

# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA

GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

\$2.00 AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2017



2017  
**Hunting**  
Season Outlook





# MATTERS OF OPINION



**Terry Steinwand**  
*Director*

Where has summer gone? That's probably the most frequently asked question I've fielded of late.

Considering that there are still 24 hours in a day, seven days in a week, and so on, this summer isn't any shorter than those in the past.

I have a theoretical, and somewhat psychological answer to the question, though. Based on last winter's weather, specifically a six-week stretch from late November to early January, we thought we'd have flooding and wet conditions once again. While there was flooding in some areas of the state, like Belcourt, overall flooding did not occur as anticipated.

Signs of drought were even seen in early spring in portions of the state. And when much-needed precipitation failed to appear, the areas negatively impacted grew significantly.

This summer has been a very stressful time for many farmers and ranchers across the state, and wildlife populations are stressed as well. And with that stress there is a lost concept of time – thus the “shorter summer.”

Our white-tailed deer population actually came through winter better than expected. I've heard some reports of twins on the landscape, but mostly reports of single fawns. While the latter doesn't increase the herd nearly as much as twins, it's still a better situation than it could have been.

No matter, there is still a large number of disappointed deer hunters across the state who didn't receive licenses for this fall. We certainly heard from some of those unsuccessful applicants, and sometimes in a not-so-pleasant fashion.

The solution to this issue is relatively simple and that's to increase the deer population. Accomplishing that, however, isn't that simple. It comes down to putting more wildlife habitat on the landscape. We're constantly working on that, but it is a slow process.

Upland birds, like white-tailed deer, came through the winter better than expected. There certainly was some mortality associated with the early winter weather, but we expected worse.

What followed, as mentioned earlier, was a dry weather pattern, which typically benefits pheasants and other ground-nesting birds. Unfortunately, the pattern went to the extreme, offering very little precipitation and little insect production to feed chicks early in their development.

We don't have a complete picture of upland game bird broods across North Dakota just yet, but it doesn't look great.

I know I'm not painting the rosiest of pictures, but we certainly recognize the weather extremes we face in North Dakota. We have the innate ability to endure these extremes and survive. The same can be said of the fish and wildlife in North Dakota, but their ability to bounce back depends on what's on the landscape. Much as our ability as humans to be resilient depends on shelter and food, the same is true of fish and wildlife.

Many North Dakotans look forward to the pleasant fall weather and the anticipation of getting out to hunt or fish. And while this fall may not be the optimum for harvest success for some species, just getting out and enjoying all of what North Dakota has to offer is a win.

I've had more than one person tell me, resident and nonresident alike, that we don't realize how good we have it in North Dakota. They may be right. I've spent the vast majority of my life here and don't want to be anywhere else. But we're always striving to make it better and more productive for fish and wildlife for people who enjoy hunting and fishing.

While you may have to work a little harder this fall, it's still a wonderful place to be. So, get out and enjoy the great North Dakota outdoors.

*Terry Steinwand*

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# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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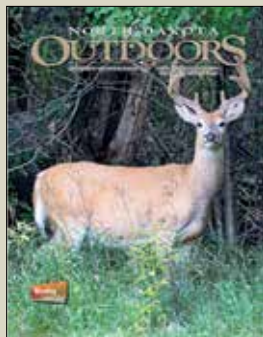
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### Front Cover

Photographed in late August, the antlers of this whitetail buck were still covered in velvet, which may or may not be rubbed off by the time bow season starts. (Photo by Craig Bihrl, Bismarck.)



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2017



# HUNTING SEASON

## Outlook

*By Jeb Williams*

Most North Dakotans will remember 2017 as a time when drought returned to the state.

North Dakota is well known for wild weather swings, but the end of 2016, and so far into 2017, is about as weird as weather can get.

As a beautiful November ended last fall, December arrived with a mission, a seemingly singular focus to make things miserable for critters and citizens of the state.

For more than a month, the weather did indeed test the resiliency of anything living. But just when many conversations were taking shape in coffee shops across North Dakota that winter 2016-17 was going to wind up as the worst on record, it stopped snowing. Temperatures increased, and snow gradually started melting in late January. By March, much of the snow was gone, with most places hardly showing a puddle of proof that some areas received record snowfall in December.





Fast forward to spring where all we needed were good rains to get some surface moisture to match the subsoil moisture in most areas. It seemed like the stage was set for a good year. But the rain didn't come. And when it did, it wasn't enough.

So what does this crazy weather mean for the state's wildlife? It's not helpful. While it appears we were fairly fortunate that most wildlife survived winter, the next hurdle is getting through the dry conditions, which can be just as difficult.

The fallout is the lack of nesting, fawning and brood-rearing cover, fewer protein-rich insects needed by young, hungry upland birds the first month of life, and a lack of water in the form of both dew and surface water.

As an agency, Game and Fish is most concerned with managing specific areas to benefit wildlife and ensure the best possible hunting opportunities. However, the agency is also charged with maintaining areas with adequate habitat where hunters feel like they have a reasonable chance to harvest game. In short: wildlife production along with public recreation.

Through the Game and Fish Department's wildlife management area system and its Private Land Open To Sportsmen program, those opportunities exist. And they will again this year. But in dry years, we also recognize the challenge that neighboring farmers and ranchers are experiencing and offer a bit more flexibility with our managed haying and grazing activities on some of these areas.

Understanding the gravity of the situation on the landscape, the Game and Fish Department, along with several other conservation organizations, signed a joint letter to the secretary of agriculture supporting early haying of Conservation Reserve Program grasslands in the state.

Hunters should keep this in mind this fall when they visit a WMA or a PLOTS tract that has been hayed or grazed. While they may see a short-term loss in the public recreation aspect, these acres will likely see a long-term gain in the quality and diversity of habitat due to the manipulation of grass cover. In addition, maintaining good relations with farmers and ranchers is in our best interest to ensure hunting opportunities

continue to exist on private property throughout the state.

This summer also accelerated the 2018 farm bill discussion and what citizens would like that bill to look like. Conservation groups and hunters have noticed the changes associated with the loss of 2 million acres of CRP grasslands from North Dakota's landscape over the last 10 years.

Across the board, the majority of North Dakota game species have declined since the peak CRP year in 2007 when the state had more than 3 million acres enrolled. We are excited to participate in the discussion as we move closer to the 2018 farm bill and how it will influence North Dakota.

In the meantime, North Dakota's fall hunting seasons are upon us. Many will argue that this is the finest time of year on the Northern Plains. Even with some expected challenges caused by uncontrollable weather the last several months, it's an argument that remains difficult to dispute.

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**JEB WILLIAMS** is the Game and Fish Department's wildlife division chief.

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*Upland game bird hunters will likely have to cover more ground this fall as pheasant, grouse and partridge reproductive efforts were likely hampered in many areas because of drought.*

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## UPLAND AND SMALL GAME

### Ring-necked Pheasants

**Opens:** Oct. 7

**Closes:** Jan. 7, 2018

**Daily Limit:** 3

**Possession Limit:** 12

**Shooting Hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

North Dakota's run of below average winter snowfall came to an end in 2016-17. December greeted parts of the state with record snowfall and cold temperatures. January brought much of the same, but near the end of the month, both humans and wildlife got a much needed break.

The remainder of winter was mild in comparison, and the birds needed it. Pheasants were feeling the effects of the harsh winter weather and many birds would have died if not for the early warm-up.

Results of this spring's crowing count survey showed lower numbers of breeding roosters throughout most of the state's traditional pheasant range. The number of roosters heard calling was down anywhere from 6-10 percent.

While residual cover for nesting hens was average in spring, drought conditions and sparse precipitation since snowmelt likely hampered the production of insects, which are vital to chick survival.

As of this writing, biologists had not completed late-summer roadside brood counts, but preliminary numbers from early routes suggest that hunters will see fewer birds this fall compared to 2016. If that holds true through the end of the survey, a season similar to 2013 is anticipated, when hunters harvested roughly 447,000 roosters. In 2016, hunters bagged about 500,000 birds.

Some areas will no doubt have good production and other areas will likely have poor production, so hunters who want to find better hunting opportunities may need to move around.

Despite weather concerns and knowing that North Dakota continues to lose quality habitat, the state still supports good

pheasant hunting opportunities.

*Rodney Gross, Upland Game Management Biologist, Bismarck*

### Wild Turkeys

**Opens:** Oct. 14

**Closes:** Jan. 7, 2018

**Shooting Hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

The turkey population in many of the state's hunting units is lower the past few years because of cool, wet spring conditions during nesting/brooding. Turkey production last spring was not good, so

The best hunting success was in the central part of the state. The western part, particularly in the badlands, is expected to provide some of the better turkey hunting opportunities this fall.

*Rodney Gross*

### Ruffed Grouse

**Opens:** Sept. 9

**Closes:** Jan. 7, 2018

**Daily Limit:** 3

**Possession Limit:** 12

**Shooting Hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Ruffed grouse are an often-ignored upland bird in North Dakota that offer a challenge to hunters willing to take a hike in the woods.

Ruffed grouse are primarily found in the native aspen woodlands of Rolette, Bottineau, Pembina, Walsh, Cavalier and portions of McHenry counties. Census data from heavily forested states like Minnesota and Wisconsin, indicate ruffed grouse numbers cycle about every 8-10 years. This was observed many years ago in North Dakota, but because of limited and fragmented acreage of native woodlands and low numbers of ruffed grouse, population cycles are seldom seen today.

But the good news for 2017 is that spring drumming counts were up 65 percent in the Turtle Mountains

and good numbers of broods were being reported in the Pembina Hills. Granted, North Dakota's ruffed grouse population may still be low compared to states to the east, but with good production, an improved population this fall in both the northeast and north central parts of the state is a possibility.

For ruffed grouse in particular, habitat is the key. A good mixture of young and old aspen trees, with a thick shrub understory



fall numbers were still relatively low. Also, severe drought may have had a negative influence on survival of young birds this year.

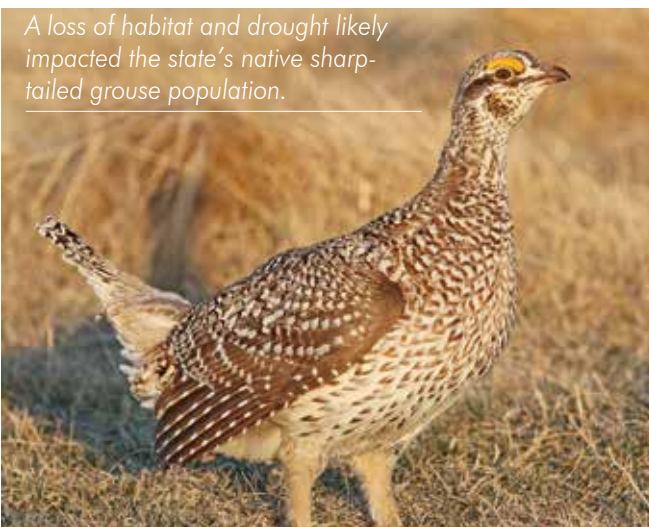
Consequently, Game and Fish has continued to reduce fall turkey licenses since 2008 to try to turn turkey numbers around and improve hunter success. Last fall, 2,361 hunters harvested 929 birds for a success rate of 39 percent.



of beaked hazel, will improve nesting success and brood survival.

Ruffed grouse hunting nearly ends each year when snow blankets the forest. That can be early in North Dakota, and frequently a couple of months of the season may be left with virtually no one hunting these superb birds. Regardless of their population status, many hunters do not consider their hunting season complete without at least one trip to the grouse woods in fall.

Rodney Gross



A loss of habitat and drought likely impacted the state's native sharp-tailed grouse population.

CRAIG BIRHLE

### Sharp-tailed Grouse

**Opens:** Sept. 9

**Closes:** Jan. 7, 2018

**Daily Limit:** 3

**Possession Limit:** 12

**Shooting Hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Sharptail populations respond either negatively or positively to certain weather conditions. There is typically a happy medium between too wet/cold and too hot/dry. If the scale is tipped too far on either end of the spectrum, negative results occur.

This year the state likely had poor grouse production as a result of hot and dry summer weather, which reduced habitat conditions and insect production.

The central and northeastern parts of the state may have fared a bit better, but we'll know more after summer roadside

counts are completed. Some localized areas will likely have good chick survival, so hunters who are willing to travel can still find good hunting opportunities.

Additionally, Game and Fish asks all sharp-tailed grouse and Hungarian partridge hunters to send in wings from harvested birds to help biologists analyze production for 2017.

Wing envelopes can be requested on the Game and Fish Department website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

Rodney Gross

### Hungarian Partridge

**Opens:** Sept. 9

**Closes:** Jan. 7, 2018

**Daily Limit:** 3

**Possession Limit:** 12

**Shooting Hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, Hungarian partridge were plentiful in North Dakota, but as weather cycles shifted

from dry to predominately wet, partridge populations responded negatively.

While the state's Hun population has increased in the last five years, hunters this fall will likely see fewer birds compared to last year due to drought conditions. However, biologists have observed some good-sized partridge broods this year compared to last summer.

Partridge have become a bonus bird for hunters pursuing sharp-tailed grouse or pheasants, so keep an eye out for areas such as abandoned farmsteads and native prairie on the edge of small grain crops. Pockets of

decent hunting may be found in these areas, but hunters will need to spend some time in the mornings scouting.

Rodney Gross



CRAIG BIRHLE

The state's Hungarian partridge population has increased the last five years.

### Tree Squirrels

**Opens:** Sept. 9

**Closes:** Jan. 7, 2018

**Daily Limit:** 4

**Possession Limit:** 12

**Shooting Hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Tree squirrels may be taken statewide with firearms loaded with shot, rimfire rifles, or with bows and arrows legal for taking upland game.

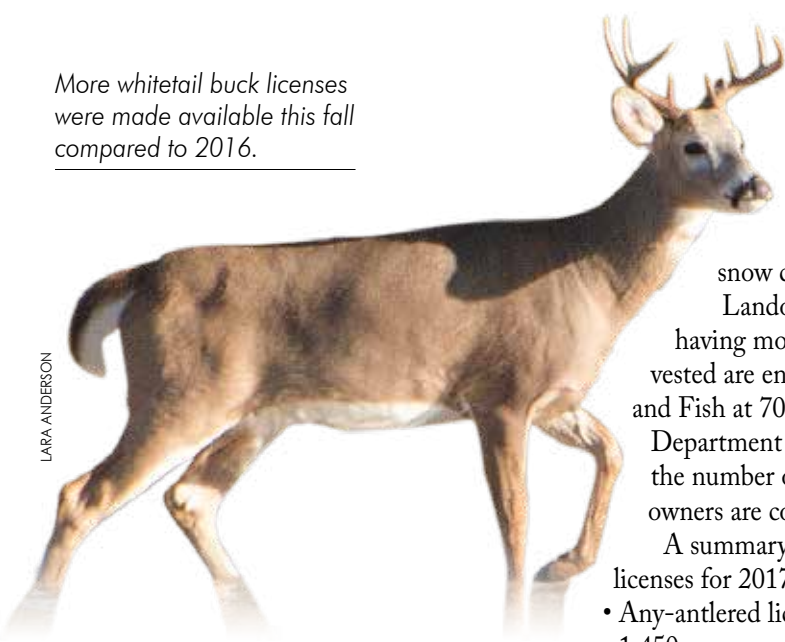


Fox squirrel.

LARA ANDERSON

More whitetail buck licenses were made available this fall compared to 2016.

LARA ANDERSON



River Valley due to inadequate snow cover.

Landowners interested in having more antlerless deer harvested are encouraged to call Game and Fish at 701-328-6300, and Department personnel will direct the number of doe hunters landowners are comfortable hosting.

A summary of white-tailed deer licenses for 2017:

- Any-antlered licenses increased by 1,450.
- Any-antlerless licenses increased by 1,750.
- Antlered white-tailed deer licenses increased by 550.
- Antlerless white-tailed deer licenses increased by 950.
- 1,022 muzzleloader licenses available in 2017 – 511 antlered white-tailed deer licenses and 511 antlerless white-tailed deer licenses. This is an increase of 94 muzzleloader licenses from 2016.
- 245 “I” licenses available for the youth deer hunting season, up 20 licenses from 2016. The licenses are limited in number for units 3B1, 3B2 and

4A-4F, and are valid for any deer, except antlerless mule deer in unit 4A. There are unlimited “H” youth deer licenses valid for any deer state-wide, except mule deer in the above restricted units.

- 382 nonresident any-deer archery licenses available for 2017, 101 more than 2016. The number of nonresident any-deer archery licenses will increase to 502 in 2018.

*Bill Jensen, Big Game Management Biologist, Bismarck*

## BIG GAME

### White-tailed Deer

**Archery Opens:** Sept. 1

**Archery Closes:** Jan. 7, 2018

**Regular Gun Season Opens:** Nov. 10

**Regular Gun Season Closes:** Nov. 26

**Muzzleloader Opens:** Dec. 1

**Muzzleloader Closes:** Dec. 17

Game and Fish made 54,500 licenses available to deer gun hunters for 2017, 5,500 more than 2016.

The statewide hunter success rate in 2016 was 66 percent, about the same as 2015 (68 percent), but below the Department goal of 70 percent.

With heavy snow in December, Game and Fish biologists flew winter aerial surveys in 26 of 32 hunting units, the most units biologists have surveyed from the air in more than a decade.

Winter 2016-17 was a mixed bag. Conditions in the southeastern and southwestern portions of the state were moderate, while the north central portion dealt with severe conditions. Luckily, February and March brought moderating temperatures and little additional snow.

Based on comparisons with past aerial surveys, deer numbers along the Missouri River and Coteau units were higher than 2013, whereas the number of deer counted in the Turtle Mountains was down. About the same number of deer were observed on the Slope, Devils Lake, upper Red River Valley and Pembina Hills as in 2013. Winter aerial surveys were not conducted in the Sheyenne, James and southern Red

### Mule Deer

**Archery Opens:** Sept. 1

**Archery Closes:** Jan. 7, 2018

**Regular Gun Season Opens:** Nov. 10

**Regular Gun Season Closes:** Nov. 26

Mule deer in North Dakota's badlands continue to show signs of recovery following the severe winters of 2009-11, which reduced deer numbers by nearly 50 percent from 2007.

For the fifth consecutive year, the spring mule deer index was higher than the previous year. The 2017 spring index was 16 percent higher than 2016, and 58 percent higher than the long-term average.

*All but one of the state's mule deer units have antlerless licenses this fall.*



SANDRA JOHNSON



The mule deer population increase is attributed to no harvest of antlerless mule deer in the badlands during the 2012-16 hunting seasons, moderate winter conditions and improved fawn production in 2013-16. Fawn production in 2016 was good and indicative of a growing population, with a fawn-to-doe ratio of 90 fawns per 100 does.

An increasing mule deer population will mean more hunting opportunities this fall. There were 2,450 antlered mule deer licenses available in 2017, an increase of 200 from 2016. Antlerless mule deer licenses also increased from 600 to 900 in 2017. All mule deer units will have antlerless licenses except 4A, where the population remains below the management goal.

A mule deer buck license remains one of the more difficult to draw in the lottery. Those lucky enough to draw a license should expect a high quality hunt similar to last year, when hunter success for mule deer buck hunters was 80 percent.

*Bruce Stillings, Big Game Management Supervisor, Dickinson*

## Pronghorn

**Archery Only Opens:** Sept. 1

**Archery Only Closes:** Sept. 24

**Gun/Archery Season Opens:** Oct. 6

**Gun/Archery Season Closes:** Oct. 22

The state's pronghorn population took a small step back in 2017, following severe early winter weather conditions, combined with extreme widespread drought in summer.

Pronghorn were slowly recovering following the severe winters of 2009-11, after which pronghorn numbers had declined by 75 percent.

This summer, biologists conducted aerial surveys in late June and early July and found the number of pronghorn in the state was 14 percent lower than last year. Although overall numbers were down, it was a good reproductive year, resulting in the highest fawn-to-doe ratio since 2002.

Game and Fish will maintain a conservative harvest strategy to provide hunting opportunities, while encouraging population growth. In 2017, 410 licenses were



*Following some tough winters and a slow-to-recover population, Game and Fish will continue with a conservative pronghorn harvest strategy in western North Dakota.*

CRAIG BIRLE

allocated, 320 fewer than 2016. Units 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A and 4C are open to hunting this fall, but the number of licenses in each hunting unit was reduced.

Hunters who drew a lottery license can use it during the archery season from September 1-24, or during the rifle season from October 6-22, using legal firearms or archery equipment.

Another moderate winter, with average fawn production, may provide conditions needed for pronghorn population growth to support additional hunting opportunities in 2018.

Last year's limited season was successful, with 716 hunters harvesting 523 pronghorn, for a success rate of 73 percent. The harvest consisted of 482 adult bucks, 17 does and 24 fawns. Hunters should expect similar success this year.

*Bruce Stillings*

## Bighorn Sheep

*For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or the 2017 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.*

A bighorn sheep hunting season is

tentatively scheduled for 2017. The status of that season will be determined in early September after the summer population survey is completed.

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

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

The survey revealed both good and bad news after a sheep die-off that began in 2014. This year's count of adult bighorns was encouraging, given the ongoing effects of bacterial pneumonia throughout most of the badlands, but the lamb count was discouraging.

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. However, the total count, recruitment rate and winter survival rate for lambs were all the lowest

on record. The recruitment rate of lambs per adult ewes was 15 percent, well below the long-term average.

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.

Adult mortality was low in 2016, and a good number of lambs survived in 2014 and 2015 to compensate for most of the adult losses in 2014. However, many bighorns are still showing signs of pneumonia, and with the poor lamb recruitment, 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.

Game and Fish issued eight licenses in 2016 and all hunters were successful harvesting a ram.

*Brett Wiedmann, Big Game Management Biologist, Dickinson*

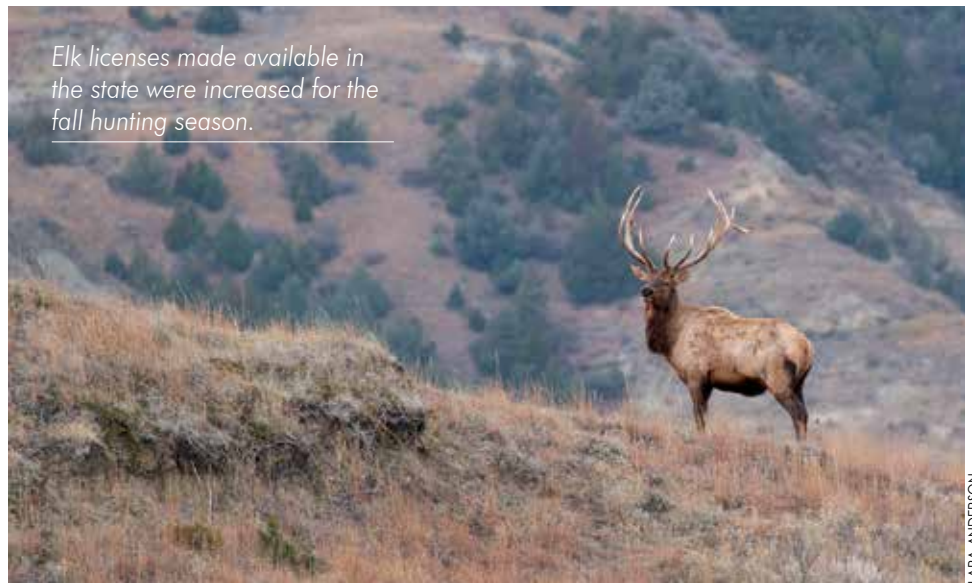
## Moose

*For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or the 2017 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.*

The 2017 moose season features another record number of once-in-a-lifetime licenses. The increase in license numbers is primarily in the northwest region of the state, in moose management units M9 and M10, with additional any-moose and antlerless licenses.

Moose continue to thrive in northwestern North Dakota, but numbers remain low in historical hunting units in the Turtle Mountains, Pembina Hills and along the Red River corridor. Moose unit M1C, located in the Pembina Hills region, has been closed since 2006 and will remain closed this year. Moose unit M4, which encompasses the Turtle Mountains, was closed in 2013 and will also remain closed this fall.

For 2017 moose unit M10 was split into two units. Unit M10 is now north of U.S. Highway 2 and unit M11 is south of U.S. Highway 2.



LARA ANDERSON

The regular moose season is now standardized statewide and runs from October 13 through November 5. Previously, moose units M5 and M6 had a later regular season opening date.

The Department continues to monitor moose that die from nonhunting related reasons to determine any effects of disease, and to gain a better understanding of cause-specific mortality. Field work for a three-year research study for moose in the Kenmare area and the Missouri River bottoms southeast of Williston is completed and has moved on to analysis of collected data. The focus of the research is on annual survival, cause-specific mortality, reproduction rates, annual and seasonal movements and home range use, as well as seasonal habitat selection for adult cow moose.

Game and Fish issued 245 licenses for 2017. This is an increase from 200 licenses in 2016. Expectations for the season are high, as hunter success for moose historically runs above 90 percent.

*Jason Smith, Big Game Management Biologist, Jamestown*

## Elk

*For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or the 2017 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.*

North Dakota's 2017 elk season features 387 licenses, which is an increase from

2016.

The season also includes a couple of format changes. Elk unit E1 was split west and east by ND Highway 20 to focus management and better direct harvest on the two separate elk herds in the Turtle Mountains and Pembina Hills. Elk unit E1W will be west of ND Highway 20 and elk unit E1E will be east of ND Highway 20.

Unit E1W has 15 any-elk and 25 antlerless licenses, while unit E1E has 20 any-elk and 50 antlerless licenses.

Elk license numbers in southwestern North Dakota increased to 130 this season for units E3 and E4. The elk population in unit E2 is stable, with 50 any-elk and 90 antlerless licenses issued, the same as 2016.

Another change for this season is establishment of unit E6, a new unit that encompasses all land east of ND Highway 31 in Sioux County. This unit was created in an effort to manage the growing elk herd in the Porcupine Hills. The Game and Fish Department is coordinating this effort along with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and private landowners within the unit. Seven licenses were allocated in unit E6, two for any elk and five for antlerless elk.

*Jason Smith*



## MIGRATORY BIRDS

### Ducks and Geese

Good wetland conditions and high waterfowl numbers were found again during the Game and Fish Department's 2017 annual spring breeding duck survey.

In its 70<sup>th</sup> year, this is perhaps the longest-running operational breeding waterfowl survey in the world, covering nearly 2,000 miles to assess spring wetland conditions and the number of waterfowl in the state.

Although winter started off with a lot of snow, late winter and spring conditions were mild and generally dry, with below average precipitation in many areas. Waterfowl habitats were drying up as spring progressed, and unlike the previous two years, there wasn't much late spring rain to replenish wetlands.

The 2017 May water index was the 30<sup>th</sup> highest on record, up 78 percent from 2016, and 8 percent above the 1948-2016 average. Unfortunately, the count was deceptively high as many wetlands were in a drying phase and probably weren't around long after the survey.

This year's breeding duck index was the 24<sup>th</sup> highest on record, down 15 percent from last year, and 23 percent above the long-term average. This is the first year since 1994 that the state's estimated breeding population of ducks (2.95 million) dropped below 3 million birds.

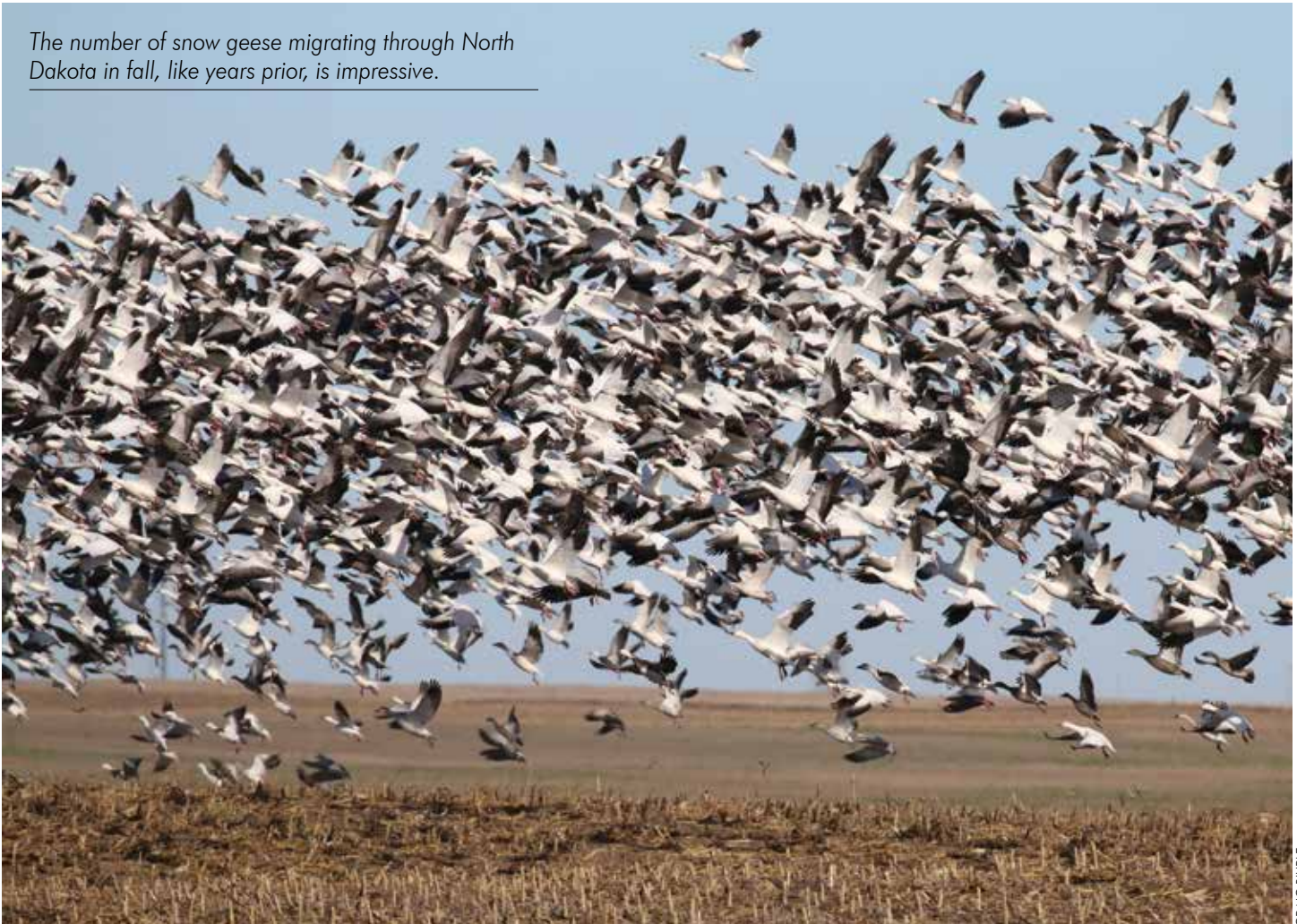
All species, except canvasbacks (up 23 percent), pintails (up 5 percent), redheads (up 2 percent) and northern shoveler (unchanged), had lower numbers than observed in 2016. Mallards were down 5 percent from 2016 for their 20<sup>th</sup> highest count on record. Wigeon and

ruddy ducks declined 16 and 36 percent, respectively, while all other species declined from 20 percent (green-winged teal) to 28 percent (gadwall).

Although most species declined from last year, all species, except pintail (down 24 percent), blue-winged teal (down 6 percent), and ruddy ducks (down 4 percent) are above the long-term average, including redheads (up 73 percent), mallards (up 67 percent), wigeon (up 48 percent), scaup (up 33 percent), gadwall (up 32 percent), shovelers (up 30 percent) and canvasbacks (up 16 percent).

Duck numbers in North Dakota have remained high since 1994 because of exceptional water conditions and abundant nesting cover provided by CRP. However, as CRP acres and native grasslands continue to decline across the state, biologists expect duck production to decline.

*The number of snow geese migrating through North Dakota in fall, like years prior, is impressive.*



CRAIG BIRLE



The brood index observed during the Department's July brood survey was down 5 percent from 2016, and 30 percent above the 1965-2016 average. The average brood size was 6.82 ducklings, up 0.5 ducklings.

July wetland counts were down 38 percent from 2016, and 16 percent below the long-term average. Wetland conditions were variable across the state, with most areas receiving little spring and summer rainfall, but some localized areas did

receive average total precipitation from heavy rains. Areas farther east and north also appear to have benefited from more persistent precipitation.

It appears brood rearing wetlands were in good enough condition going into the dry spell to provide habitat for breeding ducks and young. While shallow wetlands mostly dried, medium-sized and larger wetlands provided brood rearing habitat in summer.

It's predicted that a fall flight of ducks from North Dakota this year will be down about 8 percent from last year and similar to 2008.

Numbers of resident Canada geese, Western Prairie Canada geese and arctic

nesting Tallgrass Prairie Canada geese, snow geese and Ross's geese all remain high.

North Dakota's waterfowl hunting seasons, like last year's, can be negatively affected by mild fall weather. Ducks and geese, especially mallards and snow geese, arrived late in the season, and moved through the state in a matter of days. Hunting opportunities for ducks and geese will likely be highly variable across differ-

ent regions of the state.

Prospects for a good fall flight from northern breeding areas should be good, but as always, weather conditions and migration patterns will dictate waterfowl hunting opportunities come fall.

*Mike Szymanski, Migratory Game Bird Management Supervisor, Bismarck*

## Youth Waterfowl Season

*(For legally licensed residents and nonresidents ages 15 and younger.)*

**Opens:** Sept. 16

**Closes:** Sept. 17

**Shooting Hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

**Daily Limit:** Ducks and geese – same as regular season.

## Early Canada Goose Season

**Opens:** Aug. 15 (statewide)

**Closes:** Sept. 7 (Missouri River zone), Sept. 15 (statewide)

**Daily Limit:** 15

**Possession Limit:** 45

**Shooting Hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

## Canada Geese Regular Season

**Opens:** Sept. 23 (residents only), Sept. 30 (nonresidents)

**Closes:** Dec. 29 (Missouri River zone), Dec. 21 (statewide)

**Daily Limit:** 5 (Missouri River zone), 8 (rest of state)

*With a high resident Canada goose population, hunting opportunities are plentiful in the state.*





**Possession Limit:** 15 (Missouri River zone), 24 (rest of state)

### White-fronted Geese (Statewide)

**Opens:** Sept. 23 (residents only),

Sept. 30 (nonresidents)

**Closes:** Dec. 3

**Daily Limit:** 3

**Possession Limit:** 9

### Light (Snow) Geese (Statewide)

**Opens:** Sept. 23 (residents only),  
Sept. 30 (nonresidents)

**Closes:** Dec. 31

**Daily Limit:** 50, no possession limit

**Shooting Hours for all Geese:**

Half-hour before sunrise to

1 p.m. each day through Nov.

4. Start-  
ing Nov. 5,  
shooting hours are  
a half-hour before  
sunrise to 2 p.m.  
each day.

*Exception: Shooting hours are a half-hour before sunrise to sunset on all Saturdays and Wednesdays through the end of each season. Starting Nov. 23, all-day hunting is also allowed on Sundays through the end of each season.*

### Regular Duck Season

#### Low Plains Unit

**Opens:** Sept. 23 (residents only), Sept. 30 (nonresidents)

**Closes:** Dec. 3

**Shooting Hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

#### High Plains Unit

**Opens:** Sept. 23 (residents only), Sept. 30 (nonresidents)

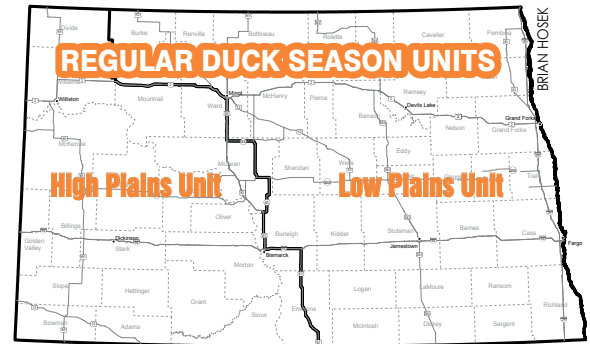
**Closes:** Dec. 3

**Opens:** Dec. 9

**Closes:** Dec. 31

**Shooting Hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

**Daily Limit:** Six



ducks, which may include no more than five mallards (two of which may be hens), one pintail, two redheads, two canvasbacks, three scaup, and three wood ducks. In addition to the daily bag limit of ducks, hunters may take an additional two blue-winged teal from Sept. 23 through Oct. 8.

**Possession Limit:** Three times the daily limit.

### Sandhill Cranes

**Open Zone 1 and 2:** Sept. 16

**Closes Zone 1 and 2:** Nov. 12

**Daily Limit Zone 1:** 3 **Zone 2:** 2

**Possession Limit Zone 1:** 9 **Zone 2:** 6

**Shooting Hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to 1 p.m. daily through Nov. 4; to 2 p.m. Nov. 5 until end of season.

The Mid-Continent Sandhill Crane Population is in good shape heading into fall. Spring migration occurred early this year due to temperatures rising quickly in the northern Great Plains after a cold and snowy winter.

With the onslaught of warmer weather, biologists decided to move the spring survey up by nearly a week, which occurs annually in the central Platte River Valley of Nebraska. Although spring survey numbers were not finalized at the time of this writing, initial reports from the survey crews are promising, plus the three-year population index used for guiding hunting season regulations has been stable to slightly increasing for several years.

Drier conditions this fall should lead to abundant staging areas throughout the state, with receding water levels within permanent wetlands providing more open shorelines suitable for roosting cranes.

The two zone – Zone 1 west of U.S.



Duck hunting opportunities will likely be highly variable across the state, biologists predict.

CRAIG BIRRE

Highway 281 and Zone 2 east of U.S. Highway 281 – structure for sandhill cranes continues. The two zones will have the same season lengths (58 days) and dates, but will continue to have different bag limits.

Nonresident hunters can pursue sandhill cranes with either a nonresident small game or waterfowl license, in addition to a crane permit. Hunters using a nonresident waterfowl license are reminded that they are required to hunt only in the waterfowl zones designated on their license.

Hunters are also reminded to make sure of their target, as federally endangered whooping cranes may be present throughout North Dakota during fall. Report all whooping crane sightings to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in Bismarck at 701-328-6300.

*Andrew Dinges, Migratory Game Bird Biologist, Bismarck*

## Doves

**Opens:** Sept. 1

**Closes:** Nov. 29

**Daily Limit:** 15

**Possession Limit:** 45

**Shooting Hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

North Dakota has a sizeable population of breeding mourning doves. Based on casual observation, production in the state was good to fair this year. The relatively early spring and dry summer allowed birds to nest early and often.

Age ratios of juvenile to adult birds captured at banding stations throughout the state is also indicative of good production this year.

Dove hunters should experience good opportunities in early September before cooler temperatures push doves south. Hunters are encouraged to scout before the season to find the right mix of conditions conducive to concentrating birds.

Hunters should look for areas with abundant harvested small grain or oil-seed fields that are also near shelterbelts or other diverse stands of trees. Doves also need to be

within a few miles of water sources. Early harvest of small grains and oil-seed crops is projected, so hunters should have plenty of places to choose from.

Eurasian collared doves continue to expand throughout the state and are found in almost every city and small town. However, these birds are not often found outside of municipalities and rarely show up in hunter harvests. Eurasian collared doves and white-wing doves, which are typically found in southern Texas, but have expanded their range, are included with mourning doves in the dove bag limit of 15 birds per day and 45 in possession.

Some dove hunters may be contacted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to participate in a wing survey, which involves clipping one wing from each dove shot early in the season to send in for analysis. Hunters are also reminded to look for banded mourning doves in their bag and report bands directly to the Bird Banding Laboratory website at [www.reportband.gov](http://www.reportband.gov).

*Andrew Dinges*

## Crows

**Fall Season Opens:** Aug. 19

**Closes:** Nov. 6

**Spring Season Opens:** March 10

**Closes:** April 22

**Daily Limit:** No limit on crows. In addition to the crow season, crows may be taken when committing or about to depredate as specified in federal law.

**Shooting Hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

## Snipe

**Opens:** Sept. 16

**Closes:** Dec. 3

**Daily Limit:** 8

**Possession Limit:** 24

**Shooting Hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

## Woodcock

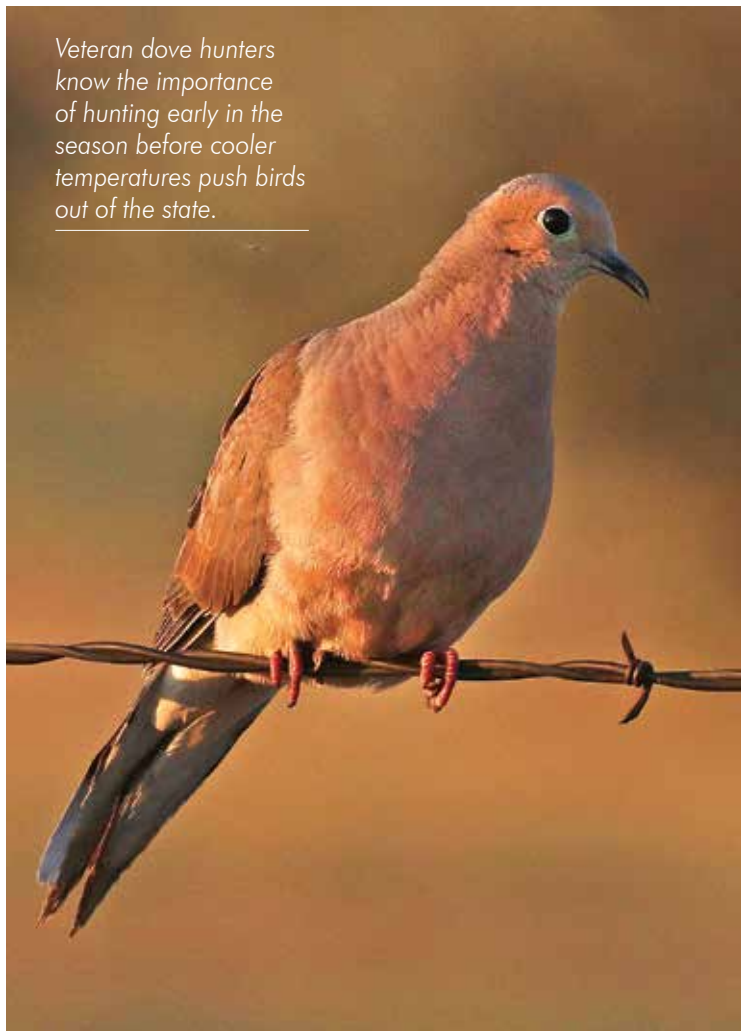
**Opens:** Sept. 23

**Closes:** Nov. 6

**Daily Limit:** 3

**Possession Limit:** 9

*Veteran dove hunters know the importance of hunting early in the season before cooler temperatures push birds out of the state.*



CRAIG BIRNLE



**Shooting Hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

## FURBEARERS

*For more season details, refer to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or the 2017-18 furbearer hunting and trapping guide.*

After nearly a century with a closed season, trappers in North Dakota will once again have a limited opportunity to harvest a river otter.

River otters are native to North Dakota, but their numbers declined and the season has been closed since 1919. Although river otters were not abundant in the state historically, they have recolonized most areas where they were known to occur. This recolonization is the result of otters in Minnesota expanding westward.

Typically, coyotes are the most sought after furbearer in North Dakota because of their valuable pelts, widespread distribution and challenging pursuit. Historically, coyotes were most prevalent in western North Dakota, but over the last 10 years their numbers have increased in eastern North Dakota as well.

This year, however, coyote numbers are trending downward in all regions of the state after nearly a decade of some of the highest numbers on record. A result of fewer animals on the landscape is an opportunity for red fox to rebound slightly, as coyotes typically suppress fox numbers, both directly through predation and indirectly through competition for space and food. Therefore, it is not surprising that surveys indicate fox numbers are up slightly in the eastern half of the state.

Muskrats, another highly desirable furbearer, are also down in all regions of the state. In contrast, spring surveys indicate an increase in beavers, mink and weasels throughout several regions. And although badger, raccoon and skunk numbers are up slightly in some regions compared to last year, these species remain well below their long-term averages statewide.

Trappers harvested 25 fishers last season, which was seven less than the previous season. The framework for the 2017 fisher season is the same as last year.

Trappers and hunters harvested 24 bobcats last season, which was similar to the previous year, but 61 percent below the 20-year average.

The hunting season for mountain lions is similar to last season, and hunters should check the status of the harvest limit on the Game and Fish Department's website before going afield. Last year, hunters took 10 mountain lions in Zone 1, three in the early season and seven in the late season.

*Stephanie Tucker, Game Management Section Leader, Bismarck*

## Mountain Lion Hunting

**Zone 1 (early) Opens:** Sept. 1

**Closes:** Nov. 26

**Zone 1 (late) Opens:** Nov. 27

**Closes:** March 31, 2018

**Zone 2 Opens:** Sept. 1

**Closes:** March 31, 2018

The overall harvest limit on mountain lions in Zone 1 is once again 15, with an early season limit of eight, and a late season limit of seven (or three females, whichever comes first). If the early season ends before eight mountain lions are taken, a conditional season could reopen after the late season, if the late season limit is reached prior to March 25.

There is no mountain lion harvest limit in Zone 2.

Mountain lions may be hunted statewide by residents using legal firearms or archery equipment during regular hunting hours. Beginning Nov. 27, mountain lions may also be hunted by pursuing with dogs. Cable devices and traps are not allowed. The limit is one lion per hunter per season. Kittens (lions with visible spots), or females accompanied by kittens, may not be taken. Any lion taken must be reported to the Department within 12 hours and

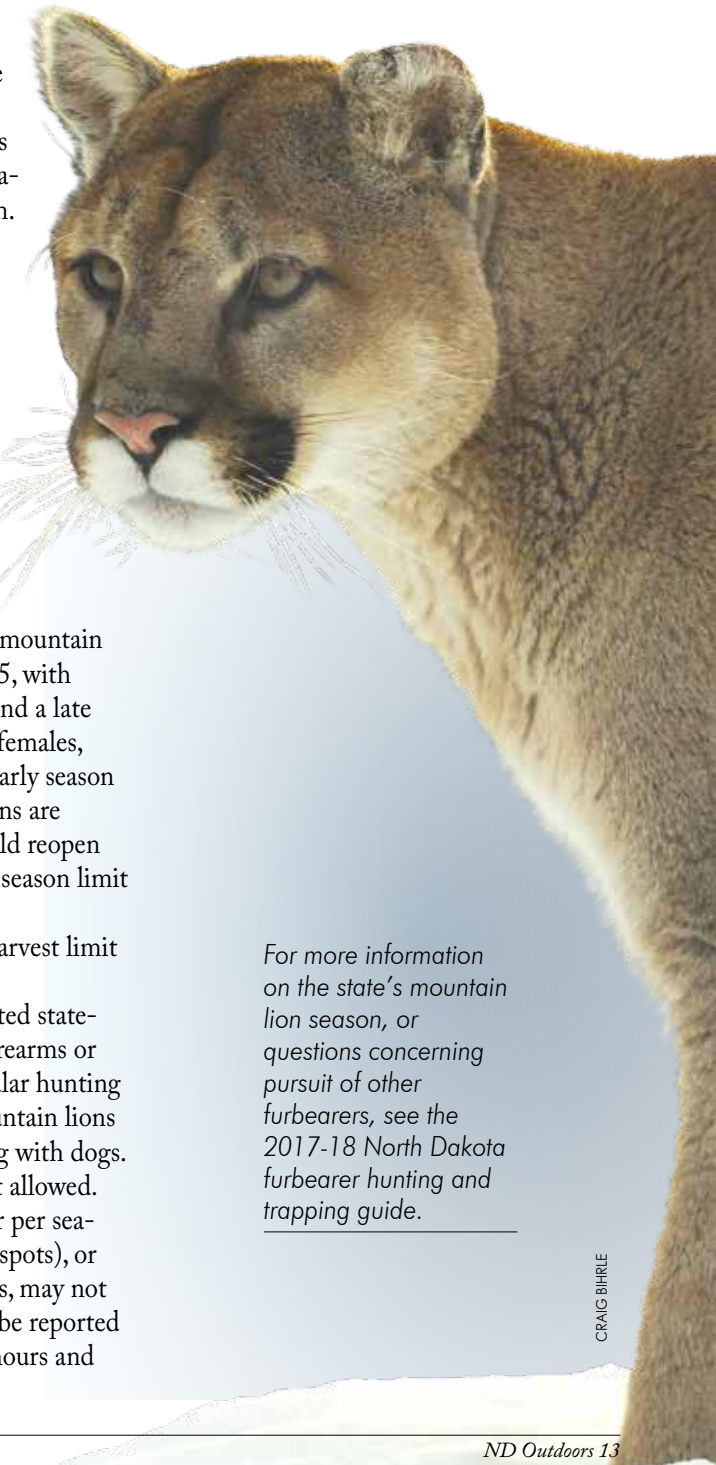
the entire intact animal must be submitted for analysis and tagging. Legally taken animals will be returned to the hunter.

## River Otter Trapping or Cable Devices

**Opens:** Nov. 27

**Closes:** March 15, 2018

Limit of one per person. Total harvest



*For more information on the state's mountain lion season, or questions concerning pursuit of other furbearers, see the 2017-18 North Dakota furbearer hunting and trapping guide.*

CRAIG BIRLE

limit of 15 statewide.

Trappers must contact the local game warden or Department field office to report their harvest within 12 hours and make arrangements to have their river otter tagged. For more information, see the 2017-18 North Dakota furbearer hunting and trapping guide.

### **Fisher Trapping or Cable Devices**

**Opens:** Nov. 27

**Closes:** Dec. 3

Only open east of U.S. Highway 281 and ND Highway 4. Limit one per person. Trappers must contact the local game warden or Department field office to report their harvest within 12 hours and make arrangements to have their fisher tagged. For more information, see the 2017-18 furbearer hunting and trapping guide.

### **Beaver and Raccoon Hunting, Trapping or Underwater Cable Devices**

**Open:** Year-round.

For more information, see the North

Dakota 2017-18 furbearer hunting and trapping guide.

### **Beaver and Raccoon Cable Devices on Land**

**Opens:** Nov. 27

**Closes:** May 10, 2018

From March 16, 2018, through May 10, 2018, cable devices must be within 50 feet of water; they must be no more than 4 inches off the ground and must have a stop restricting loop size to 12 inches or less in diameter.

Beaver dams may be dismantled when their presence causes property damage.

### **Weasel Trapping, Hunting or Cable Devices**

**Trapping Opens:** Oct. 28

**Hunting and Cable Devices Opens:**

Nov. 27

**Closes:** March 15, 2018

Weasels may be hunted statewide with .22 caliber or smaller rimfire rifles or pistols, muzzleloaders of .45 caliber or smaller, longbows and crossbows.

### **Muskrat and Mink Trapping, Hunting or Cable Devices**

**Trapping Opens:** Oct. 28

**Hunting and Cable Devices Opens:**

Nov. 27

**Closes:** May 10, 2018

Muskrat huts may be opened for insertion of traps or cable devices; however, the huts must be restored to their approximate original condition to prevent freeze-up.

Beginning March 16, 2018, colony traps must be under at least 2 inches of water, and trapping or using cable devices on the outside of any muskrat house or structure of any size is prohibited; traps may be placed completely inside a muskrat house or structure of any size, except when used on float sets; foothold traps must be submerged under water at all times or must have a protective covering; body-gripping traps used in water can have no more than 2 inches of the trap above the water or must have a protective covering.

Beginning May 1, 2018, float sets must have a protective covering.

*Musk rats, a highly desirable furbearer for trappers of all ages, are down in all regions of the state.*



BILL HAASE





CRAIG BIRRE

Armed with long, sturdy front claws, badgers are terrific diggers and find most of their meals by burrowing.

Mink and muskrat may be hunted statewide with .22 caliber or smaller rimfire rifles or pistols, muzzle-loaders of .45 caliber or smaller, longbows and crossbows.

### **Bobcat Trapping, Hunting or Cable Devices**

**Hunting and Trapping Opens:** Nov. 11

**Cable Devices Opens:** Nov. 27

**Closes:** March 15, 2018

Open only in the area south and west of the Missouri River. Beginning Nov. 27, bobcats may also be hunted by pursuing with dogs.

The pelt and carcass of each bobcat must be presented to Department personnel for inspection and tagging prior to sale or transfer of possession, but no later than 14 days after the close of the season.

For more information, see the 2017-18 furbearer hunting and trapping guide.

### **Red Fox, Gray Fox, Coyote and Badger Hunting or Hunting and Trapping**

**Open:** Year-round.

In addition, red fox, gray fox and coyote may be hunted at any hour from Nov. 27 through March 15, 2018. Any hunter who engages in the hunting of red fox, gray fox or coyote during the time from a half-hour after sunset to a half-hour before sunrise, must hunt exclusively on foot.

Hunters can use night vision and thermal imaging equipment during this portion of the season.

### **Red Fox, Gray Fox, Coyote and Badger Cable Devices**

**Opens:** Nov. 27

**Closes:** March 15, 2018

Coyote numbers are declining across the state after years of some of the highest numbers on record.



MIKE TALONDE



# PLOTS

## Program Evolves, Adapts

*By Ron Wilson*

*The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program, which turned 20 this year, opens up walk-in hunting opportunities across the state on many diverse tracts of land.*



CRAIG BIRLE



The many upturned yellow signs anchored into rural North Dakota lands are unmistakably familiar. For those who hunt, the signs that trumpet the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program, should be easily recognizable, as the walk-in access program is a long-time staple.

Kevin Kading, Game and Fish Department private land section leader, addresses the status of the PLOTS program 20 years after lawmakers called for a plan to increase hunting on private lands, while assisting landowners in the process.

***Q: What is the acreage forecast for the PLOTS program in 2017 and how does that compare to 2016?***

**A:** Between 2015 and 2016, the program acreage remained somewhat stable. In early 2017, the Department made a targeted effort to further promote the program, adding nearly 30,000 acres of CRP. At the same time, about 15,000 acres were set to expire from the program as well, so the end result for 2017 is a net gain of approximately 15,000 acres of high-quality CRP. Some of these acres are enrolled for up to 15 years, so not only did the program gain some quality acres, it will also retain those acres for years to come. The PLOTS program will have about 737,000 acres available for the fall 2017 hunting season.

***Q: There was a time the PLOTS acreage goal for the state was 1 million acres. Is that still the goal today?***

**A:** While the Department is still maintaining a goal of 1 million acres, it is becoming more difficult to achieve 1 million acres of quality habitat. We have started extensive surveys of hunters, non-PLOTS landowners and PLOTS landowners this year. We hope the survey results will give us a better picture of what hunters and landowners would like to see out of the program. We would like to maintain quality acres, versus simply enrolling acres for the sake of

hitting a goal. With that said, our goal is still 1 million acres, but our management objective is to maintain the highest amount of quality acres we can. The surveys are also designed to give us some insight into how many acres we need in the program. And not only how many acres, but what kind of acres. We've primarily focused on deer and pheasant habitat, but we know there is demand for quality waterfowl hunting tracts, which may include crop fields. There is also a lot of new interest in large tracts of land in the badlands that we have pursued. These areas are not typically pheasant areas, but offer some excellent big game opportunities.

***Q: Because of the extensive drought in the state, the U.S. Department of Agriculture approved emergency haying of CRP. How will this action influence PLOTS tracts around the state with CRP?***

**A:** CRP is an important component of the PLOTS program and many PLOTS contain CRP. In all cases, the landowner must abide by the terms and conditions of their CRP contract. When USDA released CRP for emergency haying, specific criteria must be met. For example, no more than 50 percent of the tract can be hayed. In most cases the PLOTS agreement does not place any further restrictions beyond what is spelled out in the USDA contract. There may be an instance where more than 50 percent is hayed with special approval from the Department. So, it's likely that about half of CRP that is contained in PLOTS tracts will get hayed before hunting season starts. The conservation community supported an early release date for emergency haying of CRP because of the serious drought conditions. It's good to have those grass reserves that can help some farmers and ranchers in times like this.

Game and Fish recognizes that hunters are funding the PLOTS program and they expect habitat to be on these areas when they show up to hunt in fall. It is a

balancing act. We need to be reasonable and flexible with landowners, but we also need to make sure we are still providing the wildlife habitat hunters are expecting. If the PLOTS program is too restrictive, landowners may not want to participate. In some cases, haying can actually help the tract over the long-term. We sometimes have to give up something one year, but make up for it in the long-term by improving the cover, diversity and amount of available habitat. Drought in the western and central portions of the state is having an impact on ranchers, wildlife and habitat. Hunters can expect to find areas where habitat conditions are poor, both on and off PLOTS, but they will also find areas where habitat remains.

***Q: The Game and Fish Department's PLOTS program turns 20 this year and remains one of the agency's most recognized programs. Can you describe the status of the program today and provide some insight into where PLOTS is heading?***

**A:** PLOTS has changed a lot in 20 years and I expect it to continue to change and adapt in the future. The amount of work required to enroll one acre of land now, compared to 10 or 20 years ago, has increased. We strive to do the best job we can with hunter dollars, so we conduct more compliance checks, perform more management and more special projects than we did in the past. These are all good things, but they also take a lot more time. The reason for this is simply because when the state had abundant CRP acres, enrolling those acres into PLOTS was fairly simple and straightforward. The habitat was already there and all we had to do was provide public access to those acres. Now, we're having to develop habitat – plant grass or trees – manage it, and provide access. We also have more PLOTS land enrolled in working operations and things change frequently on those types of PLOTS agreements. Crops change annually, wetlands can be full one year, dry



A rooster taken on a PLOTS tract on opening day of pheasant season last fall in Burleigh County.

MIKE ANDERSON

the next, habitat conditions can be good in the spring, but dry out in fall, and this requires considerable attention by our field biologists to maintain working relationships with landowners. The program receives positive support from hunters and we believe that the demand for quality hunting land will only increase. Unless we see large landscape level conservation programs like CRP hit the ground again, the Department will be working to develop habitat on its own, or by working with partners. The amount of acreage in the program will most likely remain below 1 million acres during this time, and the focus will be on quality habitat. If, for example, an opportunity comes along like CRP, we'll adjust once again and work to try to obtain access to those acres.

**Q: Of course, landowners are central in this program that provides walk-in access to many hunters. What are landowners saying about the program today and has their interest in PLOTS increased or decreased over the years?**

**A:** The interest in the program is somewhat steady, but the type of land and quality of the land being offered has changed. We have shifted from having a lot of CRP and other grassland habitat being offered, to offers of land coming out of CRP, or smaller parcels of grassland. There is currently a lot of interest from landowners who have CRP that expired, or will soon expire. Because Congress reduced the amount of land that can be enrolled in CRP on a national level, many landowners do not have a choice to reenroll that land. Some look to the PLOTS program since CRP is not available. The issue is that it would require a substantial budget increase for the Department to provide rental payments similar to CRP. We will likely be able to enroll some of these lands, but not very many acres. More than 300,000 CRP acres are expiring in North Dakota alone in 2017. At an average rental rate of \$50 per acre, for the state to maintain all those would cost more than \$15 million per year. The Department's annual budget for PLOTS payments is around \$6 million.

**Q: What kind of feedback do you get from hunters on the PLOTS program?**

**A:** Positive. And we hear that they would like more land. We are trying to get more specific information from the surveys about what hunters want out of the program. We have done several surveys in the past, but nothing this extensive.

**Q: What can hunters do to help ensure that PLOTS remains a staple on North Dakota's landscape?**

**A:** Hunters can tell their elected officials how important the program is to them and let the Department know if they have ideas on how to improve the program, or ways to develop new components of the program. When hunters purchase a hunting license they are supporting the PLOTS program, but they can also donate funds directly to the Department to be used for PLOTS. They can also work with their local wildlife clubs, or nonprofit groups, to develop habitat and provide access through PLOTS.



**Q: What sort of interest are we getting in the new Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and how does that fit into the PLOTS program?**

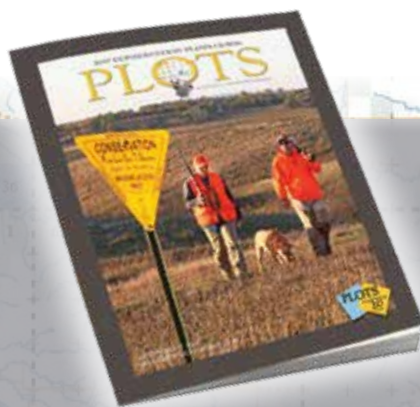
**A:** The program is brand new and just getting started. It got off to a late start this spring, so many producers already had their plans for the 2017 planting season. We do have a couple agreements in place already and a few others who have expressed interest. This program is tied to riparian areas, and designed to address water quality and habitat concerns. We will be doing some promotion of the program in fall 2017, so landowners

have time to prepare for next year. We expect some interest since the program does not require large amounts of acres to be enrolled in CRP, and also because we can enroll additional lands using PLOTS funds. These adjacent acres can be managed independently of the CREP acres, making it an attractive option when it comes to haying or grazing. The goal of the program is to protect those acres adjacent to riparian areas with a CREP buffer, or filter strip, then square off areas next to that to make it easier to farm. There is an option to plant pollinators or trees on these areas as well, so they will make some great habitat complexes. It's

everything we've heard that the ag community wants – a targeted CRP instead of enrolling large tracts of prime farmland, smaller acreages that allow them to address a specific resource concern on their land, but also to continue farming the remaining land (farm the best, leave the rest) and the ability to square off fields, making it easier to farm, requiring fewer passes with equipment. All the while protecting sensitive lands and improving water quality along important riparian areas.

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



## PLOTS Online

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen Guide for 2017 is available online at the Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). In addition, PLOTS guides will be available at most license vendors throughout the state by early September.

The guide will feature about 737,000 PLOTS acres. Because the guide is printed in August, some PLOTS tracts highlighted in the guide may have been removed from the program since

the time of printing. There will also be some PLOTS tracts where the habitat and condition of the tract will have changed significantly. Conversely, Game and Fish may have added new tracts to the program after the guide went to press.

To minimize possible confusion, Game and Fish will update PLOTS map sheets weekly on its website.

The PLOTS Guide features maps highlighting these walk-in areas, identified in the field by

inverted triangular yellow signs, as well as other public lands.

PLOTS guides are free, and available at license vendors in the state; by walk-in at the Game and Fish Department's Bismarck office; and at district offices in Riverdale, Harvey (Lonetree), Williston, Dickinson, Jamestown and Devils Lake.

The guides are not available to mail, so hunters will have to pick one up at a local vendor, or print individual map sheets from the website.

## PLOTS Donations

Deer hunters who are unsuccessful in drawing a lottery license have the opportunity to donate their refund to the

Game and Fish Department's PLOTS program. All donations contributed by deer hunters will go toward PLOTS tracts or

projects that include deer habitat. Deer hunters were able to use this option for the first time in 2016.



## Private Land Initiative

The Private Land Initiative is the Game and Fish Department's overall program for working with private landowners.

The PLI has three main goals:

- Conserve habitat for fish and wildlife populations.
- Provide landowners interested in wildlife conservation with cost-sharing assistance for developing and protecting wildlife habitat.
- Provide public opportunities to access fish and wildlife resources on private land.

The PLI gives producers/landowners several options for working with Game and Fish through the Private Land Open To Sportsmen program.

- **CRP Access Program** – Provides assistance with establishment and management costs associated with Conservation Reserve Program grasslands, and includes public access.
- **Working Lands Program** – Short-term program based on the wildlife value of actively farmed or ranched land, which also includes public access. Biologists evaluate current farming or ranching management based on conservation practices, good stewardship and quality of hunting habitat. This program also includes public access.
- **Habitat Plot Program** – Multi-year rental program with agreements that help create, enhance or protect wildlife habitat, and include public access.
- **Food Plot Program** – Short-term program that provides a wildlife food source and public access.
- **Private Forest Conservation Program** – Multi-year rental program that provides protection and enhancement of unique forested systems, and includes public access.
- **Wetlands Reserve Program** – A partnership program between the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and Game and Fish, providing incentives to producers who enroll land in WRP. The primary purpose is to restore, protect or enhance wetlands and associated uplands, as well as provide public access.
- **Tree Planting Cost-Sharing Program** – Provides assistance with establishment costs of tree plantings. The goal is to enhance wildlife habitat and conservation on private land and provide public access.

Game and Fish also works with other state and federal agencies, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, North Dakota Natural Resources Trust, Mule Deer Foundation, Pheasants for the Future and other local wildlife clubs to carry out wildlife habitat projects on some PLOTS tracts.

# NEW!

NORTH DAKOTA RIPARIAN PROJECT

## A Conservation Reserve Enhancement Project

The North Dakota Riparian Project **CREP** helps landowners identify resource concerns and design custom built CRP along riparian areas, with special focus areas, additional incentives and added flexibility within practices that can fit most qualifying operations.

### COUNTIES ELIGIBLE:

Adams, Billings, Bowman, Burleigh, Dunn, Emmons, Grant, Golden Valley, Hettinger, McKenzie, Mercer, Morton, Oliver, Sioux, Slope and Stark counties.

For more information, contact a private land biologist at the Dickinson or Bismarck district offices, or visit the Game and Fish website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).



NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
100 N. Bismarck Expressway  
Bismarck, ND 58501-5095  
[gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov) – 701-328-6300

CRAIG BIRLE



# WATERFOWL HUNTERS

Aquatic Nuisance Species can severely degrade  
waterfowl habitat and reduce  
hunting opportunity.

Follow North Dakota regulations to protect waterfowl hunting for the future.

**BEFORE** leaving a water area or access:

**DRAIN ALL WATER  
REMOVE VEGETATION  
PULL DRAIN PLUGS**

**ALL EQUIPMENT. EVERY TIME.**



**STOP AQUATIC  
HITCHHIKERS!**

Be A Good Steward. Clean. Drain. Dry.

For complete regulations visit [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov)





# Upland Game Reproduction

*and the  
Uncertainties  
of Nature*

*It's likely that the Game and Fish Department roadside brood survey will show smaller pheasant brood sizes and fewer broods across the state.*





*By Ron Wilson*

**R**ing-necked pheasants feel as much a part of rural North Dakota as prairie grasses and cattail-ringed wetlands. Yet, the popular upland birds are not native, visitors with a sometimes unbalanced hold on the countryside, depending on the unpredictable Northern Plains weather, available cover, agricultural practices and other factors.

That unpredictable weather hit parts of the state in December, lasting well into January, with record amounts of snow and cold. Its irregular nature continued in spring and summer as hoped-for rains were a disappointment, or absent altogether.

Drought was declared in North Dakota and farmers suffered, ranchers suffered and wildlife suffered.

Wildlife biologists regularly talk about weather and pheasants and how it influences reproduction of the next

generation of birds. Often, but not always, cold and wet weather during spring nesting and rearing is the topic of conversation.

First, consider the hens. It's important for hens to get through winter in fair or better condition, because they soon face the demands of breeding in spring.

"There's nothing easy about a hen's life," said Jeb Williams, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife division chief. "It's doesn't matter how many eggs a hen produces, adult females are burning more energy than roosters because they are developing eggs, sitting on nests and caring for broods."

*For a hen pheasant to successfully hatch and raise young, the obstacles, including untimely weather and predators, are often difficult to overcome.*



Rodney Gross, Department upland game management biologist, said hen pheasants produce 10-15 eggs, incubate 23-25 days, which is typically until about mid-June in North Dakota.

"After that incubation period when the hen is sitting on the nest and trying to feed herself when she can, the eggs hatch and her duties are ramped up," Gross said. "Now she has to protect her chicks from predators and all the other uncertainties that nature throws her way."

One of those uncertainties, as mentioned earlier, is cold, wet weather. Because pheasant chicks are unable to control their body temperature for many days after hatching, untimely cold, wet weather can kill the chicks despite the hen's best efforts to keep them warm and dry.

Unfortunately, but for other reasons, the hot, dry weather experienced over much of North Dakota pheasant range this year, is just as deadly.

The fallout of hot, dry weather is the scarcity of nesting habitat, cover for rearing broods, lack of dew to help regulate a chick's body temperature and a decline in insect production.

"For the first several weeks of their life, insects make up more than 90 percent of a pheasant chick's diet," Gross said. "The protein-rich insects help the chicks grow quickly. Without a buffet of insects, survival is difficult."

Making it from egg to the fall hunting season on the Northern Plains is a tough road. Yet, driven by nature and with a wary eye cast for predators, the hen does her best to pull off a brood.

Just one brood.

Gross said that during the egg-laying process or in early incubation, if the hen loses her eggs to a predator, weather or some other misfortune, she will nest again.

"She will do this until she is able to hatch a brood, or until it gets too late in the nesting season," Gross said.

Yet, he added, if the hen does hatch a brood, but loses some chicks, she is devoted to raising those that remain, not reneating.



LARA ANDERSON

While grasshoppers may be too big initially for pheasant chicks to handle, insects make up the bulk of their diet for the first several weeks of life.



MIKE ANDERSON

Record amounts of snow in December and January last winter made life difficult for wildlife, pheasants included, across much of North Dakota.

Even if all of the young are killed by predators, or die from starvation, the hen's commitment to hatching her eggs has been accomplished. Understanding this, young pheasant chicks spotted running the roadside ditches in early fall are the result of a late nesting attempt, and are not a second brood from a single hen.

"The challenges pheasants and all the other wildlife in North Dakota face

throughout the seasons is amazing," Williams said. "In times when the weather doesn't cooperate, and it seldom does, and sufficient habitat is lacking on the landscape, those successes from birth to maturity are even more remarkable."

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



## Roadside Broods

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's roadside pheasant brood survey provides a feel for the summer's pheasant production and insight into what hunters could expect in fall.

While the final summary, based on 276 survey runs made along 105 brood routes in North Dakota, was still 10 days from being completed at the time of this writing, initial indications weren't promising.

Anecdotal evidence is

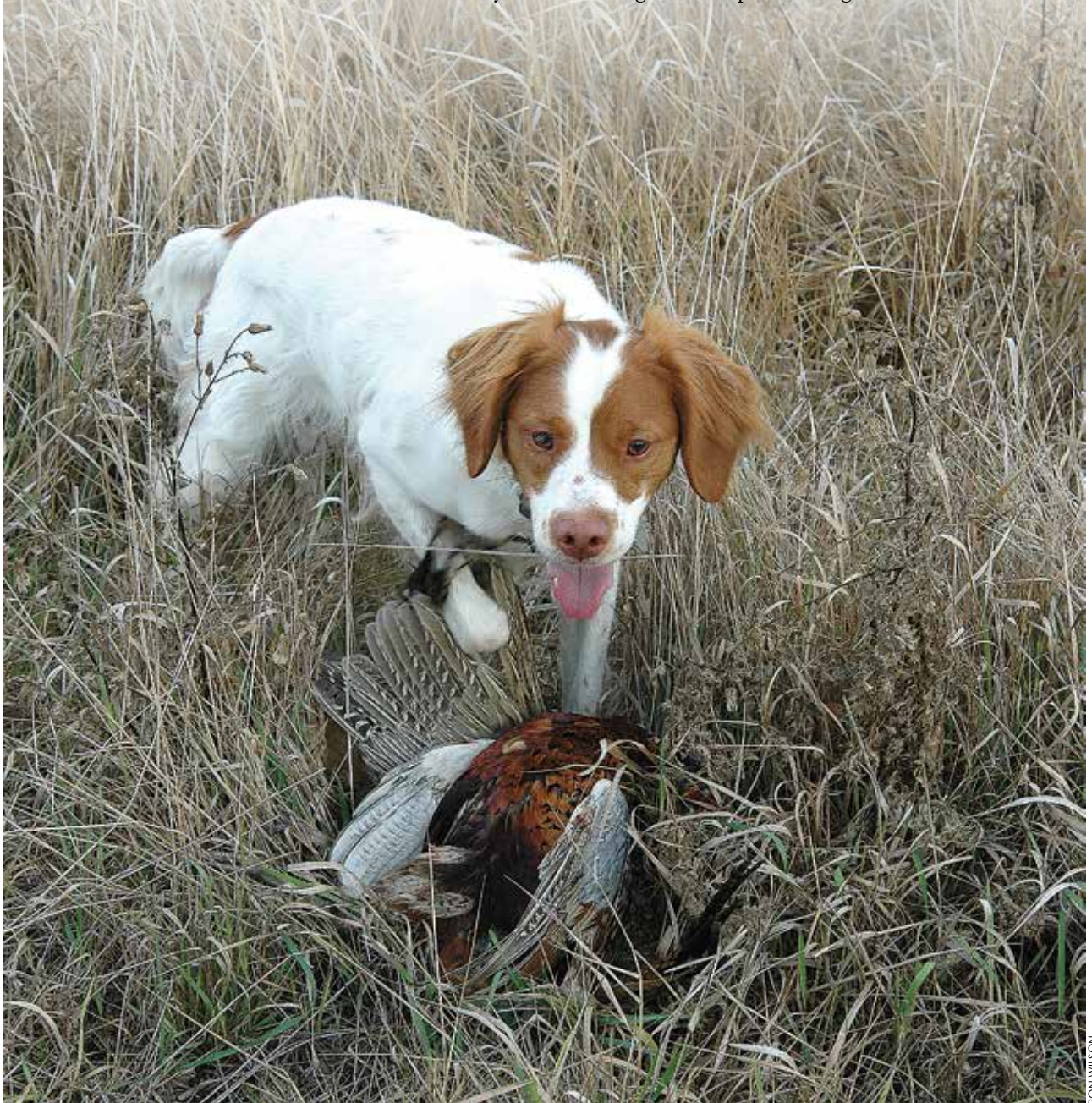
pointing to smaller brood sizes and fewer broods across the board, said Rodney Gross, Department upland game management biologist.

"The best route in the state, south of Dickinson in the heart of pheasant country, usually produces 35 pheasant broods every time the biologist goes out," Gross said. "Now he's seeing four to five broods."

Biologists run the roadside counts early in the morning as

pheasants typically gravitate to gravel roads to escape the dew and dry out. Yet, during a summer dominated by drought, dewy mornings have been few and far between.

"Plus, with all the emergency haying of CRP, maybe the birds aren't having to go to the gravel roads to dry out," Gross said. "Even so, we know pheasant numbers are going to be down because they couldn't escape the drought."



RON WILSON





# BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor



## Wing Survey Helps Manage Upland Birds

Hunters can help in the effort to manage upland game birds in the state, by collecting feathers from harvested birds and sending in wing envelopes.

Birds included in the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's upland game wing survey, which has been in practice for decades, are ring-necked pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse, Hungarian partridge, turkeys and ruffed grouse.

Collecting enough pheasant samples is typically never a problem, but securing enough sharptail and partridge feathers can be.

**In recent years, the Game and Fish Department sought the help from upland hunters via the Department's website and elsewhere, and the response was much improved.**

Game and Fish biologists will take as many sharptail and partridge feathers as they can get because the more collected, the better the data.

Biologists can determine sex and age ratios from wings and tail feathers, survival, nesting success, hatch dates and overall production.

What biologists learn from the samples is vital to helping manage North Dakota's upland game birds.

Hunters interested in receiving wing envelopes should visit the Game and Fish website ([gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov)), or contact the Department's main office in Bismarck by phone, 701-328-6300, or email, [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov).

Hunters can also get wing envelopes at Game and Fish district offices in Devils Lake, Jamestown, Riverdale, Dickinson, Williston and Lonetree Wildlife Management Area near Harvey.

## Record Number of Walleyes Stocked

North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel stocked a record number of walleye fingerlings in more than 130 waters across the state this summer.

Jerry Weigel, Department fisheries production and development supervisor, said more than 12 million fingerlings were stocked, besting the previous high by more than 1 million fish.

"Considering not many went into Lake Sakakawea, this included an unprecedented stocking of nearly 7 million fingerlings into the smaller fishing waters across the state," Weigel said.

With more than 50 new walleye lakes in North Dakota, Weigel said the demand to stock these waters, along with the larger, traditional fisheries, has greatly increased the demand from the hatcheries.

Valley City National Fish Hatchery produced more walleye in 2017 than in any other year in its 77-year history, Weigel said, and in its 54 years of raising fish Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery shipped a record number again.

"Both hatcheries have been outstanding in helping address our demand for walleye fingerlings," Weigel said.

For a complete list of all fish stockings, visit the fishing link at the Game and Fish Department's website at [gf.nd.gov/fishing](http://gf.nd.gov/fishing).





CRAIG BIRLE

## Report Banded Migratory Birds

Hunters are reminded to check harvested migratory birds for bands this fall, and report federal bands at [reportband.gov](http://reportband.gov).

In addition, the bird banding lab has a new, mobile friendly reporting site that will aid hunters to report bands via mobile devices.

The band number, date and location of each recovery are needed. After the band information is processed, hunters can request a certificate of appreciation, and information about the bird will be returned in an email. Hunters can keep all bands they recover.

Information received from hunters is critical for management of migratory game birds.



RON WILSON

## 2016 Upland Game Seasons Summarized

The harvest of pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse and Hungarian partridge last year in North Dakota was down from 2015, according to statistics compiled by the state Game and Fish Department.

Last year, more than 76,600 pheasant hunters (down 10 percent) harvested 501,100 roosters (down 15 percent), compared to 85,500 hunters and 590,700 roosters in 2015.

Counties with the highest percentage of pheasants taken by resident hunters in 2016 were Hettinger, 8.7 percent; Morton, 5.8 percent; Burleigh, 5.5 percent; Stark, 5.4 percent; and Williams, 5.3 percent.

Top counties for nonresident hunters were Hettinger, 21.1 percent; Bowman, 10 percent; Adams, 7.1 percent; Divide, 5 percent; and Emmons, 4.4 percent.

In 2016, nearly 18,900 grouse hunters (down 18 percent) harvested 65,500 sharp-tailed grouse (down 21 percent). In 2015, 23,100 hunters took 83,000 sharptails.

Counties with the highest percentage of sharptails taken by resident hunters in 2016 were Mountrail, 8.9 percent; McKenzie, 8.1 percent; Grant, 7.4 percent; Slope, 5.5 percent; and McLean, 5.2 percent.

Top counties for nonresident hunters were McKenzie, 9.3 percent; Mountrail, 9.1 percent; Adams, 7.2 percent; Hettinger, 6.9 percent; and Grant, 6.5 percent.

Last year, 16,900 hunters (down 9 percent) harvested 54,200 Hungarian partridge (down 9 percent). In 2015, 18,600 hunters harvested 59,600 Huns.

Counties with the highest percentage of Huns taken by resident hunters in 2016 were McKenzie, 9.6 percent; Williams, 9.6 percent; Ward, 9.5 percent; Grant, 8.7 percent; and Mountrail, 7.6 percent.

Top counties for nonresident hunters were Stark, 8.1 percent; Divide, 7.4 percent; McKenzie, 7.1 percent; Grant, 6.5 percent; and Hettinger, 6.5 percent.

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[instagram.com/ndgameandfish](https://www.instagram.com/ndgameandfish)



[gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov)



## SAH Accepting Goose Meat

The North Dakota Community Action Sportsmen Against Hunger program is again accepting donations of goose meat taken during the early Canada goose season. In addition, the program will accept Canada and light (snow, blue and Ross's) goose donations during the regular waterfowl season.

Similar to last year, hunters can bring in their goose meat to participating processors after removing the breast meat from the birds at home. Or, hunters may also deliver geese directly from the field to a processor, but identification such as a wing or the head must remain attached to the bird until in possession of the processor.

For a list of participating processors in North Dakota, visit the North Dakota Community Action website at [capnd.org](http://capnd.org).

Breast meat brought from home without a wing or head attached to the meat must be accompanied by written information that includes the hunter's name, address, signature, hunting license number, date taken and species and number taken. Information forms are also available at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

Hunters will also fill out a brief form so that processors can keep a record on donated goose meat, the same as is required for processing any other type of wild game meat.

Since no goose carcasses or feathers are allowed inside processing facilities, hunters must be able to ensure proper disposal and clean-up of carcasses.



CRAIG BIRRE

## Sandhill Crane Permits

North Dakota's sandhill crane season opens September 16 and continues through November 12.

In addition to other licenses required, resident hunters need a \$10 crane permit, while nonresidents need a \$30 permit. Hunters can apply online, or print out a resident or nonresident application for mailing, at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). Harvest Information Program certification is required.

# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

## WEEKLY VIDEO NEWS BROADCAST

### WILLISTON

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

### GRAND FORKS

KVRR - Saturday - 9 pm

### MINOT

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

### DICKINSON

KQCD - Saturday - 5 pm (MT)  
KXMA - Sunday - 9 pm (MT)

### BISMARCK

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

### FARGO

KVRR - Sunday - 9 pm

# ON



## Agencies Prohibit Hunting Over Bait

Hunters are reminded that hunting big game over bait is prohibited on all state owned or managed wildlife management areas, all U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service national wildlife refuges and waterfowl production areas, U.S. Forest Service national grasslands, and all North Dakota state school, state park and state forest service lands.

The governor's proclamation relating to chronic wasting disease also includes a provision that prohibits hunting big game over bait on both public and private land in deer unit 3C west of the Missouri River, and all of units 3E1, 3E2, 3F1 and 3F2.

**Hunting over bait is defined as the placement and/or use of baits for**

**attracting big game and other wildlife to a specific location for the purpose of hunting. Bait, in this case, includes grain, seed, mineral, salt, fruit, vegetable, nut, hay, any naturally derived scent or lure, or any other natural or manufactured food placed by an individual.**

Bait does not include agricultural practices, gardens, wildlife food plots, agricultural crops, livestock feeds, fruit or vegetables in their natural location such as apples on or under an apple tree, or unharvested food or vegetables in a garden.

**In addition, any firearms, equipment or accessories used by hunters on Private Land Open To Sportsmen acreage may not be left unattended without written permission of the property owner. This includes, but is not limited to, guns, blinds, stands, baits, scents and decoys. This means a hunter cannot place bait on PLOTS prior to or during the season and leave it there, unless permission has been granted by the landowner.**

## Big Game Transport Rules

Big game hunters are reminded of requirements for transporting deer, elk and moose carcasses and carcass parts into and within North Dakota as a precaution against the possible spread of chronic wasting disease.

Hunters harvesting a big game animal this fall in North Dakota deer unit 3F2 cannot transport a carcass containing the head and spinal column outside of the unit unless it's taken to a meat processor within five days of the harvest date. The head can be removed from the carcass and transported outside of the unit if it is to be submitted to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department for CWD surveillance purposes, or to a licensed taxidermist.

If the deer is processed in the field to boned meat, and the hunter wants to leave the head in the field, the head must be legally tagged and the hunter

must be able to return to or give the exact location of the head if requested for verification.

In addition, hunting big game over bait is prohibited in deer units 3C west of the Missouri River, 3E1, 3E2, 3F1 and 3F2.

Hunters are prohibited from transporting into or within North Dakota the whole carcass, or certain carcass parts, of deer, elk, moose or other members of the cervid family from areas within states and provinces with documented occurrences of CWD in wild populations, or in captive cervids. Only the following portions of the carcass can be transported:

- Meat that is cut and wrapped either commercially or privately.
- Quarters or other portions of meat with no part of the spinal column or head attached.

- Meat that has been boned out.
- Hides with no heads attached.
- Clean (no meat or tissue attached) skull plates with antlers attached.
- Antlers with no meat or tissue attached.
- Upper canine teeth, also known as buglers, whistlers or ivories.
- Finished taxidermy heads.

**Hunters should refer to the 2017-18 CWD proclamation on the Game and Fish Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), for other states that have had free-ranging deer, moose or elk diagnosed with CWD. Importation of harvested elk, white-tailed deer, mule deer, moose or other cervids from listed areas are restricted.**



## CALL FOR WATCHABLE WILDLIFE PHOTOS

The deadline for submissions for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest 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

## Practice Caution on Rural Roads

North Dakota hunters are reminded to be cautious of farm, ranch and other traffic when traveling on rural roads.

Fall is a busy time in the state as farmers and ranchers are harvesting crops, moving cattle, hauling bales and moving heavy machinery. Knowing this, hunters driving around on country roads should slow down when meeting another vehicle and pull well to the right when topping a hill.

To maintain positive landowner/hunter relations, Game and Fish Department officials said hunters should move to the right side of the road to allow wide farm vehicles to pass, park vehicles in a place that will not block a roadway, field approach or gate, pick up trash and empty shells, and not clean game in the road ditch or approach.

## HIP, Federal Duck Stamp Requirements

Harvest Information Program registration for all migratory game bird hunters, regardless of age, and a federal duck stamp for waterfowl hunters age 16 and older, are required beginning September 1.

Migratory game birds include ducks, geese, swans, mergansers, coots, cranes, snipe, doves and woodcock. Waterfowl includes ducks, geese, swans, mergansers and coots.

Hunters can HIP certify when they buy a North Dakota license, or add it later through the Game and Fish website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or by calling 888-634-4798 and recording the HIP number on their printed license.

Those who registered to hunt the spring light goose season or early Canada goose season in North Dakota do not have to register with HIP again, as it is required only once per year. However, hunters must HIP register in each state for which they are licensed before hunting migratory game birds.

This year's 2017-18 federal duck stamp is available for electronic purchase through the Department's website and instant licensing telephone number, or at license vendors registered with the

Department's licensing system. Physical stamps are not available at North Dakota license vendors, but they can still be purchased at many U.S. Postal Service offices.

The electronic stamp is a purchase item like any other hunting or fishing license. When the purchase is completed, the electronic stamp is valid immediately. The words "Federal Duck Stamp" will be printed on the license certificate, along with an expiration date 45 days from the date of purchase. The actual physical stamp will be sent by postal mail.

The physical stamp is processed and sent by the official duck stamp vendor in Texas, and should arrive to the individual buyer well before the expiration date printed on the electronic license. The physical stamp must remain in possession of the hunter after the 45-day electronic stamp has expired. Individuals who have questions regarding the status of their physical stamp can contact the federal duck stamp vendor customer service number at 800-852-4897.

The federal duck stamp has a fee of \$25. In addition, there is another \$1.50 added to cover shipping and handling costs of the actual physical stamp.





Standing Rock Game, Fish and Wildlife Department Director Jeff Kelly (left) shakes hands with North Dakota Game and Fish Department Director Terry Steinwand after signing a memorandum of understanding for an elk hunting season within the Standing Rock Reservation. Behind them are Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II and North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum.

## State, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Collaborate on Elk Season

Governor Doug Burgum and Standing Rock Sioux Chairman Dave Archambault II have signed a Memorandum of Understanding that directs state and tribal authorities on regulating an elk hunting season within the Standing Rock Reservation.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department and Standing Rock Game, Fish and Wildlife Department developed the MOU to facilitate coordination of elk management and law enforcement efforts relating to each other's authority within the boundaries of the reservation.

"This new elk season is the right thing for landowners, tribal members, wildlife and North Dakota hunting enthusiasts," Burgum said. "It also serves as a great example of how through collaboration and dialogue we can achieve better outcomes for all."

The MOU establishes elk hunting unit E6, and emphasizes the coordination between the Standing Rock Game, Fish and Wildlife Department, private landowners and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. Through this coordination, the goals are to responsibly manage elk within this area, maximize recreational

opportunities for all licensed hunters, and reduce impacts to crops and feed supplies on private lands.

"This is a good example of collaborating for the benefit of the land, wildlife and tribal members. Rather than having two different seasons on fee land and tribal land, this establishes a single season that's consistent for all hunters," Archambault said, adding it could lead to future collaboration on other hunting seasons.

"This is an important day," said Terry Steinwand, North Dakota Game and Fish Department director. "The MOU is the first official collaborative management of the wildlife resource in North Dakota between the state and Standing Rock Tribe."

Burgum and Archambault signed the MOU during a meeting of the Standing Rock Tribal Council in Fort Yates, where the governor, Lt. Gov. Brent Sanford and North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission Executive Director Scott Davis heard about challenges facing the tribe and discussed additional opportunities for collaboration between the state and tribe.

## Report All Poachers

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department encourages hunters, anglers and landowners who witness a fish or wildlife violation to file a report with the Report All Poachers program.

RAP is a cooperative project between the Game and Fish Department, State Radio Communications and the North Dakota Wildlife Federation. The RAP line offers rewards – from \$100 to \$1,000 depending on the nature and seriousness of the crime – for information that leads to conviction of fish and wildlife law violators. Reports can also go directly to game wardens or other law enforcement agencies. Calls can remain anonymous.

Witnesses should note vehicle description, including make, color, license plate number and state issued, as well as any description of the violator if possible.

Witnesses should report a violation by calling the RAP telephone number at 800-472-2121. RAP will then contact the local game warden immediately. If the witness provides the RAP operator a phone number, the witness will be contacted right away.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

## Richland County Wildlife Club Recognized

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has honored the Richland County Wildlife Club for its ongoing efforts to develop and maintain public use facilities at numerous lake and recreation areas.

The certificate of appreciation is presented annually by the Department's fisheries division to an organization that has signed on as a cooperating partner in local projects.

The Richland club was recognized for its construction of boat ramps, courtesy docks, fishing piers, roads and parking areas, rough fish removal, and trap and transport activities at many lakes, including Horseshoe Lake, Lake Elsie, Mooreton Pond and Brushvale Bridge.

## Advisory Board Members Named, Reappointed

Governor Doug Burgum has appointed Cody Sand of Forbes and Beau Wisness of Keene to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's advisory board.

The governor appoints eight Game and Fish Department advisors, each representing a multi-county section of the state, to serve as a liaison between the Department and public.

Sand fills the expiring term of Joel Christoferson, Litchville, in District 6, which includes Barnes, Dickey, Foster, Griggs, Logan, LaMoure, McIntosh, Stutsman and Wells counties.

Wisness fills the expiring term of Jason Leiseth, Arnegard, in District 1, which includes Divide, McKenzie and Williams counties.

In addition, the governor also reappointed District 5 advisory board member Duane Hanson, West Fargo, to another term.

Four members of the advisory board must be farmers or ranchers and four must be hunters/anglers. Appointments are for a term of four years. No member can serve longer than two terms.

Advisory board members host two public meetings each year, held in spring and fall, to provide citizens with an opportunity to discuss fish and wildlife issues and ask questions of their district advisors and agency personnel.

## STAFF NOTES

### Egeland Fills Education Section Leader Position

Marty Egeland, longtime Game and Fish employee, was named the Department's education section leader in Bismarck. Egeland, an Edmore native, has 19 years of service with the agency, three as a district game warden and the last 16 as an outreach biologist in Grand Forks.



*Marty Egeland*

### Ramsey Lands Williston Position

Brandon Ramsey was hired to fill a wildlife technician position in Williston. Ramsey has associate of science degrees in liberal arts and wind energy technician from Lake Region State College, Devils Lake, and a bachelor's degree in fisheries and wildlife science from Valley City State University.



*Brandon Ramsey*

### Jensen, Mernitz Retire

Longtime Game and Fish employees, Tom Jensen and Katherine Mernitz, retired in August. Jensen was the Department's video news director since 2001, while Mernitz was a licensing specialist since 2007.

Both were stationed in the main office in Bismarck.



*Tom Jensen*



*Katherine Mernitz*



# back cast



By Ron Wilson

The Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program turned 20 this year.

There was some debate, albeit minor, as to the year it all began. Some agency staff who helped usher the program into being years ago said it depended on how you looked at things.

While it wasn't until summer 1998 that the first PLOTS signs were hurriedly pounded into the ground in six counties to meet the fall hunting season, the seed for the program was planted in 1997. That's when lawmakers called on

a name," said Link, who is now the conservation and communications division chief. "A lot of the names on that list, to be honest, were pretty stupid."

Private Land Open To Sportsmen, PLOTS, came to him in bed one night. The idea for the overturned triangular yellow signs followed a few days later at work when the lights were on.

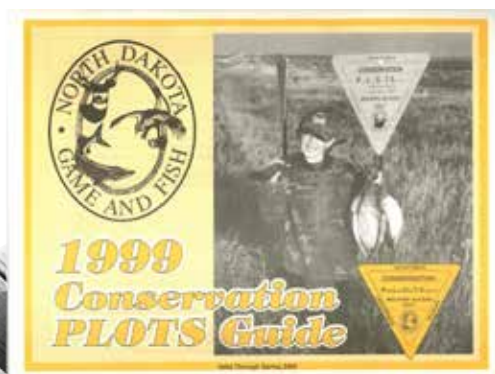
"We wanted something that would stand out, something that would be easily recognizable, even from a distance," Link said.

Even if you flip a triangle on its head,

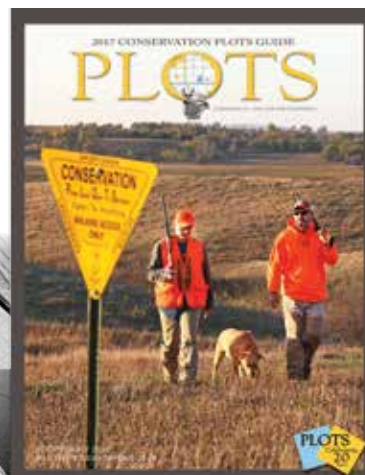
the time, split up and visited with hunters hunting PLOTS.

"It was the pheasant opener and we just wanted to talk with hunters about the PLOTS program because it was brand new," Link said. "We were curious if the PLOTS tracts drew hunters specifically to the area, how did they find the tracts, had they hunted the area before, what was their experience, those kinds of things."

Initially, the PLOTS program didn't catch on with hunters, mostly because they weren't familiar with it. Plus, the



Celebrating  
20 Years



the Game and Fish Department to create programs for landowner assistance that encouraged public access to private lands for hunting.

That authorization 20 years ago was the beginning of what is today perhaps the Game and Fish Department's most familiar program.

Somewhere in his files, Greg Link, the Department's private land coordinator at the time, has a list of potential names that were tossed around, debated by Game and Fish personnel looking for the perfect hook, a handle that would stick and resonate with hunters.

"The clock was ticking and we needed

it still has three points, which is important, Link said, because the idea was that the PLOTS program was to be built on the foundation of (1) sportsmen, (2) landowners and (3) wildlife.

With a name picked and signs made, crews of Department employees moved temporarily into FEMA campers and shouldered into the task of setting posts and tightening nuts on roughly 2,000 signs.

Fall 1998 when the PLOTS program was on the landscape for the first time on about 25,000 acres, Link and Randy Kreil, who is now retired but was the Department's wildlife division chief at

first guide, which was more of a large, fold-out map, was way more difficult to decipher than today's PLOTS Guide.

After a hunting season or two, that changed.

"Once we published a more hunter-friendly PLOTS Guide in 1999 and put more acres on the landscape, the hunters followed," Link said. "Within a few years of getting started, the PLOTS program wasn't unfamiliar anymore. It was a recognizable brand in rural North Dakota."

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





NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT ARCHIVE PHOTO

## A Look Back

By Ron Wilson

North Dakota held its first modern-day pronghorn season in 1951.

In the last 65-plus years, the season for an animal that inhabits the northeastern edge of its range in western North Dakota, has been held many times, but has not run uninterrupted.

In recent memory, of course, the pronghorn hunting season was closed from 2010 through 2013 as the pronghorn population was hit hard by difficult winters. This closure was the first in nearly three decades, according to Game and Fish Department records.

Starting in 2014, the Department has held limited pronghorn hunting seasons in western North Dakota and will follow suit this fall.

The photograph provided shows hunters from Valley City dragging a pronghorn buck back to their vehicle in Bowman County. The photograph was taken in 1952, the second year of pronghorn hunting in the state in many years.

"On the 22nd of September, 1951,

North Dakotans hunted antelope for the first time since 1899. A two and one half day season, promulgated for the dual purpose of allowing the sportsman the maximum hunting consistent with good game management and reducing the crop damage in the area, was declared in parts of McKenzie, Golden Valley, Slope and Bowman counties," according to the November 1951 issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

That year, 1,000 licenses were awarded to landowners and hunters.

"By the night of the 21st, Bowman, Beach and Watford City had become overcrowded cities. Bowman, especially, felt the influx of hunters as it is located right on the dividing line between Units 2 and 3. One woman in Bowman reported that, although she was not in the business of renting rooms, she had 17 telephone calls, requesting a place to sleep ... Doubling up was the order of the day, with hotel and restaurant facilities taxed to the limit," according to the November

1951 issue of *OUTDOORS*.

Those hunters lucky enough to draw a license that first season were asked to provide some insight on their hunt on a report card that was returned to Department staff. What follows is some of the reactions, also published in the November 1951 issue of *OUTDOORS*:

- From Halliday – "I had some very good antelope hunting and good cooperation from landowners."
- From Hettinger – "Hard hunting! Once alerted, they're very elusive."
- From Fargo – "Too tame, one of them licked my face before opening time."

According to an editor's note at the time, the last hunter from Fargo did not fill his pronghorn license.

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