

# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
\$2.00 JANUARY 2020



NORTH  
**Dakota**  
Be Legendary™

Game and Fish



## MATTERS OF OPINION



**Terry Steinwand**  
*Director*

**I**t's always difficult, when looking back at the year we just put to bed, to pick out one highlight because the Game and Fish Department is made up of many hardworking people who do their job.

Yet, to start, I would say that the fishing in 2019 was probably one of those highlights as we had some of the best fishing we ever had, if not the greatest fishing we ever had, in North Dakota.

From the smaller community fishing waters to the bigger, well-known fisheries like Sakakawea, Devils Lake and the Missouri River, the fishing was outstanding, thanks in large part to the Game and Fish Department fisheries crews.

Also, the Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen walk-in access program increased by about 30,000 acres in 2019 compared to the year before. Kevin Kading, Department private land section leader, and his crew continue to do a wonderful job.

With a dramatic decrease in Conservation Reserve Program acres on the landscape over the years, Department private land biologists are doing some good work around the countryside by making sure there's good habitat on PLOTS acres so hunters have reasonable opportunities for success.

Another highlight in 2019 was the increase in deer license numbers, which depends greatly, no matter the year, on habitat and winter to a large extent. The number of pronghorn hunting units were increased last year, while elk license numbers were higher than 2018 and moose licenses hit an all-time high.

While there were plenty of birds available, waterfowl hunters struggled a bit

as wet conditions drastically delayed, or stalled altogether, harvest of standing crops and limited access because of muddy conditions.

Pheasant numbers in 2019 were pretty much what Game and Fish biologists anticipated. In some areas we knew they were going to be pretty good and some places were going to be average in terms of bird numbers.

Of course, we always want to see the pheasant hunting be better, but without the right habitat on the ground for birds during the nesting season and the right kind of cover to help them get through the leaner winter months, it's a challenge.

Speaking of challenges, we will have our share, as we do most years, in 2020. Two of the main challenges we are addressing and will continue to do so down the road are chronic wasting disease and aquatic nuisance species.

Our goal with CWD is to keep the disease contained in the areas where it is now and make sure we have tremendous deer, moose and elk hunting opportunities for many, many years down the road.

Our attitude and strategy are the same with aquatic nuisance species. We don't want to see these invasive species spread anywhere else. That means the Game and Fish Department will continue its effort to educate the public, monitor and inspect for ANS effectively and efficiently as possible.

In 2020, I predict wonderful things for North Dakota's great outdoors, and I encourage everyone to get out and enjoy.

*Terry Steinwand*



DEPARTMENT DIRECTORY  
Governor Doug Burgum

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION

Game and Fish Director: Terry Steinwand  
Deputy Director: Scott Peterson  
Chief, Administrative Services: Kim Kary  
Business Manager: Corey Wentland  
Administrative Staff Officer: Justin Mattson  
Administrative Assistant: Lynn Timm  
Administrative Officer/Building Maint. Supvr: George Lee  
Building Maint. Technician: Brandon Diehl  
Accounting Manager: Angie Morrison  
Accountants: Kelly Wike, Melissa Long, Ashley Baker  
IT Section Supervisor/GIS Specialist: Brian Hosek  
IT Coordinators: Alan Relle, Larry Gross  
Programmer Analyst: Shane Wegner  
Licensing Manager: Randy Meissner  
Assistants: Gail Mosset, Amanda Anstrom, Tracy Price,  
Tana Bentz, Tanya Mikkelsen  
Administrative Assistant – Dickinson: Janel Kolar, Stephanie Richardson  
Administrative Assistant – Devils Lake: Lisa Toffe  
Administrative Assistant – Jamestown: Tonya Kukowski  
Administrative Assistant – Riverdale: Mattea Bierman  
Administrative Assistant – Williston: Nikki Wright

CONSERVATION AND COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION

Division Chief: Greg Link, Bismarck  
Communications Supervisor: Craig Bihrlé, Bismarck  
Editor, North Dakota OUTDOORS: Ron Wilson, Bismarck  
Digital Media Editor: Lara Anderson, Bismarck  
News Editor: Greg Freeman, Bismarck  
Video Project Supervisor: Mike Anderson, Bismarck  
Photographer/Asst. Videographer: Ashley Salwey  
Outreach Biologists: Doug Leier, West Fargo; Greg Gullickson, Minot;  
Pat Lothspeich, Bismarck; Jim Job, Grand Forks  
Information Specialist: Dawn Jochim, Bismarck  
Graphic Artist: Connie Schiff, Bismarck  
Education Supervisor: Marty Egeland, Bismarck  
Education Coordinators: Jeff Long, Brian Schaffer, Bismarck  
Hunter Education Coordinator: John Mazur, Bismarck  
Conservation Supervisor: Steve Dyke, Bismarck  
Resource Biologists: John Schumacher, Bruce Kreft, Bismarck  
Conservation Biologists: Sandra Johnson, Patrick Isakson, Elisha Mueller, Bismarck  
Administrative Assistant: Vacant

ENFORCEMENT DIVISION

Division Chief: Robert Timian, Bismarck  
Investigative Supervisor: Scott Winkelman, Bismarck  
Operations Supervisor: Jackie Lundstrom, Bismarck  
Warden Pilot: Jeff Sieger, Bismarck  
Region No. 1 Warden Supvr: Mark Pollert, Jamestown  
District Wardens: Corey Erck, Bismarck; Jerad Bluem, Steele; Michael Sedlacek, Fargo;  
Tim Phalen, Wyndmere; Andrew Dahlgren, Edgeley; Erik Schmidt, Linton; Greg Hastings,  
Jamestown  
Region No. 2 Warden Supvr: Paul Freeman, Devils Lake  
District Wardens: Jonathan Toffeland, Bottineau; Jonathan Peterson, Devils Lake; James  
Myhre, New Rockford; Blake Riewer, Grand Forks; Alan Howard, Cando; Peter Milley,  
Cavalier; Drew Johnson, Finley; Sam Feldman, Rugby  
Region No. 3 Warden Supvr: Doug Olson, Riverdale  
District Wardens: Jim Burud, Kenmare; Tim Larson, Turtle Lake; Ken Skuza,  
Riverdale; Michael Raasakka, Stanley; Brian Updike, Minot; Joe Lucas, Watford City;  
Shawn Sperling, Keenan Snyder, Williston  
Region No. 4 Warden Supvr: Dan Hoenke, Dickinson  
District Wardens: Kylor Johnston, Hazen; Art Cox, Bowman; Courtney Sprenger, Elgin;  
Zane Manhart, Gola; Jake Miller, Killdeer; Jeff Violette, Mandan; Zachary Schuchard,  
Richardton  
Administrative Assistant: Lori Kensington, Bismarck

WILDLIFE DIVISION

Division Chief: Jeb Williams, Bismarck  
Assistant Division Chief: Casey Anderson, Bismarck  
Game Mgt. Section Leader: Stephanie Tucker, Bismarck  
Pilot: Jeff Faight, Bismarck  
Upland Game Mgt. Supvr: Jesse Kolar, Dickinson  
Upland Game Mgt. Biologist: Rodney Gross, Bismarck  
Migratory Game Bird Mgt. Supvr: Mike Szymanski, Bismarck  
Migratory Game Bird Biologist: Andrew Dinges, Bismarck  
Big Game Mgt. Supvr: Bruce Stillings, Dickinson  
Big Game Mgt. Biologists: Bill Jensen, Bismarck; Brett Wiedmann, Dickinson;  
Jason Smith, Jamestown  
Survey Coordinator: Chad Parent, Bismarck  
Wildlife Veterinarian: Dr. Charlie Bahnson, Bismarck  
Game Management Technician: Ryan Herigstad, Bismarck  
Wildlife Resource Management Section Leader: Kent Luttschwager, Williston  
Wildlife Resource Mgt. Supvrs: Bill Haase, Bismarck; Brian Prince, Devils Lake; Brian  
Kietzman, Jamestown; Dan Halstead, Riverdale; Blake Schaen, Lonetree  
Wildlife Resource Mgt. Biologists: Arvid Anderson, Riverdale; Randy Littlefield, Lonetree;  
Rodd Compton, Jamestown; Judd Jasmer, Dickinson; Todd Buckley, Williston  
Wildlife Techs: Tom Crutchfield, Jim Houston, Bismarck; Dan Morman, Robert Miller,  
Riverdale; Ernest Dawson, Jamestown; Micah Ranum, Brandon Ramsey, Lonetree; Scott  
Olson, Devils Lake; Zach Kjos, Williston  
Private Land Section Leader: Kevin Kading, Bismarck  
Private Land Field Operation Supvrs: Nathan Harling, West Region; Curtis Francis, East  
Region, Bismarck  
Private Land Biologists: Colin Penner, Levi Jacobson, Bismarck; Jaden Honeyman, Ryan  
Oberhelman, Dickinson; Ryan Huber, Riverdale; Renae Schultz, Jamestown; Terry Oswald,  
Jr., Lonetree; Andrew Ahrens, Devils Lake; Jens Johnson, Williston  
Procurement Officer: Dale Repnow, Bismarck  
Administrative Assistant: Alegra Powers, Bismarck  
Lonetree Administrative Assistant: Diana Raugust, Harvey

FISHERIES DIVISION

Division Chief: Greg Power, Bismarck  
Fisheries Mgt. Section Leader: Scott Gangl, Bismarck  
Fisheries Supvrs: Jeff Hendrickson, Dickinson; Jason Lee, Riverdale; Paul Bailey, Bismarck;  
Randy Hiltner, Devils Lake; Dave Fryda, Riverdale; Brandon Kratz, Jamestown  
Fisheries Biologists: Russ Kinzler, Riverdale; Todd Caspers, Devils Lake; Aaron Slominski,  
Williston; Mike Johnson, Jamestown  
Fisheries Techs: Phil Miller, Devils Lake; Pat John, Jamestown; Justen Barstad, Bismarck;  
Brian Frohlich, Riverdale; Jeff Merchant, Dickinson  
Production/Development Section Supvr: Jerry Weigel, Bismarck  
Aquatic Habitat Supvr: Scott Elstad, Bismarck  
Aquatic Nuisance Species Coordinator: Vacant  
Aquatic Nuisance Species Biologist: Benjamin Holen, Jamestown  
Fisheries Development Supvr: Bob Frohlich, Bismarck  
Fisheries Dev. Proj. Mgr: Wesley Erdle, Bismarck  
Fisheries Development Technician: Kyle Hoge, Bismarck  
Administrative Assistant: Janice Vetter, Bismarck

ADVISORY BOARD

District 1 ..... Beau Wisness, Keene  
District 2 ..... Travis Leier, Velve  
District 3 ..... Thomas Rost, Devils Lake  
District 4 ..... Bruce Ellertson, Lakota  
District 5 ..... Duane Hanson, West Fargo  
District 6 ..... Cody Sand, Forbes  
District 7 ..... David Nehring, Bismarck  
District 8 ..... Dwight Hecker, Fairfield

# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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

• Editor: Ron Wilson • Graphic Designer: Connie Schiff • Circulation Manager: Dawn Jochim

JANUARY 2020 • NUMBER 6 • VOLUME LXXXII

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### FEATURES

2019 in Review.....	2
2019 Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest .....	6

### DEPARTMENTS

Buffaloberry Patch.....	20
Back Cast .....	25



### Front Cover

Short-eared owls are birds of the open country. They nest in North Dakota, and many overwinter here as well, depending on food availability. *Photo by Craig Bihrlé.*



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 • email: ndgfg@nd.gov  
• Information 701-328-6300 • Administration 701-328-6305  
• Outdoors Subscriptions 701-328-6363  
• Hunter Education 701-328-6615 • Licensing 701-328-6335  
• 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.

Permission to reprint materials appearing in North Dakota OUTDOORS must be obtained from the author, artist or photographer. We encourage contributions; contact the editor for writer and photography guidelines prior to submission.

The NDGFD receives federal financial assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the NDGFD joins the U.S. Department of the Interior and its bureaus in prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex (in education programs or activities) and also religion for the NDGFD. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or you desire further information, please write to: N. D. Game and Fish Department, Attn: Chief Administrative Services, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095 or to: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Attn: Civil Rights Coordinator, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Mail Stop: MBSP-4020, Arlington, Virginia 22203.

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

**Report All Poachers (RAP) 701-328-9921**

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



## *in Review*

*By Scott Peterson*

Regardless of age, most people in North Dakota today never experienced a fall as wet as the one we just put behind us.

While the tremendous amount of precipitation is a boon to North Dakota's fisheries, especially those prairie lakes down several feet from their highs a few years ago, it's made life very difficult for farmers, ranchers and many others.

As it happens in winter during odd-numbered years, the North Dakota Legislature was in session in 2019. While the Game and Fish Department dealt with many bills during the gathering, as always, a few seemed to ultimately

require more time and attention than others.

Senate Bill 2315, commonly referred as the "no trespass" bill, garnered a lot of discussion and debate. The Game and Fish Department is committed to finding some common ground for this ongoing debate to hopefully put an end to the inevitable and undesirable effect it has on landowner/hunter relationships.

The passage of Senate Bill 2293 provided the Department a bit more leverage in dealing with aquatic nuisance species, more specifically, zebra mussels. As most readers are already aware, zebra mussels were found in Lake Ashtabula in

June and downstream in the Sheyenne River in early fall. What this will mean to the long-term health and viability of those fisheries is yet to be seen.

Senate Bill 2293 does provide Game and Fish more funding and personnel in the battle against aquatic nuisance species and we are committed to using those positions and funds in the most efficient manner possible.

Game and Fish Department fisheries crews continue to manage a historically high number of waters across the state. While fishing opportunities are currently as good as they've ever been in North Dakota, we understand that rising water

levels and historic amounts of precipitation are not good for everyone.

Going into the fall, upland game bird numbers appeared to be up slightly on a statewide basis. Reports Game and Fish staff have received from hunters are sketchy at this point, which may be due in large part to the unusually high number of acres of standing crops across the landscape. It is looking like many of those standing crops will remain until spring and will likely influence any statements the Department can make about the quality of the upland hunting season in 2019.

From a statewide basis, deer numbers are on the rise. The Department made available more deer licenses again in fall, so the trend is moving in the right direction, albeit slowly.

Department big game biologists will tell you that deer license numbers aren't where they'd like to see them in most hunting units, but given the fact that North Dakota has considerably fewer acres of wildlife habitat on the landscape than just a few years ago, the scenario playing out is not unexpected. As always, a mild winter will have a positive influence on deer numbers going into next spring.

Chronic wasting disease continues to create challenges in North Dakota. CWD generates a lot of discussion around the state between hunters who are passionate about their hunting traditions. We understand their passion and commitment and the Game and Fish Department's goal is to reduce the risk and spread of CWD in an attempt to safeguard those deer hunting traditions for generations to come.

### **Hard Winter, Wet Conditions Follow**

Cold temperatures and abundant snow made the winter of 2019 a difficult one.

While Game and Fish Department fisheries biologists deal with winterkill on some waters no matter the year, last winter was harder on the resources than most.

Tough conditions and declining lake levels – many of the states newer lakes were down several feet from their highs – led to winterkill on 20 or so marginal waters.

Runoff in spring from heavy winter snows provided a much-needed jump to lakes with falling water levels. What followed was an exceptionally wet summer and an unusually wet fall, which led to most lakes nearing all-time high levels.

### **Upland Game Birds and Waterfowl**

North Dakota's roadside surveys indicated total pheasant, sharp-tailed grouse and Hungarian partridge numbers in 2019 were up compared to 2018.

The survey showed total pheasants observed per 100 miles were up 10% from 2018. In addition, broods per 100 miles were up 17%, while the average brood size was down 5%.

Game and Fish Department biologists said 2019 was the first year in a while that had good residual cover to start the year, and good weather for nesting and brood-rearing. In the southwest portion of the state, which is North Dakota's primary pheasant district and most popular hunting area, local populations were said to be slowly improving.

The survey indicated that sharptails observed were up 113% statewide from 2018, yet still about 50% below numbers seen from 2012-15. Partridge numbers were also up 58% from 2018.

Improved wetland conditions, along with increased numbers of waterfowl responding to those conditions, were found during the Game and Fish Department's 72nd 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 number of duck broods observed during the Department's July brood survey was down 9% from 2018, but 59% above the long-term average. The average brood size was 6.76 ducklings, nearly identical to the 2018 estimate.

Numbers of resident Canada geese,

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

### **Fall Fish Surveys**

The Game and Fish Department's fall fish reproduction survey, which evaluates natural reproduction, stocking success and forage abundance, indicated the future looks promising, especially compared to 2018 when many waters were struggling.

Many lakes already had low water levels going into last winter, and then a heavy snowpack resulted in significant winterkill. Good moisture throughout summer 2019 rejuvenated the habitat in many smaller lakes around the state, primarily in the central and southeast.

The cooler, wet summer also produced ideal receiving conditions for stocked pike and walleye.

Similar to 2018, Devils Lake saw fair to good numbers of walleye, with the catch close to average. However, very low numbers of yellow perch were observed, which means it wasn't a good reproductive year for perch.

The survey showed a good catch of young walleye, the result of a combination of stocking efforts and natural reproduction, in Lake Sakakawea. Plus, a lot of rainbow smelt were noted, so the forage base remained pretty solid.

Lake Oahe has had several years of good walleye reproduction, including 2019. Oahe's walleye population continues to be dominated by smaller fish because the lake is lacking forage.

### **Zebra Mussels Discovered at Ashtabula and Beyond**

The Game and Fish Department confirmed well-established populations of invasive zebra mussels in Lake Ashtabula in June, and in the Sheyenne River near Valley City in September.

At 5,200 acres, Lake Ashtabula is operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and it offers a variety of outdoor activities such as boating, swim-



ming, fishing, camping and skiing. It's unknown how these small, sharp-shelled mussels were introduced into Ashtabula, and there is no known method to completely rid a lake of zebra mussels.

In 2019, Department biologists also found bighead carp in the James River, which was a first for the state. The carp moved up the James River from South Dakota during times of high water.

## Deer License Numbers Increased

The Game and Fish Department made available 65,500 licenses to deer gun hunters in 2019.

The number of licenses increased by 10,350 from 2018 and was well above the recent low of 43,275 in 2015.

Some of the increases in 2019 were any-antlered (up 3,150), any-antlerless (up 4,100), whitetail bucks (up 700), and mule deer bucks (up 450).

## Millions of Walleyes Stocked

Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel stocked more than 140 lakes across the state with walleye fingerlings, which completed one of the largest stocking efforts in the history of the agency.

The 2019 stocking effort included more than 11.3 million fingerlings from Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery, which bested the previous record walleye production by nearly 1 million fish.

A big year was needed from the Garrison hatchery to make up for production that couldn't be used out of the Valley City National Fish Hatchery, due to the discovery of zebra mussels in Lake Ashtabula, which is the water source for the hatchery in Valley City.

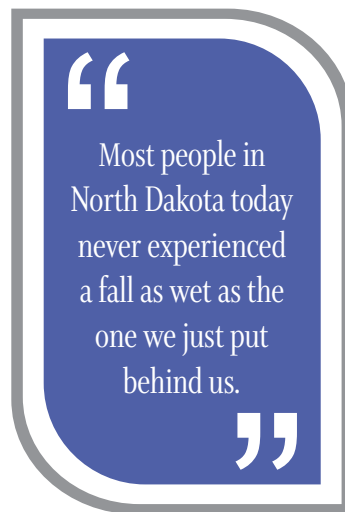
Walleyes were already in production at Valley City when it was decided to only use those for stocking Lake Ashtabula. Some Valley City walleye fingerlings were also sent to other states for use in lakes where zebra mussels already exist.

Getting fish back into lakes that suffered winterkill was a priority in 2019, along with keeping up with the growing number of walleye fishing lakes in North Dakota.

## Fall Mule Deer Survey

Biologists counted 2,218 mule deer in the annual fall mule deer aerial survey in October.

Overall, big game biologists said there was good fawn production and stable buck-to-doe ratios at or near their long-term averages. The ratios were 41 bucks per 100 does, and 84 fawns per 100 does.



## New CWD Findings, Surveillance Continued

Since 2009, 15 deer have tested positive for CWD in the state – 13 from Grant and Sioux counties in the southwest, and one from Divide County in the northwest.

The 15th animal, a severely emaciated white-tailed deer found dead just south of Williston in late February 2019, was the first documented case of mortality due to CWD in North Dakota.

Then, two mule deer taken in September tested positive for CWD, including one during the archery season from deer gun unit 4B in McKenzie County, where CWD had not previously been found. The other deer was harvested during the youth season in unit 3A1 in Divide County where CWD was first detected in 2018.

The Game and Fish Department continued its Hunter-Harvested Surveillance program during the 2019 hunting season by sampling deer for chronic wasting disease from units in more than half of the state.

Samples from hunter-harvested deer taken in the eastern portion of the state

were tested from units 1, 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 2E, 2F1, 2F2, 2G, 2G1, 2G2 and 2L. In addition, deer were tested in the northwest from units 3A1, 3A2, 3A3 (that portion of the unit north of U.S. Highway 2) and 3B1, in the west from units 4B and 4C, and in the southwest from units 3C (the portion of the unit west of the Missouri River), 3E1, 3E2, 3F1 and 3F2.

CWD tests results for the 2019 deer gun season weren't available at the time of publication.

CWD has not been found in the eastern third of the state. Biologists anticipated that additional positive deer would be found in 2019 in units 3A1, 3B1, 3F2 and 4B where CWD had been previously detected. Infection rates are relatively low in those areas, but in previous years only a small portion of hunters had submitted heads for testing.

## Lawmakers Gathered

North Dakota lawmakers gathered in Bismarck in 2019 for the 66th legislative assembly. Game and Fish Department officials tracked 40 outdoors-related bills.

Of those 40 bills, 21 passed both chambers and were signed into law.

In one move, lawmakers created an aquatic nuisance species fund to assist in the ongoing monitoring efforts of aquatic nuisance species around the state.

The new legislation established an ANS fee of \$15 for motorized watercraft registered in North Dakota to run concurrent with the three-year motorized watercraft registration period. The fee starts with the 2020-22 registration period.

## Bighorn Licenses Increased

The Game and Fish Department allocated five bighorn sheep licenses for the 2019 hunting season, two more than in 2018.

Department biologists said the objective for the 2019 season was to reduce the number of rams in the southern badlands, to lessen the risk of transmitting bacterial pneumonia to the northern population.

According to 2019 population estimates, there are more than 300 bighorn sheep north of Interstate 94, but only 20 south of the Interstate.

A record 15,518 hunters applied for a bighorn sheep license in 2019.

## Moose, Elk, Pronghorn Licenses

North Dakota hunters had more opportunities in 2019 to hunt big game as increases in license numbers were noted for moose, elk and pronghorn.

For pronghorn, following a 4% population increase from 2018, Game and Fish allocated 1,330 licenses, or 255 more than the year prior. Twelve hunting units were opened in fall, two more than 2018.

Game and Fish allocated a record number (475) of once-in-a-lifetime moose licenses in 2019, up from 330 in 2018. The Department also allocated 474 once-in-a-lifetime elk licenses (more than 2018) to address population increases primarily in elk units E1E, E1W and E3.

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

### 2019 Numbers in Review

- 29 – Number of male sage grouse counted on eight leks in spring, up 7% from 2018.
- 90 – Number of elk captured and fitted with GPS collars as part of a study to better understand elk distribution and movements in the badlands.
- 600 – Approximate number of hunters who successfully drew a deer license but, as required by state law, did not purchase a general game and habitat license.
- 820 – The record number of archers who competed in the North Dakota National Archery in Schools program state bull's-eye tournament in Minot.
- 2,000 – Approximate number of walleyes tagged by Department fisheries biologists in Alkaline Lake in Kidder County as part of a one-year study.
- 3,000 – Approximate number of walleyes tagged by Department fisheries biologists in Lake Sakakawea as part of a four-year study.
- 14,000 – Approximate number of trout, pike and catfish stocked by Department fisheries personnel in dozens of community fisheries around the state in spring.
- 78,000 – Approximate number of hunters, not including 13,500 gratis applicants, who applied for 64,500 deer gun lottery licenses.
- 99,000 – Estimated number of Canada geese counted during the Department's annual mid-winter waterfowl survey.
- 791,000 – Number of Private Land Open To Sportsmen acres made available to hunters for the fall hunting season.

2018-19 LICENSES AND PERMITS ISSUED		
	RESIDENT	NONRESIDENT
Individual Fishing	49,826	19,207
Married Couple Fishing	14,389	5,531
Senior Citizen Fishing	12,387	
Disabled Fishing	260	
Short-Term Fishing		
10-Day		7,028
3-Day		25,204
Paddlefish Tags	2,769	725
Commercial Tags	8	
Retail Bait Vendor	257	
Wholesale Bait Vendor	36	4
Fish Hatchery	4	
2018 Boat Registrations	8,461	
(Second year of 3-year decal)		
General Game Hunting	41,375	38,086
Small Game Hunting	15,488	19,704
Combination License	56,148	
Waterfowl Hunting		21,392
Furbearer Hunting/Trapping	9,589	2,970
Fur Buyer	28	9
Deer Gun Hunting	41,068	343
Deer Gun Hunting (Gratis)	13,098	277
Deer Bowhunting	26,318	2,506
Moose Hunting	283	
Moose Hunting	47	
(Preferential Landowner)		
Elk Hunting	346	
Elk Hunting	72	
(Preferential Landowner)		
Turkey Hunting (Spring)	5,412	
Turkey Hunting (Fall)	3,148	
Turkey Hunting (Gratis Spring)	394	
Turkey Hunting (Gratis Fall)	173	
Habitat Stamp	79,461	
Shooting Preserve	13	
Fishing/Hunting Guide	273	35
Taxidermist	238	1
Falconry	2	
Scientific Collector	32	17
Swan	1,543	1,157
Sandhill Crane	2,364	1,741

### 2019 SPECIAL BIG GAME LICENSES

	LICENSES AVAILABLE	APPLICATIONS RECEIVED
Moose	475	22,456
Elk	489	19,290
Bighorn Sheep	4	15,520

### FINANCIAL STATEMENT JULY 1, 2018 TO JUNE 30, 2019

Income	\$ 32,872,473
Expenses	\$ 39,725,599

### FUND BALANCES, FIXED ASSETS AND LONG-TERM DEBT

Game and Fish General Fund	\$ 31,220,053
Habitat and Depredation Fund	\$ 981,268
Nongame Wildlife Fund	\$ 138,836
Total All Funds	\$ 32,340,156
Fixed Assets	\$ 52,558,466
Department Net Worth	\$ 84,898,622



**Overall Winner**  
Bighorn sheep  
Michael Ranum, Bismarck  
Photo taken near Fairfield





# 2019 watchable **WILDLIFE PHOTO** contest

*By Patrick T. Isakson*

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest is different this year.

Simply, more photographs were featured in this year's contest than in the past.

While it was exciting to see the nearly 30-year-old contest attract a record number of entries this year, what was impressive was the quality of many of those photographs and the animals themselves, frozen in time by the push of a button.

For instance, the photograph of the Virginia rail in the nongame category taken by Mason Sieges of Bismarck caught our eye, in great part because this reclusive and elusive rail is so seldom photographed.

Thanks to the many digital images provided by contest participants, each of the three categories – game, nongame and plants and insects – will feature a first-place photograph and eight runners-up.

The overall winning photograph in the 2019 contest features bighorn sheep in the badlands taken by Michael Ranum of Bismarck.

Bighorn sheep were reintroduced after considerable effort into western North Dakota in 1956. For decades these distinctive animals have been a showpiece in the gorgeous, yet ruggedly steep badlands terrain that so readily suits them.

---

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







### Game Runner-up

Wood duck

Kevin Hice, Washburn

Photo taken at McKenzie Slough WMA



### Game 1st Place

Coyote stalking sharptails

Kevin Hice, Washburn

Photo taken near Mercer





**Game Runner-up**  
Ring-necked pheasant  
Michael Ranum, Bismarck  
Photo taken near Bismarck



**Game Runner-up**  
Elk  
Jill Edinger, Carrington  
Photo taken at Sully's Hill National Game Preserve



**Game Runner-up**  
Red fox pup  
Brad Starry, Fargo  
Photo taken near Fargo

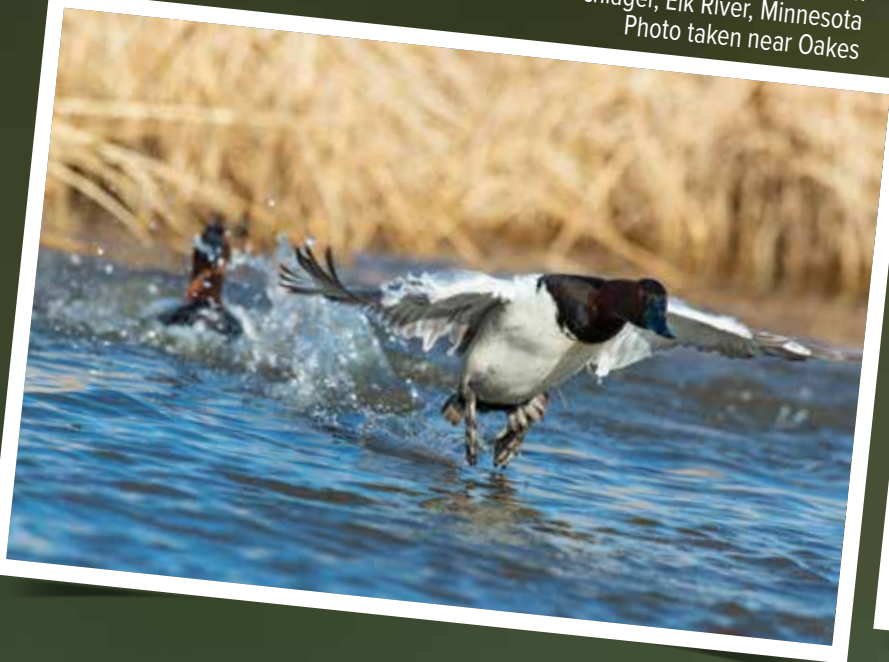


**Game Runner-up**  
White-tailed deer fawn  
Brandon Hillius, Fargo  
Photo taken at Orchard Glen Park, Fargo





**Game Runner-up**  
Canvasback  
Steve Oehlenschlager, Elk River, Minnesota  
Photo taken near Oakes



**Game Runner-up**  
Moose  
Ross Warner, rural Bismarck  
Photo taken in McLean County



**Game Runner-up**  
Blue-winged teal brood  
Thomas Wirtz, Bismarck  
Photo taken in Burleigh County





**Nongame 1st Place**  
American bittern with garter snake  
Lugene Gerber, Bismarck  
Photo taken near Bismarck

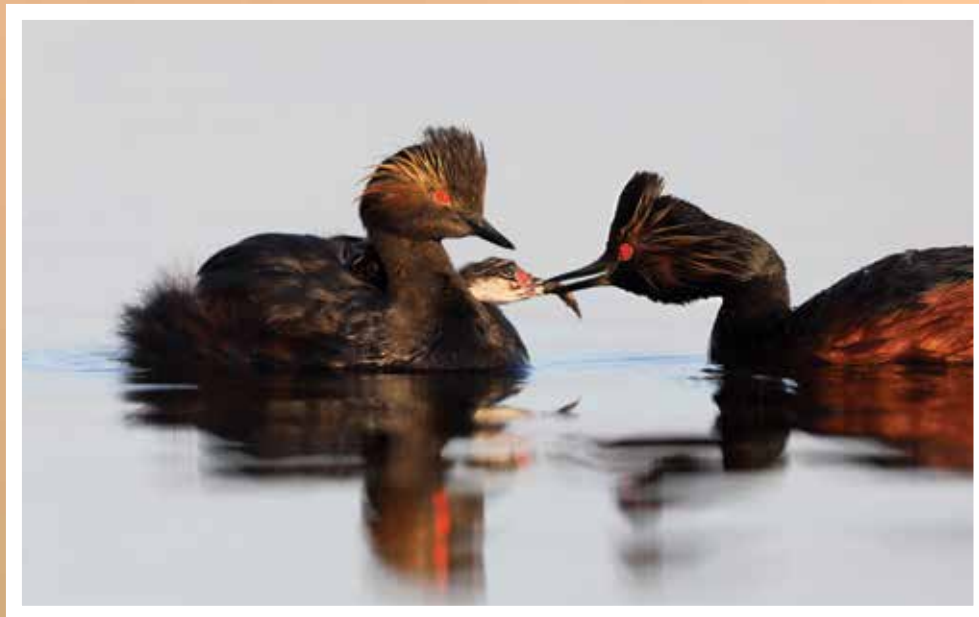


**Nongame Runner-up**  
Prairie rattlesnake  
Nels Kilpela, Dickinson  
Photo taken near Fryburg





**Nongame Runner-up**  
Eared grebe  
Kevin Hice, Washburn  
Photo taken at McKenzie Slough WMA



**Nongame Runner-up**  
Virginia rail  
Mason Sieges, Bismarck  
Photo taken at McKenzie Slough WMA



**Nongame Runner-up**  
Sedge wren  
Kelly Krabbenhoft, West Fargo  
Photo taken in McLean County

**Nongame Runner-up**  
Long-billed dowitcher  
Kevin Hice, Washburn  
Photo taken at McKenzie Slough WMA







**Nongame Runner-up**  
Snowy owl  
Matt Sorum, Fargo  
Photo taken near Fargo



**Nongame Runner-up**  
Ruby-throated hummingbird  
Mark Pfeifer, Lidgerwood  
Photo taken in Richland County



**Nongame Runner-up**  
Short-horned lizard  
Benjamin Bauer, Lino Lakes, Minnesota  
Photo taken at Theodore Roosevelt  
National Park



Plants and Insects 1st Place  
Dragonfly  
Linda Whisman, Harvey  
Photo taken in Harvey





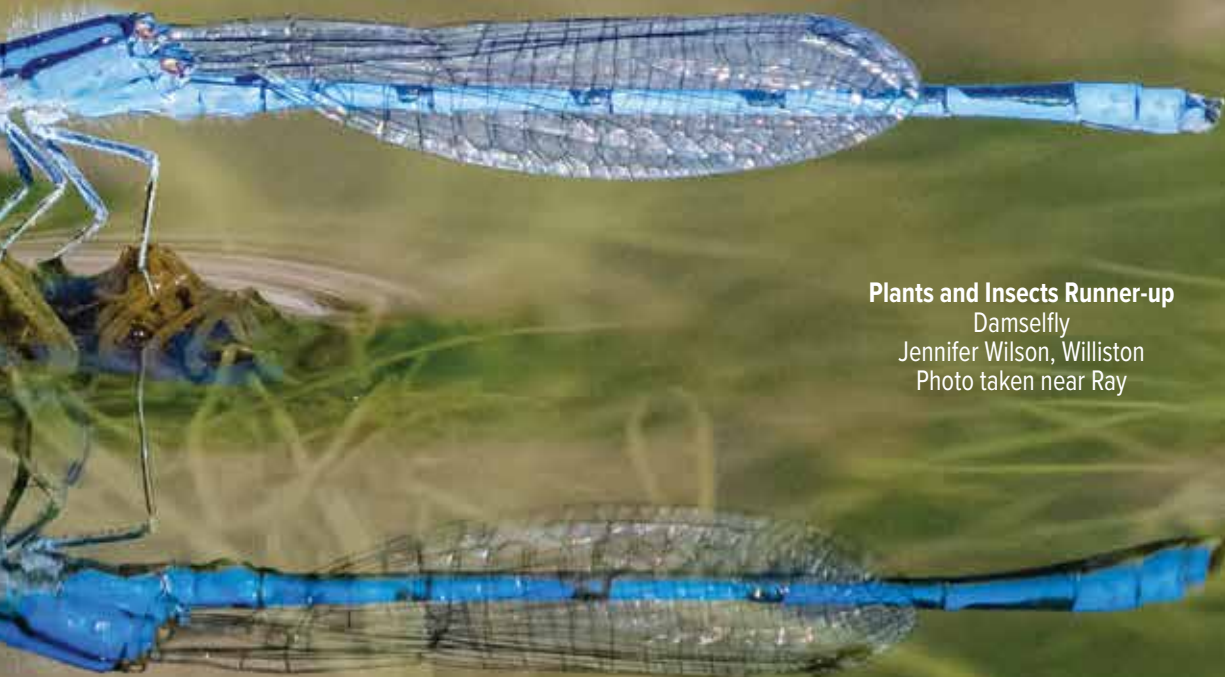
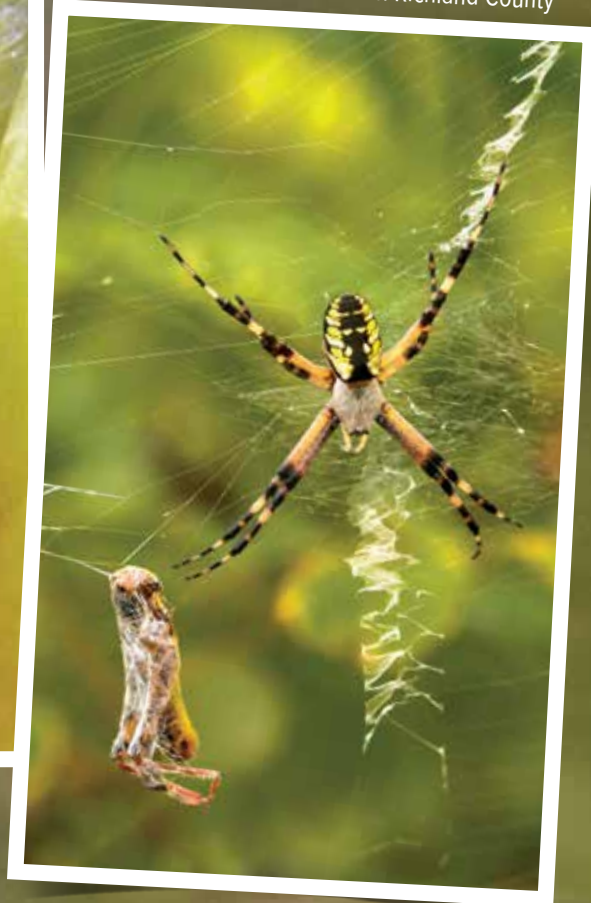
**Plants and Insects Runner-up**

Metallic green bee  
Becky Graner, Huff  
Photo taken near Huff



**Plants and Insects Runner-up**

Garden spider  
Mark Pfeifer, Lidgerwood  
Photo taken in Richland County



**Plants and Insects Runner-up**

Damselfly  
Jennifer Wilson, Williston  
Photo taken near Ray

**Plants and Insects Runner-up**

Peppered moth caterpillar

Sharon Watson, Buxton

Photo taken in Buxton



**Plants and Insects Runner-up**

Bee on sunflower

Ryan Hurley, Jackson, Tennessee

Photo taken at Lehr Waterfowl  
Production Area





**Plants and Insects Runner-up**  
Prickly pear flower  
Nancy Secrest, Hettinger  
Photo taken near Hettinger



**Plants and Insects Runner-up**  
Sphinx moth  
Rita Frovarp, West Fargo  
Photo taken in West Fargo



**Plants and Insects Runner-up**  
Blue dragonflies  
David Hanson, Grand Forks  
Photo taken in Grand Forks



*By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor*

## CREP ENROLLMENT OPEN

Landowners in southwestern North Dakota are again able to enroll in the state Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, after the U.S. Department of Agriculture opened a new signup period in early December.

In addition, USDA also announced a signup for the general Conservation Reserve Program, which is open until February 29.

The North Dakota Riparian Project CREP, first offered in spring 2017, allows states to identify resource concerns and design custom-built projects along riparian areas.

"Over a 10-year period, approximately \$19 million in federal funds from the USDA Farm Service Agency can be used to provide annual rental, incentive and cost-share payments for filter strips, riparian buffers, or pollinator and honeybee habitat," according to Kevin Kading, private land section supervisor for the State Game and Fish Department.

The state will contribute more than \$4.3 million, which is funded from the Game and Fish Private Land Open To Sportsmen program, and the North Dakota Outdoor Heritage Fund.

"We've worked a long time developing these projects with USDA, and working with other partners and stakeholders," Kading said. "We feel these are good options for landowners to address a resource concern, and also open up some quality habitat for hunters."

Landowners interested in CREP can enroll acres in portions of Adams, Billings, Bowman, Burleigh, Dunn, Emmons, Grant, Golden Valley, Hettinger, McKenzie, Mercer, Morton, Oliver, Sioux, Slope and Stark counties. The enrollment cap for this program is 20,000 acres.

Expired, or expiring CRP is not eligible for the North Dakota Riparian Project CREP at this time, Kading said. Land offered must meet FSA cropping history requirements and be located within the project boundary.

There is no minimum acreage requirement for enrolling land into CREP, but any land enrolled in a CREP contract with USDA must also be enrolled in the Game and Fish PLOTS program. Kading said landowners don't have to allow public access to their entire property, but the PLOTS tract must be at least 40 acres in size.

Landowners will receive payments for allowing walk-in hunting access, and are eligible for additional habitat enhancements, incentives and cost-share.

For information regarding the project, landowners should contact a local Game and Fish private land biologist or their local county USDA service center.

## NORTH DAKOTA RIPARIAN PROJECT

### A CONSERVATION RESERVE ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

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

#### COUNTIES ELIGIBLE:

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

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

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

CRAIG BIRLE



## WATERCRAFT REGISTRATIONS ONLINE

North Dakota watercraft owners are reminded that 2020 is the first year of a new three-year registration period.

Watercraft registrations must be renewed online by visiting My Account at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). A credit card is required.

The price to register motorboats in North Dakota under 16 feet in length, and all canoes, is \$18; motorboats from 16 feet to less than 20 feet in length is \$36; and motorboats at least 20 feet in length are \$45. Fees are prorated.

In addition, Senate Bill 2293, passed by the 2019 state legislature, created an aquatic nuisance species program fund in the state treasury. Effective Jan. 1, 2020, this new state law establishes an ANS fee of \$15 for each motorized watercraft registered in North Dakota to run concurrent with the three-year watercraft registration period.

For motorized watercraft operated on waters in North Dakota and not licensed in North Dakota, the state law establishes an ANS fee of \$15 to be paid for each calendar year, and to display an ANS sticker on the watercraft.

New watercraft owners can attach the required documentation, such as the bill of sale or proof of taxes paid, with the online purchase, or send in the required documentation via standard mail. A 10-day temporary permit will be issued to allow for processing and delivery of registration and decals. For timely processing, Game and Fish encourages watercraft owners to submit attachments online.

The 2020-22 watercraft registration cycle begins January 1 and runs through December 31, 2022.

## COYOTE CATALOG AVAILABLE FOR HUNTERS, LANDOWNERS

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department and North Dakota Department of Agriculture are once again opening the Coyote Catalog, a statewide effort designed to connect coyote hunters and trappers with landowners who are dealing with coyotes in their areas.

Last winter, more than 20 landowners participated in the Coyote Catalog, along with 400 hunters and trappers. Landowners can sign up on the Department of Agriculture website at <https://www.nd.gov/ndda/livestock-development-division/coyote-catalog>. County and contact information is required.

Hunters and trappers can sign up at the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov/hunting/hunter-landowner-contact](http://gf.nd.gov/hunting/hunter-landowner-contact). Anyone who registered for the Coyote Catalog in the past must register again to activate their names on the database.

Throughout winter, hunters or trappers may receive information on participating landowners, and they should contact landowners to make arrangements. Landowners who are experiencing coyote depredation of livestock should first contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services.

The Coyote Catalog will remain active through March 31, 2020. For more information, contact Ryan Herigstad at Game and Fish, 701-595-4463 or [rherigstad@nd.gov](mailto:rherigstad@nd.gov); or Jamie Good, at the Department of Agriculture, 701-328-2659 or [jgood@nd.gov](mailto:jgood@nd.gov).

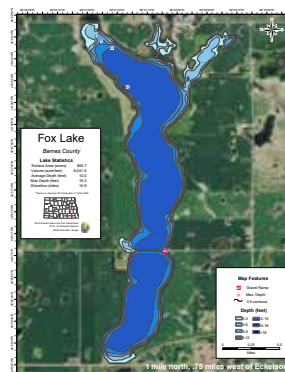


## CONTOUR LAKE MAPS ON WEBSITE

North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel recently added new fishing waters to the list of available contour maps on the Game and Fish website.

In addition, Jerry Weigel, fisheries production and development section leader, said maps of existing waters have been reprocessed to improve detail and quality.

"We have access to more tools and options to create a better map than we did back in the early 2000s when most contour mapping occurred," Weigel said.





## HUNTER EDUCATION CLASSES

Individuals interested in taking a hunter education class in 2020 are reminded to register early, as most classes are held the first few months of the calendar year.

Interested students must click on the education link at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). Classes are listed by city and can also be sorted by start date. Classes will be added throughout the year as they become finalized.

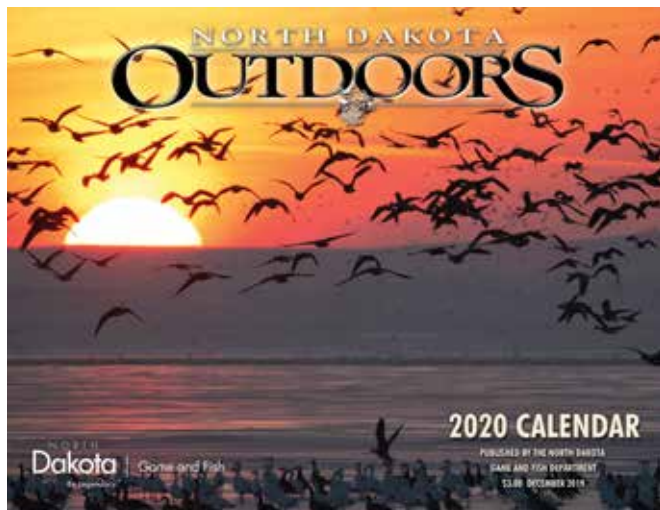
To register for a class, click on “enroll” next to the specific class, and follow the simple instructions. Personal information is required.

Individuals interested in receiving a notice by email when each hunter education

class is added, can click on the “subscribe to news and alerts” link found below the news section on the Game and Fish home page. Check the box labeled “hunter education” under the education program updates.

In addition, SMS text notifications of new classes can be sent directly to a cell phone. Simply text “NDGF Hunter-Class” to 468311 to subscribe to this feature.

State law requires anyone born after December 31, 1961 to pass a certified hunter education course to hunt in the state. Hunter education is mandatory for youth who are turning 12 years old. Children who turn age 11 during the calendar year can take the class.



### 2020 NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS CALENDAR AVAILABLE

The 2020 *North Dakota OUTDOORS* calendar is available for ordering online at the state Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

Calendars are also available via mail order. Send \$3 for each, plus \$1 postage, to: Calendar, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095.

The calendar is the North Dakota OUTDOORS magazine's December issue, so current subscribers should have already received it in the mail.

## STAFF NOTES



Alan Reile (left), 2019 Game and Fish Director's Award recipient, along with Terry Steinwand, director.

### REILE NAMED GAME AND FISH EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

Alan Reile, North Dakota Game and Fish Department information technology coordinator in Bismarck, received the agency's Director's Award for professional excellence at the Department's annual staff meeting in December.

Terry Steinwand, Game and Fish director, said Reile has had a hand in making all staff more efficient by maintaining Department systems, law enforcement technologies, video production, cyber security and desktop support.

“Alan consistently demonstrates professionalism by supporting our technologies and staff,” Steinwand said. “His ability and effort have helped us all perform at a very high level. Perhaps most of all, his commitment to the Department and his willingness to help is recognized and appreciated by all.”





*Renae Schultz*



*Mike Anderson*



*Justin Mattson*



*Bill Hasse*



*Mike Szymanski*



*Steve Dyke*



*Sandra Johnson*



*Elisha Mueller*



*Keenan Snyder*

## GAME AND FISH RECOGNIZES EMPLOYEES

North Dakota Game and Fish Department Director Terry Steinwand recently honored a number of employees with performance-based awards. Steinwand presented the following employees with special recognition awards at the Department's annual winter meeting.

- Renae Schultz, private land biologist, Jamestown, was recognized for her attitude, persistence and efforts in coordinating a Private Lands Open To Sportsmen tract along the James River.
- Mike Anderson, video project supervisor, Bismarck, was recognized for his planning, shooting, editing, script writing and voicing the North Dakota Outdoors weekly broadcast, in addition to hosting and editing the Game and Fish Department's weekly online webcast.
- Justin Mattson, administrative staff officer, Bismarck, was recognized for his work ethic, reliability and willingness to take on extra responsibilities in the administrative services division.
- Bill Haase, wildlife resource management supervisor, Bismarck, was recognized for his work on several projects, including public shooting ranges, cover crops and GPS mapping for weed spraying.
- Mike Szymanski, migratory game bird management supervisor, Bismarck, was recognized for his vision and coordination in combining the three separate small game, waterfowl and furbearer/trapping guides into one combined hunting and trapping guide.
- Steve Dyke, conservation section leader, and Sandra Johnson and Elisha Mueller, conservation biologists, all Bismarck, were recognized for their efforts in developing a new standard for wind project planning and siting in North Dakota.

In addition to special recognition recipients, Keenan Snyder, district game warden, Williston, was named North Dakota's Boating Officer of the Year. His district has approximately 150 miles of shoreline bordering Lake Sakakawea and portions of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers. Chief game warden Robert Timian said warden Snyder has been tasked with water patrols relating to monitoring environmental issues associated with oil activities in, on and around these three water bodies, and has met these challenges with enthusiasm, which reflects highly on the department and the community he serves.



## STAFF NOTES, *continued*



Art Cox (left), 2019 Wildlife Officer of the Year, along with Terry Steinwand, director.

### COX NAMED WILDLIFE OFFICER OF THE YEAR

Art Cox, North Dakota Game and Fish Department district game warden stationed in Bowman, is the state's 2019 Wildlife Officer of the Year. Cox was honored in December by the Shikar-Safari Club International, a private conservation organization that annually recognizes outstanding wildlife officers in each state.

In a nomination letter sent to Shikar-Safari, chief warden Robert Timian said Cox's district contains a variety of wildlife and recreational areas that encompasses parts or all of four counties.

"Warden Cox has a large district that requires energy and dedication to patrol with elk, deer, pronghorn, grouse, partridge, waterfowl, fishing and pheasant seasons overlapping," Timian said. "He is often pulled in different directions, but always finds a way to get his mission completed and has a great working relationship with the public and landowners in his district."



Ryan Oberhelman



Jens Johnson



Ben Holen



Shane Wegner

### OBERHELMAN, JOHNSON FILL PLI POSITIONS

Ryan Oberhelman, Dickinson, and Jens Johnson, Williston, have been hired to fill Game and Fish Department private land biologist positions.

Oberhelman, a native of Bloomington, Minnesota, has a Bachelor of Arts from Reed College in Oregon, Master of Arts from the University of Nebraska, Master of Fine Arts from the University of Wyoming and a Master of Arts, Environment and Natural Resources with graduate work on rangeland ecology.

Johnson, a native of Northwood, has a Bachelor of Science in fish and wildlife biology from the University of North Dakota.

### HOLEN HIRED AS ANS BIOLOGIST

Bismarck native Ben Holen has been hired as the agency's aquatic nuisance species biologist. Holen has Bachelor of Science degrees in biology, and fisheries and wildlife, from Valley City State University.

### WEGNER HIRED AS PROGRAMMER ANALYST

Shane Wegner has filled the Department's programmer analyst position. He has a computer science degree from the University of Jamestown.



# BACKCAST



*By Ron Wilson*

I'm an average birder most days.

I know what I know and it's not often that I'll reference a field guide, even though one is likely handy. For example, if we're hunting squirrels in the Missouri River bottoms and I see a sparrow-sized bird creeping downhill headfirst on a tree trunk, I know it's a nuthatch. And if I'm in the back yard – or in those same river bottoms – and I hear from the thick overhead cover the unmistakable *chick-a-dee-dee-dee* call, I know without investigating that it's a black-capped chickadee.

What got me to thinking about birds was this bit of interesting information emailed recently from American Bird Conservancy.

According to the bird conservation specialists, black-capped chickadees gather and store large supplies of seeds in many different places in fall. While it makes sense that this adaptation helps the chickadees survive the leaner months that follow, the question is, how do the birds remember where they stashed their seeds?

Scientists explain that black-capped chickadees can increase their memory capacity each fall by adding new brain cells to the hippocampus, the part of the brain that supports spatial memory. During this time, the chickadee's hippocampus expands in volume by about 30%. In spring, when feats of memory are needed less, its hippocampus shrinks back to normal size.

While I don't know if my memory most days equates to that of a chickadee's in spring or fall, I can typically piece together a season in the outdoors.

Yet, if I get confused, if things are a little fuzzy and the fishing and hunting trips start to run together for, say, 2019, I can poke around in the freezer and confirm to a degree, depending what's already been eaten, that we did indeed shoot some doves, sharp-tailed grouse and an embarrassingly few pheasants.



RON WILSON

The vacuumed-packed and dated venison roasts and stew chunks also confirm that the boys filled their doe tags opening weekend. The salmon and halibut filets, sealed tight just like the venison roasts, are gifts from a Grandpa-led fishing trip with the kids to Alaska.

Fittingly, but not on purpose, the skinned and quartered fox squirrels and three packages of channel catfish filets wrapped in white butcher paper, are stored side-by-side, as both critters are deeply associated with the Missouri River. For the catfish, caught from the waters of the Garrison Tailrace, the connection is obvious. For the squirrels, not so much, as they nest and hurry through the gigantic cottonwoods established years ago when flooding in Missouri River backwaters and floodplains was common.

Missing from 2019's frozen inventory is any sign of a hard-earned, once-in-a-lifetime cow elk from unit E2. My youngest drew the license last spring, and during the three-month season where, at least compared to last season, he likely had a less than 30% chance in harvesting an animal, no shots were fired.

Even so, the country was pretty.

---

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

**North Dakota Outdoors Magazine**  
**North Dakota Game and Fish Department**  
**100 N. Bismarck Expressway**  
**Bismarck, ND 58501**

**To renew your subscription or change  
your address, call (701) 328-6300 or  
go to [gf.nd.gov/buy-apply](http://gf.nd.gov/buy-apply).**

*Snowy owls are typically  
a common sight in North  
Dakota in winter as  
the big, beautiful owls  
wander south from the  
arctic in search of food.*



CRAIG BIERLE

**connect with us**  
**[gf.nd.gov/connect](http://gf.nd.gov/connect)**

facebook

website

instagram

**OUTDOORS**  
on TV

YouTube

podcasts

subscribe