaten the ecosystem, economy or human activities. In North Dakota, known ANS include curly leaf pondweed, Eurasian water milfoil, common carp, silver carp and zebra mussels.

Curly leaf pondweed is an invasive plant that grows quickly, forming dense mats that shade out native aquatic plants and makes recreation difficult. It can be transported as plant fragments, and is currently found in the Missouri River System and a few isolated lakes throughout North Dakota.

Eurasian water milfoil is an invasive plant used in aquariums and water gardens that has similar effects and transport methods as curly leaf pondweed. It is currently found in Lake Ashtabula and just below in the Sheyenne River.

Common carp are large-bodied invasive fish that uproot vegetation and stir sediment, decreasing water quality and habitat for native species. Carp are often moved as ornamental fish (koi) or bait, and are currently found in many North Dakota waters.

Silver carp are large-bodied invasive fish that can compete with native fish, invertebrates and mussels for food, and can leap up to 10 feet out of the water when disturbed. They spread through upstream migrations and transport as bait, and are currently only found in the James River up to the Jamestown Reservoir dam.

Zebra mussels are small, triangular bivalves that affect the ecosystem through filter-feeding, recreation through fish and waterfowl population declines, and the economy by fouling and damaging infrastructure for power and water industries. They can be spread as adults attached to equipment, or as microscopic larvae in water. Zebra mussels are currently found in the Red River.



# SAGE GROUSE

RECOVERY EFFORT UNDERWAY



*An adult sage grouse airlifted from Wyoming hesitates before taking its first steps onto a lek in southwestern North Dakota.*





*By Ron Wilson  
Photos by Craig Bihrlé*

**S**tate wildlife managers are hoping a unique sage grouse translocation project will bolster a population of birds in southwestern North Dakota that's been staggered over time. In April, North Dakota Game and Fish personnel moved 60 sage grouse – 40 females and 20 males – from southern Wyoming to Bowman County. To keep tabs on the birds, all were marked with either GPS or VHF radio devices.

"We have to manage people's expectations," said Aaron Robinson, Game and Fish Department upland game management supervisor in Dickinson. "Just because we introduced 60 birds to southwestern North Dakota doesn't mean the sage grouse population is now stable."



Sage grouse decoys were used to help the newcomers feel at home.



Even so, Robinson said it's imperative to try to help the species rebound.

"We need to be able to look ourselves and the public in the eye and say, and know for certain, that we did everything we possibly could," he said.

### Living on the Edge

Sage grouse in southwestern North Dakota are on the eastern edge of their range, where habitat and weather limit their success and expansion.

The big upland birds have a fundamental link to the aromatic plant, big sage. Sagebrush is critical to sage grouse, as they rely on the plant for food for much of the year, cover from weather and predators, and nesting and brood habitat.

The reality, however, is about half of the big sage habitat in North Dakota has vanished from the landscape in the last half-century, but has remained stable for the last decade or more.

A sage grouse eases out of the release box onto a lek in North Dakota.



Graduate student, Kade Lazenby, will monitor the sage grouse over summer.

Jaden Honeyman, Department private land biologist, unloads sage grouse flown in from Wyoming.





The state's sage grouse population, even a number of years ago when the birds were at their peak here, has never been considered high in comparison to other states, like Wyoming and Montana.

While efforts to improve sagebrush habitat are ongoing, the decline in sage grouse numbers in the last decade or so in North Dakota is credited in part to West Nile virus. The population was especially hard hit by the virus in 2007-08.

North Dakota had its first sage grouse hunting season in 1964 and it was closed just once, in 1979, before being shut down indefinitely in 2008. The season, a three-day hunt the bulk of those years, never attracted many hunters, maybe 100 or so annually.

Following troubling declines in sage grouse numbers in 11 Western states, North Dakota included, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced in 2015 the species didn't need protection under the Endangered Species Act, considering threats to sage grouse had since been significantly reduced across much of the species' breeding habitat.

Among other efforts over the years to benefit sage grouse in North Dakota, the Game and Fish Department worked with USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service and U.S. Bureau of Land Management on sagebrush plantings to connect fragmented areas, protect the sagebrush habitat that remains, and provide incentives to landowners to introduce grazing practices that increase residual grass cover that benefits sage grouse.

### **Anchoring in North Dakota**

After capture in Wyoming, the birds were put individually into boxes and flown to North Dakota, where, with as little fuss as possible, quietly released on a lek in Bowman County.

"Flying the grouse to North Dakota worked really well, as it helped minimize the stress on the birds and limited their exposure to people," Robinson said.

Robinson said there are two types of releases – soft and hard – when reintroducing animals back into the wild. Biologists used the former with the sage grouse in North Dakota, by placing the boxed birds on the lek overnight before their

doors were quietly opened early the following morning.

"With a soft release, you want the grouse to get accustomed to their new surroundings," Robinson said. "So when it's time to release them, they've calmed down, and hopefully stick around when they walk out onto the lek."

Then again, Robinson said sage grouse are a difficult species to recover and handle because of their need and want to return to their old turf.

"We took these birds from sage grouse habitat in Wyoming that is as beautiful as you've ever seen ... all you can see on the horizon is the Rocky Mountains and sagebrush in between," he said. "I'm sure coming to North Dakota is a shock to their system."

Many of the GPS- and VHF-marked birds that biologists are tracking have moved, in some instances, great distances.

"There are birds moving all over ... into South Dakota, Montana and back," Robinson said. "It was not unexpected, but when you see the size of some of their movements, it's pretty astonishing."

Before their release, a sample of the females were artificially inseminated, with the hope that they'd nest in southwestern North Dakota. To get some of the females, even just a few, to initiate a nest, would likely anchor them to North Dakota. And, in turn, do the same to hatched young.

"If we can get a female to initiate a nest and raise at least one chick, then that chick is now part of North Dakota's population because of the young bird's fidelity to the site," Robinson said.

Robinson said that while it's too early to write the bird's eulogy in North Dakota,



*Sixty sage grouse were captured in Wyoming and released in North Dakota.*

patience is required as the recovery effort will take time. Next year, with minor adjustments to the translocation process where hiccups occurred in 2017, the plan is to move the same number of birds from Wyoming to North Dakota.

In the interim, a graduate student from Utah State University will keep tabs on the newcomers to see if they adjust to North Dakota, rear young and hang around.

In late April, the marked female sage grouse had yet to show signs of initiating nest sites, but it was early yet.

"Hopefully in the next couple weeks they'll slow down their movements and start initiating nesting," Robinson said. "If we could just get a couple of females to do that, then it's a start."

**RON WILSON** is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



# 2017 Legislative Review

*By Scott Peterson,  
Game and Fish Deputy Director*

After weeks of debate and discussion, North Dakota lawmakers adjourned in late April.

As always, a number of the bills introduced to the 65th Legislative Assembly had the potential to play significant roles in how the North Dakota Game and Fish Department serves its constituents.

In total, Game and Fish Department officials tracked 28 bills, 11 of which were passed by both chambers and signed into law. Any new legislation passed into law this session won't take effect until August 1, unless there was an emergency clause attached to the bill.

The Department evaluated each bill based on its own merit and provided appropriate feedback, or testimony, based on those evaluations.

We believe that establishing a relationship with legislators is important to facilitating open dialogue during the session. That interchange is an important and effective strategy for influencing the development of new hunting- and fishing-related laws.

Some bills inevitably have the potential of becoming contentious and, from that perspective, require more attention than others. Hunting- and fishing-related bills can and sometimes do attract a lot of attention, which is a reflection of how strongly many North Dakotans feel about their hunting and fishing opportunities.

While there will be some changes to the state's hunting and angling laws, my assessment would be that, overall, any negative influences will be minimal.

While the legislative process can seem intimidating or cumbersome to many, it is cleverly designed and places a high value on public input. The Department continues to encourage all hunters and anglers to become involved in that process.

What follows is a look at the 28 outdoors-related bills tracked by Game and Fish Department officials that passed and failed:

## **BILLS THAT PASSED**

**HB 1017** – Appropriates \$83,277,498 to the Game and Fish Department for the biennium beginning July 1, 2017, and ending June 30, 2019. Passed House 72-13. Passed Senate 44-1.

**HB 1025** – Provides a guideline for the Director to allocate big game hunting licenses to eligible organizations, and turkey hunting licenses for individuals receiving hunting expeditions from a nonprofit organization. Passed House 84-6. Passed Senate 45-0.

**HB 1150** – Allows a resident of North Dakota, who does not want to receive a hunting license issued by lottery, to purchase a bonus point for a fee that is the same as the respective license. The fee is allocated to the Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program. Passed House 90-0. Passed Senate 44-0.

**HB 1204** – Reduces the age from 16 to 12 to qualify for an apprentice hunter

validation license; allows youth who turn age 11 before the end of the calendar year to receive a whitetail doe license valid only for the youth hunting season without having taken the hunter education course; repeals the eagle language on state law, however, eagles remain protected under federal regulations. Passed House 83-2. Passed Senate 47-0.

**HB 1207** – Allows Game and Fish to seize tangible property presumed abandoned on state game refuges, real property leased or managed by the Game and Fish Department, and state game or fish management areas. After 90 days, the director may dispose of seized, unclaimed, tangible property presumed abandoned, or order it be turned over to the North Dakota Wildlife Federation to be sold for the highest price obtainable. The sale proceeds, after expenses of the seizure and sale are deducted, must be remitted to the North Dakota Wildlife Federation Report All Poachers fund. A report of the sale, supported by proper vouchers covering all deductions made for expenses, must be filed for the record with the director. Passed House 84-4. Passed Senate 46-0.

**HB 1367** – An operator of a personal watercraft is not required to have an observer on board while towing an individual on water skis, kneeboard or an inflatable craft if the personal watercraft is equipped with a mirror on each side with an unobstructed field of vision to the rear; allows an individual who is at least

RON WILSON



16 years old to windsurf or boardsail without wearing a personal flotation device; prohibits water skiing or surfboarding between one hour after sunset to one hour before sunrise. Includes emergency clause. Passed House 87-5. Passed Senate 44-3.

**HB 1419** – Gives the director the option to establish a shooting sports grant program, which may be made available to schools, clubs and organized youth groups. Passed House 85-3. Passed Senate 41-4.

**SB 2239** – Repeals the annual inspection of all watercraft used for hire. Includes emergency clause. Passed House 89-2. Passed Senate 47-0.

**SB 2284** – A vendor who sells hunting and fishing licenses may add a 3 percent service fee to the total transaction. The service fee does not apply to license purchases or applications made through the Game and Fish Department website. Passed House 91-3. Passed Senate 46-0.

**SB 2308** – Allows a fish house and a coyote snare to be identified by a registration number provided by the Game and Fish Department. Previously, the trapper or angler needed to display their name or telephone number. This new law provides a registration number as another option for identifying fish house and snare ownership. Passed House 90-2. Passed Senate 47-0.

**SB 2318** – Requires the pheasant hunting season to open no later than October 12. In 2017, the season is tentatively set to open October 7. Passed House 81-10. Passed Senate 46-0.

## **BILLS THAT FAILED**

**HB 1077** – Would have appropriated \$83,569,734 to the Game and Fish Department for the biennium beginning July 1, 2017, and ending June 30, 2019. Failed House 0-88.

**HB 1170** – This bill was related to criminal forfeitures, forfeiture of property, seizure procedures and forfeiture procedures. A

portion of the bill originally replaced the term “property” with “animals, birds or fish” as items that must be turned over to the North Dakota Wildlife Federation to be sold for the highest price obtainable, but was removed during House proceedings. Passed House 50-42. Failed Senate 0-46.

**HB 1180** – Would have required a law enforcement officer to have reasonable suspicion to stop an operator of a vehicle solely to determine compliance, except for inspections and safety checkpoints for commercial motor vehicles. This would have required Game and Fish to have reasonable suspicion for stops for violations of laws relating to wildlife. Failed House 41-46.

**HB 1268** – Would have allowed Game and Fish to issue lifetime fishing licenses, and adopt rules necessary to determine eligibility and fees for the licenses. Failed House 22-67.

**HB 1350** – Would have waived the non-resident landowner deer hunting license fee for retired veterans. Failed House 9-81.

**HB 1377** – Would have allowed an individual to use a mechanized vehicle, spotlight, or artificial light of any size or battery capacity, to pursue, shoot, kill, take, or attempt to take, a coyote. Failed House 25-65.

**HB 1396** – Would have allowed the director to issue special elk depredation management licenses to landowners in designated areas between ND Highway 14 on the western border, ND Highway 43 on the southern border, ND Highway 3 on the eastern border, and the Canadian border on the northern border, upon payment of the fee requirement for a resident big game license. Failed House 0-92.

**HB 1413** – Would have developed a system for hunting license lotteries, providing preference to applicants 70 years of age or older. Failed House 16-74.

**SB 2056** – Would have allowed a hunter of at least 65 years of age to use a crossbow during any bowhunting season. Failed Senate 13-32.

**SB 2155** – Would have allowed an individual to use an airbow during any deer gun season. Failed Senate 10-34.

**SB 2225** – Would have required an individual to receive permission from the landowner to hunt, trap or pursue game on private land. Currently permission must be received if the land is posted. Failed Senate 7-28.

**SB 2226** – Would have allowed an honorably discharged veteran, who must obtain a certificate of completion for a hunter education course, to obtain the certificate by completing four hours of online instruction on hunter safety approved by the director. Failed Senate 19-26.

**SB 2227** – Would have allowed a non-resident age 65 or older to purchase up to two nonresident waterfowl hunting licenses per year, with \$100 of the fee for the nonresident’s second license to be used for the PLOTS program. The second license would have cost \$150. Failed Senate 21-24.

**SB 2228** – Would have allowed the director to issue six deer licenses and four spring wild turkey licenses to veterans residing in North Dakota who are selected by a nonprofit organization. Failed Senate 6-39.

**SB 2259** – Would have allowed a non-resident to buy a waterfowl license for \$200 that would have been valid for three periods of four consecutive days. Passed Senate 33-13. Failed House 30-63.

**SB 2282** – Would have allowed an individual over age 65 who received a muzzleloader license to hunt deer using a telescopic sight, with a maximum four-power magnification. Passed Senate 44-2. Failed House 44-47. Motion to reconsider failed.

An aerial photograph of a vast, green landscape. A winding river flows through the center of the image, surrounded by lush vegetation. The land is divided into various fields and patches of trees, with a mix of light and dark green tones. The sky is a pale blue, and the overall scene is bright and clear.

# GAME AND FISH ANNOUNCES HABITAT PROJECTS DESIGNED FOR WILDLIFE

*By Greg Freeman*

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is partnering with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to provide landowners with options to enroll acreage into two new programs designed to develop wildlife habitat.

A new Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, and State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement, are companion programs to the popular Conservation Reserve Program. Kevin Kading, Game and Fish private land section leader, said the partners are excited about these opportunities available to landowners.

"We've worked a long time developing these projects with USDA, and working with other partners and stakeholders," Kading said. "We feel these are good options for landowners to address a resource concern and also open up

some quality habitat for hunters."

The North Dakota Riparian Project CREP allows states to identify resource concerns and design a custom built CRP along riparian areas, with special focus areas, additional incentives and added flexibility within practices to address resource concerns.

Landowners interested in CREP can enroll acres in portions of Adams, Billings, Bowman, Burleigh, Dunn, Emmons, Grant, Golden Valley, Hettinger, McKenzie, Mercer, Morton, Oliver, Sioux, Slope and Stark counties. The enrollment cap for this program is 20,000 acres.

Over a 10-year period, approximately \$19 million in federal funds from the Farm Service Agency will be used to provide annual rental, incentive and cost-share payments for filter strips,

riparian buffers, or pollinator and honeybee habitat. The state will contribute more than \$4.3 million, which is funded from the Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program and the North Dakota Outdoor Heritage Fund.

Kading said riparian areas are identified in the Department's Wildlife Action Plan, and provide important habitat for a variety of fish, plant and animal species, including pollinators and other species of concern, by filtering nutrients and sediments and improving water quality.

Producers interested in developing filter strips, riparian buffers or pollinator and honeybee habitat will enter into a CREP contract with FSA and receive annual rental payments, incentives and cost-share. Game and Fish will also





*An aerial view of Sweet Briar Creek and the riparian habitat that borders the winding waterway.*

CRAIG BIRNIE

provide additional incentives and cost-share on CREP acres.

Expired CRP is not eligible for the North Dakota Riparian Project CREP. Land offered must meet FSA cropping history requirements and be located within the project boundary.

There is no size requirement for enrolling land into CREP. Any land enrolled in a CREP contract with USDA must also be enrolled in the Game and Fish PLOTS program. Landowners will receive payments for allowing walk-in hunting access, and are eligible for additional habitat enhancements, incentives and cost-share.

Kading said landowners don't have to allow public access to their entire property, only a 40-acre minimum is required for enrollment in PLOTS.

In addition to the CREP, North

Dakota landowners can enroll up to 40,000 acres into the Declining Grasslands Birds SAFE, which is designed to develop habitat for species of special concern.

"Many species of grassland birds have seen significant declines in recent years," Kading said. "The project was developed around a suite of grassland birds identified in the Department's Wildlife Action Plan, one of those species is the state bird, the Western meadowlark."

Through SAFE, landowners can establish native grasses and forbs that will help maintain or improve grassland bird populations. Managed grazing is allowed and will help ensure a healthy and diverse prairie habitat. Landowners will receive annual CRP rental payments, cost-share and signup incentives from USDA. Public access is not required, Kading said, but

landowners may be eligible for additional payments and cost-share for allowing walk-in access through the PLOTS program.

Counties in the project area for SAFE are all of Adams, Billings, Bowman, Burleigh, Dunn, Emmons, Grant, Golden Valley, Hettinger, Kidder, Logan, McIntosh, McKenzie, Mercer, Morton, Oliver, Sioux, Slope, Stark and Williams counties; and portions of Burke, Dickey, Divide, Foster, LaMoure, McHenry, McLean, Mountrail, Sheridan, Stutsman, Ward and Wells counties.

For information regarding the project, landowners should contact a local Game and Fish private land biologist or their local county USDA service center.

---

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





# BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor



## 2016 Deer Season Summarized

A total of 44,140 North Dakota deer hunters took approximately 29,300 deer during the 2016 deer gun hunting season, according to a post-season survey conducted by the state Game and Fish Department.

Game and Fish made available 49,000 deer gun licenses last year. Overall hunter success was 66 percent, with each hunter spending an average of 4.4 days in the field.

Hunter success for antlered white-tailed deer was 72 percent, and antlerless whitetail was 60 percent. Mule deer buck success was 89 percent, and antlerless mule deer was 78 percent.

Hunters with any-antlered or any-antlerless licenses generally harvest white-tailed deer, as these licenses are predominantly in units with mostly whitetails. Buck hunters had a success rate of 71 percent, while doe hunters had a success rate of 66 percent.

Game and Fish issued 13,466 gratis licenses in 2016, and 11,369 hunters harvested 6,593 deer, for a success rate of 58 percent.

A record 26,755 archery licenses (24,532 resident, 2,223 nonresident) were issued in 2016. In total, 22,071 bow hunters harvested 9,492 deer (8,686 whitetails, 806 mule deer), for a success rate of 43 percent.

## BIGHORN SHEEP POPULATION STABLE

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual bighorn sheep survey revealed a minimum of 296 bighorn sheep in western North Dakota, up slightly from last year and 3 percent above the five-year average.

Altogether, biologists counted 104 rams, 170 ewes and 22 lambs. Not included are approximately 20 bighorns in the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

Brett Wiedmann, Department big game biologist, said the survey revealed both good and bad news after a sheep die-off that began in 2014.

"This year's count of adult bighorn was encouraging, given the ongoing effects of bacterial pneumonia throughout most of the badlands, but the lamb count was discouraging," he said.

The northern badlands population, which was hit the hardest from the die-off, increased 2 percent from last year. However, the southern badlands population was down 3 percent.

"The total count of adult rams and ewes was the highest on record, but the total count, recruitment rate and winter survival rate for lambs were all the lowest on record," Wiedmann said. "The recruitment rate of lambs per adult ewes was 15 percent, well below the long-term average."

Wiedmann noted that one year isn't necessarily a trend, but poor lamb survival is typical in populations exposed to *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae*, the

pathogen responsible for most die-offs of bighorn sheep, and those effects can last many years.

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

"Adult mortality was low in 2016, and we had a good number of lambs survive in 2014 and 2015 to compensate for most of the adult losses in 2014," Wiedmann said. "However, many bighorns are still showing signs of pneumonia and lamb recruitment was poor in 2016, so next year's survey will be important in determining if the state's population continues to recover from the disease outbreak, or if the pathogens are likely to persist and cause a long-term population decline."

Dr. Dan Grove, Department veterinarian, said that 19 adult bighorn were tested for deadly pathogens last winter, but results are still pending. He said animals continue to succumb to pneumonia, albeit at a much slower rate.

A bighorn sheep hunting season is tentatively scheduled to open in 2017, unless there is a recurrence of significant adult mortality from bacterial pneumonia. The status of the bighorn sheep season will be determined September 1, after the summer population survey is completed.

Game and Fish issued eight licenses in 2016 and all hunters harvested a ram.





CRAIG BIRKLE

## Spring Mule Deer Survey Complete

The state Game and Fish Department's annual spring mule deer survey indicated western North Dakota's mule deer population increased 16 percent from last year.

Biologists counted 3,349 mule deer in about 306 square miles during the survey. Overall mule deer density in the badlands was 10.9 deer per square mile, which is up from 9.4 deer per square mile in 2016.

Bruce Stillings, Department big game management supervisor, said mule deer in the badlands have recovered nicely following the winters of 2009-11, which led to record low fawn production and a population index low of 4.6 mule deer per square mile in 2012.

"The population recovery is due to no antlerless deer harvest for four years, combined with milder winter conditions during 2012-16, which led to good fawn production since 2013," Stillings said. "However, the long-term health of the population will depend on maintaining high quality habitat."

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

## JUNE DEER DRAWING DEADLINE

The application deadline for the 2017 deer gun and muzzle-loader season is June 7.

Online applications for regular deer gun, youth, muzzleloader, and resident gratis and nonresident landowner licenses are available through the Game and Fish Department's website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). Also, paper applications are available at vendors and other locations throughout the state.

North Dakota's 2017 deer gun season opens November 10 at noon.

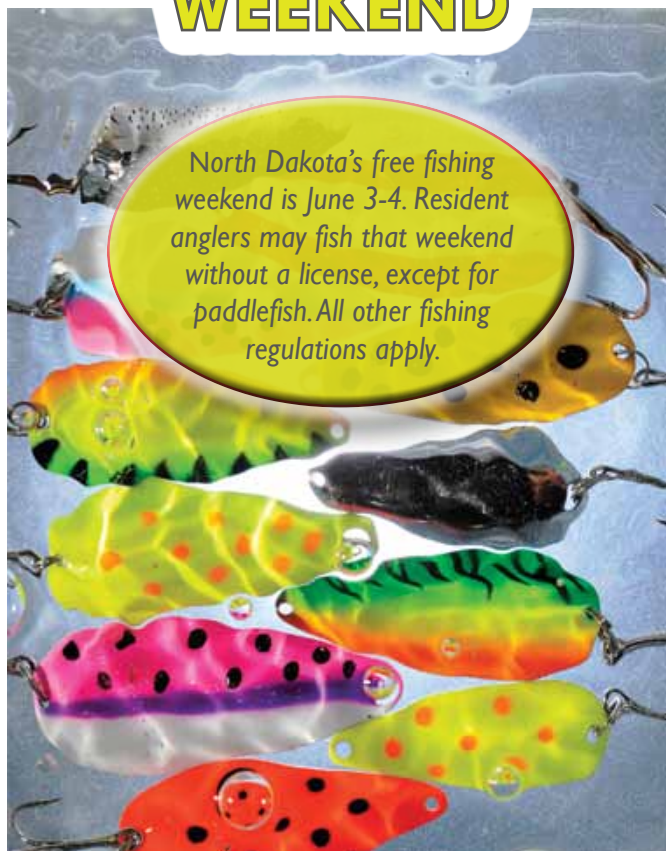
State law requires residents age 18 or older to prove residency on the application by submitting a valid North Dakota driver's license number or a North Dakota nondriver photo identification number. Applications cannot be processed without this information.

Gratis applications received on or before the regular deer gun lottery application deadline (June 7) will be issued an any-legal-deer license. As per state law, gratis applications received after the deadline will be processed based on licenses remaining after the lottery – generally only antlerless licenses remain.

Hunters are also reminded of an option that allows unsuccessful applicants to donate their refund to the Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program. Proceeds from this donation fund will focus on deer habitat and hunting access to deer habitat.

The new provision to allow hunters to donate their application fee in order to purchase a bonus point, passed by the state legislature in 2017, will not go into effect until 2018.

## FREE FISHING WEEKEND



*North Dakota's free fishing weekend is June 3-4. Resident anglers may fish that weekend without a license, except for paddlefish. All other fishing regulations apply.*

CRAIG BIRKLE





## NASP State Tournament Results

A record 614 archers competed in the North Dakota National Archery in the Schools Program state bull's-eye tournament in March in Minot, a 15 percent increase from the mark set last year.

Hankinson students claimed top honors in the elementary (grades 4-6), middle school (grades 7-8) and high school (grades 9-12) divisions.

Overall male and female winners were Hankinson archers Clayton Stone and Jaycee Brown.

Winning teams and the top 10 individuals qualify for the national tournament in May in Louisville, Kentucky. The Game and Fish Department and North Dakota Youth Archery Advisory Council contribute a total of \$3,000 in travel assistance to the first place team in each division, and \$1,000 to the overall male and female individual winners. In addition, the NDYAAC also awarded \$21,000 in college scholarships to the top five overall scorers in both boys and girls divisions.

Qualifying for nationals in each division are:

- High school boys – 1) Clayton Stone, Hankinson; 2) Chase Bladow, Hankinson; 3) Evan Mickelson, Mt. Pleasant; 4) Will Peckham, Montpelier; 5) Ty Wixo, Wahpeton; 6) Braydin Diede, Edgeley; 7) Chase Hibl, Wahpeton; 8) Michael McKenna, North Sargent; 9) Noah Trittin, Wahpeton; 10) Brandon Bottchen, Hankinson.
- High school girls – 1) Kate Loewen, Hankinson; 2) Jaidyn Sander, Hankinson; 3) Laura Kielb, North Sargent; 4) Morgan Ohm, Hankinson; 5) Abigail Henderson, Edgeley; 6) Alicia Biewer, Hankinson; 7) Mary Goroski, Wahpeton; 8) Cassie Boelke, Wahpeton; 9) Josephine Nelson, North Sargent; 10) Brinley Mathern, Edgeley.
- Middle school boys – 1) Grady Henderson, Edgeley; 2) Avery McFarland, North Sargent; 3)

Brennan Wiederrich, Edgeley; 4) Jack Thompson, Hope-Page; 5) Austin Bladow, Hankinson; 6) Kase Kassian, Wilton; 7) Calvin Loewen, Hankinson; 8) Isaac Pierce, North Sargent; 9) Tavon Stadler, Griggs County; 10) Connor Schall, Oakes.

- Middle school girls – 1) Jaycee Brown, Hankinson; 2) Gracie Gunderson, Medina; 3) Grace Neameyer, Mt. Pleasant; 4) Marti Moberg, Mt. Pleasant; 5) Jaden Gilje, North Sargent; 6) Allee



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT PHOTO

- Boyer, Edgeley; 7) Sydni Berg, Edgeley; 8) Hannah Neameyer, Mt. Pleasant; 9) Lily Wiek, Oakes; 10) Octavia Ralph, Griggs County.
- Elementary boys – 1) Matthew Wehseler, North Sargent; 2) Riley Christensen, North Sargent; 3) Marcus Garza, Oakes; 4) Parker Deering, Oakes; 5) Zeke Barnick, Edgeley; 6) Michael Erlanson, Wilton; 7) Joey Burgard, Oakes; 8) Jesse Sagaser, St. John's; 9) Dalton Praska, Wahpeton; 10) Isaac Stadler, Griggs County.
- Elementary girls – 1) Makenna Vosberg, Hankinson; 2) Estella Prochnow, Hankinson; 3) Rylee

Suhr, Griggs County; 4) Kirstan Loewen, Hankinson; 5) Skyler Foertsch, Hankinson; 6) Jewels Hamling, Hankinson; 7) Aysia Frederick, Wilton; 8) Ariana Onchuck, Hankinson; 9) Madison Samuelson, Mt. Pleasant; 10) Paetyn Hamann, North Sargent.

In addition, a record 404 archers – a 25 percent increase from 2016 – competed in a NASP 3-D Challenge, run simultaneously with the bull's-eye tournament. Overall male and female winners were Evan Mickelson, Mt. Pleasant, and Kate Loewen, Hankinson.

Top performers were:

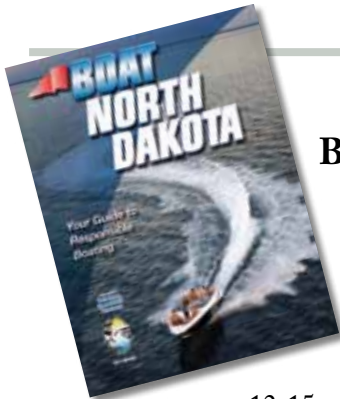
- High school boys – 1) Evan Mickelson, Mt. Pleasant; 2) Cheyne Meyer, Hankinson; 3) Skylar Keller, Hankinson; 4) Glenn Sabinash, Kensal; 5) Ty Wixo, Wahpeton.
- High school girls – 1) Kate Loewen, Hankinson; 2) Mary Goroski, Wahpeton; 3) Chase McFarland, North Sargent; 4) Alicia Biewer, Hankinson; 5) Laura Kielb, North Sargent.
- Middle school boys – 1) Avery McFarland, North Sargent; 2) Brady McKenna, North Sargent; 3) Austin Bladow, Hankinson; 4) Isaac Pierce, North Sargent; 5) Connor Schall, Oakes.
- Middle school girls – 1) Grace Neameyer, Mt. Pleasant; 2) Hannah Neameyer, Mt. Pleasant; 3) Jaden Ligje, North Sargent; 4) Jaycee Brown, Hankinson; 5) Avery Trittin, Wahpeton.
- Elementary boys – 1) Riley Christensen, North Sargent; 2) Blayson Dolney, Oakes; 3) Matthew Wehseler, North Sargent; 4) Keaton Cudworth, New Rockford-Sheyenne; 5) Zeke Barnick, Edgeley.
- Elementary girls – 1) Joclynn Beckley, Kensal; 2) Madison Samuelson, Mt. Pleasant; 3) Isabella Sundby, Oakes; 4) Aysia Frederick, Wilton; 5) MaKenna Vosberg, Hankinson.



### NEW STATE RECORD CARP

Derek Barnick's catch on April 21 is the first entry to North Dakota's list of state record fish in 2017. The Tappen man took a 31 pound, 9 ounce common carp from Lake Etta-Alkaline with a bow and arrow.

The 36-inch fish broke the old record of 31 pounds taken by Austin Loberg of Thompson from the Sheyenne River in 2003.



### Boat North Dakota Course

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

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

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

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

Upon completion of the online test, students can print out a temporary certification card, and within 10 days a permanent card will be mailed.

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

For more information contact Brian Schaffer, Department education coordinator, by email at [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov); or call 701-328-6300.

### Leave Baby Animals Alone, Watch for Deer

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department emphasizes a simple message to well-intentioned humans who want to pick up and rescue what appear to be orphaned baby animals – don't touch them.

No matter the animal – fawn, duckling, rabbit or songbird – it is better to just leave them alone.

More often than not young animals are not abandoned or deserted, and the mother is probably watching nearby. Young wildlife are purposely placed into seclusion by adults to protect them from predators.

Anytime a young wild animal has contact with a human, its chances for survival decrease. It's illegal to take wild animals home, and captive animals later returned to the wild will struggle to survive because they do not possess learned survival skills.

The only time a baby animal should be picked up is if it is in an unnatural situation, such as a young songbird found on a doorstep. In that case, the young bird could be moved to the closest suitable habitat.

Citizens should also steer clear of adult wildlife, such as deer or moose that might wander into urban areas. Crowding stresses animals, and this could lead to a potentially dangerous situation.

In addition, motorists are reminded to watch for deer along roadways. June is one of the peak months for deer vehicle accidents because young animals are dispersing from their home ranges. With deer more active at that time, the potential for car deer collisions increases.







## Summer BOW Set June 23-25

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program is accepting registrations for the annual summer workshop June 23-25 at the North Dakota 4-H Camp, Washburn.

Enrollment is limited to participants age 18 or older. Workshop fees of \$150 cover instruction, program materials, use of equipment, all meals and lodging.

Participants can choose from a number of different activities, including archery, firearms, fishing, hunting, paddling sports, wildlife and plants, cooking and outdoor knowledge.

BOW workshops are designed primarily for women with an interest in learning skills associated with hunting, fishing and outdoor endeavors. Although open to anyone age 18 or older, the workshops are tailored primarily to women who have never tried these activities or who are beginners hoping to improve their skills.

Women interested in attending the summer workshop can get more information at the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), and print and mail an accompanying enrollment form. Registration deadline is May 17. The camp is limited to 72 participants.

More information is available by contacting Brian Schaffer, Department education coordinator, at 701-328-6300, or email [bschaffer@nd.gov](mailto:bschaffer@nd.gov).



*Ryan Schumacher,  
Dickinson  
1st Place*



*Morgan DeGeldere,  
Grafton  
2nd Place*



*Deanna Rose,  
Grand Forks  
3rd Place*

## Game and Fish Sponsors Earth Day Project

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

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

Last winter the Game and Fish Department sponsored a contest for students ages 6-18 to design a North Dakota Earth Day patch. Winners in the three age categories were Ryan Schumacher of Dickinson (6-9),

Morgan DeGeldere of Grafton (10-13) and Deanna Rose of Grand Forks (14-18). Schumacher's design was chosen as the contest winner, and will be used on this year's Earth Day patch.

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

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



*Megan Tichy  
~BEST OF SHOW~  
North Dakota Junior Duck Stamp Contest*

## Tower City Youth Wins Best of Show

A northern shoveler was chosen the 2017 Best of Show in the North Dakota Junior Duck Stamp Contest.

Megan Tichy, an 18-year-old high school student from Tower City, used acrylic paints for her presentation of a drake shoveler. Her artwork was selected from more than 1,400 entries from across North Dakota.

Tichy's painting will represent North Dakota at the National Junior Duck Stamp Contest sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The winner of the national contest will have their entry made into a stamp.

Other first place winners in the four age categories were:

- Grades K-3 – Ethan Bro, Bismarck; Vivian Lunden, Alexander; and Owen Tichy, Tower City.
- Grades 4-6 – Angela Chen, Devils Lake; Bailee Hagar, Karlsruhe; and Mikaela Woodruff, Garrison.
- Grades 7-9 – Fisher Ackerson, Sherwood; Sydney Nelson, Valley City; and Daniel Schumacher, Linton.
- Grades 10-12 – D.J. Elstrom, Valley City and Devin Anderson, Valley City.



# back cast



By Ron Wilson

Years ago I often fished with a guy who, while driving to whatever river, lake or farm pond we were headed to, would shout over the thumping from his 8-track player, "That's a good sign."

Without even turning my head, I knew he was shouting about cows. He theorized if the fenced-in cows we passed were up and grazing, and not lazing in the shade doing nothing, then the bluegills, bass or whatever we were headed to fish for were doing likewise, actively feeding on bugs and tadpoles, rather than sulking under submerged vegetation.

I don't remember him being either right or wrong. What I do remember is fishing, always fishing, and never turning for home simply because the local livestock was lying down.

When my son, in late April, found an empty turtle shell in the middle of a mile-long footpath that led to what had been described as some decent pike fishing, we joked if it was some kind of sign, good or bad.

We decided that it was bad for the turtle, likely killed by a predator, and the meat eaten entirely by scavenger beetles. And what it meant to us, we figured, probably didn't matter.

Our good fortune rested in the fact that my son, 23, had caught a short break from work. For a few days he could forget

about counting sharp-tailed grouse on leks, surveying raptors, checking water quality of running and still waters and clicking a pitch counter every time he

handful of ducks and a pair of long-legged American avocets that waded a shallow flat beyond a submerged barbed wire fence, we did.

Two hours later, with enough pike landed to make the hike back to the road certainly worth the effort, we put on our backpacks and left the water to the wading birds.

Two days later, four of us, my two sons and a friend from work, were hiding in a makeshift blind of fallen cottonwood limbs, trying to convince a wild turkey, any male turkey, long-bearded or not, that our three decoys were more than rubber imitations.

Early, long before the sun would peak through the trees and warm our hideout in the bottom of a draw, two hens marched within 50 yards, with little pause, and left as quickly as they arrived.

While a handful of toms gobbled out of sight on three points of the compass, one talked to us in the open from a ridgetop to the east, displaying his arched tail, spread to full width.

On the hike out, up one draw and down another, the wildlife biologist in the group found a turkey egg, with what remained of the yellow yolk spilling onto a flat rock.

A cool find, certainly, but not something like a turtle shell that you'd drop into the side pocket of your backpack and take home.

---

**RON WILSON** is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



RON WILSON

heard a ring-necked rooster call in early morning in the distance.

Putting a mile between where we parked and the small back bay of a Burleigh County lake, I figured we'd have the place to ourselves. Save for a





NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT ARCHIVE PHOTO

# A Look Back

By Ron Wilson

State Game and Fish Department personnel have been counting strutting male sage grouse in southwestern North Dakota for more than 65 years.

The counts were typically made in April, but at times in May. Birds were counted from the ground, and in the air from airplanes, or sometimes both.

While the birds have gathered uninterrupted on leks for seemingly forever, bad weather, hazardous roads, lack of personnel and other hurdles have kept wildlife biologists away some years.

The first sage grouse count was in 1951. That year, 367 males were counted on 11 active leks. In 1953 on 18 active grounds, 542 birds were counted, which still stands as the most ever tallied in North Dakota.

The above black and white photograph of a Game and Fish Department biologist parked very near strutting

male sage grouse was probably taken sometime in the late 1960s or early 1970s.

In North Dakota, sage grouse are on the eastern edge of their range. Their numbers have been up and down over the years. Since biologists started monitoring them in spring on leks in 1951, their numbers today have never been lower.

The reality that sage grouse in southwestern North Dakota are on their edge of their range, where sagebrush habitat requirements aren't as flush as some Western states, has never been lost on those individuals who managed them.

"Sage grouse in North Dakota are a minor species as far as hunters are concerned. The population is small, season length short, and bag limit only one per day," according to the January

1972 issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

Even so, despite rollercoaster numbers over the years, the sage grouse belong in southwestern North Dakota.

"Some living creatures seem, in a special way, to be a part of the land they live in ... It is that way with the sage grouse," according to the February 1966 issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*. "And for us, the sagebrush too suffers a certain deadness unless we, from time to time, can glimpse a sage grouse crossing the road or calmly pecking around in an exposed patch in the brushland. Even merely knowing that they are there, helps give a secure feeling that, although the sagebrush may look forbidding and dry, it harbors a living soul within."

**RON WILSON** is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.