

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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NOVEMBER 2022



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Department fisheries biologists, pictured here on Lake Sakakawea, spent much of fall surveying the Missouri River System and district lakes checking natural fish reproduction, spring stocking success and forage conditions.

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ASHLEY PETERSON

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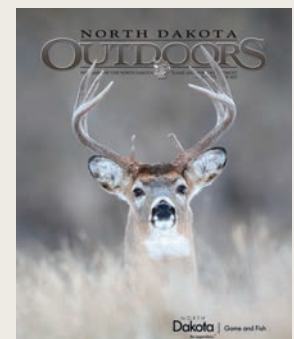
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Front Cover

November means that North Dakota's deer gun season, arguably the state's most celebrated hunting season, is here. Photo by Jesse Kolar.



My 2 Cents

By Jeb Williams, Director

While it's easy to think about all of our wonderful terrestrial pursuits as fall slips too quickly away and folks transition to North Dakota's deer gun season, we can't fail to mention that the fall fishing opportunities have been nothing to sneeze about, either.

Combining numerous, picture-perfect fall days, along with what has seemed to be a nonstop bite in many parts of the state for some time, this is what many people are talking about when the quality-of-life component is discussed both inside and outside of North Dakota's borders.

Quality of life, at least for those who hunt and fish, is taking advantage of a crisp fall morning chasing roosters, decoying waterfowl, sitting comfortably 12 feet up in your favorite tree, or wetting a line later in the day when the temperature hits that perfectly comfortable 60 degrees. Or perhaps a combination of some of these activities all in one day.

Even for those who aren't active participants in North Dakota's outdoor culture still benefit from the over \$2 billion annual input to the state's economy. These direct and in-direct expenditures from hunters and anglers generate approximately \$50 million in state-level tax collection.

So, it is easy to see why outdoorsmen and women are proud of their contributions to our state at no cost to North Dakota's general fund since the Game and Fish Department is solely funded by those who purchase hunting and fishing licenses.

As I write this, our deer gun season opens in one week. This quickly approaching and long celebrated activity has always been a social and economic bonus for many parts of our state. Local café's, dinner clubs, gas stations and many other local businesses have at some point felt the rush of deer season. While some communities today still feel that impact, others would like it to return, both for the deer hunting culture and the social gatherings it creates.

With continued focus on additional habitat programs and new partnerships with agriculture and conservation partners, we can continue to move that needle in providing additional deer hunting opportunities for the many who want to participate. For those of you who drew a deer license this year, good luck, be safe and Hunt for Tomorrow.

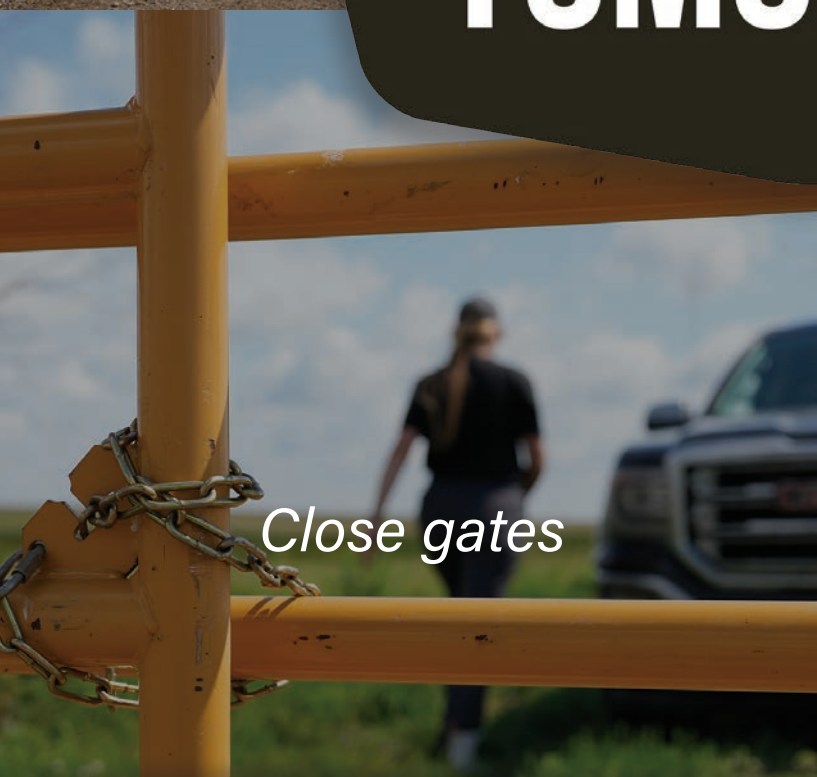


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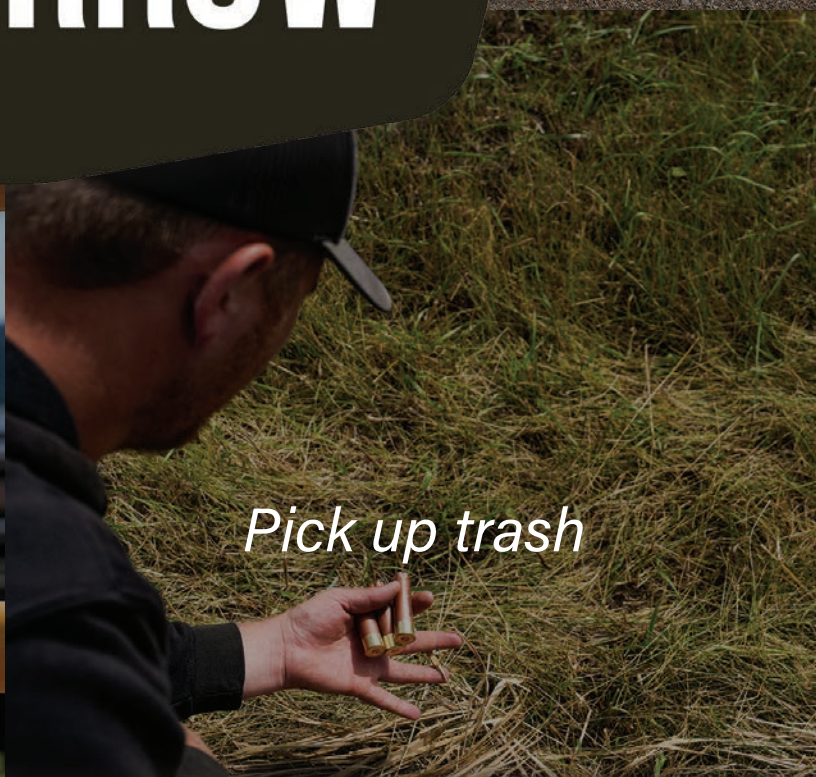


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SIMPLE THINGS YOU CAN DO

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RUNNING

WITHOUT INTERRUPTION

By Ron Wilson

If you use the first time a specific license was required to hunt deer in North Dakota as when the seed was planted, that means this time-honored, eagerly anticipated fall pastime is roughly 90 years old.

Or you could say that deer hunting didn't really take root until 1954, as that year marked the first of nearly 70 deer seasons that have run without pause.

Maybe it doesn't matter.

What does, as today's hunters would eagerly attest, is that North Dakota's 16½-day deer gun season will without doubt open on a Friday at noon somewhere between Nov. 4 and Nov. 10, depending on how the calendar falls.

Like the coming of winter on the Northern Plains, the arrival of the deer season is beyond question.

BIG EARS, WHITE TAILS

The 2022 deer gun season is like all the seasons that came before it in that many of the participants will be hunting deer for the first time.

And an untold number will be carrying tags that provide them the opportunity to shoot a white-tailed deer, mule deer or, in some instances, either or.

That being true, and as elementary as it

may seem to veteran hunters, not everyone will know the difference between the two species.

Bill Jensen, North Dakota Game and Fish Department big game management biologist who has spent 30-plus years helping to manage both species in the state, offers this:


"The whitetail got its name because it has a big white tail. The mule deer got its name because it has big ears like a mule. The antlers of a mule deer are bifurcated, or they divide and then divide again, which is distinctive. Whereas the antlers on a whitetail, the main beam comes up, goes out and curls forward," he said. "The tail of a mule deer is not as heavily furred. It tends to be kind of rosey with a black tip. But mule deer have a big white butt ... that's their primary signaling message on hair color. Also, mule deer tend to be a little grayer in terms of hair color."

The animals, at times, move differently and it's noticeable.

"Mule deer have sort of a distinctive gait where when alarmed they bounce across the landscape. It's called stotting, a Scottish term for bounce," Jensen said. "Whereas whitetails just tend to have an all-out, bolt run."



*A whitetail doe showing her
unmistakable white tail.*

A mule deer doe is captured in mid-stride, running across a field of snow and dry grass. The deer is facing right, with its head turned slightly towards the viewer. Its legs are extended, showing the characteristic stotting gait. The background is a blurred line of trees and shrubs.

A mule deer doe displays its distinctive stotting gait.

Jensen said there's some evidence that stotting is a signaling mechanism for young or other members of the family group that there's danger nearby. There are other theories, too, that it's a better means of traveling across the landscape and being able to get above the vegetation and see. But that's yet to be determined, he added.

"There are all these sorts of signaling mechanisms that animals have and for whitetails to signal danger to other members of the group they'll raise their white tail and flash it back and forth," Jensen said. "And as I mentioned earlier, mule deer don't have the big tail, but they have a large white butt and that's what it uses to signal others."

When hunters bump a whitetail or mule deer, the manner of departure for both species is often different.

"Whitetails primarily evolved in more of a wooded, forested setting. So, when they first observe danger or people, they're generally really pretty close and they bolt," Jensen said. "Whereas mule deer are predominantly in more open, arid country and rugged terrain. If they were bolting every time they saw a coyote, they'd be running all the time. They'll stand up and look and size up the danger, which makes some people think they're stupid. It's just that if they're going to react the same way as whitetail, they'd be running around all the time."

SNAIL AND SLUGS

Mule deer are largely found in western North Dakota, but these animals have extended their range eastward over time. Today, spotting a group of mule deer in, say, central North Dakota and somewhat farther east, is hardly a head-turner as it once was.

As Jensen explained it, the ranges of animals are never constant or stable.

"Prior to European settlement, the mule deer range extended well into Minnesota, but they got shot back, there was a lot of land conversion and whitetails came in," Jensen said. "One of the things that I think is primarily influencing changes in range of whitetail and mule deer right now is that whitetail carry a parasite, a brain worm. They can tolerate it. When mule deer, elk and moose get infected, they have neurological problems and die. The intermediate host for that parasite are snails and slugs. And if the climate or the habitat changes and it can't support the intermediate host, then mule deer can coexist in those areas."

"It's been a slow process over the last 20, 30 years, and now it's not uncommon to see mule deer north and east of the Missouri River on the Missouri Coteau and even out into the drift prairie," he added. "The prevalence of the parasite in whitetails is still high in the Red River Valley. And so, you're rarely going to see

mule deer that far east. They may wander into the area, but I wouldn't expect them to be able to establish themselves there."

HABITAT, HABITAT, HABITAT

The Game and Fish Department made available 64,200 deer gun licenses for the 2022 season, the majority of which were for white-tailed deer. When you do the math, that's 62,139 more licenses than were made available to hunters in 1931 when a specific license was required for the first time to hunt deer in North Dakota.

Hailed today as maybe the most adaptable big game animal in North America, for many years following that first season (it wasn't until 1945 that more than 10,000 tags were made available to hunters) spotting a whitetail, no matter the time of year, was certainly a conversation starter at the local café.

Whitetail populations back in the day, Jensen said, were such because of the lack of habitat. But as the landscape changed, this adaptable animal started growing in numbers.

"After the Dirty Thirties and the drought, people started establishing tree rows to protect the soil from erosion. That had benefits to a wide variety of wildlife, including whitetail deer," Jensen said. "All the other com-

ponents started falling in place, too. There are crops that they could take advantage of, along with a nice mix of cover habitat like wetlands or cattail marshes, which are pretty important habitat for whitetail deer."

While whitetail numbers are certainly more robust than they were decades ago, the amount of wildlife habitat on the landscape has been trending in the wrong direction.

Jensen wrote in *North Dakota OUTDOORS* earlier this fall that quality deer habitat is not as abundant as in the past ... particularly in the eastern third of the state, which limits the potential for population recovery.

"For example, Grand Forks County used to have the highest density of tree rows in the nation, and that was pretty characteristic of the Red River Valley. And that same density of tree rows extended well out onto the drift prairie, too, but with modern farming practices, computerized tractors, bigger machinery, those tree rows are being removed to expedite farming," Jensen said. "Considering that, there's really no place for a whitetail deer to have a fawn. I mean, sure, they can have the fawn in a plowed field, but they tend to get picked off by coyotes that way. There's been some work done where fawns that are born in plowed fields have a higher susceptibility to the cold and die of hypothermia. They don't need a lot, but they need something."

What wildlife habitat that remains across the landscape looks good this year compared to 2021 when the state was in the crippling grip of drought. Heading into winter, deer and other wildlife will at least be afforded better quality habitat when the weather turns than a year ago.

"Right now, the bucks are in the best condition they'll be all year and they've been putting on weight all summer. But with the start of the rut, their body condition is going to slowly deteriorate over time until they're pretty well spent by the end of December, when all breeding ceases," Jensen said. "The does are still putting on food reserves, but once they hit winter, they can't really eat enough to gain any more weight. So as the winter progresses, it's kind of like a bucket with a hole in it. And the longer the winter is, the more severe the winter is, the more energy reserves are going to drain out of that bucket."

And if they run out of fat reserves before the winter ends, they die. If they still have energy reserves when spring comes, they live and get to reproduce again.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

Whitetail buck.



JESSE KOLAR



THE RESPONSIBILITY OF HUNTING

CAYLA BENDEL

Most hunting accidents happen because people become complacent, said Brian Schaffer, North Dakota Game and Fish Department hunter education coordinator. With upland game bird seasons in full swing, waterfowl hunters hiding in layout blinds and thousands of hunters heading to the field for North Dakota's deer gun season, Schaffer offers some tips to combat this complacency, so everyone goes home safely.

NDO: *What are some tips deer hunters, upland game bird hunters, waterfowl hunters, all hunters, should employ to be safe in the field this fall?*

Schaffer: I think the most important thing for people to remember is it's your responsibility to be safe in the field. And the most important thing is to just take a moment beforehand, whether it's with yourself to go over a mental checklist or to have that conversation with the group you're hunting with, to talk about firearm safety in or around vehicles, in the field, and just general safety and firearm rules you should be aware of before ever loading that firearm and heading out into the field.

NDO: *All upland game bird seasons are open and continue through Jan. 1, 2023. What should hunters be aware of when, for example, hunting pheasants in the weeks to come?*

Schaffer: Probably the most important thing you need to be aware of is to have that communication with the people you're hunting with, about maintaining a safe zone of fire for everyone in the party, maintaining a line when you're walking. And that varies drastically depending on the type of cover you're in and how fast different people walk. It's just everyone's responsibility in a group to make sure you're maintaining that straight line for safety, which then definitely impacts where your safe zones of fire are.

NDO: *And keep your safety on until you're ready to fire.*

Schaffer: Absolutely. That safety doesn't come off until that firearm is shouldered and right before you pull the trigger.

NDO: *Historically, how do most of our hunting accidents occur?*

Schaffer: Generally speaking, our accidents occur in or around a vehicle or crossing an obstacle, whether it's a fence or a creek, especially when we're in close proximity with other hunters. The big thing to remember when it comes to hunting accidents, the vast majority of them are avoidable. It's just incredibly important for hunters, especially early in the year when you might be a little bit rusty handling that firearm, it doesn't matter if you're taking someone new out or you're hunting with somebody you've been hunting with your entire lifetime. Just take that extra minute to have a little discussion about firearm safety. And don't be afraid to have

**ABILITY
SAFELY**

that conversation with someone if they're not being safe. Because it does only take a second or two for something terrible to happen. Most hunting accidents are very avoidable, so we encourage people to have those tough conversations with people.

NDO: *Even though it's not required to wear hunter orange when upland game hunting, the Game and Fish Department certainly recommends it.*

Schaffer: We really recommend it for our upland bird hunters so they can be seen by other hunters. This is especially true during the rifle deer season when some of the best pheasant hunting opportunities are at hand. So, we just encourage people to wear that blaze orange even when not required.

NDO: *What are some safety tips for waterfowl hunters?*

Schaffer: We've seen some accidents in recent history with layout blinds. It's real important to maintain positive muzzle control when in your blind, whether that's a blind on a wetland or in a layout blind, make sure that muzzle is always pointed in a safe direction, especially when you have hunters or dogs going out to retrieve downed birds.

Another thing people don't really think about, whether they are hunting ducks or trapping near water, is to pack an extra set of clothes in the vehicle, which can be a lifesaver if you do accidentally get wet.

NDO: *With more than 64,000 deer gun licenses made available to hunters this year, which will usher a lot of hunters into the field, what are some of the things people should be aware of when going deer hunting?*

Schaffer: We live in a relatively flat state, so being sure of what your target is and what's beyond it is vital. Rifle bullets can go a long way on the prairie, so we really recommend people take that extra split second to confirm what they're shooting at and what's beyond that target. Also, getting in and out of vehicles is always a tricky situation where we have some accidents occurring and that can be resolved just by taking the extra time to do it the right way. And that's everybody on the same side of the vehicle unloading firearms completely, leaving those actions open and putting them safely in a vehicle.

NDO: *All big game hunters, including bowhunters, are required to wear orange clothing while the regular deer gun season is in progress. Which means a head covering and outer garment above the waistline of solid daylight fluorescent orange color, totaling at least 400 square inches, correct?*

Schaffer: Yes. Camouflage blaze orange is not legal, yet we still see that a few times a year where people out in the field are not wearing the legal blaze orange.

NDO: *What about hunting off the ground safety?*

Schaffer: We see more and more people sitting in tree stands or elevated platforms, and anytime you're off the ground, we highly recommend using a fall restraint system or a safety strap of some kind. One fall from a tree stand can end in a very serious matter. Any time your feet are off the ground, we want hunters wearing a fall restraint system.


NDO: *A lot of our hunting seasons are happening about the same time landowners are in the field harvesting crops, moving cattle, doing what they need to do to make a living. What are some things hunters can do to not interrupt these activities?*

Schaffer: The majority of North Dakota is privately owned, and we live in a state that is highly driven by agriculture, whether that's farming or ranching. And

MIKE ANDERSON



Taking the time to safely cross a fence during deer season.



Hunters should leave gates the way they found them.

we have a lot of wonderful landowners out there who share their land with hunters and trappers. Understanding that, we really encourage our hunters to take that extra step, to be a good steward and be polite to those landowners. Give them space when they're out there combining or moving cattle, pull off to the side of the road and let that semi go by without them having to slow down. It's pretty common for landowners to be harvesting corn and sunflowers during the rifle season.

NDO: *And if you come across a gate that's closed and you open it, make sure you close it when you leave.*

Schaffer: Correct. But that goes both ways. If a gate is open, leave it open, because you don't know if they're moving cattle from one section of pasture to another. So, leave the gate as you find it and just be courteous at all times and leave it better than when you got there. If you see a pop can on the ground, pick it up. It's your responsibility as a hunter to do what's right, even when no one's watching.

NDO: *That goes for empty shotgun shells and rifle casings, correct?*

Schaffer: If you're shooting ducks and geese in a field, you can go through quite a bit of ammunition, especially if you have a group of hunters. We just really encourage you to take that extra 10 minutes to pick up all of those empty hulls.

NDO: *While the Game and Fish often encourages respect for landowners, many of the same courtesies should be shown to other hunters.*

Schaffer: Courtesy in the field goes a long way. You don't know who that other hunter is, and we all kind of have an attitude that we think the spot we're hunting is our spot. But it may not necessarily be your spot and only your spot. So, give people lots of space. You know,

people are pretty protective of where they hunt and the time that they take off from work or the time they spend with family. Knowing that, it's always best just to side on the side of caution and give that extra space to those other hunters just like you would want them to do to you.

NDO: *So, the most important thing this fall is for everybody to have a good time and come home safe.*

Schaffer: Absolutely. North Dakota provides some of the best hunting in the nation. And I think there's lots of room out there for people to get out and enjoy it. Doesn't matter if you live close to one of our larger urban areas, there are still fantastic hunting opportunities all across the state of North Dakota for people to get out there and enjoy the resources.

NDO: *Any closing thoughts for hunters heading outdoors this fall?*

Schaffer: Make sure you do your homework. We are very fortunate to live in a state where a lot of our landowners still grant access to hunters. I highly recommend, not the night before you plan on hunting, to get out there and try and make some contacts. Even if you're going home to where you grew up, reach out to those landowners and have a conversation with them and explain what you're wanting to do. I can't emphasize enough about getting out there and knock-on doors and introducing yourself.

Don't leave spent shells in the field.



CAYLA BENDEL



An always fatal disease to deer and other cervids that has found some footing in North Dakota, yet has a smaller footprint compared to some other states, will forever remain on the landscape.

The reality of this, the certainty that chronic wasting disease is going nowhere and has the potential to significantly impact our big game populations if left unchecked, is sobering.

FOREVER ON THE LANDSCAPE

By Ron Wilson

While the North Dakota Game and Fish Department has long, among other management practices, tested thousands of deer and other big game for CWD in the last 20 years, the agency tasked to protect, conserve, enhance and sustain wildlife populations for current and future use, has upped the ante in this continued threat.

A CWD task force of agency employees from several divisions was formed in 2021, according to Jeb Williams, Department director, to review the science of CWD, evaluate the status of CWD management in North Dakota, and chart a best path forward while folding in lessons across North America over decades.

"For the past 20 years, our Department has been working pretty hard to keep up with it. We've tested over 40,000 deer. We've followed the science and applied our different tools to the extent that made sense and we were able," said Dr. Charlie Bahnson, Department wildlife veterinarian. "And, by and large, we're happy with the results that's gained us. But here we are 20 years later, and it's time to stop and do a comprehensive reassessment of where we're at and where we hope to go."

Department officials held three public meetings in late summer in Fargo, Dickinson and Minot to update those in attendance about the status of CWD in the state and how Game and Fish hopes to address the disease in the future.

"The task force had some fairly broad topics or purposes, the first was this status review of CWD surveillance and management in North Dakota, and after that we read nearly all of the state wildlife management plans for CWD that are

available across the country," Bahnson said. "There were some really good ones, some less good ones, but hopefully we took the best parts of those plans and folded them into what we're doing. We were looking at what management options are out there that make sense to apply here in North Dakota."

CWD, caused by a prion protein that leads to irreversible damage to the nervous system, was first identified in North Dakota in mule deer in 2009 and white-tailed deer in 2013.

In total, according to Bahnson, CWD has been found in eight deer gun hunting units in North Dakota. Fortunately, while a number of deer have tested positive for the disease, the prevalence of CWD remains low, from 2-5% in affected units.

The Department's updated CWD management and surveillance plan will not go into play until 2023. Hunters will recognize at that time changes to carcass transportation regulations and adjustments to surveillance efforts. Regulations regarding baiting will remain as is.

Concerning hunter-harvested surveillance, the plan reads in part: Beginning in 2023, a deer gun unit will be surveyed less frequently but more thoroughly. Relative to other diseases, CWD progresses slowly. This means that annual changes are less meaningful than longer term trends. Therefore, the Department will focus resources on one-fifth of deer gun units annually, ultimately resulting in less frequent but more accurate prevalence estimates. A sampling goal will be set at 10% of allocated deer gun licenses for a given year.

CWD testing in North Dakota began in 1998 with road-killed, sick and suspect animals. In the early 2000s, the Department increased surveillance efforts by annually collecting hunter-harvested deer, elk and moose.

Typically, surveillance efforts from hunter-harvested deer focused on a third of the state on a rotating basis, and those areas where wildlife managers are trying to manage CWD.

Participation by hunters has never been great.

"Thank you to anybody in the room that's ever contributed a sample because that's very important. But you're actually kind of a minority despite a lot of effort, we could just very rarely ever get more than 5% of license holders to turn in a head for sampling," Bahnson said at the public meeting in Dickinson in August. "And that just translated to very imprecise data and it's hard to make important decisions based off such incomplete data. Moving forward, we plan to divide the state into smaller units. Instead of going kind of a mile wide and inch deep, we plan to split it up into fifths and test much harder, making use of different sample sources to get to our surveillance goals."

Bahnson readily acknowledges that baiting generates a lot of spirited conversation within North Dakota's deer hunting community. Even so, he's quick to point out the fallout from baiting, from congregating groups of deer for sometimes months at a time, because it's understood how the disease is spread from deer to deer.

"We know that deer can be infected in a variety of ways, through direct contact with another infected animal, through indirect contact, through environments contaminated with bodily fluids – urine, saliva, feces – from an infected deer," he said. "And then even we know that carcasses that are infected, that are left out in the landscape, can be a source of infection for years afterwards."

"But regardless of how it happens, once a deer becomes infected, the clock starts ticking. And in about a year and a half to two years, it'll reach this point where it starts to rapidly lose body condition," he added. "It's excessively urinating, salivating. It becomes what we call neurologic. It's got a disease of the brain and is acting erratically, but it invariably will die. It's 100% fatal."

The bait ban issue in the 2023 plan remains status quo, and reads in part: The Department will continue to reduce the risk of CWD transmission through its ability to regulate baiting as a method of take. Baiting will be restricted via CWD proclamation in any deer gun unit that falls within 25 miles of a previous detection.

For the 2022 hunting season, it is illegal 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. It is also illegal to hunt big game over bait or place bait on any Game and Fish Department wildlife management area.

"When we think about keeping the infection rate low in CWD positive areas, we realize that anything that is going to bring these animals into congregation or bring them close together is going to increase these direct contacts and these indirect contacts," Bahnson said. "The more often that happens, the more intense it happens, the longer that it happens, the faster that we're going to perpetuate this disease. And importantly, again, there's that environmental contamination component. If we have these concentrated areas where there's a lot of biological buildup of urine, saliva, feces, even after these deer are gone, we provide potential areas to perpetuate the problem moving forward."

Department wildlife managers understand that hunters remain the best and most important tool in slowing the spread of CWD in North Dakota, and an effort to improve hunter access to maximize this tool is ongoing.

"We've long said that a hunter's gun is our most important tool for managing this issue and frankly, for managing most of our wildlife issues. And if you think about it, it makes sense," Bahnson said. "We have identified areas that certainly have higher infection rates. So, if we can focus some harvest, particularly around those areas, we do a number of things. One, we get positive animals off the landscape sooner, so we're decreasing how many animals those positive animals are going to infect. Also, if we decrease deer density, we discourage deer from moving out of the infected areas ... we hopefully influence net movement inward instead of outward."

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.

CURRENT BIG GAME TRANSPORT REGS

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

Hunters are prohibited from transporting into or within North Dakota the whole carcass of deer, elk, moose or other members of the cervid family harvested outside of North Dakota.

In addition, hunters harvesting a white-tailed deer or mule deer from deer hunting units 3A1, 3A2, 3B1, 3C, 3D1, 3E2, 3F2, 4B and 4C, a moose from moose hunting units M10 and M11, or an elk from elk hunting units E2 and E6, cannot transport the whole carcass outside the unit. However, hunters can transport the

whole carcass between adjoining CWD carcass restricted units.

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

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

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

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


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

- Meat boned out.
- Quarters or other portions of meat with no part of the spinal column or head attached.
- Meat cut and wrapped either commercially or privately.
- Hides with no heads attached.
- Skull plates with antlers attached and no hide or brain tissue present.
- Intact skulls with no visible brain or spinal cord tissue present that has the eyes, lower jaw, tongue, salivary glands, tonsils and lymph nodes removed.
- Antlers separated from the skull plate.
- Upper canine teeth, also known as buglers, whistlers or ivories.
- Finished taxidermy heads.
- Lymph nodes extracted from the head for CWD testing contained within a sealed, plastic bag.

There is an exception to the regulation that reads "a deer carcass or boned-out meat must be accompanied by the head to the final place of storage." The exception is: Tag the deer as required, then take two photographs using a cellphone with location, date and time stamp turned on. One photograph of the entire animal at the kill site with tag attached, and a second photograph of a closeup of the tag so that the tag information is readable. If a hunter leaves the 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.



MIKE ANDERSON



Even if the fish weren't biting, this winter scene on a North Dakota lake was worth getting off the couch to enjoy.



GOING INTO Winter IN GOOD SHAPE

PAUL BAILEY

Going into last winter, with many North Dakota waters lower than they'd been in some time thanks to severe drought, Game and Fish Department fisheries managers worried that declining water levels and other factors would lead to significant winterkill.

Turns out, it wasn't nearly as bad as anticipated.

"Winterkill is a game changer. In a bad winter we can lose 20 waters on the low side to as many as 50 waters on the high side," said Greg Power, Department fisheries chief. "Thankfully, we didn't have much winterkill, so all those lakes, about 450 of them, are still out there producing fish. Our fish populations are in good to excellent shape pretty much throughout the state. That means lots of opportunities for anglers. We're going into winter in good shape."

The good news about last year's drought is that it ended in pretty dramatic fashion in April with an unprecedented amount of snow in parts of the state, followed by rain.

"Knock on wood, but because of the high water this spring and the flooded vegetation at the right time, it appears to have produced a very strong yellow perch year-class throughout most of our waters," Power said of a species that draws anglers from near and far during the ice fishing season. "That will pay dividends to the angler three, four years from now, and maybe we'll have a real resurgence in some quality perch lakes throughout the state."

In the interim, Power anticipates much of the focus just like a number of years prior, will be on walleye in North Dakota's bigger, touted fisheries, as well as in the many prairie walleye lakes that dot the landscape.

"North Dakotans like walleye and they get plenty of them during the summer but there are probably even more walleye fishing opportunities in winter because a lot of these new lakes don't



Ice fishing for northern pike in late winter.

MIKE ANDERSON

have the greatest summer access," he said. "They may not have a boat ramp, but they're accessible via ice fishing. And we have probably another dozen or so new lakes that will provide keeper-sized walleye this winter."

For a number of years, Department fisheries personnel encouraged ice anglers to take advantage of the pike fishing during the winter months. While pike populations aren't what they once were in some waters, Power said pike fishing through the ice last winter was probably better than expected.

"It was really encouraging as we saw a fair amount of interest from anglers," he said. "And the pike were biting, which was a good thing."

Power said pike are like perch as they rely on flooded vegetation to help boost natural reproduction. Understanding that and knowing those powerful spring storms resulted in the inundation of vegetation left high and dry during the drought, a strong 2022 pike year-class from last spring is likely.

"I think pike and perch are going to be a little more predominant on the landscape here in a couple of years or so. And I think walleye should just keep at these levels or we might be able to even increase that a little more in the next few years," he said. "The wonderful thing about walleye, especially in the southern half of the state, is that their growth rates are off the charts compared to what our statewide averages were historically. In some cases, all it takes is two years and you'll have a winter fishery for 14- to 15-inch walleye."

When it comes to yellow perch, a fan favorite during winter, Power said there will be a handful of waters that will provide the kind of perch fishing anglers have grown to appreciate.

Yet: "The perch fishing in North Dakota is not what it was, say, 10 years ago," he said. "Once again, we'll hopefully, in the next three to four years, have a big boom again in perch populations."

The influence ice fishing has on the annual fishing

The following numbers are telling. What they say is this when using 2022 as an example: There are 451 active (fishable) lakes in North Dakota (record number), and pike (not necessarily catchable size, but they're in the lake) can be found in 255 of those waters, while yellow perch can be found in 331 and walleye in 234.

Year	Active Lakes	Pike	Perch	Walleye
1992	177	104	96	79
2002	225	140	137	78
2012	365	207	278	145
2022	451	255	331	234

100-PLUS YEARS OF ICE FISHING REGULATIONS

HISTORICAL

1915 to 1950 – No fish houses were allowed.

1951 – Fish houses allowed but had to be licensed (first year 53 licenses issued statewide).

1900 to late 1940s – Many of the few lakes in the state were closed to ice fishing. (In 1948, lakes Metigoshe and Tewaukon, Spiritwood and Odland Dam were opened to ice fishing, but only for select species, anglers could use only one line, all holes had to be marked and only daylight fishing was allowed.)

1956 – Two lines became legal.

1960 – The state had about 60 fishable waters but 18 were closed to ice fishing.

1978 – Became legal to release fish.

1989 – About 190 fishable waters in North Dakota but 20-plus were closed to ice fishing.

1993 – Year-round fishing (historically late season ice fishing was illegal).

1996 – Four lines allowed statewide.

1999 – Fish houses no longer had to be licensed.

2001 – Darkhouse spearfishing allowed.

2006 – Fish house size restrictions removed.

2012 – Pike daily limit increased to 5 fish.

TODAY

- 450-plus fishable waters.
- Virtually all waters in the state are open to ice fishing. More waters available in winter than the open water season as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refuge waters (Audubon and Alice) are also open.
- Same regulations as open water fishing, plus anglers are allowed to use up to four lines.

effort in North Dakota varies greatly. If access, due mostly to heavy snows, is hampered, ice fishing may contribute just 5% to the overall fishing effort.

"But in the long term, 20 to 25% of our entire annual fishing effort is ice fishing. Last winter it was right about 25%," Power said. "That's fairly substantial. And what's neat about ice fishing is it provides access, fishing opportunities to waters that are oftentimes a little tougher to get on during the summer."

Fishing license sales in North Dakota were down initially in 2022 but have since rebounded and are near the five-year running average. But even with an open winter and good drive-on ice around the holidays when most anglers venture outdoors, Power doesn't expect license numbers to climb much more.

"While I'd like that to happen, they never have in the past," he said. "As we've seen in the past, our fish license sales are really driven in April and May, and we didn't have very good weather this past April and May. You just don't pick up that slack that you've lost in the spring."

The Game and Fish Department has allowed darkhouse spearfishing in the state for more than 20 years and Power said attention to the winter activity is seemingly starting to plateau.

"In the early 2000s there were only a handful of lakes open to darkhouse spearfishing and we have since really, really liberalized the regulations. Now, darkhouse spearfishing is basically allowed statewide for pike," Power said. "We're not

really growing more darkhouse participants out there, but people who do it still enjoy it and have a good time. Darkhouse spearfishing is driven by the pike population and clear water. And if you don't have that, it can really stifle opportunity."

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.



*A yellow perch
through the ice.*

ASHLEY PETERSON



BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

Fishing in Winter

Anglers are encouraged to refer to the 2022-24 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 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.



PAUL BAILEY

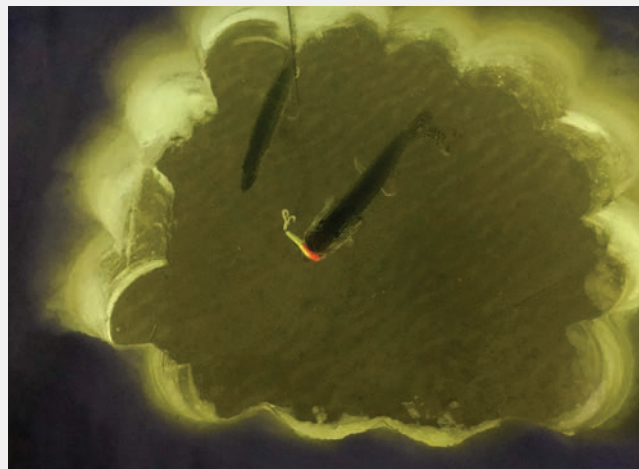
Hunters Urged to Participate

North Dakota hunters receiving a survey this winter are encouraged to help with wildlife management by completing the survey online or returning it to the state Game and Fish Department.

Chad Parent, Department survey coordinator, said big game, small game, waterfowl, swan, turkey and furbearer questionnaires will be mailed to randomly selected hunters.

Parent said it is important hunters complete and promptly return the survey, even if they did not hunt. The harvest survey allows Game and Fish to evaluate the hunting season, to determine the number of hunters, amount of hunting activity and size of the harvest.

A follow-up survey will be mailed to those not responding to the first survey.



PAUL BAILEY

Register for Darkhouse Spearfishing

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.

Of note and new this season: For Stump Lake and the Devils Lake complex south of U.S. Highway 2 and the Missouri River System (including lakes Sakakawea, Oahe and the Missouri River) up to the first tributary bridge, walleyes are also legal.

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, or through any Game and Fish Department office.

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 2022-24 North Dakota Fishing Guide for more information.



ASHLEY PETERSON

Venison Sausage Egg Bake

For this recipe and others to bring wild game to your table with flavor, visit gf.nd.gov/caylas-kitchen.

Ingredients

- 1 pound venison breakfast sausage (60:40 venison to pork mix with breakfast seasoning, ground, and frozen as loose sausage)
- 1 tube refrigerated biscuits
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 small can diced green chiles
- 8 eggs
- ¼ cup milk
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions

- Preheat oven to 350 F.
- Cook sausage in medium skillet until brown.
- Cut or tear each biscuit into pieces and place in the bottom of a 9 x 9 baking dish sprayed with cooking spray.
- Add cooked venison sausage, then cheese and green chiles on top of biscuits.
- Whisk together eggs, milk, salt and pepper and pour over everything else.
- Bake 35-45 minutes until eggs are cooked.

Advisory Board Schedule

Outdoor enthusiasts are invited to attend a North Dakota Game and Fish Department fall advisory board meeting in their area.

The public meetings, held each spring and fall, provide citizens with an opportunity to discuss fish and wildlife issues and ask questions of their district advisors and agency personnel.

The governor appoints eight Game and Fish Department advisors, each representing a multi-county section of the state, to serve as a liaison between the Department and public.

Any person who requires an auxiliary aid or service must notify the contact person at least five days prior to the scheduled meeting date.

DISTRICT 1 – Divide, McKenzie and Williams counties

Date: Nov. 21, 7 p.m.

Location: Tioga Community Center

Host: Peaceful Valley Pheasants Forever

Contact: Kelci Hanson, 701-641-2097

Advisory board member: Beau Wisness, Keene

DISTRICT 2 – Bottineau, Burke, McHenry, Mountrail, Pierce, Renville and Ward counties

Date: Nov. 29, 7 p.m.

Location: Mountrail County South Complex (Stanley)

Host: North Dakota Fur Trappers and Harvesters Association

Contact: Chris Pulver, 701-629-1475

Advisory board member: Travis Leier, Velva

DISTRICT 3 – Benson, Cavalier, Eddy, Ramsey, Rolette and Towner counties

Date: Dec. 5, 7 p.m.

Location: Eagles Club (New Rockford)

Host: Eddy County Rod and Gun Club

Contact: Duane Duda, 701-302-0510

Advisory Board Member: Edward Dosch, Devils Lake

DISTRICT 4 – Grand Forks, Nelson, Pembina and Walsh counties

Date: Dec. 6, 7 p.m.

Location: American Legion Club (Cavalier)

Host: Pembina County and Area Sportsman's Club

Contact: Roger Furstenau, 701-265-2960

Advisory board member: Bruce Ellertson, Michigan

DISTRICT 5 – Cass, Ransom, Richland, Sargent, Steele and Traill counties

Date: Nov. 28, 7 p.m.

Location: Embden Community Center

Host: Four Corners Wildlife Club

Contact: Kyle Schultz, 701-361-7429

Advisory board member: Doug Madsen, Harwood

DISTRICT 6 – Barnes, Dickey, Foster, Griggs, Logan, LaMoure, McIntosh, Stutsman and Wells counties

Date: Nov. 22, 7 p.m.

Location: Valley City Eagles Club

Host: Barnes County Wildlife Federation

Contact: Perry Kapaun, 701-490-1797

Advisory board member: Cody Sand, Ashley

DISTRICT 7 – Burleigh, Emmons, Grant, Kidder, McLean, Mercer, Morton, Oliver, Sheridan and Sioux counties

Date: Nov. 30

Location: Game and Fish Department (Bismarck – in person and livestream)

Host: Dakota Pheasants Forever

Contact: TBD

Advisory board member: Jody Sommer, Mandan

DISTRICT 8 – Adams, Billings, Bowman, Dunn, Golden Valley, Hettinger, Slope and Stark counties

Advisory board member: Rob Brooks, Rhame

Date: TBD



Report Violations with RAP

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department encourages hunters, anglers and landowners who witness a fish or wildlife violation to file a report with the Report All Poachers program.

Witnesses should report a violation by calling RAP at 701-328-9921.

Witnesses should note the vehicle description, including make, color, license plate number and state issued. Description of the violator should also be considered.

The RAP line offers rewards — from \$100 to \$1,000 depending on the nature and seriousness of the crime — for information leading to the conviction of fish and wildlife law violators. Reports can also go directly to game wardens or other law enforcement agencies. Callers can remain anonymous.



ND Outdoors Podcast

In this episode of NDO Podcast, hosts Cayla Bendel, Department R3 coordinator, and Casey Anderson, Department wildlife division chief, visit with Dr. Charlie Bahnson, Department wildlife veterinarian. They learn more about the many diseases impacting wildlife in the state, touch on CWD and the status in North Dakota and hear about the grossest thing Dr. Bahnson has encountered as a wildlife vet. Listeners can find the NDO Podcast on their favorite podcast platform.

Don't Miss an Episode!

Subscribe to the ND Outdoors Podcast to get text or email reminders each time an episode launches.



Order 2023 NDO 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 2023. Along with color photographs of North Dakota's wildlife and outstanding 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.

DEER HUNTERS

WE NEED YOUR HELP WITH 2022 CWD SURVEILLANCE

**EARLY DETECTION IS KEY TO LIMITING THE EFFECTS OF CWD ON THE HERD.
MOST CWD-INFECTED DEER LOOK PERFECTLY HEALTHY. PLEASE GET YOUR ANIMAL TESTED.**

Drop Off Instructions: Remove head from carcass, leaving 4-6 inches of neck attached. Remove antlers if you wish to keep them. Ensure that the Game and Fish license tag is still attached to head or affix new, filled-out ID tag (available at site). UNLABELED HEADS CANNOT BE SAMPLED. Carcass tag must stay with meat.

Taxidermy Heads: *Remove cape and antlers, affix new ID tag to the remainder of the skull and place in barrel.

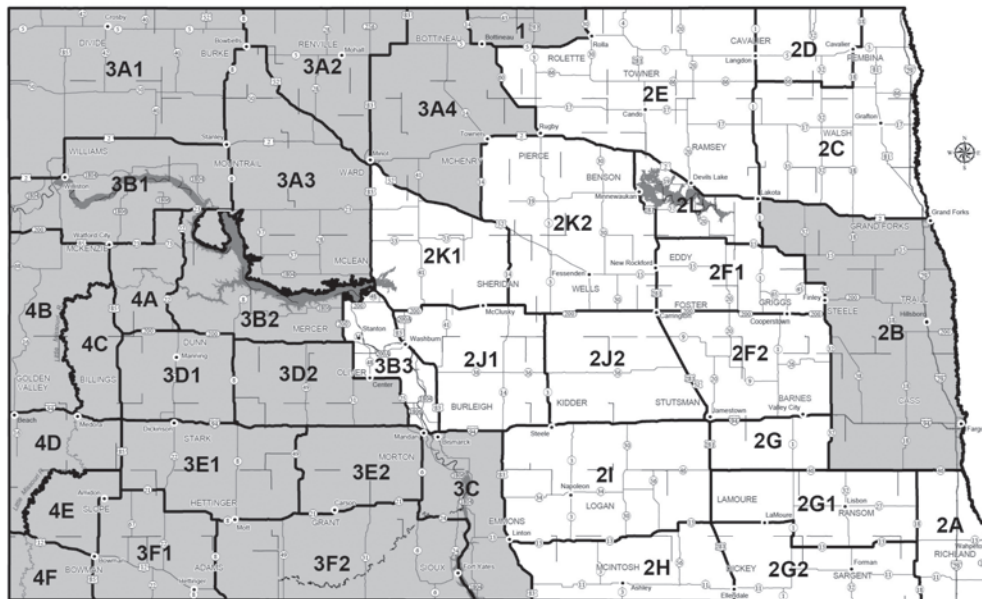
European Mount Heads: *Take the head to a Game and Fish district office to be sampled.

Fawns and Head-shot Animals: Cannot be tested.

*Can also be sampled at home or in the field. Request kits at gf.nd.gov/cwd. Transportation restrictions still apply.

Results can be expected within 4 weeks and will be sent to your Game and Fish account inbox. For questions or concerns, call 701-204-2161.

North Dakota Game and Fish Department CWD Surveillance Units



Drop-off locations can be found at the following locations during the deer gun season. Thanks to all cooperators for their help!

CITY	LOCATION	CITY	LOCATION	CITY	LOCATION
Alexander	Sather Dam	Garrison	Myers' Meats and Supplies	Parshall	Myers' Meats and Supplies
Alexander	Wild Bison Travel Center	Glen Ullin	Kuntz's Butcher Shop	Powers Lake	Farmer's Union
Amidon	Mo's Bunker Bar	Grand Forks	Tractor Supply Co.	Ray	Horizon-Cenex
Beach	Interstate Cenex	Grassy Butte	501 US-85	Ray	Thoreson's Meat Processing
Belfield	Badlands Taxidermy	Grenora	Farmer's Union	Rhame	ProPoint Coop Cenex
Belfield	Superpumper	Harvey	NDGF Lonetree Office	Richardton	Farmer's Union
Belfield	Sinclair Station	Hazen	Hazen Meats	Riverdale	NDGF Riverdale Office
Bismarck	3BE Meats	Hettinger	Dakota Packing	Rolla	New Legacy Coop - Cenex
Bismarck	NDGF Bismarck Office	Hillsboro	Cenex	Rugby	Cenex C-store
Bismarck	West Dakota Meats	Jamestown	NDGF Jamestown Office	Scranton	Wolf's Meat Processing
Blaisdell	BJ Taxidermy	Kenmare	Farmer's Union	Selfridge	Cenex
Bottineau	Mattern Family Meats	Killdeer	Grab N Go	Sentinel Butte	Buffalo Gap Guest Ranch
Bottineau	Cenex	Linton	Bosch's Meat Market	Solen	Hettich Salvage
Bowbells	The Joint	Linton	Scherr's Meats	Stanley	Stanley Ace Hardware
Bowman	Frontier Travel Center	Mandan	Butcher Block Meats	Strasburg	Cenex
Carson	Hertz Hardware	Minot	State Fairgrounds	Tioga	Recycling Center
Center	Tesoro	Minot	Dakota Outerwear Co.	Towner	Cenex
Crosby	Cenex/New Century Ag	Moffit	Schweitzer's Gourmet Meats	Velva	Cenex
Devils Lake	NDGF Devils Lake Office	Mohall	Envision Hardware	Watford City	Farmer's Union Cenex
Dickinson	NDGF Dickinson Office	Mott	4 Corners Car Wash	Watford City	Forest Service Office
Elgin	Melvin's Taxidermy	New Leipzig	Hertz Hardware	Westhope	Cenex
Elgin	Gunny's Bait & Tackle	New Leipzig	Hwy 49 - 10 miles S of New Leipzig	Westhope	The Locker
Fargo	NDSU Veterinary Diagnostic Lab	New Salem	Arrowhead Inn	Williston	Bickler Taxidermy
Flasher	NDGF Disposal Site	New Town	TAT Fish and Wildlife Division	Williston	Mounts by Mert
Fort Yates	Prairie Knights Quik Mart		Office	Williston	NDGF Williston Office
Fortuna	The Teacher's Lounge	Noonan	New Century Ag		

PROTECT **THE** HERD

YOUR ACTIONS MATTER



**KNOW THE REGULATIONS
TO HELP FIGHT
CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE**



BACKCAST

By Ron Wilson

Opening weekend last fall during charitable weather for November (upper 50s, little wind), we skinned and quartered deer that hung from a hand-me-down hitch-mounted hoist that Grandpa had welded fashion years ago and have since become common contraptions in deer camps.

We weren't the first hunters to clean game there as a countless collection of duck, goose and sandhill feathers temporarily stuck to the grass on the north side of the place we were renting for the weekend. The next strong wind out of the northwest, the eventual arrival of which you could hang your hat on with certainty, would wipe the slate clean, sending the waterfowl fluff the color of dirty snow into the next township.

The two deer, a whitetail buck and a mule deer doe, were shot maybe a mile apart. The buck appeared out of nowhere, headed to who knows where, as they often do when the rut is in swing. The doe was bedded in a head-high patch of vegetation no bigger than the bed of my pickup and made the mistake of standing up.

Skinning and quartering the two animals and loading their parts into cloth game bags and a cooler with block ice was comfortable work, the way it should be but so seldom is.

Typically, we're fighting cold hands that only want to work partway through the job and sheltering in any break we can find from an incessant wind that is as dedicated to hurrying across the landscape as we are to wandering the countryside in November.

The second weekend in the deer season that gives us three, the weather whipped a U-turn. By the number of other hunters we saw in the field, none that I can remember, we missed the memo that we should have stayed home.

An ugly northwest wind that felt like it was going to blow in something unforgiving, rocked my parked pickup as my youngest, hell-bent on going it alone in the hills to fill his doe tag, doublechecked his backpack before heading out.

My job, as it stood, and certainly not terrible duty considering, was to drive around, eat my tuna sandwich and pick him up at an undetermined location in an hour or so when he called.



RON WILSON

He never called.

I thought I might hear something when it started to rain.

Nothing.

I expected him to hit me up when the rain turned to a wet, sideways-blowing snow that censored my binoculars-view of the hills he was hunting.

Nothing.

When I finally spotted him through the blowing snow, I was confused, because the tan hunting pants he was wearing looked black. And why was he walking hunched over like a hunter many times his senior?

Then it all made sense.

When I jumped out of the vehicle to give him a hand, I congratulated him and said that was a long way to drag a deer solo.

You could have called, I added.

We skinned and quartered the deer at a buddy's farm on the lee side of some evergreens, stopping more than once to jump in the pickup to warm hands that just didn't want to work.

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Mike Sedlacek, North Dakota Game and Fish Department game warden, Fargo, inspects a hunter's harvest at a Department check station in southeastern North Dakota in October. Department wardens conduct check stations for hunters and anglers a few times a year, often with the help of other law enforcement agencies. Most hunters and anglers, the wardens report, follow the letter of the law, are cooperative and appreciative that wardens are out doing their job to protect North Dakota's wildlife and fisheries resources.



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