

# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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# MATTERS OF OPINION



**Terry Steinwand**  
*Director*

Over the last 10 years I've been involved in an event called Hunting Dakota with Roosevelt. The event was created by some very civic-minded individuals who loved to hunt and also had a goal in mind to honor those who served, or do serve, in the military, while at the same time raising funds for the much-deserving Bismarck Cancer Center.

The first year I attended the event, the emcee was Ted McKnight. The first time we met I remember recognizing the name, but couldn't place it. I quickly discovered that he was a former running back for the Kansas City Chiefs and Buffalo Bills. Ted is an imposing individual, and along with his many gifts, a very talented speaker.

While I'd had nine years to get acquainted with Ted during the events, I can't say I'd ever spent more than just minutes at a time talking with him. That changed this year when he rode with me from Bismarck to southwestern North Dakota to attend the hunt.

After nearly three hours of conversation, I can say that I'm even more impressed with Ted after that ride. While he's a wealth of information on a variety of topics, I can attest to never laughing so much in my life. Ted has a way of spicing up (or maybe exaggerating?) even the simplest story with his deep baritone voice. And the depth of his knowledge on a variety of topics is absolutely amazing.

The hunt took place on an extremely windy day, and with the pheasant population being what it is this year, we saw some

birds, but didn't harvest any. It wasn't for the lack of trying, nor the lack of talent in the dogs, or the individuals in the group. It was just one of those days.

The post-hunt gathering is always a special event because you get to know a variety of people from all walks of life, who are the incentive for this column.

I've come to appreciate the relationships that are built from these types of gatherings. It's not always about harvesting birds – certainly a bonus to a day of hunting – it's also about the great friends we make and the experiences we share.

As we know, it's been a tough fall for hunting upland game, but there are some areas that are still good. Bird numbers will bounce back, but when that happens will depend greatly on habitat conditions and Mother Nature.

There is one thing I can count on every year, and that's the enjoyment of hunting with family and friends. I'm proud to say that I've made some great friends over the years, and I can't begin to express my appreciation for those friendships and great times I've experienced in the field or after the hunt.

With plenty of fall hunting opportunities remaining, not to mention the coming ice fishing season and everything else that follows, I encourage you to get outdoors and experience what North Dakota and the great people of our state have to offer. Reacquaint with friends or make new ones in the great North Dakota outdoors.

*Terry Steinwand*

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# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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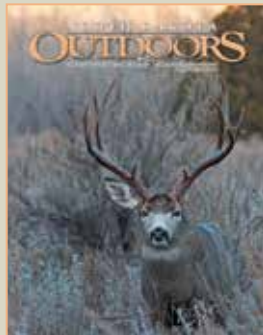
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### FEATURES

Increase in Deer Gun Licenses a Start .....	2
Prairie Walleye Lakes, Pike Highlight Winter Fishing Forecast .....	8
Partnership to Benefit Ruffed Grouse, Other Wildlife .....	14
Monitoring Mussels in the Red River .....	20

### DEPARTMENTS

Buffaloberry Patch .....	22
Back Cast .....	25



### Front Cover

A mature mule deer buck photographed in western North Dakota's badlands. (Photo by Lara Anderson, Bismarck.)



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LARA ANDERSON

**Y**ou could argue that there is nothing significant about this year's deer gun season.

Considering that we've long marked 1931 as North Dakota's first official deer season, because that was the first time a specific deer license was required, then the 2017 season is the state's 86th. Not a milestone year as, say, the state's 90th deer season.

Then again, you could argue that every deer gun season in North Dakota, especially opening weekend, is noteworthy.

While the pheasant and waterfowl openers garner notable interest from North Dakota's hunters, it's the deer season that resonates, stirs up something special in the leather boots and wool socks crowd.

This season, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department made available 54,500 deer gun licenses to hunters. While that doesn't sound like a lot, especially if you consider that more – some years way more – than 100,000 licenses were made available each season from 2001 through 2011, it's a good sign.

The number of licenses in 2017 has climbed from 2014, when numbers dipped below 50,000 for the first time since 1981.

"The good news is that we are in better shape than we were two years ago, but in terms of the state's deer population and license numbers, we're still lower than where hunters would like to be," said Jeb Williams, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife division chief.

is good reproduction, no severe setbacks from winter, and wildlife habitat on the landscape."

It's not often that the stars align on the Northern Plains and the conditions are conducive to producing and supporting a large deer population.

For a six-season stretch beginning in 2004, when Game and Fish made available more than 145,000 deer licenses, habitat conditions on the landscape were outstanding, at the same time the state benefitted from more than a decade of moderate to mild winters, which is unusual for North Dakota.

"While we hope to see changes in habitat and conservation programs to help influence and increase deer and other wildlife populations, it's very unlikely

# Increase in **DEER** **GUN LICENSES** a Start

By Ron Wilson

*There were 2,450 mule deer buck licenses made available this fall, an increase of 200 from 2016.*

Two years ago, in 2015, the Department made available just 43,275 deer gun licenses, the lowest since 1980.

"We're going in the right direction in terms of deer numbers," Williams said, "but it's going to be small steps in getting the deer numbers back to where hunters and biologists would like to see them."

According to the Game and Fish Department's deer management plan, agency officials have proposed a plan that will support issuing 75,000 deer licenses.

Williams said the deer management plan is reevaluated every five years and is based, in large part, on the amount of wildlife habitat on the landscape and the uncertainties of the state's winter weather.

"Everything has to fall in place, however, for that goal of 75,000 licenses to happen," he said. "What we need to see

we'll see deer numbers like we did in the early to mid-2000s," Williams said. "If North Dakota's deer population continues to increase, the landscape, in large part, will dictate where the deer numbers end up."

While last winter got off to a difficult start in terms of lots of snow and cold, things eventually mellowed and it appears that reproduction within the state's deer population was good.

"There was some loss, but just along the lines of normal winter mortality," Williams said. "From what we're seeing on the landscape, and what we're hearing anecdotally, we expect it to be a good deer season."

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



# LATE START

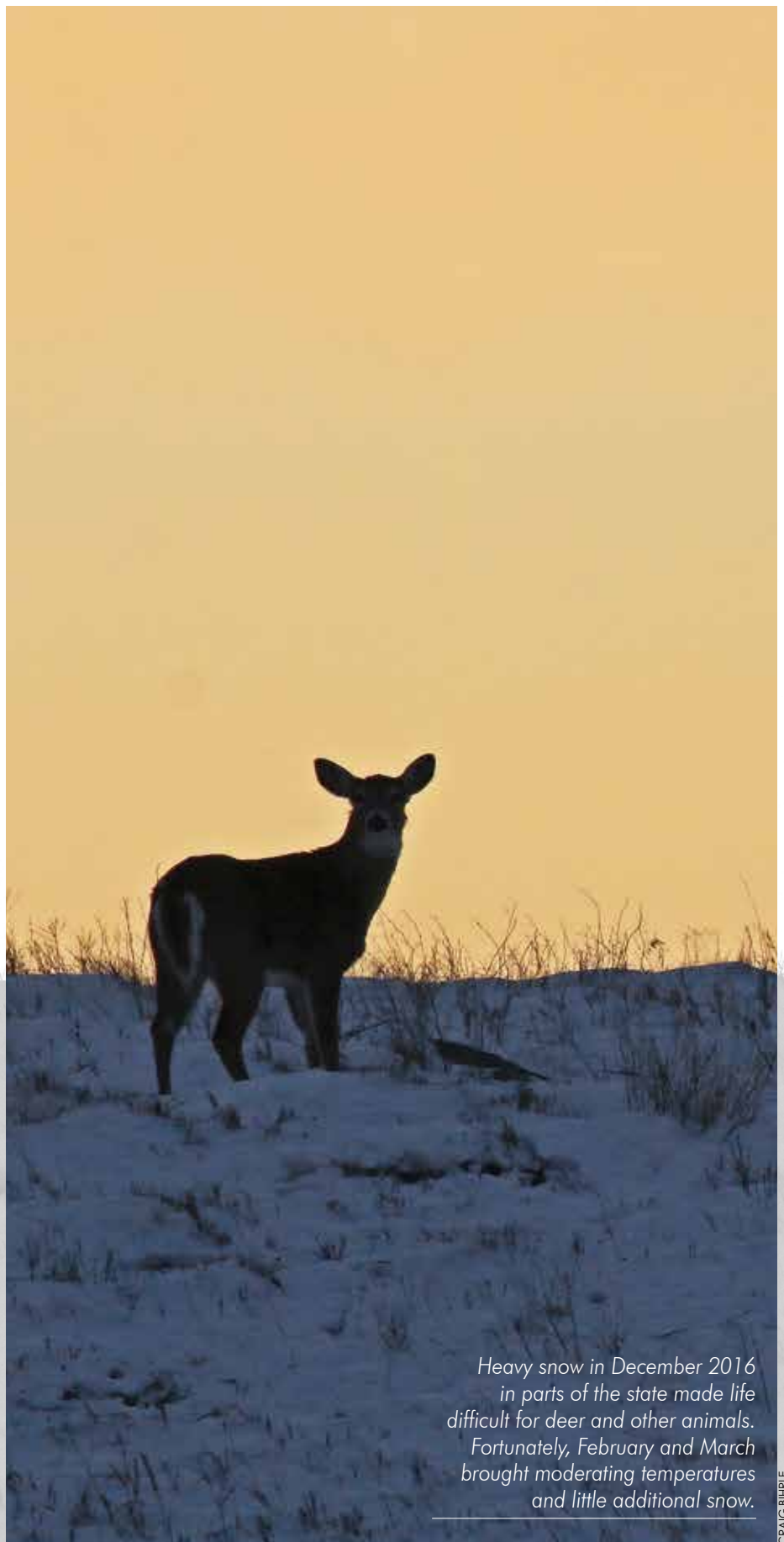
For those hunters keeping track, you are correct in saying that this year's gun season is getting a late start.

The November 10 opener feels particularly late, considering the season opened in 2016 on November 4.

The traditional deer opener has been the Friday before November 11 for about 30 years. That means the range, based on this rotating standardized approach, for the opener is November 4 through November 10.

Also, since the late 1980s, the regular deer gun season has consistently spanned 16.5 days, starting at noon on Friday and providing three weekends for hunting.

Also of note, it was roughly in that same time period (1981) that North Dakota's deer hunters were required by law to don 400 square inches of fluorescent orange in the field.



*Heavy snow in December 2016 in parts of the state made life difficult for deer and other animals. Fortunately, February and March brought moderating temperatures and little additional snow.*

CRAIG BIRNLE



# BUYING BONUS POINTS

In the 65th Legislative Assembly, lawmakers passed a bill that allows resident hunters, who do not want to receive a hunting license issued by lottery, to purchase a bonus point for a fee that is the same as the respective license.

The fee is allocated to the Game and Fish Department's popular walk-in access program, Private Land Open To Sportsmen.

Deer hunters applying in the Department's deer lottery will have this option for the first time in 2018. (Note: This option also is available to hunters applying for pronghorn licenses and spring and fall turkey licenses. The latter is the only one that was in play during the 2017 lottery process.)

"Buying bonus points offers those people the opportunity to sit out a particular season for whatever reason, like for maybe a family trip or a hunting trip elsewhere," said Jeb Williams, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife division chief. "This option also takes someone out of the lottery who doesn't want to be there, while giving someone else who wants to be in the lottery a little bit better chance at drawing a license."



*A mule deer buck license remains one of the toughest deer licenses to draw. Even more difficult, it would seem, would be to find an animal like this during the season.*

LARA ANDERSON



# ONE GUN LICENSE

In 2012, for the first time in years, hunters were allowed just one license for the regular deer gun season.

Things haven't changed.

Today's hunter, at least the hunter fortunate to draw a lottery license, is allowed the one deer gun license, but can also purchase a bowhunting license and is eligible to apply for a muzzle-loader license.

On another front, for just the second year in a row, licenses were made available for antlerless mule deer in seven of eight badlands hunting units. Hunters were not allowed to harvest mule deer does in those units from 2012-15, following a drastic decline in the population in western North Dakota after a number of difficult winters, beginning in 2008.



*As has been the case for what seems like forever, the deer season opens on a Friday at noon and the season runs for 16.5 days. Neither of those things changed, of course, for the 2017 season.*

CRAIG BIRRE



# EHD

Like most years, there have been some reports of white-tailed deer in southwestern North Dakota dying from what appears to be epizootic hemorrhagic disease.

“To date, the Department’s wildlife division has 17 reports from the public regarding likely, or confirmed, EHD deaths of 33 deer, which is a fairly minor outbreak if it doesn’t gain momentum,” said Jeb Williams, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife division chief.

Word of some whitetails dying each summer is not necessarily news, because the biting midge responsible for transmitting the virus is always present.

The last significant EHD outbreak in North Dakota was 2013. While EHD kills white-tailed deer, biologists aren’t certain why mule deer, elk, moose, pronghorn and bighorn sheep don’t succumb to the disease.

“The fortunate thing is that there were hard freezes in EHD country,” Williams said, as a hard freeze is needed to kill the biting midge. “Some years we lose more deer than others. It doesn’t appear this was one of those outbreak years.”

A nice whitetail buck caught wandering along the Missouri River corridor near Garrison Dam.



CRAIG BIRLE





WES EDDLE

A nice walleye through the ice for a young angler.



# PRAIRIE WALLEYE LAKES, PIKE HIGHLIGHT WINTER FISHING FORECAST

*By Ron Wilson*

**T**here are no guarantees when it comes to ice fishing in North Dakota.

Considering the uncertainties of the weather, and how it influences freeze-up and access, anglers really never know how things are going to play out.

Last year, following a mild November, December bared its teeth in parts of the state with record snowfall and cold temperatures. Access to many waters was difficult or worse.

"Ice fishing in North Dakota is really predicated on access and good fishing opportunities," said Greg Power, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries division chief. "Obviously, the weather is the one variable we don't have control over."

In a perfect ice fishing world, Power said, North Dakota's waters would experience a typical freeze-up beginning around deer season, followed by colder weather in December, with little snow accumulation.

"What we've seen is that if you don't get anglers on good ice, with good access, by the holidays, then they don't often fish that winter," Power said. "The lakes and the fish are out there, but it's just a matter of anglers being able to gain access to where they want to fish."

Typically, Power said, when access isn't an issue, ice fishing accounts for about 25 percent of all fishing that occurs annually in North Dakota. In tough winters, where access is limited, this can drop to as low as 5 percent.

While blowing and drifting snow can, at times, make getting on a lake

difficult, Power reminds anglers that the agency doesn't provide access.

"If you see that an access has been plowed or blown out, it's being done by a local fishing club or local landowners," he said. "We don't have the resources to maintain the 1,000-plus access sites around the state."

The other side of the weather picture, and its likely influence on the ice fishing season and fish populations, is drought that gripped North Dakota in spring and summer.

Scott Gangl, Department fisheries management section leader, said that while many fisheries in North Dakota lost water to drought, not all lakes were affected the same.

"The last five or six years we've had increasing water levels and increasing fish populations," Gangl said. "While our fish populations are still doing well, the concern is that when you lose water, you are losing fish habitat, and that increases the risk for winterkill."

Even so: "I'm still pretty optimistic," he added. "This one dry summer is not going to cause 40-50 lakes to winterkill. We've been so water-rich for years that many of our lakes are going to be just fine."

Falling water levels particularly influence yellow perch, which are one of the more popular fish species for winter anglers.

"To have a year where we are actually drying out a bit is probably going to affect things like perch reproduction," Gangl said. "We are probably not going to see a lot of perch this year because they really thrive on that flooded vegetation."

Gangl said yellow perch populations in North Dakota tend to boom and bust in direct correlation to the state's water cycle.

"Right now, coming off a dry spring and summer, we're kind of on the backside of the boom," he said.

Understanding that, Gangl and Power both remain optimistic about quality ice fishing opportunities, considering the state's continued robust pike population and a host of healthy prairie walleye lakes.



CRAIG BIRNLE

"We have to re-channel angler expectations away from perch to pike and walleye, which is not a bad thing because those opportunities are widely available," Power said. "We have evolved to stocking many of the opportunistic perch lakes with walleye and this winter could prove to be pretty good. There are a scattering of lakes with 14- to 17-inch walleye that experience very little fishing pressure."

Gangl said many of the

former perch waters that have since been stocked with walleye were flush with fathead minnows, providing plenty of prey to the newcomers.

"Many of the waters were full of minnows and the walleye grew like crazy," Gangl said. "A lot of these new prairie walleye fisheries will be the keystone of North Dakota's ice fishing season."

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

## FISHING FOR OPPORTUNITIES ON ICE

What follows are a number of fisheries around North Dakota that, depending on ease of access and other factors, could provide good ice fishing opportunities for walleye, northern pike and other species. Some of the waters are only accessible in winter, while others see fishing pressure during the open water season. Game and Fish Department district fisheries supervisors and biologists have provided a short look at fish populations in each water to help frame ice fishing expectations. Following continued dry conditions and falling waters levels, some fisheries will be more susceptible to winterkill than others.



*Little has changed when it comes to northern pike in North Dakota. The ice fishing opportunities for the state's fish are many.*



## SOUTH CENTRAL FISHERIES DISTRICT

*Paul Bailey, district fisheries supervisor,  
Bismarck*

**Crimmins WPA (Burleigh County)** – Walleye up to 22 inches in good numbers.

**Goose Lake (Emmons County)** – Good number of northern pike, with fish occasionally surpassing 8 pounds.

**Helen Lake (Kidder County)** – A consistent northern pike producer for years and remains a good option for fish up to 10 pounds.

**Horsehead Lake (Kidder County)** – This large body of water is a great destination for pike up to 10 pounds.

**Long Alkaline Lake (Kidder County)** – Abundant pike up to 5 pounds.

**Nagel Lake (McIntosh County)** – Healthy walleye population, with fish up to 25 inches. Foot traffic access through WPA.

**Rafferty Lake (Kidder County)** – Walleye from 13-18 inches abundant.

**Remmick Lake (Kidder County)** – Small walleye abundant, but fish up to 23 inches present.

**Round Lake (Kidder County)** – Walleye not extremely abundant, but fish occasionally surpass 25 inches. Fair numbers of pike and yellow perch.

**Woodhouse Lake (Kidder County)** – Walleye abundant, with a few fish exceeding 25 inches.

**Baumgartner Lake (Emmons County)** – Pike up to 6 pounds abundant.

**Geier Lake (Kidder County)** – Walleye up to 22 inches abundant and a lower number of larger perch.

**Lake Geneva (Kidder County)** – Walleye up to 21 inches abundant, with a number of perch up to 13 inches.

**Leno Lake (Kidder County)** – A good fishery for 2- to 5-pound pike.

**Logan WMA (Logan County)** – Walleye up to 22 inches abundant.

**Trautmann Lake (Kidder County)** – An excellent population of 14- to 21-inch walleye.

**Wentz WPA (Logan County)** – Walleye up to 20 inches common.

## NORTHEAST FISHERIES DISTRICT

*Randy Hiltner, district fisheries supervisor,  
Devils Lake*

**Sibley Lake (Griggs County)** – Shallow lake, with declining water levels. Pike numbers and size are very good, with fish averaging more than 5 pounds.

**Island Lake (Rolette County)** – A larger, shallow lake that is susceptible to winterkill in harder winters. Pike numbers are very good, with fish averaging about 25 inches.

**Long Lake (Rolette County)** – A large, shallow lake with falling water levels that could winterkill. Netting survey in 2016 sampled lots of pike averaging nearly 5 pounds.

**School Section Lake (Rolette County)** – Shallow lake susceptible to winterkill after a hard winter. Good number of various-sized pike up to 30 inches, along with some perch.

**Heaton Slough Complex (Wells County)** – Water levels receding the past couple of years. Two different water bodies exist, with some nice perch and pike from 3-10-plus pounds.

**Silver Lake WMA (Wells County)** – Low water levels going into winter may lead to winterkill. Fair numbers of 9- to 11-inch perch, with the occasional jumbo. Fast-growing walleye will be 15-17 inches this winter.

## SOUTHWEST FISHERIES DISTRICT

*Jeff Hendrickson, district fisheries supervisor,  
Dickinson*

**Dickinson Reservoir (Stark County)** – Abundant walleye up to 6 pounds and a good number of pike up to 11 pounds, with a good number of perch up to 1 pound.

**Heart Butte Reservoir (Grant County)** – Mostly small walleye abundant, with some fish up to 7 pounds, and pike up to 7 pounds.

**Indian Creek Dam (Hettinger County)** – Walleye abundant, with some up to 10 pounds.

## NORTHWEST FISHERIES DISTRICT

*Aaron Slominski, fisheries biologist, Williston*

**Northgate Dam (Burke County)** – Good walleye and bluegill populations.

**Blacktail Dam (Williams County)** – Good numbers of pike, perch and bluegill, with a fair number of walleye.

**McGregor Dam (Williams County)** – Good number of walleye.



CRAIG BIRHLE



*A number of North Dakota's prairie walleye lakes only allow winter access.*

## **NORTH CENTRAL FISHERIES DISTRICT**

*Jason Lee, district fisheries supervisor, Riverdale*

**Coal Lake (McLean County)** – Good number of walleye from 12-14 inches.

**Scooby Lake (McLean County)** – Good number of walleye from 12-14 inches.

**Clear Lake (Pierce County)** – Abundant walleye with many fish from 14-17 inches.

**Hinsz Lake (Sheridan County)** – Good number of walleye from 14-16 inches.

**Lake Richard (Sheridan County)** – Decent number of 13- to 20-inch walleye. Shallow lake, with a high risk of winterkill in a long winter with lots of snow.

**Makoti Lake (Ward County)** – Abundant northern pike from 29-32 inches.

**Long Lake (McLean County)** – Good number of 22- to 26-inch northern pike. Shallow lake, with a high risk of winterkill if covered in a lot snow for an extended period.



*Access to many of the state's waters was difficult last winter, and it's only a guess what Mother Nature will toss our way in weeks to come.*



**Lake Gertie (McLean County) –**

Good number of pike from  
22-29 inches.

**SOUTHEAST FISHERIES  
DISTRICT**

*Brandon Kratz, district fisheries  
supervisor, Jamestown*

**Mosher WPA (Barnes County) –**

First stocked with walleye in  
2014, and contains an excellent  
population of 15- to 20-inch  
fish. Exclusively a walleye lake.

**Island Lake (Barnes County) –**

Contains an excellent popula-  
tion of 15- to 24-inch wall-  
eye. Some perch present, but  
primarily a walleye lake.

**Kee Lake (Barnes County) –**

Contains a good number of  
walleye up to 25 inches. Aver-  
age size around 2 pounds. A  
few pike and perch present.

**Wahl Lake (Richland County) –**

Wahl Lake has receded con-  
siderably the last several years,  
with the maximum depth at  
approximately 8 feet. Contains  
an excellent population of wall-  
eye from small to large. Some  
perch, crappie and bluegill.

**Flood Lake (LaMoure County) –**

Contains a healthy population  
of northern pike, averaging  
more than 5 pounds. Less  
water translates into higher fish  
densities.

**Sunday Lake (Stutsman**

**County) –** Contains a good  
population of northern pike,  
averaging more than 4 pounds.

**Grass Lake (Sargent County) –**

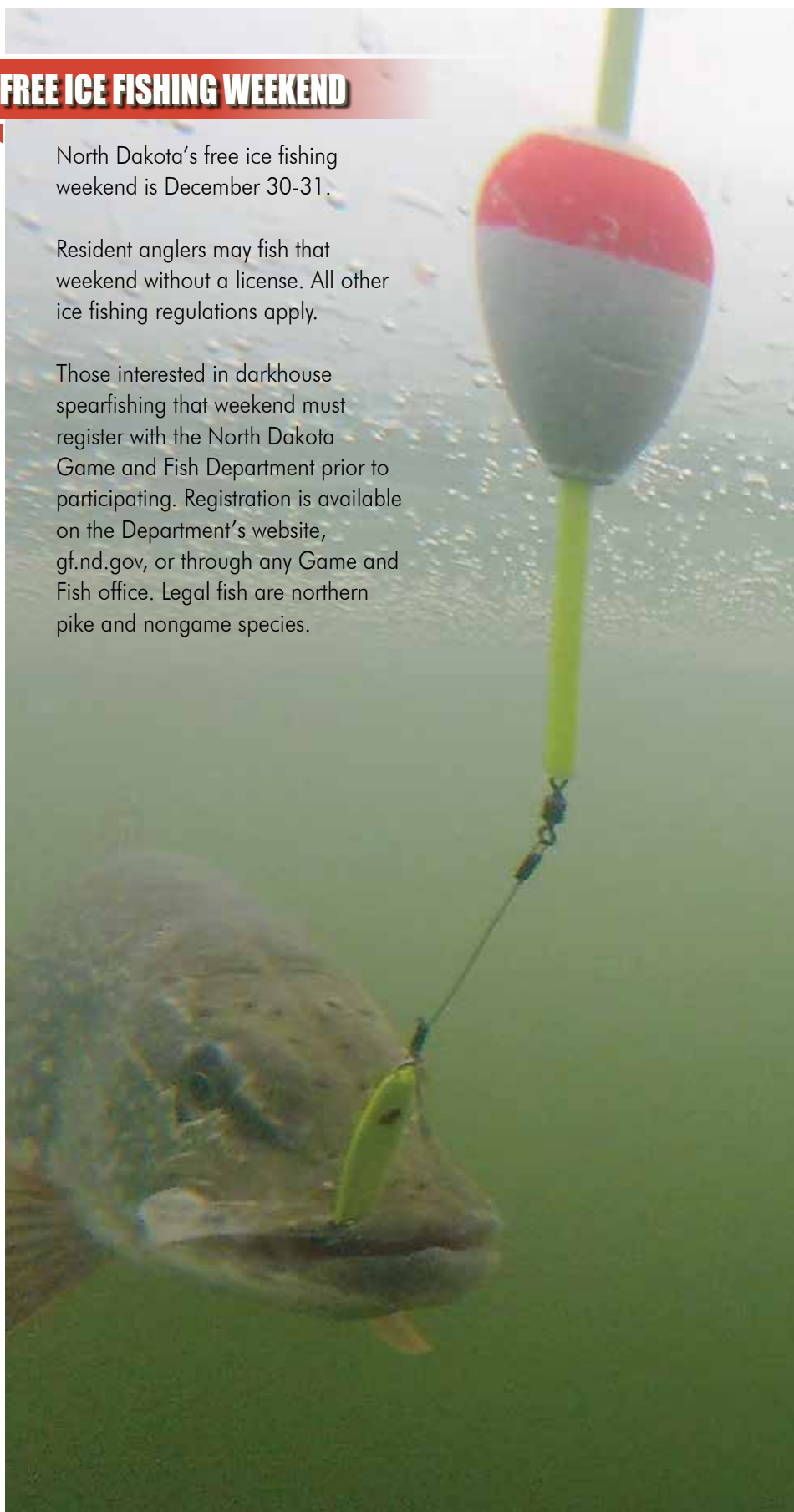
Though Grass Lake contains  
both walleye and northern  
pike, in recent years the crap-  
pie population has taken off,  
with abundant 10- to 12-inch  
fish. Water levels have receded  
considerably.

**FREE ICE FISHING WEEKEND**

North Dakota's free ice fishing  
weekend is December 30-31.

Resident anglers may fish that  
weekend without a license. All other  
ice fishing regulations apply.

Those interested in darkhouse  
spearfishing that weekend must  
register with the North Dakota  
Game and Fish Department prior to  
participating. Registration is available  
on the Department's website,  
[gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or through any Game and  
Fish office. Legal fish are northern  
pike and nongame species.



CRAIG BIRLE









*Downed trees, brush and neatly stacked logs marked the beginnings of a partnership in the Turtle Mountains to improve the health of the forest.*

# Partnership

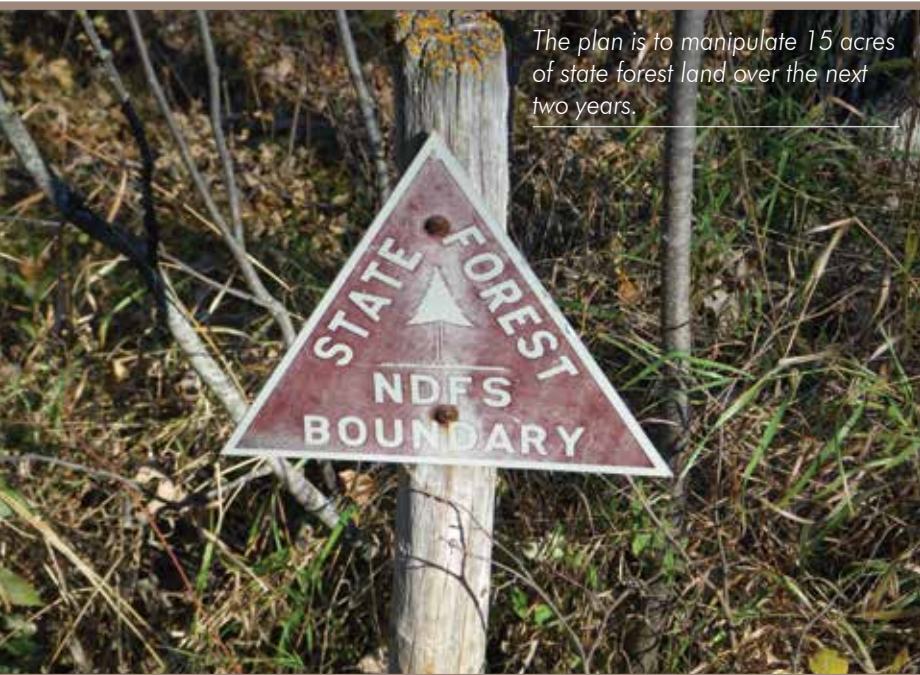
## TO BENEFIT RUFFED GROUSE, OTHER WILDLIFE

STORY AND PHOTOS  
BY RON WILSON

Hunting ruffed grouse in North Dakota's Turtle Mountains is as much about the gorgeous forested country that shoulders up against Canada as it is about the native birds.

In fall, when the grouse are in season and have long since moved on from an entertaining spring courtship initiated by drumming males, the woodlands transform from greens to head-turning reds and yellows. A hike in the woods, with or without a grouse in the game bag, is a treat as temperatures cool and the days shorten.





The plan is to manipulate 15 acres of state forest land over the next two years.



It was during this natural autumn alteration in early October that work was being done on a small chunk of woods to improve the health of the forest, while creating an environment that will one day benefit ruffed grouse and other woodland animals.

As part of a cooperative agreement between the state Game and Fish Department and the North Dakota Forest Service, the agencies plan to treat 15 acres of state forest land and 15 acres on two Department wildlife management areas in the Turtle Mountains over the next two years.

The agencies also intend to continue to apply regeneration treatments in the form of 5- to 10-acre patch-cuttings over the next 10 years on high priority Forest Service and Game and Fish lands.

While hard hats and chainsaws are employed at times, much of the work to clear blocks of forest and stack logs falls on a forestry brush cutter and a heavy duty skid steer. The equipment was purchased by the agencies through federal Wildlife Restoration Act funds.

“By sharing this equipment, we will be able to initiate some stand treatments that are going to have a long-term, beneficial impact on a variety of wildlife species in the Turtle Mountains,” said Mike Kangas, North Dakota Forest Service nursery and state forest team leader.

Kangas said that about 17 percent of the state’s forestland is classified as aspen/birch forest type, the majority of which is found in the Turtle Mountains. Unfortunately, much of it is in a state of decline.

“Lack of fire disturbance and/or harvesting has resulted in older stands, with minimal natural regeneration,” Kangas said. “The current condition of many stands are characterized by extensive stem decay and large stem mortality caused by canker fungi. In addition, these stands are prone to periodic outbreaks of defoliating insects that reduce growth, predispose trees to other damaging agents, and exacerbate the senescence of aging aspen stands.”

The forestry brush cutter, sort of a lawnmower/weed whacker on steroids, chews up most everything in its path, thereby allowing vigorous regrowth of aspen suckers. The bigger trees, those bigger around than 12 inches, are cut by chainsaw and stacked with the skid steer.

The forest stands being manipulated by the machines are roughly in the shape of a square.

“When it’s all said and done, it will look like a clear cut,” Kangas said. “What some people don’t understand is that a clear cut is not necessarily a bad thing ... what we are doing is mimicking a natural disturbance, such as fire.”

“

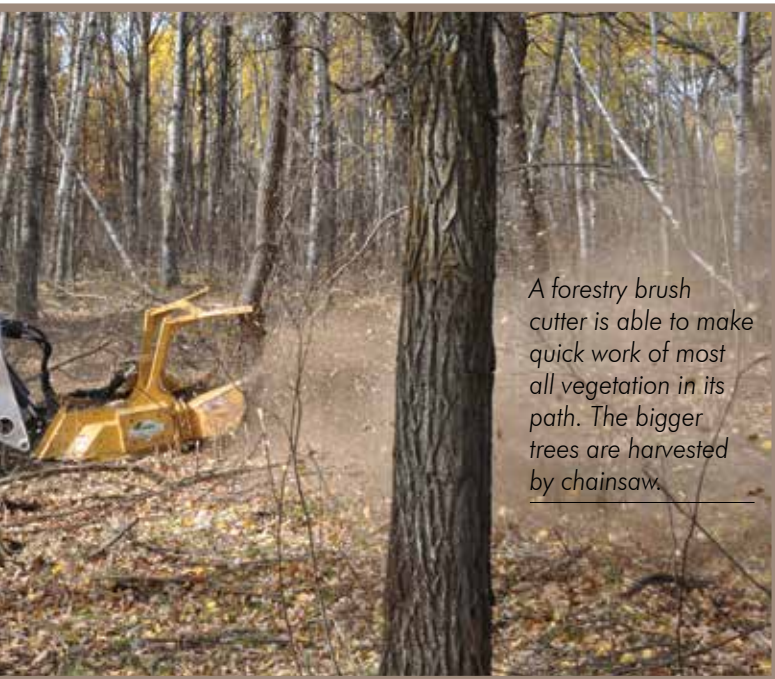
Mike Kangas, North Dakota Forest Service nursery and state forest team leader, said the larger felled trees that cannot be ground up by the equipment will be stacked, set aside and made available for firewood cutting.

“In those areas where it is logistically feasible, we’ll make the wood available to the public for harvest,” he said. “We just ask that they first apply for a firewood permit.”

Considering the predominance of aspen in the Turtle Mountains, Kangas said it is evident that disturbance was an important factor historically in these stands.

“Mimicking those disturbances will create a mosaic of different age classes of aspen, benefiting numerous wildlife species in the Turtle Mountains,” he said.





*A forestry brush cutter is able to make quick work of most all vegetation in its path. The bigger trees are harvested by chainsaw.*



*Bark painted a reddish color marks the boundary of a block of woods that will one day, hopefully, provide improved habitat for ruffed grouse and other woodland animals.*

Brian Prince, Department wildlife resource management section leader in Devils Lake, said Game and Fish has had its hand in aspen management in the Turtle Mountains, mainly for ruffed grouse, dating back to 1963. Much of that management effort stalled for a number of years because contractors were not available to do the work.

"But this project now has given us some renewed hope that we can continue managing aspen primarily for our ruffed grouse, but also for big game species," Prince said. "Basically, most of the wildlife species in the Turtle Mountains are going to benefit from this in some way."

Prince said aspen management through the partnered project will take place on 7.5 acres at Willow Lake Wildlife Management Area, followed by 7.5 acres at Wakopa Wildlife Management Area, the Department's largest WMA in the Turtle Mountains.

Biologists have long understood the specialized habitat needs of ruffed grouse and how proper forest management influences the woodland species.

"While ruffed grouse are very dependent on aspen, it's not enough just to have aspen on the landscape," Prince said. "They need to have certain aspen age classes available to provide those habitat needs that are required throughout the year.

"If you look at the literature, for instance, there is a strong correlation between drumming sites for male ruffed grouse in spring ... there is a strong correlation and need for hen ruffed grouse and their broods to have that sapling stage, where they can move into those areas that provide vertical cover from avian or terrestrial predators," Prince added. "Also, what they find in those sapling-aged stands is a flush of insects as a food source to boost development for young birds and get a good jump-start on becoming adult grouse."

Prince said Department biologists have seen, through male ruffed grouse drumming counts in spring, the connection between aspen management and an increase in bird numbers.

"Looking back at spring drumming survey routes that go through Wakopa where there has been a lot of aspen management in the past, there are some correlations that lead us to believe that what we are doing on our WMAs is

assisting the grouse population," Prince said. "Unfortunately, we have a situation in the Turtle Mountains where this type of aspen management is not happening everywhere, and the older, decadent stands aren't helping grouse."

Kangas said that while the partnered program to manipulate aspen stands has just begun, he envisions the work to continue in the Turtle Mountains for some time.

"We want to continue to use the equipment indefinitely, as long as it lasts," he said. "We are hoping, over a 10- to 12-year period that we're able to treat up to 100 acres, and I think that will have a significant impact on creating some edge and browse habitat for wildlife in the Turtle Mountains."

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



# EVALUATING DAYS IN THE FIELD

If you're a hunter or angler in North Dakota, you've likely received, through the mail, a survey from the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. For years, the Department has solicited the help of outdoor enthusiasts to accurately and honestly relive their experiences while in the field.

*North Dakota OUTDOORS* visited with Chad Parent, Department survey coordinator, who addresses the gist of the surveys and their importance in helping the agency manage wildlife in the state.

## **Q: Why does the Game and Fish Department survey hunters?**

**A:** The short answer is that we send out surveys so that we can count how many animals were harvested. This probably sounds obvious, but to put that into perspective, we need to touch on some concepts from wildlife ecology as it relates to hunting. There is this concept in ecology that suggests each hunting unit in the state has some biologically sustainable amount of harvest that a wildlife population can support without having detrimental effects

to the number in the population in future years. Knowing what amount of harvest is "sustainable" requires information on a couple of things, but importantly, the number of animals removed from the population through harvest. We obtain these data by surveying hunters, and from those surveys we can estimate harvest. Our biologists use harvest estimates in conjunction with other data to make decisions about how much and where to distribute harvest in future hunting seasons.

## **Q: Does Game and Fish send out surveys for all game animals in North Dakota?**

**A:** We work really hard to survey harvests for all of our game animals because it's an essential piece of information our biologists use to manage North Dakota's wildlife and fisheries. So, we pretty much survey everything. Currently, we have four surveys that have been sent out to the hunting public, including youth seasons for pheasant, waterfowl and deer, and we also just wrapped up an early Canada goose survey. Looking forward into fall and winter, we have all of our big game

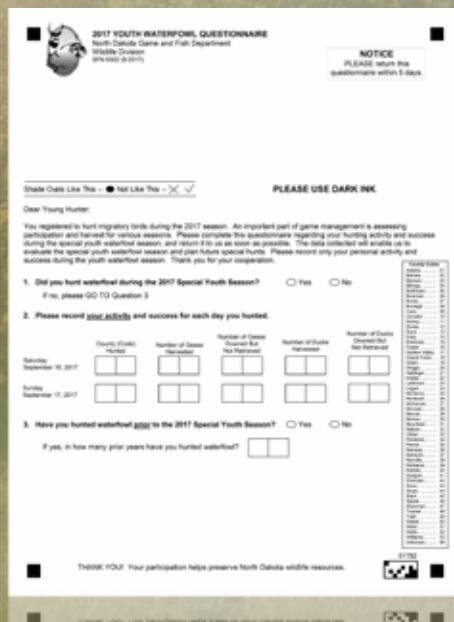
surveys for deer, pronghorn, elk and moose, as well as surveys for the fall turkey season. In spring we get a chance to catch our breath because it slows down considerably; but we do have furbearer and our spring turkey surveys.

## **Q: The surveys don't take long to fill out. What are some of the questions?**

**A:** We try to be sensitive to a hunter's time when we draft our surveys because we know their time is valuable. Although we'd love to ask more questions, we're really only interested in a couple of things: (1) where, and for how many days, did you hunt; (2) were you successful; and if it applies, (3) additional questions about the biology of the game animal you harvested such as its sex and age.

## **Q: How important is it for these surveys to be filled out accurately?**

**A:** Really important. It's also really important that successful hunters complete their surveys and get them back to us. The harvest estimates we produce are only



2017 YOUTH WATERFOWL QUESTIONNAIRE  
North Dakota Game and Fish Department  
Wildlife Division  
970-668-3-0177

PLEASE USE DARK INK

Dear Young Hunter:

You registered to hunt migratory birds during the 2017 season. An important part of game management is assessing participation and harvest for various seasons. Please complete this questionnaire regarding your hunting activity and success during the special youth waterfowl season, and return it to us as soon as possible. The data collected will enable us to evaluate the special youth waterfowl season and plan future special hunts. Please record only your personal activity and success during the youth waterfowl season. Thank you for your cooperation.

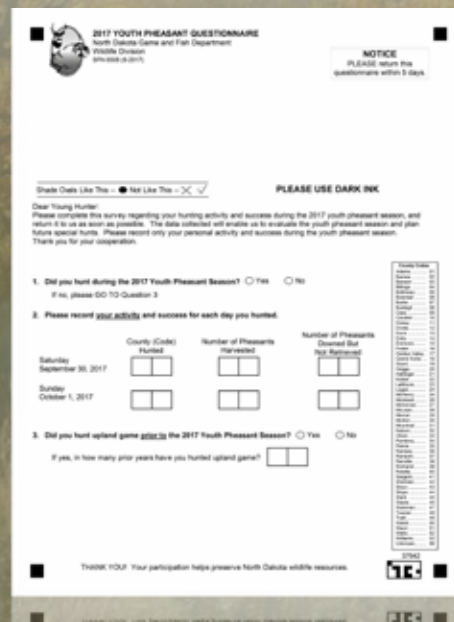
1. Did you hunt waterfowl during the 2017 Special Youth Season? ☐ Yes ☐ No  
If no, please GO TO Question 3

2. Please record your activity and success for each day you hunted.

Date	County (Code)	Number of Days Hunted	Number of Days Not Hunted	Number of Birds Harvested	Number of Birds Not Harvested
Saturday September 16, 2017					
Sunday September 17, 2017					

3. Have you hunted waterfowl prior to the 2017 Special Youth Season? ☐ Yes ☐ No  
If yes, in how many prior years have you hunted waterfowl?

THANK YOU! Your participation helps preserve North Dakota wildlife resources.



2017 YOUTH PHEASANT QUESTIONNAIRE  
North Dakota Game and Fish Department  
Wildlife Division  
970-668-3-0177

PLEASE USE DARK INK

Dear Young Hunter:

Please complete this survey regarding your hunting activity and success during the 2017 youth pheasant season, and return it to us as soon as possible. The data collected will enable us to evaluate the youth pheasant season and plan future special hunts. Please record only your personal activity and success during the youth pheasant season. Thank you for your cooperation.

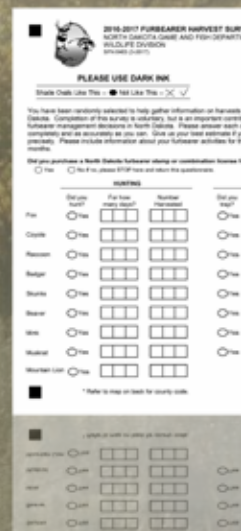
1. Did you hunt during the 2017 Youth Pheasant Season? ☐ Yes ☐ No  
If no, please GO TO Question 3

2. Please record your activity and success for each day you hunted.

Date	County (Code)	Number of Pheasants Harvested	Number of Pheasants Not Harvested
Saturday September 16, 2017			
Sunday September 17, 2017			

3. Did you hunt upland game prior to the 2017 Youth Pheasant Season? ☐ Yes ☐ No  
If yes, in how many prior years have you hunted upland game?

THANK YOU! Your participation helps preserve North Dakota wildlife resources.



2016-2017 FURBEARER HARVEST SURVEY  
NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
WILDLIFE DIVISION  
970-668-3-0177

PLEASE USE DARK INK

Dear Hunter:

You have been randomly selected to help gather information on furbearer harvest. Completion of this survey is voluntary, but it is an important part of furbearer management decisions in North Dakota. Please answer each question as accurately as you can. Give us your best estimate if possible. Please include information about your furbearer activities for 6 months.

1. Did you hunt a furbearer during the 2016-2017 season? ☐ Yes ☐ No  
If no, please STOP here and return the questionnaire.

2. Please record your activity and success for each day you hunted.

Date	County (Code)	Number of Furbearers Harvested	Number of Furbearers Not Harvested
Saturday September 16, 2017			
Sunday September 17, 2017			

THANK YOU! Your participation helps preserve North Dakota wildlife resources.



going to be as good as the responses on the surveys that we get back from hunters. If there are errors on surveys, there will be more variability around our estimates of harvest, and if a successful hunter doesn't return their survey, we must assume they were unsuccessful, which results in an under-estimation of the true harvest. All of these sources of error add uncertainty to the process we use to determine the number of licenses in future hunting seasons.

**Q: If a hunter goes deer hunting or pheasant hunting and doesn't harvest any game, should he or she still fill out the survey?**

**A:** Absolutely. Knowing where hunters did not harvest any game provides a number of important insights to our biologists. In fact, the information that we get from unsuccessful hunters – even if they have no harvest to report, or maybe they didn't make it out at all – is just as important as the information we get from successful hunters. The bottom line is, the more surveys we get back that are filled out accurately, the better our information is about the harvest.

**Q: How do you determine who receives a survey in the mail?**

**A:** It kind of depends on the game species and the season. Generally, we identify a random selection of hunters to receive the survey, and we spread the sample proportionally across all of our hunting units so that we can get good information across the state. However, for some of our smaller harvests, where there are fewer than 1,000 hunters, we send surveys to all hunters who successfully drew a license. This ensures that we get enough surveys back to produce good estimates of harvest.

**Q: The Game and Fish Department has been conducting surveys in the state for a long time, so this is not something that is new?**

**A:** We really do have a rich tradition in North Dakota of collecting good information from our hunters. For example, we've implemented the same, consistent harvest survey for the deer gun season since 1975. That's more than 40 years of information collected in a consistent manner. These

types of data sets are not that common amongst wildlife management agencies across the nation. Having 40 years of information can be really useful, because it allows us to put into perspective some of the short-term trends that we might see.

**Q: Any new innovative ways that Game and Fish is going to be sending surveys in the future?**

**A:** The Game and Fish Department wants to start exploring different delivery strategies for an electronic survey. And by "electronic," we are going to send out the same paper survey that you would typically get in the mail, but you'd fill it out online using your computer or smartphone. What this will hopefully do is make it easier for hunters to complete their surveys. If it's easier to fill out a survey, we anticipate getting more surveys back, which means better estimates of harvest. Hunters should be on the lookout for these special surveys starting this winter. They will come in the form of either an email, or a standard paper survey, with a special weblink to complete the survey online.

The image displays three versions of the 2014 Deer Gun Hunter Questionnaire form. The top form is the front page, featuring the title "2014 DEER GUN HUNTER QUESTIONNAIRE" and "NORTH DAKOTA'S GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT WILDLIFE DIVISION". It includes a "NOTICE" box and instructions for hunters. The middle form is the back page, showing a detailed map of North Dakota with a grid for hunters to indicate where they hunted. The bottom form is another version of the front page, with slightly different instructions and a different map.



# MONITORING MUSSELS

*in the Red River*

CRAIG BIRKLE

*By Ron Wilson*

High water and strong flows hampered the search for adult zebra mussels in the Red River in late October, where the exotics were first discovered in 2015.

Jessica Howell, North Dakota Game and Fish Department aquatic nuisance species coordinator, headed the sampling effort at five sites from Wahpeton to Fargo for a mussel population that is closely monitored.

"At this time of year we are specifically looking for adults to get an idea how quickly the population is growing in the Red River," Howell said.

The only adult zebra mussels found were attached to a dock in Wahpeton that was pulled from the river. Howell said the darker, deeper stretches of the river, where the mussels prefer to attach to rocks, concrete and other

hard surfaces, were too difficult to sample because of the high-flow conditions.

Leaving the Red River mostly empty handed did little to quiet her concerns about the exotics' continued grip in the north-flowing waterway.

"Based on just that one day of sampling in the poor conditions we were faced with, I can't say what the zebra mussel population is doing," she said. "Yet, when the water was much lower in August, I quickly found shells at the Grand Forks site just after a couple minutes of looking. So, it's likely that they are increasing."

The shells Game and Fish Department personnel found varied in size. The smallest, Howell said, would cover only about a quarter of her nail on her pinky.

"Two of the mussels were very small," she said. "That's why when we are sampling and checking equipment, we are feeling with our hands, as much as we are looking with our eyes, because the small shells can resemble a clump of mud or rock."

The fact that zebra mussels can be so small and mostly unnoticeable emphasizes the caution Red River recreationists (and all other water users) must take in making sure the exotics aren't hitching a ride on boats, trailers and other equipment.

"That's why we are asking people, to 'Clean Drain Dry,' their equipment," Howell said. "It's important to let the equipment dry completely, especially in those areas you can't see. We are asking people to continue to take these steps to stop the spread



of aquatic nuisance species in North Dakota.”

Sampling of microscopic larvae, or zebra mussel veligers, was also conducted May through September on Lake Sakakawea, Lake Oahe and Lake Audubon. The search for the tiny invasive species is in response to veligers being found last fall in the Missouri River System in Montana.

Because the veligers are free-floating in

the water column, it is expected that they will make their way into North Dakota eventually if the Montana population establishes. Montana searches this year turned up empty for veligers and adults.

“Unfortunately, the veligers do travel downstream and I do expect it to take some time, at least a few years if Montana were to find a population,” Howell said.

Tests for veligers in the Missouri River

System in North Dakota have turned up negative thus far.

On a broader scale, Howell said Game and Fish personnel did not find any new populations of aquatic nuisance species during open water surveillance efforts across the state in 2017.

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*RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.*

Jessica Howell checks rocks for attached zebra mussels at the 52nd Street boat ramp on the Red River in south Fargo.



CRAIG BURLE

## Clean Drain Dry

While the window on open-water fishing and waterfowl hunting opportunities is closing as winter approaches, waters users, no matter how many, are encouraged to follow these three simple steps to protect our waters from the impacts of ANS:

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

## ANS Observation Report Form

Boaters, anglers, hunters and water enthusiasts play an important role in detecting new aquatic nuisance species when they first enter the state or begin to establish populations.

Jessica Howell, North Dakota Game and Fish Department aquatic nuisance species coordinator, said that because there are more people enjoying the outdoors than there are Game and Fish personnel sampling state waters for invasive species, it's vital for these outdoor enthusiasts to report anything that looks like it doesn't belong.

“If someone sees anything out-of-place, for example, a snail that is unrecognizable, we encourage people to report their findings,” Howell said.

An ANS observation report form can be found on the Game and Fish Department's website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).





# BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor

## 2017 CWD Surveillance

The state Game and Fish Department will continue its Hunter-Harvested Surveillance program during the 2017 deer hunting season, by sampling deer for chronic wasting disease and bovine tuberculosis from 10 units in North Dakota. In addition, all moose and elk harvested in the state are eligible for testing.

Samples from hunter-harvested deer taken in the central portion of the state will be tested from units 2H, 2I, 2J1, 2J2, 2K1, 2K2, 3A4, 3B3 and 3C. In addition, deer will be tested from unit 3F2 in the southwest.

Every head sampled must have the deer tag attached. A new tag can be filled out with the license number, deer hunting unit and date harvested.

Hunters are encouraged to drop off deer heads at the following locations:

- **Ashley** – Ashley Super Valu Store
- **Bismarck** – Game and Fish Department headquarters, Call of the Wild Taxidermy, 3Be Meats, West Dakota Meats
- **Bottineau** – Mattern Family Meats
- **Carrington** – Barton Meats
- **Devils Lake** – Devils Lake Game and Fish district office
- **Dickinson** – Dickinson Game and Fish district office
- **Ellendale** – Oxenrider Motel
- **Granville** – S&E Meats
- **Harvey** – Lonetree Game and Fish district office
- **Heaton** – Miller Game Processing
- **Jamestown** – Jamestown Game and Fish district office
- **LaMoure** – LaMoure Lockers

- **Linton** – Bosch's Meat Market, Scherr's Meats
- **Mandan** – Butcher Block Meats, Nevada's Wildlife Designs
- **McClusky** – Bentz Supply Store
- **Minot** – Johnson Taxidermy
- **Moffit** – Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge office
- **Parshall** – Myers Meats and Specialties
- **Riverdale** – Riverdale Game and Fish district office
- **Rolette** – Meat Shack
- **Rugby** – Cenex C Store
- **Sheyenne** – Brenno Meats, Wild Things Taxidermy
- **Streeter** – Reister Meats and Catering
- **Turtle Lake** – Main Street Market
- **Upham** – J. Clark Salyer NWR office
- **Washburn** – Enerbase
- **Wilton** – Cenex
- **Wing** – Terry's Sales and Service
- **Woodworth** – Chase Lake NWR office.

Drop off locations for deer taken from unit 3F2:

- **Carson** – Hertz Hardware
- **Elgin** – Gunny's Bait and Tackle, Melvin's Taxidermy
- **Glen Ullin** – Kuntz's Butcher Shop
- **Hettinger** – Dakota Packing
- **New Leipzig** – Hertz Hardware

Moose and elk heads should be taken to a Game and Fish office.

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

## Winter Fishing Regulations

Anglers are encouraged to refer to the 2016-18 North Dakota Fishing Guide or the Game and Fish Department's website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov) for winter fishing regulations.

Some winter fishing regulations include:

- A maximum of four poles is legal for ice fishing. However, when fishing a water body where both open water and ice occur at the same time, an angler is allowed a maximum of four poles, of which no more than two poles can be used in open water.
- Tip-ups are legal, and each tip-up is considered a single pole.
- There is no restriction on the size of the hole in the ice while fishing. When a hole larger than 10 inches in diameter is left in the ice, the area in the immediate vicinity must be marked with a natural object.
- It is only legal to release fish back into the water immediately after they are caught. Once a fish is held in a bucket or on a stringer, they can no longer be legally released in any water.
- It is illegal to catch fish and transport them in water.
- It is illegal to leave fish, including bait, behind on the ice.
- Depositing or leaving any litter or other waste material on the ice or shore is illegal.
- Any dressed fish to be transported, if frozen, must be packaged individually. Anglers are not allowed to freeze fillets together in one large block. Two fillets count as one fish.
- The daily limit is a limit of fish taken from midnight to midnight, and no person may possess more than one day's limit of fish while actively engaged in fishing. The possession limit is the maximum number of fish that an angler may have in his or her possession during a fishing trip of more than one day.



## Deer Season Questions and Answers

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department receives questions every year from deer hunters who want to clarify rules and regulations. Some common questions are listed below.

Hunters with further questions can call Game and Fish at 701-328-6300, or access the hunting and trapping link at the Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

**Q: What licenses do I need for deer gun season?**

**A:** A fishing, hunting and furbearer certificate, the general game and habitat stamp or a combination license, and the deer license. Gratis license holders need only the gratis license.

**Q: Can I use my gratis license to take a mule deer doe?**

**A:** Yes, except in unit 4A.

**Q: Can hunters age 14 or 15 (and qualifying 13 year olds) with a youth season license who did not harvest a deer during the youth season hunt the regular deer gun season with this license?**

**A:** Yes, but you are subject to the restrictions listed on the license.

**Q: I was unsuccessful in filling my mule deer buck license in a restricted unit during the youth season. Can I hunt the remainder of the state during the regular gun season?**

**A:** No. You are restricted to the same unit as during the youth season.

**Q: What should I do if I find a wounded deer?**

**A:** Contact a game warden. Do not shoot the deer unless you want to tag it, or are instructed by the warden to do so.

**Q: Is camouflage blaze orange acceptable for the deer gun season?**

**A:** No. You must wear both a hat and outer garment above the waistline totaling at least 400 square inches of solid daylight

fluorescent orange.

**Q: I hunt with a bow. When do I have to wear orange?**

**A:** Only during the regular deer gun season.



LARA ANDERSON

**Q: Can I hunt road rights-of-way?**

**A:** Do not hunt on road rights-of-way unless you are certain they are open to public use. Most road rights-of-way are easements under control of the adjacent landowner and are closed to hunting when the adjacent land is posted closed to hunting.

**Q: Can I hunt on a section line if it is posted on both sides?**

**A:** No. If the land is posted on both sides, the section line is closed to hunting, but is still open for travel.

**Q: Can I retrieve a wounded deer from posted land?**

**A:** If the deer was shot on land where you had a legal right to be and it ran on posted land, you may retrieve it. However, you may not take a firearm or bow with you. The Department suggests contacting the landowner as a courtesy prior to entering.

**Q: What if the landowner says I cannot retrieve a deer from posted land that was shot on land where I had a right to be?**

**A:** Contact a game warden.

**Q: Can I drive off a trail on private land to retrieve a deer?**

**A:** Unless prohibited by a landowner or

operator, you may drive off-trail on private land once a deer has been killed and properly tagged. You must proceed to the carcass by the shortest accessible route, and return to the road or trail by the same

route. However, off-trail driving is prohibited in all circumstances on state wildlife management areas, Bureau of Land Management lands, national wildlife refuges, national grasslands, federal waterfowl production areas and state school land.

**Q: Can I transport someone else's deer?**

**A:** Yes, but you will need a transportation permit from a game warden. The license

holder, person transporting the animal, and the carcass must be presented to the game warden before the permit is issued.

**Q: What if I am going to take my deer head to a taxidermist and meat to a butcher shop? How do I keep the tag with it all?**

**A:** The tag should remain with the head and the carcass tag should remain with the meat.

**Q: May I carry a pistol when I am hunting with a deer rifle?**

**A:** Yes, but the handgun must meet minimum requirements listed in the deer hunting regulations to be legal for taking deer.

**Q: Can I use a bow to fill my regular deer gun license?**

**A:** Yes. You may use any legal firearm or bow during the regular deer gun season.

**Q: Can I carry both bow and gun afield during deer gun season if I have both licenses?**

**A:** Yes, but only if you are going to fill your gun license. No firearms, except handguns, may be in the hunter's possession while hunting with a deer bow license. However, handguns may not be used in any manner to assist in the harvest of a deer with an archery license.





## Advisory Board Meetings Set

Outdoor enthusiasts are invited to attend a North Dakota Game and Fish Department fall advisory board meeting in their area.

These public meetings, held each spring and fall, provide citizens with an opportunity to discuss fish and wildlife issues and ask questions of their district advisors and agency personnel.

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.

Any person who requires an auxiliary aid or service must notify the contact person at least five days prior to the scheduled meeting date.

### **DISTRICT 2 – BOTTINEAU, BURKE, MCHENRY, MOUNTRAIL, PIERCE, RENVILLE AND WARD COUNTIES**

**Date:** November 27 – 7 p.m.

**Location:** Lansford Community Center, Lansford, 783 Main St.

**Host:** Mouse River Loop Pheasants

**Contact:** Austin Adams, 263-1835

**Advisory board member:** Robert Gjellstad, Velva, 338-2281

### **DISTRICT 6 – BARNES, DICKEY, FOSTER, GRIGGS, LOGAN, LAMOURE, MCINTOSH, STUTSMAN AND WELLS COUNTIES**

**Date:** November 27 – 7 p.m.

**Location:** McIntosh County Bank, McIntosh, 204 W. Main St.

**Host:** McIntosh Ducks Unlimited

**Contact:** Gus Schlepp, 426-1683

**Advisory board member:** Cody Sand, Ashley, 357-7011

### **DISTRICT 4 – GRAND FORKS, NELSON, PEMBINA AND WALSH COUNTIES**

**Date:** November 28 – 7 p.m.

**Location:** Red River Archery Range, Grand Forks, 2001 N. 42<sup>nd</sup> St.

**Host:** Red River Archers

**Contact:** Jason Whitesock, 218-791-2996

**Advisory board member:** Joe Solseng, Grand Forks, 317-5009

### **DISTRICT 3 – BENSON, CAVALIER, EDDY AND RAMSEY COUNTIES**

**Date:** November 28 – 7 p.m.

**Location:** Lake Region State College, 204 W. Main St., Devils Lake

**Host:** Lake Region Pheasants Forever

**Advisory Board Member:** Thomas Rost, Devils Lake 662-8620

### **DISTRICT 8 – ADAMS, BILLINGS, BOWMAN, DUNN, GOLDEN VALLEY, HETTINGER, SLOPE AND STARK COUNTIES**

**Date:** December 4 – 7 p.m. MT

**Location:** Eagles Club, Dickinson, 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. E

**Host:** Pheasants Forever, Dickinson chapter

**Advisory board member:** Dwight Hecker, Dickinson, 483-4952

### **DISTRICT 5 – CASS, RANSOM, RICHLAND, SARGENT, STEELE AND TRAILL COUNTIES**

**Date:** December 4 – 7 p.m.

**Location:** Cogswell Community Center, Cogswell, 299 4<sup>th</sup> Ave.

**Host:** Cogswell Gun Club

**Contact:** Mike Marquette, 680-0860

**Advisory board member:** Duane Hanson, West Fargo, 367-4249

### **DISTRICT 1 – DIVIDE, MCKENZIE AND WILLIAMS COUNTIES**

**Date:** December 5 – 7 p.m.

**Location:** Civic Center Meeting Room, Watford City, 213 2<sup>nd</sup> St. NE

**Host:** Pheasants Forever, Watford City chapter

**Contact:** Rick Pokrzywinski, 770-2736

**Advisory board member:** Beau Wisness, Keene, 675-2067

### **DISTRICT 7 – BURLEIGH, EMMONS, GRANT, KIDDER, MCLEAN, MERCER, MORTON, OLIVER, SHERIDAN AND SIOUX COUNTIES**

**Date:** December 5 – 7 p.m.

**Location:** Wilton City Community Hall, Wilton, 105 Dakota Ave.

**Host:** Pheasants Forever, Wilton chapter

**Contact:** Jeremy Klausen, 400-0224

**Advisory board member:** Dave Nehring, Bismarck, 214-3184

## DARKHOUSE SPEARFISHING REGISTRATION

North Dakota's darkhouse spearfishing season opens on most state waters December 1. The season extends through March 15. Legal fish are northern pike and nongame species. Darkhouse spearing is allowed for all residents with a valid fishing license and for residents under age 16.

Nonresidents may darkhouse spearfish in North Dakota if they are from states that offer the same privilege for North Dakota residents.

All individuals who participate in darkhouse spearfishing must register with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department prior to participating. Registration is available at the Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or through any Game and Fish Department office.

All waters open to hook and line fishing are open to darkhouse spearing except: Braun Lake, Logan County; East Park Lake, West Park Lake, Lake Audubon, McLean County; Heckers Lake, Sheridan County; McClusky Canal; New Johns Lake, Burleigh County; Red Willow Lake, Griggs County; and Sweet Briar Dam; Morton County.

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

## ORDER 2018 OUTDOORS CALENDARS

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is taking orders for its *North Dakota OUTDOORS* calendar, the source for all hunting season and application dates for 2018. Along with outstanding color photographs of North Dakota wildlife and scenery, it also includes sunrise-sunset times and moon phases.

To order online, visit the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or send \$3 for each, plus \$1 postage, to: Calendar, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095. Be sure to include a three-line return address with your order, or the post office may not deliver our return mailing.

The calendar is the *North Dakota OUTDOORS* magazine's December issue, so current subscribers will automatically receive it in the mail.





# back cast



By Ron Wilson

On a date that is nearly a week later than a year ago, North Dakota's deer gun season opens.

Hunters dressed in at least 400 square inches of solid fluorescent orange will sit in stands, creep through blocks of timber – some no bigger than an acre or two – hike far beyond the sound of pickup tires munching gravel, or shoulder through the tangle of cattails that ring wetlands, cursing the explosion of fluff that settles in their noses and mouths.

They'll hunt on private land owned by friends, relatives, people who they just met by politely knocking on a farmhouse door, hat in hand. They'll hike habitat managed by the federal government, or managed by the state, with familiar monikers like PLOTS or wildlife management area. Public land.

All of these hunting strategies and others employed across these landscapes often work, but sometimes they don't. We question the wind, the weather – too hot, too cold, too wet or too dry – or possibly the moon phase because, man, it's got to be something.

The season runs for 16.5 days, which is how it's been for a number of years. There was a time when three weekends, with some days scattered throughout, didn't sound long enough. There was also a time when we counted the days, starting sometime in early October, until the season finally opened.

Worrying over either has faded a bit. Some concede that this new outlook is simply a matter of getting older, which is difficult to argue.

After more than 40 years of chasing deer on the Northern Plains and elsewhere, I'm certain I could tell you a little something about a lot of those hunts and would mostly be telling the truth. While deer, either those that hung in camp or simply, inexplicably, got away, would get some play, I'm guessing much of what I might provide, what would shove its way to the forefront of my memory, wouldn't involve antlers.

Rather, the recollections of where we camped, the hardships that mostly had to do with the weather, the contentment of the annual gathering, and the food eaten off of tailgates, paper plates on our laps, or standing, leaning against a wall in an unheated building, would get the most notice.

Back in the day, when we slept in a canvas tent that leaked, it was a ritual, like the deer hunting season itself, to fry in a cast iron pan the heart and liver from the first deer unloaded in camp.

Served with potatoes, onions and eggs over easy, it wasn't a meal that people, from the youngest to the oldest, pushed around on their plates with a fork and uncertainty.

An opening weekend breakfast of fried heart and liver was anticipated, almost ceremonial.

Saving these deer organs back then was something we did out of habit, without consideration. Like rinsing a folding knife before putting it back in its sheath.

We stopped doing this some time ago, but I don't know when or why.

What endures, without uncertainty, is the season itself. We'll be in the field for the opener, albeit nearly a week later than last year.

CRAIG BIRLE

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.





# A Look Back

By Ron Wilson

If you look back, deer and deer hunting in North Dakota have traveled an up and down path.

When the provided black and white photograph was taken in Mercer County more than a century ago, hunters could shoot more than one deer per day. Roughly a decade later, deer hunting closed for the first time in the state in 1913 and remained so for another seven years.

Thumb through the archives of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*, or read "Big Game in North Dakota," a Game and Fish Department publication, and you'll get a feel for the historical roller coaster ways of deer on the prairie, river bottoms and badlands.

Interestingly, you'd imagine the good old days of deer and deer hunting, with the same being said for other game species, being way back when.

Depending on the decade you focus on as a reader of historical interest, that wasn't necessarily the case. Ponder the

following anecdotal accounts, for example, from "Big Game."

**Belfield:** "Deer were so scarce in the year 1902 we'd hunt all day and not see a deer. In fact, if you saw a fresh track in the snow it would be quite a thing."

**Bisbee:** "There weren't many deer in this area in the period 1912-1920. There are more deer now (1962) than at any time since I've lived here."

**Emmons County:** "In the early 1900s deer were really scarce. We never really got them – none to amount to anything – until the late 1940s."

History has shown, at least up to this point, that Game and Fish Department wildlife managers were correct when they proclaimed the decade-long stretch, beginning in 2001 when more than 100,000 deer licenses were made available to hunters, were the good old days.

While white-tailed deer today are found in all parts of the state from the badlands to Buxton, there was a time these animals

were only associated with North Dakota's woodlands, found along riparian corridors and elsewhere.

As reported in "Big Game," biologists in the late 1940s were surprised at what they were seeing during the Department's winter aerial deer surveys.

"It is quite apparent that some change in deer habits is taking place in the state. Four of five years ago one would normally expect to find the great bulk of the total deer herd in accepted winter ranges, in or close to available timber. Three years ago we began to note that regardless of snow conditions many of our whitetails ... were to be seen spending winter out on the prairie somewhat far from timber ... (biologists) have never seen more deer scattered so homogeneously through North Dakota. There were deer in practically every township."

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