

# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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# MATTERS OF OPINION



**Terry Steinwand**  
*Director*

I've lived in North Dakota the majority of my life, venturing only slightly east and west for short periods of time for part-time jobs and a little life experience.

We've experienced a multitude of changes and opportunities in that time and I'm guessing over the next few decades we'll continue to see more. Some will be good and some will be not so good, depending on your point of view.

The demographics of our state have changed to some extent, with the majority of larger communities growing, even some of the smaller communities experiencing the same.

While there are fewer solitary houses on the landscape, one thing I've noticed that hasn't changed is North Dakota's outdoor heritage. It may wax and wane to some extent, but overall we have a great appreciation for what we have in the state.

Across the nation there is concern over the dwindling number of hunters and what it means for the future. We've seen higher numbers of people hunting in North Dakota in past years, but we've also seen lower numbers.

There is a nationwide effort called R3 – recruitment, retention and reactivation – which is meant to get people into hunting and fishing, keep them in these great outdoor activities, and get those individuals who may once have participated back into the outdoors to realize what they've been missing.

I've always said there are two things required to have a successful hunting and fishing outing. First, there must be the resource to utilize. Second, there must be reasonable access to that resource. Without both of these we'll likely have a difficult time with the R3 concept.

But we also have to initiate the interest in hunting, fishing or other outdoor activities. That's part of the recruitment process.

On June 17, I had the privilege of attending the North Dakota Clay Target League

state championship held at the Horace Shooting Park south of Fargo. A number of things came to mind when I attended, but the first was the number of young men and women who participated in the event, which I believe was about 650 middle and high school shooters.

I watched (mostly with envy) at the shooting and how these events foster good sportsmanship and camaraderie among those participating. I reunited with some old friends and made some new ones. I was able to watch a young man from Rugby shoot a perfect round of trap, meaning he never missed a clay pigeon! Given the reaction from those watching the young man shoot you'd think he'd won the lottery. And in a manner, he did. Not many can claim they've shot a perfect round of trap.

While some of these young adults may not hunt, it offers the chance to experience what it would be like. But, after talking with some of them and their parents, I know some of them do hunt.

On the drive home I was thinking that this is what North Dakota is all about. There was definitely a competition going on between teams and individuals, but there was also a sense of community. Parents, grandparents, siblings, communities and others gathering for a day to participate in what is important for many of us in North Dakota.

Also, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that the day went off without a hitch, largely because of the volunteers who worked the shooting park event. A huge thanks also goes out to the volunteer coaches and parents.

We have our challenges in North Dakota, but I'm proud to be, largely, a life-long resident and wouldn't want to live anywhere else. Our outdoor opportunities are basically endless and the people are great. As we hit the halfway point in summer, you still have plenty of opportunity to enjoy what is offered in the great North Dakota outdoors.

*Terry Steinwand*



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# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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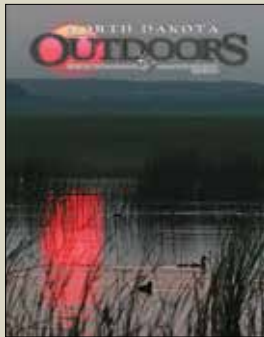
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### Front Cover

A mid-summer sunset highlights life on a North Dakota wetland. (Photo by Craig Bihrl, Bismarck.)



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# ESTABLISHING NEW FISHING

**I**f you're looking for a place to go fishing in North Dakota, there are a few ways to pick a good spot.

You might visit a bait shop to ask where the fish are biting, or maybe needle a fishing report from a friend or neighbor. Many anglers have also relied on the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's published list of fishing

waters over the years for information such as fish species in a lake, or driving directions to a fishery.

Some anglers probably remember when the fishing waters list was a stand-alone pamphlet, before it was incorporated into the Department's North Dakota Fishing Guide. Today, fishing waters are still listed in the fishing guide, published in the March-

April issue of *North Dakota OUT-DOORS* and found on the Department's website.

The online listing provides a more up-to-date format for biologists to describe what the fish population looks like in each lake. With all the new waters in North Dakota that popped up over the two decades or more, Department biologists have received





# LAKES IN NORTH DAKOTA

*By Scott Gangl*

*Boat access on  
a section line at  
Lake Geneva in  
Kidder County.*

CRAIG BIRLE

numerous calls inquiring about the process to get fish stocked in a particular lake.

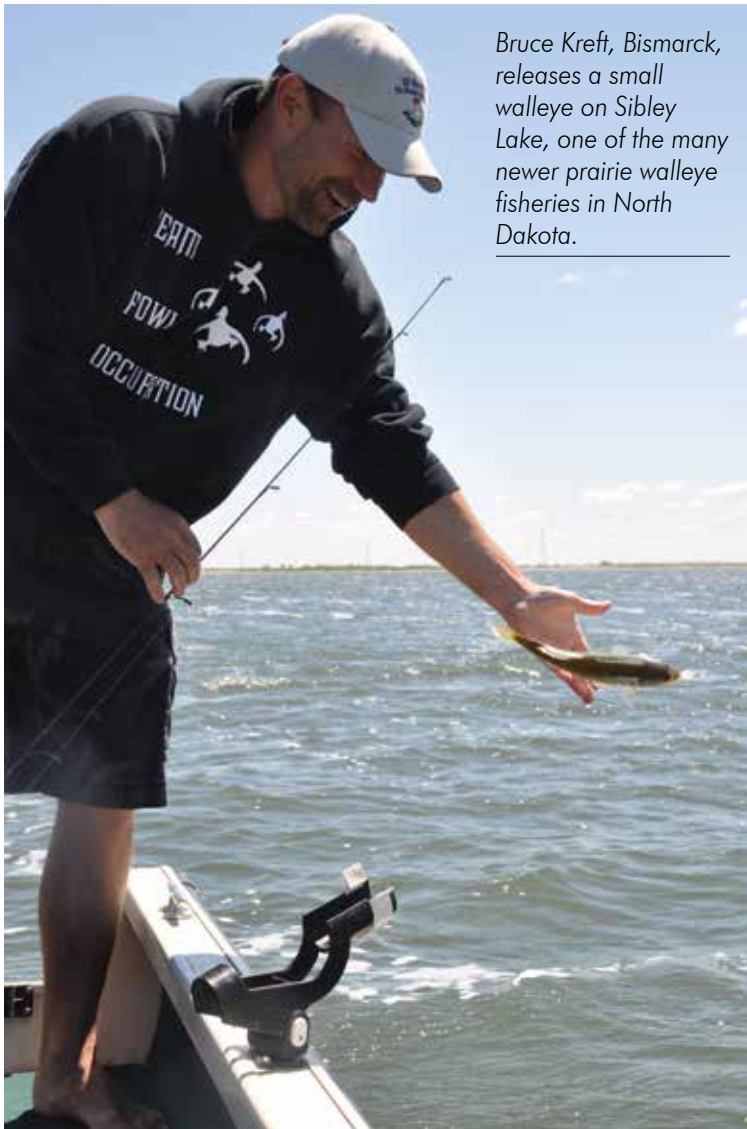
The first step in establishing a new lake is to ensure that the public has access. Wild fish are considered a public resource in North Dakota, and the Game and Fish Department will not stock a lake unless there's some public benefit from the stocking.

All lakes in the fishing waters list have some form of public access. Some have public lands and park-like access areas, some are accessible from a public right-of-way, such as a section line, while others have easements to cross private land to access the water.

These easements have become pretty standard between the Game

and Fish Department and private landowners. Easement terms can be negotiated somewhat, but the standard terms are simple, as landowners agree to allow the public to access the water across their land (the point of access is specified in the easement) in exchange for the Game and Fish Department stocking fish and managing the lake. The length of





Bruce Kreft, Bismarck, releases a small walleye on Sibley Lake, one of the many newer prairie walleye fisheries in North Dakota.

RON WILSON

are no other fish to compete with. But if the water is already full of fathead minnows, walleye may be the best option for producing quality fishing in a short amount of time because they grow well in that type of environment.

Once fish are selected and stocked, the lake is left alone for a time to let the fish grow to catchable size. Periodic test netting is done to evaluate survival, growth and possible reproduction. When the fish become abundant

anglers who only fish from boats, some landowners have legitimate reasons for wanting winter access only – typically in areas where access is through a planted field or a pasture with grazing cattle. Some other lakes that are open in summer, but lack boat ramps, are still accessible to anglers with small boats, canoes, kayaks and other similar watercraft.

So regardless of whether you prefer to fish from a big fiberglass boat or a small “puddle jumper,” whether you like to shore-fish, or if you only ice fish, there are a variety of access types around the state to provide something for just about everyone.

The Game and Fish Department has created many new fisheries because of local desires to get fish stocked in their rural lakes. By cooperating with rural landowners and local sporting groups, our system of landowner easements has successfully provided fishing access for countless anglers over the years.

While most lakes are accessed without incident, it's essential that anglers respect private property to keep these access sites open. Most easements allow for public access to go fishing, but that typically doesn't allow for camping, hunting or other activities on private land.

One of the most common reasons landowners give for not wanting to provide public access is their concern that irresponsible anglers will leave trash behind. Anglers can help maintain this public

the easement can also be negotiated from a few years to a maximum of 99 years.

When fisheries managers are asked about stocking a new lake, they want to learn as much as possible about the resource before preparing a formal easement or stocking. Biologists will typically assess the size of the lake and measure depth and oxygen levels to see if it can support fish over winter. In some instances, they may set nets to determine what kind of fish, if any, are already present.

Then, like a farmer planning which crops to plant in the coming year, they use the information gathered to select fish best suited for the lake. For instance, if it's a small water body, they may choose bluegill and avoid a big predator like northern pike. Or, if the water has no fish, they may stock yellow perch, which can thrive on aquatic insects and amphipods when there

and large enough for anglers to catch, the lake is added to the fishing waters list for anglers to see.

On many of the newer lakes, the access points are pretty rudimentary at first. Manicured parking areas, toilets or boat ramps on these newer waters across the state requires additional permission from the landowner, and maintenance is usually the responsibility of a local partner, such as a fishing club, park board or similar entity.

Given their rural locations, most new lakes will never warrant this kind of infrastructure investment. But some will develop into excellent fisheries, and will be targeted for boat ramps and other amenities as needed.

On the flip side of boat ramps, a number of easements allow for winter access only. While this may disappoint some

*Today, fishing waters are still listed in the fishing guide, published in the March-April issue of North Dakota OUTDOORS and found on the Department's website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).*

relationship with landowners by simply picking up their garbage.

Since most rural lake access sites don't have trash cans, anglers can create a lot of goodwill (and set a good example for others) by packing out what they packed in, and by picking up what others might have



*Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel launch a boat from shore on McPhail WMA in Kidder County.*



CRAIG BIRLE

left behind.

It's also important that anglers respect the private property surrounding lakes by staying on the easement area. This is especially true in summer when crops may be growing nearby. It's also true in winter when access areas blow shut with snow and anglers are tempted to drive around posted signs across private land to get on the ice.

If the land is posted, this would be considered trespassing. Even if the land isn't posted, landowners may not tolerate this behavior, especially when the ground begins to soften in spring and vehicle traffic can rut and damage private property.

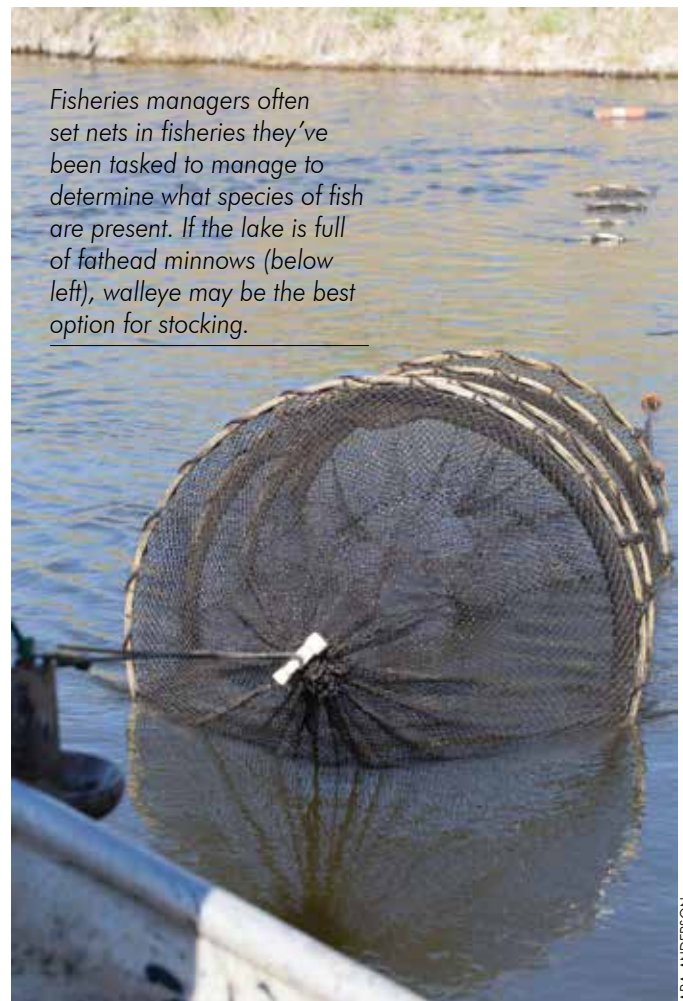
By simply respecting private property and treating it like their own, anglers can maintain good private landowner relationships for the future of fishing in North Dakota.

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**SCOTT GANGL** is the Game and Fish Department's fisheries management section leader.



CRAIG BIRLE



*Fisheries managers often set nets in fisheries they've been tasked to manage to determine what species of fish are present. If the lake is full of fathead minnows (below left), walleye may be the best option for stocking.*

LARA ANDERSON

# Grassland Birds

## *Study Aims Birds into Nets*

*By Sandra Johnson*

It's early June and a few minutes past sunrise in western North Dakota, about 5 a.m. Mountain time. The field crew of eight is weary eyed and the caffeine is slow to kick in.

Yet, the other life out here is wide awake, exuberant and ready for another day of defending their chosen patch of prairie. A high-pitched insect-like song – tik tuk tik-a-zeeeeeeee – radiates from one direction, then another, and another farther away. Then a more musical song, with a slight tinkle tone – tik a-tl- tleeeeeee – advertises nearby.

We get to work setting up two mist nets, made of fine nylon mesh that resemble a volleyball net, suspended between two poles. An electronic game call is placed below the net, but instead of hearing the usual jackrabbit distress for coyote hunting, the two grassland bird songs we hear around us start playing.

Within minutes, a brown object flutters low across the grass toward the game call. A few feet from the net it hesitates slightly, but the will to defend its territory is too strong. Into the net it flies, tangling in one of the loose mesh pouches. Two field crew members rush the net and gently grab the bird, disentangling it from its hold.

"Is it banded?" asks one crew member. "Nope" says another. We are in nearly the same spot on the prairie as last year where biologists from Bird Conservancy of the Rockies trapped grasshopper sparrows and Baird's sparrows, and outfitted them with tiny geolocators.

These devices store data on light levels, which can then be used to calculate latitude and longitude, and produce a map that shows the sparrow's migration route. The hitch is the bird must be caught and the geocator removed to retrieve the data.

The bird caught in the mist net is a male grasshopper sparrow. Since he is wearing nothing, he will get fitted with a lightweight geocator, which is sort of a tiny bird backpack, a numbered metal band on one leg, and a colored plastic band on the other. Maybe next year, in this same exact spot on the prairie, he will return and the researchers will catch him again and find out where exactly he's been.

This is just one piece of a much larger project to understand the full annual life cycle – breeding, wintering, and migratory behavior – of grassland nesting songbirds.

Grassland dependent birds, such as Baird's and grasshopper sparrows, Sprague's pipit and chestnut-collared longspurs, have declined more than other guilds of birds. One obvious reason is loss of grassland habitat, particularly native prairie in the breeding grounds.



If you look closely, you will notice this Baird's sparrow is outfitted with a small geolocator on its back.

SANDRA JOHNSON





*Kelsey Bell, with Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, carefully untangles a grasshopper sparrow from a net.*

SANDRA JOHNSON



*Kaitlyn Wilson (left) and Kelsey Bell, both with Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, assemble a mist net.*

LARA ANDERSON



LARA ANDERSON

*A mist net, teamed with a game call, is used to catch unsuspecting grassland birds defending their territory.*

Some grassland birds, such as grasshopper sparrows, are more generalists and aren't as picky about the type of grass they seek. They are found equally in native prairie or planted grassland such as CRP. Others, like Baird's sparrows and chestnut-collared longspurs, will pretty much stick to native prairies, particularly grazed pastures.

Yet, there is a lot we don't know about these birds that may also be factors in their decline, such as annual productivity, nest success, juvenile survival and adult survival. This demographic information is important because it will help scientists understand where populations may be most limited, even if the habitat is available.

In 2015, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department provided State Wildlife Grant funding to Bird Conservancy of the Rockies to study grassland nesting bird demographics at sites in far western North Dakota.

Field crews conduct nest searches by dragging a nylon rope through grass to flush incubating birds, or use behavioral cues to find nests. The nests are monitored every one to three days to estimate daily survival rate and nest success (i.e. how many nests fledge at least one young). When young are nearly ready to fledge, they are fitted with miniscule radio transmitters and are tracked at least once a day





LARA ANDERSON

Tim Wuebben, with Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, tracks grasslands birds outfitted with transmitters.



SANDRA JOHNSON

Erin Strasser, with Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, releases a sparrow.

to determine if they die or disappear.

Adult birds are also caught using mist nets and audio lures, fitted with radio transmitters, and tracked daily to determine if they survive the nesting season. And if they don't, researchers try to verify the cause of death.

It's not easy growing up on the ground, as there are lots of predators, such as snakes and 13-lined ground squirrels. Field crews have tracked transmitters underground and dug up burrows containing a cache of the devices, banded legs, and other nestling bird body parts.

Other factors, like weather, can play a huge role in survival. Last year, it got terribly dry around the field sites and insects were tough for adult birds to find to feed their young. Researchers surmised that many fledglings died from starvation.

This year marks the third year of research in North Dakota. The Bird Conservancy has also initiated demographic monitoring and geolocator deployment at a study site in Montana, and with partners in Alberta, Canada, as well. Furthermore, the Conservancy has been monitoring these birds on wintering grounds in the Chihuahuan Desert grasslands in Mexico, to better understand winter survival rates and if populations may be limited during winter. Another piece of the full annual life cycle mystery.

Back on the breeding grounds, we hear on the radio: "I've got a banded Baird's over here." We each pick up an end of a pole, with the mist net waving in between, and march over the hill about 100 yards.

One of the crew has spotted a colored leg band on

a Baird's sparrow. It's a geolocator tagged bird from last year. We quickly get set up, hunker in the grass, and watch as the bird darts from grass clump to grass clump. The audio playback is not enticing him and all we can do is watch him fly away. The crew marks the spot and will try catching him another day.

We keep moving the nets, catching new birds, sending them off to get fitted with their new bling, when we finally spot another color banded bird. "I can see his geolocator," a researcher yells. We move the nets to his territory and in a few minutes we've caught a tagged bird.

This male grasshopper sparrow was caught in almost the same exact spot on the prairie of western North Dakota as he was nearly one year ago. In late summer/early fall he left the state, heading south through the Central Flyway, and like a snowbird, spent winter somewhere in the warm desert grasslands of the southern United States or Mexico.

Now that his geolocator has been recovered, researchers will analyze the data and find out exactly where he's been and if he stopped anywhere along the way. Knowing this will help identify areas that are important to the birds to rest and refuel during the long journey.

It's an amazing feat, this long migration from, say, Mexico, to nearly the exact spot on its summer grounds in western North Dakota. It's especially remarkable for a bird that weighs about a half-ounce.

**SANDRA JOHNSON** is a Game and Fish Department conservation biologist.

## More on Grassland Birds

For more information and to watch a video about the project, see <https://gf.nd.gov/wild-life/swg/project/t-46-r>. To learn more about the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, see <http://www.birdconservancy.org/>.





In both photographs, Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel work with channel catfish netted from the Missouri River System. These fish, and others, were stocked in waters around the state.

# Channeling Angler Efforts Toward Catfish

*By Ron Wilson*

In the upper reaches of Lake Sakakawea and Lake Oahe, channel catfish rule.

That is to say that North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel often catch more channel catfish in netting surveys than any other fish species.

"They are the number one fish in netting surveys in those areas," said Greg Power, Department fisheries chief. "At least that's the case most years."

Channel catfish are native to North Dakota. This unmistakable fish has a deeply forked tail, is grayish brown in color, and has four pair of whisker-like barbels near its mouth. Smaller fish often have black spots.



MIKE ANDERSON

MIKE ANDERSON





CRAIG BIRHLE



CRAIG BIRHLE

Fishing scenes on the Red River in eastern North Dakota. The Red River, as shown in the photograph on the right, is a trophy channel catfish destination.

One of the things the channel catfish doesn't have, and this fish species isn't alone, is that it's not called walleye.

"The channel catfish fishery is truly unexploited, especially in the Missouri River System," Power said. "I make a point in public presentations to tell anglers that if North Dakota was located 500 miles south, most anglers would be tapping into this wonderful resource and likely spending much less time walleye fishing."

It's not Power's intention to try and convert the state's ardent walleye contingent, but rather remind them, and other anglers, of a resource that continues to get better, especially in the Missouri River System.

"The average North Dakota angler fishes 20 days per year, and of those 20, 19 are spent fishing for pike, perch or mainly walleye," he said. "We'd just like to see anglers take a couple of those 20 days and

try something different. Getting the news out on channel catfish opportunities in more than 40 waters across the state is a start."

While channel catfish are down the list of go-to species for anglers, the fish have earned a certain amount of respect, Power said.

"We're not seeing the same type of reaction when someone catches a carp, our top invasive species in the state," he said. "You don't see any wanton waste; catfish tossed on shore and left to rot."

Channel catfish, by nature, prefer bigger, turbid waters, which is why fisheries biologists are so successful in netting fish in the Little Missouri arm of Lake Sakakawea. While Lake Oahe isn't as turbid, it does fit the big water preference.

"The exception to turbid water, however, is the Garrison Dam Tailrace. Oftentimes, there is a very good catfish

bite," Power said. "There are some anglers who target channel catfish in the Tailrace at those times. The lion's share of the fish are about 2 pounds, great table fare coming from that cool water. The anglers targeting them sure seem to have a blast catching and keeping them."

Power said it's unknown why the fish move and stay in the Tailrace other than for an easy meal of rainbow smelt coming through the dam. And the formidable Garrison Dam itself is simply the end of the upstream road.

They are certainly not there to spawn, as channel catfish need water temperatures to hit 75 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit to reproduce, which they find in the tributaries on Sakakawea like the Little Missouri River and the Cannonball River and Beaver Bay on Lake Oahe, for example.

You can't write a channel catfish story without mentioning the Red River, which





MIKE ANDERSON



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Another nice channel catfish (top) from the Missouri River System. Tina Willis (below) with her state record channel catfish from Moon Lake in Barnes County. Willis caught the 42-pound, 1-ounce fish in 2009.

## More Notable Catfish Waters

- Red River, especially downstream of Fargo
- Lower Sheyenne River
- Upper lakes Sakakawea and Oahe
- Lower portions of the Little Missouri River, including the Little Missouri arm
- Heart Butte Reservoir
- Dickinson Reservoir
- Heart and Cannonball rivers

## Some Community Waters Stocked With Catchable Catfish

- Belfield Pond, Stark County
- Dickinson Dike, Stark County
- Gaebe Pond, Morton County
- Kriegs Pond, Morton County
- Stanley Pond, Mountrail County
- Watford City Park Pond, McKenzie County
- West Spring Lake Pond, Williams County

shoulders up against the Minnesota border in eastern North Dakota and uncharacteristically flows north.

"The Red River is truly a trophy channel catfish destination, especially farther downstream in the Drayton area," Power said. "Anglers travel long distances to fish for these cats. And while the Red receives its share of fishing pressure, anglers practice a lot of catch-and-release."

Power said the channel catfish are bigger farther downstream because studies show the bulk of the spawning and rearing, which would harbor more smaller fish in the overall population, takes place from Fargo to Wahpeton.

"Plus, considering catfish prefer a bigger water environment, your bigger cats will be downstream in that Drayton area," he said.

While channel catfish have been thriving in the Missouri River System for

decades, and have largely gone unnoticed, Department fisheries personnel have for years trapped and transported adult fish to smaller waters around the state.

"We've stocked thousands of adult catfish in smaller lakes and community fisheries where anglers have easy access," Power said. "We're giving anglers a chance to catch a fish that is still eager to bite when water temperatures heat up in summer."

According to the Department's 2016 fish stocking report, adult catfish were released in more than a dozen waters across the state, including Belfield Pond, Stark County; Stanley Pond, Mountrail County; Krieg's Pond, Morton County; Braddock Dam, Emmons County; and Moon Lake, Barnes County.

In the case of Moon Lake, some anglers may remember that on July 25, 2009, Tina Willis of West Fargo set the new state

record with a 42-pound, 1-ounce channel catfish from this Barnes County fishery.

Her fish was the product of the Department's trap and transport effort, not a product of natural reproduction.

In the case of Braddock Dam, and there are others like it, channel catfish were not simply stocked in the fishery to provide angler enjoyment, but to curb an unwanted bullhead population.

"When our fisheries personnel are trapping channel catfish in spring from Sakakawea or Oahe, they are hardly touching what's out there," Power said. "It's a good use of a resource that is not being utilized, and we're also bringing fish to the public by moving them into other waters around the state where they're happily caught."

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





# AVOIDING BLUE-GREEN ALGAE

By Greg Freeman

Most years during the heat of summer, outdoor enthusiasts are advised to be cautious with their dogs around some waters due to potential health hazards associated with blue-green algae. Ingestion by a dog, even humans, can lead to severe illness, and in extreme cases for pets, death.

In a nutshell, blue-green algae, or cyanobacteria, are microscopic organisms found in water. Potentially toxic blue-green algal blooms occur under conditions of hot, dry weather.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department generally issues an advisory of this nature in late July, August or

September, when the fall hunting seasons are ready to kick off under less than ideal warm weather conditions.

Dr. Dan Grove, Game and Fish Department wildlife veterinarian, said it is usually late summer and early fall when prime conditions exist for blue-green algae growth in many state waters.

"But it only takes a few hot days for blue-green algae to bloom, and we have experienced many days like this already this summer," Grove said. "Conditions are right for lakes, ponds and wetlands to become contaminated by the toxins produced by the blue-green algae."

Shallow, stagnant water, with moderate to high nutrient content, provides an optimum environment for blue-green algal growth. Water or wind movements often concentrate blue-green algae along the shoreline, and eventually the bloom appears as a blue-green "scum" floating on the water's surface. The threat diminishes, but is not completely eliminated, once the weather cools.

And it's a warning that shouldn't be taken lightly, Grove said, because when these conditions are present it is not uncommon to receive reports of dog deaths after drinking water where





CRAIG BHRLE



CRAIG BHRLE

Scientists warn outdoor enthusiasts of the dangers about recreating in waters with blue-green algae. Ingestion by dogs, and also humans, can lead to severe illness. Hunters who are training dogs in mid- to late summer should carefully assess water conditions.

blue-green algae blooms are present.

"Dogs shouldn't drink or swim in discolored water or where blue-green algal blooms are apparent," Grove said. "If dogs practice retrieving in these conditions, they should be rinsed off immediately and shouldn't be allowed to lick their coat."

In addition to dogs, Grove urges the public to avoid contact with, and most importantly, not to swallow water affected by blue-green algae.

According to Greg Power, Game and Fish Department fisheries chief, "Lakes with an ongoing blue-green algae bloom may not be aesthetically pleasing, but anglers can still fish and eat fish that they harvest. People just need to make sure that they thoroughly rinse the fish and their hands. Thankfully, most people are pretty thorough when cleaning fish."

In 2016, the North Dakota Depart-

ment of Health issued advisories or warnings for 15 lakes and reservoirs that experienced blue-green algae blooms with unsafe levels of the toxin in the water. The advisories and warnings were finally lifted the end of October.

The North Dakota departments of Health and Agriculture recommend these steps to avoid exposure:

- Respect advisories announced by public health authorities.
- Do not swim, water ski, or boat in areas where the water is discolored or where you see foam, scum or mats of green or blue-green algae on the water.
- If you accidentally swim in water that might have a blue-green algae bloom, rinse off with fresh water as soon as possible.

The Department of Health also notes

that people and animals that swallow water containing these toxins can become sick with severe diarrhea and vomiting; numb lips, tingling fingers and toes; dizziness; or rashes, hives or skin blisters. They say children are at higher risk than adults for illness because their smaller size can allow them to ingest a relatively large dose of toxin. Symptoms can occur as quickly as one hour after ingestion.

For additional information about the effects of blue-green algae blooms, visit the North Dakota Department of Health website at [www.tinyurl.com/NODAKHABS](http://www.tinyurl.com/NODAKHABS), the North Dakota Department of Agriculture's Animal Health Division at 701-328-2655, or call a local veterinarian.

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



One of two great  
horned owls hatched  
and raised on Game  
and Fish Department  
property, surveys its  
new surroundings.



LARA ANDERSON



# EMPTY NEST

*By Ron Wilson*

On February 8, when temperatures for the day started below zero and slowly climbed into the single digits, a great horned owl, a mature female, settled into a hand-me-down nest constructed of mostly sticks.

Her mate, a smaller raptor, with the same widely spaced feathered ear tufts that gives the owl its name, was likely perched nearby, scanning the terrain with its haunting yellow eyes.

The nest, located about 30 feet up a tree, weeks away from

sprouting leaves, overlooked the north parking compound at Game and Fish Department headquarters in Bismarck.

The great horned owl, a year-round resident of North Dakota, is one of the state's earliest nesters. Seeing one hunkered stoically in a nest while it's definitely still winter, and spring seems so far away, is not unusual. Yet the sight does provide pause as to the owl's indifference to the weather and questionable timing.

Great horned owls are

opportunistic in their nest selection, picking one that was built, occupied and then abandoned by another species. And, considering their early jump on the nesting season, competition for a place to lay eggs and fledge young without doubt isn't fierce.

"When you are one of the earliest nesters, and there is always an empty raptor nest around somewhere, then you get your pick," said Sandra Johnson, Game and Fish Department conservation biologist.



*An adult great horned owl, with two young owls sitting in the nest.*

LARA ANDERSON



The nest selected by the great horned owl pair was constructed two to three years ago, and occupied last summer by Swainson's hawks.

Egg incubation duties were left to the mature female owl. If not for her feathery warmth, the eggs would certainly have succumbed to freezing temperatures.

After hatching, the duty of providing prey for the two downy, and mostly homely young, was left to the male.

"The male typically brings the food to the nest and the female teaches the young how to feed," Johnson said. "The male was likely catching voles, probably cottontail rabbits, birds and other prey."

The male's hunting ground, you'd have to imagine, was mostly the Department's Outdoor Wildlife Learning Site, which consists of acres of quality wildlife habitat.

Great horned owls are terrific

hunters. They fly silently from perch to prey, thanks to feathers that are ragged on the ends. They do most of their hunting at night, but when times are lean, like in winter, they will hunt during the day.

While scientists say that a female great horned owl can lay from one to six eggs, the Department's backlot nest had two young.

A month or more after hatching, the fledged young were able to fly from the nest on their own, beginning a chapter that included catching their own food.

"They didn't leave right away after they've fledged," Johnson said. "Like a lot of raptors, they hung around the area with the adults."

Today, as has been the case for weeks, the nest is empty.

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



Today, the nest once occupied for weeks by great horned owls, is empty.

MIKE ANDERSON



### Editor's Note

Many of the photographs, and all of the video, were shot with a GoPro camera mounted on the end of a long, metal pole.

To get good images, as unobtrusively as possible, took some doing. It was a team effort, including Mike Anderson, Department videographer, Lara Anderson, website editor, Sandra Johnson, conservation biologist, and Bruce Kreft, resource biologist.

To watch some video of the female great horned owl and her young, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2O06M8S2tM&feature=youtu.be>.







MIKE ANDERSON

A young, fuzzy great horned owl, with an adult in the background.

After fledging, the great horned owl young and adults hung around the area for a while before moving on to new hunting grounds.



LARA ANDERSON

Great horned owls are wonderful hunters and have the equipment to prey on a variety of animals.



MIKE ANDERSON





# BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor



This drainage area within the new addition to the Painted Woods Wildlife Management Area will eventually become a community fishing area. Inset: Game and Fish Director Terry Steinwand (left) presented cooperating landowner Robert Landgren with an appreciation plaque at the May 10 dedication event.

CRAIG BIRBLE

Painted Woods



CRAIG BIRBLE

## Partnership is Key to WMA Addition

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has added 255 acres to an existing wildlife management area south of Washburn in McLean County. The addition was dedicated on May 10, 2017.

Called Painted Woods WMA, the original area of 585 acres, just upstream of where Painted Woods Creek flows into the Missouri River about six miles south of Washburn, was purchased by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in 1988. Game and Fish then assumed primary management of the area.

The recent project came about after several flood events in recent years inundated private farmland along Painted Woods Creek.

After mitigating those flood events, the McLean County Commission and Water Board approached Game and Fish to possibly partner in a project designed to alleviate flooding that occurs at the lower end of the Painted Woods Creek watershed.

Eventually the county, Game and Fish and several other wildlife groups, forged an agreement for purchase with the adjacent landowner that was

supported by the county, nearby landowners, and other agricultural and wildlife interests.

The proposed acquisition was approved by the state Natural Areas Acquisition Advisory Committee and former Governor Jack Dalrymple in spring 2016.

Game and Fish will manage the land. The county will begin constructing the flood control features as soon as possible. Game and Fish is also going to develop a small fishing lake on the new property, as well as develop other wildlife habitat.





CRAIG BIRRE

## Spring Breeding Duck Numbers Tallied

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's 70th annual spring breeding duck survey conducted in May showed an index of 2.95 million birds, down 15 percent from last year.

Mike Szymanski, Department migratory game bird supervisor, said even though the index is below 3 million for the first time since 1994, it still stands 23 percent above the long-term average (1948-2016) and is the 24th highest on record.

"Fortunately, we still have a lot of ducks," Szymanski said.

Survey results indicate canvasbacks (up 23 percent), pintails (up 5 percent) and redheads (up 2 percent) increased from their 2016 estimates, while shovelers were unchanged. Mallards were fairly stable (down 5 percent), while ruddy ducks showed the largest decrease (down 36 percent).

All other ducks were 16-28 percent below last year's numbers. However, most species, with the exception of pintails, blue-winged teal and ruddy ducks, were well-above the 69-year average.

The number of temporary and seasonal wetlands was higher than last year, as figures show the spring water index was up 78 percent. However, Szymanski said that is misleading.

"Last year's water index was very low

during our survey, and was followed by a lot of rain in late spring," he said. "When you combine that with winter snow melt, the temporary and seasonal wetlands had water during the survey, but were struggling to hang on."

Szymanski said because of habitat concerns, it looks like there might be a struggle to produce ducks, with the exception of the northeast portion of the state and to a lesser degree the northern tier.

Szymanski said there were also areas struggling to attract pairs of ducks where he expected to see better numbers.

"There was a fair bit of water in bigger basins, but those larger water areas aren't attractive to ducks, as they look for smaller wetlands, and those were drying up."

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

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

"And as we have seen in recent years, a lot depends on bird movements before and during hunting seasons, and weather patterns during the migration," he said.

## PRONGHORN AND SWAN APPS

Hunting license applications for fall pronghorn and swan seasons will be on the Game and Fish Department's website ([gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov)) and at vendors in mid-July.

The pronghorn application deadline is August 2, followed by the swan deadline August 16.

## WATCHABLE WILDLIFE PHOTO CONTEST OPEN

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest is now open, and the deadline for submissions is October 2.

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

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

By submitting an entry, photographers grant permission to Game and Fish to publish winning photographs in *North Dakota OUTDOORS* magazine, on the Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), as well as the agency social media channels.

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

Send emailed digital photos to [photocontest@nd.gov](mailto:photocontest@nd.gov). Photographers will need to supply the original image if needed for publication.

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





CRAIG BIRLE

## Game and Fish at State Fair

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department will host thousands of visitors to its Conservation and Outdoors Skills Park July 21-29 at the State Fair in Minot.

Visitors will be treated to an array of activities, exhibits and useful information as the park is open from 1-7

p.m. daily. Pathways to Hunting, Fishing, Trapping and Archery are major attractions where interested kids and adults can participate in each outdoor activity.

In addition to hands-on outdoor learning opportunities, the area offers a live fish display, furbearer exhibit and

native prairie plantings. Two information centers staffed by Game and Fish Department personnel bookend the Conservation and Outdoors Skills Park, which is located on the north end of the state fairgrounds near the State Fair Center.



MIKE ANDERSON

## ANS COMPLIANCE CHECKS

Jim Job, North Dakota Game and Fish Department warden, Devils Lake, visits with anglers getting ready to launch their boat on Devils Lake at Grahams Island State Park during an aquatic nuisance species compliance check in June. Job said the enforcement division is conducting more road checks this year and are also being more aware of boats going down the road. The top ANS violation, Job said, is boats being trailered down the road with their drain plugs still in.





MARTY EGGLEND

## Rugby Student Captures State High School Clay Target Title

Seth Jaeger of Rugby broke every target he shot at to win the 2017 North Dakota State High School League Clay Target championship, held June 17 at the Shooting Park near Horace.

High school trap shooting is a fast-growing activity in North Dakota, and the 2017 state tournament attracted more than 600 entrants, more than 200 over the 2016 total.

Each competitor shot three rounds at 25 targets per round, and Jaeger compiled a perfect score of 75 to take the high gun varsity male and overall high gun titles.

Gabby Fischer of Grand Forks Central broke 71 targets to claim the high gun varsity female title, while West Fargo Sheyenne captured the

team title. Top individual and team scores are as follows:

### High Gun Varsity Male

- First, Seth Jaeger, Rugby, 75; second, Ordale Morstad, Munich, 73 (tie-breaker); third Devin Klingbeil, Central Cass, 73 (tie-breaker).

### High Gun Junior Varsity Male

- Blake Didier, Valley City, 72; Matt Lyter, Valley City, 70; Josh Hudson, Richland, 69.

### High Gun Novice Male

- Levi Gilbertson, Kindred, 69 (tie-breaker); Sam Mehus, Valley City, 69; George Ringuette, Barnes County North, 64.

### High Gun Varsity Female

- Gabby Fischer, Grand Forks

Central, 71; Kelsey Stumvoll, Garrison, 70; Kyla Radomski, Rugby, 65.

### High Gun Junior Varsity Female

- Emma Mielke, Valley City, 67; Kathleen Gilbertson, Enderlin, 65; Megan Mathison, Fargo Shanley, 63.

### High Gun Novice Female

- Joncy Mastel, Wahpeton, 69; Emma Jordet, Grand Forks Red River, 62; Alex Houser, Garrison, 59.

### Team Totals

- West Fargo Sheyenne, 361; Grand Forks Central, 356; Devils Lake 352; Fargo Oak Grove, 351; Valley City, 350.

JUST TEXT: **NDGF Alerts**  
TO: **468311**

For more options to receive  
Game and Fish news and  
information, visit the Game  
and Fish website at  
[gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

TEXT  
ALERTS

**RECEIVE:**

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





## Game and Fish Pays \$644,000 in Property Taxes

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department recently paid more than \$644,000 in taxes to counties in which the Department owns or leases land. The 2016 in-lieu-of-tax payments are the same as property taxes paid by private landowners.

The Game and Fish Department manages more than 200,000 acres for wildlife habitat and public hunting in 51 counties. The Department does not own or manage any land in Traill or Renville counties.

Following is a list of counties and the tax payments they received. Tax payment for Foster County was not available at the time of publication.

COUNTY	TAX DUE	COUNTY	TAX DUE	COUNTY	TAX DUE
Adams	\$ 184.05	Grand Forks	\$16,610.77	Pierce	\$ 2,819.98
Barnes	5,709.88	Grant	1,218.87	Ramsey	16,503.19
Benson	4,538.30	Griggs	95.71	Ransom	1,706.58
Billings	279.06	Hettinger	4,690.83	Richland	16,283.26
Bottineau	5,336.06	Kidder	10,446.68	Rolette	41,699.00
Bowman	2,316.12	LaMoure	9,734.65	Sargent	18,222.08
Burke	1,119.99	Logan	331.63	Sheridan	66,788.36
Burleigh	29,138.98	McHenry	1,841.03	Sioux	297.28
Cass	7,244.52	McIntosh	9,138.74	Slope	1,424.09
Cavalier	28,911.28	McKenzie	33,604.23	Stark	4,680.48
Dickey	13,399.83	McLean	101,583.15	Steele	7,778.54
Divide	1,757.60	Mercer	15,952.71	Stutsman	4,916.05
Dunn	6,529.46	Morton	18,735.44	Towner	2,229.33
Eddy	6,488.04	Mountrail	8,101.21	Walsh	11,063.61
Emmons	4,396.03	Nelson	5,998.82	Ward	101.87
Foster	N/A	Oliver	2,996.67	Wells	68,884.87
Golden Valley	165.55	Pembina	16,161.38	Williams	3,843.12

## Hunting Guide and Outfitter Test Set

The next guide and outfitter written examination is August 12 at 1 p.m. at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department office in Bismarck. The test is given periodically to anyone interested in becoming a hunting guide or outfitter in the state.

In addition to passing a written exam, qualifications for becoming a guide include a background check for criminal and game and fish violations; certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and standard first aid; and employment by or contract with a licensed hunting outfitter.

**Hunting outfitter eligibility requirements include the guide qualifications, as well as an individual must have held a hunting guide license for two years; and must have proof of liability insurance.**

Interested individuals are required to preregister by calling the Game and Fish Department's enforcement office at 701-328-6604.

## NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

WEEKLY VIDEO NEWS BROADCAST

### WILLISTON

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

### GRAND FORKS

WDAZ - Wednesday - 5 pm

### MINOT

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

### DICKINSON

KQCD - Saturday - 6 pm (MT)  
KXMA - Sunday - 10 pm (MT)

### BISMARCK

KFYR - Saturday - 6 pm  
KXMB - Sunday - 10 pm  
CATV - Saturday - 9:30 am

### FARGO

KVRR - Sunday - 9 pm

ON



# back cast



By Ron Wilson

It's a start.

Readers will remember that in April state Game and Fish Department personnel moved 60 sage grouse – 40 females and 20 males – from Wyoming to Bowman County in southwestern North Dakota. All the adult birds were marked with GPS and VHF radio devices so wildlife biologists can keep track of their whereabouts.

This translocation project, with assistance from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, was initiated in an effort to,

to hatched young.

In mid-June, Robinson reported that two hens had successfully hatched young and were brooding chicks. Two other hens, as of June 17, were still sitting on nests, waiting for their chicks to hatch, which was expected to happen in the following week to 10 days.

"You always want more, but this is positive," Robinson said.

It's a start.

Robinson said that five other sage grouse nests failed because of depredation

other things, they are checking to see the kind of habitat the birds chose to nest in.

Robinson said the next important step is for the chicks to grow, avoid the many obstacles in the wild that could kill them, and become part of the population.

"If we can get those chicks to survive, then we are in better shape than we were," Robinson said.

Because Lazenby and crew are keeping their distance so as not to disturb the two females tending to broods, it's unknown how many young are actually on the



CRAIG BIRBLE

fingers crossed, help build North Dakota's declining sage grouse population.

Fundamental in the project was the artificial insemination of a sample of female sage grouse, with the hope that some would nest in southwestern North Dakota.

After their release in April, Aaron Robinson, Department upland game management supervisor, said 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

by predators, and those birds are unlikely to re-nest.

Robinson said that of the GPS and VHF marked birds, 11 females and five males have died.

"I expected this type of mortality," Robinson said. "The highest mortality for sage grouse is in springtime during breeding when they are most vulnerable to predators."

The translocated sage grouse are monitored daily by graduate student, Kade Lazenby, and two technicians. Among

ground.

No matter, it's a start.

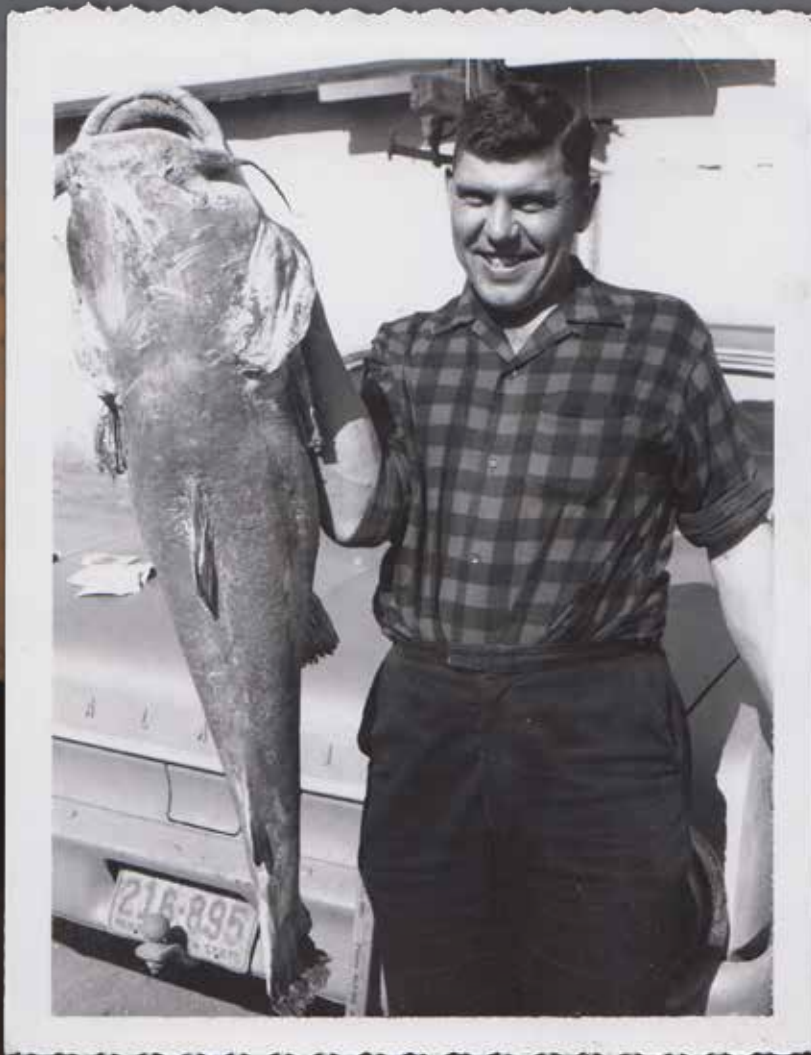
Robinson said the plan is to translocate another 60 sage grouse from out-of-state next spring, with the goal of anchoring more birds into North Dakota's sage grouse population.

"I just keep crossing my fingers that some of these chicks are recruited into the population," Robinson said.

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



# A L O O K B A C K



NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT ARCHIVE PHOTO

By Ron Wilson

In this issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*, readers will find an article on fishing for channel catfish in the Missouri River System and elsewhere.

While checking some background information, we ran into a photograph taken more than 50 years ago that caught our eye.

The caption for the photograph, published in the July 1963 issue of *OUTDOORS*, reads: "Clarence Lindeman of Linton caught this 37 pound mud or flathead catfish in the Missouri River."

Lindeman caught the big flathead on a legal set, or trotline, not with a rod and reel.

What's interesting is that if you rummage through Game and Fish Department file photos dating back years, you'd be

hard pressed to find a bigger example of what today is deemed North Dakota's rarest fish.

In an article in *OUTDOORS* in 2013, Greg Power, Department fisheries division chief, said that while flatheads are native to North Dakota and the Missouri River System, they were never abundant and became even less so after impoundment.

"North Dakota is the northern end of their range," he said. "We've really never had that many."

To prove that point, Power said Game and Fish Department fisheries biologists have handled in roughly the last half-century about 20,000 channel catfish from the Garrison Tailrace to the South

Dakota border. In those same netting surveys, they've caught only about 20 flathead catfish. Also, one flathead was caught in Lake Oahe by an angler in recent years.

The last time fisheries biologists caught any flatheads from Lake Oahe was 2015, when they netted two fish.

Because the flatheads captured in fisheries nets over the years aren't anywhere as big (roughly 15 to 35 inches) as what Lindeman caught on a trotline years ago, it proves that the fish aren't holdovers from pre-impoundment, but rather the product of reproduction.

Regardless of these spawning efforts, flathead catfish are still North Dakota's rarest fish.

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