

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT





MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

As I write this, we're still more than two weeks from the first day of summer. For the people who live in North Dakota, I'm guessing that seasonal marker means little in terms of when it's time to get outdoors.

Anglers have been fishing open water for weeks and North Dakota's spring wild turkey season has come and gone.

Game and Fish Department fisheries staff started taking northern pike eggs at Lake Oahe in mid-April and jumped to the walleye spawn on Lake Sakakawea in early May. Wildlife staff surveyed mule deer in the badlands in early spring after the snow was gone and before the leaves popped, which makes it easier to spot animals from an airplane.

My point is, when Mother Nature allows – and sometimes even when she doesn't during our leanest months – the North Dakota Game and Fish Department is a busy place, with much of the action taking place outdoors this time of year.

For instance, Game and Fish staff completed the Department's 72nd annual spring breeding duck survey in May. During this statewide survey, which covered more than 450 square miles, two-person crews counted every wetland and wetland basin that had water along the survey routes. They also counted ducks, noting the species of each.

What's interesting about this effort is that it's believed to be the longest-running breeding waterfowl population survey done on such a large scale in the world.

Mike Szymanski, migratory game bird management supervisor, nailed it on Outdoors Online, the Department's weekly webcast, when he said, "It is a very unique data set and we are pretty proud of what we've got here in North Dakota."

At this time of year, much of the focus from those who enjoy recreating outdoors centers around our big waters, such as Lake Sakakawea and Devils Lake, and the 400-plus district fisheries scattered across the state.

Aside from stocking fish and other work needed to maintain quality fishing opportunities for anglers, there are many infrastructure items that need to be addressed on an annual basis. Such as delivering docks to new lakes, installing grinders at fish cleaning stations, repairing boat ramps, installing new ramps, and the list goes on and on.

Speaking of the latter, plans called for two district lakes – North Washington Lake in Eddy County and Kislingbury Lake in McIntosh County – to get new ramps this open water season.

Again, without belaboring my point, the staff here at the Game and Fish Department works hard on many things that go unnoticed, and some that don't, in an effort to provide the best possible experiences for hunters, anglers and others.

While this agency is one of the smallest wildlife agencies in the country, you wouldn't, in my opinion, know it by the amount and quality of work that gets done.

This effort is something we can all appreciate the next time we are enjoying North Dakota's great outdoors.

Terry Steinwand

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NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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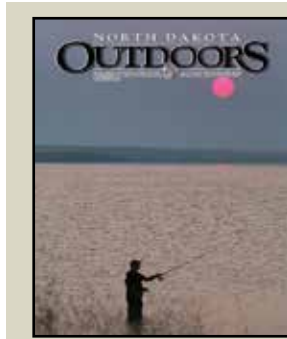
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Front Cover

Fishing for northern pike before sunset on a Burleigh County lake. *Photo by Craig Bihrie.*



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Cole Thompson (left) and Zach Kulla (right), both Game and Fish Department seasonal employees at Lonetree Wildlife Management Area, mend a border fence on Lonetree.

A photograph of two men, Cole Thompson and Zach Kulla, working on a border fence. They are both wearing blue polo shirts, jeans, and baseball caps. They are kneeling in a grassy field, using tools to mend a fence made of wire and straw. The background shows a line of trees under a blue sky with clouds.

THE VALUE OF HELPING HANDS

By Ron Wilson

You can hardly swing a gillnet at a North Dakota Game and Fish Department gathering without hitting a full-time staffer who wasn't employed as a seasonal worker earlier in their career.

By most counts, more than half of the 163 full-time Game and Fish Department employees hired on as seasonal staff during their college years.

Department wildlife and fisheries managers place a high value on this part-time staff because of the number of tasks, many of which go unseen by the public, that get accomplished by young, hard-working hands.

"Without the help from seasonal staff, we as a Department just wouldn't get by," said Terry Steinwand, current Department director and seasonal worker in 1975-76.

While the Department hires both full-time, year-round and summer seasonal staff, the majority work during the summer months.

"It's in summer, with the help of our seasonal staff, when a good portion of our workload is getting accomplished," said Casey Anderson, Department assistant wildlife division chief and seasonal worker in summer 2001. "For example, while weed management seems tedious, it's a necessary task that is accomplished by these people on Game and Fish Department wildlife management areas around the state. Plus, there is always some boundary issues, fences to fix on these properties ... the list goes on."

Just for some perspective, there are about 220 wildlife management areas owned or managed by the Department across the state, totaling roughly 220,000 acres.



Seasonal workers with the Game and Fish Department fisheries crews play a huge role in collecting fish population sampling data on many North Dakota lakes.

ASHLEY SALWEY

CRAIG BIERLE



Kelly Zorn, Department seasonal employee, tags a walleye on Lake Sakakawea as part of a walleye tagging study.

in the water

"Oftentimes what Department seasonal employees are doing is not glamorous work, but extremely important in fulfilling our mission at the Game and Fish Department," said Scott Peterson, Department deputy director. Peterson's first summer as a Department seasonal was in 1979. "Spraying weeds, planting trees, planting grass, fixing what's broken ... all of those duties that need

to get done, but we just don't have the time and personnel to do it ourselves."

Greg Power, Department fisheries chief, was a summer seasonal in 1979 and remembers that he, well, knew very little about what needed to be done or how to do it when he started. He guesses what he felt then is no different than what young seasonal workers experience today.

"I thought at the time, 'What did it get myself into ... this is not what the college textbooks taught me,'" Power said. "This is not the job for you if you think you are going to be sitting behind a desk, instead with fisheries crews you will get your hands wet, feet wet and grease up to your elbows in the shop. The work is critical to our mission and we simply wouldn't get it done without the help."

Much of the fish population sampling data earned by hours of netting fish in many of North Dakota's waters is the byproduct of seasonal sweat and effort.

"They set the nets, pull the nets, take the fish out of the nets and sometimes record the data," Power said. "Depending on where they are with their experience, those who return for another summer or two will lead a crew. These people are critical to our data collection."

Paul Bailey, Department district fisheries supervisor in Bismarck, said the tradeoff for a summer of hard work is valuable experience.

"While seasonal workers are essential in getting our work done because having those extra bodies is extremely helpful," Bailey said, "what we offer out of the Bismarck office is the experience and diversity of working on big waters like Lake Oahe and the Missouri River and many of the smaller district lakes that are also incredible fisheries. It's a great experience if you want to work in the fisheries field."

For the most part, those people who apply for seasonal work with Game and Fish have designs on working with a wildlife agency, or somewhere similar, once they graduate.

"We consider these seasonal jobs as somewhat of a paid internship," Peterson said. "Looking back, when I worked that first summer as a seasonal

on the browse crew in western North Dakota, I think it was important that I got to rub elbows with people working for the Department and get some sort of an understanding of how things worked. Plus, I thought it was pretty good duty to spend the summer in a camper in the badlands.”

Power said he would bet that 99 percent of the seasonal workers Department personnel interview, and hire, are in college or have recently graduated.

“And I would wager that the majority have an interest in working at the Game and Fish Department for a summer or two because that’s what they are studying in school,” he said. “I will have to say that I’m nothing but impressed with the work ethic of those people we do hire. That, and their passion to make this a way of life, speaks highly of the people who work for us.”

Peterson, Power and Anderson all agree their summer stints on the water sampling fish or on land spraying weeds for the Department was critical in eventually landing full-time positions.

“I thought it was more important than who I knew, but that they knew my work ethic,” Anderson said.

Peterson said that mentality hasn’t changed any.

“So, let’s say we have an opening with the Department and we have X number of applicants. After interviewing, there is a two-way tie at the top of the ranking. One of those has a track record with us, is a rock star worker, and the other looks good on paper, but that’s all we know,” Peterson said. “Well, there is your tie-breaker.”

Zach Kjos was hired as a wildlife technician for the Department in Williston in 2018 after working as a seasonal for five years.

“Working those five years was certainly a plus for getting hired full-time,” he said. “The people who hired me had first-hand knowledge of my work ethic.”

Anderson said agency managers don’t look at seasonal workers as simply that, but rather the next generation of Game and Fish Department employees.

“When you get a good one, you want to keep them forever,” Anderson said.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



MIKE ANDERSON

Kevin Frigon (top), Department seasonal employee, with a paddlefish from the Missouri River near Bismarck. Kasen Christiansen (bottom), Department seasonal employee at Lonetree WMA, helps plant a monarch mix on the WMA near Harvey.



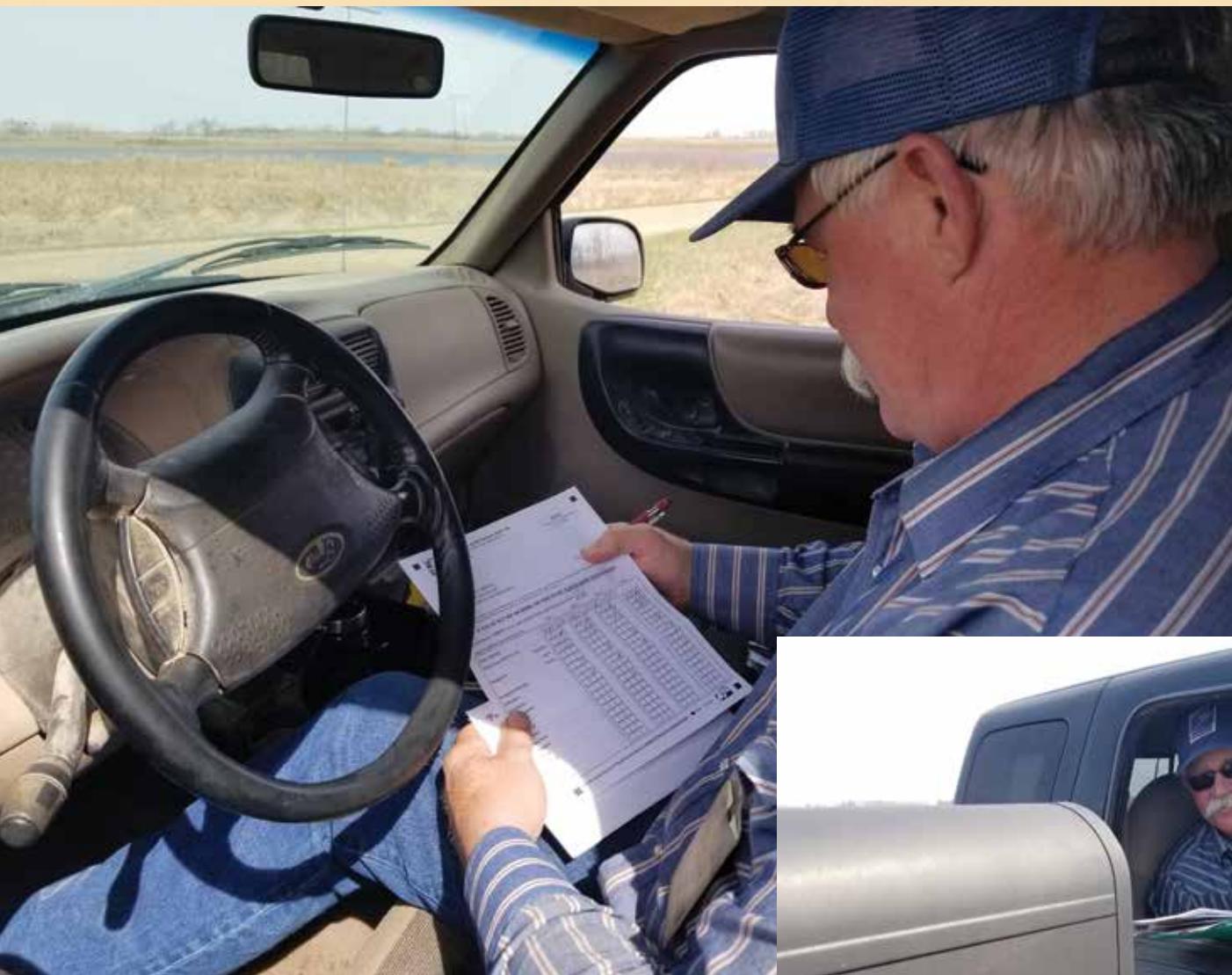
ASHLEY SALWEY



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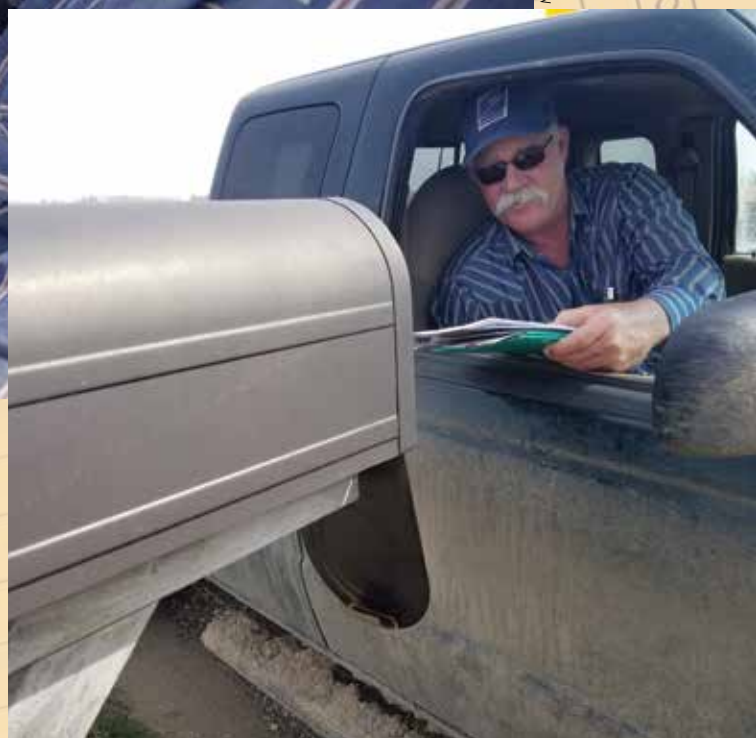
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MIKE ANDERSON

Jeff Trzpuc is a rural mail carrier from Kathryn. Trzpuc has delivered mail for more than 20 years and has helped the Department with its survey during the course of his career.



By Ron Wilson

"The rural letter carriers of North Dakota have completed the April survey of upland game. Covering more than 40,000 miles the letter carriers furnish the State Game and Fish Department with a wealth of information on game conditions in every part of the state ... In addition to the actual counts of birds requested, most of the rural letter carriers add letters and comments, which are greatly appreciated."

While those 60-plus words were published in *North Dakota OUTDOORS* more than 70 years ago, they remain relevant today as rural mail carriers continue to collect observation data for the Game and Fish Department on several furbearer and upland game bird species.

Stephanie Tucker, Department game management section leader, said the rural mail carriers collect data for Game and Fish four times per year.

"Essentially, we're asking them to simply record the number of live animals they see while they're delivering mail," Tucker said. "And they do this statewide for three mornings in a row."

Rural mail carriers across the state have volunteered their time to Game and Fish for decades (not all participate), providing valuable insight into North Dakota's wildlife from the front seat over thousands of miles of dusty backroads.

Jeff Trzpuc, a rural mail carrier from Kathryn who travels about 115 miles per day, has delivered mail for more than 20 years and has participated in the surveys since the day he started. If it wanders near North Dakota's backroads, Trzpuc has likely encountered it.

"Pheasants, squirrels, skunks, coyotes, weasel, mink muskrats ... I like watching the wildlife anyway, so I might as well count what I see while I'm delivering the mail," Trzpuc said.

Tucker said the data collected would be impossible to come by without the help of the mail carriers, and it's all done as part of normal routes, so there is no additional costs to the U.S. Postal Service.

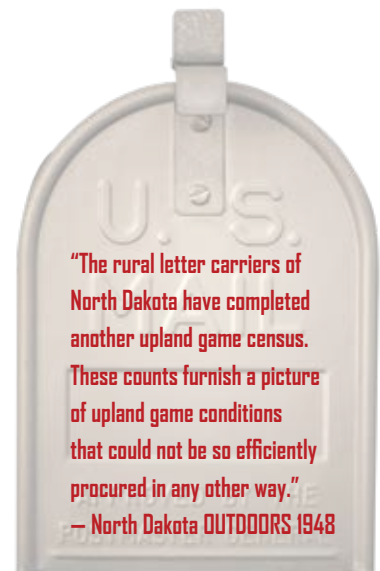
"They collect great, amazing data for us on a statewide scale that logistically, or fiscally, we just wouldn't be able to get otherwise," she said. "We just don't have the money or staff to do this level of a survey and collect this kind of great information."

Tucker said the observation data provides good trend indices, alerting wildlife biologists to the ups and downs of animal populations.

"For furbearer species like coyotes and fox, for instance, we've done research to show that the survey data collected by rural mail carriers is very good data," Tucker said, "and in some cases, it's the only data we get for some furbearer species on a statewide level."

During any given year, rural mail carriers participating in the surveys are doing so on anywhere from 80 to 115 daily mail routes. That means anywhere between 35,000 to 45,000 miles are covered during a survey period.

"The data the mail carriers provide is, once again, valuable, and their long-time cooperation with the Game and Fish Department doesn't go unnoticed," Tucker said.



RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

North Country Trail

NORTH DAKOTA'S OPEN SECRET

By Alicia Underlee Nelson

One of the longest trails in the nation starts in North Dakota. When completed, the North Country National Scenic Trail will span more than 4,600 miles (more than twice the length of the Appalachian Trail) between Lake Sakakawea State Park and Crown Point, New York on the western shore of Lake Champlain.



A North Country National Scenic Trail sign at
Lonetree Wildlife Management Area near Harvey.



ASHLEY SALWEY

Miles of the NCT (top) courses through prairie habitat at Lonetree WMA. Segments of the trail (bottom), this one through the Sheyenne National Grassland in southeastern North Dakota, are nicely signed and easy to find in North Dakota.

But most North Dakota residents have no idea that such a storied path passes right under their noses, attracting outdoor lovers across the country in all seasons. The nonmotorized byway for hikers, cyclists, cross-country

skiers, snowshoers and equestrians is hiding in plain sight, but that may soon change. Just as the North Country Trail is closing in on accomplishing its original 4,600-mile goal, another has appeared on the horizon. In February 2019,

federal lawmakers passed legislation to extend the NCT across the border into Vermont, where it will connect with its more famous cousin, the Appalachian Trail. The NCT is already linked with the Lewis and Clark Trail, which begins in Seaside, Oregon. When all three trails are completed, it will be possible to walk across the country, from Oregon to Maine, then all the way down to Georgia.

The high-profile Appalachian Trail connection may prompt more people to start their own NCT journey. The trek eastward begins just steps from the ranger station in Lake Sakakawea State Park, where a family wearing daypacks rests on a park bench. A large sign emblazoned with the NCT's blue triangle and eight-pointed star crest proudly marks the western terminus. It's the first of thousands of markers and royal blue blazes on signposts and trees that thru-hikers will follow on their



ALICIA UNDERLEE NELSON

journey across seven states.

From its western terminus, the NCT snakes across the central part of North Dakota, following the New Rockford and McClusky canals, passes by farm fields, vast stretches of prairie like Lonetree Wildlife Management Area and the watchful eyes of water birds in the marshes and wetlands, before descending into the lush, green Sheyenne River Valley in the southeast.

Laughter is often audible just around the bend at Fort Ransom State Park, where a popular trailhead welcomes campers and day-hikers. As the NCT meanders east through the Sheyenne National Grassland, the only sounds are the whipping prairie wind, soft lowing of gentle-eyed cows that keep watch from vast stretches of grazing land, the sharp metal clang of gates designed to keep the livestock contained, and the flute-like call of Western meadowlarks.

The trail crosses the Minnesota border just east of the Fort Abercrombie State Historic Site, passing the headwaters of the Mississippi River in the Minnesota northwoods before ambling on past Wisconsin's forests and waterfalls. It skirts the shores of Lake Superior and Lake Michigan, and the sandstone cliffs of Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore in Michigan. It traverses rolling hills and quiet farmland in Ohio and winds through state game lands and the Allegheny National Forest in Pennsylvania and the Adirondacks in New York.

In some places, the NCT is a footpath. In others, it's a gravel road, a stretch of asphalt, a wide, mowed path through a sleepy state park campground or a neatly

maintained walking path through a forest.

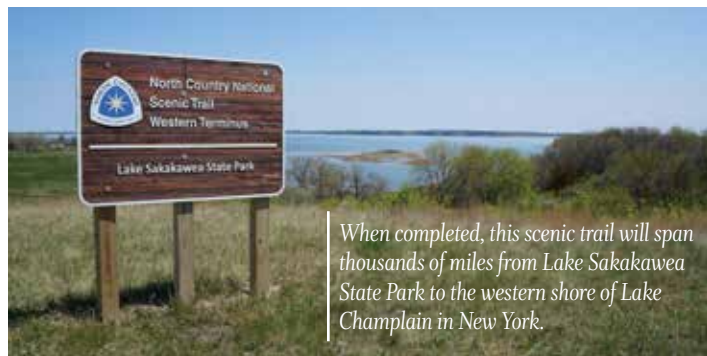
Scott Peterson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department deputy director, was the Garrison Diversion habitat biologist at Lonetree Wildlife Management Area near Harvey back when the NCT was in its infancy. He helped coordinate efforts to mark the trail through the Lonetree prairie.

"When I started attending meetings with the National Park Service and the NCT Association, there were sections of the trail that were certified by the National Park Service, but at that time it was basically a vision or a concept," he said. "The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation partners with those two."

The National Park Service and NCT Association oversee maintenance and development of the trail and help facilitate the complex web of partnerships between homeowners, businesses and state and national wildlife organizations. But much of the actual, physical work of clearing, marking and maintaining the trail has fallen to a cheerful crew of volunteer members of local NCT Association chapters around the country. They are among the trail's fiercest advocates.

The vision for the NCT was drafted in the 1980s. But segments cleared by the NCT Association chapters in North Dakota – Sheyenne River Valley and Dakota Prairie Association – are much newer.

"North Dakota was one of the last ones that started building the trail," said Rennae Gruchalla, a charter member of the Dakota Prairie chapter. "That started in the Sheyenne River Valley group, which is out of Valley City. That was



When completed, this scenic trail will span thousands of miles from Lake Sakakawea State Park to the western shore of Lake Champlain in New York.

back in 2003. The Dakota Prairie Chapter was actually established in about 2010."

Like other NCT chapters across the country, the North Dakota groups have a three-pronged mission – to build, mark and connect new segments of the trail in their state, maintain existing segments and promote awareness about the trail to local hikers. Although the local chapters serve as contacts and "trail angels" who provide advice, water and transportation to the handful of thru-hikers who tackle the entire trail, most trail traffic is from local and regional users. It's a volunteer opportunity that has forged a tight-knit community.

"I am very involved with the Sheyenne River Valley chapter that maintains about 70 miles of NCT hiking trail from the Sheyenne State Forest near Fort Ransom to the Griggs County line north of Lake Ashtabula," said Deb Koepplin, who has served as chapter president, membership director and treasurer and attended 14 national NCT conferences since the chapter's inception. "I plan fun hiking events as well as build, mow and maintain the actual trail."

Both North Dakota chapters offer a steady stream of hikes and networking opportunities on Facebook and MeetUp.com to reach individuals interested in the outdoors. The

Dakota Prairie chapter (which maintains just over 90 miles of trail that stretches from the eastern North Dakota border, through the grasslands to the Fort Ransom State Park boundary), hosts lively pizza and hiking information meetings at the Fargo Public Library, an educational camping and hiking expo at local Boy Scouts headquarters, and offers photography and family hikes. Many first-time attendees had no idea the NCT existed.

"I wish more people knew about it," said Jerry Warner of Fort Ransom. "I wish they knew that the NCT is no more than a few hours drive from anywhere in the state and much closer for most."

Warner is an avid hiker, member and volunteer with the Sheyenne River Valley chapter since 2007. He has helped build and maintain the oldest portion of the NCT in North Dakota, a 4.4-mile stretch that ushers hikers to the state's only registered natural waterfall.

"My baby is in the Sheyenne River State Forest," he said, exhibiting parental pride that seems to fuel North Dakota volunteers of all ages. "There are forested areas as you walk down into the draws along the Sheyenne River, then up onto hilltop tallgrass prairie areas, with beautiful views of the Sheyenne River Valley."



The volunteer effort, which includes working hands of all ages, to maintain portions of the NCT in North Dakota should be applauded.

Alicia Underlee Nelson

Warner has hiked his favorite corner of North Dakota since the mid-1990s. But he fell into his work with the NCT – quite literally – on a hike to that same waterfall trail.

“There were no boardwalks on the stream crossings yet, and one stream in particular was quite wide with the spring snowmelt in progress,” he said. “I opted to hop across the stream on some boulders, but I slipped and fell. That slip prompted me to contact the NCTA folks and tell them that I was OK with doing what it takes to get across the stream, but if they want others to use this trail that a bridge would be needed. Their reply was an invite to join them and that’s what I did.”

And he hasn’t looked back. Warner leads a volunteer program through his employer, Bobcat, that has resulted in over 110 volunteers donating more than 900 volunteer hours to the NCT since 2014.

Most chapter members have stories like this, but they won’t say a word about them. To passersby, the Sheyenne

River Valley chapter’s annual National Trails Day event at Fort Ransom State Park looked like any other summer gathering. Participants, ranging in age from 10 to “don’t ask,” joined campers for a ranger-led hike up into the hills, welcomed new hikers to a complimentary picnic, like the ones they serve volunteers after work days, and paddled down the Sheyenne River in canoes and kayaks. But if you know what to look for, you can read their accom-

plishments at a glance.

“A lot of the shirts people are wearing detail their volunteer hours,” Koeplin said.

On a cooler day, they’d be the wearing vests and jackets awarded for volunteering as well.

“They’re brandishing their accomplishments,” added Valley City resident Stephanie Hoffarth with a grin.

Hoffarth has logged 200 hours of volunteer time – an impressive total for anyone, but especially for a 14-year-old. Her

sister, Marisa, 10, has volunteered 100 hours. Their father, Chris Hoffarth, wears a long-sleeved NCT shirt he received for 400 hours of volunteering.

He slows his pace slightly as he tries to remember exactly how many hours he’s volunteered. “At least 1,000,” he said as a final guess. Then he shrugs and turns his attention back to the trail ahead of him.

Outdoor enthusiasts earn recognition for time spent hiking the trail as well. Hikers are awarded patches for completing the trail in each state, finishing the entire trail and logging a certain number of miles on the trail.

“The Hike 100 is a patch that most members try for – that is hiking 100 miles on the NCT within a given year,” said Gruchalla. “This was started in 2016 by NCTA, and it was so successful that they’ve had it every year since.”

Many North Dakota members will finish the Dakota Challenge this year. The accomplishment honors individuals who also complete all 430 miles of trail in North Dakota within four years.

But just because many of the core members have hun-



A hiker on the NCT in North Dakota pauses to take in a scenic view.

Alicia Underlee Nelson

dreds of miles on their hiking boots doesn't mean that such a commitment is necessary. Chapter members go out of their way to welcome even the most casual hikers. You don't even need to wait for a formal invitation.

"Come to one of our monthly hikes to experience it with a group so you can see where it is more easily and learn more about it," said Gail Rogne, a charter member of the Dakota Prairie chapter (and former chapter president) from Kindred. "They can come and experience it for themselves, too. There are brochures and if they come to our meetings or come to our hikes, they can

get those. Also, just looking on MeetUp or Facebook to find our activities. And you can leave messages. Sometimes if you say, 'I want to go hiking with somebody next Tuesday,' maybe somebody will have that Tuesday available and want to go hiking with you."

The trails are relatively flat and appropriate for all ages. No special skills or equipment, other than good walking shoes or hiking boots, are needed. Group hikes are an especially gentle introduction.

"The hikes are usually no longer than 5-6 miles on moderate trails, so it gives you a start to have fun, meet people and learn how to find our

maps online on the northcountrytrail.org website," Koepplin said. "You do not need to be super fit or a fast hiker, as we do it for fun mostly on weekends on our local trail."

The North Country National Scenic Trail's most frequent users and staunchest advocates hike and volunteer for different reasons. But they all share a fierce devotion to what they proudly consider "their" trail. They'll continue the painstaking work of clearing and maintaining the NCT, mile by mile. They do it because they love it. But they also do it for the ones who will follow in their footsteps.

"It's not only getting people

to know the trail, which is important for future generations, but it's also about getting people out into nature," Gruchalla said. "We always say it's a 4-foot wide and 4,600-mile long national park."

"It also has the potential to benefit all," Warner added. "Who needs a treadmill when you can go for a real walk or run or cross-country ski or snowshoe? Hiking is not for everyone. But our trail is."

ALICIA UNDERLEE NELSON, West Fargo, is a freelance writer who also blogs about outdoor recreation, travel and food in North Dakota and beyond at prairiestylefile.com.

What Bring on a Day Hike

The 10 essentials recommended by the American Hiking Society:

- 1. Appropriate footwear** – Sturdy, comfortable hiking boots or sneakers are a must. Spray footwear with bug spray to guard against ticks before you head out.
- 2. Daypack/Backpack** – This doesn't have to be high-tech, just sturdy enough to carry what you need and comfortable enough for a few hours on the trail.
- 3. Maps and compass or GPS** – Make sure phones and GPS devices are charged and bring a portable phone charger. Carry a trail map so you'll always have a backup on hand.
- 4. Plenty of water** – Always bring more water than you think you'll need and research spots where water is available along your route.
- 5. Extra food** – Light, high-energy food sources like granola bars, dried fruit, nuts, trail mix and jerky are smart options. Pack more than you anticipate you'll need in case you're out longer than intended.
- 6. Rain Gear** – Pack a lightweight hoodie or shirt to layer under a rain jacket. Wearing gaiters, a hat or hood, carrying a trekking umbrella and covering your daypack with a waterproof cover (or a trash bag, in a pinch) will keep you dry. Make sure the layer closest to your skin is a moisture wicking-fabric (not cotton).
- 7. Safety Items** – Cover all your bases with a headlamp or flashlight in case you're delayed on the trail, a whistle to signal your location if you become separated from your group and a source of fire so you can keep warm.
- 8. First Aid Kit** – Pack antibiotic cream, bandages, gauze, medical tape and antibacterial wipes, as well as pain relievers and anti-diarrhea medicines.
- 9. Knife or multi-tool** – Use a knife to cut cords, wood, bandages and tape or strike the knife to start a fire if needed. A multi-tool will contain tweezers, a bottle opener and other useful items to remove splinters, prepare food, drinks and repair gear.
- 10. Sun protection** – Apply sweat-proof sunscreen before you set out on the trail and bring plenty to reapply as you go. Wear sun protective clothing and bring a hat and sunglasses for extra protection.

Learn More

Membership or volunteering are *not* required to join a group hike. Anyone is welcome.

Dakota Prairie Chapter – northcountrytrail.org/dpc

Sheyenne River Valley Chapter – northcountrytrail.org/srv

Events – [Facebook.com/NCTND](https://www.facebook.com/NCTND)
[Meetup.com/NCTHikersinND](https://www.meetup.com/NCTHikersinND)



ASHLEY SALWEY

Managing Fish and Angling Opportunities **IN THE NORTHEAST**

*Story by Randy Hiltner
Photos by Jim Job*

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's northeast fisheries management district encompasses all or parts of 16 counties. Included are several large natural lakes, such as Devils Lake, Stump Lake and the Lake Irvine complex. Additionally, the district has about 55 smaller natural lakes and reservoirs, the latter of which makes up more than one-third of the total.

Anglers should take advantage of the various fish habitats in the northeast district for the diverse fishing opportunities that are provided.

Anglers fish from an accessible pier on South Golden Lake in Steele County.



Although Devils Lake, Stump Lake and Lake Irvine get most of the fishing use in the northeast district, good fishing also exists in the much smaller lakes and reservoirs. This article focuses on the smaller natural lakes and reservoirs in terms of how they differ in fish habitat, fish populations and fish management; what fish management challenges exist for natural lakes vs. reservoirs; and how fishing opportunities stack up for natural lakes and reservoirs.

Some natural lakes could be described as “permanent” or “perpetual,” such as Lake Upsilon and Gravel Lake in the Turtle Mountains. This does not necessarily mean they continuously sustain fish

couple of years, which, if flooded, provide spawning habitat and escape cover for young fish, as well as increased productivity of the water body. Conversely, stable or steadily declining water levels reduce spawning habitat, escape cover and productivity. These changes are more apparent in natural lakes that typically have a more gradual shoreline slope.

The “newer” natural lakes that experience rising water levels provide optimum habitat conditions for walleye, perch and pike. The food chain explodes, starting with microscopic plankton, to invertebrates, to forage fish. This type of system can produce lots of game fish pounds per acre.

Examples of these lakes in the northeast district include Hurdsfield-Tuffy Lake, Lake Coe, Goose Lake, Silver Lake WMA, Lake Addie and Lake Laretta.

Many reservoirs in the district were constructed in the 1960s, so these are not “newer” waters. They were similar to a new natural lake in the first years after dam construction, as vegetation flooded for the first time. However, the fish habitat quickly degraded as runoff from cultivated watersheds deposited tons of topsoil in the reservoirs over time. Water clarity and the amount of aquatic habitat was reduced as sediments gradually filled in the reservoirs.

Because dams are built on rivers or coulees,

reservoirs tend to be long and narrow, creating a relatively steep shoreline. Steep contours provide fewer acres of littoral (productive, shallow fish habitat) areas, as compared to most natural lakes.

Since many reservoirs are connected to rivers, they tend to have more problems with rough fish, such as white suckers, carp and bullheads, that were present in the river before the dams were built. Rough fish are well-adapted for survival in many types of habitat and compete with game fish for food and space in a lake or reservoir. Rough fish can outcompete game fish in the turbid waters until they comprise the majority of fish in a reservoir. Renwick Dam is an example where high white sucker numbers are causing management problems.

Fish management in “permanent” natural lakes and reservoirs is more difficult than in a “newer”



Red Willow Lake in
Griggs County.

life, but just that they rarely go dry. Other “newer” natural lakes were once shallow duck marshes, but are now good fishing lakes, as water levels have risen dramatically because of wet conditions.

In the northeast district, water levels in natural lakes tend to fluctuate widely compared to the reservoirs. In many cases, water levels can rise a lot in a natural lake before flowing out through a natural outlet. Whereas, reservoir water levels are relatively stable because they can fill to full pool in spring, and excess water flows over the spillway. Reservoirs often have huge watersheds that contribute large amounts of water and fill to full pool, even if levels were down the previous fall.

Water level fluctuations are usually good for game fish populations if they're not so extreme. Reason being, terrestrial vegetation often grows on exposed shorelines over the course of a

natural lake because, in many cases, there are high densities of rough fish and/or stunted yellow perch. This is comparable to starting spring planting with a serious weed problem. Fewer desirable game fish will be produced even with high stocking rates for many years.

The presence of rough fish and stunted panfish reduces the game fish potential for that water, but does not eliminate it. Some decent walleye and pike are still found in many of these types of waters, just not as many as if there were fewer or no rough fish.

Red Willow Lake, Wood Lake, Golden lakes and Lake Upsilon have either stunted panfish or bullhead issues, but are still decent walleye and/or pike fisheries. Mt. Carmel Dam and Whitman Dam have moderately high white sucker populations, but still periodically produce good game fish populations. Bisbee Dam is a rather rare reservoir in that there are few rough fish and, not surprisingly, game fish populations have been relatively good for many years even with the reservoir habitat limitations.

The easiest lakes to manage are the “newer” natural lakes with rising lake levels. If there are waters that are going to make a fisheries biologist look good, these are it. In many cases, these lakes are teeming with food like fathead minnows and/or invertebrates such as freshwater shrimp. Many do not have an existing rough fish population, so fisheries managers are starting with a “weed free” plot for “planting.”

Walleye stocking in these lakes is usually very successful, and high-density, fast-growing populations can be established with relatively low stocking rates. Yellow perch often do well when stocked into these lakes as the only game fish species, but are definitely more hit or miss than walleye.

In “newer” lakes, where both perch and walleye exist, perch populations tend to decline over time because of predation from increasing walleye densities (and angler harvest in some cases). Goose Lake and Hurdsfield-Tuffy Lake are good examples where this has occurred. Though there are exceptions, this commonly occurs.

If these “newer” lakes are deep enough to



overwinter fish, and if they remain free of rough fish, they will usually provide some good, long-term fishing opportunities for perch and walleye, but primarily walleye. Lake Coe, Lake Addie, Hurdsfield-Tuffy, Goose Lake and Lake Laretta are good examples.

However, what goes up, must come down. As water levels in these “newer” lakes consistently drop due to drier conditions, game fish populations eventually succumb to winterkill. Fish management on these waters will then be on hold until the next wet period replenishes the water volume for sustained game fish survival.

Anglers currently have many fishing opportunities in the northeast district. “Permanent” natural lakes, “newer” natural lakes and older reservoirs all contain fishable numbers of game fish. For those anglers targeting walleye, the “newer” lakes have higher numbers of keeper-sized fish. Anglers should take advantage of the various fish habitats for the diverse fishing opportunities that they can provide.

RANDY HILTNER is the Game and Fish Department's northeast district fisheries supervisor in Devils Lake.

*Lake Addie (top)
near Binford in
Griggs County.
Anglers launch at
boat (bottom) at
Larimore Dam in
Grand Forks County.*





BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor

Zebra Mussels Discovered in Lake Ashtabula

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has confirmed the presence of invasive zebra mussels in Lake Ashtabula.

In June, an angler discovered a suspected zebra mussel and turned it in to Game and Fish aquatic nuisance species coordinator Jessica Howell. Howell confirmed it as an adult zebra mussel, and subsequent inspections of Lake Ashtabula, an impoundment on the Sheyenne River in Barnes and Griggs counties in east central North Dakota, also found well-established populations of zebra mussels of various ages throughout the lake.

At 5,200 acres, Lake Ashtabula is operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and it offers a variety of outdoor activities such as boating, swimming, fishing, camping and skiing. Howell said it's unknown how these small, sharp-shelled mussels were introduced into Lake Ashtabula, and there is no known method to completely rid a lake of zebra mussels.

"This situation shows how important it is for boaters, anglers, swimmers and skiers to be aware of aquatic nuisance species and to take precautions to prevent their spread," Howell said. "Everyone who uses this lake now plays a key role in stemming the spread of these mussels to uninfested waters."

Because of this new finding, the Game and Fish Department has classified Lake Ashtabula, and the Sheyenne River downstream all the way to the Red River, as Class I ANS infested water. Emergency rules are in effect to prohibit the movement of water away from the lake and river, including water for transferring bait. Notices will be posted at lake access sites and popular shore-fishing spots along the river.



Adult zebra mussel.

CRAIG BIERLE

The Red River is the state's only other Class I ANS water. Adult zebra mussels were discovered in the Red in 2015.

Prevention is the best way to avoid spreading ANS, Howell said, as they often travel by "hitchhiking" with unsuspecting lake-goers.

"Always clean, drain and dry boats and other equipment before using another lake," Howell said. "Also, don't transfer lake water or live fish to another body of water. This can help stop the spread of not only zebra mussels, but most aquatic nuisance species that may be present."

Zebra mussels attach to solid objects, so lake-goers should be careful when handling mussel-encrusted objects and when grabbing an underwater object when they can't see what their hands may be grasping. Visitors should protect their feet when wading, or walking on shoreline rocks.

Zebra mussels are just one of the nonnative aquatic species that threaten North Dakota waters and native wildlife, Howell said. North Dakota regulations designed to

prevent the spread of ANS include:

- Remove aquatic vegetation before leaving the water access and do not import into North Dakota.
- Drain all water before leaving the water access.
- Remove drain plugs and devices that hold back water, and leave open and out during transport.
- Do not import bait. For Class I ANS Infested waters, bait cannot be transported in water away from the river or lake. In all other areas, bait must be transported in a container that holds 5 gallons or less. Fish cleaning stations are available around Lake Ashtabula to dispose of unused bait. Remember that it is illegal to dump unused bait on shore or into the lake. If no fish cleaning station is available, place in a dry container and dispose of the bait at home.

In addition to North Dakota regulations, the Game and Fish Department strongly recommends that all equipment is cleaned, drained and dried every time it is used.

- Clean – remove plants, animals, and excessive mud prior to leaving a water access.
- Drain – drain all water prior to leaving a water access.
- Dry – allow equipment to dry completely before using again or disinfect.

For more information about aquatic nuisance species in North Dakota, options for disinfection, or to report a possible ANS, visit <https://gf.nd.gov/ans>.

About Zebra Mussels

Zebra mussels are dime-sized mollusks with striped, sharp-edged, two-part shells. They can produce large populations in a short time and do not require a host fish to

reproduce. A large female zebra mussel can produce 1 million eggs, and fertilized eggs develop into microscopic veligers that are invisible to the naked eye. Veligers drift in the water for at least two weeks before they settle out as young mussels, which quickly grow to adult size and reproduce within a few months.

After settling, zebra mussels develop byssal threads that attach their shells to submerged hard surfaces such as rocks, piers and flooded timber. They also attach to pipes, water intake structures, boat hulls, propellers and submerged parts of outboard motors. As populations increase, they can clog intake pipes and prevent water treatment and electrical generating plants

from drawing water. Removing large numbers of zebra mussels to ensure adequate water flow can be labor-intensive and costly.

Zebra mussels are native to the Black and Caspian seas of western Asia and eastern Europe, and were spread around the world in the ballast water of cargo ships. They were first discovered in the United States in Lake St. Clair and the Detroit River in 1988, and quickly spread throughout the Great Lakes and other rivers including the Mississippi, Illinois, Ohio, Tennessee, Arkansas and Hudson. Moving water in boats and bait buckets has been identified as a likely vector, as has importing used boat lifts and docks.

Spring Pheasant Count Up from Last Year

North Dakota's spring pheasant population index is up slightly from the same time last year, according to the state Game and Fish Department's 2019 spring crowing count survey.

R.J. Gross, Department upland game management biologist, said the number of roosters heard crowing this spring was up about 6 percent statewide. The primary regions holding pheasants ranged from up 14 percent in the southeast and up 17 percent in the northwest, to down 8 percent in the southwest. The count in the northeast, which is not a primary region for pheasants, was up 33 percent from last year.

"We are still seeing the effects of the drought of 2017 that resulted in low chick survival," Gross said. "Typically, a spring pheasant population is composed primarily of yearling roosters with nearly as many 2-year-olds, and currently we have very few 2-year-old roosters."

While the spring number is an indicator, Gross said it does not predict what the fall population will look like. Brood surveys, which begin in late July and are completed by September, provide a much better estimate

of summer pheasant production and what hunters might expect for a fall pheasant population.

"Barring significant storms or prolonged cold temperatures in June and July, we could be set for a good hatch," Gross said.

Pheasant crowing counts are conducted each spring throughout North Dakota. Observers drive specified 20-mile routes, stopping at predetermined intervals, and counting the number of pheasant roosters heard crowing over a two-minute period during the stop.

The number of pheasant crows heard is compared to previous years' data, providing a trend summary.



Adult ring-necked rooster.

ASHLEY SALWEY



CRP Enrollment Open

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is accepting applications for certain practices under the continuous Conservation Reserve Program.

Eligible farmers, ranchers and private landowners can sign up at their local USDA Farm Service Agency offices.

Practices eligible for enrollment include grassed waterways, filter strips, riparian buffers and wetland restoration.

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, an offshoot of CRP, is also open for enrollment.

Continuous signup enrollment contracts are for 10 to 15 years, with soil rental rates set at 90 percent of the existing rate. Incentive rates are not offered.

Kevin Kading, North Dakota Game and Fish Department private land section leader, said landowners

interested in these programs could also qualify for additional financial incentives and cost-share from Game and Fish.

"Anyone who's interested in seeing how Game and Fish can help add to these practices, can contact a private land biologist in their area," Kading said.

Department land biologists and the counties they serve include:

- Bismarck – Levi Jacobson (701-527-3764) – Burleigh, Emmons, Kidder, Morton and Oliver counties).
- Devils Lake – Andrew Ahrens (701-204-5227) – Bottineau, Cavalier, Grand Forks, Nelson, Pembina, Ramsey, Rolette, Towner and Walsh counties.
- Dickinson – Jaden Honeyman (701-260-3546) – Adams, Grant, Hettinger and Sioux counties.

- Dickinson – Curtis Francis (701-227-7431) – Billings, Bowman, Golden Valley, Slope and Stark counties.
- Harvey – Terry Oswald, Jr. (701-399-9958) – Benson, Eddy, Foster, Pierce, Sheridan and Wells counties.
- Jamestown – Renae Schultz (701-320-4695) – Barnes, Cass, Dickey, Griggs, LaMoure, Logan, McIntosh, Ransom, Richland, Sargent, Steele, Stutsman and Traill counties.
- Riverdale – Ryan Huber (701-527-8963) – Dunn, McHenry, McLean, Mercer, Renville and Ward counties.
- Williston – Todd Buckley (701-770-3815) – Burke, Divide, McKenzie, Mountrail and Williams counties.

Spring Breeding Duck Numbers Tallied

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's 72nd annual spring breeding duck survey conducted in May showed an index of 3.4 million birds, up 20 percent from last year.

Mike Szymanski, Department migratory game bird supervisor, said the index was the 22nd highest on record and stands 40 percent above the long-term (1948-2018) average.

"Breeding duck numbers generally trend with wetland conditions," Szymanski said. "The large number of ducks in North Dakota this spring can again be attributed to the large number of ducks that we have been producing for many years."

Survey results indicate numbers for all primary species were up from their 2018 estimates, including mallards (16 percent), green-winged teal (81 percent) and ruddy ducks (57 percent). All other ducks ranged from 5 (scaup) to 40 percent (pintails) above last year's numbers. All species, except for pintails and blue-winged teal, were above the 71-year average.

The number of temporary and

seasonal wetlands was substantially higher than last year, as figures show the spring water index is up 46 percent. The water index is based on basins with water and does not necessarily represent the amount of water contained in wetlands or the type of wetlands represented.

"Water conditions ranged from poor to excellent across the state," Szymanski said. "Excellent wetland conditions in the south and east quickly deteriorated moving into the north central region, but are fair to good in the northwest."

Szymanski said concerns about habitat remain, as nesting cover in North Dakota continues to decline.

"Waterfowl breeding habitats are under extreme pressure, and expiring Conservation Reserve Program contracts and the continual conversion of



habitat to other uses can only further reduce waterfowl production in the state," he added.

The July brood survey provides a better idea of duck production and insight into expectations for this fall, Szymanski said, though hunting success is also influenced by bird movements before and during hunting seasons, and weather patterns during the fall migration.

Traveling Boaters Take Note of ANS Regulations

North Dakota boaters traveling to or through other states or Canadian provinces, are reminded to check the aquatic nuisance species regulations of their destination, to make sure they are in compliance.

Mandatory boat inspections may be required along highways or at lakes based on destination or route taken.

In general, to ensure compliance, boaters are encouraged to clean, drain and dry equipment.

- Clean – remove plants, animals

and excessive mud from trailers, hulls, motors and other equipment such as fishing rods.

- Drain – drain all water, including bilges, livewells and bait buckets.
- Dry – allow all equipment to dry completely, as an inspection might be failed in a neighboring state if any standing water is present. If necessary, use sponges or towels to remove excess water and leave compartments open to dry.

More information on bordering state and provincial ANS regulations is available at the following web addresses.

- South Dakota Game, Fish and

Parks at sdleastwanted.com

- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources at <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/ais/index.html>
- Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks at <http://cleandraindry.mt.gov/>
- Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment at <http://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/environment-public-health-and-safety/wildlife-issues/invasive-species/aquatic-invasive-species-prevention-program>
- Manitoba Department of Sustainable Development at <http://www.gov.mb.ca/sd/waterstewardship/stopais/index.html>



PHOTOS BY ASHLEY SALWEY

The fallout of a tough winter in North Dakota is often winterkill. To help combat these fish kills and to provide anglers fishing opportunities during the open-water season, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries staff often trap adult fish in one lake and transport them to waters that suffered setbacks over winter. That's what these two photographs depict. In the photo on the left, fisheries personnel in spring trapped adult bluegill from Harmon Lake and stocked them in Crown Butte Dam in the photo on the right. Both fisheries are in Morton County. According to Department fisheries managers, Crown Butte Dam suffered a total winterkill.



Hunting Guide and Outfitter Exam Scheduled

The next guide and outfitter written examination is August 17 at 1 p.m. at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in Bismarck. The test is given periodically to anyone interested in becoming a hunting guide or outfitter in the state.

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

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

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

Application Deadlines

Hunters are reminded the pronghorn application deadline is August 7 and the deadline for swan permits is August 14.

Later that month, archery seasons for deer and pronghorn open on August 30, while the mountain lion season opens on the same date.

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS
PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
WEEKLY VIDEO NEWS BROADCAST

WILLISTON	MINOT	GRAND FORKS
KUMV - Saturday - 6 pm KXMD - Sunday - 10 pm; Monday - Noon	KMOT - Saturday - 6 pm KXMC - Sunday - 10 pm	KVRR - Saturday - 9 pm
DICKINSON	BISMARCK	FARGO
KQCD - Saturday - 5 pm (MT) KXMA - Sunday - 9 pm (MT)	KFYR - Saturday - 6 pm KXMB - Sunday - 10 pm CATV - Saturday - 9:30 am	KVRR - Sunday - 9 pm

ON

2018 WATCHABLE WILDLIFE PHOTO CONTEST

Plant and Insect Runner-up

Painted lady butterfly
Rich Barrios, Lincoln

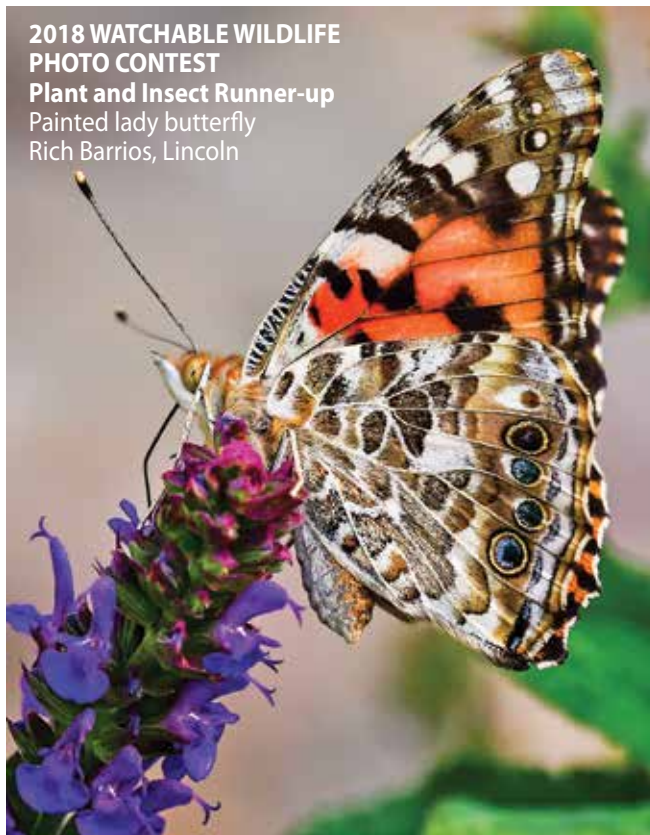


Photo Contest Deadlines in Fall

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest guidelines are the same as in previous years, but the process for submitting photos has changed.

Photographers who want to submit photos to the contest will now go the Department's website at gf.nd.gov/photo-contest. Then it is a matter of providing some pertinent information about the photo and uploading it.

The changes were put in place to help both with ease of submitting photos for the photographer and managing those images for Department staff.

The contest is now open and the deadline for submitting photos is October 1. For more information or questions, contact Patrick Isakson, Department conservation biologist, at pisakson@nd.gov.

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

Contestants are limited to no more than five entries. Photos must have been taken in North Dakota.

By submitting an entry, photographers grant permission to Game and Fish to publish winning photographs in *North Dakota OUTDOORS*, and on the Department's website.

Game and Fish at State Fair

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department will host thousands of visitors to its free Conservation and Outdoors Skills Park July 19-27 at the State Fair in Minot.

Visitors will be treated to an array of activities, exhibits and useful information as the park is open from 1-7 p.m. daily. Pathways to Hunting, Fishing, Trapping and Archery are major attractions where interested kids and adults participate in each outdoor activity.

In addition to hands-on outdoor learning opportunities, the area offers a live fish display, furbearer exhibit and native prairie plantings. An information center staffed by Game and Fish Department personnel greets visitors to the Conservation and Outdoors Skills Park, which is located on the north end of the fairgrounds near the State Fair Center.



Kids in action at the Department's Conservation and Outdoors Skills Park in Minot.

CRAIG BIRHLE

WMA Regulations Prohibit Fireworks, Camping Restrictions Lifted for Holiday

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department reminds citizens that possession or use of fireworks on state wildlife management areas is prohibited.

The primary objective of a wildlife management area is to enhance wildlife production, provide hunting and fishing opportunities, and offer other

outdoor recreational and educational uses that are compatible with these objectives.

Only activities that would not disrupt the intentions of how these areas are managed are encouraged, and a fireworks display is not compatible.

In addition, the Game and Fish Department will lift the Tuesday-

Wednesday no-camping restriction for the upcoming Fourth of July holiday week, which will allow overnight camping July 2-3 on those WMAs that otherwise have this two-day restriction in place.

A complete list of the WMA regulations is available on the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov.

Fur Harvester Education Class

The North Dakota Cooperative Fur Harvester Education Program is sponsoring a free 16-hour fur harvester education class August 6 and 8 from 5-9 p.m. and August 10 from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. for anyone interested in trapping or hunting furbearers.

Students will learn the history of the fur trade in the Dakotas, furbearer identification, tools and techniques for harvesting furbearers in North Dakota,

as well as proper handling (skinning, fleshing and boarding) of furbearers.

Upon completion, graduates are issued a certification card recognized by any state requiring trapper education prior to purchasing a license. For details and to register, visit the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website at <https://gf.nd.gov>, click the education link, then fur harvester education.





SHOOTING CLAYS

The North Dakota State High School Clay Target League state championship was held in June at The Shooting Park in Horace. The Game and Fish Department is an active supporter of the program, providing grants to help the teams get started through its Encouraging Tomorrow's Hunters grant program, as well as supporting the state tournament.

Top three individual varsity and team results follow:

Class 1A Boys – Kordell Kraft, Rugby High School, 100; Blaine Howard, Century High School, 98; and Daniel Murray, Shiloh Christian School, 97.

Class 1A Girls – Kyla Radomski, Rugby High School, 96; Evie Janosek, Thompson High School, 90; and Piper Suhr, Barnes County North High School, 88.

Class 1A Team – Rugby High School, first place; West Fargo High School, second place; and Century High School, third place.

Class 2A Boys – Lathan Stroklund, South Prairie High School, 98; Isaac Pisen, Red River High School, 97; and Blake Didier, Valley City High School, 96.

Class 2A Girls – Cassidy Lipelt, Legacy High School, 95; Emma Jordet, Red River High School, 90; and Jenna Thompson, Mandan High School, 89.

Class 2A Team – Sheyenne High School, first place; South Prairie High School, second place; and Red River High School, third place.



ASHLEY SALWEY

back cast

Off and on since the early 2000s, birders have driven North Dakota backroads in spring in search of long-billed curlews.

The process is simple. Volunteers drive 20-mile survey routes, stop forty times, get out of their vehicles and look and listen for five minutes for birds.

Finding what is North America's largest shorebird (21-26 inches long) that sports an incredibly long, down-turned bill, and that loudly and proudly sort of sings its own name (a sharp *curlee*), isn't so simple.

Like bighorn sheep, pronghorns and sage grouse, North Dakota is the eastern edge of the long-billed curlew's range and there just aren't many of them in the state during the nesting season.

"While volunteers are seeing more birds this year than last, there are some routes, places where we have habitat, that we just haven't seen any birds," said Sandra Johnson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department conservation biologist.

While volunteer birders and wildlife biologists know where to look for these conspicuous birds that have flown countless miles north from wintering grounds to nest, it's not a given for many of us.

Knowing that long-billed curlews are members of one of five families of shorebirds, a good bet would be to at least look near water.

Good luck with that.

Turns out, this brownish bird blessed with such a long bill for probing deep into mud and sand in warmer climates for aquatic invertebrates, nests in upland grass cover, pastures grazed by cattle and the occasional stubble field.

"While we get the occasional sighting elsewhere, the key counties for where these birds nest in the state are Slope, Bowman, Billings, Stark and Golden Valley," Johnson said. "If you want to see long-billed curlews, you have to go to southwestern North Dakota."

Which is a far and unusual cry from the

tidal estuaries, mudflats, flooded fields and beaches where the birds spend winter.

"It's not uncommon to find curlews nesting near cow pies or near rocks, which likely helps to camouflage them because they are nesting in the middle of nowhere," Johnson said.

Coordinating the curlew surveys in southwestern North Dakota is Cheryl Mandich with the American Bird Conservancy. Mandich said that while the long-billed curlew is a species of concern in North Dakota, bird numbers are also declining elsewhere on the northern Great Plains.



SANDRA JOHNSON

"We don't want it to get to the point where you run the risk of losing them," Mandich said.

When you consider the deadly realities of successfully raising young on the prairie and pastures, it's a wonder any survive.

The four or so olive-buff eggs are often easy targets for coyotes, badgers and other predators. And, considering where the shallow nests are located, it's not unheard of for livestock to step on the eggs.

But let's say the adults, a pair of birds that share incubation duties, successfully safeguard the eggs until hatching.

Congrats.

But now the curlew young must contest the heat, disease, aerial and ground predators for roughly five weeks until they fledge or learn to fly. And to further complicate things, only one adult, the male, has stuck around to run interference

until the birds successfully flap their wings.

It's a tough road that's playing out now in tough country.

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



By Ron Wilson



A Look Back

By Ron Wilson

"A bald eagle nest in North Dakota ... could it be true?"

Ed Bry, former editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* and game warden before that, wrote those words in the magazine in August 1975.

His excitement and doubt were certainly honest because it had been many years since an active bald eagle nest had been reported in North Dakota.

"District game warden Floyd Chrest gave me information on a nest in late May and I had no reason to doubt him, yet I couldn't help being skeptical because after working with wildlife in North Dakota for 25 years, I had never seen an active bald eagle nest," Bry wrote.

Bry was in no hurry to check the report on the nest that was located somewhere in McLean County near the Missouri River, understanding that there was plenty of time because the young wouldn't be in a hurry to leave the nest.

"On June 13, I stopped at the landowner's home and was taken to the nest site. I was not disappointed – a

pair of bald eagles definitely was nesting – high up in a cottonwood tree," Bry reported. "After a long wait, I finally saw a young eagle stand up in the nest. It was quite small ... On July 7, I again returned to the nest site. I was worried that a severe storm may have dislodged the nest or the young eagle but was relieved to find the youngster well and growing."

Finding an active bald eagle nest in North Dakota in 1975, and years to follow, was a big deal. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Secretary of Interior in 1967 listed bald eagles south of the 40th parallel under the Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966.

Following enactment of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the Service listed the species in 1978 as endangered throughout the lower 48 states, except in Michigan, Minnesota, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin where it was designated as threatened.

"Possibly there are other bald eagles nesting in the state. Timber along the

Red and Little Missouri rivers or in the Pembina Hills and Turtle Mountains, as well as the Missouri River, could hide other nest sites, but I feel it is doubtful more are here," Bry wrote 44 years ago. "There is a good chance we can look forward to more bald eagle nests in the state in future years."

Bry was right.

According to Sandra Johnson, Game and Fish Department conservation biologist, bald eagles were removed from the endangered species list in 2007, and today there are more than 270 active nests in North Dakota.

"I bet we could be pushing 300 today, but there are just so many that are showing up in tree rows in the middle of crop fields that just don't get reported," she said.

Of note, Johnson said there were just 12 active nests in North Dakota in 2002 when she started working for Game and Fish.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.