

# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA

GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

\$2.00 OCTOBER 2020



NORTH  
**Dakota**  
Be Legendary.

Game and Fish





## MATTERS OF OPINION



**Terry Steinwand**  
*Director*

**T**wo days ago, September 22, marked the transition from summer to fall. It was difficult to notice the shift in seasons as the daytime high that day was somewhere in the upper 80s.

Weather aside, we were already into the anticipated slide into fall, marked earlier by the deer and pronghorn archery openers, the first full weekend of grouse and partridge hunting, and on it goes.

For many who live in North Dakota, when the hunting seasons start on the Northern Plains, fall is here no matter what the calendar reads.

This is further evidence, I believe, in the deep belief in the state's hunting heritage that is held by so many North Dakotans.

I've often commented in this space about the hunter's responsibility to treat the land they hunt, much of it privately owned, with respect. I've also encouraged hunters to show that same regard for other hunters they encounter in the field.

While doing the right thing, with respect to others and the wild game we pursue, is something all hunters should strive to accomplish without pause, the occasional reminder doesn't hurt.

As you'll see in this issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*, we need hunters, no matter their age, to do the right thing. This is especially true when it comes to chronic wasting disease and what hunters can do to slow the spread of a disease that can cause long-term population declines if left unchecked.

While the CWD feature in this issue of NDO (pages 2-7) goes into greater detail than I will go into in this space, it's important to note that hunters adhere to the baiting restrictions and transportation requirements in place. (Also, visit the Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), for more information.)

If you've ever visited with Dr. Charlie Bahnson, the Department's wildlife veterinarian, he has long said that hunters are our best and most important tool in managing a healthy, sustainable population at the right deer densities. Yet, beyond harvest, hunters, again, must do the right thing and observe the Department's baiting and transportation restrictions to help slow the spread of CWD.

Also of significance in this effort is testing for this invariably fatal disease. According to Department statistics, in hunting units in North Dakota where we have CWD documented, only about 10% of license holders drop off the heads of harvested deer for sampling.

It goes down from there.

In adjacent hunting units, we're looking at maybe 2% to 3% of license holders dropping off their deer heads for testing. Those numbers certainly need to climb and the only way that will happen is if hunters, in this effort to keep CWD in check, do the right thing.

On a brighter note. It's fall, a season many have been waiting for because of the many opportunities afforded us in North Dakota's great outdoors.

*Terry Steinwand*

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# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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*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.*

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### Front Cover

Fall in North Dakota is difficult to beat. From waterfowl hunting, to chasing upland game birds and deer, young and old hunters alike have many opportunities this time of year to choose from.

*Photo by Ashley Salwey.*



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# Keeping CWD in check

*By Ron Wilson*

## **Chronic wasting disease takes its time and the outcome is always the same.**

Once a deer, elk or moose is infected with the disease, it can take on average 18 months or longer before the animal rapidly loses body condition, starts to act strange, becomes emaciated and dies.

"It's important to remember that for the most of that period of time that infected deer will look perfectly healthy, feed with other deer and travel across the landscape as a normal deer would," said Dr. Charlie Bahnson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife veterinarian. "The fact that you have this seemingly healthy deer on its way to death is what makes this disease particularly challenging to manage."

The first month or two after a deer is infected is likely the only time it's not a threat to other animals.

"Studies have shown the disease agent in the saliva, urine and feces starts a couple months after infection," Bahnson said. "So, for several months thereafter, it's a danger to the rest of the herd, potentially infecting them."

Bahnson said CWD was first recognized in Colorado in the 1960s in captive research facilities, and then in wild deer in the area in the 1980s.

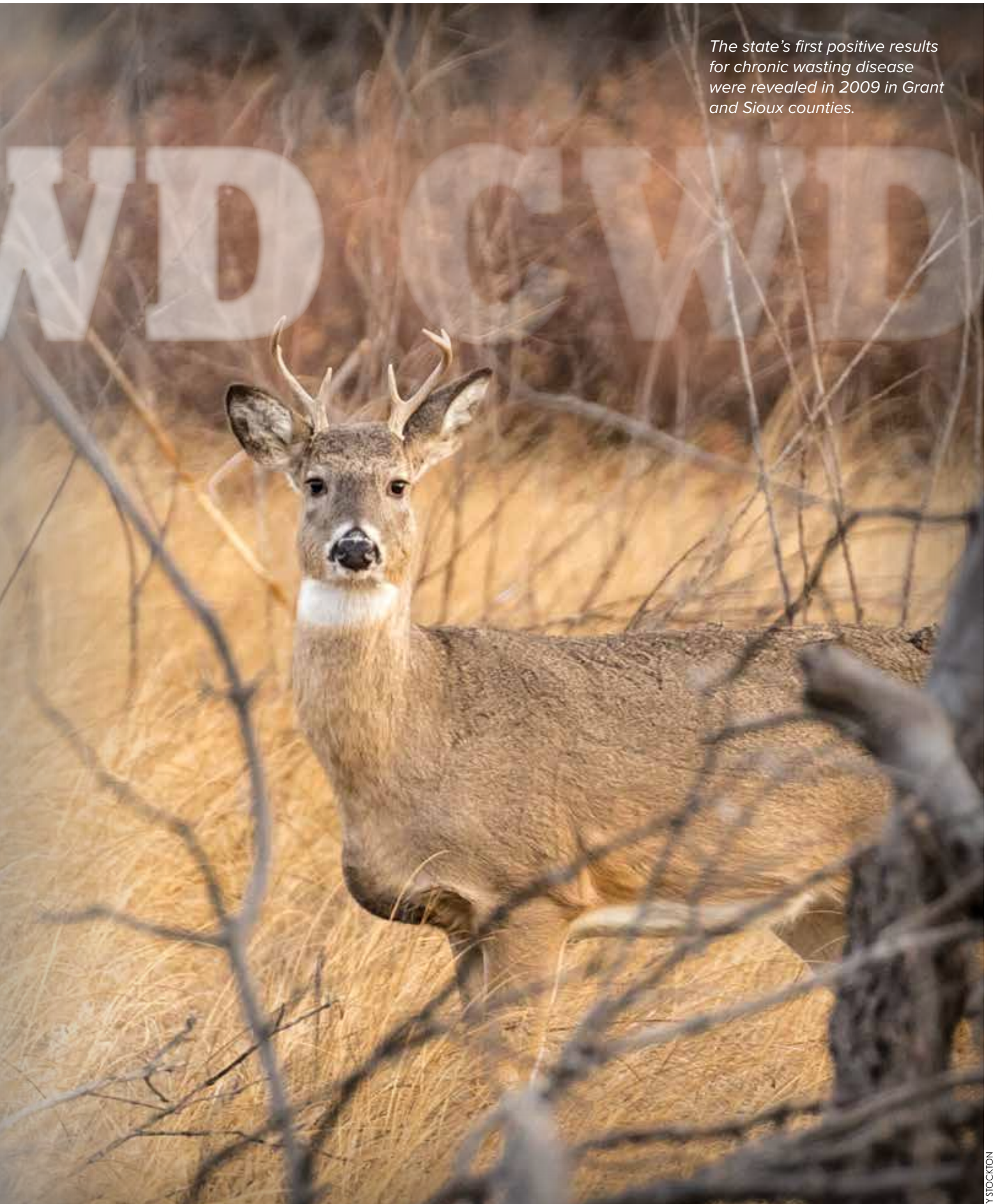
It was long a concern, yet remained somewhat of a curiosity in North Dakota, until the late 1990s and early 2000s.

"But at that point, it started showing up in other states and Canada, and we started looking for it intensely in North Dakota," Bahnson said.

By the early 2000s, CWD had been found in farmed and wild animals in parts of Wisconsin, Montana, Minnesota, South Dakota and elsewhere.



*The state's first positive results for chronic wasting disease were revealed in 2009 in Grant and Sioux counties.*



TY STOCKTON



At the time, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department and other state agencies intensified efforts to test farmed and wild animals for the disease – 470 deer and 25 elk shot by hunters in 2002 tested negative – in the state, while holding collective breaths for the first positive result.

“We’re not just in this for a few years ... We are concerned about the overall health of North Dakota’s wildlife,” said Jacquie Gerads, former Game and Fish Department wildlife disease biologist in 2003. “Is it only a matter of time? If so, I can’t tell you what that time frame is.”

Unfortunately, it didn’t take that terribly long.

“We first started finding deer with CWD in Grant and Sioux counties, hunting unit 3F2, in 2009, and we’ve been finding positive deer down there ever since,” Bahnson said. “And in 2018 we found it for the first time in Divide County, unit 3A1. And since then, we found it farther south as well in Williams County in unit 3B1 and then unit 4B last year.”

Fortunately, and this is important to remember, while a number of deer have tested positive for the disease in North Dakota, the prevalence of CWD remains low, from 2-5%.

“An important thing to emphasize is that we certainly care about where CWD is, but probably equally important is how common it is within our hunting units,” Bahnson said. “CWD remains at a low prevalence and it’s probably not terribly important in terms of having long-term population level impacts. But once it starts to climb, you get into this exponential phase where the prevalence will start to rapidly increase and you’ll start to pass this threshold where all of a sudden it’ll have a really meaningful impact on your population.”

It’s hard enough a being deer in North Dakota, Bahnson said, when you factor in the hard winters, predators, fragmented landscape and other diseases that occasionally come through a herd. If you add substantial mortality due to CWD year after year on top of all that, it’s difficult to see how that population can remain viable long term.

“Right now, one of the positive things



*Hunters remain the best and most important tool in slowing the spread of CWD in North Dakota.*

is that we still are fairly early in the course of the disease in North Dakota. Much of the state remains disease free, and where we have it, the prevalence is fairly low,” he said. “Comparably, there are other jurisdictions, both Canadian and the United States, where they’ll have a local prevalence of 30%, 40%, 50%, if not higher. And once you reach that point, your options are pretty limited. I use those examples as a word of caution and say that we need to do everything we can right now to keep things in check in North Dakota.”

The best tool to do so, Bahnson said, is sufficient, appropriate hunter harvest season after season, which is what wildlife managers have long thought and continues to be born out in scientific literature.

“Hunters are absolutely our best and most important tool,” he said. “If you manage a healthy, sustainable population at the right deer densities, we reduce how many contacts that are occurring on the landscape. But importantly, we are also getting positive animals off the landscape every year.”

An infected deer sheds the disease through its bodily fluids – urine, saliva and

feces. Understanding this, when it comes in contact with other deer, it can infect those animals as well.

“But also, those bodily fluids remain infectious on the landscape for years afterwards, so that is a source of infection as well,” Bahnson said. “And we also know that its carcass parts, particularly its nervous tissue, the spinal column and the brain are a source of infection long after the animal dies and the carcass breaks down.”

Understanding how CWD is transmitted and continues in the environment is key to how wildlife managers in North Dakota and elsewhere are addressing it.

“A hunter can be well intentioned, but harvest an animal that looks perfectly healthy, travel a great distance, butcher the animal,” Bahnson said, “but if those high risk parts end up on the landscape, that can be a source of infection. That’s why we have transportation restrictions in place.”

Knowing that CWD is transmissible and can be spread from animal to animal, or indirectly through contaminated environments, the Game and Fish Department



## Transporting Big Game

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

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

In addition, hunters harvesting a white-tailed deer or mule deer from deer hunting units 3A1, 3B1, 3F2, 4B and 4C, a moose from moose hunting units M10 and M11, or an elk from elk hunting units E2 and E6, cannot transport the whole carcass outside the unit. However, hunters can transport the whole carcass between adjoining CWD carcass restricted units.

North Dakota Game and Fish Department district game wardens will be enforcing all CWD transportation laws.

Hunters are encouraged to plan accordingly and be prepared to quarter a carcass, cape out an animal, or clean a skull in the field, or find a taxidermist or meat locker within the unit or state who can assist.

Game and Fish maintains several freezers throughout the region for submitting heads for CWD testing.

For questions about how to comply with this regulation, hunters should contact a district game warden or other department staff ahead of the planned hunt.

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

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





## Hunter-harvested Surveillance

Surveillance efforts during the 2020 hunting season will focus on areas where CWD has been previously detected. If you harvest an animal from one of these areas, drop off the tagged head at one of the collection sites, a list of which can be found on the Game and Fish Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

Every effort will be made to provide results within 3 weeks. However, delays may occur due to COVID-associated challenges.

Results from lottery licenses (gun, youth, moose, muzzleloader, elk) can be accessed through your Game and Fish account on the Department's website (log on then click on "View Details" for the associated license.)

For nonlottery licenses (archery), results will be provided via email or text message, based on your preferred communication method as listed on your Game and Fish account. To add or update contact information, go to My Account on the Department's website.

*In 2019, the Game and Fish Department collected about 3,500 samples for chronic wasting disease testing from hunter-harvested animals. Efforts to further test deer, elk and moose are ongoing.*



ASHLEY SALWEY

has restricted baiting in hunting units where CWD has been detected or are at risk of having CWD show up in the near term.

"There are infected deer out on the landscape right now that are a major threat when they come into contact with others. We know that baiting brings a lot of unrelated individuals into close contact, but we also know that an animal eating feed off a common pile on the ground where a lot of other animals have been is likely to eat feed that has been contaminated by bodily fluids," Bahnson said. "Restricting baiting is a way that we as hunters can reduce the overall risk of the disease spreading."

There are a lot of strong opinions about baiting, Bahnson said, and some people have a hard time accepting the restrictions.

"But it's undeniable that baiting is a thing that we have the ability to stop doing in order to reduce the overall risk," he said. "We don't pretend to say that it's

going to stop all deer from congregating. We absolutely know that deer congregate in certain times of the year. We know that they are social animals. That being said, it is a way that we can reduce the overall number of those high-risk contacts."

Testing in North Dakota for the invariably fatal disease began in 1998 with roadkilled, sick and suspect animals. In the early 2000s, Game and Fish increased CWD surveillance efforts by annually collecting samples from hunter-harvested deer, elk and moose.

The Department has collected thousands of samples from (mostly) deer, elk and moose over the years. Typically, surveillance efforts from hunter-harvested deer focuses on a third of the state on a rotating basis, and those areas where wildlife managers are trying to manage for CWD.

Last year, the Game and Fish Department collected about 3,500 samples from hunter-harvested animals. And like





MIKE ANDERSON



ASHLEY SALWEY

*Given the unusual circumstances with the COVID situation, the Game and Fish Department will focus its hunter-harvested surveillance efforts this fall in areas of the state where CWD has already been detected.*

most years, 300-400 of those samples were from each hunting unit where CWD has been confirmed.

"This year, given the COVID situation, we're prioritizing with our hunter-harvested surveillance in the northwestern and southwestern parts of the state," Bahnson said. "We had initially planned to do the central third of the state, but we're going to put that on hold until next year so we can focus our resources, our personnel, on areas where it's a little greater concern."

While surveillance is an essential part of managing for CWD, Bahnson said it's important to note that testing deer doesn't actually address the disease on the landscape but helps wildlife managers understand what is going on so they can tailor their management.

"We really rely heavily on hunters to submit heads for sampling, we rely heavily on taxidermists, meat lockers and gas stations that are willing to host

the drop-off sites," he said. "In terms of compliance from hunters, it varies quite a bit. In units where we have CWD documented, roughly 10% of license holders end up dropping off heads for sampling. Outside those units, in adjacent units, we're looking at more like 2% to 3%. So, that's a number we'd like to see increased quite a bit."

In hunting units where CWD is documented, it's important to get a good handle on how common it is. But equally important, Bahnson said, is documenting where CWD is not.

"In order to be confident in saying that we don't have CWD in a unit, we have to test a lot of heads. Only testing 10 heads doesn't give you much confidence," he said. "But if we can get a lot of hunters to participate, if we can test a few hundred heads from each unit, then we can start to confidently make assessments of whether CWD is likely there or not. So, hunter surveillance is a critical part of the big picture."

CWD presents a lot of challenges for wildlife managers – especially when you consider deer move naturally, unimpeded, across the landscape – and it's probably fair to say that the disease will likely show up in other areas of North Dakota given time.

"But I think it's important to realize that when that happens, that's not the end of the fight ... I don't look at that as a reason to say it's hopeless," Bahnson said. "I say that when it shows up in an area, that means it's time to take the next steps to keep things in check."

"Because, again, we can live with CWD at low infection rates, probably indefinitely," he added. "If we say it's a hopeless endeavor, if we give up and let those infection rates blow out of control, then it truly will be a hopeless situation."

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

# SIZE MATTERS



BY RON WILSON



*Advanced walleye  
fingerlings ready  
for stocking.*

MIKE ANDERSON





*The release of advanced walleye fingerlings into South Golden Lake in Steele County in August.*

MIKE ANDERSON

**North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries biologists have for years stocked millions of walleye fingerlings – envision tiny fish about the length of a paperclip or slightly longer – in waters around the state in June.**

An example: Department fish haulers drove thousands of miles early this summer and stocked a record 180 North Dakota waters with nearly 12 million walleye fingerlings.

Yet, for the last handful of years, while still continuing to stock fingerlings in June, fisheries biologists have broken from tradition just a bit to produce and stock bigger fingerlings – envision fish about the length of three paperclips and longer – in late summer that are hopefully less interesting to predators.

“We’ve been experimenting by growing some of our traditional 1¼ - to 1½-inch fish for an extra six weeks up to, say, 3 to 4 inches to see if we can have a little better success in lakes with high bullhead or perch populations,” said Jerry Weigel, Department fisheries production and development supervisor. “Our hope

is that these larger, advanced fingerlings get passed on by predators and we can create a little better walleye fishery in some of these lakes.

“The big thing about the advanced fingerlings is that most are of a size where they’re too big for the bullheads to eat,” he added. “They get to a size that the bullheads don’t even attempt to eat them.”

Even so, survival for the advanced fingerlings isn’t certain because even bigger fish, like adult walleye and northern pike, remain a threat.

While it’s too early to gauge survival of the advanced walleye fingerlings in many of the selected waters around the state, there is some evidence that size does matter.

“Up in the Turtle Mountains, there are a handful of lakes, Lake Metigoshe

included, that we’ve been stocking for a while now that have shown some early signs that it’s looking like these advanced walleye fingerlings are positively contributing,” Weigel said.

The advanced fingerlings stocked this year – roughly about 170,000 fish – in about mid-August in a number of waters from Braun Lake in Logan County to Upsilon Lake in the Turtle Mountains, were raised at Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery near Riverdale.

“We re-pond them in the end of June and we don’t feed them minnows or anything ... they literally just eat natural food in the ponds, and we get amazing survival and outstanding production,” Weigel said. “We do this on a limited basis because it creates a lot of pounds of fish and dramatically fewer fish than our traditional smaller walleye fingerlings.”

Yet, the impact on the hatchery is minimal, Weigel said, while the goal of improving the recruitment of walleye young at problem lakes is certainly attainable.

When the advanced walleye fingerlings were stocked in Braun Lake in August, where the main predator is perch, the water temperature was about 72 degrees, or about the same temperature as the 7- to 8-foot deep pond at the

hatchery near Lake Sakakawea where the fish started their day.

"We try to stock plenty of fish to compensate for any mortality, but as we saw here," Weigel said in reference to the fish just released into the Logan County fishery, "the fish didn't have any problems with the temperature of the lake. Once they got their bearings, they took off, which is a really good sign."

It will take time for the advanced

walleye fingerlings to grow big enough to be of any interest to anglers. Weigel said fish stocked in the southern part of the state will typically grow to 1 pound in three years or less, while those stocked in waters near the Canadian line take a little longer.

"It's our hope to provide quality fishing opportunities in the lakes we're stocking despite the established bullhead populations," Weigel said. "We're trying to turn

*Jerry Weigel, Department fisheries production and development supervisor, handles just some of the estimated 170,000 advanced walleye fingerlings stocked in North Dakota waters in 2020.*



MIKE ANDERSON

*Jerry Tishmack, Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery fisheries biologist, weighs advanced walleye fingerlings at the hatchery prior to transport.*



MIKE ANDERSON



the tide on the bullheads and get a high enough walleye population that they're actually starting to control the bullhead population a little bit."

After traveling thousands of miles stocking fish around the state starting in June, Weigel said anglers, likely many new anglers, were out in force taking advantage of the fishing opportunities in North Dakota.

"I think people, just for their own

sense of happiness during these uncertain times, are outdoors and taking advantage of what the state has to offer," he said. "And there's never been a better time to fish in North Dakota than right now."

Like our lives in North Dakota, life on the prairie is forever changing.

"There was a time in the state where you could get multiple deer tags and everyone could go deer

hunting ... and there was a time when pheasant hunting was as good as pheasant hunting could get," Weigel said. "But right now, fishing is it. The prairie is producing right now and if you ever thought of getting into fishing, there's no better time than what the next few years should offer."

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



*An adult walleye.*



# Hunting Doesn't E

**DEED OEDD GUDD HUNTER QUESTIONS**  
HUNTER QUESTIONS  
HUNTER QUESTIONS  
HUNTER QUESTIONS

Dear Hunter,

The State of Texas Department of Education (TDE) is proud to provide information about our hunting season, using the Hunter Questionnaire. This questionnaire is important to the success of the State of Texas. Please take a moment to complete this questionnaire about our hunting season, and return it to the State of Texas Department of Education. We appreciate your participation. **Thank you for your participation in the State of Texas Department of Education.**

Thank you for your participation in the State of Texas Department of Education.

**1. ARE YOU CURRENTLY HUNTING THE STATE OF TEXAS HUNTER QUESTIONS?**  
a. Yes, I am still hunting. ☐  
b. No, I am not hunting. ☐

**2. WHICH STATE ARE YOU CURRENTLY HUNTING?**  
a. Texas ☐  
b. Other ☐

**3. WHICH STATE ARE YOU CURRENTLY HUNTING?**  
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b. Other ☐

**4. WHICH STATE ARE YOU CURRENTLY HUNTING?**  
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**32. WHICH STATE ARE YOU CURRENTLY HUNTING?**  
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**33. WHICH STATE ARE YOU CURRENTLY HUNTING?**  
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b. Other ☐

**34. WHICH STATE ARE YOU CURRENTLY HUNTING?**  
a. Texas ☐  
b. Other ☐

[illegible]



**TEACHING YOUR CHILD TO READ**  
 Tennessee Department of Education  
 1000 North 3rd Street  
 Nashville, Tennessee 37203

**TEACHING YOUR CHILD TO READ**  
 Tennessee Department of Education  
 1000 North 3rd Street  
 Nashville, Tennessee 37203

**TEACHING YOUR CHILD TO READ**

Dear Parents/Guardian:

We have a fun Department-wide activity on reading that you can do at home with your child. This activity is designed to be a fun way to help your child learn to read. Please take a few minutes to read the instructions and then fill out the form. We will be sending you a letter about the activity and a letter about the results. We will also be sending you a letter about the results of the activity. We will be sending you a letter about the results of the activity. We will be sending you a letter about the results of the activity.

**HOW TO USE THIS FORM:**

1. Fill out the form. We will be sending you a letter about the results of the activity.
2. We will be sending you a letter about the results of the activity.
3. We will be sending you a letter about the results of the activity.
4. We will be sending you a letter about the results of the activity.
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9. We will be sending you a letter about the results of the activity.
10. We will be sending you a letter about the results of the activity.

**TEACHING YOUR CHILD TO READ**

We will be sending you a letter about the results of the activity.



A man in camouflage gear and a cap stands in a marshy area with tall grasses. In the foreground, a large splash of water is visible, and several waterfowl, including a prominent mallard with a red belly, are in the water. The scene is dynamic, with water droplets suspended in the air.

# End With The Bang

By Ron Wilson



Back in the day, let's say sometime in the 1960s, the response rate for North Dakota Game and Fish Department hunter harvest surveys was around 90%.

Fast forward to the mid-1990s and the percentage of hunters who received paper surveys in the mail and returned them to Game and Fish dropped to about 40%.

"If you're trying to use the data that you get from some of these hunter harvest surveys to inform management, you really want a higher response rate," said Chad Parent, Game and Fish Department survey coordinator. "So, in the mid-1990s we started sending out follow-up surveys for the first time, with the cost being additional work hours and more dollars."

enforceable by anybody but yourself and your own set of personal values."

Like closing gates and making sure you didn't leave any trash in the grass on private land you were given permission to hunt. Or sneaking to hunt a buddy's secret duck slough that he showed you when he's not around.

You know. Unwritten rules.

"If you're a good hunter, good sportsman and you follow these kinds of unwritten rules, I don't think your commitment to be this kind of person ends when you're out of the field," Parent said. "It continues afterwards when you get home and receive a survey from us."

While the Game and Fish Department conducts many hunter harvest surveys on

populations go up or down, we need to have some good information and that's where the surveys come in."

At the time of this interview in early September, with the youth waterfowl and youth deer seasons nearly in swing, the hunter harvest survey season was just kicking off, with pronghorn, deer, upland birds and more to follow.

"We survey everything and we're kind of unique in North Dakota because we have the ability to do that," Parent said. "We're a small agency that can be flexible and capture all of our hunter harvest for all of our seasons. There's always a lot going on."

Currently, the Game and Fish is sending hunters an online or paper hunter harvest survey through the mail. Parent calls this a mixed mode survey design that's relatively new to the agency.

Knowing that, he said it's important to not just jump into new survey methodology because the traditional methodology has been working well.

"You know, we've been sending out the same deer survey for about 50 years and it's provided one of, perhaps one of the best, datasets in the country on deer harvest," Parent said. "While we're not in a rush to start something new, at the same time, there's a lot of new demands out there. Our biologists, if they have the ability to get online survey information right away, then access to that information is really important and valuable for managing the deer population. We can't really do that with paper surveys because the turnaround time on them is measured in months and not days."

Whereas, with some electronic surveys sent to hunters via email, Game and Fish can get 5,000 responses in a couple of days and have a really good picture of what the season's deer harvest looks like.

Plus, Parent added, it's extremely cost effective to send hunter harvest surveys over the internet when compared to sending them through the mail.

"What this mixed mode fashion is going to look like for hunters this year is that if you're drawn for a survey for one of the deer gun, muzzleloader or archery seasons, you're going to get an electronic



**While the Game and Fish Department conducts many hunter harvest surveys on many different species of wild game, its evaluation of deer has been around the longest.**

The follow-up requests, Parent said, bumped hunter response up to a respectable 60% to 65% on some of the surveys.

"The research will tell you, and it's kind of an arbitrary rule, that if you can hit a 60% response rate, you can be pretty comfortable with your surveys," he said. "For the Game and Fish, we do want to hit that because we place a lot of importance on our harvest estimates."

Yet, this question remains: Why the noticeable decline in hunter response to Department surveys over the years?

"There are a lot of ecological values to these surveys that really benefit the Game and Fish Department, but the bottom line, I think, is that a lot of people don't value these as scientific pieces of information, and that's OK," Parent said. "Instead, I want to appeal to a hunter's sense of ethics."

"We have a lot of rules when it comes to hunting and being a sportsman ... some of them are statutory and a lot of them are unwritten," he added. "But it's the unwritten ones that I want people to think about for now because they're not

many different species of wild game, its evaluation of deer has been around the longest, for about a half-century, that may hit home best with hunters who question the merit behind this kind of review.

"The Game and Fish manages deer at the level of a hunting unit and within a hunting unit there are a bunch of different factors that can potentially make that deer population go up or down," Parent said. "Primarily, we think about this in terms of the availability and the amount of habitat, and maybe the weather during key parts of reproduction, and more recently, disease on the landscape such as CWD."

"We've also got to balance those things with the people who are living in those hunting units. We may have people who want a large deer population and we may have people who are less tolerant for larger deer populations," he added. "So, we're balancing these kinds of natural survival, mortality factors and social carrying capacity. And the lever that we use to do that is hunter harvest. And if we're going to pull that lever to make





TY STOCKTON

*The North Dakota Game and Fish Department conducts many hunter harvest surveys. It's evaluation of deer, however, has been around the longest, for about 50 years.*

survey sent to your email first and if we don't hear back from you after a couple weeks, we'll follow up with paper," he said. "Paper is still a really important way of getting these surveys out because we recognize that a lot of people may not be internet savvy or may not have access to the Internet. Yet, we still want to capture those individuals and their hunting activity the best we can."

There are a couple of key pieces of information the Department cares about when surveying hunters. First and foremost, Parent said, is that they want to know if you did indeed hunt. And, if you didn't, they still want the survey returned.

Following that, if you did hunt, where did you go? How hard did you hunt in those places? And were you successful?

While response to Game and Fish Department hunter harvest surveys remain at about 60% to 65%, Parent knows there is room for improvement.

"There was a time when that wasn't always the case because many hunters returned surveys no matter what," he said.

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



BRIAN SCHAFER

*All hunters, young and old, receive hunter harvest surveys from the Game and Fish Department. No matter their age, hunters are encouraged to participate in the effort that is valuable in helping manage North Dakota's wild game.*

# History of Night Hunting

By Stephanie Tucker



JIM JOB

Night hunting of coyote and fox has been a controversial topic the last several years.

Some hunters have embraced new technologies, such as night vision and thermal imaging equipment, that give hunters an advantage over the nocturnal predators they enjoy pursuing.

Other coyote and fox hunting enthusiasts believe those technologies go beyond fair chase and give hunters too much of an advantage. And there is some speculation that the addition of night hunting equipment increases pressure and further educates the animals and may be counterproductive to overall coyote hunting success.

No matter which side of the fence you land on, here is a little background into the topic.

Night hunting of coyote and fox was first allowed during the winter of 1991-92. When the season is held has remained relatively consistent since that time, opening annually in late November or early December and closing mid-March. The timing of the night hunting season has generally been an acceptable compromise between including prime

fur season and good snow cover, while avoiding conflicts with other hunting seasons, such as the deer gun season.

Early on, night hunting for these predators was typically done on nights with good moonlight and snow cover, so that hunters could see the animals coming toward them in response to their predator call, as artificial lights were prohibited by state law.

The first significant change to these regulations came during the 2016-17 season, when by proclamation the North Dakota Game and Fish Department began allowing the use of night vision and thermal imaging equipment. However, state law continued to prohibit the use of infrared illuminators in conjunction with night vision because it was a form of "artificial light."

Infrared illuminators are a common component on night vision optics. As such, during the 2019 legislative session, fur harvesters successfully lobbied the legislature for a change. When the ink dried on HB 1412, state law now allows the use of artificial light, night vision, thermal vision, or infrared light with a power source of not more than six volts while

hunting afoot for coyote, fox, raccoon, or beaver during the open season. The artificial light must produce a red, green, or amber color when used in the hunting of coyote, fox, raccoon, or beaver, except when taking a raccoon treed or at bay.

The legalization of new technologies has resulted in some hunters wanting to use their equipment to help livestock producers alleviate depredation caused by coyotes outside of the night hunting season. State law (ND Century Code 20.1-07-04) already allows for this, whereby a producer may authorize a hunter as their agent in helping remove depredating coyotes outside the traditional night hunting season.

Night hunters who are assisting with removal of depredating coyotes outside the night hunting season are encouraged to notify their local game warden as to their activities prior to going afield, in case the night hunters are falsely reported by the public as engaging in illegal activities.

---

**STEPHANIE TUCKER** is the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's game management section leader.

## NIGHT HUNTING SEASON

Coyote and fox (red and gray) may be hunted statewide at any hour. Any person who engages in hunting from 30 minutes after sunset to 30 minutes before sunrise must hunt exclusively on foot. Allows the use of artificial light, night vision, thermal vision or infrared light with a power source of not more than 6 volts. The artificial light must produce a red, green or amber color. The use of archery equipment, including crossbows, is prohibited until after the close of the archery deer season.



# Keep your hunting spot the way you found it

You can help prevent aquatic hitchhikers  
from invading your favorite wetland

**Remove aquatic plants, plant fragments and mud**  
from waders, decoys, strings and anchors

**Drain water**  
from decoys, boats, motors and trailers



**STOP AQUATIC  
HITCHHIKERS!**  
Be A Good Steward. Clean. Drain. Dry.

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Game and Fish



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- GIS map creation
- Review important season dates and regulations
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For more options to receive Game and Fish news and information, visit the Game and Fish website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

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KXMB - Saturday - 10 pm  
CATV - Saturday - 9:30 am

### DICKINSON

KQCD - Saturday - 5 pm (MT)  
KXMA - Saturday - 9 pm (MT)

### FARGO

KVRR - Saturday - 9 pm

### GRAND FORKS

KVRR - Saturday - 9 pm

### MINOT

KMOT - Saturday - 6 pm  
KXMC - Saturday - 10 pm

### WILLISTON

KUMV - Saturday - 6 pm  
KXMD - Saturday - 10 pm

## NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

100 North Bismarck Expressway Bismarck, ND 58501-5095 701-328-6300 [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov)

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*According to roadside surveys conducted in late summer, pheasant numbers are up around the state compared to 2019.*

ASHLEY SALWEY

## Upland Bird Numbers Improving

North Dakota's roadside surveys conducted in late July and August indicate pheasant, sharp-tailed grouse and gray partridge numbers are up from last year.

State Game and Fish Department upland game biologist RJ Gross said results of the annual upland late summer counts brought some good news. "We had good residual cover to start the year, and good weather for nesting and brood-rearing," he said. "There were some areas that experienced abnormally dry periods throughout the summer, but nesting appeared to be successful."

Total pheasants observed per 100 miles are up 38% from last year, but 14% below the 10-year average. Broods per 100 miles are up 30% from last year and 16% below the 10-year average. Average brood size is up 10% from 2019 and 5% below the 10-year average. The final summary is based on 275 survey runs made along 100 brood routes across North Dakota.

"While these numbers are encouraging, it's important to remember that bird numbers in the last five years have been lower than what upland game hunters have been used to for many

years, due to changing habitat conditions and the drought of 2017," Gross said. "For context, these numbers put us about half-way back to where we were prior to the 2017 drought. Local populations are building back up, but they are not at the point yet of spreading out into new territories. Hunters will need to find localized hotspots of pheasants."

Observers in the northwest counted 12 broods and 91 pheasants per 100 miles, up from five broods and 39 pheasants in 2019. Average brood size was six.

Results from the southeast showed five broods and 41 pheasants per 100 miles, down from six broods and 51 pheasants in 2019. Average brood size was five.

Statistics from southwestern North Dakota indicated eight broods and 70 pheasants per 100 miles, up from six broods and 41 pheasants in 2019. Average brood size was six chicks.

The northeast district, generally containing secondary pheasant habitat with lower pheasant numbers compared to the rest of the state, showed three broods and 22 pheasants per 100 miles, compared to three broods

and 15 pheasants last year. Average brood size was six.

Sharptails observed per 100 miles are up 54% statewide, and partridge are up 45%.

Brood survey results show statewide increases in number of grouse and broods observed per 100 miles. Observers recorded two sharptail broods and 21 sharptails per 100 miles. Average brood size was six.

Although partridge numbers have shown a slight increase, Gross said most of the partridge harvest is incidental while hunters pursue grouse or pheasants. Partridge densities in general, he said, are too low to target. Observers recorded one partridge brood and 10 partridge per 100 miles. Average brood size was 10.

The pheasant season opens Oct. 10 and continues through Jan. 3, 2021. The two-day youth pheasant hunting weekend, when legally licensed residents and nonresidents ages 15 and younger can hunt statewide, is set for Oct. 3-4.

The grouse and partridge seasons opened Sept. 12 and continues through Jan. 3, 2021.



White-tailed deer.

TY STOCKTON

## General Game and Habitat License Required

Deer hunters are reminded of a state law that requires hunters to purchase a general game and habitat license before receiving a deer license.

North Dakota Century Code 20.1-03-02 reads, "a person may not acquire any resident or nonresident license to hunt, catch, take or kill any small game or big game animal unless that person first obtains an annual general game license."

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department will only mail deer licenses after the general game and habitat license is purchased.

The general game and habitat license can be purchased online by visiting My Account at the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

Also, it's important to locate your deer license and check it for accuracy, making sure the unit and species is what is intended.

Deer hunters who can't find their deer license and who have already purchased their general game and habitat license, can get a replacement license by printing out a duplicate (replacement) license application from the Game and Fish website, or can request an application by calling 701-328-6300.

The form must be completed and notarized, and sent back to the Department with the appropriate fee.



Bighorn sheep ram.

TY STOCKTON

## Coveted Bighorn Licenses Allocated

The Game and Fish Department allocated six bighorn sheep licenses for the 2020 hunting season, one more than last year.

Two licenses were issued in units B1 and B4, and one license in B3. In addition, one license, as authorized under North Dakota Century Code, was auctioned in March by the Midwest Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation, from which all proceeds are used to enhance bighorn sheep management in North Dakota.

**The number of once-in-a-lifetime licenses allotted to hunters is based on data collected from the Game and Fish Department's summer population survey. Brett Wiedmann, big game management biologist in Dickinson, said results showed a 22% increase in ram numbers from 2019 due primarily to high lamb survival last year.**

"Our objective this hunting season is to maximize hunter opportunity in the northern badlands where ram numbers are strong while continuing to reduce the number of rams in the southern badlands, to lessen the risk of transmitting disease to the northern population," Wiedmann said, while mentioning the concern is the ongoing effects of the bacterial pneumonia outbreak that was first detected in 2014 that resulted in a loss of 15-20% of the adult population.

Wiedmann noted there are more than 300 bighorn sheep north of Interstate 94, but fewer than 20 south of the interstate.

Game and Fish announced in February the status of the bighorn sheep hunting season would be determined after completion of the summer population survey. Prospective hunters were required to apply for a bighorn license earlier this year on the bighorn sheep, moose and elk application. A record 16,935 applicants applied for bighorn sheep. Successful applicants have been notified.





*Motorists are cautioned to watch for deer on roads this time of year.*

## Motorists Warned to Watch for Deer

Motorists are reminded to watch for deer along roadways this time of year because juvenile animals are dispersing from their home ranges.

October through early December is the peak period for deer-vehicle accidents. Motorists are advised to slow down and exercise caution after dark to reduce the likelihood of encounters with deer along roadways. Most deer-vehicle accidents occur primarily at dawn and dusk when deer are moving around.

Motorists should be aware of warning signs signaling deer are in the area. When you see one deer cross the road, look for a second or third deer to follow. Also, pay attention on roadways posted with Deer Crossing Area caution signs.

Deer-vehicle accidents are at times unavoidable. If an accident does happen, law enforcement authorities do not have to be notified if only the vehicle is damaged. However, if the accident involves personal injury or other property damage, then it must be reported.

In addition, a permit is still required to take parts or the whole carcass of a road-killed deer. Permits are free and available from game wardens and local law enforcement offices.

A few precautions can minimize chances of injury or property damage in a deer-vehicle crash.

- Always wear your seat belt.
- Don't swerve or take the ditch to avoid hitting a deer. Try to brake as much as possible and stay on the roadway. Don't lose control of your vehicle or slam into something else to miss the deer. You risk less injury by hitting the deer.
- If you spot deer ahead, slow down immediately and honk your horn.



## Waterfowl Hunters Reminded of ANS Regulations

Waterfowl hunters need to do their part in preventing the spread of aquatic nuisance species into or within North Dakota.

Waterfowl hunters must remove plants and plant fragments from decoys, strings and anchors; remove plant seeds and plant fragments from waders and other equipment before leaving hunting areas; remove all water from decoys, boats, motors, trailers and other watercraft; and remove all aquatic plants from boats and trailers before leaving a marsh or lake. In addition, hunters are encouraged to brush their hunting dogs free of mud and seeds.

Cattails and bulrushes may be transported as camouflage on boats. All other aquatic vegetation must be cleaned from boats prior to transportation into or within North Dakota.

In addition, drain plugs on boats must remain pulled when a boat is in transit away from a water body.

More ANS information, including regulations, is available on the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).



Boat lifts pulled from Lake Ashtabula.

MIKE ANDERSON

## Water Recreationists, Property Owners Asked to Help Search for ANS

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is asking water recreationists and property owners to check for zebra mussels and other aquatic nuisance species when removing boat lifts, docks and other equipment from state waters.

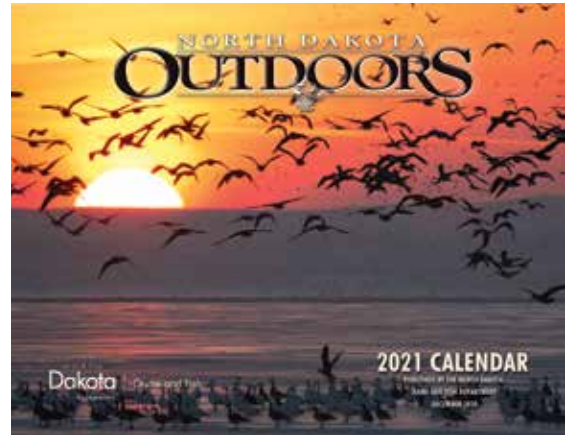
ANS coordinator Ben Holen said zebra mussels attach to hard surfaces that are left in the water for long periods of time, first settling in tight spaces and areas that are protected from sunlight. He said this is a great opportunity for members of the public to assist in ANS detection efforts because the earlier a new ANS infestation is detected, the better the chance to contain the spread.

"It makes it easier to do a thorough search on equipment when it's taken out of the water in fall," Holen said. "Pay special attention to wheel wells, right angles on frames, and areas otherwise protected from sunlight. Feel for attached organisms that have small hair-like structures holding them in place. Small mussels can feel like rough sandpaper, and adults can be as large as 2 inches long."

Holen said if you think you've found a zebra mussel, take pictures, write down any relevant information, such as how many were found and where, and report it online at the Game and Fish website [gf.nd.gov/ans](http://gf.nd.gov/ans), or email Holen at [bholen@nd.gov](mailto:bholen@nd.gov).

Zebra mussels are native to the Black and Caspian seas and were introduced to the United States in the mid-1980s. Since then, they have caused massive damage to infrastructure, increased costs to electric and water users, and altered the ecosystems into which they were introduced. They were first discovered in North Dakota in the Red River in 2015 as a result of downstream drift from infested Minnesota lakes. Most recently, zebra mussels were discovered in Lake Ashtabula in 2019, and Lake LaMoure earlier this year.

"Water recreationists and property owners play a vital role in ANS prevention," Holen said. "Equipment such as boat lifts and docks are high risk vectors for spreading ANS, especially zebra mussels. When transporting boat lifts or docks, thoroughly inspect, and dry for three weeks before placing in a different waterbody."



## Order 2021 OUTDOORS Calendars

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is taking orders for its *North Dakota OUTDOORS* calendar, the source for all hunting season and application dates for 2021. Along with outstanding color photographs of North Dakota wildlife and scenery, it also includes sunrise-sunset times and moon phases.

To order online, visit the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or send \$3 for each, plus \$1 postage, to: Calendar, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095. Be sure to include a three-line return address with your order, or the post office may not deliver our return mailing.

The calendar is the *North Dakota OUTDOORS* magazine's December issue, so current subscribers will automatically receive it in the mail.

## Youth Waterfowl Hunting Trailer Available

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department and Ducks Unlimited co-sponsor a trailer full of waterfowl hunting gear that is available to families with young hunters.

Purchased by the Game and Fish Department's Encouraging Tomorrow's Hunters grant program, the trailer is designed for families who don't have the appropriate gear for their young hunters to hunt waterfowl. The equipment is donated by Avery Outdoors.

Use of the trailer is free, and it is equipped with goose and duck decoys for field hunting, and two bags of floating duck decoys and marsh seats for hunting a wetland.

For more information, or to reserve equipment, contact the Ducks Unlimited office in Bismarck at 701-355-3500.





ASHLEY SALWEY

## Prepping for the Deer Gun Season

With North Dakota's deer gun season opening in early November, many hunters will be looking for a place to sight in their firearms to get ready for the season.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department manages five gun ranges on wildlife management areas in the state, and also partners with many local clubs around North Dakota to offer many other public shooting facilities.

The Department-managed ranges not only provide places for people to simply shoot, but they also make available places where they can hone their skills and sight in firearms prior to the deer gun season.

The five gun ranges managed by the Game and Fish Department include:

- Lewis and Clark WMA, located 6 miles southwest of Williston.
- Little Heart (Schmidt) Bottoms, located 12 miles south of Mandan off ND Highway 1806.
- MacLean Bottoms, located 2 miles south of ND Highway 1804, about 15 miles southeast of Bismarck.
- Riverdale WMA, located 2 miles southwest of Riverdale.
- Wilton Mine WMA, located 2 miles east of Wilton.

The Department may periodically close these ranges for routine maintenance and improvements. The current status of each range can be found on the Department's website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

The website also provides a detailed listing of other shooting facilities in North Dakota.

## Hunting from Duck Boats Safely

Waterfowlers hunting from boats are encouraged to wear properly-fitted life jackets while on the water.

Hunting jackets with built-in life jackets are light and comfortable to wear. In addition, wearing a life jacket will not only keep the overboard hunter afloat, but also slows the loss of critical body heat caused by exposure to cold water.

Capsizing and falling overboard from small boats are the most common types of fatal boating accidents for hunters.

## PLOTS Guides Online

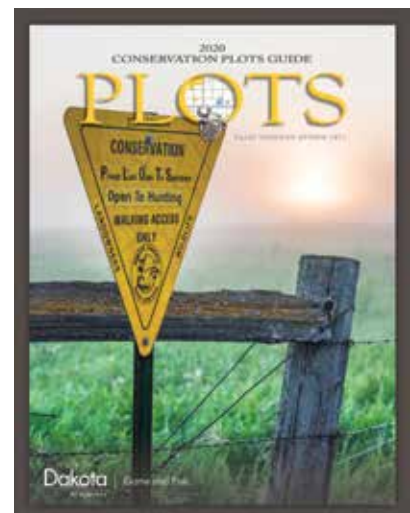
The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen Guide for 2020 is now available online at the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). In addition, the free printed PLOTS guides are available at most license vendors and other locations throughout the state.

The guide features about 800,000 PLOTS acres. Because the guide is printed in mid-August, some PLOTS tracts highlighted in the guide may have been removed from the program since the time of printing. There will also be some PLOTS tracts where the habitat and condition of the tract will have changed significantly. Conversely, Game and Fish may have added new tracts to the program after the guide went to press.

To minimize possible confusion, Game and Fish will update PLOTS map sheets weekly on its website.

The PLOTS guide features maps highlighting these walk-in areas, identified in the field by inverted triangular yellow signs, as well as other public lands.

The guides are not available to mail, so hunters will have to pick one up at a local vendor, or print individual maps from the website.





## Whooping Crane Migration

Whooping cranes are in the midst of their fall migration and sightings will increase as they make their way into and through North Dakota over the next several weeks. Anyone seeing these endangered birds as they move through the state is asked to report sightings so the birds can be tracked.

The whooping cranes that do make their way through North Dakota each fall are part of a population of about 500 birds that are on their way from nesting grounds at Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada to wintering grounds at Aransas National Wildlife

Refuge in Texas, a distance of about 2,500 miles.

Whoopers stand about five feet tall and have a wingspan of about seven feet from tip to tip. They are bright white with black wing tips, which are visible only when the wings are outspread. In flight they extend their long necks straight forward, while their long, slender legs extend out behind the tail. Whooping cranes typically migrate singly, or in groups of 2-3 birds, and may be associated with sandhill cranes.

Other white birds such as snow geese, swans and egrets are often

mistaken for whooping cranes. The most common misidentification is pelicans, because their wingspan is similar, and they tuck their pouch in flight, leaving a silhouette like a crane when viewed from below.

Anyone sighting whoopers should not disturb them, but record the date, time, location and the birds' activity. Observers should also look closely for and report colored bands which may occur on one or both legs. Whooping cranes have been marked with colored leg bands to help determine their identity.

## STAFF NOTES



*Terry Steinwand, Department director, and Robert Timian (right), who retired in summer after 35 years with the agency.*

### Robert Timian Retires

Robert Timian, longtime North Dakota Game and Fish Department chief of enforcement, retired in August after 35 years with the agency.

Timian began his career as a district game warden in Makoti in 1985. In 1991 he was appointed district game warden supervisor in Dickinson, and became chief of law enforcement in 2004.

"I worked with Bob in many capacities in his time with the Department but closely for the last 15 years in his time as chief warden," said Terry Steinwand, Game and Fish Department director. "He was fantastic in providing information on almost a daily basis and had great insight on enforcement issues, within and outside of the Department. To say I implicitly trusted Bob would be an understatement. I'll miss having him around on a daily basis, but I also know his phone number, so he isn't considered completely retired in my mind."



*Jason Rowell*

### Rowell Fills Game Warden Post

Jason Rowell of Valley City was hired as a district game warden and is stationed in Killdeer. Rowell graduated from Valley City State University with a bachelor's degree in fisheries and wildlife sciences, with an emphasis in conservation law enforcement.



# BACKCAST



By Ron Wilson

Hunting upland birds without a bird dog always seemed like a foolish errand.

Yet, here we are.

After 25 years, give or take, without a dog or two zipping ahead of us with enviable energy and enthusiasm, we're going it alone, with mediocre human noses and inferior instincts.

Technically, we do have a bird dog at home, but he isn't near the hunter, or dog, he once was. Old age, and the fallout from going hard for years, which some of us are certainly familiar with, have sidelined him to daily walks around the neighborhood and unenthusiastic rounds of fetch with a tennis ball in the back yard.

The last bird he retrieved was a sharp-tailed grouse shot on public land last fall an hour from home. On Monday, he sniffed with passing interest a mostly flattened dove likely hit by a vehicle two blocks from home.

I'm expected to know what's best and be the one to decide why lazing on the couch is smarter than running through

buckbrush and little bluestem. It's a load I don't relish but can wrap my head around when I run my hand over bony front shoulders and hips that are too often unstable nowadays.

Time, at least years of it, it turns out, is not a bird dog's friend. The same, certainly, can also be said for the hunter.

There was a time, out here in western North Dakota where we open the sharp-tailed grouse season on just a postage stamp of the more than 1 million acres of public land, when the birds were so abundant that employing a dog in the effort, other than to help pick up the fallen, maybe wasn't even considered.

As was reported in "Feathers from the Prairie," a Game and Fish publication: *We had thousands of grouse in the early days (1908-23) in the Little Missouri bottoms. When you'd shoot a bird out of the bottoms, there would be so many grouse getting up, the air was filled with a roar of wings.*

Hard to imagine.

With the temperature near 80 degrees, a gorgeous, wouldn't-trade-it-

for-anything day in the badlands, we do the obvious and hump it from one buffalo berry patch to next, hoping to flush grouse chilling in the shade.

This is a passable strategy that has worked before but starts to wear thin. Yet, no one suggests parking somewhere in the shade, eating what's left of the fried chicken, venison jerky and cheese, and taking a nap, so we hunt.

Shouldering missed opportunities and just one sharptail in the bag, we wander into evening knowing that time, again, isn't on our side. The sun will set before we know it. The conversation turns to what kind of pizza we should order at the hotel once we get back.

When the grouse flush, maybe a dozen or more, the air isn't filled, like some old timers remember it, with the roar of wings. Yet, when we share this moment days from now, we'll say it was difficult to tell because of all the shooting going on.

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



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Drew Johnson, district game  
warden stationed in Finely, visits  
with a successful pheasant  
hunter. While Game and Fish  
Department wardens are busy  
year-round, their contact with  
people utilizing the state's  
wonderful natural resources  
certainly ramps up in fall.



JIM JOB

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