

# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA

GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
\$2.00 AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2019



NORTH  
**Dakota**  
Be Legendary.

Game and Fish



## MATTERS OF OPINION



**Terry Steinwand**  
Director

**W**hen you read through the 2019 hunting season outlook in this issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*, there is plenty of good news.

Without giving it all away, some of what we know heading into the fall hunting season is an increase of more than 10,000 licenses for the deer gun season compared to 2018.

While there are a number of things that must align, including assistance from Mother Nature and quality wildlife habitat on the landscape, deer gun licenses are heading in the direction hunters like to see.

In 2015, the Game and Fish Department made available only 43,275 deer licenses, the lowest total since 1978. The climb from that low (49,000 in 2016, 54,500 in 2017 and 55,150 in 2018) has been slow, but encouraging, nonetheless.

Also, North Dakota's pronghorn population is estimated to be the highest in nearly a decade, providing more hunting opportunities, in more hunting units, for hunters.

Additionally, the forecast for the fall flight of ducks from North Dakota this year is expected to be up from last year, while numbers for Canada and snow geese remain high.

In the category of more good news, Kevin Kading, Department private land section leader, reports that acre numbers in the Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program also

continue to increase.

The number of acres in this popular walk-in access program has climbed the last few years from about 730,000 acres in 2015 to 762,000 acres in 2018.

Approximately 791,000 acres will be available to hunters this year as we head into fall.

The Game and Fish Department's private land staff, and the many land-owners around the state who willingly participate in the PLOTS program, should be applauded.

That additional 30,000 acres is certainly good news for hunters. And continuing this trend of maintaining the highest amount of quality habitat in the program as possible is the Department's aim.

By the time this message hits the hands of readers, many hunters will have already dirtied their hunting boots in pursuit of North Dakota's early fall opportunities, while waiting for other hunting seasons to open.

Fall, depending on who you talk to, is arguably the best time of year in North Dakota. The opportunities are many for those who enjoy the outdoors, hunting birds and big game, or fishing our open waters that are promised to ice over in weeks to come.

North Dakota is a special place that just seems to be at its best in fall. Having enjoyed my share over the years, I encourage you to sample, with family or friends, North Dakota's great outdoors in the coming days.

*Terry Steinwand*



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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

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2019 • NUMBER 2 • VOLUME LXXXII

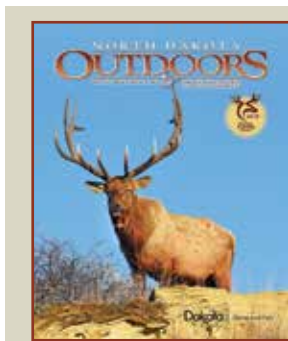
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### Front Cover

The number of elk licenses for 2019 increased in North Dakota compared to 2018. *Photo by Craig Bihrl.*



Official publication of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (ISSN 0029-2761)  
100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095  
Website: [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov) • email: [ndgfg@nd.gov](mailto:ndgfg@nd.gov)  
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• 24-Hour Licensing by Phone: 800-406-6409  
• The TTY/TTD (Relay ND) number for the hearing or speech impaired is 800-366-6888

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. Remittance should be by check or money order payable to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. Indicate if subscription is new or renewal. 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.



# 2019 HUNTING SEASON OUTLOOK

By Jeb Williams

For those hunters fortunate enough to draw a mule deer license in the badlands, the outlook for a quality hunt is high.

MIKE ANDERSON

Summer has come and gone. There was a time when I would wish away the 90-degree summer days to get to the cooler fall weather, when mosquito spray and sunscreen are no longer required.

Yet, as I get older, I no longer do this, no matter the season, because summer disappears quickly enough on its own. Unfortunately, so does fall. I'm now at the point where I would gladly stop the clock to prevent the days, months, seasons and years from racing by.

Both of my daughters have youth deer tags this year, another sign that time is passing, and that they are growing up too fast. It doesn't seem that long ago that I was dropping them off at their first day of school.

Anyway, time flies.

Excluding the north central portion of North Dakota, rain was plentiful this summer, and the countryside looks fantastic because of it. There is an abundance of vegetation for livestock and wildlife, crops look wonderful and there are plenty of insects, a must-have food source for young game

birds the first several weeks after hatching.

As always in North Dakota, there are some challenges, with a few highlights mixed in. For example:


## **Chronic Wasting Disease**

North Dakota opened a new chapter in its CWD book last year when the disease was found in the northwestern part of the state. This didn't come as a total surprise as Game and Fish Department wildlife managers were contacted a year prior by Saskatchewan officials about a deer that tested positive for CWD just 7 miles north of Portal.

In addition, testing efforts in Montana also revealed several CWD positive deer in the northeast corner of the state and farther west along the Canadian border.

To reduce the spread of CWD, the Game and Fish Department will manage deer at a lower density, and has implemented a baiting ban and carcass transportation restrictions. These measures are all consistent with how we have dealt with CWD in unit 3F2 since 2009.





The goal is to keep the prevalence of CWD at a low level in North Dakota. Anytime we can minimize the amount of time deer spend congregated, such as around bait piles, will help reduce the potential spread as the prions that cause CWD are believed to be spread through saliva, urine and feces.

Unfortunately, it doesn't appear that live animals are the only concern to spreading CWD. Transporting harvested, CWD-positive animals and disposing of their carcasses is also believed to be a method of contamination because prions remain on the landscape for an extended period. Tissue from the central nervous and lymph systems are particularly concerning, which is why it is important to leave the head and spinal column in the area where deer are harvested.

Through education and cooperation from hunters, the Game and Fish Department is encouraged it will achieve its goal of keeping CWD at a low prevalence.

### **Western Elk Research**

While North Dakota isn't known as an elk hunting destination, the opportunity and experience for residents to hunt this big game animal is cherished. To be able to hunt and harvest an elk in your home state is an opportunity that approximately 20,000 residents look forward to each spring when they apply in the Department's competitive lottery.

Elk in western North Dakota have expanded their range and big game biologists are curious to learn more about their movements, preferred habitats and improving survey protocol for annual monitoring. In a cooperative effort between the Game and Fish Department and the University of Montana, work crews collared 90 elk in January to begin gathering data.

To date, more than 150,000 GPS collar location points have been collected from collared elk in the northern and southern badlands and eastern Montana. While the study is a long way from completion, the movement data is interesting and reaffirms the challenge the Department has in managing elk. The research and findings will only improve the Department's goal of managing elk within the capacity of available habitat, landowner tolerance, while providing elk hunting opportunities for the public.

### **Private Land Open To Sportsmen**

The Game and Fish Department's PLOTS program experienced an increase in the number of acres enrolled in the walk-in access hunting program, which is good news. Unfortunately, North Dakota's landscape, PLOTS tracts included, is not dotted with large tracts of Conservation Reserve Program acres like it once was. The CRP program fulfilled both the habitat and public access component quite well under our private land initiative.

While the PLOTS program is nosing near 800,000 acres, Department personnel often wonder if they could do more for both wildlife and access. What if a program focused solely on wildlife by cost-sharing with interested landowners and didn't require access? The Department's existing model will work with any interested landowner, on any habitat project, but does require public access.

We know there are some landowners out there who already do great things for wildlife, and would do more, if the access component wasn't required. We also understand that many people would not be comfortable with Game and Fish using hunter dollars on projects where the public isn't afforded guaranteed access.

Agency officials hope to visit with the public about this option at upcoming advisory board meetings to generate the discussion on the pros and cons of this type of program. As you are hunting this fall, give it some thought. Drop me a note. Give me a call. We want to hear from you as we move forward.

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

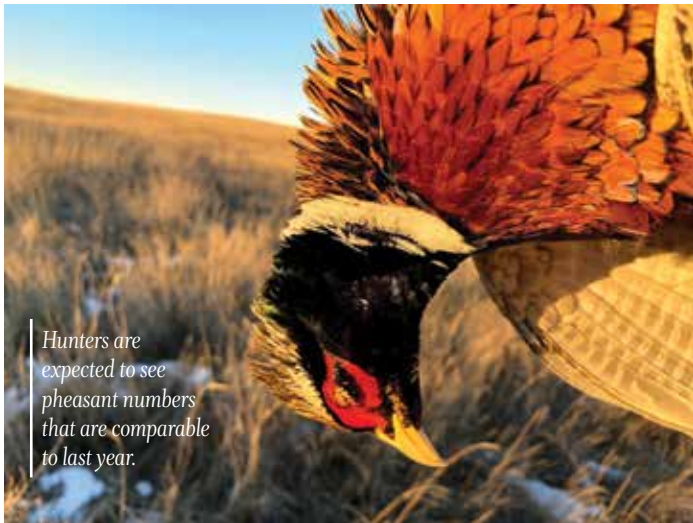
## **Notable Small Game, Waterfowl and Furbearer Regulations**

North Dakota's 2019 small game, waterfowl and furbearer regulations and most season structures are similar to last year.

Noteworthy items include:

- Opening day for ducks, geese, coots and mergansers for North Dakota residents is September 21. Nonresidents may begin hunting waterfowl in North Dakota September 28.
- The daily limit on pintails is reduced from two to one.
- River otter season limit is increased from 15 to 20.
- The fisher trapping season is expanded almost state-wide, except for Bottineau and Rolette counties, which remain closed.
- The tree squirrel season is extended to February 29.
- Veterans and members of the Armed Forces (including National Guard and Reserves) on active duty, who possess a resident hunting license, may hunt waterfowl September 14-15.
- The prairie chicken and sage grouse seasons will remain closed due to low populations.
- In accordance with state law, nonresidents are not allowed to hunt on Game and Fish Department wildlife management areas or Private Land Open To Sportsmen areas from October 12-18.

Hunters and trappers can find the North Dakota 2019-20 Hunting and Trapping Guide – which includes upland game, migratory game bird and furbearer/trapping regulations and other information – by visiting the state Game and Fish Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). Printed guides are available at vendor locations.



Hunters are expected to see pheasant numbers that are comparable to last year.

BRIAN SHAFFER

## UPLAND AND SMALL GAME

### Ring-necked Pheasants

**Opens:** Oct. 12

**Closes:** Jan. 5, 2020

**Daily Limit:** 3

**Possession Limit:** 12

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

Pheasants in North Dakota were treated with above average snowfall and below average temperatures for most of last winter. However, results of the spring crowing count survey showed higher numbers of breeding roosters throughout most of the traditional pheasant range. The number of roosters heard calling was up anywhere from 14-16 percent throughout North Dakota's good pheasant range. This was not a surprise, as last summer's reproduction led to a slight increase in the late summer roadside counts.

Cover for nesting hens was average in spring due to timely spring rains and residual cover. Those timely rains continued into summer and all of North Dakota was green through late July. Areas in the southwestern part of the state experienced multiple severe weather events, which may translate to pockets of low densities of pheasants due to chick mortality.

At the time of this writing, Game and Fish biologists were still conducting summer roadside brood counts.

most of the state should have good production, so hunters need to be mobile and willing to move to different locations to find some good pheasant hunting opportunities.

*Rodney Gross,  
Upland Game  
Management  
Biologist*

### Wild Turkeys

**Opens:** Oct. 12

**Closes:** Jan. 5, 2020

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

The turkey population in many of the state's hunting units has been higher than normal the past few years due to increased production in the western half of the state.

Last year, conditions were improved from the drought in 2017. Turkey production was good last spring, so fall numbers were

higher in parts of the state.

In spring 2019, conditions were favorable for an average hatch in the western part of the state. The eastern part of the state has seen declining numbers of birds the last few years in response to the loss of quality turkey habitat.

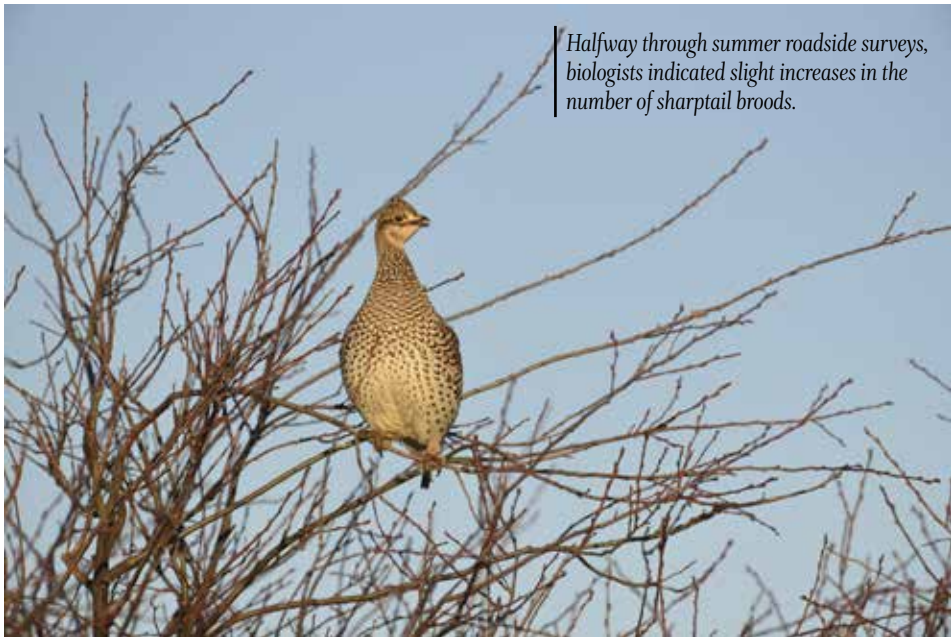
Early reports indicate good numbers of turkey broods on the ground in the west. Department biologists expect a small uptick in turkey production this year in this area. Fall wild turkey licenses were reduced slightly in an attempt to turn turkey numbers around and improve hunter success, mainly focusing on shifting licenses from the eastern part of the state to the west. It's anticipated the central and west central parts of the state along river



Wildlife biologists expect some improvements in turkey production in parts of the state.

CRAIG BIRRE





Halfway through summer roadside surveys, biologists indicated slight increases in the number of sharptail broods.

LARA ANDERSON

corridors will provide some of the better turkey hunting opportunities in North Dakota this fall.

Rodney Gross

### Ruffed Grouse

**Opens:** Sept. 14

**Closes:** Jan. 5, 2020

**Daily Limit:** 3

**Possession Limit:** 12

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

Ruffed grouse populations occur in the Turtle Mountains in the north central part of the state and in the Pembina Hills in the northeast. They are typically found in aspen forests with multi-aged stands of trees.

In 2019, spring drumming counts showed mixed results. Spring surveys showed a 41 percent decrease in the Turtle Mountains, but nearly four times more grouse were heard drumming in the Pembina Hills this year.

Once again, for anyone looking to key in on ruffed grouse, it's recommended that hunters look for areas with quaking aspen stands that provide areas of young, densely packed shoots mixed with areas of large mature trees.

*Jesse Kolar, Upland Game Management Supervisor, Dickinson*

### Sharp-tailed Grouse

**Opens:** Sept. 14

**Closes:** Jan. 5, 2020

**Daily Limit:** 3

**Possession Limit:** 12

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

Sharp-tailed grouse harvest in 2018 remained near 20-year lows. Unfortunately, the 2018 hunter reports and 2019 spring surveys have only shown slight increases since the drastic population decline in 2017.

Nesting conditions were good for 2019. This spring was the first since the drought of 2017 where the state had tall residual vegetation and promising nesting conditions. Additionally, there were not widespread severe storms during the June-July nesting and brood rearing period. So far, during the first half of Department brood surveys, biologists have observed slight increases in the number of sharptail broods, but no increase in average brood size (4.6 chicks per brood). Sharptail broods are observed more frequently later in the brood survey period (late August), so a better fall forecast will be available when results of summer roadside counts are released in early September.

Currently, the highest sharptail densities occur in our management district that follows the Missouri River from Montana to South Dakota. The lowest densities have been in the far eastern part of the state.

Hunters should be aware of two areas closed to sharptail hunting: an area west of Grand Forks and an area around the Sheyenne National Grasslands. (Maps of areas closed to sharptail hunting are found in the North Dakota 2019-20 Hunting and Trapping Guide on the Department's website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).)



The North Dakota Game and Fish Department owns or manages more than 200 wildlife management areas in the state.

CRAIG BIRLE

Once again, hunters are encouraged to send in grouse and Hungarian partridge wings from harvested birds to help biologists further assess production for 2019. Since it's predicted harvest will be low, it's hoped that hunters who have not submitted wings in the past will help in the wing collection effort. Hunters can request prepaid wing envelopes on the Department's website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

*Jesse Kolar*

### Hungarian Partridge

**Opens:** Sept. 14

**Closes:** Jan. 5, 2020

**Daily Limit:** 3

**Possession Limit:** 12

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

In the 1980s and early 1990s, Hungarian partridge were plentiful in North Dakota, but as farming practices changed and weather patterns shifted from a dry to a predominately wet cycle, partridge populations responded negatively.

Over the past five years, North Dakota's partridge population has continued to decline. Hunters will most likely see reduced partridge numbers compared to last year due to below

average reproduction in response to a wet spring. Biologists have observed smaller partridge broods this year compared to summer 2018.

Partridge respond favorably to drier conditions and it's hoped that this will only be a quick depression and the Hun population will rebound. Partridge are a bird that hunters primarily harvest while pursuing sharp-tailed grouse or pheasants. Hunters should keep a look out for areas such as abandoned farmsteads and native prairie on the edge of small grain crops. Pockets of decent hunting may be found in these areas, but hunters will need to spend some time in the mornings scouting potential areas.

*Rodney Gross*



| Fox squirrel.

CRAIG BIRKLE

### Tree Squirrels

**Opens:** Sept. 14

**Closes:** Feb. 29, 2020

**Daily Limit:** 4

**Possession Limit:** 12

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

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

## BIG GAME

### White-tailed Deer

**Archery Opens:** Aug. 30

**Archery Closes:** Jan. 5, 2020

**Regular Gun Season Opens:** Nov. 8

**Regular Gun Season Closes:** Nov. 24

**Muzzleloader Opens:** Nov. 29

**Muzzleloader Closes:** Dec. 15

Game and Fish made available 65,500 licenses for the 2019 hunting season, an increase 10,350 from 2018.

Population and harvest data indicate the state's deer population is stable to increasing, but still below management goals in most eastern hunting units. Consequently, there was a moderate increase in deer licenses allocated in 2019, to increase hunting opportunities while continuing to encourage population growth. The statewide deer gun hunter success rate in 2018 was 64 percent, a little higher than 2017 (61



| Just 603 whitetail buck licenses were made available for the hard-to-draw muzzleloader season in 2019.

CRAIG BIRKLE



percent), and below the Department goal of 70 percent.

Because deer tested positive for chronic wasting disease in hunting units 3A1 and 3B1, deer management strategies were altered in those and surrounding units. The goal is to minimize the CWD prevalence rate and reduce the spread of the disease outside those two units. Therefore, a more aggressive harvest strategy was applied in the northwestern part of the state.

High quality deer habitat is not as abundant as in the past, which limits the potential for population recovery. For example, deer numbers in hunting units 2E and 2C in northeastern North Dakota have not responded to more favorable winter weather conditions and reduced harvest. These hunting units have lost approximately 60 percent of CRP grass cover and nearly 400 acres of trees.

Winter aerial surveys were generally good to excellent throughout most of the state, allowing 31 of the 32 hunting units with monitoring blocks to be flown. In terms of severity, the winter of 2018-19 was a mixed bag. Conditions in most of the state were moderate, however, the southeastern portion of the state received some late winter snow causing prolonged winter conditions.

Deer numbers were stable in Slope, Missouri River, Turtle Mountains, Badlands and Souris/Des Lacs management units; increasing in Coteau, Sheyenne/James, Pembina Hills, and Red River management units; and decreasing in the Devils Lake management unit.

The 2019 spring mule deer index declined by 20 percent from 2018, but remains 14 percent above the long-term average. Mule deer densities in the badlands are above the long-term average, with localized areas above landowner tolerance levels.

A conservative management approach will continue for mule deer in the badlands for 2019; antlered

licenses were increased by 150 and antlerless licenses were increased by 200. Mule deer densities increased by 34 percent in hunting unit 4A, allowing Game and Fish to issue antlerless mule deer licenses in that unit for the first time since 2011.

A summary of deer licenses for 2019:

- Any-antlered licenses increased by 3,150.
- Any-antlerless licenses increased by 4,100.
- Antlered white-tailed deer licenses increased by 700.
- Antlerless white-tailed deer licenses increased by 1,250.
- Antlered mule deer licenses increased by 450.
- Antlerless mule deer licenses increased by 700.
- 1,206 muzzleloader licenses available in 2019 – 603 antlered white-tailed deer licenses and 603 antlerless white-tailed deer licenses. This is an increase of 184 muzzleloader licenses from 2018.
- 305 “I” licenses available for the youth deer hunting season, up 45 licenses from 2018. The licenses are limited in number for units 3B1, 3B2, and 4A-4F, and are valid for any deer. There are unlimited “H” youth deer hunting licenses that are valid for any deer statewide, except mule deer bucks in the above restricted units.
- 607 nonresident any-deer archery licenses available for 2019, an increase of 105 from 2018. The number of nonresident any-deer archery licenses will increase to 780 in 2020.

Landowners interested in having more

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

*Bill Jensen, Big Game Management Biologist, Bismarck*

## Mule Deer

**Archery Opens:** Aug. 30

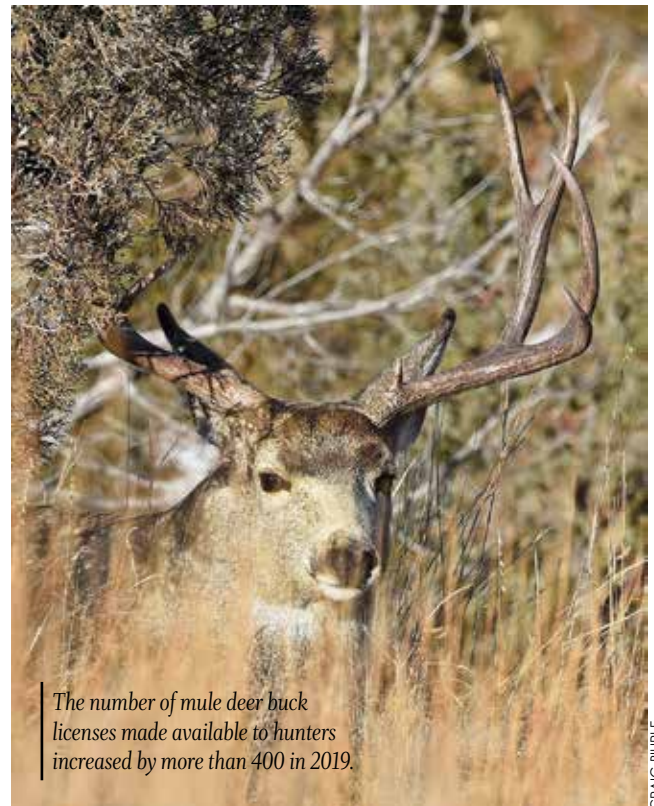
**Archery Closes:** Jan. 5, 2020

**Regular Gun Season Opens:** Nov. 8

**Regular Gun Season Closes:** Nov. 24

Mule deer in North Dakota's badlands continue to show signs of recovery following the severe winters of 2008-09 through 2010-11, which resulted in deer numbers declining by nearly 50 percent from population levels in 2007. Mule deer densities remain high in 2019, although lower than 2018. The 2019 spring index was 20 percent lower than 2018, but 14 percent above the long-term average.

The mule deer population increase is attributed to no harvest of antlerless mule deer in the badlands during the 2012-16 hunting seasons, more moderate winter conditions, and



The number of mule deer buck licenses made available to hunters increased by more than 400 in 2019.

CRAIG BIRKLE

Following a slight increase in pronghorn numbers, two more hunting units were opened in 2019.



LARA ANDERSON

improved fawn production in 2013-18. Fawn production was highest in 2014 and 2016 with fawn-to-doe ratios of 95 and 90 fawns per 100 does, respectively.

A stable mule deer population will mean more hunting opportunities this fall. There were 3,050 antlered mule deer licenses available in 2019, an increase of 450 from 2018. Antlerless mule deer licenses also increased from 1,450 to 2,150 in 2019.

Much of the license increase was in hunting units 3B1 and 3B2 in response to a deer that tested positive for chronic wasting disease in hunting unit 3B1. All mule deer units have antlerless licenses this year. This is the first year since 2011 that antlerless licenses were issued in hunting unit 4A.

A mule deer buck license remains one of the most difficult licenses to draw, but for those lucky hunters, it should result in a high-quality hunt. Hunter success for mule deer buck hunters was 81 percent in 2018.

While another year of a stable to increasing population is encouraging, mule deer in the badlands face many challenges, such as encroachment of juniper in mule deer habitat, direct and indirect habitat loss due to energy development, predators and weather conditions.

*Bruce Stillings, Big Game Management Supervisor, Dickinson*

### Pronghorn

**Archery Only Opens:** Aug. 30

**Archery Only Closes:** Sept. 22

**Gun/Archery Season Opens:** Oct. 4

**Gun/Archery Season Closes:** Oct. 20

North Dakota hunters will have more opportunities to hunt pronghorn this year due to a slight population increase.

Biologists conducted aerial surveys in early July and found that the number of pronghorn in the state increased by 4 percent from last year. The population increased to just over 9,800 animals, which is the highest estimate since 2009.

Pronghorn have slowly recovered since 2013, following the severe winters of 2008-09 through 2010-11, which resulted in numbers declining by 75 percent. A combination of milder winter conditions since 2010-11, closed seasons from 2010-13, and improved fawn production and survival since 2013 have resulted in the population reaching a level that is able to support a higher harvest this fall

Game and Fish will continue a conservative harvest strategy to provide hunting opportunities, while encouraging population growth. In 2019, 1,330 licenses were allocated, or 255 more

than in 2018. Twelve hunting units – 1A, 1D, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4C, 5A, 6A, 7A, and 10A – are open this fall, two more than 2018. Hunting unit 1D and 10A are open for the first time since 2009.

Pronghorn have also increased to a level in hunting unit 4A where doe/fawn licenses were issued to address areas of high pronghorn density and provide additional hunting opportunities. Hunters who drew a lottery license can use it during the archery season from August 30-September 22, or during the rifle season October 4-October 20, using legal firearms or archery equipment.

Last year's season was successful, with 976 hunters harvesting 792 pronghorn for a success rate of 81 percent. The harvest consisted of 761 adult bucks, 28 does and three fawns. Hunters should expect similar success this year.

*Bruce Stillings*

### Bighorn Sheep

*For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or the 2019 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.*

The Department's spring bighorn sheep survey, completed by recounting lambs in March, revealed a minimum of 283 bighorn sheep in western North Dakota, up 7 percent from 2017 and equal to the five-year average.

Biologists counted 84 rams, 161 ewes and 38 lambs. Not included are approximately 20 bighorns in the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

The increase in the 2018 count reflects lessening effects of bacterial pneumonia detected in 2014. The northern badlands population increased 9 percent from 2017 and was the second highest count on record. The southern badlands population declined again to the lowest level since 1999.

The total count of adult rams declined in 2018, but the number of



adult ewes increased. Most encouraging was the significant increase in the lamb count and recruitment rate following record lows in 2016 and 2017.

Fortunately, annual survival rates of adult bighorns are similar to those prior to the die-off and lamb survival is improving, which could indicate the population is becoming somewhat resilient to the deadly pathogens first observed in 2014. The next few years will be important in determining if the state's population shows signs of recovering from the disease outbreak, or if the pathogens are likely to persist and cause a long-term population decline.

Four of 15 adult bighorns tested for the deadly pathogens last winter were positive.

A bighorn sheep hunting season is tentatively scheduled to open in 2019, unless there is a recurrence of significant adult mortality from bacterial pneumonia. The status of the bighorn sheep season will be determined September 1, after the summer population survey is completed.

Game and Fish issued three licenses in 2018 and all hunters were successful in harvesting a ram.

**Brett Wiedmann, Big Game Management Biologist, Dickinson**

## Moose

*For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or the 2019 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.*

The 2019 North Dakota moose season will again include a record number of once-in-a-lifetime licenses. The increase in license numbers is primarily for the northwest region of the state in moose management units M9, M10 and M11, with additional any-moose and antlerless licenses.

Moose continue to thrive in northwest North Dakota, but numbers remain low in historical hunting units in the Turtle Mountains, Pembina Hills and along the Red River corridor. Moose unit M1C, located in the Pembina Hills

region has been closed since 2006 and will remain closed again this year. Moose unit M4, which encompasses the Turtle Mountains, was closed in 2013 and will also remain closed this fall.

Game and Fish issued 475 licenses for 2019. This is an increase from 330 licenses in 2018. Expectations for the season are high as success for moose hunters historically runs above 90 percent.

**Jason Smith, Big Game Management Biologist, Jamestown**

## Elk

*For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or the 2019 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.*

North Dakota's 2019 elk season features 474 licenses, which is an increase from 2018. The primary increase in licenses was for elk units E1E, E1W and E3. This was in response to growing elk populations in those areas. The season outlook for elk in 2019 is good, with success likely similar to previous years.

As always, making landowner contacts and scouting prior to the season opener is recommended and is an essential component to a successful hunt this fall.

**Jason Smith**

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## MIGRATORY BIRDS

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### Ducks and Geese

Much improved wetland conditions, along with increased numbers of waterfowl responding to those conditions, were found during the Game and Fish Department's 72<sup>nd</sup> annual breeding duck survey. Much of the state had good to excellent conditions for breeding ducks in spring and breeding habitats were maintained by abundant rain going into summer.

The 2019 May water index was the 33<sup>rd</sup> highest on record, up 46 percent from 2018, and 4 percent above the 1948-2018 average. Although the

statewide index was near average, few areas had average wetland conditions. Excellent wetland conditions in the southern and eastern part of the state quickly deteriorated moving into the north central region, but were fair to good in the northwest region.

Following the May survey, average to above average rainfall continued through June and into early July in many important duck producing regions. Widespread abundant precipitation maintained good wetland conditions in seasonal wetland basins, and incited renesting by hens that failed during early nesting attempts.

This year's breeding duck index was the 22<sup>nd</sup> highest on record, up 20 percent from last year, and 40 percent above the long-term average. The state's estimated breeding population of ducks (3.37 million) increased back above 3 million birds for the first time since 2016.

All of North Dakota's primary species of breeding ducks had increased breeding population estimates over what was observed in 2018. Mallards were up 16 percent from 2018 for their 17<sup>th</sup> highest count on record. Green-winged teal and ruddy ducks increased 81.4 percent and 56.8 percent, respectively. Increases of all other duck species ranged from 4.7 percent for scaup to 40.1 percent for pintails.

Blue-winged teal are at their long-term average (1948-2018), and green-winged teal (114 percent above); mallards (87 percent above); redheads (98 percent above); shovelers (82 percent above); wigeon (67 percent above); gadwall (35 percent above); scaup and ruddy ducks (33 percent above); and canvasbacks (27 percent above) are above the long-term average. Pintails were the only species to not surpass (3 percent below) their long-term average.

The number of broods observed during the Department's July brood survey was down 9 percent from 2018, but 59 percent above the 1965-2018 average. The average brood size was 6.67 ducklings, nearly identical to last year's estimate. July wetland



Hunters in makeshift blinds on a Missouri River sandbar wait for Canada geese to take notice of their decoys.

CRAIG BIRRE

counts were up 41 percent from 2018, and 34 percent above the long-term average. Wetland conditions were variable across the state, ranging from poor to excellent in some regions, and most observers commented that thick wetland vegetation made it difficult to observe broods.

When duck brood surveys were conducted, wetland conditions in the south central and southeastern regions of the state had benefited most from rainfall, but duck production also appeared to be very good in the northeast and northwest parts of the state. Although conditions for observing broods were tough this year, observers noted that delayed haying allowed many late-nesting or renesting hens to hatch broods, especially lesser scaup.

Brood-rearing wetlands benefited from abundant snowmelt and consistent rain to provide good habitat for breeding ducks and their young. Many shallow wetlands have recovered from drying up last summer and upland vegetation is providing thick nesting cover. The north central region is still cycling

through some dryness, but this will help maintain productivity within wetland basins when wet conditions return.

The forecast for the fall flight of ducks from North Dakota this year will be up about 5 percent from last year, and similar to 2009, 2011 and 2013 and the highest since 2014.

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

North Dakota's waterfowl hunting seasons are always affected by fall weather, and the mix from early to late seasons is usually not consistent from year to year. By producing a lot of birds locally, hunters aren't dependent on good migration weather to bring birds from Canada in a timely manner. Abundant wetlands in good condition, coupled with abundant, secure nesting cover in the uplands, drives duck production. Hunting opportunities for waterfowl should be good this season based on duck production in North Dakota. However, prairie Canada was

fairly dry this spring and that might limit the size of the fall flight of ducks that migrate through the state.

As always, hunting conditions will vary, but this year hunters should see more consistent wetland conditions within broader regions.

The Department's fall wetland survey will give one last look at regional wetland conditions in September. Prospects for a good fall flight from northern breeding areas will be good, but as always, weather conditions and migration patterns will dictate waterfowl hunting opportunities come fall.

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

### Youth Waterfowl Season

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

**Opens:** Sept. 14

**Closes:** Sept. 15

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

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



## Special Veteran and Active Military Waterfowl Season

(For legally licensed veterans and members of the Armed Forces on active duty, including members of the National Guard and Reserves on active duty, other than for training.)

**Opens:** Sept. 14

**Closes:** Sept. 15

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

**Daily Limit:** Ducks and geese – same as regular season (does not include bonus blue-winged teal).

## Early Canada Goose Hunting

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

**Closes:** Sept. 7 (Missouri River Canada Goose Zone), Sept. 15 (Western Canada Goose Zone), Sept. 20 (Eastern Canada Goose Zone)

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

**Daily Limit:** 15

**Possession Limit:** 45

## Canada Geese Regular Season

**Opens:** Sept. 21 (residents only),

Sept. 28 (nonresidents)

**Closes:** Dec. 27 (Missouri River Canada Goose Zone), Dec. 21 (Western Canada Goose Zone), Dec. 16 (Eastern Canada Goose Zone)

**Daily Limit:** 5 (Missouri River zone), 8 (all other zones)

**Possession Limit:** 15 (Missouri River zone), 24 (all other zones)

## White-fronted Geese (Statewide)

**Opens:** Sept. 21 (residents only), Sept. 28 (nonresidents)

**Closes:** Dec. 1

**Daily Limit:** 3

**Possession Limit:** 9

## Light (Snow) Geese (Statewide)

**Opens:** Sept. 21 (residents only), Sept. 28 (nonresidents)

**Closes:** Dec. 29

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

**Shooting Hours for all Geese:** Half-hour before sunrise to 1 p.m. each day through Nov. 2. Starting Nov. 3, shooting hours are a half-hour before sunrise to 2 p.m. each day.

*Exception: Shooting hours are a*

*half-hour before sunrise to sunset on all Saturdays and Wednesdays through the end of each season. Starting Nov. 27, all-day hunting is also allowed on Sundays through the end of each season.*

## Regular Duck Season

### Low Plains Unit

**Opens:** Sept. 21 (residents only), Sept. 28 (nonresidents)

**Closes:** Dec. 1

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

### High Plains Unit

**Opens:** Sept. 21 (residents only), Sept. 28 (nonresidents)

**Closes:** Dec. 1

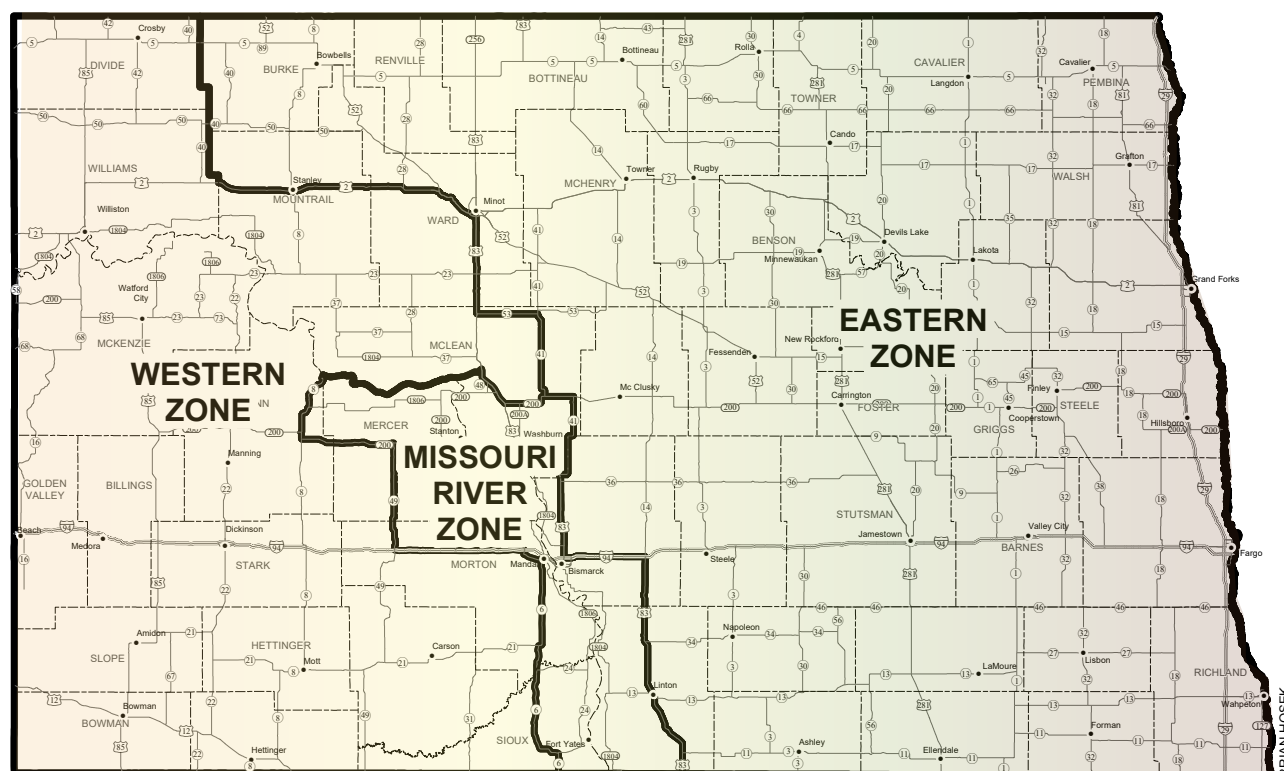
**Opens:** Dec. 7

**Closes:** Dec. 29

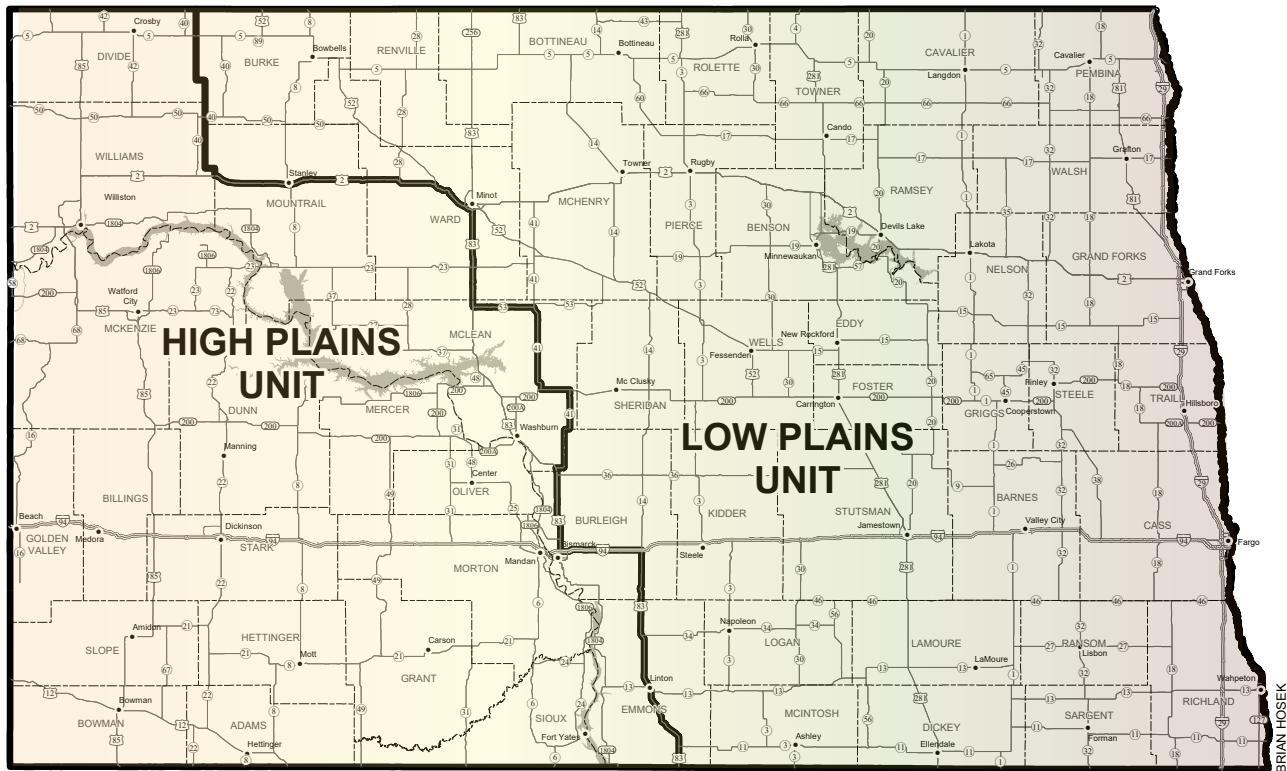
**Shooting-hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

**Daily Limit:** Six ducks, which may include no more than five mallards (two of which may be hens), one pintail, two redheads, two canvasbacks, three scaup and three wood ducks. In addition to the daily bag limit of ducks, an

## CANADA GOOSE HUNTING ZONES



## DUCKS HIGH PLAINS/LOW PLAINS UNITS



additional two blue-winged teal may be taken from Sept. 21 through Oct. 6.

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

### Sandhill Cranes

**Opens:** Zone 1 and 2: Sept. 14

**Closes:** Zone 1 and 2: Nov. 10

**Daily Limit Zone 1:** 3

**Daily Limit Zone 2:** 2

**Possession Limit Zone 1:** 9

**Possession Limit Zone 2:** 6

**Shooting Hours:** Half-hour before sunrise to 1 p.m. daily through Nov. 2; to 2 p.m. Nov. 3 until end of season.

The Mid-continent Sandhill Crane Population is in good shape heading into fall. Cold weather lingered into March and April on the northern Great Plains for the second straight year in 2019, which greatly slowed the spring migration. As a result, few birds made it north of the central Platte River Valley in Nebraska where the annual spring survey is conducted.

Given these conditions, a large proportion of the population was likely captured during the survey. Initial reports indicate numbers comparable to record-setting 2018 totals.

In addition, the three-year population index used for guiding hunting season regulations has been stable to slightly increasing for several years.

Wetland conditions throughout much of North Dakota also improved tremendously in summer, which will provide plenty of options for roosting sandhill cranes during fall migration.

The two-zone structure for sandhill cranes continues. Zone 1 is west of U.S. Highway 281 and Zone 2 is east of U.S. Highway 281. Zone 1 has a daily bag limit of three cranes; in Zone 2 the daily bag limit is two. The possession limit in Zone 1 is nine cranes, and six in Zone 2.

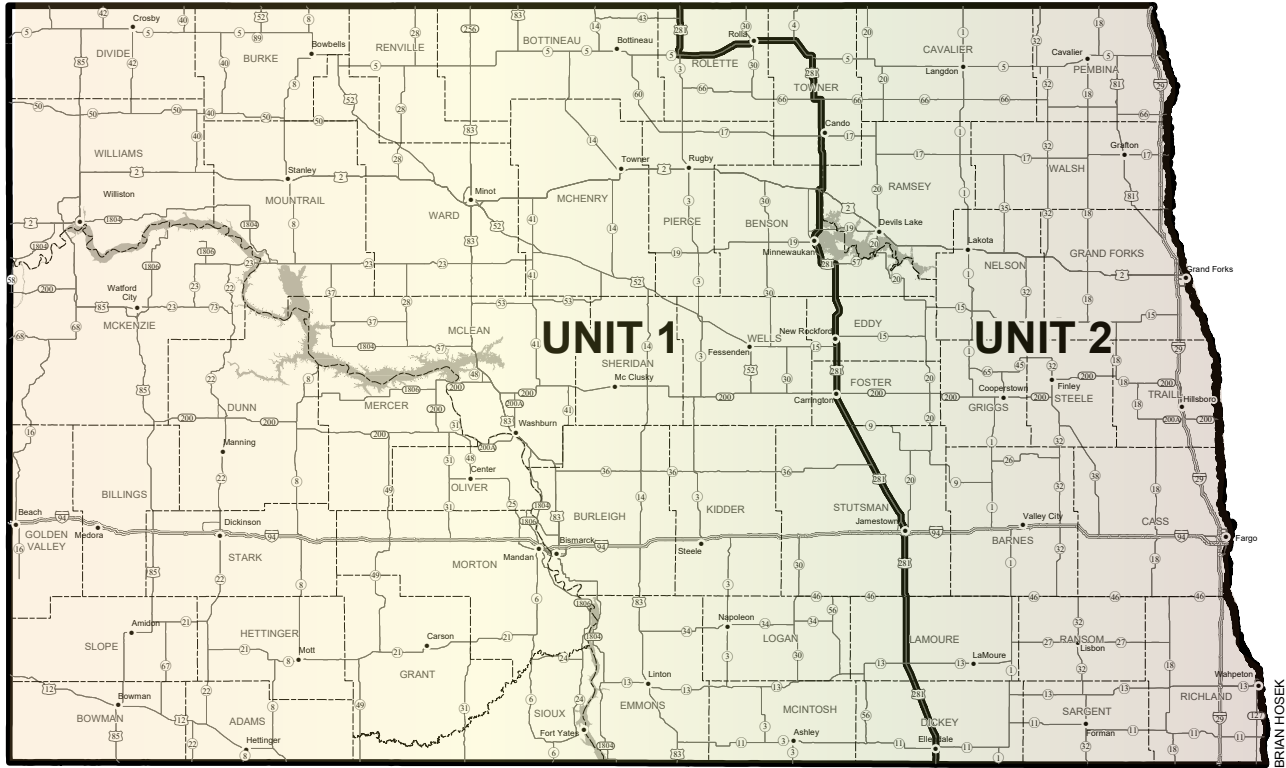


Two of North Dakota's sizeable mourning dove population.

TY STOCKTON



## SANDHILL CRANE UNITS



Nonresident sandhill crane hunters can pursue cranes with either a valid nonresident small game or waterfowl license, in addition to a crane permit. Nonresident sandhill crane permits are valid for use within the dates and zones of nonresident waterfowl or small game licenses selected during purchase.

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

*Andrew Dinges, Migratory Game Bird Biologist, Bismarck*

### Doves

**Opens:** Sept. 1

**Closes:** Nov. 29

**Daily Limit:** 15

**Possession Limit:** 45

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

North Dakota has a sizeable population of breeding mourning doves. Based on casual observations,

production in the state has been fair, but likely down from previous years. The cool and wet summer that most of North Dakota experienced typically hinders production and doves often nest less.

The Game Fish Department tallies mourning doves during late summer roadside counts, but numbers were not yet finalized before this issue went to press. Although survey numbers were not available to compare to previous years, hunters should expect slightly fewer doves this fall. However, given the sheer size of this population, hunting should still be good, but expect to put a little more effort into finding concentrations of birds.

Dove hunters should experience good opportunities during early September before cooler weather sets in throughout the state and pushes doves south. Hunters are encouraged to scout before the season to find the right mix of conditions that are conducive to concentrating birds. Hunters should look for areas with abundant harvested small grain or oilseed fields that are also near

shelterbelts or other diverse stands of trees. Doves also need to be within a few miles of water sources. Harvest of small grains and oilseed crops are projected to be a little behind average, but by September hunters should still have plenty of places to choose from.

Eurasian collared doves continue to expand throughout the state and are found in almost every city and small town. However, these birds are not often found outside of municipalities and are rarely harvested by hunters. Nonetheless, Eurasian collared doves can be pursued during the dove season and are included with mourning doves in the daily bag and possession limits if harvested.

Some dove hunters may be contacted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to participate in a wing survey. Hunters are also reminded to look for banded mourning doves in their bag and report bands directly to the Bird Banding Laboratory website at [report-band.gov](http://report-band.gov).

*Andrew Dinges*

## Crows

**Fall Season Opens:** Aug. 17

**Closes:** Nov. 4

**Spring Season Opens:** March 14, 2020

**Closes:** April 26, 2020

**Daily Limit:** No limit on crows.

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

In addition to the crow season, crows may be taken when committing or about to commit depredations as specified in federal law.

## Snipe

**Opens:** Sept. 14

**Closes:** Dec. 1

**Daily Limit:** 8

**Possession Limit:** 24

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

## Woodcock

**Opens:** Sept. 21

**Closes:** Nov. 4

**Daily Limit:** 3

**Possession Limit:** 9

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

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## FURBEARERS

*For more season details, refer to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or the 2019-20 hunting and trapping guide.*

Notable changes to furbearer regulations this fall include a slight increase in the river otter harvest limit and an expansion of the area open to fisher trapping.

The statewide harvest limit for river otters will be 20 this coming season, up from 15 last season, which was reached in 2018 in only 7 days. Fisher trapping will now be allowed statewide during the open season, except for Bottineau and Rolette counties. Fisher trapping will not be allowed in those counties to continue protection of American marten in those areas. Last season trappers took 26 fishers during the open season.

Legislative changes to state law also expanded technology to allow for night hunting of some furbearers starting this fall. Hunters can use artificial light (must produce a red, green or amber color) or infrared light while hunting afoot for coyote, fox, raccoon and beaver during the open night-hunting seasons. The use of night vision or thermal vision remains legal during the open seasons as well.

Trappers and hunters should expect to see fewer coyotes throughout the state this year, as both harvest and spring surveys were down from 2018. Game and Fish Department surveys indicated the highest densities of coyotes in spring were once again in the Prairie Pothole Region. Red fox numbers remain low throughout the state.

Muskrats have yet to rebound after their numbers dipped back in 2013. Similarly, spring surveys indicated decreases in beavers and skunks throughout most of the state. And although badger, mink and raccoon numbers are up slightly in some regions compared to last year, these species remain well below their long-term averages on a statewide level.

The seasons for bobcats and mountain lions will also be the same as 2018. Last year, hunters and/or trappers took 64 bobcats, 11 mountain lions in Zone 1 (two in the early-season, seven in the late-season, and two in the conditional season) and three mountain lions in Zone 2.

Trappers are reminded that the Department recommends checking all traps and snares by visually inspecting them and removing all captured animals at no greater than 48-hour intervals, and that rubber gloves be worn for skinning and handling of all furbearers.

*Stephanie Tucker, Game Management Section Leader, Bismarck*

## Mountain Lion Hunting

**Zone 1 (early) Opens:** Aug. 30

**Closes:** Nov. 24

**Zone 1 (late) Opens:** Nov. 25

**Closes:** March 31, 2020

**Zone 2 Opens:** Aug. 30

**Closes:** March 31, 2020

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

There is no mountain lion harvest limit in Zone 2.

Mountain lions may be hunted statewide by residents using legal firearms or archery equipment during regular hunting hours. Beginning Nov. 25, mountain lions may also be hunted by pursuing with dogs. Cable devices and traps are not allowed. The limit is one lion per hunter. Kittens (lions with visible spots), or females accompanied by kittens, may not be taken.

Any lion taken must be reported to the Department within 12 hours and the entire intact animal must be presented for tagging. Legally taken animals will be returned to the hunter.

## River Otter Trapping or Cable Devices

**Opens:** Nov. 25

**Closes:** March 15, 2020

Limit of one per person. Total harvest limit of 20 statewide.

Trappers must contact the local game warden or Department field office to report their harvest within 12 hours and make arrangements to have their river otter tagged. For more information, see the North Dakota 2019-20 hunting and trapping guide.

## Fisher Trapping or Cable Devices

**Opens:** Nov. 25

**Closes:** Dec. 1



Open statewide except for Bottineau and Rolette counties. Limit one per person. Trappers must contact the local game warden or Department field office to report their harvest within 12 hours and make arrangements to have their fisher tagged. For more information, see the North Dakota 2019-20 hunting and trapping guide.

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

**Open:** Year-round.

*For more information, see the North Dakota 2019-20 hunting and trapping guide.*

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

**Opens:** Nov. 25

**Closes:** May 10, 2020

From March 16, 2020, through May 10, 2020, cable devices must be within 50 feet of water; they must be no more than 4 inches off the ground and must have a stop restricting loop size to 12 inches or less in diameter.

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

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

**Trapping Opens:** Oct. 26  
**Hunting and Cable Devices**

**Opens:** Nov. 25

**Closes:** March 15, 2020

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

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

**Trapping Opens:** Oct. 26  
**Hunting and Cable Devices**

**Opens:** Nov. 25

**Closes:** May 10, 2020

Muskrat huts may be opened for insertion of traps or cable devices; however, the huts must be restored to their approximate

original condition to prevent freeze-up.

Beginning March 16, 2020, colony traps must be under at least 2 inches of water, and trapping or using cable devices on the outside of any muskrat house or structure of any size is prohibited; traps may be placed completely inside a muskrat house or structure of any size, except when used on float sets; foothold traps must be submerged under water at all times or must have a protective covering; body-gripping traps used in water can have no more than 2 inches of the trap above the water or must have a protective covering.

Beginning May 1, 2020, float sets must have a protective covering.

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

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

**Hunting and Trapping Opens:** Nov. 9

**Cable Devices Opens:** Nov. 25

**Closes:** March 15, 2020

Open only in the area south and west of the Missouri River. Beginning Nov. 25, bobcats may also be hunted by pursuing with dogs.

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

For more information, see the 2019-20 furbearer hunting and trapping guide.

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

**Open:** Year-round.

In addition, red fox, gray fox and coyote may be hunted at any hour from Nov. 25 through March 15, 2020. Any hunter who engages in the hunting of red fox, gray fox or coyote during the time from a half-hour after sunset to a half-hour before sunrise, must hunt exclusively on foot.

Hunters can use night vision, artificial light, thermal vision, and infrared light equipment during this portion of the season. The artificial light must produce a red, green or amber color.

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

**Opens:** Nov. 25

**Closes:** March 15, 2020



*It's anticipated that trappers and hunters will see fewer coyotes this year.*

LARA ANDERSON



# PLOTS

## PROGRAM UPDATE



Hunting a PLOTS tract in  
southeastern North Dakota.



By Ron Wilson

**K**evin Kading, Game and Fish Department private land section leader, addresses the status of the Private Land Open To Sportsmen program. The popular walk-in access program has been on North Dakota's landscape for more than 20 years.

***Q: Where does the PLOTS program stand this year in comparison to the last few years in terms of the number of acres?***

**A:** When we set out this year for the sign up, Game and Fish Department private land biologists developed some goals and work plans for the PLOTS program in an attempt to anticipate the number of acres to be enrolled and added to the program. We set out to have 786,000 acres in the program. That was what we anticipated we would have if we hit our marks, if we hit our goals and what we had money budgeted for. Biologists met and exceeded that goal this year, with 791,000 acres, which was good and that was just because there was interest out there. Our biologists put in a lot of leg-work this year meeting with landowners, putting out promotional materials, holding workshops ... a lot of different promotional activities to try to drum up interest and let landowners know about the program. It wasn't really a surprise that we got those acres, we put in a lot of work to get those acres. But it's welcome to see additional acres versus what we had anticipated.

***Q: After carrying more than 700,000 acres for the last several years, and the numbers are even trending higher, is a goal of 1 million acres still realistic down the road?***

**A:** The Game and Fish Department met its goal of 1 million acres in 2007 and since then we've slowly been tapering off from that. The Department still has that goal, we still want to try to reach that goal of 1 million acres, but what we've seen from survey results from hunters is that they'd rather see higher quality acres in the

program versus just more acres in the program. We're taking that and looking at how we can improve acreage in the program, existing habitat or existing tracts, and trying to improve the habitat on those acres and then trying to enroll higher quality acres. We're still trying to get to 1 million acres and we're slowly making that climb and increasing every year, but the acres that we're putting into the program, we're trying to make sure those are higher quality acres.

***Q: It's mid-July and still weeks away from the fall hunting seasons, but what kinds of reports are you hearing about how enrolled acres are looking this year?***

**A:** The conditions have been such that the cover, the wildlife habitat is really looking good this year. Hopefully, that translates to some good habitat this fall and it sure looks like it will. We're not looking at any major drought issues or anything like that, yet I know there are some parts of the state that are a little drier than they want to be, but overall habitat conditions are looking really good on Department PLOTS tracts and elsewhere. There are still going to be some areas that hunters come across on PLOTS that have some haying or grazing being done on them, but that's part of the landowner's PLOTS agreement, too. Some of those acres are under agreements that are for working lands and landowners can still do those activities on their PLOTS tracts. But overall, hunters will hopefully see some pretty good habitat conditions come fall.

***Q: The PLOTS program has been around for 20-plus years and is widely recognized by hunters in North Dakota. What is the status of the program today?***

**A:** The PLOTS program today is in good standing with landowners and is really well received. There's still a lot of interest by landowners. Hunters continually tell us and give praise to the Department for the program. Overall, the PLOTS program

is in good shape. While the Department would like to see more acres in the program, and I know hunters would like to see more acres, private land biologists are taking those small steps to make sure we have good habitat in the program. The landowners in the Department's PLOTS program are great to work with. They don't have to enroll their land in the PLOTS program as it is strictly voluntary. Landowners know they can choose at any time to not participate in the program, but they have chosen to participate, which tells us a lot, too. The Department's private land staff has some great working relationships with the private landowners participating.

***Q: While many of the state's Conservation Reserve Program acres have been lost, how does this federal idle grass program factor into the PLOTS program?***

**A:** To put things into perspective a little bit, prior to 2007 there was just a lot more CRP on the landscape in the state, and the ability to enroll those acres in the PLOTS program was great for the Department. There are several different avenues that landowners can take to put land in the PLOTS program and one of the most common avenues is through CRP. If they have CRP and they are looking to get some additional incentives for public access, or help with planting the grass or some cost-share on establishing that cover, that's where the PLOTS program has come in. Prior to 2007, 2008, 2009, there was a lot of those opportunities out there. Fast forward to where we're at now, the CRP program in the state is less than half of what it used to be and there are just fewer opportunities for those acres to go into the PLOTS program. That's kind of the relationship a lot of people maybe don't understand, or don't see the connection, but that's the way it is. When CRP acres become available, we certainly welcome those acres as additions to the PLOTS program, but when they're not out there, when they're not available, that is

The number of PLOTS acres in the state are on the rise.



CRAIG BIRLE

just one less acre in the PLOTS program. The outlook for the CRP program in North Dakota now that the farm bill has passed may provide some more opportunities for CRP, but it's unlikely it will be like it was back in the early to mid-2000s.

**Q: Anything new the agency is working on to improve the PLOTS program for wildlife, landowners and hunters?**

**A:** Some of the things that private land biologists have focused their time on in the last couple of years has been enhancing the existing acres the PLOTS program does have. The biologists visit with the landowners and talk to them about habitat enhancements, whether that's new grass plantings or adding some food plots or cover crops to their area. We have seen some interest in these enhancements. In fact, this year part of the total increase in PLOTS acreage is about 5,000 acres of new grass ... some of those acres are brand new habitat going into the fall hunting season and will be on the landscape for many years to come. This new grass

gets planted and it's on the landscape for 6 to 10 years or longer and will benefit the program for many years.

**Q: What do you hear – both good and bad – from landowners who are enrolled in the PLOTS program and from hunters who hunt PLOTS acres?**

**A:** Landowners are still interested in the program and the agency gets some positive comments. The PLOTS program is very flexible. We've tried to make it workable for landowners and that's one of the things that attracts the interest ... we're pretty easy to work with and the PLOTS program offers a lot of different options. It's not all about just having CRP. You can have other land that might have cropland or pastureland or grazing lands, so there's a lot of different opportunities for landowners to put their land in the program. Our biologists in the field are knowledgeable about all the different partnership programs, including USDA programs and others, that Department staff can try to help landowners work through, as well

as piggybacking on our PLOTS program. Every year we hear from hunters, we get photos of people who had some success and of kids getting their first bird or their first deer on a PLOTS tract. We try to relay this information back to landowners to let them know they are making a difference out there. Overall, hunters, I believe, still have a really positive view of the PLOTS program.

**Q: It's imagined that many hunters carry dog-eared copies of the latest PLOTS Guide in their vehicles to help guide them to the various PLOTS tracts and other public lands. Yet, are hunters nowadays finding the location of the lands in other ways?**

**A:** Hunters can use the paper-copy PLOTS Guide to find tracts they want to hunt, but there are other options available. Most people nowadays are carrying a smartphone in their pocket. There's an app you can find on the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, that hunters can download on their



phones, which is basically an electronic version of the PLOTS Guide. So, if people want to use that to navigate around the countryside, it works pretty well. Also, on the Department's website there's an online mapping application that hunters can use if they want to look at some areas ahead of time or maybe print some maps of where they're going.

**Q: If a landowner is interested in the PLOTS program, who can they contact to get the information they seek?**

**A:** The Game and Fish Department has eight private land districts. Landowners can find those districts, and the name and phone numbers of the biologists on the Department's website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

If a landowner is interested in talking to a private land biologist in their area about enrolling in the PLOTS program, I'd encourage them to make a phone call. Department biologists can come out, take a look at the land and talk about the opportunities available through the PLOTS program.

**Q: Anything you'd like to tell hunters planning to utilize these private lands made available for walk-in access this fall?**

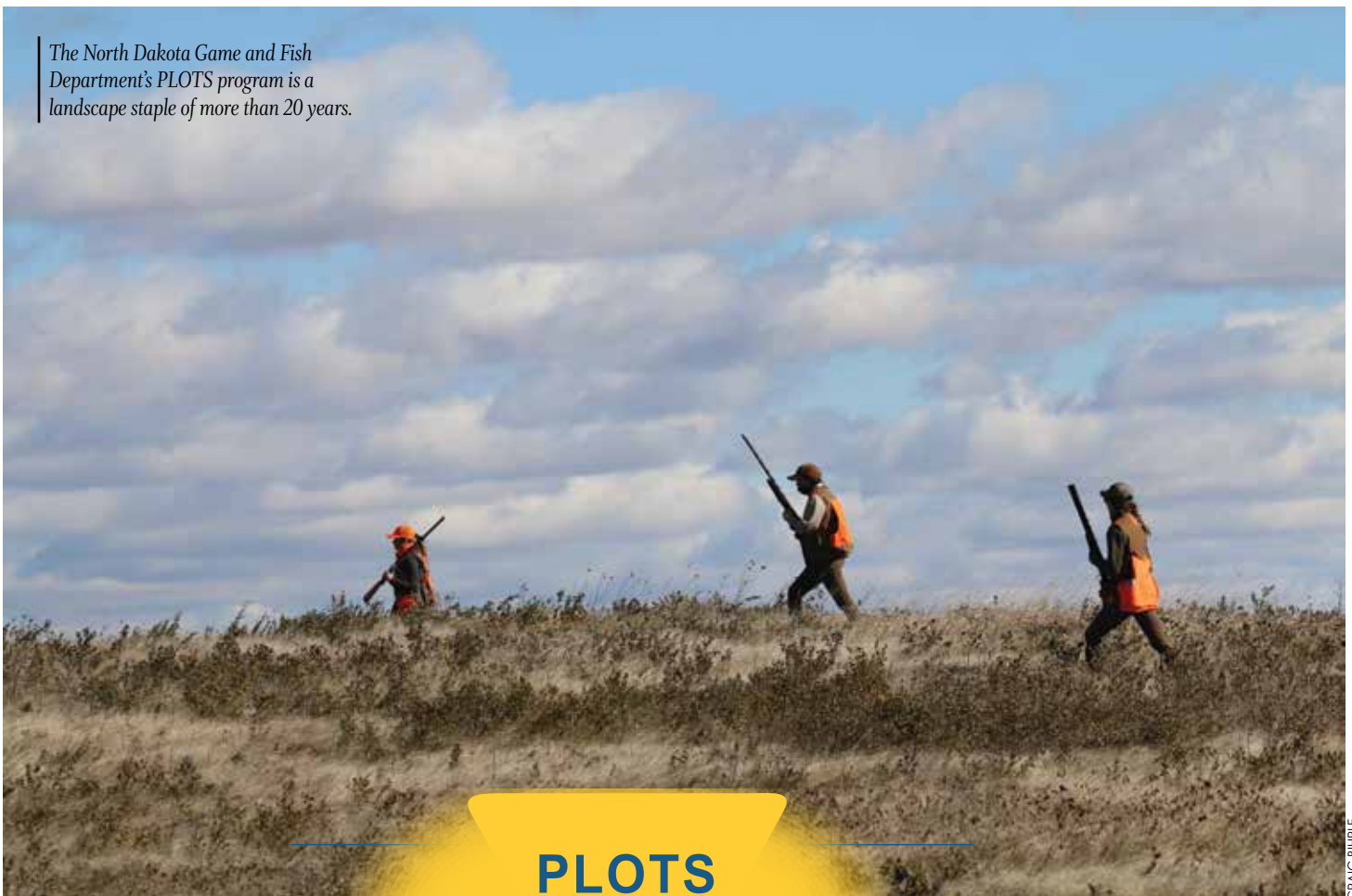
**A:** A lot of times, and in a lot of minds, the PLOTS program gets lumped in with the public land category. People just assume PLOTS is public land. It's available for the public, but it's still privately owned and

it's an agreement that we have with the landowner. When hunters are out hunting on PLOTS land, they need to remember they're on private land and there might be some farming going on, there might be some haying or some harvesting going on ... they need to be aware of that. They need to be aware of where they park their vehicles, which direction they are shooting, which direction they are hiking ... It's private land and we want hunters to leave a good impression on landowners when they are hunting the PLOTS tracts.

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

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's PLOTS program is a landscape staple of more than 20 years.



**PLOTS**  
are private lands.  
Please **ENJOY** this opportunity  
and **RESPECT** the land as if it were your own.

CRAIG BIRLE

# NOW AVAILABLE

## *The* **DUCK FACTORY** A History of Waterfowl in North Dakota

By Mike Jacobs and Erik Fritzell



Foreword by Mike Johnson and Afterword by Mike Szymanski  
Waterfowl Biologists, North Dakota Game and Fish Department  
Published by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 2019

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## *In the foreword of...*

***“The Duck Factory – A History of Waterfowl in North Dakota,”*** Mike Johnson, waterfowl program leader for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department from 1981 to 2015, wrote this:

“This book recounts the remarkable history of the ecology, management, conservation, research and hunting of waterfowl as well as their habitats in North Dakota, and tells the stories of the people, conflicts and politics that wind through this history. It is an extraordinary story and its telling is long overdue.”

***“The Duck Factory,”*** a Game and Fish Department publication, is all that and more.

“We had a lot of information to work with, an incredible amount of history and interesting facts about waterfowl in North Dakota,” said Mike Szymanski, Game and Fish Department migratory game bird program leader. “We wanted to make the book appealing to both waterfowl hunters and people interested in history. We tried really hard to produce a piece of literature that was user friendly and fulfilling to read and I think we did that.”

Szymanski and Johnson worked with authors Mike

Jacobs and Erik Fritzell and others to see the book to publication.

In the world of waterfowl, ***“The Duck Factory”*** is an important story because of North Dakota’s longtime and continued contribution to the world of migratory birds.

“North Dakota is the most important state for breeding ducks,” Szymanski said. “The contribution of ducks from North Dakota into the fall flight is unmatched by any other state, and its importance to duck hunters cannot be understated. Describing the history of waterfowl in North Dakota was a story that we felt was certainly worth telling.”

The 200-plus page book is now on sale only online for \$24.99, including shipping, on the Game and Fish Department’s website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), by clicking on “buy and apply” and then “shop”.

“Not only is the book a great read, there are a lot of good, old waterfowl and duck hunting photos that go back almost 150 years,” Szymanski said.

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



Here's an excerpt from "The Duck Factory," the chapter on early sport hunters, reprinted in its entirety.

### ... Sport Hunters

Late in the 19th Century, North Dakota became a destination for a group of men often called "sport hunters." In this context, the term suggests men of wealth who mounted well-equipped expeditions with the principal objective of hunting waterfowl. North Dakota ...

was hardly unique in this role. Hunting of this kind was well developed along the mid-Atlantic Coast, including the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia and the Pamlico Sound in North Carolina, as well as along the Gulf of Mexico, especially in coastal Louisiana. These places provided amenities, including hotels and guides, that North Dakota couldn't offer, though local people sometimes worked as guides. One considerable hunting lodge did develop, at Wamduska on Stump Lake. Many hunters brought their own luxury, in the form of private railroad cars. Some lodged with local people. Some slept on the ground.

In general, these hunters were men of affairs. One of them became president of the United States. One became a prominent artist. One was an important lumberman, mineral developer and mayor of a Midwestern city. Still another was a successful lawyer. Some were authentic "birdmen," professional or amateur ornithologists who made important contributions to scientific understanding of waterfowl. Several wrote of their experiences. Some published books. Most contributed articles to sporting magazines.

The most famous of these hunters was Theodore Roosevelt, the future president. He is one who slept on the ground. Frederic Remington, the renowned western artist, also hunted in North Dakota.

Roosevelt spent a total of about a year in North Dakota on several different trips, and he left recollections of his hunting experiences here in two books, *Ranch Life and*

*the Hunting Trail* and *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*.

While he focused largely on big game, Roosevelt also

enjoyed hunting birds, and he certainly enjoyed eating them. Both books include tales of duck hunting and duck eating.

This passage from *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*, published in 1885, reflects Roosevelt's powers of observation, his keen appreciation of the birds and the hunt, and his gusto at the meal following. Roosevelt favored lengthy paragraphs; this passage has been divided into shorter bursts.

"(In the evening) we had lain among the reeds near a marshy lake and had killed quite a number

of ducks, mostly widgeon and teal, and this morning we intended to try shooting among the cornfields. By sunrise we were a good distance off, on a high ridge, across which we had noticed that the ducks flew in crossing from one set of lakes to another.

"The flight had already begun, and our arrival scared off the birds for the time being; but in a little while, after we had hidden among the sheaves, stacking the straw up around us, the ducks began to come back, either flying over in their passage from the water, or else intending to light and feed. They were for the most part mallards, which are the commonest of the western ducks, and the only species customarily killed in this kind of shooting. They are especially fond of the corn, of which there was a small patch in the grain field. To this flocks came again and again, and fast though they flew we got many before they left the place, scared by the shooting. Those that were merely passing from one point to another flew low,



W.B. Mershon, a Michigan lumberman, brought dozens of sport hunters to the Dawson area during the late 19th Century. He and others published extensively about their experiences. University of Michigan Bently Historical Library Collection.

and among them we shot a couple of gadwall and also knocked over a red-head from a little bunch that went by, their squat, chunky forms giving them a very different look from the longer, lighter-built mallard. The mallards that came to feed flew high in the air, wheeling round in gradually lowering circles when they had reached the spot where they intended to light.

"In shooting in the grain fields there is usually plenty of time to aim, a snap shot being from the nature of the sport exceptional. Care must be taken to lie quiet until the ducks are near enough; shots are most often lost through shooting too soon. Heavy guns with heavy loads are necessary, for the ducks are generally killed at long range; and both from this circumstance as well as from the rapidity of their flight, it is imperative to hold well ahead of the bird fired at.

It has one advantage over shooting in a marsh, and that is that a wounded bird which drops is of course hardly ever lost. Corn-fed mallards are most delicious eating; they rank on a par with teal and red-head and second only to the canvas-back – a bird, by the way, of which I have never killed but one or two individuals in the West."

Remington illustrated Roosevelt's *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*, published in 1888, and his illustrations helped guarantee its success. Remington described a hunt near Devils Lake about 1890. "The air was now full of flying birds – mallards, spoon-bills, pintails, red-heads, butter-balls, gadwalls, widgeon and canvasbacks – and the shooting was fast and furious."

William Butts Mershon was a different kind of hunter. He concentrated on waterfowl and he lived in luxury. He made a fortune in the lumber business in Michigan, where he was elected mayor of Saginaw. Later he invested in copper and salt mines in the western states.



The "City of Worcester" carried the families of two Massachusetts industrialists to North Dakota for hunting along the railroad in the early 1880s. F. Jay Haynes/NDSU Collection.

For two decades, Mershon made annual trips to Dakota Territory and North Dakota. Initially, he hunted near Buffalo at the western edge of the Red River Valley. When the area had been overhunted and birds became scarce, he began hunting in the Dawson area. Mershon also maintained hunting camps near his home in Michigan and in Canada.

For his North Dakota trips, Mershon used private railroad cars that he had fitted up. The first of these, purchased in 1883, had "six lower berths, six upper berths, a kitchen at one end, and an observation room or dining room in the other, a large ice-box and all that sort of thing," Mershon wrote in a memoir, *Reflections of My*



*Fifty Years Hunting and Fishing*, published in 1923. Later Mershon and his friends bought a second car, adding a bath tub and a tank holding 500 gallons of water. This car he named “The City of Saginaw.” His hunting coterie he called “The Saginaw Crowd.”

Mershon was the epitome of the sporting waterfowl hunter, wealthy, serious and enthusiastic about waterfowl and the sport of waterfowl hunting. He was an accomplished writer, and his prose captures both the ambience and excitement of hunting at sunset in Dakota in the 1880s: “At dusk, just as the great red glow of the gorgeous Dakota sunset was at its best in the west, the ducks began to come in fast and furious. I do not think I shot more than twenty minutes. My gun was hot. Frequently I had to dodge to avoid being hit by the teal coming in like bullets. Sometimes they came in so fast and so low and close that they startled me and I put up my arm to shield them off ... I remember that I picked up and brought in 46 ducks ... and that they were largely teal and mallards.”

Mershon also shot geese. He wrote, “We used to get tremendous bags of geese. The plan was to drive through the stubble fields early in the morning and find where the geese were feeding, make an examination of the ground after the geese had left and see if there was much food left ... and if we had good reason to believe it was a regular feeding, we put in pits ... In came flock after flock, and by the booming guns at the far end of the field we knew our friends were having sport too. Oh! For another hour of such excitement! It was grand. We had four or five different kinds – pure white fellows with black on the ends of their wings; and one yellow-legged fellow that the natives called a California goose, with a breast all blotched with black, looking as though he had been wounded the year before and black had grown in instead of the original yellowish gray; great big Canada geese and smaller ones that seemed nearly the same.”

Mershon was not only a hunter; he was also a genuine “bird man,” an associate member of the American Ornithologists Union and a frequent contributor to *The Auk*, since 1884 the premier journal of bird science in the



*The adults hunted; the children appeared to envy them.  
F. Jay Haynes/NDSU Collection.*



nation. As a “birdman,” Mershon’s most important work may have been on passenger pigeons. Early in the 20th Century, he began to gather all of the material he could find about these birds, which by then were clearly doomed. The result was *The Passenger Pigeon*, published in 1907, seven years after the last reliable sighting of the pigeon in the wild

and seven years before the death of the last captive pigeon, a bird named Martha, in the Cincinnati Zoo. He also wrote about the very large Canada geese that he hunted in North Dakota, and later in his life he campaigned to have them designated as a full species.

William Bruce Leffingwell, a lawyer in Clinton, Iowa, also made regular hunting trips to North Dakota. Like Mershon, he left a considerable record of his hunting excursions. Leffingwell published two books, *Wildfowl Shooting* and *Shooting on Upland, Marsh and Stream*. Of more interest to North Dakotans, however, is a series of articles he published in *The American Field*. These were titled *Wanderings in Dakota*, and concentrated almost entirely on his experiences in North Dakota.

Leffingwell's books were filled with advice for hunters. Here's what he had to say about hunting with decoys: "The reader has noticed the partiality I have shown toward decoys. In doing so I have no apology to offer, for it has been my constant aim and desire to disclose to you the secrets of the art of hunting wild fowl successfully, as constant practice, unlimited opportunities and over twenty years' experience have demonstrated to me ... Always have decoys along with you if you contemplate shooting over water. Bear in mind this, that you cannot have too many, the more the better for the larger the flock the greater the attraction to birds. ... The best way to carry them is in a large coffee sack with puckered string at the top. Have two – one to hold 12 to 18 mallards, in the other about 10 or 12 redheads and 12 to 18 bluebills. This will give a variety that will do for all kinds of ducks."

Here is Leffingwell's enthusiastic appreciation of the

canvasback, "When the western duck hunter, through a generous fate, is fortunate enough to enjoy one good day's shooting of canvasbacks, he is apt to remember it for years if not during his whole life, for in the West they are so scarce that one successful hunt becomes so emblazoned in our memory that years cannot efface it, nor will time tarnish the pleasant recollections."

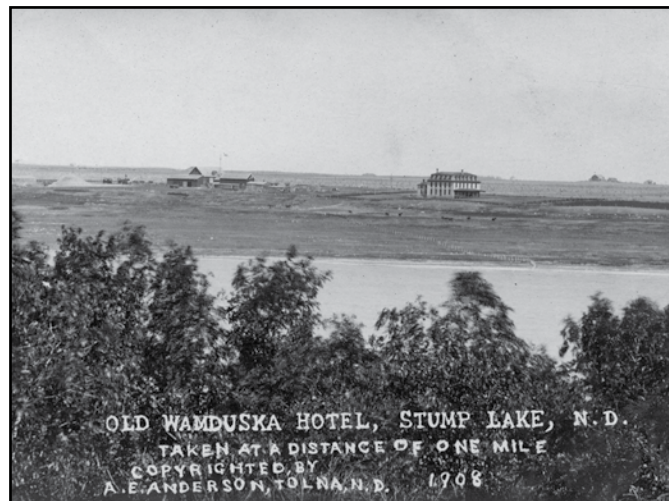
Not all hunters came from distant parts; parties of hunters went out from Fargo and the state's other cities as well. In 1891, W.S. Parker, a druggist in Lisbon, got together a party and headed for Devils Lake. His party "made our headquarters at the house of a substantial

German farmer."

At Dawson, Joseph J. Gokey made a living as a warden and hunting guide. One of his customers was Emerson Hough, well known as a writer of western novels. "In appearance we found Gokey to be strictly weird, about medium height, but with long black hair hanging on his shoulders," Hough wrote ... "Gokey of Dawson has done more to make his state famous than any

politician within its borders. He is known all over his own state and moreover in every other state of the union. He has friends by the score among the best and wealthiest sportsmen of America."

Some of the sport hunters remained anonymous, yet left records of their exploits in Dakota. Many of these accounts were collected by Harold F. Duebbert who published them in *Wildfowling in Dakota 1873-1903*. Duebbert, a renowned waterfowl researcher, worked at the Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center. An avid reader and hunter, he brought together articles that had been published in such magazines as *The American Field* and *Field and Stream*.



Old Wamduska Hotel, Stump Lake, N.D. NDSU Collection.



Sport hunters seeking accommodation had at least one commercial establishment to serve them, the Wamduska Hotel, which opened in 1882 on the eastern shore of Stump Lake northwest of today's Stump Lake County Park. The hotel was a three-story building with 42 rooms, including a ballroom and 33 guest rooms. Guests arrived by rail at the Lakota station on the Great Northern, and then traveled overland to Wamduska, a distance of about 10 miles. The hotel operated for about three decades, closing about 1910.

A guest book preserved at the Tofthagen Library and Museum in Lakota contains names of guests from New York City and Washington, D.C. The place was a favorite of railroad magnate James J. Hill. He often brought friends there, even though he routed his Great Northern Railway around the north end of Devils Lake, bypassing Wamduska. Alexander Griggs, the founder of Grand Forks, was a frequent guest. So too was Emery Mapes, for whom the tiny town of Mapes is named. He was a wealthy landowner and an entrepreneur. He invented Cream of Wheat. Some guests were anonymous, though they left a record of themselves.

"What did we go to Dakota for?" one author asked in an anonymous book about his adventures. "For amusement? Yes, for amusement – but not that only, nor mainly; that was simply the butter on our bread. We were in need of some outdoor exercise; and hunting was the horse we recommended ourselves to ride in taking this exercise. We happened to hear at the time exciting stories of the immense autumnal flight of birds across Dakota, southward, resting on their way, in the lakes and ponds and slews (sic). The wild geese were described as coming

down there in certain places, and in certain states of the weather, by the millions. These representations, by reliable individuals, besides setting our imaginations on fire, induced the conviction in our minds that the hygienic exertion we demanded could best be secured by a hunting trip to those regions."

So they did it, and reported it in *Wam-dus-ky/Descriptive Record of a Hunting Trip to North Dakota in 1892*.

These men were not experienced hunters, as their continuing account demonstrates. "They made a great many holes in the sky, but none in the birds; at least not

one of them came down to testify to any harm it received."

Yet their anticipation seemed met. "Immense flocks of geese were flying from the north and toward the lake. They seemed to have come from the far north. They were flying with the wind. They seemed to



Wamduska Hotel. Tofthagen Library and Museum, Lakota, N.D.



have come from far and higher than usual ... Reaching a point above the lake they began suddenly to descend – and this was the greatest sight of all.”

Finally, their marksmanship improved. “And do you notice what variety of ducks we have? Here are mallards, redheads, canvasbacks, blue-winged and green-winged teal, bluebills, widgeon, gadwalls, spoonbills, gray ducks, muddy ducks, buffle-headed ducks, sawbill ducks, and some other ducks I think.”

It’s a veritable catalog of North Dakota duck species – even if we can’t quite know what gray ducks and muddy ducks might have been, and we have to guess that sawbill ducks were a species of merganser.

This sort of hunting generated controversy, as Frank Seebart reported in Lakota’s centennial history book published in 1983. “The famous Stump Lake Pass eventually came into the possession of wealthy outsiders who were not inclined to let the locals use it. They brought their own hunting parties on weekends and took all the game the law allowed. Area hunters resented the practice and at times local feelings ran high against these ‘foreigners.’ ”

This kind of reaction isn’t surprising given the behavior of some hunters. One party from Fort Totten reportedly borrowed a cannon and shot into the sky-darkening flocks of geese. In front of the Wamduska House they strung up their hundreds of goose trophies.

## Birdmen

Hunters were not alone in seeking waterfowl in late 19th Century North Dakota. Birdmen came too.

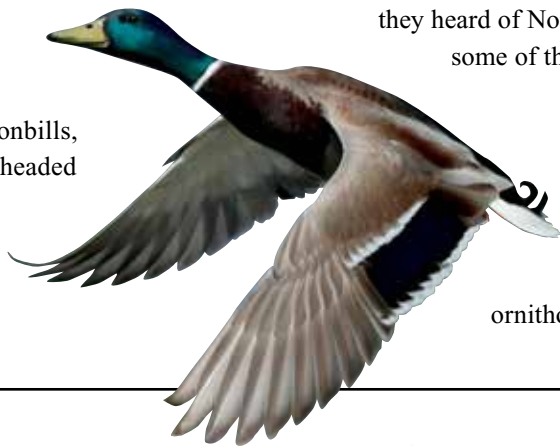
Natural history was a popular hobby among the well-heeled and well-educated easterners of the time, and when they heard of North Dakota’s abundant bird life, some of them came to see for themselves.

Many of them kept private collections of skins and eggs – while the practice of oology or egg collecting was still within the law. Others sought observations to report to

ornithological journals – an ambition that absorbed hunters such as William Mershon as well. These observations contributed to scientific knowledge of bird life on the Northern Plains. Even today, some collections of eggs and skins are available for scientific study, including one at the North Dakota Heritage Center in Bismarck.

Herbert K. Job is a typical example of the type. A native of Connecticut, he made a number of trips to North

Dakota, starting in 1898. He visited Stump Lake, Devils Lake, Rush Lake and the Turtle Mountains. In his book *Among the Waterfowl*, published in 1902, Job uses more than 50 pages to describe his discoveries of breeding ducks, geese and other birds. Notably, he photographed many of the birds he found. His account includes locating his first duck nest, finding 11 species of waterfowl in a small slough, spending a couple of rainy days in a barn owned by a Norwegian farmer and falling into the muck of a prairie wetland.



*Although portions of the hotel were closed, the structure provided housing for families into the 1930s. Tofthagen Library and Museum, Lakota, ND.*



In 1901, Job brought America's most famous living birdman to North Dakota. This was Arthur Cleveland Bent, whose life work, occupying half a century, was the 10-volume *Life Histories of North American Birds*, an invaluable resource. Initially published by the Smithsonian Institution, beginning in 1910, the entire series was reissued by Dover in the mid-1960s. Throughout his descriptions of waterfowl species, Bent refers to his personal observations made in North Dakota. As illustrations, he included photographs taken by Job. Bent's records of nesting by giant Canada geese, white-winged scoters and a few others provide today's biologists with important reference material.

Here is Bent's description of the landscape in Steele County, found as a kind of introduction to his life history of the canvasback. "In the summer of 1901 we found the canvasbacks breeding quite abundantly in Steele County, North Dakota. Even then their breeding grounds were being rapidly encroached upon by advancing civilization which was gradually draining and cultivating the sloughs in which this species nests. Since that time they have largely, if not wholly disappeared from the region, as breeding birds, and their entire breeding range is becoming more and more restricted every year, as the great northwestern plains are being settled and cultivated for wheat and other agricultural products. This and other species of ducks are being driven farther and farther north and must ultimately become exterminated unless large tracts of suitable land can be set apart as breeding reservations, where the birds can find congenial surroundings."

Elmer T. Judd was another respected birdman, and a hunter as well. He wrote regularly for *Field and Stream* magazine from his home near Cando. From 1890 to 1896, he kept a comprehensive list of birds he saw in north central North Dakota, in the Big Coulee west of Esmond, the Devils Lake region and the Turtle Mountains. From

1920 to 1923, he served as game and fish commissioner.

Elliott Coues certainly deserves a place in the list of distinguished birdmen who worked in North Dakota. An Army surgeon, he did a survey of bird life along the international border in the 1870s, where he recorded many bird species, including waterfowl. Many of these records appear in his monumental book *Birds of the Northwest*, which was published in 1874 and drew extensively on his work in what became North Dakota. Coues also edited the journals of Lewis and Clark, and was among the first to recognize the importance of their observations of bird life along the Missouri River.

John James Audubon, the most famous of American birdmen, also visited North Dakota. At age 56, after his famous "Elephant Portfolio" had been published and his fame established, Audubon turned his attention to mammals, undertaking his *American Quadrupeds*, in which he sought to do for mammals what his earlier works had done for birds. Audubon reached Fort Union at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers in August 1843 and spent about six weeks hunting and painting. Although his focus was on mammals, he discovered, described and painted several new species of birds.

These birdmen followed the explorers, many of whom were distinguished birdmen, too. Meriwether Lewis is most prominent in this group. He was a talented observer who described new species and expanded scientific knowledge of others. He established, for example, that Canada geese do nest in trees, using old bald eagle nests, and on cliff faces.



Noted bird artist John James Audubon was in North Dakota in 1843 primarily to work on his "Quadrupeds of North America" portfolio. But he also left us with some early records of waterfowl in the state - and the Audubon National Wildlife Refuge had a namesake. Wikimedia Commons.



By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor

## 2018 UPLAND GAME SEASONS SUMMARIZED

North Dakota's 2018 pheasant and sharp-tailed grouse harvests were similar to 2017, while the number of Hungarian partridge taken last year was down from the year before, according to state Game and Fish Department statistics.

More than 58,200 pheasant hunters harvested 327,000 roosters (up 6 percent) in 2018, compared to 58,300 hunters and 309,400 roosters in 2017.

Counties with the highest percentage of pheasants taken by resident hunters last year were Williams, 6.7; McLean, 6.5; Richland, 6; Morton, 5.6; and Divide, 5.2.

Top counties for nonresident hunters were Hettinger, 13.6 percent; Bowman, 10.4; Divide, 7.6; Dickey, 5.9; and Emmons, 4.8.

In 2018, nearly 13,100 grouse hunters (down 4 percent) harvested 45,600 sharp-tailed grouse (down 3 percent). In 2017, 13,600 hunters took 46,900 sharptails.



Ring-necked rooster.

ASHLEY SALWEY

Counties with the highest percentage of sharptails taken by resident hunters in 2018 were Slope, 6.5; Walsh, 5.5; Mountrail, 5.4; Kidder, 5.3; and Benson, 4.6.

Top counties for nonresident hunters were Bowman, 11.3; Hettinger, 7.4; Divide, 7; Mountrail, 6.8; and Ward, 6.4.

Last year, 11,200 hunters (down 19 percent) harvested 23,000 Hungar-

ian partridge (down 30 percent). In 2017, nearly 13,800 hunters harvested 32,800 Huns.

Counties with the highest percentage of Huns taken by resident hunters in 2018 were Williams, 15.1; Mountrail, 12.1; Logan, 7.3; Ward, 6.5; and Burke, 5.9. Top counties for nonresident hunters were Divide, 10.3; McLean, 9.9; Mountrail, 9.3; Hettinger, 8.9; and Dunn, 8.2.

## Big Game Transport Rules

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

Hunters are prohibited from transporting into or within North Dakota the whole carcass of deer, elk, moose or other members of the cervid family from states and provinces with documented occurrences of CWD in wild populations, or in captive cervids.

In addition, hunters harvesting a white-tailed deer or mule deer from

deer hunting units 3A1, 3B1 and 3F2; a moose from moose hunting unit M10; and an elk from elk hunting unit E6 cannot transport the whole carcass, including the head and spinal column, outside of the unit. However, hunters can transport the whole deer carcass between units 3A1 and 3B1 during any open deer season.

The following lower-risk portions of the carcass can be transported:

- Meat that has been boned out.
- Quarters or other portions of meat with no part of the spinal column or head attached.
- Meat that is cut and wrapped either commercially or privately.
- Hides with no heads attached.
- Skull plates with antlers attached having no hide or brain tissue present.
- Intact skulls with the hide, eyes, lower jaw and associated soft tissue removed, and no visible brain or spinal cord tissue present
- Antlers with no meat or tissue attached.
- Upper canine teeth, also known as buglers, whistlers or ivories.
- Finished taxidermy heads.



## Baiting Restrictions

Hunters are reminded it is unlawful to hunt big game over bait, or place bait to attract big game for the purpose of hunting, on both public and private land in deer units 3A1, 3A2, 3A3 north of U.S. Highway 2, 3B1, 3C west of the Missouri River, 3E1, 3E2, 3F1 and 3F2.

The restriction is in place to help slow the spread of chronic wasting disease, a fatal disease of deer, moose and elk that can cause long-term population declines if left unchecked. Hunting units in the northwest have been added to the restriction zone, following the detection of CWD in those areas this past year.

Hunting over bait is defined as the placement and/or use of baits for attracting big game and other wildlife to a specific location for the purpose of hunting. Baits include but are not limited to grains, minerals, salts, fruits, vegetables, hay, or any other natural or manufactured foods.

In addition, placing of bait for any purpose is prohibited on all North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife management areas. Hunting big game over bait is also prohibited on all U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service national wildlife refuges and waterfowl production areas, U.S. Forest Service national grasslands, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers managed lands, and all North Dakota state school, state park and state forest service lands.

More information on CWD can be found at the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).



| Native sharp-tailed grouse.

LARA ANDERSON

## Wings Needed for Survey

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Equipment on Wildlife Management Areas

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department reminds hunters that tree stands, ground blinds and game cameras cannot be placed on state wildlife management areas prior to August 20.

Equipment set out prior to that date, or left on a WMA after January 31 is considered abandoned property and is subject to removal.

In addition, an equipment registration number, or the owner's name, address and telephone number, must be displayed on all equipment requiring identification.

**Owners can generate an equipment registration number by visiting My Account at the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). One registration number will be issued that can be used on all equipment that requires identification.**



LARA ANDERSON



## Walleye Fingerlings Stocked

North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel stocked more than 140 lakes across the state in summer with walleye fingerlings, completing one of the largest stocking efforts in the history of the agency. This included more than 11.3 million fingerlings from Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery, besting the previous record walleye production by nearly 1 million fish.

Jerry Weigel, Department fisheries production and development section leader, said a big year was needed from the Garrison Dam Hatchery.

"They had to make up for the production that couldn't be used

out of the Valley City National Fish Hatchery due to the zebra mussel discovery in Lake Ashtabula, which is the water source for the Valley City Hatchery," Weigel said.

Walleyes were already in production at Valley City when it was decided to only use those for stocking Lake Ashtabula. Some Valley City walleye fingerlings were also sent to other states for use in lakes where zebra mussels already exist.

"This was done out of caution

until more is known about the zebra mussels in Ashtabula," Weigel said.

Getting fish back into lakes that suffered winterkill was a priority this year, along with keeping up with the growing number of walleye fishing lakes in North Dakota.

"The condition of the receiving waters could not have been better, with cool temperatures and a lot of newly flooded vegetation, which makes for excellent survival

conditions for fingerlings," Weigel said. "The combination of an amazing walleye production effort and lots of water across the state bodes well for continued great walleye fishing in the future."

The number of acres of

production ponds at both hatcheries has remained unchanged in more than 30 years, yet Weigel said hatchery staff continue to find ways to produce more each year when requested.

"This is a testament to the dedicated and experienced staff at both hatcheries in the state," he said.

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



Walleye fingerlings.

MIKE ANDERSON



2018 Watchable Wildlife Contest  
Game Runner-up mallard drake  
Michael Ranum, Bismarck

### PHOTO CONTEST DEADLINE NEARS

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](http://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](mailto: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.



## HIP Registration Required

Migratory bird hunters of all ages are reminded to register with the Harvest Information Program prior to hunting ducks, geese, swans, mergansers, coots, cranes, snipe, doves and woodcock. Hunters must register in each state they are licensed to hunt.

Hunters can HIP certify when purchasing a license – or by clicking the Migratory Bird HIP link – at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). In addition, hunters can call 888-634-4798 and record the HIP number on their printed license.

Those who registered to hunt the spring light goose season in North Dakota do not have to register with HIP again, as it is required only once per year.

HIP registration is a cooperative program designed to determine a sample of hunters from which to measure the harvest of migratory birds for management purposes.



CRAIG BIRKLE

### REPORT BANDED BIRDS

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

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

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

## Hunting, Trapping Guide

Hunters and trappers can find the North Dakota 2019-20 Hunting and Trapping Guide, which includes upland game, migratory game bird and furbearer hunting/trapping regulations and other information, by visiting the state Game and Fish Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). Printed guides are available at the usual license vendor locations.

The 50-plus page guide also features a colored duck identification guide, aquatic nuisance species information, Tom Roster's Nontoxic Shot Lethality Table and more.



## Sandhill Crane Permits

North Dakota's sandhill crane season opens September 14 and continues through November 10.

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

Hunters can also send the permit fee, along with personal information, including height, weight, social security number, date of birth, color of hair and eyes, and hunter education number and state issued, to Crane Permit, NDGF, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501.

## Federal Duck Stamp Required

A federal duck stamp is required for waterfowl hunters age 16 and older beginning September 1. Waterfowl includes ducks, geese, swans, mergansers and coots.

This year's 2019-20 federal duck stamp is available for electronic purchase through the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), instant licensing telephone number, 800-406-6409, or at license vendors registered with the Department's licensing system.

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

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

The physical stamp is processed and sent by the official duck stamp vendor in Texas, and should arrive to the individual buyer well before the expiration date printed on the electronic license. The physical stamp must remain in possession of the hunter after the 45-day electronic stamp has expired. The federal duck stamp has a fee of \$25. An additional \$1.50 fee is added to cover shipping and handling costs of the actual physical stamp.



## More High School Clay Target Championship Results

What follows are the results of the novice and junior varsity divisions for both girls and boys at the North Dakota State High School Clay Target League state championship held earlier in summer at The Shooting Park in Horace. Results of the top finishers in the varsity divisions were published in the July issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

**Class 1A Novice Girls** – Kaitlin Slaubaugh, Wolford High School, 82; Blake Miller, Richland High School, 79; and Maycee Bolgrean, Central Cass High School, 77.

**Class 1A Novice Boys** – Cole Boyd, Dakota Prairie High School, 87; Braeden Volk, Mohall-Lansford High School, 86; and Luke Reinhart, Dakota Prairie High School, 84.

**Class 1A Novice Team** – Dakota Prairie High School, first place; Barnes County High School, second

place; and Richland High School, third place.

**Class 1A Jr. Varsity Girls** – Halle Dunlop, Century High School, 91; Josie Hajek, Sargent Central High School, 87; and Alizabeth Krick, Century High School, 83.

**Class 1A Jr. Varsity Boys** – Preston Mitzel, Century High School, 93; Dylan Jost, Wahpeton High School, 91; and Tyler Guscette, Barnes County North High School, 90.

**Class 1A Jr. Varsity Team** – Century High School, first place; Wahpeton High School, second place; and Barnes County North High School, third place.

**Class 2A Novice Girls** – Veronica Miller, Kindred High School, 76; Kylee Greuel, Kindred High School, 73; and Caitlyn Thoreson, Valley City High School, 70.

**Class 2A Novice Boys** – William

Gay, Sheyenne High School, 83; Mason Brew, Mandan High School, 82; and Calahan Burchill, Valley City High School, 81.

**Class 2A Novice Team** – Valley City High School, first place; Mandan High School, second place; and Fargo North High School, third place.

**Class 2A Jr. Varsity Girls** – Samantha Bauer, Legacy High School, 88; Sydney Steffen, Devils Lake High School, 87; and Makaelyn Lorenz, Valley City High School, 86.

**Class 2A Jr. Varsity Boys** – Bryce Brendel, Mandan High School, 92; Derek Bear, Valley City High School, 91; and Connor Johnson, South Prairie High School, 90.

**Class 2A Jr. Varsity Team** – Valley City High School, first place; Legacy High School, second place; and Mandan High School, third place.

## Devils Lake Access Committee Recognized

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department honored the Devils Lake Access Committee for its ongoing efforts to develop and maintain public use facilities at numerous lake and recreation areas.

The committee was recognized for its construction of boat ramps, courtesy docks, fishing piers, fish cleaning stations, and roads and parking areas at many sites, including Estenson's Landing, Lakewood, Schwab Landing, Pelican Lake, Henegar Landing, Channel A and Four Seasons.

The access committee includes the city of Devils Lake, Devils Lake Chamber of Commerce, Devils Lake Park Board, Ramsey County Commission and Lake Region Anglers Association.

The Game and Fish Department's fisheries division annually presents a "Certificate of Appreciation" to an organization that has signed on as a cooperating partner in local projects.



Pictured from left to right: Suzie Kenner, Devils Lake Tourism; Mike Grafsgaard, city of Devils Lake; Terry Wallace, Devils Lake Park Board; Bob Gibson, Lake Region Anglers Association; Mark Olson, Ramsey County Commission; Jamie Beck, Devils Lake Park Board; Paula Vistad, Devils Lake Chamber of Commerce; and Todd Caspers, North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

SUBMITTED PHOTO



# BACKCAST



By Ron Wilson

Merle died on a Wednesday in July.

Days after, just for the briefest of moments, I'd find myself looking for him around the house, wonder-

ing if he needed help getting to his feet and gently piloted out the door to take care of business in the back yard.

I don't do that anymore and feel bad that I don't.

Merle was my third Brittany. His predecessor, Deke, also died years ago in summer. Both were 14. Coincidences, certainly, but nothing more.

We've always had bird dogs and likely always will. Ollie, our 11-year-old golden retriever who, I'm certain is sacked on our leather couch as I write this, has slowed a step and doesn't recover as quickly from a day in the field. That, and the want to hunt often when work and family allow, is something we have in common.

In 14 years, with Merle mostly quietly in tow (he'd ride without a peep on pavement, but invariably broke into a nervous, shaking whine once tires touched gravel), it's difficult to remember all our outings. Considering

all the miles, the many empty shotgun shells, our share of birds and seasons of tailgate lunches, much of it blends together.

Yet, like recalling your kid's first fish, deer or duck, I can easily unearth from the clutter of many years' worth of memories, Merle's first hunt.

*It's the sharp-tailed grouse opener, a Saturday, of course. It's raining a bit, but not enough to keep us home. This is going to be, has to be, a quick hunt. I promised I wouldn't be late to a youth soccer game back in town where they don't keep score and the T-shirts hang nearly to the little players' knees. I'm*

*town and seasons before we've shot a bird or two on the sidehills. I've yet to shift my pickup into park when I see birds, sharptails, maybe a dozen or more, fly a halfmoon around the tallest hill in the pasture and land out of the wind. I know it can't be this easy, it typically never is, but we'll make the quarter-mile hike because that's why we're here, putting Merle's inexperienced nose into the wind, and see what happens. I split my time watching Merle weave with purpose through the short grass and keeping an eye on the sidehill to see if the birds stay put. I'm*

*guessing that this early in the season, this early in September, that some of the birds are just like my dog, young and inexperienced enough to let us within shotgun range. Turns out, they are. With two grouse in my game vest, bouncing warm against my lower back, we hustle down-*

*hill to my pickup and a soccer game. What a wonderful start.*

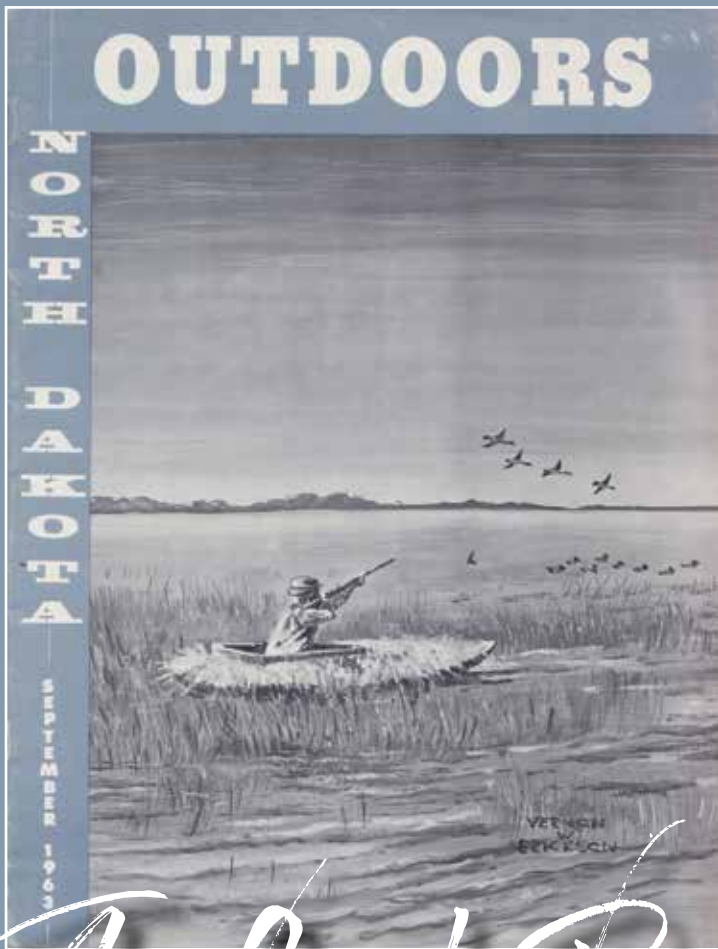
Years later, on a Wednesday in July, I can't say the same about the end.

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



*Merle-*

*excited to see how the morning will unfold, but I'm not holding my breath. This is wholly different than training on grouse wings tugged around the back yard on a string. I've picked this spot, a hilly pasture, with buckbrush patches here and there, because it's close to*



# A Look Back

By Ron Wilson

North Dakota hunters have targeted fast-flying mourning doves forever. Well, that's not entirely true, even though it may seem that way.

In 1963, North Dakota held its first dove season since the early 1920s.

"Although a highly prized and respected game bird in 31 of 50 states, the mourning dove was pretty much ignored in North Dakota until a token season was proclaimed in 1963. This represented the state's first dove season in 41 years," according to the February 1964 issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

Dove seasons were held in North Dakota in 1963 and 1964, then abandoned for more than a decade until legislation changed things.

"House Bill 1341 again places the mourning dove on the game bird list. The dove was listed as a game bird until 1965 when the legislature removed it from that status and declared it a harmless bird, thus

affording it full protection. Mourning doves are considered a game bird ... are very abundant and will easily support annual hunting seasons in North Dakota," according to the June 1979 issue of NDO.

North Dakota's dove season has run uninterrupted since 1979. According to Game and Fish Department statistics, the dove season attracted on average about 20,000 hunters from 1981 to 1984. Hunter numbers have fallen since, due to changing lifestyles, busy schedules, competing interests, increase in early season bowhunting opportunities for deer, you name it, to roughly an average of 7,600 hunters from 2000 to 2016.

Even when dove hunter numbers were at their best in the state, some questioned why participation wasn't higher.

"Strangely enough, recreational dove hunting has a very limited following among ordinary upland game bird hunters ... (but) those who

have discovered the thrill of dove hunting don't just hunt for the bag, but out of an addiction to pursue a unique challenge," according to the February 1984 issue of NDO. "The mourning dove is an extremely skillful flyer and possesses a remarkable knack for aggravating the bird hunter who has a short temper."

In 1963, during the first dove season in decades, about 17,000 hunters bagged nearly 70,000 birds.

"Most sportsmen tried dove hunting for the first time in their lives and, naturally, were a bit skeptical about hunting so common a bird," according to the February 1964 issue of NDO. "Many thought dove hunting would be too easy to make it sporting, but after a few tries most were convinced of the quality of the hunting."

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