

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA

GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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NORTH
Dakota
Be Legendary

Game and Fish



MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

Change is inevitable. I've witnessed a lot of change since 1982 when I started with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. Changes in the landscape. Population changes in the animals that inhabit our countryside. Changes in the ways we manage the state's natural resources. Changes in Department personnel.

In August, Bob Timian retired after 35 years of service with the agency. Bob's last assignment with the Department was chief of enforcement, the position he held since 2004.

I worked with Bob in many capacities over the last many years and he will be missed. But, like I said, change is inevitable, and I'm excited for what's ahead.

Readers are introduced to Scott Winkelman, the new chief of enforcement, later in these pages of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

I'm looking forward to working with Scott in his new capacity for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, as he came from a pool of good candidates. It's not that I haven't worked with Scott in the past on other issues, but now he has the opportunity in a much larger role to continue to do great things for the enforcement division and the Department.

Trust, character and integrity are important to me and Scott possesses all three of those in my mind. I know he'll approach his new role with

fairness and empathy while protecting the fish and wildlife resources of North Dakota that are important to all of us.

On that note, North Dakota's deer gun season, which ranks high in what's important to many of us, is in full swing.

We've seen a change in deer license numbers of late, a trend hunters would like to see continue. Since 2015, when the Department made available just 43,275 deer gun licenses (the lowest since 1979), license numbers increased from 49,000 in 2016 to 69,050 in 2020.

A number of factors – favorable winter weather and available wildlife habitat on the landscape, to name a few – need to work in our favor to keep the state's deer population moving in the right direction. But as we know, life here on the Northern Plains means that change, good or bad, is inevitable and there is little, if anything, we can do about it.

What we can control is our actions while in the field. I encourage hunters to be respectful of landowners and other hunters they encounter.

North Dakota's hunting heritage is strong, in part because of the respectfulness displayed by hunters to the game they pursue and to the land that harbors these animals.

Be safe, know your target before pulling the trigger, leave little trace of your passing and enjoy the resources this fall in North Dakota's great outdoors.

Terry Steinwand

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NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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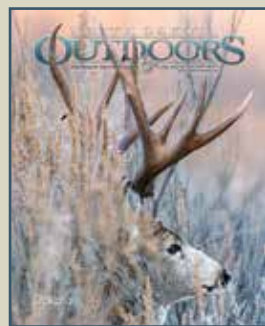
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Front Cover

A mule deer buck license is a difficult draw. Finding a big buck like this hiding in the sage in western North Dakota is equally daunting.

Photo by Lara Anderson



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LOOKING LOOKING

In the early 2000s, which feels like forever ago, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department was under some pressure to reduce the number of deer on the landscape.

Jump ahead to, say, the last five years or so, and the thinking about the state's deer population has changed. Not surprisingly, that's what happens when you go from more than 100,000 licenses per season for an 11-year stretch starting in 2001, to just 43,275 licenses in 2015.

"In the early 2000s when we had a lot of deer on the landscape, we developed a five-year plan, and the concept at that point in time was to determine how the Department was going to reduce those deer numbers and to what level," said Jeb Williams, Game and Fish Department wildlife division chief. "It took a lot of conversations with a lot of different people because we obviously have some varying interests out there as far as deer numbers."

Today, and certainly the last five years, we're dealing with a different scenario.

"I wouldn't say everybody, but a good majority of people probably agree that the state could have more deer and more licenses than what we've had of late," Williams said.

Yet, as deer licenses increase to the 70,000 to 80,000 range, Williams said wildlife managers understand that deer-vehicle collisions and landowner tolerance issues, among others, become bigger talking points because of increased deer numbers.

"This year the Game and Fish made available 69,050 deer licenses, so we're starting to get to

For the fifth year running, the number of deer gun licenses made available to hunters was increased. In 2020, any-antlered licenses increased by 1,500 compared to 2019.

G BACK AHEAD

By Ron Wilson



that point where discussions about deer numbers are probably going to be a little more interesting as we move forward,” Williams said.

The biggest hurdle to overcome to keep deer numbers – and many other wildlife species, like pheasants and waterfowl – trending in the right direction is the loss of habitat. All animals have certain habitat needs throughout the year, and if those needs aren’t met, wildlife populations reflect the shortcomings.

“In certain parts of the state we still have very good deer habitat on the landscape, but in other parts of the state we don’t, so we aren’t able to support the same number of deer we had 15 years ago,” Williams said. “It’s habitat based in North Dakota ... always has been.

“As we all know, we can either be gifted or punished with some pretty severe winter weather here on the Northern Plains,” he added. “But if we have the habitat base in place, it affords critters the ability to get through tough winters. And it also affords those critters the extra opportunity to rebound a little bit faster with good habitat on the landscape.”

Contrasting Falls

Heading into North Dakota’s deer gun season, Williams said hunting conditions in 2020 should look nothing like fall 2019, which was significantly influenced by one of the wettest Septembers on record and an early October snowstorm.

“I was born and raised in North Dakota and last fall was probably the craziest fall, hands down, that

ASHLEY PETERSON



ASHLEY PETERSON

RON WILSON

I've ever participated in," Williams said. "The amount of moisture we received alone on October 9, anywhere from 16 to 30 inches of snow in some parts of eastern and central North Dakota, made things interesting and difficult for a lot of people.

"It didn't help farmers, of course, trying to get their crops off, and the amount of crop left standing on the landscape was significant," he added. "That provided lots of extra areas for deer and pheasants to be in and then access getting to some of those areas was extremely tough."

This fall, Williams said hunters will experience nearly the opposite.

"It's not very often that we talk about a good chunk of row crops being off before the pheasant season opens in North Dakota," he said. "But this year, we actually saw that. There's going to be a little bit of standing crop around during the deer season, but definitely not a lot."

Hunter Enthusiasm

Rising or falling deer license numbers. Habitat on the landscape. A plan to manage deer in North Dakota. All of these things mean something to many people as deer hunting, a storied activity that dates back nearly nine decades when licenses were first issued to hunters, in North Dakota remains relevant.

"We see the enthusiasm for deer hunting in a couple of different ways," Williams said. "For one, we see it in the number of people who actually apply for deer licenses, which remains pretty high."

In 2020, more than 81,000 hunters applied for the 69,050 licenses made available by the Game and Fish Department.

"We also see it in the form of frustration when people aren't getting a deer license and have to wait a period of time to get a deer license," Williams said. "We still hear from hunters about that and it's understandable. But I also take that as enthusiasm for deer hunting. The day our phones don't ring, or our emails don't light up from people with concerns and interest in deer hunting, that tells me that maybe they've run out of enthusiasm."

Williams said wildlife managers certainly understand the frustration of some hunters who have difficulty drawing a license through the Department's deer lottery. Yet, if a hunter is willing to be flexible, sometimes there is an answer for that.

"If you're an individual who is particular about where you deer hunt because of, say, a connection to grandpa's farm in a particular unit, but it's difficult to draw a license there, and you don't feel like you have the ability to move to another unit where you have a better chance ... the frustration certainly gets a little bit higher," he said. "But if you want to be out there hunting and participating in the family event associated with deer hunting, applying for an antlerless tag is not the worst thing in the world."

Williams said it's understandable that most hunters want to draw a buck license, but that's not going to happen.

"Even when we were issuing close to 150,000 licenses, not everybody had that buck tag," Williams said. "That's not practical. That's not possible. So, if people want that experience and just to feel like they're part of the hunt, looking at other options is certainly something to consider."

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.



From 2001 to 2011, deer gun license numbers in North Dakota were unprecedented. In 2006, when this license was notched by a hunter, 143,500 were made available to hunters.



EHD Outbreak

Because of continued reports of white-tailed deer mortality in western North Dakota caused by epizootic hemorrhagic disease, the state Game and Fish Department allowed hunters with whitetail licenses in 12 units the option of turning those licenses in for refunds.

Jeb Williams, Department wildlife division chief, said EHD has been around for a long time and is something that presents management challenges for the Game and Fish about every 10 years.

The last time Game and Fish made license refunds an option for hunters because of an EHD outbreak was in 2011.

EHD, a naturally occurring virus that is spread by a biting midge, is almost always fatal to infected white-tailed deer, while mule deer do not usually die from the disease.

"We wanted to offer the opportunity for people to assess their individual situation, visit with landowners and other contacts in their area to find out the degree of intensity of the outbreak before they decided to take us up on our refund option," Williams said.

The decision to offer refunds was based on evidence of moderate to significant white-tailed deer losses in some areas that might affect hunting success in those locations.

The Department first received reports of isolated deer deaths in August, and loss of deer to this disease extended into October and covered a large area of western North Dakota.

Department wildlife managers said whitetail population was not decimated and, in many areas, a good harvest was still needed. More than 9,000 white-tailed deer license holders were eligible for license refunds.

A Conversation

North Dakota Game and Fish Department wardens are busy year-round, but especially in fall when deer, waterfowl and upland game bird seasons are in full swing.





With Scott Winkelman

It's late October at the time of this interview and North Dakota's deer gun season is around the corner. Pheasant hunters have been in the field for a couple weeks and waterfowl hunters have been decoying birds longer than that.

It's a busy time in North Dakota's outdoors, always is this time of year, and that's especially true for the Game and Fish Department's enforcement personnel.

Scott Winkelman took over as chief of enforcement in early October, replacing Robert Timian, who retired after 35 years with the agency.

North Dakota OUTDOORS staff visited with Winkelman early in the transition.

NDO: What is your professional background?

Winkelman: I started as a conservation officer in South Dakota in 2002. I moved to North Dakota in 2003, and I was the district game warden in Bottineau until 2007. That's when I moved to Bismarck as the wildlife investigator, and in 2015 I was promoted to investigation supervisor.

NDO: What got you interested in wildlife enforcement?

Winkelman: I went to college at the University of North Dakota and got a bachelor's degree in fisheries and wildlife biology. While I was doing that, I started working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seasonally. And the more I was around other wildlife professionals, I just gravitated toward the enforcement side. I enjoy being able to work directly with hunters and anglers and those who are utilizing our resources.

NDO: As you mentioned, you were the investigative supervisor before being named division chief. Tell us about your management style?

Winkelman: I will be very supportive of our game wardens. I feel we hire very competent, talented, educated, skilled people to be game wardens in North Dakota. But while I'm supporting them, I'm fairly hands off because we hire such good people. I trust them to do their jobs and they do it well.



ASHLEY PETERSON



ASHLEY PETERSON

The Game and Fish Department has 28 field wardens. No matter the time of year, during the open water fishing season or when lakes freeze, these men and women are scattered across the landscape safeguarding the state's natural resources.

NDO: *What are some of the challenges you foresee as the new division chief?*

Winkelman: These are certainly trying times for enforcement in general. With the COVID pandemic going on, it's uncertain where that will take us, but we'll continue to react to it on a daily basis and see where it takes us in the future.

NDO: *The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is a small agency when compared to others around the country. Knowing this and understanding how big the state is physically, how demanding is it for your staff to do their jobs?*

Winkelman: It certainly is demanding and a challenge at times. We are a small agency and a small division. We have 39 total employees in the enforcement division, but only 28 field wardens. So, they do have to cover large areas and they do a tremendous job with what they're allowed to do, but it can be a challenge at times.

NDO: *Along those same lines, with significant increases in fishing and hunting license sales in 2020, which means more people on the water and in the field, how are your wardens adjusting to this rise in participation?*

Winkelman: They've been handling it well. They're certainly taking more calls, they're making more contacts in the field. They've been busy, but they're doing a tremendous job. With maybe some new hunters and anglers out there this year with increased license sales, we haven't seen a lot of problems with people not knowing what rules they are supposed to be following. They do a pretty good job of following our regulations. And part of that is we like to keep our regulations simple and easy to understand and follow.

NDO: *As a game warden, especially this time of year with the deer season in full swing, pheasant hunters on the landscape, the list goes on, are there enough hours in the day to safeguard North Dakota's natural resources?*

Winkelman: You know, sometimes it doesn't seem like it, but the wardens do a good job of knowing where to go and when to be there. And they do a great job of protecting our natural resources. Our wardens try and be out and maximize their time when hunters are actually going to be out in the field.

NDO: *Let's think year-round, not just fall in North Dakota. Are there some things of interest, some priorities you want your staff to focus on?*

Winkelman: With aquatic nuisance species slowly expanding in places in the state, we're trying to do everything we can to keep that from happening. In the summer, and even in the fall with waterfowl hunters, the wardens do seriously look for those violations. ANS is certainly a focus area. Along those same lines, curbing the spread of chronic wasting disease in the state is also another issue of concern our wardens will focus on.

NDO: *How has technology, especially in the last decade, changed how your wardens do their investigations?*

Winkelman: Technology has completely changed our jobs. Today, even compared to when I started as a warden, everybody has a mobile computer in their hand that they carry with them and they're posting pictures, they're chatting instantly as things are happening. So, we're always reacting, trying to investigate based off of social media tips. We get a lot of complaints based off of social media and it is an item that we are looking at on a constant basis.

NDO: *The Game and Fish Department often promotes the Report All Poachers program. How big of a role does the public play in helping wardens do their jobs?*

Winkelman: RAP plays a huge role and is one of the most important programs we have. With our limited number of wardens in the field, we can't be everywhere. And when the public, hunters and anglers witness a violation and make that phone call to us, it is a huge help. And quite frankly, we would have a hard time being successful at our jobs without the RAP program, and the Wildlife Federation and their help in running the program. While we do get a lot of calls through the RAP line (701-328-9921), those of us in the enforcement division also get a lot of phone calls directly to our phones also because they're all published on the Game and Fish website (gf.nd.gov). Again, the RAP line is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. So, that is a good number to call if you need to get in touch with a game warden because you witnessed a violation.

NDO: *Anything else? Any last remarks to those people who participate in the many opportunities afforded them in North Dakota's outdoors?*

Winkelman: Everybody have a safe, enjoyable fall and winter, and if you see or witness any violations, please give us a call.



ASHLEY PETERSON

SCOTT WINKELMAN is the Department's new enforcement division chief.





Venison Sausage C



By Alicia Underlee Nelson

Leah Kastner has been making venison sausage with her parents and sister since she was a kid. Her role in the family assembly line has been the same for almost as long.

"We all have designated jobs, and I am the 'gut girl,'" she said with a hearty laugh. "I'm usually the one that's putting the casing on the meat crank. I don't know how I got stuck with that job!"

Her father, Russ Johnson, hunts white-tailed deer, pronghorn and mule deer across North Dakota, Montana and Wyoming. Once he gets his venison back from the processor, family members gather in the kitchen of the West Fargo home he shares with his wife (and Kastner's mom), Sandy. Then the sausage making begins in earnest.

Kastner's sister, Kara Erickson, drives in from Bismarck with her husband, Brad, and son, Cole, in tow. Sometimes cousin Valerie Bensley and her family make the trip from Grand Forks. "Gut girl" is just another cog in a well-oiled machine.

"The guys are usually cranking the meat out and taking it out of the smoker," Kastner said. "My mom and my sister typically are tying. They're taking it from me and lining it up on baking sheets to take out to the smoker. And I'm just trying not to let the guts rip, trying not to let the sausage break open."



TY STOCKTON

Connects Generations

Brothers John (left) and Matthew Breker and sister Rachel Olson pause during their venison sausage making operation.



BILLY STOUT



JOHN BREKER

For many families and friends across North Dakota, gathering to make venison sausage from deer harvested during the state's November season is as much of a tradition as donning blaze orange and pushing deer from tree rows and cattail-ringed sloughs.

There's a rhythm to the process, a repetitious sense of flow as the family finds its groove, transforming raw venison and pork into ring sausage – and other varieties too.

"We're a big pancake and waffles family so we kind of get our breakfast sausage for the year," Kastner said.

Kastner's son is 6 years old. When the day comes for him to take his place in line, he might discover that he already knows what to do. That's what happened to John Breker. He'd watched his extended family make sausage in his grandparents' basement in rural Rutland for as long as he could remember. By the time he and his cousins were old enough to be useful, the third generation of

Brekers already knew the basics, seemingly by osmosis.

"It's just like doing Christmas. Nobody teaches you how to open presents," he said. "At some point you have a chance to start mixing meat. You might get to put the meat in the grinder. That's a fascinating process for a little kid."

It can also be a major production. If the Kastner's parents had an assembly line in their kitchen, the Breker family operation resembled a small factory.

For one thing, there was a lot more meat to process. Breker estimates that when deer populations were high in the mid-1990s, there could easily be 15 hunters in the family. If just half of them filled their tags, that still meant that there was

a lot of venison to process, a small army of aunts, uncles and cousins milling about and plenty of work for many hands.

Eventually, the sausage making operation moved from the basement to the barn at Breker's mom and dad's farm. The gleaming, sterile milk room, which had previously served the family's dairy cows, became sausage central. The family upgraded their supplies to keep up with their volume.

"That milk room was a really great staging area," Breker said. "We built a big massive table. The boys had an industrial grade meat grinder that was purchased back in the 1970s or 1980s."

They'd leveled up, big time. The equipment had been upgraded, but the process remained consistent. After running the meat through the grinder (Breker recommends a course grind for better texture), cutting the venison with pork from the family farm, and seasoning it in 25-pound batches, the stuffing begins.

The Breker family has made ring baloney as long as anyone can remember, so that's a main priority. But they make brats as well.

It's no surprise that hog farmers should prefer pork casings over beef. For Breker, who has since moved off the family farm and into Grand Forks, this is a matter of taste and texture.

"With beef casings, you end up with a much larger sausage and it's a thicker casing than the pork," he said. "If you don't mind eating the casing, I think the pork is just fine. Whereas with the beef, I feel it's better to peel off. It's a little bit tough to chew."

He adds this last part thoughtfully, diplomatically, perhaps thinking of his parents' neighbors down the road. They raised beef cattle and might have different opinions on the subject.

That's to be expected. Discussions about sausage seasoning, preparation methods and smoking techniques are part of the venison sausage making experience, even among people working at the same table. The debates and refreshments both help pass the hours. No matter how experienced a group is,

sausage making always takes time.

"Dedicate a whole day to smoking sausage," Breker said. "Don't think you're going to get it done the same day as your grinding and stuffing."

Slow and steady is the way to go for smoking the venison sausages too. The Brekers smoke their brats and ring sausage over apple or hickory, carefully monitoring the temperature as they go. The family constructed a new version of the smoker that Grandpa Melvin made all those years ago.

Rick Diede built his own smoker too. Now the smell of smoked venison sausage serves as a conversation starter in his Fargo neighborhood. It's also a way to introduce his friends and neighbors (many of whom don't hunt) to wild game.

"There's nothing better than walking outside and smelling that smoker," Diede said. "Even the neighbors smell it. It is kind of a unique thing. Not everybody gets a chance to have that, so I like to share it so that other people can enjoy it."

The tempting smells wafting through Diede's neighborhood draw folks like a magnet. He's experimented with a variety of sausage options throughout the years, including ring sausage, breakfast sausage, brats and pan sausage.

The type of sausages that Diede makes vary. But his preparation is consistent. The process starts the moment he or his grown son, Josh, harvest a deer.

"We are very particular about how our meat is handled once the deer has been harvested," he said. "We try to get the cape off it right away. I'm a firm believer in getting the hide off the animals right away, and letting it cool down really nice, and make sure that it's washed down really well. We wash our meat two or three times before we ever freeze it or process it. I want to have clean, fresh meat when we get back."

Diede said it's about more than just food quality. It's a philosophy.

"It all comes down to respect," he said. "You have an obligation out here as a sportsman and a hunter. It's ethics – take care of what you've just taken care of."

"You're living off the land, whether it's

growing a crop or harvesting wildlife, so this is just another step in the continuum," Breker said. "You're moving the product from the earth to your kitchen table."

These beliefs are in line with the way that indigenous hunters harvested deer for centuries. Native American nations were organic, ethical, nose to tail eaters before any of these concepts were trendy.

Venison – both *tahca sinte ska* (white-tailed deer) and *tahca sinte sapele* (mule deer) – have been a part of Lakota diets for many generations. James Beard award-winning chef, cookbook author and Oglala Lakota educator, Sean Sherman, has sparked new interest in foraging, wild game and traditional food sources native to the Great Plains and Great Lakes.

His cookbook, "The Sioux Chef,"

pairs venison with ingredients that most outdoor enthusiasts could spot in the wild, including crushed juniper, sage, wild onions and fresh mushrooms. (And his recipes featuring sumac and cattails just might change the way readers view the landscape during their next hunt, hike or fishing trip.)

Poet, author and editor, Heid E. Erdrich, is a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa and grew up in Wahpeton. Her book, "Original Local: Indigenous Food, Stories, And Recipes From The Upper Midwest," examines the connections between ingredients, history and cultural traditions by sharing recipes and tales from indigenous cooks throughout the region. Her venison recipes are accented with flavors from the north, including wild ginger, leeks and maple sugar, ingredients that can be woven into



Rick Diede built his own smoker and when it's fired up, the smell attracts his Fargo neighbors. This is his way of introducing them, especially those who don't hunt, to wild game.

RICK DIEDE



JOHN BREKER

Like the many different methods to hunt deer in North Dakota – from sitting in tree stands to organized drives – there are that many more venison sausage recipes that families and friends use on their hard-earned wild game.

sausage making and serving suggestions.

Kastner's family makes *pølse* (Norwegian for "sausage") as a nod to Norway. The descendants of Scandinavian immigrants often season their sausages with simple salt and pepper. Or they might add finely chopped onions, or the fragrant mix of allspice, cloves, and coriander found in Danish and Norwegian Christmas sausages.

Potatoes may also make an appearance, especially for those with Swedish ancestry. Swedish potato sausage combines equal amounts of venison, ground pork and potato for a traditional sausage that the sausage makers might not even realize has roots in another nation.

Germany reigns as the sausage king, with an estimated (and mind-boggling) 1,500 varieties of wurst – each with its own special spice blend, list of ingredients and painstaking preparation process. Many of these recipes can be adapted to include venison. Several have found their way to the United States through families like the Brekers. Their sausage is inspired by their ancestors' roots in Bavaria – with a few Polish influences thrown in for good measure.

But just because recipes are grounded in tradition doesn't mean they never change. Kastner's father adds a little mustard seed or extra black pepper from year to year, so the sausage is always evolving. Diede adjusts his sausage recipes too, playing with spices or popping in a little high-temp cheddar or pepper jack cheese to take his brats to the next level. Even those classic Breker family recipes have undergone a few modern transformations.

"In more recent years, it's gotten a lot more interesting because we've been willing to experiment with flavors and recipes that deviated from the traditional family recipes," Breker said. "We've been getting a little bit heavier with sage and thyme or going the spicy route with jalapeños or crushed red pepper."

Discussing the recipes, making the sausage and taking home the final product are rewarding experiences. But no matter how the sausage making process goes, just gathering is a good time in and of itself.

"It's kind of a fun family tradition," Kastner said. "Depending on the time of day, we'll have a few drinks and crank up the tunes."

"It's a blast," Diede said. "It's a fun social gathering for a lot of friends. Everybody gets excited. It's just been more and more people every year. Don't get me wrong, it's a lot of work, no doubt about it. But it's a camaraderie thing."

The pandemic is limiting the ways that families and friends physically gather together this year. Many hunters and sausage makers didn't get together in 2020 at all. The prognosis for 2021 is still uncertain. And that's been hard to take. It's just another sacrifice in a long and trying year.

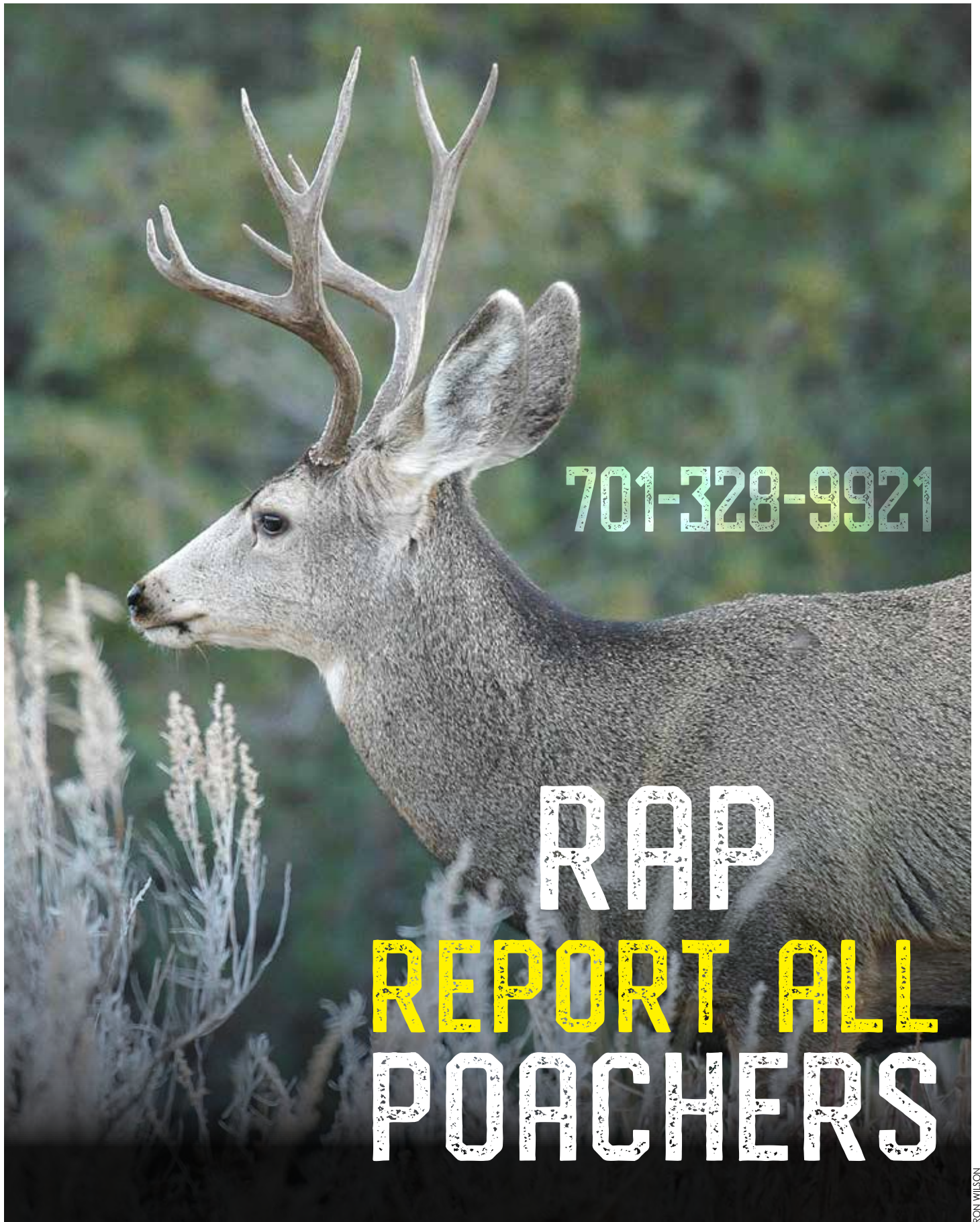
But it's almost impossible to make venison sausage without thinking of the past. Just walking across the plains can remind us of the hunters who walked there before us. Setting up Grandpa's smoker or our great-uncle's meat grinder are even more tangible reminders of those who taught us the skills that are now second nature. Our ancestors – no matter where they came from – had hard times too. Acknowledging that connection – and remembering that our own lives are a link in a long generational chain – can help put our strange and unpredictable present into perspective.

No matter what happens this month, this year or in the year to come, the hunt continues. The cycle rolls on. And the sausage making tradition will live on as well, one way or another. It's just too much fun to let it go. And besides, somebody's got to get the next generation hooked.

"That's kind of how it all gets started. Before you even realize, you're indoctrinated in this cultural and ethnic heritage," Breker said. "And you take a liking to it. Probably not the work so much when you're little, but the enjoyment of it. To not only harvest your own deer in the field, but also to turn it into a usable product – it's part of keeping the tradition alive."

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.





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RAP
REPORT ALL
POACHERS

RON WILSON

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a blue and black fishing jacket, is smiling and holding a large, silvery-green chinook salmon. The fish has a prominent eye and a slightly open mouth. In the background, a small motorboat with two people on board is on the water. The shoreline is rocky and covered with autumn-colored trees and grass. The text "SHOCKING THE SHALLOWS FOR SALMON" is overlaid in large, bold, brown and orange letters.

SHOCKING THE SHALLOWS FOR SALMON

Mattea Bierman, Department fisheries technician, with a mature chinook salmon taken from the shallows of Lake Sakakawea in October while electro-fishing (top photo).

OWS MON

By Ron Wilson

Nothing, certainly not the weather, interrupts the push of chinook salmon returning to their biological beginnings in North Dakota.

In October 2019, with diminishing daylight hours triggering salmon into this single-minded mission, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries biologists leaned into an early taste of winter in their pursuit of catching and relieving the sexually mature fish of their milt and eggs.

"Last year at this time, we were basically electrofishing in a blizzard ... and the year before that, there was snow on the ground," said Russ Kinzler, Game and Fish Department fisheries biologist. "While it's been pretty windy so far this fall, we'll take the wind when it's warm out."

The only constant is the salmon, introduced into Lake Sakakawea 40-plus years ago, that will hit the peak of the spawn sometime in mid-October and fisheries biologists will be there to meet them.

In 2019, fisheries biologists took the bulk of the 1.4 million chinook salmon eggs in the Missouri River below Garrison Dam.

"Last year the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers were evacuating surplus water from Sakakawea, so they had the spillway gates open for the first time in the fall," Kinzler said. "The salmon just got pulled out of the lake and ended up in the river and we were able to catch them down there. It worked out, but it was very different from what we would consider normal."

Normal, from 1987 to 2004, was the use of a manmade salmon ladder placed in Rodeo Bay at Lake Sakakawea State Park where the salmon would collect in fall in search of a stream in which to spawn. Yet, the only running water found was falling down the ladder.

Setup, takedown and the round-the-clock monitoring of the ladder required each fall was a lot of work, and the number of fish that ran up it was erratic and didn't justify the effort.

"You had to monitor the ladder every day, you had to fuel it up every day and there were oil changes with the pump," Kinzler said. "Part of the reason we quit using the ladder was the price of fuel got too high and we were putting in 50 gallons of fuel every day at \$4 per gallon and it just wasn't paying off."

Today, the majority of salmon needed to meet yearly egg goals are taken by electrofishing. Fish are attracted to the electrical field produced by an onboard generator and are temporarily stunned and captured by fisheries personnel armed with long-handled dip nets.

"This year, we're back to doing what we typically do and most of the fish are coming from Lake Sakakawea above the dam in the back of bays and along the dam itself," Kinzler said. "They tend to congregate around the intake structure."

Like last year, the goal in 2020 is 1.4 million salmon eggs. On October 2, Kinzler reported that Department fisheries biologists and Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery personnel, collected their first batch of eggs, nearly 181,000 from 55 females. On October 9, they collected 398,000 eggs from 104 female salmon, putting their total at that point at just over 1.1 million eggs. Just days later, fisheries

It takes a lot of eggs to meet the goal of eventually stocking 400,000 salmon young raised in the hatchery into Lake Sakakawea next spring.

crews completed their annual spawning operation with 2.1 million eggs.

It takes a lot of eggs to meet the goal of eventually stocking 400,000 salmon young raised in the hatchery into Lake Sakakawea next spring.

"When you think about it, we're in North Dakota and salmon aren't native to North Dakota, so you can't expect that we're going to have high success like you do in ocean fish spawning in streams," Kinzler said. "Essentially, our

long-term average is that we'll lose about 50% of the eggs from fertilization to when you can start seeing eyes on the eggs, which we call eye-up. While it varies from year to year, in the end we have about 30% survival from spawn to stock."

When the fish are stocked into Sakakawea, they are about 5 inches long. At that length, fisheries biologists have learned, the young salmon are likely big enough to escape Sakakawea's

goldeye population.

"That's the one major predator we hope we can get the salmon past," Kinzler said. "If we can do that, then hopefully a few more survive."

The majority of salmon biologists shock in the shallows are on average about 2 years old. These mature fish, full of milt and eggs, looked bigger this fall than many of those captured in 2019.

"They look really good this year,"



MIKE ANDERSON



The average size (top) of female chinook salmon this fall was 8.3 pounds, almost 2 pounds heavier than last year. The bounty (right), and just a portion of the 2.1 million eggs taken from salmon this fall, of North Dakota's salmon spawn.



RON WILSON

Kinzler said. “The females are about 2 pounds bigger than they were last year and the males are about 1 pound or more than last year. Actually, they look better than the last few years.”

Rainbow smelt are, without argument, the driving force for a healthy chinook salmon population in Lake Sakakawea. Smelt and salmon inhabit the same coldwater habitat and the former are the main food source for the latter.

“If we have a good population of rainbow smelt in Sakakawea, we are generally going to have good numbers of salmon in the lake,” Kinzler said. “And when the rainbow smelt are bigger, we tend to have bigger salmon. The last few years we’ve had a lot of smelt, but they’ve been small, and the salmon reflected that. And this year we’ve noticed that there’s some bigger smelt out there and we have bigger salmon.”

Without this effort to annually pursue

chinook salmon in the shallows in fall and raise their bounty in a cooperative effort at the hatchery, these nonnative fish would blink off Lake Sakakawea’s underwater map in short order.

“If we didn’t spawn salmon in Sakakawea in the effort to stock fish in spring, they’d been gone in four years,” Kinzler said.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



MIKE ANDERSON

It's a cooperative effort (top) between the Game and Fish Department and Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery personnel to capture and then relieve the adult salmon of eggs and milt. Since salmon (right) cannot naturally reproduce in North Dakota, Game and Fish personnel capture salmon and transport them to the hatchery.



MIKE ANDERSON



Deer head collection site at Department headquarters in Bismarck.

MIKE ANDERSON

Testing for CWD

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department will continue its Hunter-Harvested Surveillance program during the 2020 hunting season by sampling deer for chronic wasting disease from units in the western third of the state.

Samples from hunter-harvested deer taken will be tested from units 3A1, 3A2, 3A3 (that portion of the unit north of U.S. Highway 2), 3B1, 3C (that portion of the unit west of the Missouri River), 3E1, 3E2, 3F1, 3F2, 4A, 4B and 4C.

Game and Fish wildlife veterinarian Dr. Charlie Bahnson said given the COVID situation, Game and Fish is focusing resources and personnel to prioritize hunter-harvested surveillance in the northwestern and southwestern parts of the state where CWD is a little greater concern.

In units where CWD is documented, Bahnson said roughly 10% of license holders end up dropping off heads for sampling. Outside those units, in adjacent units, he said it's more like 2-3%. That's a number he would like to see increased quite a bit.

"In hunting units where CWD is documented, it's important to get a good handle on where and how common it is," Bahnson said. "But equally important, 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," continued Bahnson. "Only testing 10 heads doesn't give you much confidence. 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."

Hunters are encouraged to drop off the head of an adult or yearling deer. Fawns and head-shot deer cannot be tested. Hunters wishing to keep the deer head can bring it to a Game and Fish district office during business hours to have it sampled.

The Department will attempt to provide results within three weeks, however, delays may occur. Results for lottery licenses can be viewed by logging on to their Game and Fish account and clicking on "Additional Info" for the associated license. Results for first-come, first-served licenses will be sent via email. To add or update contact information, visit My Account at the Department's website, gf.nd.gov.

Hunters should note a carcass or head of a deer taken from units 3A1, 3B1, 3F2, 4B and 4C may not be transported to a collection site outside of the unit. Exception: hunters can transport the whole deer carcass between adjoining CWD carcass restricted units.

More information on CWD, including transportation restrictions, is available at the Game and Fish website.

Hunters are encouraged to drop off deer heads at the following locations:

- **Alexander** – Sather Lake Recreation Area
- **Amidon** – Mo's Bunker Bar
- **Beach** – Gooseneck Implement
- **Belfield** – Badlands Taxidermy, Game and Fish disposal site, Superpumper
- **Bismarck** – 3Be Meats, Game and Fish office, West Dakota Meats
- **Blaisdell** – BJ Taxidermy
- **Bottineau** – Mattern Family Meats
- **Bowbells** – The Joint
- **Bowman** – Frontier Travel Center
- **Carson** – Hertz Hardware
- **Crosby** – Cenex/New Century Ag
- **Dickinson** – Game and Fish office, Wildlife Creations
- **Elgin** – Gunny's Bait and Tackle, Melvin's Taxidermy
- **Flasher** – Game and Fish disposal site
- **Fort Yates** – Prairie Knights Quik Mart
- **Fortuna** – The Teacher's Lounge
- **Garrison** – Myers' Meats and Supplies
- **Glen Ullin** – Kuntz's Butcher Shop
- **Grassy Butte** – Sweet Crude Travel Center
- **Grenora** – Farmer's Union
- **Hettinger** – Dakota Packing
- **Kenmare** – Jessica Ware's Taxidermy, Farmers Union
- **Killdeer** – Grab N Go
- **Mandan** – Butcher Block Meats
- **Minot** – Blom's Locker and Processing, Frenchy's Taxidermy, State Fairgrounds, Wallen's Taxidermy
- **Mohall** – Engebretson Processing, Farmer's Union
- **Mott** – 4 Corners Car Wash
- **New Leipzig** – Hertz Hardware, Game and Fish disposal site
- **New Salem** – Arrowhead Inn
- **New Town** – TAT Fish and Wildlife Division Office
- **Parshall** – Myers' Meats and Supplies
- **Powers Lake** – Farmers Union
- **Ray** – Horizon-Cenex, Thoreson's Meat Processing
- **Richardton** – Farmers Union
- **Riverdale** – Game and Fish office
- **Scranton** – Wolf's Meat Processing
- **Selfridge** – Cenex
- **Sentinel Butte** – Buffalo Gap Guest Ranch
- **Solen** – Hettich Salvage
- **Stanley** – Ace Hardware
- **Tioga** – Recycling Center
- **Watford City** – Farmers Union Cenex, Forest Service office
- **Williston** – Bickler Taxidermy, Dave's Heads or Tails Taxidermy, Mounts By Mert, Game and Fish office, Zerr's Taxidermy



Mike Johnson (left), Game and Fish Department fisheries biologist in Jamestown, was one of a number of people, including students from Valley City State University, who combined efforts this fall to collect and relocate more than 10,000 mussels below Kathryn Dam on the Sheyenne River. The relocation project was spearheaded by Andre Delorme, professor at VCSU. The mussels were removed from what is North Dakota's largest mussel bed because of work being done to the dam that would be detrimental to the mussels. Mussels are native to North Dakota and have been here thousands of years. Those collected during the relocation effort were moved well upstream of the dam. Delorme said that while the site below the dam was still considered the largest bed in the state before the relocation project, it isn't what it once was. Twelve years ago, Delorme said there was an estimated 100,000 mussels in that stretch of river. He added that these filter feeders are prone to any type of pollution and 70% of mussels in North America are either endangered or threatened.



Winter Fishing Regulations

Anglers are encouraged to refer to the 2020-22 North Dakota Fishing Guide or the Game and Fish Department's website at gf.nd.gov for winter fishing regulations.

Some winter fishing regulations include:

- A maximum of four poles is legal for ice fishing. However, when fishing a water body where both open water and ice occur at the same time, an angler is allowed a maximum of four poles, of which no more than two poles can be used in open water.
- Tip-ups are legal, and each tip-up is considered a single pole.
- There is no restriction on the size of the hole in the ice while fishing. When a hole larger than 10 inches in diameter is left in the ice, the area in the immediate vicinity must be marked with a natural object.
- It is only legal to release fish back into the water immediately after they are caught. Once a fish is held in a bucket or on a stringer, they can no longer be legally released in any water.
- It is illegal to catch fish and transport them in water.
- It is illegal to leave fish, including bait, behind on the ice.
- Depositing or leaving any litter or other waste material on the ice or shore is illegal.
- Any dressed fish to be transported, if frozen, must be packaged so that the fillets are separated and thus can be easily counted without thawing. Two fillets count as one fish.
- The daily limit is a limit of fish taken from midnight to midnight, and no person may possess more than one day's limit of fish while actively engaged in fishing. The possession limit is the maximum number of fish that an angler may have in his or her possession during a fishing trip of more than one day.
- Anglers are reminded that two North Dakota lakes are closed to ice fishing. McDowell Dam in Burleigh County and Lightning Lake in McLean County are closed when the lakes ice over.



ASHLEY PETERSON

Advisory Board to Livestream Fall Meetings

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department Advisory Board will host its fall round of public meetings online this year due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Districts 1, 2, 7 and 8, which make up roughly the western half of the state, will have their combined meeting on Monday, Nov. 30. Districts 3, 4, 5 and 6 in the eastern part of the state, will follow on Tuesday, Dec. 1. Both meetings will start at 7 p.m. Central Time and conclude around 9 p.m.

The meetings will begin with department presentations, followed by questions and answers with select staff, including director Terry Steinwand and deputy director Scott Peterson.

Outdoor enthusiasts are invited to this public livestream event by visiting the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov. Questions can be submitted in advance at ndgflive@nd.gov, or via live chat during the event.

Wildlife Viewing Devices on Private Land

Outdoor recreationists who install devices for viewing wildlife on private land should be aware of a state law that was passed during the 2019 legislative session.

The law requires an individual who enters private property and installs a device for observing, recording or photographing wildlife to receive written permission from the landowner. Otherwise, the device must be identified with a permanently affixed metal or plastic tag with either a registration number issued by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, or the individual's name, address and telephone number.

An equipment registration number can be generated by visiting "Buy and Apply" at the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov. One registration number will be issued that can be used on all equipment that requires identification.

The equipment registration number does not expire.



ASHLEY PETERSON

Darkhouse Spearfishing Registration

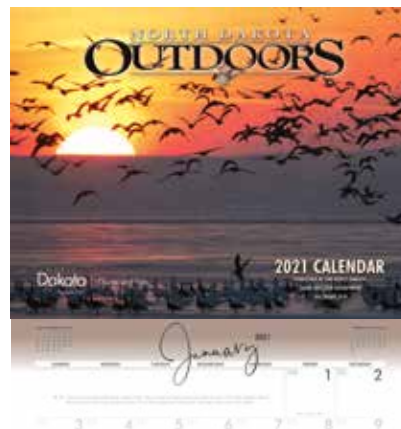
North Dakota's darkhouse spearfishing season opens whenever ice-up occurs. The season extends through March 15. Legal fish are northern pike and nongame species.

Darkhouse spearing is allowed for all residents with a valid fishing license and for residents under age 16. Nonresidents may darkhouse spearfish in North Dakota if they are from states that offer the same privilege for North Dakota residents.

Individuals who are required to possess the needed valid fishing license to participate in darkhouse spearfishing must register with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department prior to participating. Registration is available at the Department's website, gf.nd.gov.

All waters open to hook and line fishing are open to darkhouse spearing except: Lake Audubon, East Park Lake and West Park Lake, all McLean County; Heckers Lake, Sheridan County; Larimore Dam, Grand Forks County; McClusky Canal; New Johns Lake, Burleigh County; Red Willow Lake, Griggs County; Wood Lake, Benson County; Lake Ashtabula, Barnes and Griggs counties; and Whitman Dam, Nelson County.

Anglers should refer to the 2020-22 North Dakota Fishing Guide for more information.



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, 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.

Dead Deer Permit Needed

North Dakota Game and Fish Department enforcement personnel are issuing a reminder that a permit is required before taking possession of a dead deer found near a road or in a field. Only shed antlers can be possessed without a permit.


Permits to possess are free and available from game wardens and local law enforcement offices.

STAFF NOTES



Cayla Bendel

Cayla Bendel of Lakeville, Minn., was hired as the Game and Fish Department's R3 coordinator. Bendel graduated from the University of Minnesota Crookston with a Bachelor of Science degree in natural resource management, with a minor in communications. She also earned a Master of Science in range science from North Dakota State University.



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BACKCAST



By Ron Wilson

I filled my doe tag in 2019 on the second Saturday of the season.

Opening weekend, typically, is about family and friends filling their tags, especially those who have traveled the farthest to get here, because it's a good bet they won't be back before the season ends.

I'm afforded something they aren't, time, which is why my rifle rarely sees the outside of its case the first few days of the season and I wonder why I even bring it.

When it all goes the way we want it, we have a handful of deer to skin, quarter, debone and package. We do the latter in the basement on an old table we bring in from outside that displays the knife scars from last season and the season before that.

The table is situated between the TV – and whatever game we decide on – and the sink and refrigerator. The chatter of a football game turned low and the unmistakable hum of a vacuum sealer safeguarding the various cuts of venison from the freezer are sounds I can easily get behind.

While I wouldn't trade opening weekend with those I enjoy being around, a tradition I'd never want to shake, part of me looks forward to going it alone. Hunting at my own pace. Sitting when I want to sit. Hiking when I want to hike. Eating a sandwich out of the wind, with my rifle leaning against a rock, when I'm hungry.

The fallout, of course, is obvious. If I shoot something, no matter how far from the vehicle, I'm more alone, at least figuratively, than when I started. While the work of quartering an animal and getting it out solo isn't terrible work, it's work, nonetheless.

The morning I shot my doe, I hiked before first light to a rock pile

a half-mile off the road. Good vibes, this rock pile. My oldest shot a doe there opening weekend and his brother did nearly the same just to the south of it.

After an hour, maybe longer, I was wondering if it was too early to eat my sandwich. Nothing was moving, not even in the distance through binoculars.

In the unit we hunt, there are a number of mule deer scattered across the landscape. It used to seem odd to see them in this part of the country, but we're over it now. Hunt any of the hills to the northeast and south of the rock pile and you'll bump into them in places you expect and in some places you don't.

One redeeming value of these animals, and there are more than a few in my view, is that if you bump a mule deer from its bed, it won't immediately run with its ears pinned back for the next township like a whitetail. Oftentimes they'll stop, give a look around as if they're curious as to what spooked them.

That's what I was counting on when I left the rock pile and hiked a mile into the hills, a mule deer doe just curious enough to hang around long enough for me to kneel and pull the trigger.

When my phone vibrated in my front pocket sometime later, it was my youngest, who was pheasant hunting about a half-hour south, checking to see if I'd had any luck. I told him I was kneeling over a mule deer doe and was about to get to work.

I know where you're at and I'll come pack it out, he said.

Turned out, I wasn't alone after all.

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



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Life was good for this porcupine when its photograph was snapped in fall. The weather was pleasant, food was abundant, but things were certain to change, as life always does during the leanest months on the Northern Plains. When winter hits, this solitary, pigeon-toed critter doesn't settle in for months of hibernation like some animals, but rather goes about its business, occasionally riding out the toughest weather in a hollow log or tree.



LARA ANDERSON

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