

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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| Game and Fish



MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

North Dakota's lakes and rivers are busy places in summer.

This is understandable, considering the many quality fishing opportunities these waters offer, and the undeniable fact that summers are short by comparison on the Northern Plains, and people do their best to get the most enjoyment out of their preferred water activities before the window closes.

Unfortunately, not everyone makes good choices when they recreate on state lakes and rivers. And many times, those poor choices are fueled by alcohol.

With this in mind, and the understanding that there are tens of thousands of registered watercraft in the state, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wardens will participate in Operation Dry Water July 3-5 on lakes and rivers around the state to educate boaters about the dangers of boating while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Department enforcement personnel first started participating in this nationally coordinated effort in 2016. Since then, wardens have made contacts on the water with an untold number of boaters from Lake Sakakawea to Lake Metigoshe.

A feature story on Operation Dry Water appears in this issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* and one of the things that jumped out at me is this:

"According to Game and Fish enforcement records from 2015-19, there were 74 reported boating accidents, including 11 fatalities, five of which were alcohol-related deaths, and 45 injuries beyond first aid."

Those numbers, all of them, are too high, which is why Operation Dry Water is fundamental in the Department's effort to educate boaters about playing it smart while on the water.

I've long stressed on this page over the years about the safety of those who participate in our state's hunting seasons. That encouragement to make good decisions while in the field certainly transfers to fishing our lakes and rivers or tubing behind a boat.

While Game and Fish Department personnel make it a priority to safeguard and enhance North Dakota's natural resources, we want you, all recreationists, to make it your priority to play safe and smart while enjoying the outdoors.

During these certainly unfamiliar and challenging times in our communities across North Dakota, our natural resources provide a wonderful release for those looking for a change in scenery.

We encourage people to enjoy North Dakota's great outdoors and the many activities found beyond their back yards. We also challenge them to play safe and play smart.

Terry Steinwand

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NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FEATURES

Shocking Bass for Science	2
Keeping Common Birds Common.....	6
Campaign Addresses Drinking and Boating	10
8 Underappreciated Outdoor Places.....	14

DEPARTMENTS

Buffaloberry Patch.....	20
Back Cast	25



Front Cover

A female ruddy duck photographed in spring on a North Dakota wetland.

Photo by Ashley Salwey.



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SHOCKING BASS

for Science

*By Ron Wilson
Photos by Ashley Salwey*


Nelson Lake in Oliver County is distinct. It has long been labeled the best largemouth bass lake in a state where walleye rule and northern pike have, since 1969, unknowingly shouldered the renown of being the state fish.

Nelson's unique stature is a byproduct of the Milton R. Young Station, a coal-fired power plant in Oliver County that has produced electricity for a half-century. Even during the leanest months here on the Northern Plains, warm water released from the facility creates a year-round open water environment, which allows largemouth bass a longer growing season than anywhere else in the state.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department manages the fishery, which means on an annual basis from about mid- to late May, fisheries biologists conduct an electrofishing survey to determine, among other things, the predator/prey balance in the lake.

The photographs that follow document the nighttime electrofishing operation that has long played a significant role in managing this popular largemouth bass fishery.

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

A photograph taken from the perspective of someone on a boat at night. Three people are standing on the deck, facing away from the camera, looking out over a body of water. They are holding long, thin poles that extend into the water. The person on the left is wearing a dark jacket and a light-colored cap. The person in the middle is wearing a dark jacket with reflective stripes and dark pants. The person on the right is wearing a dark jacket and bright red pants. In the foreground, there is a small, illuminated compartment or hatch on the boat deck. The water is dark, and the sky is a deep blue with some faint clouds. A bright light source, possibly a generator or a large lamp, is visible in the distance, creating a strong glow and illuminating the water and the people. The overall scene suggests a night fishing operation using an electrical field to attract and capture fish.

An onboard generator produces electricity that runs to the front of the boat. The electrical field produced goes down about 6 feet into the water. Fish are attracted to the electrical field and are temporarily stunned, allowing fisheries personnel to capture them with long-handled dip nets.

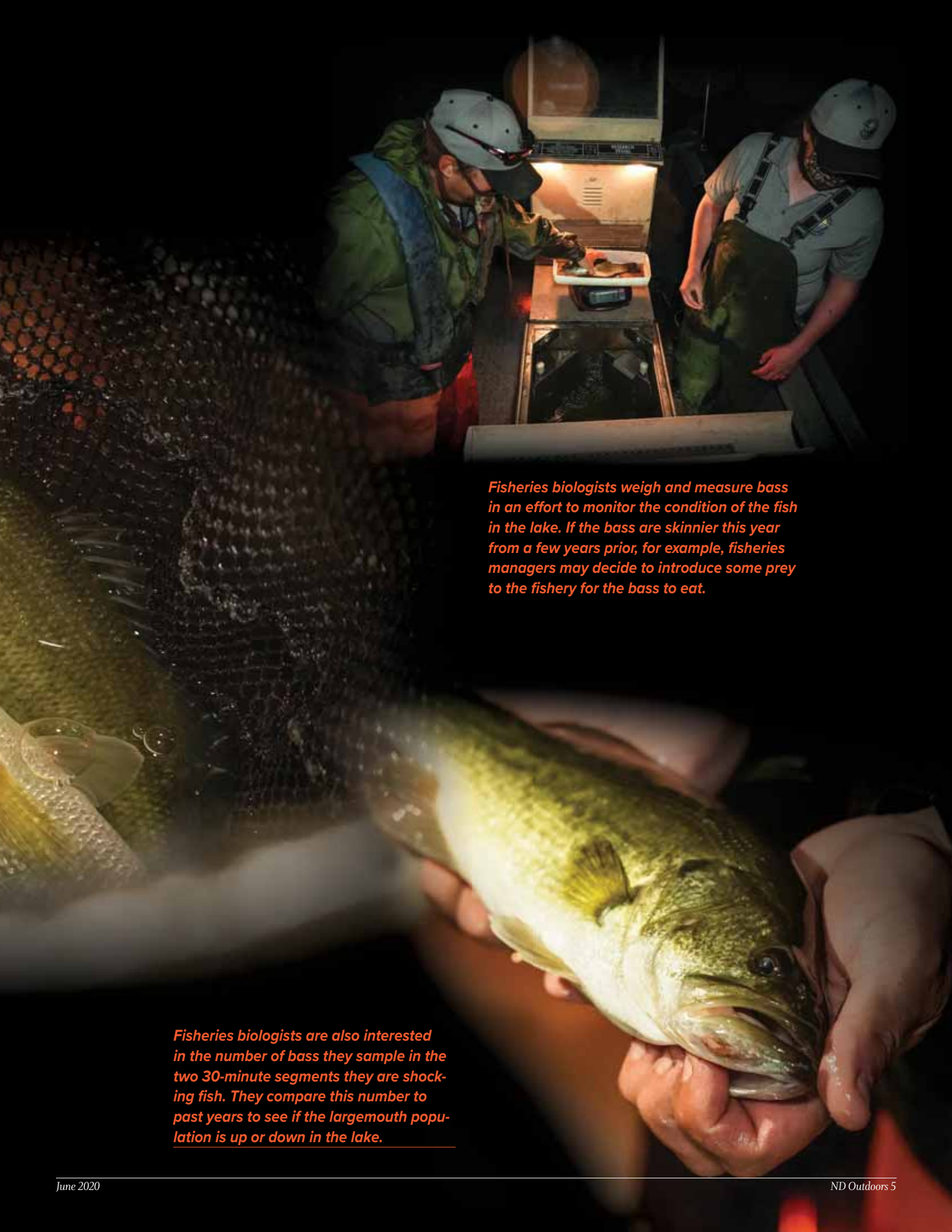


On this particular night in late May, Department fisheries personnel collected, weighed, measured and released more than 60 largemouth bass. What biologists like to see in the collection of fish is a good range in the sizes of fish sampled, plus a sampling of younger fish that will fuel the fishery for seasons to come.

The benefit of electrofishing for largemouth bass at night is that the fish have a natural tendency to move into shallower water under the cover of darkness.



Another benefit for fisheries personnel in electrofishing at night is that those fish stunned in the electrical field are easier to see thanks to boat-mounted lights shining on the water. It's harder to see, by comparison, during daylight hours because of the sun reflecting off the water, biologists say.



Fisheries biologists weigh and measure bass in an effort to monitor the condition of the fish in the lake. If the bass are skinnier this year from a few years prior, for example, fisheries managers may decide to introduce some prey to the fishery for the bass to eat.

Fisheries biologists are also interested in the number of bass they sample in the two 30-minute segments they are shocking fish. They compare this number to past years to see if the largemouth population is up or down in the lake.

Keeping Common Birds **COMMON**

By Sandra Johnson



Western meadowlark numbers have declined in North Dakota over the years.

"Sometimes in the early morning, when crossing the open, grassy plateaus, I have heard the prince of them all, the Missouri skylark. The skylark sings on the wing, soaring overhead and mounting in spiral curves until it can hardly be seen, while its bright, tender strains never cease for a moment," wrote Theodore Roosevelt in "Hunting Trips of a Ranchman."

The Western meadowlark, right? Regrettably, North Dakota's state bird is not the *"prince of them all."* Although Roosevelt did describe the meadowlark perfectly, *"One of our sweetest, loudest songsters is the meadowlark ..."* and *"the meadowlark is a singer of a higher order, deserving to rank with the best. Its song has length, variety, power and rich melody; and there is in it sometimes a cadence of wild sadness, inexpressibly touching."*

There is no doubt the meadowlark held a special place in his heart, as it does for many of us. However, the bird, the "prince of them all," Roosevelt referred to is the Sprague's pipit. This prince, although in appearance is rather uninteresting, when singing on the wing as described by Roosevelt, it does broadcast one of the most noble and captivating sounds on the prairie.

Have you lived in North Dakota your entire life, or spent a lot of time ranching, hunting, or walking the prairie, and have never seen this so-called royal pipit? Well, maybe you have but couldn't connect the bird with the sound because a male pipit will spend hours singing high overhead, and can be darn hard to see against a blue sky.

If not high in the sky, they are on the ground slinking through the grass, rarely perching on fences or posts like meadowlarks. However, most likely you do not know this bird because it has declined 75% since 1970. There are few places in North Dakota where Roosevelt's prince still reigns.

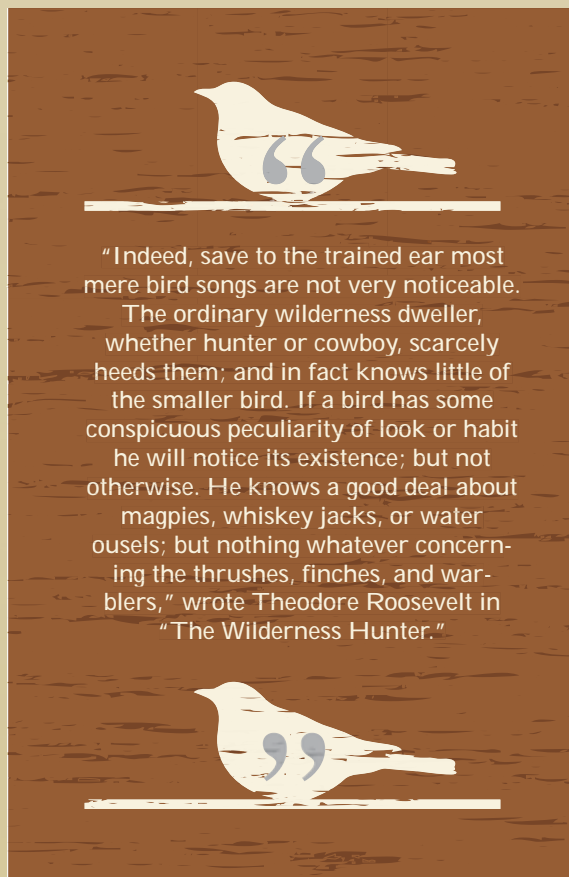
According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, we know that birds like the pipit and meadowlark are declining. The BBS launched in 1966 as an international avian monitoring program to track

the status and trends of North American bird populations. More than 4,600 BBS routes exist across the United States and Canada, and 44 of those are in North Dakota.

A survey route is 24.5 miles long and at every half-mile, the observer stands on the road and conducts a 3-minute point count, where every bird seen and heard within a quarter-mile radius is recorded.

That means counting every pipit, every blackbird, every grunting coot in the cattails that you hear but can't see. It involves logging not just if the species was present, but also the number of each species. A massive amount of bird data has been collected for a very long time thanks to birders and biologists running BBS routes.

In the 1980s, scientists analyzing BBS data discovered alarming rates of decline for many species, especially long-distance migrants and grassland birds. Yet, in the 1980s, there weren't a lot of cheerleaders for nongame bird conservation. There was, however, a lot of enthusiasm for waterfowl, thus the creation of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act.





Eastern kingbird.

SANDRA JOHNSON

Wildlife conservation leaders from state wildlife agencies, federal agencies, international partners, and many nongovernment organizations, realized a similar effort was needed for “landbirds” and in 1990 formed Partners in Flight.

Landbirds are described as breeding birds that principally use terrestrial habitats throughout the year – raptors, grouse, woodpeckers, flycatchers, jays, chickadees, warblers, sparrows, blackbirds and many others – and generally live most of their lives on dry land.

The Partners in Flight mission is simple: “Keeping common birds common and helping species at risk through voluntary partnerships.” The PIF network includes more than 150 partner organizations distributed throughout the Western Hemisphere, dedicated to all aspects of landbird conservation from science, research, planning, and policy development, to land management, monitoring, education, and outreach.

PIF partners aim to halt and reverse bird population declines before species are listed as threatened or endangered, a cost-effective and proactive solution for common sense bird conservation. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department supports this mission and applauds PIF on its 30-year anniversary.

The Partners in Flight 2016 Landbird Conservation Plan documented increases in some species but noted widespread declines in populations of many of the 448 species in the United States and Canada (Table 1).

It’s concerning that even some common birds are in steep decline. Ask yourself: “When was the last time you heard a meadowlark?” Most North Dakotans should say they heard one yesterday or at least sometime this spring, but for some folks, it has been a long time since they saw or heard the state’s sweetest, loudest songster.

The challenge is that there is not a singular smoking gun that points to the meadowlark’s decline. Habitat loss is a key factor, but habitat degradation, loss of insects (food), increased collision mortality, disease or other factors could all be contributors.

In September 2019, scientists quantified the decline, and increase, of all birds (including landbirds, waterfowl, waterbirds and shorebirds) and concluded the continent has lost 3 billion birds since the 1970s, or nearly 30% of the total number of birds. That is a net loss, so even with substantial increases in some



Wild turkeys are an introduced species to North Dakota.

CRAIG BHRLE

populations, such as snow geese, there are many fewer birds in the skies today.

It’s clear we’ve got more work ahead of us to stop the bird decline. However, we know that others across the hemisphere are working toward the same goal because of PIF. We have to work together to bring back the birds because Theodore Roosevelt would be awfully disappointed if the prince of them all ceased to soar above the grassy plateaus of North Dakota.

SANDRA JOHNSON is a North Dakota Game and Fish Department conservation biologist.



Clay-colored sparrow.

CRAIG BIHRLE

TABLE 1. Select birds from the PIF Landbird Species Assessment.

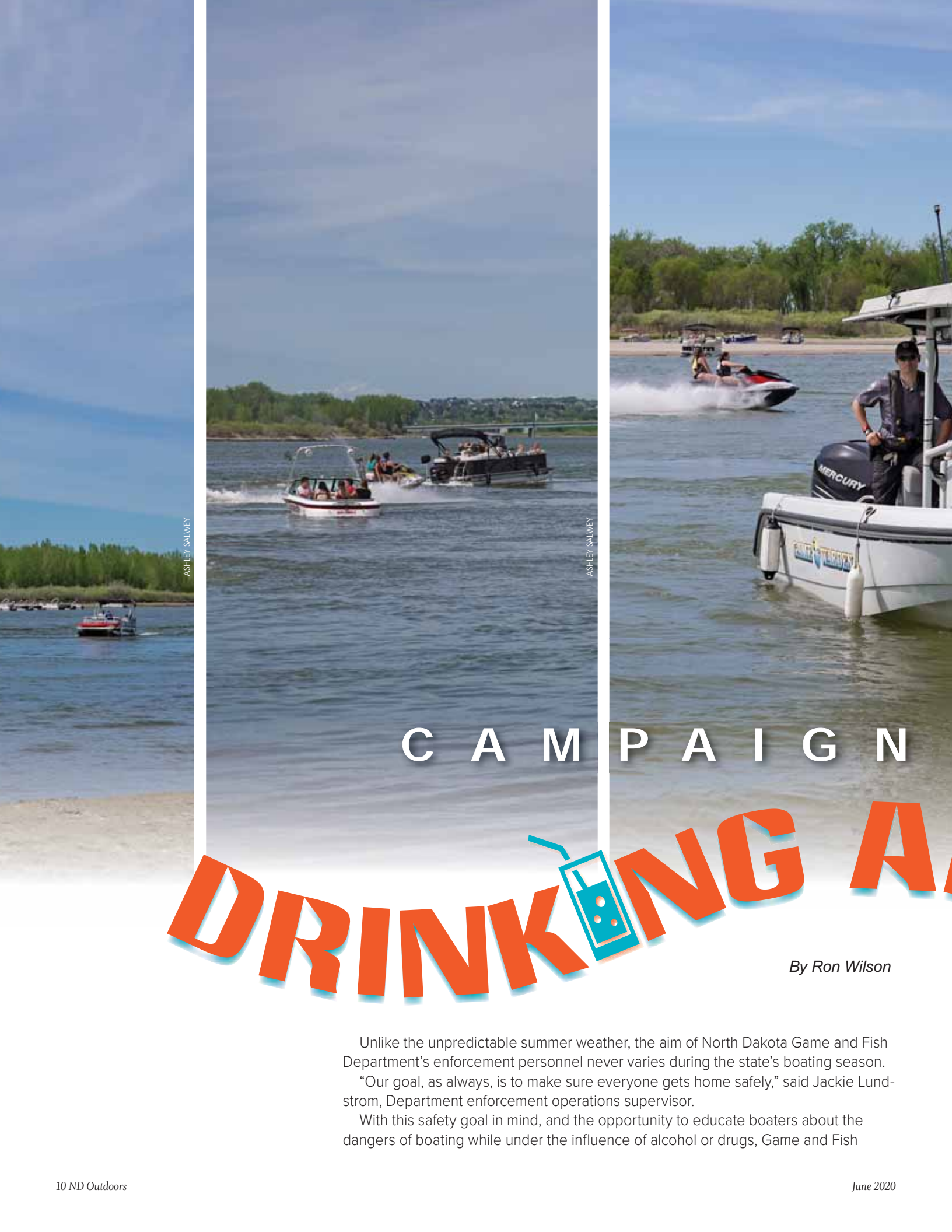
Some birds have adapted very well to changes on the landscape. Others do not handle change well, or not at all.

INCREASING BIRDS	POPULATION CHANGE FROM 1970-2014	DECLINING BIRDS	POPULATION CHANGE FROM 1970-2014
Wild turkey	> 200%	Greater sage grouse	>-50%
Bald eagle	131%	Burrowing owl	-35%
Cooper's hawk	> 200%	Common nighthawk	-58%
Turkey vulture	186%	Loggerhead shrike	-74%
Ruby-throated hummingbird	110%	Horned lark	-65%
Yellow-bellied sapsucker	46%	Sprague's pipit	-75%
Say's phoebe	40%	Chestnut-collared longspur	-85%
Common raven	168%	American tree sparrow	-53%
Black-capped chickadee	40%	Harris's sparrow	-63%
White-breasted nuthatch	124%	Baird's sparrow	-71%
Blue grosbeak	45%	Western meadowlark	-42%
House finch	26%	Pine siskin	-80%
American goldfinch	5%	Evening grosbeak	-94%

Swainson's hawks prefer open plains, grasslands and prairies.



JESSE KOLAR



ASHLEY SALWEY

ASHLEY SALWEY

C A M P A I G N

DRINKING A

By Ron Wilson

Unlike the unpredictable summer weather, the aim of North Dakota Game and Fish Department's enforcement personnel never varies during the state's boating season.

"Our goal, as always, is to make sure everyone gets home safely," said Jackie Lundstrom, Department enforcement operations supervisor.

With this safety goal in mind, and the opportunity to educate boaters about the dangers of boating while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, Game and Fish



CRAIG BIRRE



ASHLEY SALWEY



ASHLEY SALWEY

ADDRESSES AND BOATING

Department wardens will participate again in Operation Dry Water July 3-5 on lakes and rivers around the state.

Operation Dry Water is a national heightened awareness enforcement campaign targeting boating under the influence. The campaign's mission is to reduce the number of alcohol- and drug-related accidents and fatalities on the water.

According to Game and Fish enforcement records from 2015-19, there were 74 reported

Talking Points

- Alcohol use is the leading contributing factor in recreational boating deaths and a major factor in accidents on the water.
- Boating under the influence is illegal. Operating a boat in North Dakota with a blood alcohol concentration of .10 or higher is against state law.
- Alcohol use is dangerous for passengers too. Impairment can cause slips, falls over board and other accidents.
- If you boat under the influence of drugs or alcohol you are endangering your life and the lives of others.
- Alcohol use impairs a boater's judgment, balance, vision and reaction time.
- Sun, wind, noise, vibration and rocking of the boat are all stressors common to the boating environment. These stressors intensify the effects of alcohol, drugs and some medications.
- Impairment can be even more dangerous for boaters than for drivers, since most boaters have less experience and confidence operating a boat than they do driving a car.

boating accidents, including 11 fatalities, five of which were alcohol-related deaths, and 45 injuries beyond first aid.

It's no secret, Lundstrom said, that alcohol impairs judgment and reaction time, especially on the water, because of added stressors of heat, wind, wave action, noise and vibrations of the boat.

"Anytime you go out on the water you need to be prepared ... you need to have food along and plenty of water to drink on a hot summer day," Lundstrom said. "Being prepared also entails having a float plan. If you are the only one on the boat that knows how to safely operate it, should you be drinking? The key is to have a sober driver to get everyone safely back to shore."

Lundstrom said she started patrolling the Missouri River near Bismarck-Mandan in 1997 and has seen her share of boat operators who have had too much to drink on a summer day.

"The stigma that it's OK to be drunk in your boat because you're getting a ride by a sober driver home once you get on shore floors me," she said. "There should be no difference in that mentality."

Operation Dry Water isn't the only time water recreationists will see law enforcement patrolling North Dakota waters. Game and Fish Department wardens, for example, team up with other local law enforcement personnel to patrol the Missouri River in the Bismarck-Mandan area during the summer months.

"We run the patrols during Operation Dry Water just like we do any other day on the water," Lundstrom said. "If we see an issue, we'll stop and make a contact with the people on board."

Talking to boaters and educating them on the dangers of boating under the influence has earned law enforcement some positive reviews over time.

"We've had some positive comments about Operation Dry Water over the years," Lundstrom said. "When they read about it, or hear public service announcements about the campaign, they're appreciative that we care and want to reduce the drinking while boating numbers."

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.

Practice Safe Boating

While having a sober boat operator is a priority, boaters need to follow other safe boating practices on the water, such as having enough life jackets for everyone on board.

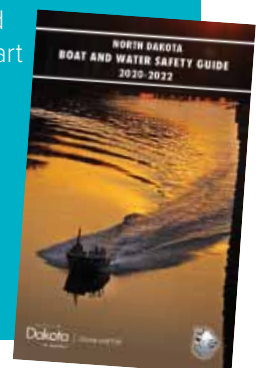
North Dakota law requires all children ages 10 and younger to wear a personal flotation device while in boats of less than 27 feet in length. The law also requires all personal watercraft users to wear a life jacket, as well as anyone towed on skis, tubes, boards or other similar devices.

In North Dakota most years, one of the leading citations is an inadequate number of personal flotation devices on board. In 2019, Game and Fish Department wardens wrote 206 citations for this offense.

It is also important that children wear a PFD while swimming. Swimmers should know the water's depth, as serious injuries can occur from diving. Large objects hidden below the water's surface can lead to significant injury.

North Dakota boaters also are reminded that marine VHF radios are an important part of boat safety that should not be improperly used by operators. These radios are intended for boat operators who are in distress and facing an emergency.

Regulations to help ensure safe boating this summer are found in the North Dakota Boat and Water Safety Guide.





CRAIG BHRLE

Arrests, Citations, Warnings

In 2019, 736 local, state and federal agencies participated in Operation Dry Water. Over the three-day heightened awareness and enforcement weekend law enforcement officers contacted 271,286 boaters, made 563 BUI arrests, and issued 34,976 citations and warnings for safety violations.

Dry Water Impact

Since the inception of the Operation Dry Water campaign in 2009, law enforcement officers have removed 4,095 BUI operators from the nation's waterways and contacted over 1.5 million boaters during the annual three-day weekend. The campaign continues to make a significant impact on boater safety and spreading the message of the danger of boating under the influence.



ASHLEY SALWEY



ASHLEY SALWEY

Tubing (upper left) on the Missouri River near Bismarck-Mandan. Like much of the miles-long Missouri River System, the stretch of river between Garrison Dam and Lake Oahe (upper right) is busy in summer. Jet skiing (lower left) is popular on a number of North Dakota waters.



S Underappreciated

*A picturesque view of the Pembina Gorge
in northeastern North Dakota.*

North Dakota is famous for its wide-open spaces. But Theodore Roosevelt National Park gets much of the glory (and the tourists) and even locals overlook the natural beauty in their own back yards.

After a spring of social distancing, mounting cabin fever and a barrage of stress-inducing concerns, more people are realizing what outdoor enthusiasts have always known; spending time in nature has major physical and mental health benefits. You don't even have to do an organized activity to reap the rewards.

"If you can have some solitude in nature it really helps your perspective. It's a way to sort out your thoughts," said Ann Hoffert, birder and Carrington resident. "I train my mind to go there when I'm feeling frustrated or trying to change something that I don't have control over."

There's plenty in the world that we can't control. But getting outdoors seems doable. Since widespread travel projections are down, interest in the outdoors is way up, and more North Dakotans are interested in exploring close to home, finding that much-needed solitude in nature might get a little more challenging this summer.

So, skip the crowds and set off for a summer of dirt road drives and scenic byways, intriguing trails and clifftop views, forest hikes and peaceful wildlife refuges. If you're lucky, you'll have them all to yourself.

ated Outdoor Places

By Alicia Underlee Nelson

Alicia Underlee Nelson



Alicia Underlee Nelson

Pembina Gorge

Scenic views and a variety of terrain make the Pembina Gorge State Recreation Area worth a pilgrimage. Steep cliffs look out over the gently twisting Pembina River, while pockets of prairie and bustling, bird-studded wetlands stretch out into the distance.

But the forest is the real star of the show. The 2,800-acre recreation area contains North Dakota's largest uninterrupted stretch of woodlands, which blankets the region in a dense patchwork of green before erupting into a riot of rust, persimmon and gold in autumn. Sweeping views and fall foliage draw travelers off the Rendezvous Region Scenic Backway to the Masonic Scenic Overlook, which perches 1,155 feet above sea level in Walhalla.

Hiking down from the overlook is just one way to access more than 30 miles of mixed-use trails. The trail network also accommodates mountain bikers, horseback riders and ATV, side by side and dirt bike operators. It's a popular spot for OHV recreation, since only the Lady Slipper Trail is nonmotorized.

If the river itself is the draw, canoe and kayak access docks are located at Vang Bridge, Brickmine Bridge and Riverside Park. The Pembina Gorge State Recreation Area also offers daily and hourly kayak rentals, which include life jackets and paddles.



Alicia Underlee Nelson

Little Missouri National Grassland

The contrast of the prairie grasses against the colorful badlands buttes draws droves of hikers and travelers to western North Dakota every year. The landscape feels regal, rugged and unspeakably ancient.

Most people see it by driving through Theodore Roosevelt National Park. But when coronavirus concerns closed the park this spring, Terri Thiel, executive director of Dickinson Convention and Visitors Bureau, and her colleagues began steering visitors to western North Dakota's grasslands.

"People will ask, 'Isn't the park closed? And we'll say, 'It is, but there's 1.5 million acres that are open to you and the majority are in the badlands, which have always been accessible,'" she said. "Sometimes people take for granted what's in their own back yard."

The Little Missouri National Grassland near Medora is the largest in the nation, so it accounts for most of that acreage. Hikers will find dramatic badlands bluffs rising above rolling hills, prairie plains and grazing cattle.

"Respect for the ranchers' 'back yard' is to be exercised," cautioned photographer Mary Lou Tastad, who covers western North Dakota extensively for her website, BeautifulBadlandsND.com. "Everyone should use a U.S. Forest Service map to determine which land is private, which land is public. Maps can be obtained at the U.S. Forest Service stations in Dickinson, Watford City and Bismarck."

Thiel will also leave trail guides outside the Dickinson Convention and Visitors Bureau upon request. Maps are available online at fs.usda.gov/dpg/ as well.



ALICIA UNDERLEE NELSON

Sheyenne River Valley

The valley's rolling hills and woodlands sometimes shock those who assume central North Dakota is all pancake-flat prairie land. The region has more surprises in store for curious travelers.

Cruising along the Sheyenne River Valley National Scenic Byway is a pleasant way to get the lay of the land. The route begins north of Valley City and winds 63 miles south to Lisbon, passing Native American cultural sites, historical farmsteads, charming small towns, and the wooded trails of Fort Ransom State Park along the way. Interpretive panels provide snippets of local history.

Portions of the North Country Trail (the longest trail in the country) run through Fort Ransom State Park and the Sheyenne River State Forest. A relatively easy 2.2 mile out and back trail (4.4 miles total) in the forest leads to the state's only registered waterfall.

To find it, start in Lisbon and drive nine miles west on Highway 27. Turn right on 122nd Avenue and look for the trailhead on the left. The route connects with the Mineral Springs Trail to the waterfall.

For a great North Country Trail view, try the Sheyenne River Overlook. The trailhead is off 160th Avenue, about 5 miles south of Kindred.

"There are big sand dunes," said Rennae Gruchalla of Fargo, an avid hiker who helps maintain sections of the North Country Trail in North Dakota. "From that point you can see tops of trees and then the Sheyenne River meandering through. It's just beautiful. And every season, it's different."



ALICIA UNDERLEE NELSON

Maah Daah Hey Trail

The views from the Maah Daah Hey Trail are jaw-dropping – think rocky plateaus, jagged cliffs and heart-pounding ridgeline trails that skirt badlands bluffs and plunge into scenic river valleys. The trail network snakes 144 miles through rolling grasslands, the confines of Theodore Roosevelt National Park and up and around craggy buttes, before crisscrossing the Little Missouri River. It's almost inconceivable that a place this striking remains one of the state's best-kept secrets.

A bucket list spot for cyclists, the Maah Daah Hey is one of the most beautiful (and brutal) single-track mountain biking trails on the planet. (Cycling isn't allowed within Theodore Roosevelt National Park.) But its backcountry terrain is kinder to hikers and equestrians.

Tastad has seen more interest in the region lately. She suggests accessible places to start exploring.

"One of the more popular sections of the trail (officially the end of the Maah Daah Hey Trail) is accessed at the CCC Campground, south of the Long X Bridge, 15 miles south of Watford City on U.S Highway 85," she said. "It's across the Little Missouri River from the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park, so offers astounding views."

The other end of the Maah Daah Hey Trail also offers interesting – and unexpected – sights.

"It entails a long drive through beautiful scenery to access the Burning Coal Vein Trailhead, south of Medora, northwest of Amidon," she said. "There's a huge Ponderosa Pine forest in the area."



Crow Flies High Butte

The view from Crow Flies High Butte, 2,087 feet above sea level, is a showstopper. The badlands loom along the placid waters of Lake Sakakawea. The 4,500-foot Four Bears Bridge (the longest in North Dakota) carries travelers headed to New Town on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation, home of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara nations. But this spot isn't just scenic – it's also steeped in history.

The bridge honors two great chiefs – one Hidatsa, one Mandan – who were both named Four Bears. It's decorated with 10-foot medallions that showcase the heritage of the three nations that live here.

Standing on top of the butte – a spot William Clark once used as a lookout – you can see the foundations of the underwater ghost town of Sanish when the water levels are low. From 1917 to 1956, this land was part of Verendrye National Park, named for the explorers who passed through the region (although possibly not this exact spot) in the 1700s. It now anchors one end of the Killdeer Mountain Four Bears Scenic Byway, which passes historical and cultural sites on its 64-mile route to Manning.



Prairie Pothole Region

Central North Dakota is the heart of the Central Flyway, one of the most important migratory bird routes in North America. The landscape is dotted with pockets of wetlands, marshes and small ponds that give the region its puddle-inspired nickname.

"The majority of birds are going to come through during the middle of May and that will go on through the second week in June," said Hoffert. "This time of year, even city parks are going to be good to see birds. Anywhere that's by water – a river or a pond – that's going to be better habitat."

The 2,300-acre Edward M. Brigham III Alkali Lake Sanctuary near Spiritwood is a haven for shorebirds, the Western meadowlark (North Dakota's state bird) and flocks of American white pelicans. Arrowwood National Wildlife Refuge, located along the James River near Pingree, is a popular breeding ground for waterfowl and shorebirds. It's home to 13 different species of ducks and geese, including blue-winged teal, mallards and Canada geese.

Birding is one of the most affordable and accessible outdoor pastimes available. All you need to get started is a good pair of binoculars and a bird guide. Hoffert recommends "The Sibley Guide to Birds."

These are just some of the unexpected places you can see when you get off the tourist trail in North Dakota. The journey can be as rewarding as the destination.

"I'll always start a trip with a destination in mind, but the best parts of those trips end up being the places you find in between," said Bismarck-based meteorologist and photographer Zachary Hargrove. "There are so many hidden gems. You'll really be amazed by what you'll find."

Guidelines for the New Normal

- In the event of a coronavirus surge, park facilities

(including restrooms), rentals and programming are usually the first to close and the last to reopen. Research the available amenities and plan accordingly.

- Bring more water than you think you'll need. Refill opportunities may be limited.
- Research and call area restaurants if you'll need to eat on the road, as hours and services may have changed.
- Pack extra snacks or picnic as a backup.
- Keep at least 6 feet of distance between you and other people you meet.



ALICIA UNDERLEE NELSON



CRAIG BIERLE

Grand Forks Greenway

For an easy outdoor escape in the middle of the city, check out the Greenway in Grand Forks and East Grand Forks, Minnesota. With 2,200 acres of green space for walking, biking, skating and other outdoor recreation along the banks of the Red and Red Lake rivers, it offers plenty of room to spread out.

The 20 miles of walking and biking trails are wide and mostly flat, so the Greenway is an accessible option for those with limited mobility or endurance, as well as families with young children in tow. Although the parks, pools and disc golf courses located along the Greenway remained closed at press time, there are still lots of shady spaces for exercise, rest and picnics. It's a good choice for visitors who are nervous about visiting more remote locations, and those who want to combine an outdoor excursion without shopping for supplies.

The Grand Forks Greenway is a popular spot for fishing, kayaking, canoeing and paddle-boarding for visitors of all abilities. An ADA-accessible floating dock north of DeMers Avenue, just off River Road, offers a dry launching place for nonmotorized watercraft and a fishing spot for anglers. Good shore-fishing spots are found up and down the riverbanks.

- Wear sunscreen, layers, insect protection and good walking shoes.
- Cell phone service can be spotty (especially out west), so head to higher elevation to get a signal.
- Charge your phone before you go and save map images to preserve your battery.
- For guidance about hunting on wildlife refuges, check with refuge headquarters for maps of areas open/closed to hunting, or visit the websites for each individual refuge.

Minot Area Wildlife Refuges

Bismarck-based meteorologist and photographer Zachary Hargrove was storm chasing near Upham when he accidentally wandered into J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge. But the beauty of the landscape kept drawing him back.

"It's one of those rare places in North Dakota where there are lots of trees," he said. "It's very marshy, with lots of hiking and wildlife viewing opportunities."

Two auto tours are available if you'd like to explore by car. The 5-mile Grassland Trail takes you through prairie and marsh habitat, while the 22-mile Scenic Trail navigates wetlands, forests and ravines. Deer, moose, turkey, grouse, partridge, pheasant, fox and waterfowl hunting is allowed on parts of the refuge in season.

There's also an auto tour at the Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge, the second of three scenic spots located a short drive from Minot. The active butterfly research site and waterfowl breeding grounds contain five hiking trails, two canoe trails and 35 miles of hills, prairie and wetlands along the Souris River.

The river and Lake Darling are full of northern pike, walleye, yellow perch and smallmouth bass, and the Outlet Fishing Area boasts an accessible fishing pier. The refuge is open for seasonal deer, partridge, pheasant and grouse hunting.

Hargrove also recommends Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuge near Kenmare. The preserve offers fishing, deer and upland hunting and wildlife viewing, and is rarely crowded, despite its soothing landscape.

"I think it's the most underappreciated place in North Dakota," he said. "The lake and the river are down in the middle of the valley and there are green rolling hills. It's a pretty dramatic landscape for North Dakota."

ALICIA UNDERLEE NELSON is a freelance travel writer and photographer from West Fargo. She blogs frequently about travels within North Dakota on her website, prairiestylefile.com.



By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor



Mule deer in the badlands.

CRAIG BIRHLE

Spring Mule Deer Survey Complete

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department completed its annual spring mule deer survey in April, and results indicate western North Dakota's mule deer population is up 7% from last year and 22% above the long-term average.

Biologists counted 2,364 mule deer in 267.3 square miles during this year's survey. Overall mule deer density in the badlands was 8.8 deer per square mile.

Big game management supervisor Bruce Stillings said the population is above objective and remains at a level able to support more hunting opportunities in the northern badlands.

"Mule deer have recovered nicely across the badlands following the winters of a decade ago," Stillings said. "But long-term challenges remain for further population growth, including predators and weather patterns, and changes in habitat."

The spring mule deer survey is used to assess mule deer abundance in the badlands. It is conducted after the snow has melted and before the trees begin to leaf out, providing the best conditions for aerial observation of deer. Biologists have completed aerial surveys of the same 24 study areas since the 1950s.

Practice Patience at Boat Ramps

North Dakota boaters are reminded to exercise patience, practice physical distancing and plan accordingly when heading to a lake or river this summer.

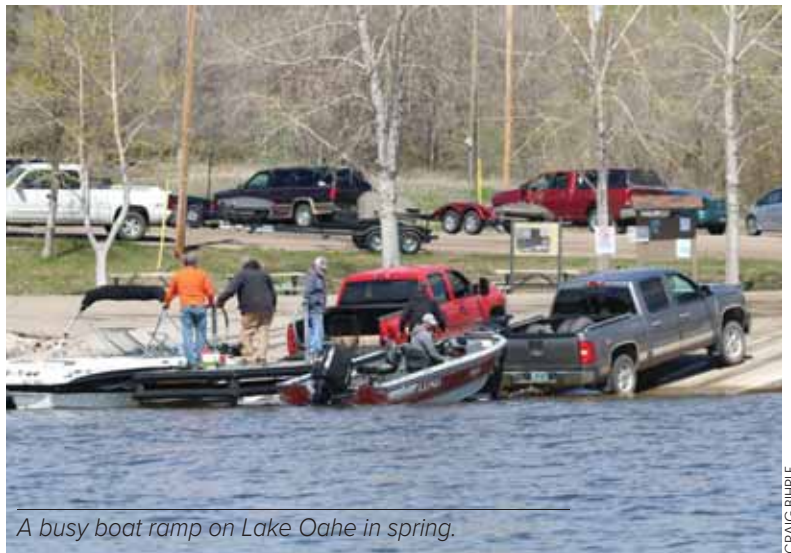
The state Game and Fish Department receives a number of complaints every year about overly aggressive behavior at boat ramps. A few simple reminders will help ensure a fluent transition when launching and loading a boat.

Launching

- Don't pull onto the ramp until your boat is ready to launch.
- Prepare for launching in the parking area. Remove covers, load equipment, remove tie downs, attach lines and put in drain plug, before backing onto the ramp.
- When ready, pull into line to launch. Wait your turn. Be courteous.
- It takes at least two people to efficiently and courteously launch a boat: one to handle the boat and one to take care of the tow vehicle.

Loading

- Don't block the loading area with your boat until your tow vehicle is ready to load. Wait until you are clear of the launch area to unload gear.
- As soon as your trailer is in the water, load and secure your boat to the trailer.
- Remove boat and trailer from the water as quickly as possible.
- Get clear of the ramp. Pull into the parking area to finish securing your boat, unloading gear, draining all water and inspecting for and removing any vegetation. Remember to leave plugs out when transporting boat.



A busy boat ramp on Lake Oahe in spring.

CRAIG BIRHLE



Walleye with a metal jaw tag.

CRAIG BIRRE

Walleye Tagging Studies

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department continues to conduct walleye tagging studies across the state.

At Lake Sakakawea, the state's largest fishery, Department fisheries biologists are in the second year of a four-year walleye tagging study. The goal on Sakakawea is to tag about 3,000 walleyes per year, a target fisheries biologists more than met this year when they fit 3,188 fish with metal jaw tags. Another project was conducted at Lake Josephine in Kidder County where nearly 500 walleyes were tagged.

In both waters, the respective tagging studies will provide Department fisheries biologists with several pieces of information, including angling mortality, that will help to properly manage the fisheries and maintain good fishing into the future.

Anglers can help both tagging studies by reporting any tagged fish they catch on the Game and Fish website at gf.nd.gov, or by calling 701-328-6300.

Anglers who report tagged fish will receive follow-up correspondence from a fisheries biologist (as soon as time permits during the busy field season) containing biological information on their fish.

White-Nose Syndrome Kills Bats

Little brown bats found dead in western North Dakota died of white-nose syndrome.

In early May, the Southwest District Health Unit in Dickinson contacted the North Dakota Game and Fish Department with reports of dead bats found in Medora. Six were submitted to the USGS National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wisconsin, for analysis.

The bats all tested positive for the fungus *Pseudogymnoascus destructans*, and have been confirmed with WNS, a deadly disease of hibernating bats that has caused dramatic population declines in eastern states. It is named for the powdery, white fungus that often appears around the muzzle. WNS is not known to affect humans, pets, livestock or other wildlife.

Game and Fish Department conservation biologist Patrick Isakson said the Department is working with several federal agencies to screen for Pd and WNS in North Dakota.

“This is the second time that Pd has been detected in the state, but these are the first documented deaths in bats attributed to WNS,” Isakson said, while noting it was roughly a year ago that Pd was found on a live bat within the boundary of the Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site.

WNS has been confirmed in bats from 35 states and seven Canadian provinces to date.

"The discovery of white-nose syndrome in these bats signals the continued expansion of this invasive pathogen through North America," said Jeremy Coleman, National White-nose Syndrome Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which leads the national response to WNS. "It also highlights the need for continued vigilance to track the spread of the disease and the impact it is having on native bat populations so we may better focus our conservation efforts."

State and federal agencies are asking for help to monitor the spread of this disease. Anyone seeing a dead or sick bat is asked not to handle it, but to notify health officials or state biologists who can provide further guidance. For more information visit <https://www.whitenosesyndrome.org/>.

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PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

WILLISTON KUMV - Saturday - 6 pm KXMD - Sunday - 10 pm; Monday - Noon	MINOT KMOT - Saturday - 6 pm KXMC - Sunday - 10 pm	GRAND FORKS KVRV - Saturday - 9 pm
DICKINSON KOCD - Saturday - 5 pm (MT) KXMA - Sunday - 9 pm (MT)	BISMARCK KFVR - Saturday - 6 pm KXMB - Sunday - 10 pm CATV - Saturday - 9:30 am KNDX - Fox - Friday - 9 pm	FARGO KVRV - Saturday - 9 pm

ON

WEEKLY VIDEO NEWS BROADCAST



Preventing the Spread of Aquatic Nuisance Species

North Dakota anglers, water recreationists and anyone working in lakes or streams are reminded to follow these simple regulations to help prevent the spread of aquatic nuisance species.

Know the laws, as each state and province have their own rules and regulations. North Dakota regulations include:

- Do not import live aquatic bait.
- Use only legal bait species.
- Transport live bait in containers of 5 gallons or less.
- Properly dispose of unused bait.
- Drain water and remove vegetation from all equipment when leaving a waterbody.
- Remove drain plugs and keep out or open during transport.
- Anglers may not transport live bait in water away from any Class I ANS infested water (currently the Red River, Lake Ashtabula, and the Sheyenne River from Lake Ashtabula downstream to the Red River).
- Clean, drain and dry any equipment (recreational or commercial) that is used in any waterbody.
- **Clean:** remove plants, animals and excessive mud from trailers, hulls, motors and other equipment such as fishing gear and watersports equipment.
- **Drain:** drain all water, including bilges, livewells and bait buckets.
- **Dry:** allow all equipment to dry completely or decontaminate before using again. If necessary, use sponges or towels to remove excess water and allow compartments to dry.
- Report any plant or animal that seems out of place.
- Visit the online reporting form at the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov.

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

Mandatory boat inspections may be required along highways or at lakes based on destination or route taken. In general, to ensure compliance, boaters are encouraged to clean, drain and dry equipment.

Public Asked for Help to Prevent Rabbit Disease

North Dakota animal health officials are asking for help in preventing an exotic rabbit disease from entering the state.

Since March, rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus, or RHDV, has been killing wild, domestic and feral rabbits in southwestern U.S.

The disease is extremely contagious among rabbits and highly deadly. It does not infect humans or other animals and is unrelated to COVID-19.

There is currently no treatment or licensed vaccine in the U.S. The virus is extremely hardy and can be spread directly between rabbits, by insect bites, or contaminated equipment, feed, meat or fur.

RHDV has not yet been found in North Dakota, according to Dr. Beth Carlson, deputy state veterinarian with the North Dakota Department of Agriculture's Animal Health Division.

"Our focus right now is to reduce the chance of RHDV entering the state," she said. "We also want to make sure we detect any potential outbreaks quickly, so they can be contained."

Rabbit owners are reminded that a health certificate is required for all rabbits imported into the state. Extreme caution should be used if purchasing or transporting rabbits or rabbit products from outside North Dakota. Owners are strongly encouraged to consult with their veterinarian to ensure adequate precautions are taken and any unusual mortalities are investigated.

According to Dr. Charlie Bahnson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife veterinarian, there is also concern for wild rabbits since RHDV has been attributed to die-offs in some areas of the Southwest.

"We are fortunate in North Dakota that none of our cottontail or jackrabbit species have the legal status of threatened or endangered, but RHDV could still cause major impacts to the food chain," he said. "Maybe even more importantly, if RHDV becomes established in our wildlife, it will be extremely difficult to prevent in domestic rabbits."

Anyone finding three or more dead, adult wild rabbits is asked to contact Game and Fish at 701-328-6300, or email ndgf@nd.gov. Because rabbits can die of other diseases of concern to humans, carcasses should not be handled until guidance is provided.

More information about RHDV can be found at the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service website.



Cottontail rabbit.

RON WILSON

White Suckers Only Legal in Bois de Sioux, Red Rivers

The state Game and Fish Department reminds anglers that live white suckers are not legal baitfish anywhere in North Dakota, except in the Bois de Sioux and Red rivers.

Although anglers can use live white suckers on the Bois de Sioux and Red rivers, and tributaries up to the first vehicular bridge, they are illegal elsewhere.

Fathead minnows, sticklebacks and creek chubs are the only legal live baitfish outside of the Bois de Sioux and Red rivers. Dead white suckers which have been preserved by freezing, salting or otherwise treated to inactivate reproductive capabilities are legal bait.

Transportation of live white suckers, other than in Richland, Cass, Traill, Grand Forks, Walsh and Pembina counties, is illegal.

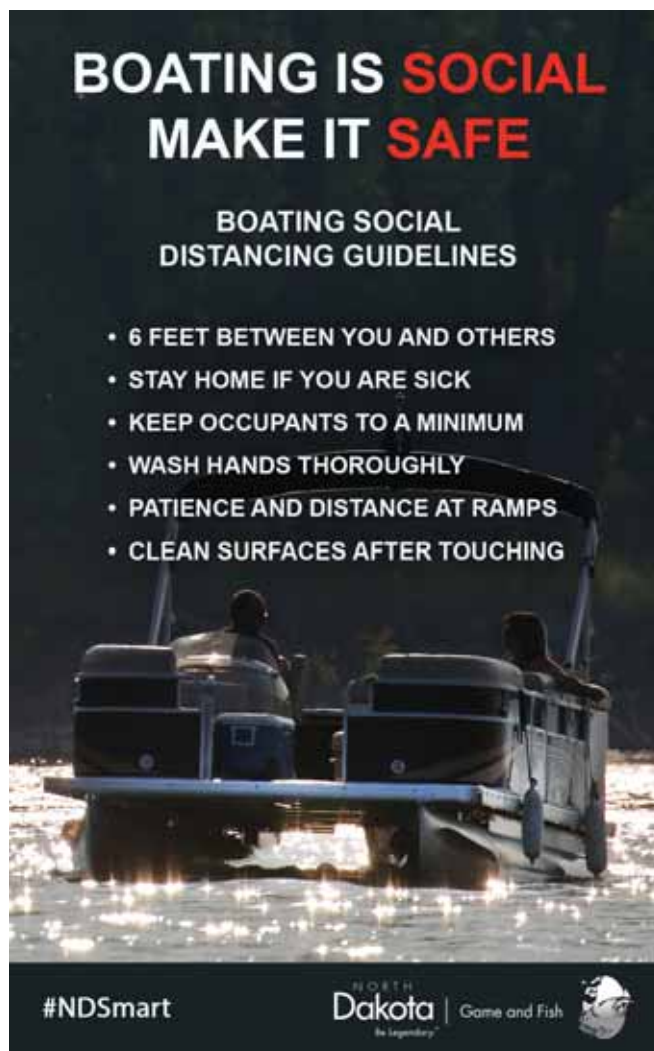
Anglers are also reminded that live baitfish, or other live aquatic bait such as leeches, cannot be transported from another state into North Dakota.

Illegal to Import Live Aquatic Bait

Anglers are reminded that it is illegal to import minnows and other forms of live aquatic bait into North Dakota.

Anglers should buy bait from a licensed North Dakota retail bait vendor. Bait vendors can properly identify species and have taken steps to ensure all bait is clean of any aquatic nuisance species.

For more information, refer to the 2020-22 North Dakota Fishing Guide, available at license vendors or online at the state Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov.



Leave Baby Animals, Watch for Deer

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department offers a simple message to well-intentioned humans who want to pick up and rescue what appear to be orphaned baby animals this time of year: Don't touch them. Whether it is a young fawn, duckling, cottontail rabbit or a songbird, it is better to just leave them alone.

Often, young animals are not abandoned or deserted, and the mother is probably nearby. Young wildlife are purposely secluded by their mothers to protect them from predators.

Anytime a young wild animal has human contact its chance for survival decreases significantly. It's illegal to take wild animals home, and captive animals later returned to the wild will struggle to survive because they do not possess learned survival skills.

The only time a baby animal should be picked up is if it is in an unnatural situation, such as a young songbird found on a doorstep. In that case, the young bird could be moved to the closest suitable habitat.

People should also steer clear of adult wildlife, such as deer or moose that might wander into urban areas. Crowding stresses animals and can lead to a potentially dangerous situation.

In addition, motorists are reminded to watch for deer along roadways. During the next several weeks young animals are dispersing from their home ranges, and with deer more active during this time, the potential for car deer collisions increases.





Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest

While contest guidelines for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest have change little from previous years, photographers are reminded to follow the guidelines for submitting their work.

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

Doing so helps 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 2. For more information or questions, contact Patrick Isakson, Department conservation biologist, at pisakson@nd.gov.

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

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

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

Habitats Workshop Offered Online

Habitats of North Dakota, a workshop for teachers, environmental educators and anyone who works with youth, will be offered online June 30 to July 17.

Instructor Sherry Niesar said the program features new material using inquiry and project-based learning.

"The materials presented will align with the North Dakota Envirothon Wildlife learning objectives," Niesar said. "Students will explore current issues in conservation management, North Dakota habitats, wildlife species and wildlife adaptations."

Different instructional methods will be used to teach across the curriculum integrating subject areas. Curriculum materials are suitable for both elementary and secondary teachers. All supplies will be provided.

The workshop will contain many activities educators can use in the classroom, discussion of classroom and curriculum integration, and self-guided walking field trips at the location of the student's choice, in their yard, or if needed, can be completed using nature programming or live webcams.

To register for the workshop, visit the Dickinson State University West River Teacher Center website. One graduate credit is available.

For more information, contact Sherry Niesar at 701-527-3714 or email sniesar@nd.gov.

Put Garbage Where it Belongs

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department reminds outdoor recreationists to keep it clean this summer by packing out all trash.

All garbage, including used fireworks, should be placed in a proper trash receptacle. If trash cans aren't available, or are full, take the trash and dispose of it at home.

It is not uncommon to see garbage piling up around full trash containers. Styrofoam containers are not biodegradable, but are often found wedged in cattails, drifting or washed up on shore.

Tires, mattresses and kitchen appliances have found their way to public use areas. This illegal dumping is costly to clean up and takes a significant toll on the environment. Not only does it spoil the beauty of the land, it destroys habitat, has the potential to pollute North Dakota waters and can injure wildlife.

Littering violations should be reported by calling the Report All Poachers hotline at 701-328-9921.



STAFF NOTES



Kelly Zorn

Zorn Hired as ANS Biologist

Kelly Zorn was hired in late spring as the aquatic nuisance species biologist in Jamestown. Zorn has a Bachelor of Science degree from Texas A&M University.



Brian Schaffer

Hunter Education Coordinator Hired

Brian Schaffer has accepted the hunter education coordinator position. He has been an education coordinator in the Department's conservation and communications division since 2015.

BACKCAST

320. 383. 350. 547.

Those numbers, not shouted, but spoken with a little oomph by one fisheries biologist to another to clear the alien noises of the nearby coal-fired power plant, denote the lengths and weights of largemouth bass in millimeters and grams.

Like the nighttime working conditions, and much of what else is going on around me, I'm mostly in the dark. Considered by biologists the universal language of science, the metric system is as unfamiliar to me as zipping an electric current into the water to stun and collect fish in long-handled dip nets.

Yet, here we are on Nelson Lake in late May, with the Milton R. Young Station glowing to the south, doing just that.

Hanging with Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel in the coronavirus era is strange because of the necessary precautions. Everyone is wearing a mask because it's impossible to stay 6 feet away from anyone in the boat. Facial expressions are hidden. Conversations are limited.

Equally as strange is the electrofishing process. It's hard to wrap my head around the fact that we're purposefully applying an electric current into the water while standing on a metal boat that's floating on said water.

The fisheries biologist manning the craft over my right shoulder agrees that when you think about it, it does seem odd.

He also warns me not to stick my hand in the water.

To a pedestrian, electrofishing is pretty cool. The fish aren't harmed, and biologists get the information needed from the bass they net to properly manage this popular fishery.

Yet, the best part is that you never know what will surface from the turbid lake illuminated by onboard lights – foot-long bass, hand-sized bluegill and carp bigger than the neighbor's dog.

Fisheries biologists have long called Nelson Lake the best largemouth bass lake in the state because open water year-round, made possible by warm water discharged from the power plant, allows fish to grow better than in other lakes.

The state record bass, which weighed in at more than 8 pounds, 7 ounces, was caught at Nelson Lake in 1983 by Leon Rixen of Minot.

Knowing this and watching the effectiveness of the multi-tentacled probes creating an electrical field in the water, I expect to see at any turn a new record largemouth, or one weighing in the same neighborhood, stretching the bottom of one of the long-handled dip nets.

Not tonight.

Of the five dozen or so bass fisheries biologists weigh, the heaviest comes in at 1,203 grams. Sounds impressive, but it's far from a record.



By Ron Wilson



ASHLEY SALWEY

North Dakota Outdoors Magazine
North Dakota Game and Fish Department
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*Nature's beauty is often
obvious. But sometimes, you
have to slow down and look
closer to capture the nearly
hidden sights, such as this
spider and its dew-covered web
near Lake Metigoshe.*

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