

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

\$2.00 JANUARY 2018





MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

We have another year behind us, with the new bringing us the coldest winter weather so far.

Although, it's all relative when it comes to living on the Northern Plains. Think back to one year ago when we not only had cold temperatures, but an accumulation of about 50 inches of snow in a six-week period.

I'd love to write this article and say that hunting in North Dakota was the best it's ever been in 2017, but if you went upland bird hunting this past fall you'd know that was far from the truth.

We went into spring relatively optimistic about a good pheasant hatch, even though nesting habitat had decreased. Even so, biologists felt with good spring weather the reproduction should have been adequate to provide at least an average hunt.

Actually, the spring/early summer conditions were good for the hatch, but along came drought conditions that proved to be an extreme challenge not only for wildlife, but farmers, ranchers and anyone or anything that depends on the landscape for survival.

Turns out, survival of upland chicks was dismal. As most know, chicks are highly dependent on bugs as a food source for the first few weeks of life. If you spent anytime outside this past summer you likely noticed that bug production was next to nothing and therefore survival of upland bird chicks followed suit.

As always, there were some pockets of good pheasant and grouse production, but they weren't plentiful.

The past year finally brought us a little increase in deer numbers, which to some was unexpected given the harsh winter conditions, however brief those conditions were in relative terms.

Yet, once again, there were a large number of disappointed and disgruntled deer gun applicants, which is understandable. I've stated a number of times there are only two main holidays in North Dakota – Christmas and the opener of the deer gun hunting season. It's an important activity and tradition in North Dakota and one the Game and Fish Department doesn't take lightly.

I've said this often, but increasing the state's deer population to the point where we can give at the least the majority of applicants a reasonable chance to hunt deer will take habitat. It means cover during the fawning season and cover in winter to help animals buffer the effects of cold and snow.

On the positive side, those who were fortunate to receive a deer gun license appeared to have had good success. We don't have our hunting season survey results completed yet, but anecdotally the reports were good.

There's one activity I haven't touched on yet and that's fishing. Once again, there was phenomenal fishing across the state thanks in part to Mother Nature. While I didn't fish nearly as much as I would have liked, I did have some good success when I got out.

While we're at the end of North Dakota's major hunting seasons for another year, there's still plenty of outdoor activities in which to participate. Predator hunting, bird watching, cross country skiing, and just being out in the wonderful outdoors of North Dakota that we call home.

While the winter weather can be brutal at times, and Mother Nature can throw us the drought curveball every so often, we live here because we want to, because of all of the wonderful opportunities available. All you have to do is get out and enjoy them.

Terry Steinwand

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Governor Doug Burgum

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NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA

GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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

• Editor: Ron Wilson

• Graphic Designer: Connie Schiff

• Circulation Manager: Dawn Jochim

JANUARY 2018 • NUMBER 6 • VOLUME LXXX

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Front Cover

Ice fishing is in full swing and there's plenty of winter left to take advantage of good fish populations in North Dakota's record number of fishing lakes. *Photo by Ty Stockton, Bismarck.*



Official publication of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (ISSN 0029-2761)

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North Dakota OUTDOORS is published 10 times a year, monthly except for the months of April and September. Subscription rates are \$10 for one year or \$20 for three years. Group rates of \$7 a year are available to organizations presenting 25 or more subscriptions. New subscriptions or renewals are available online at gf.nd.gov, or by mail with included check. The numbers on the upper right corner of the mailing label indicate the date of the last issue a subscriber will receive unless the subscription is renewed.

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

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

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



YEAR ²⁰¹⁷ IN REVIEW

By Scott Peterson

Last year at this time, following multiple winter storms, North Dakota was knee-deep in snow, and concerns about resident wildlife dominated our thoughts. Fortunately, the weather moderated a bit moving into January and February, but the brutal start to winter certainly had a

negative impact on wildlife populations across the state.

Life in the Northern Plains is one of extremes. It's always been that way. This point was driven home again as we transitioned from a fairly wet winter, to a spring and summer that received little

precipitation and reached extreme drought conditions in much of western North Dakota.

While we felt that we had dodged a bullet moving into late winter, that lack of moisture going into the upland game bird nesting season soon tempered our

While drought negatively influenced upland nesting birds and other animals, resident Canada goose numbers in North Dakota remained high.



TY STOCKTON

optimism about a good hatch. As of mid-summer, it was becoming increasingly clear that these weather extremes did indeed have a significant negative influence on certain species, particularly pheasants and grouse.

Reports from farmers and ranchers were concerning and eventually validated when Game and Fish Department biologists initiated the agency's annual upland game brood surveys. Further validating those

early concerns were stories from hunters. While some – the minority – found pockets of birds with decent numbers, other hunters – the majority – found pheasant and sharp-tailed grouse numbers to be down considerably.

So what does all of this mean moving into winter 2018? Without a crystal ball, it's only a guess. However, even with a mild winter and favorable moisture next spring, habitat conditions going into the

nesting season will likely be less than ideal. There is a noticeable lack of available habitat on North Dakota's landscape, and the habitat that is available is of a lesser quality due in part to drought conditions that are hopefully behind us.

With that said, for those of us who cherish our time spent outdoors, opportunities to hunt upland birds, deer, waterfowl and other animals remain. And for those of us who also like to fish, opportunities to

wet a line in a record 450 managed waters across the state are as good as they've ever been.

While we may have to change our tactics, adjust our priorities, and maybe even realign our expectations outdoors, we are continually blessed to live in a state with such diverse fish and wildlife resources. That's one of the reasons we are proud to call North Dakota home.

MORE WET THAN DRY

As drought arrived on the heels of five or six years of rising water levels and increasing fish populations, Game and Fish Department personnel entered 2017 managing more than 425 fisheries.

Not surprising, many North Dakota fisheries lost water last year, but fisheries managers say not all lakes were affected the same.

In summer, Department fisheries personnel stocked more than 12 million walleye fingerlings – topping the previous high by more than 1 million fish – into

130-plus waters around North Dakota.

Considering not many of the fingerlings went into Lake Sakakawea, the effort included an unprecedented stocking of nearly 7 million fingerlings into smaller waters across the state.

With more than 50 new prairie walleye lakes in North Dakota, demands at the fish hatcheries to stock these waters

increased. Valley City National Fish Hatchery produced more walleyes in 2017 than in any other year, while Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery produced a record number again.

Fall reproduction surveys, which evaluate natural reproduction, stocking success and forage abundance, revealed good numbers of walleye and sauger in Sakakawea, a robust walleye population in Devils Lake, and an indication of gizzard shad reproduction in Lake Oahe.

Department fisheries managers said that fall fish surveys showed that many of the state's smaller lakes have high adult fish populations, plus the young fish that were stocked in summer.

UPLAND BIRDS AND WATERFOWL

North Dakota's roadside pheasant survey indicated total birds and number of broods were down considerably statewide from 2016.

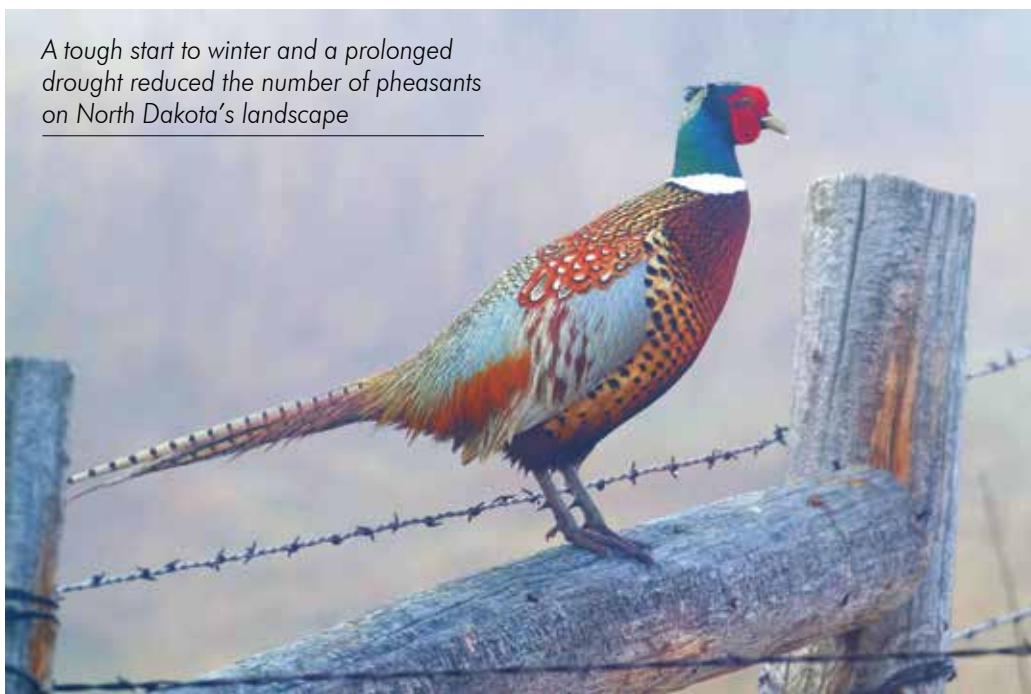
The majority of the state was in extreme drought conditions during critical times for pheasant chicks, resulting in poor nesting/brood habitat and more than likely a less

No matter the year, walleye are the highest-targeted fish species in the state. 2017 was no exception.



MIKE ANDERSON

A tough start to winter and a prolonged drought reduced the number of pheasants on North Dakota's landscape



CRAIG BIRRE

than ideal insect hatch.

The survey showed total pheasants were down 61 percent from last year. In addition, brood observations were down 63 percent, while the average brood size was down 19 percent.

Roadside counts for sharp-tailed grouse were down 29 percent from 2016, while partridge were down 62 percent.

Good wetland conditions and high waterfowl numbers were again found during the Game and Fish Department's 70th annual spring breeding duck survey.

The number of duck broods observed during the Department's July brood survey was down 5 percent from 2016, and 30 percent above the 1965-2017 average. The average brood size was up 8 percent.

Numbers of resident Canada geese, Western Prairie Canada geese and arctic nesting Tallgrass Prairie Canada geese, snow geese and Ross's geese all remained high.

ELK SEASON COLLABORATION

Governor Doug Burgum and Standing Rock Sioux Chairman Dave Archambault II signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2017 that directed state and tribal authorities on regulating an elk hunting season within the Standing Rock Reservation.

The MOU established elk hunting unit E6 and emphasized the coordination between Standing Rock Game, Fish and Wildlife Department, private landowners and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

Through coordination, the goals were to responsibly manage elk within the area,

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

Terry Steinwand, North Dakota Game and Fish Department director, said the MOU was the first official collaborative management of the wildlife resource in North Dakota between the state and Standing Rock Tribe.

DEER LICENSES

The Game and Fish Department made available 54,500 licenses to deer gun hunters in 2017.

The license total is much lower when compared to 2001 through 2011 when, thanks to plentiful wildlife habitat on the landscape and a string of mild winters, license totals stretched well beyond 100,000.

Yet, considering the number of deer gun licenses allocated to hunters the three seasons prior – 48,000 in 2014; 43,275 in 2015; and 49,000 in 2016 – the increase in 2017 continued a trend in the right direction.

BIGHORN SHEEP

The Game and Fish Department allocated five bighorn sheep licenses to hunters in 2017, after closing the season altogether in 2015 to assess the severity of a bacterial pneumonia outbreak in the population in western North Dakota.

The pneumonia outbreak was first detected in 2014.

The number of once-in-a-lifetime licenses made available to hunters last fall was based on data collected from the Department's summer population survey. The survey showed a total of 83 rams, or 21 fewer than 2016 when agency officials allocated eight



LARA ANDERSON

(Above) A hunting unit for once-in-a-lifetime elk licenses was established on the Standing Rock Reservation through a coordinated effort. (Below) The number of bighorn sheep rams declined some due to a continued pneumonia outbreak that started in 2014 in western North Dakota.



TY STOCKTON



CRAIG BIRKLE

(Above) A unique sage grouse translocation project was launched in hopes of bolstering a population of birds in southwestern North Dakota that has struggled over time. (Below) Jessica Howell, Game and Fish aquatic nuisance species coordinator, searches the Red River in fall for invasive adult zebra mussels.



CRAIG BIRKLE

licenses.

Big game biologists said the 20 percent decline in ram numbers was the result of the ongoing pneumonia outbreak. Biologists said it was encouraging to note that no adult animals within the herds exposed to disease in 2014 showed clinical signs of pneumonia during the summer survey, and the lamb count in those herds improved.

SAGE GROUSE TRANSLOCATION

Sage grouse in southwestern North Dakota are on the eastern edge of their

range, where habitat and weather limit their success and expansion.

Understanding this, and the fact that native grouse numbers have been declining for years without any sign of rebounding, Game and Fish Department personnel in spring moved 60 sage grouse – 40 females and 20 males – from southern Wyoming to Bowman County.

Before their release, a sample of the translocated females were artificially inseminated, with the hope that they'd nest in southwestern North Dakota.

Getting some of the females to initiate a nest, it was believed, would likely anchor them to North Dakota. And, in turn, do the same to hatched young.

All the adult birds moved from Wyoming were marked with GPS and VHF radio devices so wildlife biologists could track their whereabouts.

In mid-June, Department biologists reported that two hens had successfully hatched young and were brooding chicks. There was hope that other adult birds would have the same success.

MOVING MUSSELS

While high water and strong flows made searching for zebra mussels in the Red River difficult, Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel did find just a few attached to a dock pulled from the river in Wahpeton.

Zebra mussels were first discovered in the Red River in 2015. Although it's uncertain how well established the mussel population is in the river, fisheries biologists know that the invasive species still exists and poses a threat to other waters around the state.

On a statewide perspective, Game and Fish personnel did not find any new populations of aquatic nuisance species during open water surveillance efforts in 2017.

LAWMAKERS MEET

Game and Fish Department officials tracked 28 bills, 11 of which passed both chambers and were signed into law, during the 65th Legislative Assembly.

One change was a law that allows residents 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 Private Land Open To Sportsmen program. While this option pertains to hunters applying in the Department's license lottery for deer, pronghorn and spring and fall turkey, only the latter was in play in 2017.

SCOTT PETERSON is the Game and Fish Department's deputy director.

2017 BY THE NUMBERS

- **0** – The number of new aquatic nuisance species populations found by Game and Fish Department personnel in 2017.
- **16** – The percentage rise in the mule deer population in western North Dakota compared to 2016 seen during Game and Fish Department's annual spring mule deer survey.
- **20** – The milestone reached by the Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program after lawmakers called on the agency in 1997 to create programs for landowner assistance that encouraged public access to private lands for hunting.
- **31 pounds, 9 ounces** – The record weight of a common carp Derek Barnick of Tappen shot with bow and arrow at Lake Etta-Alkaline Complex on April 21.
- **57 pounds, 8 ounces** – The record weight of a buffalo Derek Larson of Mandan shot with bow and arrow at Heart Butte Reservoir on May 5.
- **70** – The number of years Game and Fish Department personnel have conducted the annual spring breeding duck survey.
- **255** – The number of acres added to Painted Woods Wildlife Management Area by the Game and Fish Department.
- **450** – The approximate number of fishing waters managed by the Game and Fish Department.
- **600-plus** – The number of student athletes who participated in the North Dakota State High School Clay Target League state tournament in June in Horace.
- **614** – The record number of archers who competed in the North Dakota Archery in the Schools Program state tournament in March in Minot.
- **26,360** – The number of Canada geese counted during the Game and Fish Department's annual midwinter waterfowl survey in January, down from a record 222,890 in 2016. Due to the difficult wintering conditions, only 3,160 mallards (15,000 in 2016) were also counted statewide.
- **737,000** – The approximate number of acres made available to hunters through the Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program.
- **2.5 million** – The number of chinook salmon eggs collected by Game and Fish Department personnel during the fall salmon spawn.

2016-17 LICENSES AND PERMITS ISSUED

	RESIDENT	NONRESIDENT
Individual Fishing	54,534	18,731
Husband/Wife Fishing	13,904	5,099
Senior Citizen Fishing	12,064	
Disabled Fishing	308	
Short-Term Fishing		
10-Day		7,267
3-Day		24,796
Paddlefish Tags	2,700	651
Commercial Tags	17	
Retail Bait Vendor	291	
Wholesale Bait Vendor	32	7
Fish Hatchery	4	
2016 Boat Registrations (Third year of 3-year decal)	7,812	
General Hunting	38,749	45,866
Small Game Hunting	20,121	28,464
Combination License	57,262	
Waterfowl Hunting		23,024
Furbearer Hunting/Trapping	10,654	3,375
Fur Buyer	34	4
Deer Gun Hunting	34,970	175
Deer Gun Hunting (Gratis)	13,466	246
Deer Bowhunting	24,350	2,223
Moose Hunting	172	
Moose Hunting (Preferential Landowner)	28	
Elk Hunting	287	
Elk Hunting (Preferential Landowner)	61	
Turkey Hunting (Spring)	5,584	
Turkey Hunting (Fall)	3,244	
Turkey Hunting (Gratis Spring)	314	
Turkey Hunting (Gratis Fall)	249	
Habitat Stamp	84,635	
Shooting Preserve	10	
Fishing/Hunting Guide	270	28
Taxidermist	219	
Falconry	4	
Scientific Collector	36	16
Swan	1,302	897
Sandhill Crane	2,049	1,923

2017 SPECIAL BIG GAME LICENSES

	LICENSES AVAILABLE	APPLICATIONS RECEIVED
Moose	245	18,432
Elk	399	15,902
Bighorn Sheep	5	13,215

FINANCIAL STATEMENT JULY 1, 2016 TO JUNE 30, 2017

Income	\$36,879,178
Expenses	\$37,383,887

FUND BALANCES, FIXED ASSETS AND LONG-TERM DEBT

Game and Fish General Fund	\$34,314,100
Habitat and Depredation Fund	\$877,055
Nongame Wildlife Fund	\$129,092
Total All Funds	\$35,320,247
Fixed Assets	\$49,292,801
Department Net Worth	\$84,613,048

Watchable

Photo Contest 2017

It's January, which means it's time to announce the winners of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest.

The contest was initiated in 1990 to highlight the state's non-game species. Game animals, like ducks and deer, were added to the mix of eligible contest subjects in 2008.

This year's overall winning photograph, by Nels Kilpela of Dickinson, is of a great horned owl, a nongame species.

Considering, once again, that it's January, the first month of a new year, featuring a great horned owl is fitting, as this yellow-eyed raptor often commits to a new beginning this time of year.

It's in late January, or early February, some of the leanest times of the year in North Dakota, that mature great horned owls initiate nesting in abandoned structures built by other winged species.

These yellow-eyed raptors, with recognizable feathered ear tufts, are one of North Dakota's earliest nesters. They begin this seemingly uncalculated endeavor way too early, as spring, green grass and warmer temperatures are often weeks away here on the Northern Plains.

Yet, who are we to question the seemingly questionable nesting habits of this hardy, year-round resident that's been going about its business just fine for eons.

PATRICK T. ISAKSON is a Game and Fish Department conservation biologist.



Wildlife



Overall Winner

Great horned owl
Nels Kilpela, Dickinson
Nikon D7200
Photo taken near Dickinson





Game 1st Place

Bobcat
Michael Ranum,
Bismarck
Nikon D500
Photo taken in south
central North Dakota



Game Runner-up

Pheasant
Myron Ranum, Bismarck
Nikon D500
Photo taken near Wing





Game Runner-up
Wood duck
Myron Ranum, Bismarck
Nikon D500
Photo taken near Mandan



Game Runner-up
Moose
Kathrine Plessner, Verona
Sony SLT-A65V
Photo taken near Verona



Game Runner-up
Blue-winged teal
Steve Oehlenschlager, Elk
River, Minnesota
Nikon D810
Photo taken near Oakes



Nongame 1st Place
Greater yellowlegs
Kelly Krabbenhoft,
West Fargo
Canon 1DX
Photo taken in
Mercer County



Nongame Runner-up
Willet
Dale Rehder, West Fargo
Canon 7D
Photo taken near Valley City



Nongame Runner-up
Yellow-bellied racer
Karen Seginak, Egeland
Canon PowerShot SX60HS
Photo taken near Hettinger



Nongame Runner-up

Porcupine

Pat Schneider, Richardton

Canon Rebel T5i

Photo taken near Richardton



Nongame Runner-up

Lazuli bunting

Thomas W. Wirtz, Bismarck

Nikon D500

Photo taken in Theodore
Roosevelt National Park





**Plant and Insect
1st Place**

Grass spider
Joshua Kuhn, Beulah
Canon 70D
Photo taken near
Sentinel Butte



**Plant and Insect
Runner-up**

Milkweed
Mike Hanson, Bismarck
Canon 7D
Photo taken near
Garrison Dam



Plant and Insect Runner-up

Swallowtail caterpillars
Kristine Harris, Gwinner
Canon 70D
Photo taken near Crete






Plant and Insect Runner-up
Praying mantis
Lacey Patzer, Martin
Canon 60D
Photo taken near Bottineau



Plant and Insect Runner-up
Wood lily
Kevin Hice, Washburn
Canon 5D
Photo taken in McLean County



Moose Mo

A photograph of a moose standing in a forest. The moose is dark brown with large, velvet-covered antlers. It is looking towards the camera. The background consists of evergreen trees and dry, brushy vegetation. The lighting is warm, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

Over the last decade or more, moose have moved west. Today, North Dakota's highest moose densities are found in the northwestern part of the state.

Move West

Story By Ty Stockton

Moose are on the loose in western North Dakota. From Dickinson to Anamoose, and Williston to

Underwood – and even all the way down to Bismarck – moose are becoming a more common sight on the landscape. But that hasn't always been the case.

North Dakota's highest moose densities today are found in the northwestern part of the state.

The largest members of the deer family were rare to nonexistent in North Dakota in the early 1900s. They reappeared again in the 1950s, and by the 1960s, a small resident population was established in the Pembina Hills. As moose numbers grew, the animals also began to populate the Turtle Mountains and surrounding area. That northeast corner of the state remained the only region where moose were reliably found through the early 1990s.

The first hunting season for moose in North Dakota was

1977, when 10 licenses were awarded to hunters. Since then, the moose population has continued to grow, and the state has had a moose hunting season every year since that first season. In fact, the season has grown along with the population. Since 1985, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department has made at least 100 licenses available to hunters every year.

But that doesn't mean the moose population has grown consistently across the state. In the last 12 years, moose numbers have declined in the Pembina Hills area. Aerial wildlife counts conducted by Game and Fish biologists note that about 250 moose were spotted in that region in 1995, but only two cow moose were observed in the survey areas flown in 2017.

Elsewhere in the state, however, moose numbers are increasing.

Moose began to increase in the western part of the state in the mid-2000s. The Anamoose and Lonetree Wildlife Man-

agement Area, Williston and Kenmare areas all have seen increases in moose populations since then, and the area with the highest moose density is no longer the Pembina Hills – it is now the Upper Missouri River area near Williston.

So why is the moose population seemingly moving west? Jason Smith, Game and Fish big game management biologist, said these 1,000-pound animals are being affected by a creature the size of a single hair.

"The primary reason for the decline in moose populations on the eastern side of the state is brain worm," he said. "As you move west, the risk of transmission of brain worm drops off, and we're seeing that same pattern in Canada."

Brain worm, or the meningeal worm *Parelaphostrongylus tenuis*, is a parasite often found in white-tailed deer, and it's spread through the deer's feces.



The 2017 moose season in North Dakota featured another record number of once-in-a-lifetime licenses. The increase in license numbers was primarily in the northwest region of the state. Game and Fish issued 245 licenses for last fall's hunting season.

TY STOCKTON

Dr. James Maskey of the University of Mary said the worm larvae are picked up by snails or slugs, and those gastropods are then accidentally eaten by ungulates like deer as they graze. In whitetails, Maskey said the worms migrate through the deer's body to the spinal column, and they travel along the outside of the spinal cord to the surface of the brain, where they survive, reproduce, and keep the cycle going. While it doesn't pose significant health issues for whitetails, it may cause death in "accidental hosts" such as moose, elk and mule deer.

Maskey said in those animals, scientists believe the worms don't receive necessary chemical cues to help them navigate the spinal column, and because of this, the worms burrow into the spinal cord, rather than along it; and into the brain stem and the brain itself, instead of traveling along the surface. The worms in the brain and spinal cord, and the resulting damage and inflammation caused by the moose's immune response, cause neurologic problems that eventually lead to death.

The more moist climates in the eastern portions of the state are necessary for the slug and snail hosts of the brain worms to survive, Maskey said. Farther west, the

climate tends to be more arid, and the snails and slugs can't survive – and because of this, the brain worms aren't spread from one animal to the next.

The worms themselves are only about two inches long, and they're thin, Maskey said. "They're about the width of a hair." Yet despite the fact that they're barely big enough to see, they're able to push around one of the biggest animals in North Dakota.

WILDLIFE UNDER THE BRIDGE

Wildlife ranges seldom are contained neatly on one side of a busy thoroughfare. More often, wild animals wander back and forth across a county road, state highway, or even an interstate.

This can lead to wildlife-vehicle collisions, which often result in property damage, human injury and wildlife deaths. And the larger the animal, the higher the probability that damage and injury will occur to vehicles and their occupants.

Near Williston, the 12,000-acre Lewis and Clark Wildlife Management Area is bisected by U.S. Highway 85. This highway has experienced an increase in vehicle traffic over the years, and to handle

that traffic, the road was slated to be widened from two to four lanes in 2016.

To complicate matters, the wildlife crossing this stretch of highway is different than what you'd expect in other areas of North Dakota. In addition to the usual white-tailed deer, coyotes, turkeys and other common inhabitants of the state's outdoors, the Williston area also has a large – and increasing – moose population.

"Widening Highway 85 means there's a bigger barrier for wildlife to cross," said Bruce Kreft, Game and Fish Department resource biologist. "It further fragments some of the most unique habitat in the state. It goes through a 2.5-mile flood plain, with a wildlife management area on both sides, and there's an expanding moose population that uses the habitat on both sides of the road."

And moose are big animals that can cause substantial damage to vehicles that strike them. When a passenger vehicle hits a 1,000-pound animal, especially one that can be nearly 7 feet tall, the damage isn't always limited to the automobile. Accidents of this sort often result in bodily injury or even death.

"The impacts of hitting a moose are pretty dramatic to the vehicle and to the

occupants, and certainly to the moose,” said Kent Luttschwager, Game and Fish wildlife resource management section leader in Williston. “So we needed to minimize that damage as best we could.”

COLLISION COURSE

While it’s a necessary route to move people from north to south and vice versa, the road travels through an important migration corridor for wildlife moving from the western side of the management area to the east, or from the east to the west.

“Fifteen to 25,000 vehicles a day through those flats is, I believe, what we are at or what we were projecting,” said Wayne Zacher, a transportation engineer with the North Dakota Department of Transportation.

With those numbers of vehicles crossing this migration corridor, wildlife-vehicle collisions are inevitable.

“We’ve had numerous moose documented killed in this general area,” Kreft said. “Several moose have been killed, and many, many white-tailed deer. Many go unreported because a lot of times they are hit with semis or larger vehicles, and those trucks just keep rolling.”

COOPERATION IS KEY

A solution was needed to reduce the chances for injury or death to people and wildlife, and a number of agencies had a vested interest in the highway and the land

it crossed.

“The Lewis and Clark Wildlife Management Area is owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,” Kreft said. “The North Dakota Game and Fish Department leases the land from them, and we manage it, but the corps is obviously a huge player in what goes on on their lands. The Federal Highway Administration was involved, as were the North Dakota Department of Transportation and the State Engineer’s Office. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also was involved due to the potential impact it would have on endangered species – in this case the pallid sturgeon. So there were a lot of agencies involved, but we were able to have good discussions and came up with a good solution.”

Zacher said from the Department of Transportation’s perspective, the inter-agency cooperation was positive and productive.

“In order to come up with a viable plan, we had to have an open and honest dialogue, and we had that,” he said. “We went around and around about the size of the wildlife underpass, but we were able to come to an agreement. Having those open discussions was key to that agreement.”

The underpass dimensions measure 15 feet high and 40 feet wide, and the resulting tunnel stretches about 84 feet long under the road. Zacher said that size was decided on after many meetings between the various agencies, as well as site visits

and peer exchanges with Montana agencies to look at similar structures in that state that are being used by wildlife, ranging in size from mink to moose.

The section of U.S. Highway 85 that crosses Lewis and Clark WMA splits habitat used by many species of wildlife, and those animals often travel from one side of the road to the other. Though all the agencies involved in the planning of the wildlife crossing may have had different reasons for wanting a safe way to get moose and other animals from one side of the road to the other, they all agreed that human safety was a main concern.

“The primary goal was to reduce the number of animal-vehicle collisions,” Zacher said. “The wildlife crossing is a win-win for everybody. People in vehicles are safer, and the animals themselves are safer.”

FENCES AND FUNNELS

Considering all the issues in the area, project planners knew a few wildlife crossing warning signs wouldn’t be enough. Signs warning of the possibility of wildlife in the roadway would alert drivers to the potential dangers, but warning signs aren’t always heeded. A fence keeping the animals off the road would only cause the crossings to occur in other places, and it would further fragment the habitat already broken up by the highway itself. And an underpass or an overpass to allow wildlife to safely cross might work, but only



An underpass designed for wildlife near Williston offers moose, deer and other animals safe passage under a busy highway.

if the animals are conditioned to use the crossings.

The solution lay in a combination of these strategies. In conjunction with the underpass, the project included 3 miles of 6-foot-high wildlife fence along both sides of the road.

“(The underpass) is much like a normal bridge that you would see anywhere in the state of North Dakota,” Kreft said. “It is designed specifically to accommodate moose. It is large enough and wide enough that data has shown that it is going to be able to allow moose to pass through it. Although, with that being said, white-tailed deer, coyotes and any other animals are going to be able to use it.”

That’s one half of the strategy. The other half lies in “teaching” the animals that the underpass is a safe way to get from one side of the management area to the other.

“There is also a fence that is associated with it to funnel those animals to the road to try to keep them off the highway and prevent them from getting hit, and to direct them to the wildlife crossing,” Kreft said.

The underpass by itself may or may not be effective in providing a safe means of travel for the area’s wildlife, but the fence is a key factor in habituating the animals to cross under the highway.

The wildlife crossing is a win-win for everybody. People in vehicles are safer, and the animals themselves are safer.

“We needed an area where we had a lot of wildlife use and a lot of wildlife crossing,” Luttschwager said. “But we also needed to direct them to that. And one of the things in conjunction with this project is a high game fence. (The animals) are going to have to follow that fence until they get to the wildlife crossing to cross to the other side.”

The underpass was completed in October 2017, and its concrete floor

was covered with more than a foot of dirt to make the path appealing to wild animals. Though the fence wasn’t finished until December, the sections that were completed immediately started funneling animals toward the underpass and to the smaller three-culvert passage farther south. Cameras were installed by the Game and Fish Department in November to monitor the crossing and to determine its effectiveness. Within a week of the cameras being activated, Game and Fish employees were excited to see a moose disappearing into the tunnel, and judging by the early camera footage, the fence and underpass seem to be working.

“It is a win-win,” Kreft said, echoing Zacher’s statements. “Numerous agencies have come together to try to address the issue of safety on the road both for traffic volume and for animal-vehicle collisions. For us, we are getting an opportunity to get those animals across the road safely. For the Department of Transportation, it is an opportunity for their mission to provide a safe roadway.”

TY STOCKTON is the photographer for the Game and Fish Department.



Trail cameras installed by the Game and Fish Department captured images of moose using the wildlife underpass for the first time in late November.



Dealing with Moose Encounters

The key to coexisting with moose is to avoid confrontations by giving moose plenty of space.

If you see a moose in an urban setting, do not approach it and call local authorities. If a moose is near a school, stay inside until properly trained responders safely herd the animal away.

In a rural setting such as a farm yard, give the moose space and time to wander away on its own, and call local authorities if you feel it is a danger.

AVOID FEEDING MOOSE

When moose wander into farm yards or urban areas during winter, it might be tempting to provide a hand-out if these animals look like they are struggling. But feeding moose, or any wild animal for that matter, almost always does more harm than good. Moose fed by humans tend to lose their healthy fear of man, and they may hastily approach the next unsuspecting person they encounter.

MOOSE AND CROPS

Moose are mostly browsers and do not typically eat hay or other foods meant for cattle. But they are adaptable and at times will eat standing crops such as sunflowers or soybeans. If they hang around in one place for an extended period, they can

cause crop damage.

In such cases, the Game and Fish Department may be able to direct licensed hunters to landowners experiencing crop damage. The Department's private lands program may also be able to provide technical assistance to private landowners to help minimize crop depredation, or work with landowners to develop wildlife food plots specifically intended for depredation purposes. To find out more about crop damage prevention measures, contact the Game and Fish Department at 701-328-6300.

MOOSE-VEHICLE COLLISIONS

In parts of North Dakota, moose are common enough that collisions with vehicles sometimes occur. When driving in moose country, especially in the winter, slow down. If a moose moves into the path of your vehicle, stop as quickly as you safely can, but don't swerve. Swerving may cause you to lose control of your vehicle.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Most people in North Dakota enjoy seeing moose, and it is a good thing that their population is expanding. It's important to remember that they are wild animals and should only be observed from a distance.



DOUG LEIER

A moose wanders through a residential back yard in North Dakota.



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT PHOTOS



BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor



2018 TENTATIVE SEASON OPENING DATES

To help North Dakota hunters prepare for hunting seasons in 2018, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department annually provides its best estimate for opening dates for the coming year.

Dates become official when approved by governor's proclamation. Tentative opening dates for 2018 include:

- Spring Turkey – April 14
- Deer/Pronghorn bow, mountain lion – August 31
- Dove – September 1
- Sharptail, Hun, ruffed grouse, squirrel – September 8
- Youth deer – September 14
- Youth waterfowl – September 15
- Early resident waterfowl – September 22
- Regular waterfowl, youth pheasant – September 29
- Pronghorn gun – October 5
- Pheasant – October 6
- Fall turkey – October 13
- Mink, muskrat, weasel trapping – October 27
- Deer gun – November 9

Equipment Registration Number Used for Identification

Hunters, trappers and anglers are reminded that an equipment registration number, or the individual's name, address and telephone number, must be displayed on all equipment requiring identification.

Identification must be attached to cable devices that are set on either private or public land, and on fish houses left unattended on the ice.

While on wildlife management areas, identification is required on items such as ground blinds, tree stands, cameras and traps.

Owners can generate an equipment registration number by visiting My Account at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov. One registration number will be issued that can be used on all equipment that requires identification.

Fish House Regulations

Winter anglers are reminded that any fish house left unoccupied on North Dakota waters must be made out of materials that will allow it to float.

A popular question this time of year is if campers qualify as legal fish houses. The answer is the same for any structure taken on the ice – if it's left unattended, it must be able to float; if it's not able to float, it must be removed when the angler leaves the ice.

Other fish house regulations include:

- Fish houses do not require a license.
- Occupied structures do not require identification. However, any unoccupied fish house must have an

equipment registration number issued by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, or the owner's name, and either address or telephone number, displayed on its outside in readily distinguishable characters at least three inches high.

- Fish houses may not be placed closer than 50 feet in any direction to another house without consent of the occupant of the other fish house.
- All unoccupied fish houses must be removed from all waters after midnight, March 15.

Anglers should refer to the 2016-18 North Dakota Fishing Guide for other winter fishing regulations.

STAFF NOTES



Russ Kinzler (left), 2017 Game and Fish Employee of the Year, is congratulated by Terry Steinwand, Department director.

Russ Kinzler, Game and Fish Employee of The Year

Russ Kinzler, North Dakota Game and Fish Department Missouri River System fisheries biologist in Riverdale, received the agency's Director's Award for professional excellence during the Department's annual winter meeting.

Terry Steinwand, Game and Fish director, said Kinzler is known for his commitment to his craft in his more than 20 years with the agency. "Russ possesses an incredible work ethic, positive attitude, strong mechanical skills and field

expertise, solid biological knowledge and maintains a great working relationship with various angling groups," he said.

Kinzler was recognized for his role in designing and completing a wide range of management and research activities on the Missouri River System. "All of his duties require an array of equipment and Russ has the ability to keep it all working," Steinwand added. "Often his skills are used in assisting other district offices, divisions and agencies."



Todd Buckley



Aaron Slominski

Agency Recognizes Employee Efforts

North Dakota Game and Fish Department Director Terry Steinwand honored a number of employees with performance-based awards in December.

- Todd Buckley, private land biologist, Williston, was recognized for his efforts working with landowners, deer depredation and many special projects that fall outside the normal private land duties.
- Aaron Slominski, fisheries biologist, Williston, was recognized for his quick and timely efforts in setting up a cleaning site during the paddlefish snagging season.
- Randy Meissner, Gail Mosset, Amanda Anstrom, Tracy Price, Tana Bentz and Tanya Mikkelsen, all with the licensing section in Bismarck, were recognized for meeting the challenges of implementing a new

online services program for electronic licensing, while managing to handle hundreds of customer phone calls, including walk-in traffic, on a daily basis.

- In addition to special recognition recipients, Zane Manhart, district game

warden, Beach, was named North Dakota's Boating Officer of the Year. Chief warden Robert Timian said Manhart's work ethic and professional drive have created a safer boating environment on waters in southwestern North Dakota.



Randy Meissner, Gail Mosset, Amanda Anstrom, Tracy Price, Tana Bentz and Tanya Mikkelsen, all with the licensing section in Bismarck, were recognized for meeting the challenges of implementing a new online services program for electronic licensing, while managing to handle hundreds of customer phone calls, including walk-in traffic, on a daily basis.



Greg Hastings Named Wildlife Officer of The Year

Greg Hastings, North Dakota Game and Fish Department district game warden in Jamestown, is the state's 2017 Wildlife Officer of the Year. Hastings was honored in December by the Shikar-Safari Club International, a private conservation organization that annually recognizes outstanding wildlife officers in each state.

In a nomination letter sent to Shikar-Safari, chief warden Robert Timian said Hastings' district boasts numerous lakes, rivers, reservoirs, wetlands and public hunting areas.

"There are tremendous fishing, hunting and boating opportunities throughout his district, and warden Hastings makes his presence felt by his dedication and perseverance," Timian said. "He has strong communication and investigative skills, an understanding demeanor and makes good decisions."

Long-term Employees

Long-term employees were recognized for their service to North Dakota at the Department's annual winter meeting.

- 40 years – Doug Howie, assistant private land coordinator, Bismarck.
- 35 years – Pat Lothspeich, outreach biologist, Bismarck; and Terry Steinwand, director, Bismarck.
- 30 years – Steve Dyke, conservation section leader, Bismarck; Randy Hiltner, north-east district fisheries supervisor, Devils Lake; Kim Kary, administrative services chief, Bismarck; and Kelly Wike, accountant, Bismarck.
- 25 years – Corey Erck, district game warden, Bismarck; Russ Kinzler, fisheries biologist, Riverdale; Brandon Kratz, south-east district fisheries supervisor, Jamestown; Robert Miller, wildlife technician, Riverdale; Brian Prince, wildlife resource management supervisor, Devils Lake; and John Schumacher, conservation biologist, Bismarck.
- 20 years – Jim Burud, district game warden, Kenmare; Ryan Huber, private land biologist, Riverdale; Janel Kolar, administrative assistant, Dickinson; Scott Olson, wildlife technician, Devils Lake; and Terry Oswald, private land biologist, Lonetree.



Tanya Mikkelsen



Jesse Kolar



Ty Stockton



Jim Job



Micah Ranum

Game and Fish Positions Filled

- Tanya Mikkelsen, Bismarck, filled a licensing specialist position at the Department's main office in Bismarck.
- Jesse Kolar, Dickinson, was hired as the Department's upland game supervisor in Dickinson. He received a wildlife biology degree from the University of Montana and a Master's in wildlife sciences from the University of Missouri.
- Wyoming native Ty Stockton was hired as the Department's photographer in Bismarck. He has a zoology degree from the University of Wyoming and a journalism degree from Colorado State University.
- District game warden Jim Job, Devils Lake, accepted the outreach biologist position in Grand Forks. He has a fisheries and wildlife biology degree from Valley City State University.
- Minnesota native Micah Ranum was hired as a wildlife technician at the Lonetree district office. He has a fisheries and wildlife biology degree from the University of North Dakota.

back cast



By Ron Wilson

Sunrise isn't for another 20 minutes or so, but we can already tell that today, the first full day of the deer gun season, is going to be a good one – big, blue skies, with little wind.

We're hunting public land that has been good to us over time. We've taken a number of sharp-tailed grouse off these prairie hilltops in early fall before the birds wised up, along with a handful of deer, all does, that fade in and out of view as the rolling landscape dictates.

So far, our fall hasn't gone as envisioned. Wildlife biologists soundly tried to temper our expectations from the fallout of a difficult start to winter and a trailing drought, but we were hoping otherwise. Here we are, the 11th of November, and we've yet to kill a rooster.

It's full-on shoot-light now as I trail behind my sons, Nathan and Jack, who, I suspect, are only thinking about shooting deer, or what I packed for lunch. The significance of this hunt, this deer season, is perhaps lost on them as this could be our last together for some time, as the older of the two is relocating out-of-state for a new career, a new life.

Thinking this, understanding the realities of growing children and their want and need to leave home, is a weight I don't want to carry now, but there it is.

When the boys stop and quickly kneel

in what's left of the season's first snow, I do likewise on their heels. Out about 100 yards, standing atop round bales stacked two high, is a coyote facing east, catching the day's first sun.

We take turns watching through binoculars, expecting the coyote to bolt at any time, but for a minute, maybe more, nothing on the animal moves but its thick coat in what passes for a breeze.



RON WILSON

It's a cool sight. While we've yet to see a deer, just old sign in the snow, we agree that the day has gotten off to a good start and we have little room for complaint.

Over the coyote's left shoulder to the north, maybe a 15-minute hike for us, is my daughter's boyfriend, John. I don't know exactly the hillside he's sitting on, but I'm familiar with his view.

A lot hunters would describe it as

drive-by country if there was any sort of road running through the landscape to offer a look, but there's not. While it looks lean on habitat, you'd be wrong. Sit there long enough, often enough, and the number of deer you see can be surprising.

We regroup over hardboiled eggs, string cheese and duck jerky and there's talk, jokingly I think, that I'm the reason

we're not shooting any deer. After hitting a number of my "go-to" spots, my "honey holes," no one has pulled the trigger.

I'm the shuttle driver now, the bad luck charm sitting out the next hunt, driving from point A to pick up the hunters at point B. Their plan is to hike south into some hills, belly crawl over a specific knob to see if deer that were spotted the day before are bedded in the same patch of brush.

What are the odds?

I didn't hear any of the shots. Missed all the excitement which, after getting a cellphone call

and hiking into the hills with drag ropes and a kid's snow sled, come in rushed accounts and excited hand-waving.

Three deer, two bucks and a doe, lie in the snow not far, from what I can decipher from the running narrative, from where they were bedded the day before.

Turns out, the odds were good.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

NORTH DAKOTA

JANUARY 1968

OUTDOORS

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A LOOK BACK By Ron Wilson

1968. Fifty years ago. Pull a wrinkled \$1 bill from your front pocket and you could buy a dozen eggs and a gallon of gas, with change to spare.

While times have changed, some things remain pretty much the same.

Like today, ice fishing was a popular winter activity in North Dakota a half-century ago.

The provided photograph, the cover shot for the January 1968 issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*, shows Daryl Briesse of Bismarck pulling a trout through the ice at Froelich Dam.

Then: Trout were one the state's most popular fish with anglers, in part, because of the establishment of new trout lakes, primarily newly created small reservoirs in western North Dakota. Another fish of choice was the northern pike, which, at the time, had yet to be officially

designated by lawmakers as North Dakota's state fish.

Now: For roughly the last 10 years, the preferred fish species for winter anglers are, in order, yellow perch, walleye and pike. With the advent of dozens of new prairie walleye lakes, and a decline in perch hotspots, the lean in winter is now more toward walleye.

"It's not surprising to see the shift because in North Dakota, nothing stays static," said Greg Power, Game and Fish Department fisheries chief.

Then: A half-century ago, the Game and Fish Department managed about 130 waters.

Today: The Game and Fish manages roughly 300 more than that.

Then: About 77,000 fishing licenses were sold, 9,000 of which were sold to nonresidents.

Today: About 220,000 fishing licenses were sold for 2016-17, 56,000 of which were sold to nonresidents.

No matter the year, or the price of a dozen eggs or a gallon of gas, what lures anglers outdoors in the middle of winter likely remains pretty much the same.

"Here in North Dakota we have a restless breed of people who are not content to spend the winter months glued to the TV screen or card table, waiting for the long winter to subside. They demand active forms of outdoor recreation. Some find it in skiing, skating, predator hunting ... but for the majority of outdoor minded North Dakotans, winter fishing fills the big need," according to the January 1969 issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.