

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
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Game and Fish Department biologists said early indications point to hunters seeing similar numbers of pheasants this fall compared to 2021.

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• Information 701-328-6300 • Licensing 701-328-6335
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SANDRA JOHNSON

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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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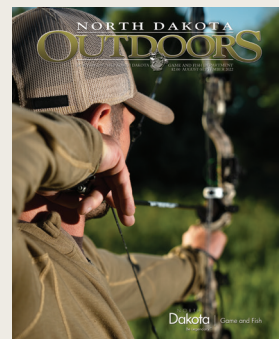
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Front Cover

North Dakota bowhunters hit the field in pursuit of whitetails and mule deer Sept. 2. The season runs through Jan. 1, 2023. Photo by Ashley Peterson, Bismarck.



My 2 Cents

By Jeb Williams, Director

Hunt for Tomorrow.

A new phrase and initiative that you will be hearing a lot about over the next several months and this special fall hunting issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* is a great way to put it in motion.

It's a catchy phrase that has a lot of substance to it. The wide variety of issues that impact the Game and Fish Department and a good portion of our North Dakota citizens will be addressed in this campaign to increase awareness of how our actions today certainly influences what our tomorrow looks like.

This initiative will provide the opportunity to talk about hunting, fishing, trapping, recruitment and the conservation actions that will undoubtedly impact our fish and wildlife populations into the future. In addition, the campaign will also take aim at the social aspect of outdoor recreation and how the present impacts the future.

For example, fire danger in fall is typically a concern for many landowners across North Dakota and communicating the importance to outdoor enthusiasts to follow the rural fire danger index and local, county restrictions (ndresonse.gov) are critical in maintaining good relationships in rural communities. Or the impact a person can have by being prepared to meet large, slow-moving farm equipment on rural roadways during fall harvest and taking the neighborly steps to quickly usher working landowners along their way and keeping everyone involved safe.

While this is second nature for some, many people who appreciate and participate in the outdoors don't have a rural upbringing and don't understand how to best navigate those situations.

These are a few examples of how this campaign will provide a bigger platform to talk about these issues (and many more) to help educate all of us on our actions and how we can ensure that conservation and our long-standing outdoor heritage in North Dakota continues. With the end goal, hopefully, being that many of these issues simply become engrained and part of our culture.

I hope you have a safe and enjoyable fall season.

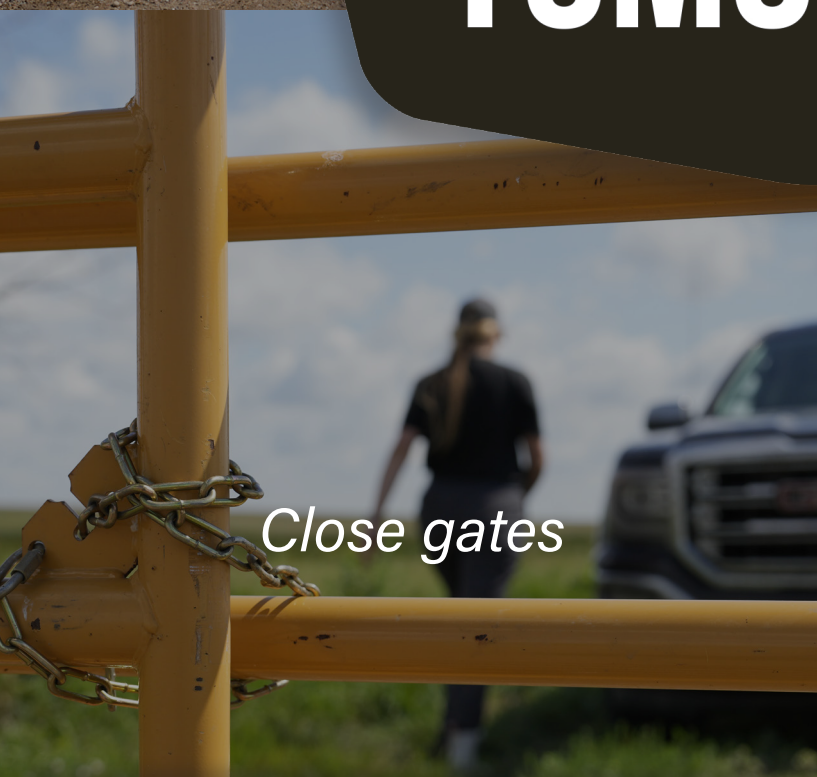


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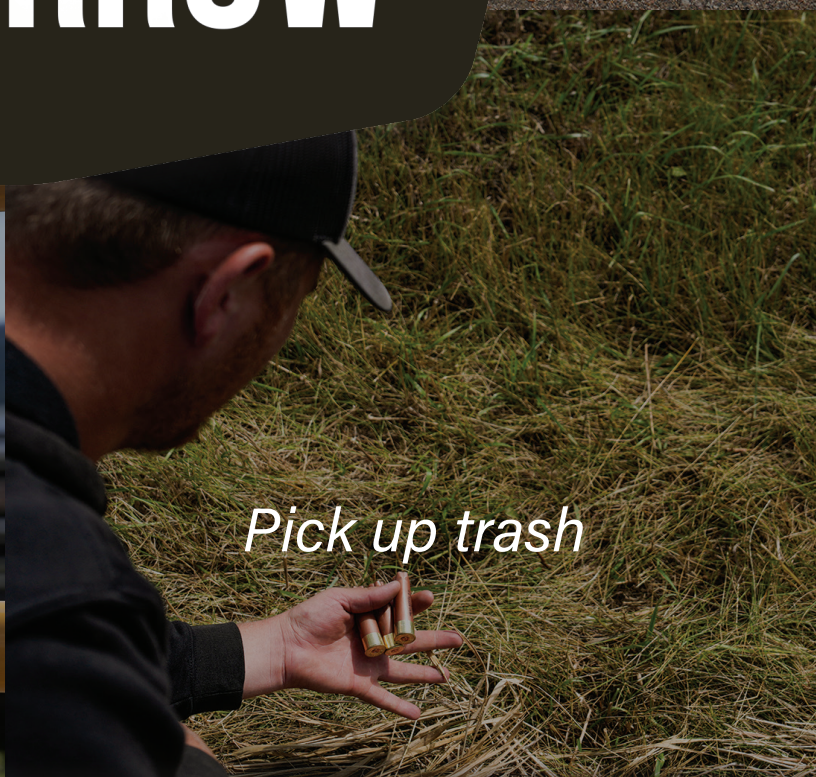


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2022



HUNTING SEASON OUTLOOK

By Casey Anderson



Since this is my first fall outlook article, I should introduce myself to readers. I grew up in central North Dakota where I still reside with my wonderful wife and two sons. We live on a small ranch where we have polled Herefords, goats, chickens, cats and a golden retriever. I loved hunting, fishing, and the outdoors since the beginning of my memories. Staying connected to the land, camping in the badlands chasing mule deer, and wading waist-deep in a pothole for waterfowl is the good life if you ask me. I've been with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department as a full-time employee for just over 20 years, starting in our private land section working with landowners as a private land biologist for 13 years. Then I was assistant chief of the wildlife division for seven years before being named wildlife division chief in October 2021.

Time flies.

Speaking of which, what a difference 10 months can make. Coming off an almost two-year drought, the countryside looks a little different this year. It shows how well nature's plants and animals can endure the hard times and flourish in the good times. Wildlife populations made it through the drought but did struggle in some areas of the state, if not statewide.

Waterfowl production was down last year in North Dakota but with water on the landscape today, it should improve this year's fall hunting opportunities for waterfowlers. One thing to note is that biologists noticed the hatch for waterfowl, and most ground-nesting birds, was later than typical with the cool spring. Even so, at this point it should be an improvement over last year's fall flight of waterfowl.

Upland game birds, especially pheasants and sharp-tailed grouse, struggled to pull off broods last year during the drought, according to Department harvest wing data and other field surveys that we do. Conditions this year should be good, where habitat is present, to pull off a brood but the spring was late and cool and nesting seems to have been pushed a little later. We have just started to get into our roadside brood counts at the time of this writing, so we should have a better idea by the end of August on nesting success and brood survival of these upland game birds.

Big game species for the most part came through the drought in fairly good shape, with the exception of white-tailed deer in some areas of the state. Conditions on the landscape last year were ideal for the nasty midge that spreads epizootic hemorrhagic disease and the outbreak in whitetails along the Missouri River corridor was swift and noticeable as deer died in significant numbers. EHD also showed up in a few other areas of the state to varying degrees.



The author with his son, Jesper, and his first deer taken during the youth season in 2021.

ASHLEY PETERSON

The fallout is deer hunting opportunities were greatly reduced for the 2022 season in these areas. The good news is the midge's ability to reproduce should have been dampened as the drought finally loosened its grip. White-tails in these areas should now have a level of immunity from EHD. While we know deer can, and usually do, rebound from this disease, how soon and to what level will have much to do with available habitat and Mother Nature.

While the habitat on the landscape looks good and the potential is there for it to produce the wildlife we all enjoy, the amount of habitat across the state is quite low compared to 10 or more years ago. North Dakota likely can't get back to the wildlife populations we had in the early to mid-2000s without a significant increase in habitat.

The Department and its wildlife division is really putting a lot of emphasis and effort into habitat creation and enhancement across North Dakota. The private lands initiative section, the folks who manage our Private Lands Open To Sportsmen program, are working relentlessly to improve habitat on private lands. Many of these habitat enhancements can also help farmers and ranchers improve the productivity of their land. Along with the programs already in place, many initiatives and opportunities for landowners may be coming to help make these improvements.

Our resource management section, the folks who manage our more than 200 wildlife management areas across the state, are really trying to increase wildlife production on these areas by getting creative and adding tools to the toolbox to increase habitat diversity and improve habitat health. The main purpose of our WMAs is to produce wildlife and guarantee a place for the public to hunt and enjoy some of that production.

In my time with the Department, I have heard a lot of different opinions on what should be done as wildlife populations have declined on the landscape. Everything from changes to the deer lottery system, to access to wildlife on the landscape. However, if you look deep into these issues, the fixes suggested are more band-aid than a solution. The one thing that makes most of these issues go away is habitat, which can improve soil health, water quality, water quantity, and ultimately wildlife populations.

So, my hope is that readers of this magazine, many of which are likely hunters, will go out and enjoy the outdoors, because North Dakota has many good opportunities to explore. But please consider how you can be a part of improving those opportunities for your neighbors and the next generation.

CASEY ANDERSON is the Game and Fish Department's wildlife division chief.

SANDRA JOHNSON

UPLAND AND SMALL GAME

RING-NECKED PHEASANTS

OPENS: Oct. 8

CLOSES: Jan. 1, 2023

DAILY LIMIT: 3

POSSESSION LIMIT: 12

SHOOTING HOURS: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Pheasants in North Dakota had a mostly mild winter in 2021-22, but these birds and other wildlife were then greeted with two April snowstorms across much of the state.

Results of the spring crowing count survey showed lower numbers of breeding roosters throughout the entire pheasant range. The number of roosters heard calling was down anywhere from 4-42% throughout the state's good pheasant range. This was not a surprise, as last summer's drought and poor reproduction caused a decrease in late summer roadside counts.

Cover for nesting hens was far below average in spring due to the lack of moisture from the 2021 drought. Habitat was either hayed/grazed or simply did not grow well enough for early nesting attempts to be successful. On the plus side, we experienced a better spring/summer when it comes to moisture and habitat conditions.

At the time of this writing, Game and Fish biologists were conducting late summer roadside brood counts, and preliminary numbers are similar to 2020. Parts of the state should have good production, so hunters need to be mobile and willing to move to different locations to find optimal hunting opportunities. Northwestern North Dakota is expected to have the best fall pheasant hunting opportunities.

RJ Gross, Upland Game Management Biologist, Bismarck

YOUTH PHEASANT

(For legally licensed residents and nonresidents ages 15 and younger.)

OPENS: Oct. 1

CLOSES: Oct. 2

DAILY LIMIT: 3

POSSESSION LIMIT: 6

SHOOTING HOURS: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

WILD TURKEYS

OPENS: Oct. 8

CLOSES: Jan. 1, 2023

SHOOTING HOURS: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

The turkey population in many of North Dakota's hunting units has been higher than normal the past few years due to increased production in the western half of the state. Last year, conditions were less than ideal for a successful turkey hatch, and Department surveys showed that. North Dakota had below average production last spring, but still had a high breeding population of hens, so fall numbers were higher in parts of the state.

The eastern part of the state has seen decreasing numbers of birds the last few years in response to the loss of quality turkey habitat. Early reports from brood surveys showed a slight decrease in the number of turkey broods on the ground in the west. Biologists expect similar production numbers as last year.

Game and Fish increased fall licenses for wild turkeys slightly this fall in attempt to give hunters more opportunities in areas where turkey populations are too high for Department management goals. Biologists suspect the central and west-central parts of the state along river corridors will provide some of the better turkey fall hunting opportunities.

RJ Gross

RUFFED GROUSE

OPENS: Sept. 10

CLOSES: Jan. 1, 2023

DAILY LIMIT: 3

POSSESSION LIMIT: 12

SHOOTING HOURS: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Ruffed grouse remain at low numbers in both the Turtle Mountains and Pembina Hills. Compared to 2021, biologists heard more ruffed grouse drumming in the Turtle Mountains this year and fewer in the Pembina Hills. However, the Turtle Mountains has not had a peak in ruffed grouse since 2009-10, whereas the Pembina Hills had a recent peak in 2020.

Ruffed grouse are an uncommon grouse in North Dakota because they live almost exclusively in aspen forests. They are only found in the Turtle Mountains and Pembina Hills. Although there was a small population in the J. Clark Salyer Wildlife Refuge (McHenry County), but wildlife managers have not heard ruffed grouse there since 2006.

Jesse Kolar, Upland Game Management Supervisor, Dickinson

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE

OPENS: Sept. 10

CLOSES: Jan. 1, 2023

DAILY LIMIT: 3

POSSESSION LIMIT: 12

SHOOTING HOURS: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Statewide, sharp-tailed grouse numbers were down 13% in spring with the strongest declines in the west (minus 24%). It's possible some of the declines observed were due to delayed surveys because many of the Department survey blocks were inaccessible during the peak lekking period due to statewide blizzard events.

Department reproduction surveys are showing smaller declines (minus 8% statewide) in grouse observed per mile, but these are roadside surveys and are a better index of reproduction. Reproduction in 2022 looked poor early on (likely because there was more snow than grass at the beginning of the nesting season, and summer started off cool and wet), but observation of broods are picking up.

A hunter and his bird dog hike back to the vehicle after a morning hunting sharp-tails.



SANDRA JOHNSON

*Sharp-tailed grouse.*

From this year's brood counts biologists are seeing an age ratio of 1.8 chicks per adult grouse. For a good sharp-tail year, biologists expect to see chick-to-adult ratios of 2.0 or higher, but reproduction has been below that since 2020 (based on brood observations and juvenile-to-adult ratios from hunter-submitted wings). The chick-to-adult age ratio has increased this year notably in southwestern North Dakota and Prairie Pothole regions (by 48% and 82%, respectively), so hopefully biologists will observe stable to increasing numbers this fall, despite declines last spring.

Statewide, sharptail populations remain above the lows following the 2017 drought in most of the state. Little Missouri Grassland numbers remain below the 10-year average, while the Prairie Pothole Region, arching along the east side of the Missouri River, remains just above the 10-year average. Grouse numbers are well above normal in the eastern third of North Dakota, however, the eastern part of the state never has really high sharptail densities.

Although conditions were much better for the later part of the nesting season in 2022, it is normal for grouse numbers to bottom out the year following a drought, as was seen following the 2017 drought. The abundant cover on the landscape this summer should provide ample winter cover and should result in adequate nest cover for the early-nesting period beginning next May.

Sharp-tailed grouse nest almost exclusively in native prairie, pastures and planted grasses, so even though they move between nesting season and fall, the best places to find them are in areas near grasslands resembling native prairies. In fall they can often be found in shrub patches on hillsides, alfalfa fields, sunflower fields and near harvested canola fields.

Jesse Kolar

HUNGARIAN PARTRIDGE

OPENS: Sept. 10

CLOSES: Jan. 1, 2023

DAILY LIMIT: 3

POSSESSION LIMIT: 12

SHOOTING HOURS: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

While the Department does not have a spring index for partridge, the numbers continue to look good for reproduction based on late summer roadside counts. The statewide average brood size this year is around 9.5 chicks per brood, and 2.1 chicks per adult. Partridge reproduction has been above average for the past 3-5 years, and biologists continue to see good numbers of partridge per mile on roadside surveys, although they are slightly down in southwestern North Dakota and the Prairie Pothole Region (minus 10.7% and minus 6.6%, respectively).

Hunters rarely go "partridge hunting," but similar to last year, it's possible that upland hunters could continue to put up a covey every 1-2 days. These numbers are not what they were in the 1980s and early 1990s, but they continue to be higher than the past 20 years.

Partridge overlap with pheasants and sharptails in North Dakota, but their preferred habitat is weedy edges, so hunters should focus on rockpile islands in the middle of harvested fields, lone trees or shrub patches in ditches, field edges, fence lines and so on.

Jesse Kolar

TREE SQUIRRELS

OPENS: Sept. 10

CLOSES: Feb. 28, 2023

DAILY LIMIT: 4

POSSESSION LIMIT: 12

SHOOTING HOURS: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

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

*Fox squirrel.*

Whitetail doe and buck in winter.



SANDRA JOHNSON

BIG GAME

WHITE-TAILED DEER

ARCHERY OPENS: Sept. 2

ARCHERY CLOSES: Jan. 1, 2023

REGULAR GUN SEASON OPENS: Nov. 4

REGULAR GUN SEASON CLOSES: Nov. 20

MUZZLELOADER OPENS: Nov. 25

MUZZLELOADER CLOSES: Dec. 11

Game and Fish made available 64,200 licenses for the 2022 deer gun hunting season, a decrease of 8,000 from 2021.

Population and harvest data indicate the state's deer population is stable to decreasing and below management goals, primarily in eastern hunting units. Due to very dry conditions, and a delay in of the first frost by more than a month, a significant epizootic hemorrhagic disease die-off of white-tailed deer occurred during summer and fall of 2021. This EHD die-off was particularly severe along the Missouri River corridor and in some hunting units south and west of the Missouri River. Consequently, there was a decrease in deer licenses allocated in 2022 to encourage population growth. The statewide hunter success rate in 2021 was 57%, which was 9% lower than 2020 and below the goal of 70%.

A total of 26 deer harvested in 2021 tested positive for chronic wasting disease, with CWD being detected for the first time in three hunting units (3D1, 3E2 and 3C). From the 2021 hunter-harvested surveillance, CWD-positive deer were also detected in 3A1 (six mule deer and three white-tailed deer), 3B1 (one mule deer) and 3F2 (11 mule deer and two white-tailed deer). Surveillance will continue in these units to better understand CWD prevalence. As a result, this altered

deer management strategies in these and surrounding units. The goal is to minimize the CWD prevalence rate and reduce the spread of the disease outside infected units; therefore, a more aggressive harvest strategy remains in parts of the state. Baiting restrictions for deer now include hunting units 1, 2B, 3A1, 3A2, 3A3, 3A4, 3B1, 3C, 3D1, 3D2, 3E1, 3E2, 3F1, 3F2, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E and 4F.

Biologists were able to conduct winter aerial surveys in 18 hunting units during winter 2022. Population indices were about the same as when last flown in 2019. However, quality deer habitat is not as abundant as in the past, which has limited the potential for population recovery, particularly in the eastern third of the state. This is due in part to these hunting units having lost more than 70% of CRP grass cover. If CRP contracts continue to expire, by 2026 we will have lost 85% of the once 3.4 million acres present in 2007.

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

A summary of deer licenses for 2022:

- Any-antlered licenses decreased by 150.
- Any-antlerless licenses decreased by 350.
- Antlered white-tailed deer licenses decreased by 4,150.
- Antlerless white-tailed deer licenses decreased by 3,700.
- 1,168 muzzleloader licenses available in 2022 – 584 antlered white-tailed deer licenses and 584 antlerless white-tailed deer licenses. This is an increase of 168 muzzleloader licenses from 2021.
- 305 "I" licenses available for the youth deer hunting season, the same as 2021. "I" licenses are limited in number for units 3B1, 3B2, and 4A-4F, and are valid for any deer. There are unlimited "H" youth deer hunting licenses valid for any deer statewide except antlered mule deer in the above restricted units.
- 810 nonresident any-deer archery licenses available in 2022, up 30 licenses from 2021. The number of nonresident any-deer archery licenses will be 862 in 2023.
- For areas in south Bismarck and Mandan, a limited number of special deer bow season licenses will be available. The areas include private land south and east of Bismarck in Burleigh County, land within Bismarck designated by the Bismarck chief of police, private land in Morton County, and the USDA-ARS Northern Great Plains Research lab in Mandan. Wording was refined to allow for more flexibility by the managing entity of each specified management zone. Watford City is now participating in the special deer-bow herd reduction. The bag limit is one any-antlerless deer for each license.
- A deer carcass or boned out meat must be accompa-

nied by the head to the final place of storage. Exception: Tag as currently required, then take two photos using a cellphone with location and date and time stamp turned on. One photo of the entire animal at the kill site with tag attached, and a second photo of a closeup of the tag so that tag information is readable. Drop off the head at a CWD collection site properly tagged or if you leave the deer head in the field at the kill site, after taking photos and saving them, the ear or antler with the tag attached must be cut off and accompany the meat or carcass while in transport. The photographs of the tagged deer must be shown to any game warden or other law enforcement officer upon request.

Bill Jensen, Big Game Management Biologist, Bismarck

MULE DEER

ARCHERY OPENS: Sept. 2

ARCHERY CLOSES: Jan. 1, 2023

REGULAR GUN SEASON OPENS: Nov. 4

REGULAR GUN SEASON CLOSES: Nov. 20

Mule deer in North Dakota's badlands remain at a healthy level based on 2022 spring index despite having below average fawn production due to extreme drought conditions. The 2022 spring index of 9.8 deer/square mile was 13% higher than 2021 and 34% above the long-term average.

A stable to increasing mule deer population will mean good hunting opportunities again this fall. There are 3,050 antlered licenses and 2,700 antlerless licenses available in



Pronghorn buck.

ASHLEY PETERSON

2022, which is 350 more antlerless licenses than 2021. A mule deer buck license remains one of the most difficult licenses to draw but for those lucky few, it should result in a very high-quality hunt. Hunter success for mule deer buck hunters was 72% in 2021.

While another year of a stable to increasing population is encouraging, there remain many challenges facing the future population growth of mule deer in the badlands. Encroachment of juniper in mule deer habitat, direct and indirect habitat loss due to oil development, predators and weather conditions including extreme drought are all challenges the population will face long-term.

Bruce Stillings, Big Game Management Supervisor, Dickinson

PRONGHORN

ARCHERY ONLY OPENS: Sept. 2

ARCHERY ONLY CLOSES: Sept. 25

GUN/ARCHERY SEASON OPENS: Oct. 7

GUN/ARCHERY SEASON CLOSES: Oct. 23

North Dakota hunters will have slightly more opportunities to hunt pronghorn this year due to a minor population increase. Biologists conducted aerial surveys of 14,360 square miles in early July and found that the number of pronghorn in the state increased by 5% from last year.

Pronghorn numbers varied considerably by management region due to nearly two years of drought conditions, epizootic hemorrhagic disease and historic spring blizzards. Hunting unit 4A was affected the most by these factors and the population was down considerably from recent years with record low fawn production, therefore licenses were significantly reduced in this unit. Hunting units 1A, 2A, 2B, 1D and 10A were not affected nearly as much as the extreme southwestern part of the state, as pronghorn increased slightly even with below-average fawn production. Pronghorn remained stable to slightly increasing in units 3A, 3B, 4C, 5A, 6A, 7A, 8A, 9A, 9C, 11A and 13A.

Mule deer buck.



SANDRA JOHNSON



SANDRA JOHNSON

Bighorn sheep.

In 2022, 1,970 licenses were made available, 250 more than 2021. Hunting units 9A and 9C will be open this fall for the first time since 2009, allowing all hunting units to be open – 1A, 1D, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4C, 5A, 6A, 7A, 8A, 9A, 9C, 10A, 11A and 13A. Pronghorn are at a level in hunting units 1A, 2A, 2B, 3B, 4A, 5A, 6A, 7A and 11A that allows doe/fawn licenses to be issued to provide additional hunting opportunities.

Lottery licenses can be used during the archery season (Sept. 2-25) with archery equipment or during the rifle season (Oct. 7- 23) using legal firearm or archery equipment for those who do not hunt or harvest during the archery season.

During last year's season, 1,457 hunters harvested 991 pronghorn for a success rate of 68%.

Bruce Stillings

BIGHORN SHEEP

For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, or the 2022 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's 2021 bighorn sheep survey, completed by recounting lambs in March, revealed a record 335 bighorn sheep in western North Dakota, up 4% from 2020 and 15% above the five-year average. The count surpassed the previous record of 322 bighorns in 2020.

In total, biologists counted 99 rams, 175 ewes and 61 lambs. Not included are approximately 40 bighorn sheep in the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park and bighorns introduced to the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in 2020.

This was the fourth consecutive year the survey saw an increase.

The northern badlands population increased 6% from 2020 and was the highest count on record. The southern

badlands population declined again to the lowest level since bighorns were reintroduced there in 1966.

Biologists were encouraged to see the count of adult rams increase to near record levels, and adult ewes were at record numbers. Most encouraging was a record lamb count corresponding with a record recruitment rate.

Department biologists count and classify all bighorn sheep in late summer, and then recount lambs the following March as they approach one year of age to determine recruitment.

Department staff, in conjunction with biologists from the Three Affiliated Tribes Fish and Wildlife Division, also reported the bighorn sheep translocated in January 2020 from Rocky Boy's Reservation in Montana to the Fort Berthold Reservation performed exceptionally well their second year in the state. The population has nearly doubled in just two years, which is exceptional population performance for bighorn sheep.

There are currently almost 450 bighorn sheep among populations managed by the Game and Fish Department, National Park Service and Three Affiliated Tribes Fish and Wildlife Division. The next benchmark is 500 bighorns in the state, which seemed improbable just a few years ago.

A bighorn sheep hunting season is scheduled for 2022. Game and Fish issued five licenses in 2021 and four hunters were successful in harvesting a ram.

Brett Wiedmann, Big Game Management Biologist, Dickinson



ASHLEY PETERSON

Bull elk in the badlands.

MOOSE

For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, or the 2022 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.

The number of once-in-a-lifetime moose licenses were slightly reduced in 2022 for this popular big game species. The decrease in licenses is due to a decrease in hunter success and a stable to decreasing moose population based on winter aerial surveys. The reductions are from the northwest region of the state for moose management units M9, M10 and M11. The number of moose licenses will be unchanged for moose units M5, M6 and M8 based on a stable population and good hunter success.

Moose numbers continue to remain lower in historical hunting units in the Turtle Mountains, Pembina Hills and along the Red River corridor. Moose unit M1C, located in the Pembina Hills region, has been closed since 2006 and will remain closed again this year. Moose unit M4, which encompasses the Turtle Mountains, was closed in 2013 and will also remain closed this fall.

Game and Fish issued 404 licenses for 2022. Expectations for the season are high as success for moose historically runs above 90%.

Jason Smith, Big Game Management Biologist, Jamestown

ELK

For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, or the 2022 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.

North Dakota's 2022 elk season features an increase in licenses from 2021. The primary increase in licenses is for elk units E1W and E1E in response to an increasing elk population in those areas and landowner tolerance concerns. Licenses in elk units E2, E3, E4 and E6 remained the same as 2021. Elk numbers in these units appear stable based on aerial surveys of core habitat and minimum counts of winter herds.

Game and Fish issued 563 licenses in 2022. Elk hunting in North Dakota can be challenging, both mentally and physically. Although high when compared to western states, success rates for North Dakota elk hunters average just over 60% over the past five years. Antlerless licenses are easier to draw but are the most difficult to fill. Hunters with antlerless licenses should be prepared for a challenging hunt, with many days in the field.

The season outlook for 2022 is expected to be good, with success similar to previous years. As always, making landowner contacts and preseason scouting are essential components to a successful elk hunt.

Jason Smith



GREG GULLICKSON

MIGRATORY BIRDS

North Dakota wetland habitats rebounded nicely following severe drought conditions in 2021. April blizzards and abundant rainfall brought a dramatic swing from dry to wet on our landscape, setting up better prospects for duck production in the state this year. The Game and Fish Department's 75th annual breeding duck survey conducted in May showed an index of 3.4 million ducks in the state. Wetland conditions across the state varied from good to excellent, and following extreme dryness, the wetland index skyrocketed 616%; the largest single-year percentage increase on record. Overall, this year's breeding duck index was the 23rd highest in the 75 years of the survey, up 16% from last year, and 38% above the long-term average.

Except for blue-winged teal, gadwall, green-winged teal and wigeon, all of North Dakota's primary breeding duck species had indices that increased from 2021. Mallards were up 58% from their 2021 estimate and represented their 25th highest index on record. Ruddy ducks increased 157%, while shovelers and pintails increased 126% and 108%, respectively. Other species' indices increased from 4% (scaup) to 69% (canvasbacks).

Increased abundance this year brought most species above their 74-year averages. However, some species are still below their long-term average, most notably pintails (minus 32%) and wigeon (minus 24%). Indices above the long-term average ranged from plus 5% (scaup) to plus 112% (redheads); mallards were 48% above their long-term average.

Not surprisingly, the number of broods observed during the Department's July brood survey increased considerably, up 36% from last year's count and 5% above the 1965-2021 average. Average brood size was 7.15 ducklings, up 11% from last year's estimate.

Following the second highest wetland index on the May

Morning duck hunt on a North Dakota wetland.

survey, North Dakota's landscape has dried up a bit following a very wet spring. July wetland counts were up 81% from 2021, and 12% above the long-term average. Precipitation has persisted enough to keep duck brood habitats in good to excellent condition. For the most part, numbers and conditions of wetlands were good to very good, with wetter conditions in the eastern half of the state.

The fall flight forecast of ducks from North Dakota is up 26% from last year and is the 25th highest fall flight from the state on record.

Numbers of temperate-breeding Canada geese, Western Prairie Canada geese and arctic nesting Tallgrass Prairie Canada geese, snow geese and Ross's geese all remain high. Production of Canada geese in the state was surprisingly good this year, and large-type Canada geese in the state are very abundant because of strong production in the Dakotas the last three years. Indications from central and western arctic breeding areas are that arctic goose production should be average, with some areas possibly negatively affected by late ice-out.

Hunters should expect favorable conditions for waterfowl hunting in North Dakota this year. Canada goose hunting should be good, but early season hunting may be difficult due to crop harvests that are expected to be later. Canada geese probably won't start grouping up and moving around much until September due to late reproduction efforts and later crop harvests. We do not expect an overly strong duck migration due to long-term dry conditions in Prairie Canada. Hunters should take advantage of early-migrants like blue-winged teal during the first two weeks of the season as teal

production appears to be very good. North Dakota's waterfowl hunting seasons are always affected by fall weather, and weather patterns from early to late seasons usually are not consistent from year to year. An increase in the percentage of young birds in the fall flight this year should help hunter success.

The Department's fall wetland survey will give one last look at wetland conditions in September.

Mike Szymanski, Supervisor, Migratory Game Bird Management, Bismarck

YOUTH WATERFOWL SEASON

(For legally licensed residents and nonresidents ages 15 and younger.)

OPENS: Sept. 17

CLOSES: Sept. 18

SHOOTING HOURS: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

DAILY LIMIT: Ducks and geese – same as regular season.

SPECIAL VETERAN AND ACTIVE MILITARY WATERFOWL SEASON

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

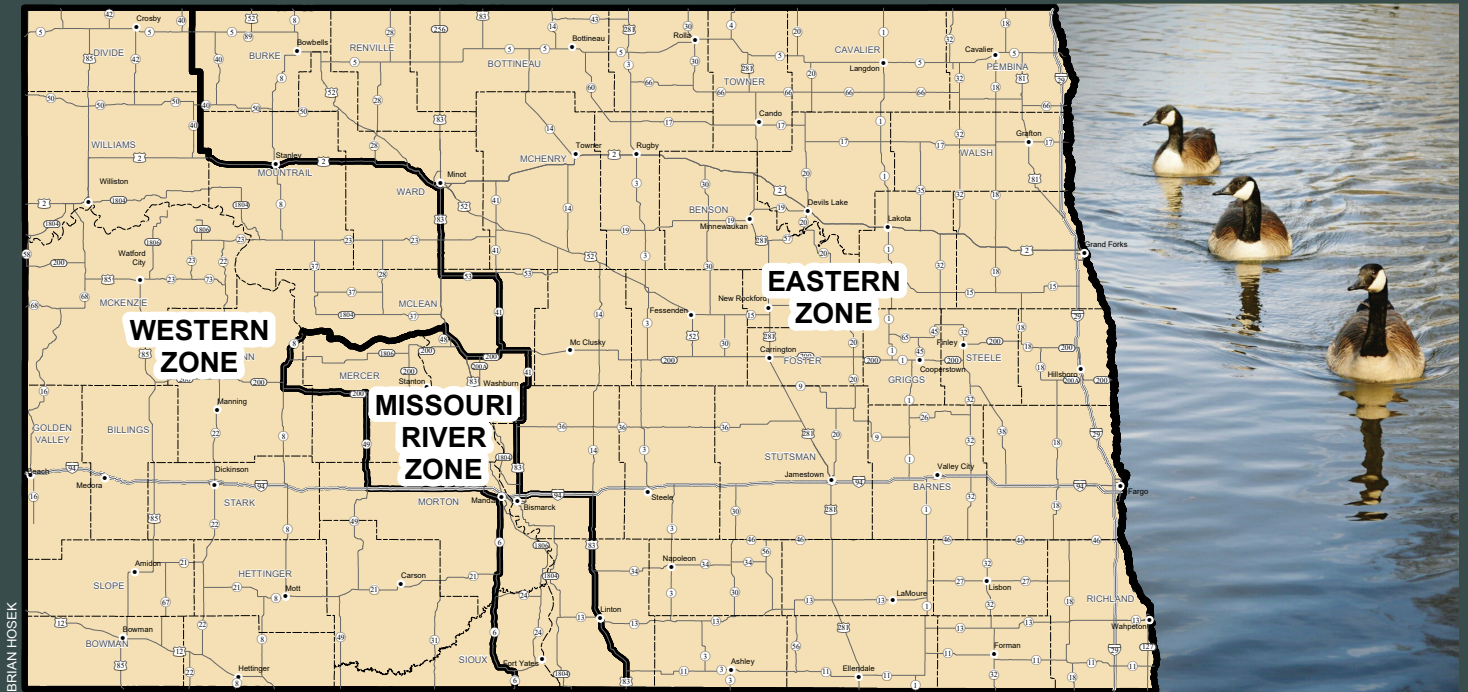
OPENS: Sept. 17

CLOSES: Sept. 18

SHOOTING HOURS: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

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

CANADA GOOSE HUNTING ZONES



EARLY CANADA GOOSE HUNTING

OPENS: Aug. 15 (statewide)

CLOSES: Sept. 7 (Missouri River Canada Goose Zone), Sept. 15 (Western Canada Goose Zone), Sept. 22 (Eastern Canada Goose Zone)

SHOOTING HOURS: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

DAILY LIMIT: 15

POSSESSION LIMIT: 45

CANADA GEESE REGULAR SEASON

OPENS: Sept. 24 (residents only), Oct. 1 (nonresidents)

CLOSES: Dec. 30 (Missouri River Canada Goose Zone), Dec. 22 (Western Canada Goose Zone), Dec. 17 (Eastern Canada Goose Zone)

DAILY LIMIT: 5 (Missouri River zone), 8 (all other zones)

POSSESSION LIMIT: 15 (Missouri River zone), 24 (all other zones)

WHITE-FRONTED GEESE (STATEWIDE)

OPENS: Sept. 24 (residents only), Oct. 1 (nonresidents)

CLOSES: Dec. 4

DAILY LIMIT: 3

POSSESSION LIMIT: 9

LIGHT (SNOW) GEESE (STATEWIDE)

OPENS: Sept. 24 (residents only), Oct. 1 (nonresidents)

CLOSES: Dec. 30

DAILY LIMIT: 50, no possession limit

SHOOTING HOURS FOR ALL GEESE: Half-hour before sunrise to 2 p.m. Exception: Shooting hours are a half-hour

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

REGULAR DUCK SEASON

LOW PLAINS UNIT

OPENS: Sept. 24 (residents only), Oct. 1 (nonresidents)

CLOSES: Dec. 4

SHOOTING HOURS: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

HIGH PLAINS UNIT

OPENS: Sept. 24 (residents only), Oct. 1 (nonresidents)

CLOSES: Dec. 4

OPENS: Dec. 10

CLOSES: Jan. 1

SHOOTING-HOURS: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

DAILY LIMIT: Six ducks (including mergansers), which may include no more than five mallards (two of which may be hens), one pintail, one scaup, two redheads, two canvas-backs, and three wood ducks. In addition to the daily bag limit of ducks, an additional two blue-winged teal may be taken from Sept. 24 through Oct. 9.

POSSESSION LIMIT: Three times the daily limit.

SANDHILL CRANES

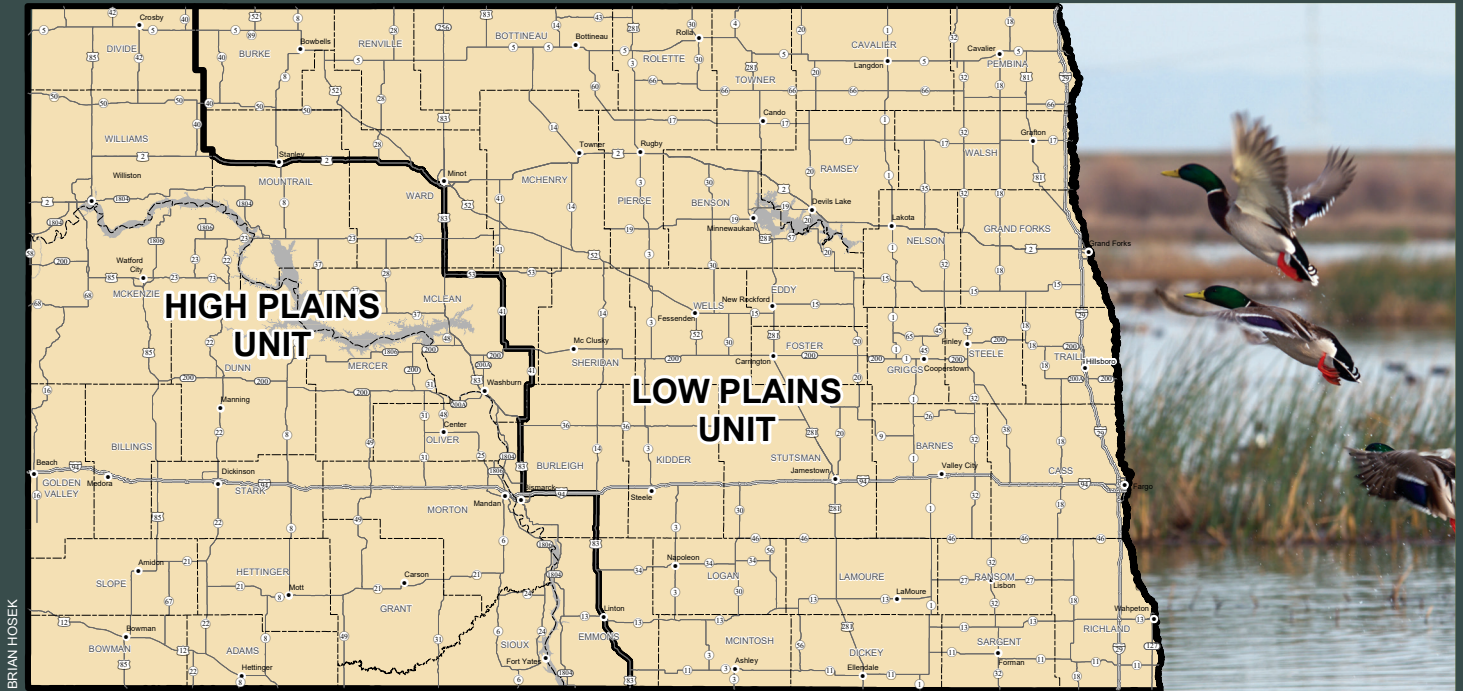
OPENS: Zone 1 and 2: Sept. 17

CLOSES: Zone 1 and 2: Nov. 13

DAILY LIMIT ZONE 1: 3

DAILY LIMIT ZONE 2: 2

DUCKS HIGH PLAINS/LOW PLAINS UNITS



POSSESSION LIMIT ZONE 1: 9

POSSESSION LIMIT ZONE 2: 6

SHOOTING HOURS: Half-hour before sunrise to 2 p.m. daily.

The mid-continent population of sandhill cranes is in good shape heading into fall. The Northern Great Plains experienced a relatively cool spring this year, which slowed down spring migration of most migratory birds. As a result, few sandhill cranes made it north of the central Platte River in Nebraska where the annual spring survey is conducted. Given these conditions, a large proportion of the popula-

tion was likely captured during the survey. Survey numbers have yet to be finalized for 2022, but initial reports from survey crews are promising. In addition, the three-year population index used for guiding hunting season regulations has been stable to slightly increasing for several years.

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

The two zone – Zone 1 west of U.S. Highway 281 and Zone 2 east of U.S. Highway 281 – structure for sandhill cranes continues. The two zones will have the same season lengths (58 days) and dates, but will continue to have different bag limits. Zone 1 has a daily bag limit of three cranes; in Zone 2 the daily bag limit is two. The possession limit in Zone 1 is nine cranes, and six in Zone 2.

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

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

Andrew Dinges, Migratory Game Bird Biologist, Bismarck

Mourning doves.



SANDRA JOHNSON

DOVES

OPENS: Sept. 1

CLOSES: Nov. 29

DAILY LIMIT: 15

POSSESSION LIMIT: 45

SHOOTING HOURS: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

North Dakota has an abundant breeding population of mourning doves and based on observations throughout the state, production has been fair this year, but likely below average. A relatively wet spring and summer, including storms and strong winds in most areas of the state, likely limited nest success and reproduction in 2022.

The Game and Fish Department also tallies mourning doves during late summer roadside counts, but numbers have yet to be finalized. Although survey numbers were not yet finalized, age ratios of juvenile to adult birds captured at banding stations indicate fair production in some regions, but in other areas recruitment has been relatively poor.

Despite below average reproduction, North Dakota's mourning dove population is still very strong, and hunters should find good to excellent opportunities during early September before cooler weather arrives in the state and pushes doves south.

Hunters are encouraged to scout before the season to find the right mix of conditions conducive to concentrating birds. Hunters should look for areas with abundant harvested small grain or oil-seed fields near shelterbelts or other diverse stands of trees. Doves also need to be within a few miles of water sources. Because wet conditions have delayed planting, harvest of small grains and oilseed crops are projected to be a little behind this year, but hunters should still have plenty of places to choose from in September.

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

Some dove hunters may be contacted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to participate in a wing survey, which involves clipping one wing from each dove shot early in the season to send in for analysis. Hunters are also reminded to look for banded mourning doves in their bag and report bands directly to the Bird Banding Laboratory website at reportband.gov.

Andrew Dinges

CROWS

FALL SEASON OPENS: Aug. 20

CLOSES: Nov. 7

SPRING SEASON OPENS: March 11, 2023

CLOSES: April 23, 2023

DAILY LIMIT: No limit on crows.

SHOOTING HOURS: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

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

SNIPE

OPENS: Sept. 10

CLOSES: Dec. 4

DAILY LIMIT: 8

POSSESSION LIMIT: 24

SHOOTING HOURS: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

WOODCOCK

OPENS: Sept. 24

CLOSES: Nov. 7

DAILY LIMIT: 3

POSSESSION LIMIT: 9

SHOOTING HOURS: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.



SANDRA JOHNSON

Mountain lion.

FURBEARERS

For more season details, refer to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, or the 2022-23 Hunting and Trapping Guide.

There are no significant changes to furbearer regulations this fall. Harvest limits, timing of seasons and zones remain similar to last year.

Spring surveys indicated coyote numbers were up slightly in most regions, although their 10-year trendlines are mostly flat or stable. Fox numbers remain low throughout the state but did tick up slightly in areas of western North Dakota and the Prairie Pothole Region. On the other hand, spring surveys indicated muskrat numbers decreased throughout the state, likely a result of last year's drought. Although slightly wetter conditions maintained in the Red River Valley last year did result in more beavers and mink being observed in that region in spring.

Last season was the first time in over 40 years that bobcat hunting and trapping was allowed statewide. The state was split into two management zones: Zone 1, west of U.S. Highway 83 and Zone 2, east of U.S. Highway 83. Bobcat harvest in Zone 2 was limited by both a bag limit (one per person) and an overall harvest season limit (no more than eight total). Hunters and trappers took 48 bobcats in Zone 1 and eight in Zone 2. Bobcat regulations will be the same for the 2022-23 season.

Last year, hunters and trappers also took 22 fishers, 25 river otters and seven mountain lions in Zone 1 (one in the early-season and six in the late-season) and one mountain lion in Zone 2.

Because many furbearer species are difficult to survey due to their secretive nature and naturally low densities, we encourage anyone to report sightings of black bears, bob-

cats, fishers, martens, mountain lions, river otters and swift foxes. Information about sightings can be submitted online at gf.nd.gov/hunting/furbearers/furbearer-observation.

Trappers are reminded to be mindful of where they place cable devices when the upland game hunting seasons are open and that written permission is required from landowners prior to placing or setting any traps or cable devices on private land, including PLOTS lands. PLOTS lands are privately owned lands leased by the Game and Fish Department for walk-in hunting only and all other activities, including trapping, require landowner permission.

Stephanie Tucker, Game Management Section Leader, Bismarck

MOUNTAIN LION HUNTING

ZONE 1 (EARLY) OPENS: Sept. 2

CLOSES: Nov. 20

ZONE 1 (LATE) OPENS: Nov. 21

CLOSES: March 31, 2023

ZONE 2 OPENS: Sept. 2

CLOSES: March 31, 2023

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

There is no mountain lion harvest limit in Zone 2.

Mountain lions may be hunted statewide by residents using legal firearms or archery equipment during regular hunting hours. Beginning Nov. 21, mountain lions may also be hunted by pursuing with dogs. Cable devices and traps are not allowed. The limit is one lion per hunter. Kittens (lions with visible spots), or females accompanied by kittens, may not be taken.

Hunters must either contact the local game warden or Department field office or register their harvest online via their account and make arrangements to have their lion inspected and tagged.

RIVER OTTER TRAPPING OR CABLE DEVICES

OPENS: Nov. 21

CLOSES: March 15, 2023

Limit of one per person. Total harvest limit of 25 statewide.

Trappers must either contact the local game warden or Department field office or register their harvest online via their account to report their harvest within 12 hours and make arrangements to have their river otter tagged. For more information, see the North Dakota 2022-23 Hunting and Trapping Guide.

FISHER TRAPPING OR CABLE DEVICES

OPENS: Nov. 21

CLOSES: Nov. 27

Open statewide except for Bottineau and Rolette counties. Limit one per person. Trappers must contact the local game warden or Department field office or register their harvest online via their account to report their harvest within 12 hours and make arrangements to have their fisher tagged. For more information, see the North Dakota 2022-23 Hunting and Trapping Guide.

BEAVER AND RACCOON TRAPPING, HUNTING OR UNDERWATER CABLE DEVICES

OPEN: Year-round.

For more information, see the North Dakota 2022-23 Hunting and Trapping Guide.

BEAVER AND RACCOON CABLE DEVICES ON LAND

OPENS: Nov. 21

CLOSES: March 15, 2023

From March 16, 2023, through May 10, 2023, cable devices must be within 50 feet of water; must be no more than 4 inches off the ground and must have a stop restrict-loop size to 12 inches or less in diameter.

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

WEASEL TRAPPING, HUNTING OR CABLE DEVICES

TRAPPING OPENS: Oct. 22

HUNTING AND CABLE DEVICES OPENS: Nov. 21

CLOSES: March 15, 2023

Weasels may be hunted statewide with rimfire or pre-charged pneumatic air guns of .22 caliber or smaller and archery equipment.

MUSKRAT AND MINK TRAPPING, HUNTING OR CABLE DEVICES

TRAPPING OPENS: Oct. 22

HUNTING AND CABLE DEVICES OPENS: Nov. 21

CLOSES: May 10, 2023

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

approximate original condition to prevent freeze-up.

Beginning March 16, 2023, colony traps must be under at least 2 inches of water, and trapping or using cable devices on the outside of any muskrat house or structure of any size is prohibited; traps may be placed completely inside a muskrat house or structure of any size, except when used on float sets; foothold traps must be submerged under water at all times or must have a protective covering; body-gripping traps used in water can have no more than 2 inches of the trap above the water or must have a protective covering.

Beginning May 1, 2023, float sets must have a protective covering.

Mink and muskrat may be hunted statewide with rimfire cartridges or pre-charged pneumatic air guns of .22 caliber or smaller and archery equipment.

BOBCAT TRAPPING, HUNTING OR CABLE DEVICES

ZONE 1: Nov. 5

CABLE DEVICES OPENS: Nov. 21

CLOSES: March 15, 2023

Beginning Nov. 21, bobcats may also be trapped using cable devices and hunted by pursuing with dogs.

The pelt and carcass of each bobcat taken in Zone 1 must be presented to Department personnel for inspection and tagging prior to sale or transfer of possession, but no later than 14 days after the close of the season.

ZONE 2: Nov. 21

CLOSES: March 15, 2023

Limit is one bobcat per person in Zone 2 and total harvest limit is eight.



River otter.



Coyote in the badlands.

In Zone 2, anyone who harvests a bobcat must either contact the local game warden or Department field office or register their harvest online via their account to report their harvest within 12 hours and make arrangements to have their bobcat tagged.

For more information, see the 2022-23 Hunting and Trapping guide.

RED FOX, GRAY FOX, COYOTE TRAPPING, HUNTING OR CABLE DEVICES

DAY HUNTING AND TRAPPING OPEN: Year-round
NIGHT HUNTING AND CABLE DEVICES

OPENS: Nov. 21

CLOSES: March 15, 2023

Red fox, gray fox and coyote may be hunted at any hour from Nov. 21 through March 15, 2023. Any hunter who engages in the hunting of red fox, gray fox or coyote during the time from a half-hour after sunset to a half-hour before sunrise, must hunt exclusively on foot.

Hunters can use night vision, artificial light, thermal vision, and infrared light equipment during the night hunting season. Hunters are prohibited from using archery equipment (including crossbows) for night hunting until after the close of the archery deer season.

BADGER TRAPPING, HUNTING OR CABLE DEVICES

HUNTING AND TRAPPING OPEN: Year-round
CABLE DEVICES OPENS: Nov. 21

CLOSES: March 15, 2023

SMALL GAME, WATERFOWL, FURBEARER REGULATIONS SET

North Dakota's 2022 small game, waterfowl and furbearer regulations are set, and most season structures are similar to last year.

Noteworthy items include:

- Opening day for ducks, geese, coots and mergansers for North Dakota residents is Sept. 24. Nonresidents may begin hunting waterfowl in North Dakota Oct. 1.
- Mergansers are included in the total duck limit with no species restrictions.
- The prairie chicken and sage grouse seasons remain closed due to low populations.
- Pre-charged pneumatic air guns are legal for taking weasel, mink, muskrat and mountain lion.
- Reporting harvest of bobcats, mountain lions, fishers and river otters can now be done online by visiting My Account at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov.

Hunters and trappers can find the North Dakota 2022-23 Hunting and Trapping Guide, which includes upland game, migratory game bird and furbearer/trapping regulations and other information, on the Game and Fish website.

For a complete listing of opening and closing dates, and daily and possession limits, refer to the table on pages 4-5 of the guide.

KEEP 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



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HITCHHIKERS!**

Be A Good Steward. Clean. Drain. Dry.

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BROWNING



THE AUTHOR ON A
DOVE HUNT IN 2021.

ASHLEY PETERSON

A JUMPSTART to FALL

By Cayla Bendel

It's been a long summer, the heat and wind relentless. Crisp, still mornings in a tree stand or chilly evenings walking the prairie are still daydreams, but it's the first full week of September signifying dove hunting is open and at its prime.

In southern parts of the country and elsewhere, dove opener elicits the same thrill and accompanying pageantry as North Dakota's deer opener, but for whatever reason it's often an overlooked and underutilized resource in this neck of the prairie. Fortunately, because of this, competition to hunt these speedy migrants is usually minimal and access abundant, even on private land if you're willing to ask.

WALKING WITH PURPOSE

Finally, my after-work walks with Fins have an aim again. Monday, we set off on our own to a wildlife management area that has produced doves in the past. I'm unsure what's been planted in the food plots this year, so my plan is to simply walk around, shotgun in hand, and see if I can't stumble into a good place to setup for an hour or so. Finley, however, has other plans. He takes off into the corn field and is locked on point just minutes into our walk. I roll my eyes as I make my way through the jungle of stalks to flush the bird, a hen pheasant. He barks with excitement as he notoriously tends to do. I urge him back to the plan.

We continue like this for about a half-hour without running into a single dove before I decide to setup two battery-powered spinning wing decoys and just wait ... to no avail. I pack up the decoys, shoulder my frustration and take the long way back to the parking area still hoping to find a few birds that always give themselves away with the tell-tale whistling sound revealed during flight.

Fins wades the cattail edges hoping the flocks of ducks don't hear or see him approaching. We come up empty handed, but both of us leave with some sort of renewed purpose that only comes with the onset of fall.

BIRTHDAY BIRDS

It's Tuesday, my birthday. I meet coworkers at some private land outside of town near a drought-hazed cornfield that supports a much better crop of weeds. We setup decoys and spread out. Contrary to yesterday, doves buzz by consistently throughout the evening. The stack of birds grows, little thanks to me and my growing pile of spent shells but we laugh at misses and interrupt side conversations to announce incoming birds.

At sunset around the tailgate, with dove feathers floating in the wind, my birthday and the start of another fall hunting season is greeted with a hearty "cheers."

MOCKED BY DOVES

Wednesday, Fins and I head to a wildlife management area along Lake Sakakawea with my husband, Scott. The area is new to us, so we stick to the plan, walk around and see if we can't find a spot to setup. With little action, we drive farther down the road and spot some doves loafing on a wire fence. We park and setup in a tree row nearby.

The doves mock us from the fence and occasionally fly to the gravel road. We eat the sandwiches I packed, Fins pants in the shade. A few catch us off guard, buzzing by much too quickly for me to even drop my cookie and shoulder my shotgun. Oh well. Fins woofs in his sleep that night.



SOUNDS OF FALL

Friday, we wait for Scott to get off of work to head west for grouse opener but Fins and I sneak in an hour at yet another wildlife management area near town, the one Scott initially recommended, and I stubbornly ignored.

Even from the parking area I can see a single tree with a half-dozen doves in it. We head toward the lone tree and one straggler, a late-to-fly dove meets its demise. Finley brings it to hand and we setup at the base of the tree hoping others will return.

Finley's ears perk at each flock of ducks that passes overhead and at the distant crow of a rooster pheasant. We enjoy another hour together listening to the start of fall, clean and pack our few doves.

Whether it's a solo endeavor, the camaraderie of friends, family, or coworkers that feel like both, a Tupperware sandwich date night, or simply a chance to sharpen your shooting for other pursuits, dove season offers the perfect start to hunting season. All week I've watched the pep in Fins step and the twinkle in his eyes that I haven't seen in months, and that was reward enough. I imagine, even after all that missing at fast-flying birds, there's a twinkle in mine too. It's back.

CAYLA BENDEL is the Game and Fish Department's R3 coordinator.

TIPS FOR DOVE HUNTING

- Localized areas that tend to have more doves are landscapes with a combination of trees, pasturelands, hay lands, croplands and water sources. When it comes to crops, wheat, barley, canola and sunflowers are best, but sometimes doves use odd areas along the edges of corn and soybean fields.
- In North Dakota, dove season opens September 1, but doves will migrate south when the weather turns cold, so usually the best dove hunting is during the first week of September.
- Recommended shot sizes for doves are 7, 7½ and 8. Purchase ammunition sooner rather than later as it may be hard to come by during hunting season.
- Dove hunting can involve a lot of missing, so don't be discouraged if there's more missing than hitting — that's normal. Bring a couple of boxes of shells when you go.
- Doves can be difficult to find once downed due to their small size and neutral grey color. Only drop birds into heavy cover if you are using a dog to assist in retrieval.
- Like any migratory game bird, doves might be carrying a metal leg band. If you harvest any birds with bands, report the band numbers at: reportband.gov.
- Never shoot at doves sitting on powerlines or other objects — it is not safe, and in some cases, illegal.
- Doves are great table fare, and three to four birds make the right portion for the average person, but weather conditions can be hot when dove hunting so be sure to get your birds cleaned soon after hunting.

For more information on gear, ammunition or strategies visit gf.nd.gov/hunting/virtual-mentor/doves.



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UPS & DOWNS



Pronghorns in late spring.

By Ron Wilson

For an animal that is neither antelope nor goat, no matter what its scientific name proclaims, life in North Dakota on the eastern edge of its range has been one of ups and downs.

The pronghorn today is a landscape staple found mostly in western North Dakota's wide open, but ranged statewide in abundance in the 1800s, according to historical records.

Following settlement, and resulting land-use changes, the pronghorn population tumbled to an estimated 225 animals in the 1920s and to about 50 by 1940.

By the late 1940s, pronghorn numbers rebounded in parts of the state and North Dakota held its first hunting season in 1951 only in certain areas. Yet, there remained large areas of historical pronghorn range that were unoccupied.

From the early to mid-1950s, the Game and Fish Department trapped animals from elsewhere, including Montana, and released them in areas of the state they had failed to inhabit themselves. By the 1960s, pronghorn were well distributed through all western counties, and the population estimate in 1964 was about 14,000 animals.

According to Bruce Stillings, North Dakota Game and Fish Department big game management supervisor, Dickinson, the statewide population estimate for pronghorn today is about 10,100 animals.

Yet, in the roller coaster ways this population has exhibited over time, the pronghorn population is headed in the right direction, given some cooperation by Mother Nature down the road.

"The good news is that we seem to have broken out of the drought cycle, and the habitat conditions on the landscape are in much better shape today than they've been in a number of years," Stillings said. "If we can avoid an extreme, severe winter coming up, that'll be a big plus. And then heading into the spring, we have the potential to really improve that fawn production, which could give the pronghorn population a much-needed bump again."

According to Department aerial survey work in July, Stillings said the pronghorn population is up 5% compared to 2021, which is a good sign, yet there are some management regions where the population is down considerably. The biggest decrease is in hunting unit 4A in extreme southwestern North Dakota where record-low fawn production was noted.

"The data we collected in July is reflective of what these animals have experienced in the last 18 to 24 months with extreme drought conditions, poor rangeland conditions, adult females in poor body condition and lower reproductive potential," he said. "And then heading into April, we had those two historic blizzards when the does would have been in their third trimester of their pregnancies, which could have really had a toll on their reproductive performance. Factoring in the drought and the blizzards, it's no big surprise that fawning was way down."

Stillings added that an epizootic hemorrhagic disease outbreak in 2021, which garnered the most news along the Missouri River in central North Dakota where EHD killed an untold number of whitetails, also had an influence on pronghorn fawn production.

"We did document losses from EHD in pronghorn this past summer and fall, and it has been shown that animals



NDGFD PHOTO

A hunter and his pronghorn taken during the 1966 season in North Dakota.

exposed to EHD the previous fall experienced much lower fawn production the following summer," he said. "So, there's no doubt EHD added a component to the reduction in fawn production this year as well."

In early August the Game and Fish Department held the 2022 pronghorn lottery and all 1,965 licenses, up 245 from 2021, were issued. In total, 16,499 applications were received, including 818 gratis applications.

Also of note, and certainly good news, 17 units are open to hunting this fall, including units 9A and 9C, for the first time since 2009.

It really wasn't that long ago that the Game and Fish Department, following a handful of difficult winters starting in 2008 that did the unthinkable and slashed the population by 75%, closed the pronghorn hunting season from 2010-13, the first such move at the time in nearly three decades.

"Northern Great Plains pronghorn are susceptible to dramatic population declines due to extreme winter conditions," Stillings said in 2010. "The last two years have been a worst-case scenario for pronghorn in North Dakota, similar to 1977-79 when three consecutive winters hit the region, resulting in closed seasons from 1978-81."

But that's in the rearview and Stillings is looking ahead.

"We're set up in really good shape. The pastures look great. Crop fields, rangeland, the conditions couldn't be any better," he said. "Barring one of those extreme North Dakota winters, we should, heading into next spring, have more residual cover from all the growth this summer. And then with adequate spring growth, the stage would be set for a much better fawning season next year."

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.



BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

2021 Upland Game Seasons Reviewed

North Dakota's 2021 pheasant, sharp-tailed grouse and Hungarian partridge harvests were down from 2020, according to the state Game and Fish Department.

RJ Gross, Department upland game biologist, said the overall harvest was likely a result of fewer hunters and below average reproduction.

"We anticipated a slight decrease in upland game harvest for the fall in 2021 based on small brood sizes and a decline in observations per mile during our late summer roadside counts," Gross said. "Although anecdotal reports from hunters indicated 2021 reproduction was better than we reported, the juvenile-to-adult ratio from our hunter-submitted wings confirmed that 2021 reproduction was below average for pheasants and sharptail."

Last year, 47,020 pheasant hunters (down 18%) harvested 259,997 roosters (down 21%), compared to 57,141 hunters and 330,668 roosters in 2020.

Counties with the highest percentage of pheasants taken were Hettinger, Divide, Bowman, Williams and Stark.

A total of 15,762 grouse hunters (down 21%) harvested 45,732 sharp-tailed grouse (down 47%), compared to 19,971 hunters and 86,965 sharptails in 2020.

Counties with the highest percentage of sharptails taken were Mountrail, Burleigh, Ward, Divide and Kidder.

Last year, 14,013 hunters (down 17%) harvested 44,822 Hungarian partridge (down 14%). In 2020, 16,795 hunters harvested 52,251 Huns.

Counties with the highest percentage of Hungarian partridge taken were Mountrail, Ward, Stark, Williams and Divide.

geese, swans, mergansers, coots, cranes, snipe, doves and woodcock. Hunters must register in each state for which they are licensed to hunt.

Hunters can HIP certify when purchasing a license by visiting the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov.

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

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



ASHLEY PETERSON

Looking for a different way to enjoy your summer catch? Check out this south-of-the-border inspired grilled fish taco recipe complete with a pico de gallo and creamy lime sauce. And for more ideas to bring wild game to your table visit gf.nd.gov/caylas-kitchen.



BILL HAASE

HIP Registration Required

Migratory bird hunters of all ages need to register with the Harvest Information Program prior to hunting ducks,

Baiting Restrictions

Hunters are reminded it is unlawful to hunt big game over bait, or place bait to attract big game for the purpose of hunting, in deer units 1, 2B, 3A1, 3A2, 3A3, 3A4, 3B1, 3C, 3D1, 3D2, 3E1, 3E2, 3F1, 3F2, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E and 4F.

The restriction is in place to help slow the spread of chronic wasting disease, a fatal disease of deer, moose and elk that can cause long-term population declines if left unchecked.

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

More information on CWD can be found at the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov.



SANDRA JOHNSON

Wing Survey Help

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

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

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

Game and Fish biologists will take as many sharptail and partridge feathers as they can get because the more collected, the better the data. Biologists can determine sex and age ratios from wings and tail feathers, survival, nesting success, hatch dates and overall production.

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

Hunters interested in receiving wing envelopes should visit the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov, or contact the

Department's main office in Bismarck at 701-328-6300 or email ndgf@nd.gov.

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

New Hunting, Trapping Guide

Hunters and trappers can find the North Dakota 2022-23 Hunting and Trapping Guide, which includes upland game, migratory game bird and furbearer hunting/trapping regulations and other information, by visiting the state Game and Fish Department's website, gf.nd.gov. Printed guides are available at the usual license vendor locations.



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



WMA Equipment Requirement

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

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

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

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



SANDRA JOHNSON



Federal Duck Stamp Required

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

This year's 2022-23 federal duck stamp is available for electronic purchase through the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's website, gf.nd.gov, or at license vendors registered with the Department's licensing system.

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

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

The physical stamp is processed and sent by the official duck stamp vendor and should arrive to the individual buyer well before the expiration date printed on the electronic license. The physical stamp must remain in possession of the hunter after the 45-day electronic stamp has expired. Individuals who have questions regarding the status of their physical stamp can contact the federal duck stamp vendor customer service at 800-852-4897.

The federal duck stamp has a fee of \$25. An additional \$1.50 fee is added to cover shipping and handling costs of the physical stamp.



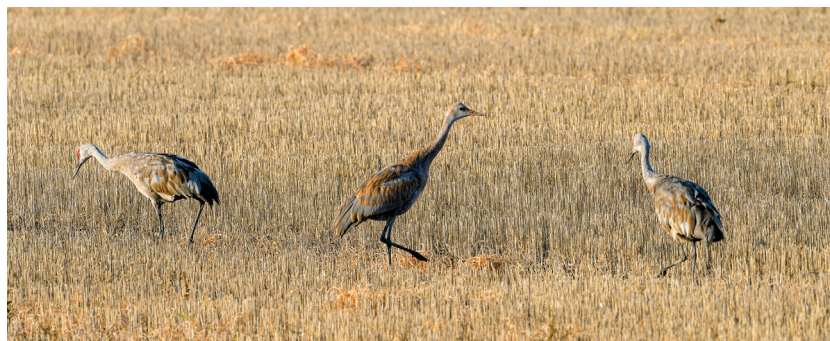
MIKE ANDERSON

Report Banded Birds

Hunters should check harvested migratory birds for bands this fall and report federal bands at reportband.gov.

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

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



SANDRA JOHNSON

Sandhill Crane Permits Required

North Dakota's sandhill crane season opens September 17 and continues through November 13.

In addition to other licenses required, resident hunters need a \$10 crane permit, while nonresidents need a \$30 permit. Hunters can apply online at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov. Harvest Information Program certification is required.



MIKE ANDERSON

Greg Gullickson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department outreach biologist in Minot, opens the gates at the Department's Conservation and Outdoor Skills Park at the 2022 North Dakota State Fair. Those who passed through the gates could fish or try their hand at the air rifle range, learn archery, and explore the world of trapping and furtaking. In 2022, for example, nearly 4,000 visitors, both youth and adults, shot at the air rifle range, while nearly 12,000 fished in the park's pond. The activities in the park are designed to give visitors a hands-on experience aided by volunteer instructors. Local clubs and organizations use this area during the rest of the year for conservation and outdoor related activities.

PLOTS Online

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen Guide for 2022 is available online on the Department's website, gf.nd.gov. In addition, the free printed PLOTS guides are available at most license vendors and other locations throughout the state.

The guide will feature about 800,000 PLOTS acres. Because the guide is printed in mid-August, some PLOTS tracts 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 might 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 Game and Fish offices, or print individual maps from the website.



roadway, field approach or gate, pick up trash and empty shells, and not clean game in the road ditch or approach.

Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest

Photographers who are interested in sending photos for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest must follow guidelines for submitting their work.

Photographers should go to the Game and Fish Department's website at gf.nd.gov/photo-contest. Then it is a matter of providing some pertinent information about the photo and uploading it. Doing so helps both with ease of submitting photos for the photographer and managing those images for Department staff.

The contest is now open and the deadline for submitting photos is Oct. 3. For more information or questions, contact Patrick Isakson, Department conservation biologist, at pisakson@nd.gov.

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

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

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



ASHLEY PETERSON

Caution on Rural Roads

North Dakota hunters need to be cautious of farm, ranch and other traffic when traveling on rural roads.

Fall is a busy time in the state as farmers and ranchers are harvesting crops, moving cattle, hauling bales and moving heavy machinery. Knowing this, hunters driving around on country roads should slow down when meeting another vehicle and pull well to the right when topping a hill.

To maintain positive landowner/hunter relations, Game and Fish Department officials said hunters should move to the right side of the road to allow wide farm vehicles to pass, park vehicles in a place that will not block a



ASHLEY PETERSON

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department launched a podcast, "North Dakota Outdoors," in September. Join hosts Cayla Bendel, Department R3 coordinator, and Casey Anderson, Department wildlife division chief, to hear from Game and Fish staff, partner staff and other experts on an array of outdoors topics from fish and wildlife surveys and research, habitat programs, conservation policy, stories from the field, and more. Listeners can find the podcast on all major podcast streaming platforms and on the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov.



ASHLEY PETERSON

Nick Hill, North Dakota Game and Fish Department waterfowl management technician, adjusts a trap to capture mourning doves for an annual dove banding project that ran from early July through mid-August. The goal was to band about 1,500 birds. The banding project helps biologists determine harvest rates, estimate annual survival and provide information on geographic distribution of harvest. On this note, dove hunters should check harvested doves for bands that sometimes can go unnoticed and report them to reportband.gov.



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ASHLEY PETERSON

In this aerial photograph taken in early August, Game and Fish Department fisheries development personnel maneuver a new concrete boat ramp into the water at Twin Lakes north of LaMoure. According to Wesley Erdle, Department fisheries development project manager, a ramp at Twin Lakes was first established in 2009 on an inundated township road. The new ramp is a major improvement. On top of the Twin Lakes project this summer, Erdle said his crew put in a new boat ramp at Horsehead Lake in Kidder County; installed a double ramp on the north basin of Alkaline Lake in Kidder County; and they started a construction of ramp at Railroad Lake in Logan County. "Later this summer and fall, we'll be up in the northwestern part of the state on the Yellowstone River where we'll be building and installing a new ramp at Sundheim Park, and then just downstream at the confluence on the upper Missouri River where we'll be building a new facility there, too," Erdle said.

Fire Danger Index for Fall Outdoor Activity

As hunting seasons and other fall activities get underway, hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts need to be aware of the daily fire danger index.

Considering the wet spring and summer, especially compared to the drought of 2021, there is a lot of fuel on the landscape, and hunters are urged to keep up with the daily rural fire danger index, which is issued by the National Weather Service, to alert the public to conditions that may be conducive to the accidental starting or spread of fires.

In addition, county governments have the authority to adopt penalties for violations of county restrictions related to burning bans. These restrictions apply regardless of the daily fire danger index and remain in place until each county's commission rescinds the ban.

Hunters should consider bringing along a shovel, fire extinguisher, extra

water and heavy fabric for putting out accidental fires. However, individuals who are not trained firefighters should not attempt to fight a fire that is out of control. Instead, contact the nearest rural fire department immediately.

Also, hunters should stay clear of tall vegetation when parking a vehicle.

The fire danger index can change daily depending on temperature, wind and precipitation forecasts. If the index reaches the high, very high or extreme category, open burning is prohibited; off-road travel with a motorized vehicle is prohibited, except for people engaged in a trade, business or occupation where it is required; and smoking is restricted to inside of vehicles, hard surface areas, homes or in approved buildings.

Information on current fire danger indexes is available at NDResponse.gov.

Staff Notes



Kevin Kading, Game and Fish Department private land section leader, received a Special Recognition Award in July at the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies annual meeting in Oklahoma City.

"Kevin's leadership with both state and national private land work has made North Dakota a model for other states to follow," said Jeb Williams, Game and Fish Department director. "Congratulations to Kevin on a very prestigious award that he's so deserving to receive."

Location	Broadcast Times
Williston	KUMV - Sat 6pm KXMD - Sat 10pm
Minot	KMOT - Sat 6pm KXMC - Sat 10pm
Grand Forks	KVRR - Sat 9pm
Dickinson	KQCD - Sat 5pm (MT) KXMA - Sat 9pm (MT)
Bismarck	KFYR - Sat 6pm KXMB - Sat 10pm CATV - Sat 930am KNDX Fox - Fri 9pm
Fargo	KVRR - Sat 9pm

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BACKCAST

By Ron Wilson

We're taking turns fishing.

Three of us are sitting on a giant log that was parked on sand and rock by the unimaginable force of spring run-off in south central Montana, while the fourth wades knee-deep in a river side-channel casting to cutthroat trout.

Catch a fish and the next person is up. Miss a fish, take a seat on the log.

It's the last day of an annual weeklong trip in early August and it feels like it. Getting up before sunrise to beat the heat and hiking up the canyon a little farther each day to get away from other anglers has lost some shine.

We'd argue that we could do this for another week, and maybe we could, but talk on the log turns to home and what awaits us.

It's not often nowadays, with our two oldest kids living in Colorado and the youngest a freshman in college, that we're together as one, all face to face over the course of the year. Holidays draw us together, certainly, as do hunting season openers, which is where our conversation has wandered atop the log.

Like ballplayers having a pregame catch in the outfield, we talk bird and deer numbers just to warm up, knowing full well no matter the forecast from wildlife managers that our hunting plans won't change.

Next, after some discussion we mentally pencil in a weekend in the badlands for the sharp-tailed grouse opener, which has fast become an annual outing for us. We could argue, and maybe even buy it for a beat or two, that shooting birds isn't a priority on this trip because the scenery (and typically the weather) in western North Dakota in early fall is worth the price of lodging, food, licenses and a plane ticket to Bismarck from the Centennial State.

A better argument, one that holds more water in our camp, is that you'd be hard-pressed to find handsomer country to flush and shoot early season grouse but having a heavier game bag than when we started always makes the view even that much easier on the eyes.

While we can certainly count to four, which is the number of doe tags we drew for North Dakota's November gun season, no one has bothered to count the fish we've



KRISTIN WILSON

caught and missed from this side-channel run in the last half-hour.

We surely don't dismiss them. The trout are as gorgeous as the country in which they swim and at times can be a little hard to tease to the surface, making them even prettier when they do.

They're kind of like our doe tags in a way. Considering the difficulty for my nonresident kids to draw a tag (nonresident applicants compete only against other nonresident hunters for 1% of licenses), teasing a "successful" lottery message into my email inbox is a lovely thing.

Last season we rented a place from friends that is located, as the crow flies, about 5 miles from where we deer hunt. The accommodations were great. The location even better. It beat driving back and forth from Bismarck and, more importantly, had the feel of a deer camp. Friends hunting in the area stopped by after last shooting light, knocking on the living room window to get our attention, to talk about the ones that got away and the ones that didn't.

These animals, all of them – hard-earned whitetails kicked from heavy cover and mule deer bedded in impossibly open country – stick with us and we can't help but count them.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.

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A happy Eli Erdle, and his two bird dogs, with a limit of pheasants and two sharp-tailed grouse taken during North Dakota's youth pheasant season on a PLOTS tract in 2021. The two-day youth pheasant season opens this fall Oct. 1.

WESLEY ERDLE

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