

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS



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GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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The early arrival of winter, with no indication of when it might end, has made life more challenging for white-tailed deer and other wildlife in North Dakota.

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• **Editor:** Ron Wilson • **Graphic Designer:** Kristi Fast • **Circulation Manager:** Dawn Jochim

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SANDRA JOHNSON

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Front Cover

A red fox at rest in the snow. Photo by Jesse Kolar.



My 2 Cents

By Jeb Williams, Director

Happy New Year.

I hope all of you had a blessed holiday season and that everyone (both people and wildlife alike) is faring OK in what looks to be a return of winter across the state. Some areas are worse than others, but most places seem to have received plenty of snow and cold in the early stages of our leanest months.

We've heard from many concerning the well-being of wildlife with weeks of winter remaining.

Pheasants and deer are rightfully the two critters most talked about as they are highly visible and typically the most impacted during a tough North Dakota winter. With a significant amount of snow on the landscape in places, teamed with stretches of temperatures far below zero, we must address the importance of wildlife habitat, and how trees, fruit-bearing shrubs, cattail sloughs and grassland cover can provide and protect our vulnerable species by providing the necessary thermal cover to get them through these winter months.

We are in the beginning phases of a legislative session where that very discussion of how the Department can do more to incentivize landowners to provide habitat on their property is rumored to come up. It is always a meaningful discussion, especially in North Dakota, where 93% of our state falls under private ownership.

As usual, many outdoor issues will receive some opportunity for debate and regardless of where you stand on the issue of the day, I encourage you to at least keep up with what is being debated and provide any input to local lawmakers. At the end of the day and things didn't go the way you envisioned, yet you neglected to provide

any input into the process, that frustration ultimately falls on the spectators.

We are fortunate to live in a world where everyone has a voice, and our input does indeed make a difference.

While the decisions made during the legislative session often play a major role in the lives of North Dakotans, I was reminded recently with the passing of a friend that we also need to keep everything in perspective as to what really matters.

A family that I grew up with in my hometown that were as closely tied to the outdoors as any group I have known, lost a brother, son, father, grandfather, and a good friend. Considering that most of my memories of Ryan have to do with the outdoors, it's certain the outdoors also lost a passionate participant. His biggest passion was hunting big game, but he also wasn't against wetting a line or shooting a few pheasants and grouse, flying ribeye as he liked to call them. He liked to tease and loved being teased, so seeing this big, stout guy gagging time and again when butchering his deer was always easy ammunition for some friendly ribbing.

Like many of us, he wasn't without his midlife struggles, which ultimately had a big impact on himself and those around him. My memories of Ryan will consist of the times when life was a little simpler for all of us and that the hunting and fishing memories created are as enjoyable now as when they took place. Heaven gained a great storyteller, even if the story may have been a bit fabricated at times. One of Ryan's best qualities was his ability to make others laugh, and that he certainly did.

RIP, Ryan.

SEARCH

ND OUTDOORS

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THE OFFICIAL PODCAST OF THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT.

2022

IN REVIEW


By Scott Peterson

One of the factors that can have a huge impact on fish and wildlife resources in North Dakota is the weather. What's particularly frustrating to fish and wildlife managers is that we obviously have no control over the one thing that can swing those populations either up or down in a big way.

We experienced a severe drought just a year ago, yet spring 2022 looked promising from a moisture standpoint, painting a much rosier picture for the future of our fish and wildlife resources. Lakes that experienced declining water levels were once again filled and the terrestrial habitat seemingly rebounded overnight. Unfortunately, some of that moisture came in the form of a couple of major spring blizzards. It was disheartening to learn about the loss of livestock because of those heavy, wet snows.

Drier conditions prevailed over much of the state after the late spring snows and rain, and we're once again crossing our fingers for adequate moisture levels going into next spring.

Epizootic hemorrhagic disease is largely influenced by climatic factors and is just one example of something that can have a devastating effect on some of our localized deer herds. EHD is a fatal disease that mostly affects white-tailed deer and it impacted our whitetail herd in 2021 to a magnitude that we'd never seen. Significant die-offs occurred in areas of the state that rarely experience EHD. The region that was most affected appeared to center around the Missouri River corridor, but EHD was also verified in areas as far east as the Red River valley.



Mule deer doe.

ASHLEY PETERSON

Fortunately, EHD was a non-issue in 2022 and our white-tail population has started to rebound in those areas most affected last year. While it may take a few years with favorable habitat conditions for those local whitetail populations to fully recover, it is encouraging that it's at least moving in the right direction.

One of the positives worth reporting from 2022 is that, at least at the time of this writing, no new zebra mussel infestations were reported. It's also encouraging to hear reports of good numbers of pheasants and Hungarian partridge from certain areas across the state.

We're often asked why there aren't as many deer or pheasants in certain parts of the state as there were several years ago. The short answer is habitat. There just isn't as much habitat on the landscape as, say, 10 or 15 years ago.

Like many of our constituents, we'd also like to see wildlife numbers similar to back then, but it's unrealistic to expect that we're going to be able to achieve that given the existing habitat base we have to work with.

On that front, we're working on and tracking a few federal initiatives that will hopefully turn that trend around to a certain degree. While we normally tend to focus most of our energies on huntable/catchable species, some of these initiatives are aimed at the management and recovery of our state's species of conservation priority. In North Dakota, there are currently 115 species that fit into that category. These are species like the Western meadowlark, our state bird, that are in decline and in need of some special attention to hopefully reverse downward population trends and begin moving the needle in their favor.

Most of these species are grassland dependent and so one of the recovery strategies will be to increase and improve grassland habitat in strategic locations with the goal of preventing these species from being listed on the threatened and endangered species list.

There will undoubtedly be some level of success with these initiatives over the next several years and, indirectly at least, many of the species we traditionally focus on will receive a shot in the arm from that as well.

SCOTT PETERSON is the Game and Fish Department's deputy director.

PROLONGED EHD FALLOUT

The number of deer gun licenses made available to hunters by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department had been on the rise since 2016.

That changed in 2022, and the blame for the reduction of 8,000 deer tags compared to 2021 was assigned to epizootic hemorrhagic disease.

In 2021, amid significant drought conditions that hamstrung much, if not all, of the state, the Game and Fish Department received its first report on Aug. 1 of deer dying from EHD near Mandan.

The fallout of the naturally occurring virus spread by a biting midge often fatal to white-tailed deer, and less commonly to mule deer, pronghorn and elk, was still being felt a year later when the Department made available just 64,200 deer tags, the lowest allocation since 2018.

Dr. Charlie Bahnson, Game and Fish Department wildlife veterinarian, said the EHD outbreak in 2021 was on par with the worst that big game biologists had witnessed in terms of EHD attributed mortality.

While EHD has often been documented in southwestern North Dakota for decades, the hardest hit areas of the state in 2021 were along the Missouri River north and south of Bismarck-Mandan, as well as a smaller area near Williston. And in 2022, following the deaths of an untold number of deer, that's where licenses were most greatly reduced.

On the upside, Department officials said there were zero confirmed reports of deer dying of EHD in 2022.

WATERFOWL SURVEY LANDMARK

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual breeding duck survey was held in mid-May, making it the 75th year the survey was held without interruption. The survey is the longest running breeding waterfowl survey in the world.

The survey showed an index of 3.4 million ducks in the state. Wetland conditions across the state varied from good to excellent, and following extreme drought in 2021, the wetland index skyrocketed 616%, the largest single-year percentage increase on record, thanks to April blizzards and abundant rain. Overall, the 2022 breeding duck index was the 23rd highest in the 75 years of the survey, up 16% from



Northern pintail on a North Dakota wetland.

2021, 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% 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). However, some species were still below their long-term average, most notably pintails (minus 32%) and wigeon (minus 24%).

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

North Dakota's landscape 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 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 2022 fall flight forecast of ducks from North Dakota was expected to be up 26% from 2021 and the 25th highest fall flight from the state on record.

MULE DEER NUMBERS FALL

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's fall mule deer survey indicated slightly better fawn production than 2021, but there was concern over the lower number of deer counted compared to previous falls.

Biologists counted 1,116 mule deer in the aerial survey in October, down significantly from the 2021 fall count of 2,163 deer. The ratio of 69 fawns per 100 does was higher than 2021 (60/100) but well below the long-term average (87/100), while 40 bucks per 100 does was similar to 2021 (38/100) and the long-term (43/100) average.

Although the fall survey is designed to assess mule deer demographics in the badlands – bucks per 100 does and fawns per 100 does – biologists were concerned about the lower number of mule deer counted in fall versus the last few years.

Ratios are meaningless, big game biologists said, without relation to population level, which is determined during the spring survey. This was the first survey following extreme blizzards that hit in April at a time when deer were struggling with extreme drought conditions for close to two years.

It appeared that many deer were lost that were in poor body condition, according to the 2022 spring index. Biologists said the 2023 spring index will be very telling in helping

better understand what effect late spring blizzards had on mule deer survival and fawn production in 2022.

The fall aerial survey, conducted specifically to study demographics, covered 24 study areas and 306.3 square miles in western North Dakota. Biologists also surveyed the same study areas in spring to determine deer abundance.

RECORD WATERS, GOOD FISHING

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

Winterkill is a game changer, fisheries managers agree, because in a bad winter, North Dakota can lose 20 waters on the low side to as many as 50 waters on the high side.

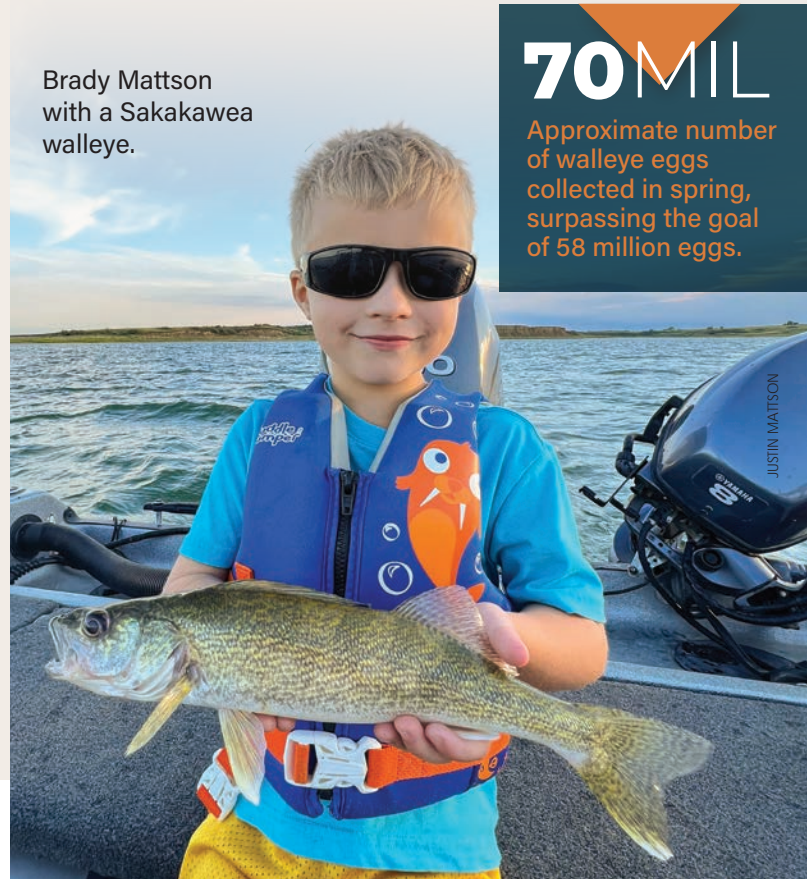
Turns out, North Dakota didn't experience much winterkill and the 450 or so waters, a record number of waters across the landscape, had good to excellent fish populations in 2022, and provided lots of opportunities for anglers.

A number of fisheries in North Dakota, from the dozens of new prairie walleye lakes to the bigger, well-known waters like the Missouri River and Devils Lake, had their tales of good fishing during the open water months and Lake Sakakawea, for example, was one of them.

Department fisheries biologists said 2022 was an exceptional year for fishing on the big lake. The lake continued to

Brady Mattson
with a Sakakawea
walleye.

70MIL
Approximate number
of walleye eggs
collected in spring,
surpassing the goal
of 58 million eggs.



81,000

Number of Canada geese counted during the Department's midwinter waterfowl survey.

7.4 MIL

Number of private land acres electronically posted.

1.8 MIL

Approximate number of chinook salmon eggs collected during the Department's annual salmon spawn.

60 lbs. 8 oz.

Weight of new bow/spear state record buffalo taken by Mitch Estabrook from Heart Butte Reservoir.

harbor a great walleye population and a great forage population. While rainbow smelt abundance was still high throughout the reservoir, what biologists observed in fall was high reproduction of alternative forage fish that game fish species feed on.

Also of note, fisheries biologists said the fall reproduction survey on Sakakawea showed the strongest sauger reproduction documented in the last 50 years.

RECORD BIGHORN SHEEP TALLY

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's 2021 bighorn sheep survey, completed by recounting lambs in March 2022, 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 were 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 counted and classified all bighorn sheep in late summer, and then recounted lambs the following March as they approached 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 nearly doubled in just two years, which is exceptional population performance for bighorn sheep.

It was estimated in 2022 that there were about 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.

The Department allocated five bighorn sheep licenses for the 2022 hunting season, the same as 2021.

UPDATED CWD PLAN UNVEILED

North Dakota Game and Fish Department officials held three public meetings in late summer in Fargo, Dickinson and Minot to update hunters and others about the status of chronic wasting disease in the state and how Game and Fish hopes to address the disease in the future.

A CWD task force of agency employees from several divisions was formed in 2021 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.

The task force updated the Department's CWD and surveillance plan, which was unveiled in 2022 at the public



SANDRA JOHNSON

Whitetail doe.



The North Dakota Game and Fish Department launched a podcast, "North Dakota Outdoors," in September 2022, to provide a platform that allows the agency to discuss topics in greater detail. The podcast is hosted by Cayla Bendel, Department R3 coordinator, and Casey Anderson, Department wildlife division chief. Guests have included Game and Fish staff, partner staff and other experts who have discussed an array of outdoors topics from fish and wildlife surveys and research, habitat programs, conservation policy, stories from the field, and more. Listeners can continue to find the podcast on all major podcast streaming platforms and on the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov.

meetings. The updated plan for the always fatal disease to deer and other cervids that has found some footing in North Dakota and will forever remain on the landscape, will go into play in 2023.

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.

Department officials said the Game and Fish has tested more than 40,000 deer in the state for CWD in the last 20 years and followed the science and applied different tools for managing for CWD.

Yet here we are 20 years later, Department officials acknowledged, and it was time to stop and do a comprehensive reassessment of where they're at and where they hope to go considering the certainty that chronic wasting disease is going nowhere and has the potential

to significantly impact North Dakota's big game populations if left unchecked.

PHEASANTS UP, SHARPTAILS DOWN

North Dakota's late summer roadside surveys indicated pheasant and Hungarian partridge were up from 2021, while sharp-tailed grouse numbers were down.

Department biologists said the annual late summer counts showed mixed results as they observed an increase in pheasant and partridge densities and reproductive rates with average brood size and age ratios, while sharptails decreased in density but had improved reproductive rates from 2021.

Total pheasants observed (49 per 100 miles) were up 9% from last year and broods (5.3) per 100 miles were up 8%. The average brood size (6.2) was up 7%.

Sharptail hunters were told to expect to find more hatch-year grouse in fall. The rangeland vegetation was significantly taller, and there were many more areas to search to find grouse than 2021 during the drought.

Sharptails observed per 100 miles were down 30% statewide. Brood survey results showed two sharptail broods and 13 sharptails per 100 miles. Average brood size was six.

Generally, most of the partridge harvest no matter the year is incidental while hunters pursue grouse or pheasants. But in 2022, with partridge numbers looking impressive, biologists indicated there might be pockets of birds where hunters could focus primarily on Huns.

Partridge observed per 100 miles were up 46%. Observers recorded one partridge brood and 12 partridge per 100 miles. Average brood size was 10. The last time partridge numbers looked this good was 2015.

Sharp-tailed grouse.

800,000

Approximate number of PLOTS acres on the landscape in 2022.

E Number of licenses made available for the bighorn sheep hunting season. More than 19,400 applications were received for bighorn sheep.

VERBATIM

"As somebody who's from North Dakota, I want to see healthy prairie habitat. And I think rattlesnakes are one of the keys to doing that in central and western North Dakota," said Matthew Smith, associate professor with North Dakota State University biological services department.

"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 ... 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," said Casey Anderson Department wildlife division chief.

"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," said Jeb Williams, Department director.

"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," said Bill Jensen, Department big game management biologist.

"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. 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," said Greg Power, Department Fisheries chief.

26,038 Number of applications received for moose, while 23,427 applications were received for elk.

1,965 Number of pronghorn licenses issued. In total, 16,499 applications were received, including 818 gratis applications.

2,639 Number of sharp-tailed grouse counted on spring dancing grounds, down from 3,281 in 2021.

22% The decline in roosters heard crowing during the Department's spring pheasant crowing count compared to 2021.

2021-22 LICENSES AND PERMITS ISSUED

	Resident	Nonresident
Individual Fishing	43,936	18,428
Married Couple Fishing	12,069	6,076
Senior Citizen Fishing	14,799	
Disabled Fishing	285	
Short-Term Fishing		
10-Day		7,766
3-Day		25,735
Paddlefish Tags	2,811	631
Commercial Tags	10	
Retail Bait Vendor	220	
Wholesale Bait Vendor	32	3
Fish Hatchery	2	
2021 Boat Registrations	10,895	
(First year of 3-year decal)		
General Game Hunting	42,802	41,282
Small Game Hunting	12,724	21,209
Combination License	63,801	
Waterfowl Hunting		23,062
Furbearer Hunting/Trapping	6,564	2,716
Fur Buyer	26	8
Deer Gun Hunting	54,662	716
Deer Gun Hunting (Gratis)	11,803	301
Deer Bowhunting	26,238	3,501
Moose Hunting	401	
Moose Hunting	68	
(Preferential Landowner)		
Elk Hunting	445	
Elk Hunting	88	
(Preferential Landowner)		
Turkey Hunting (Spring)	7,266	
Turkey Hunting (Fall)	3,550	
Turkey Hunting (Gratis Spring)	568	
Turkey Hunting (Gratis Fall)	306	
Habitat Stamp	106,603	
Shooting Preserve	12	
Fishing/Hunting Guide	308	53
Taxidermist	287	7
Falconry	4	
Scientific Collector	28	34
Swan	1,413	787
Sandhill Crane	2,581	2,316

2022 SPECIAL BIG GAME LICENSES

	Licenses Available	Applications Received
Moose	400	26,038
Elk	559	23,427
Bighorn Sheep	5	19,423

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022

Income	\$38,789,812
Expenses	\$38,366,692
FUND BALANCES, FIXED ASSETS AND LONG-TERM DEBT	
Game and Fish General Fund	\$29,175,265
Habitat and Depredation Fund	\$4,165,907
Nongame Wildlife Fund	\$145,921
Aquatic Nuisance Species Program	\$110,205
TOTAL ALL FUNDS	\$33,597,299
FIXED ASSETS	\$58,207,479
DEPARTMENT NET WORTH	\$91,804,777



OVERALL WINNER



Hungarian Partridge

Travis Anderson, Grand Forks, ND

Photo taken near Union, ND

By Patrick T. Isakson

The winning photograph in the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's 2022 Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest is an upland game bird not native to the state.

Yet, after nearly a century since its introduction to this neck of the Northern Plains, the Hungarian partridge feels as if it's been here since the beginning.

Huns, also commonly referred to as gray partridge by ornithologists, are native to northern Europe. While stockings were made intermittently in North Dakota years ago, biologists say the bulk of this upland game bird's ancestors

apparently dispersed into the state in the 1920s from the Canadian prairies.

Travis Anderson of Grand Forks photographed the winning contest entry near Union in Cavalier County, lending credence to the understanding that Hungarian partridge, like native sharp-tailed grouse, can be found in every county in North Dakota.

PATRICK T. ISAKSON is a Game and Fish Department conservation biologist.



WATCHABLE WILDLIFE

Photo Contest



GAME WINNER



White-tailed Deer
Ron Hieb, Bismarck, ND

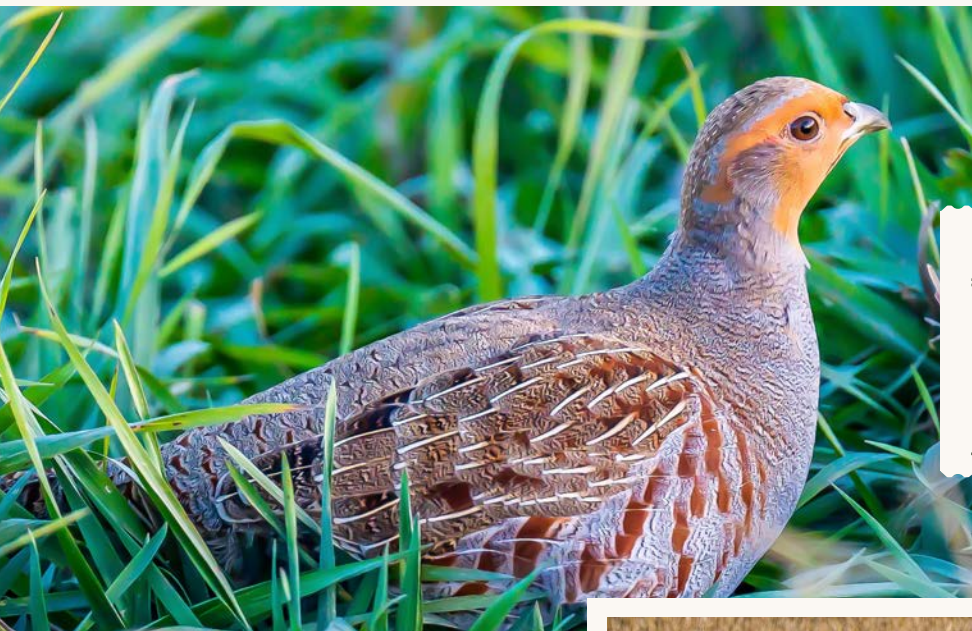
*Photo taken at Heart River in Morton
County, ND*

GAME RUNNER-UP

Mallard
Travis Anderson, Grand Forks, ND

Photo taken near Grand Forks, ND



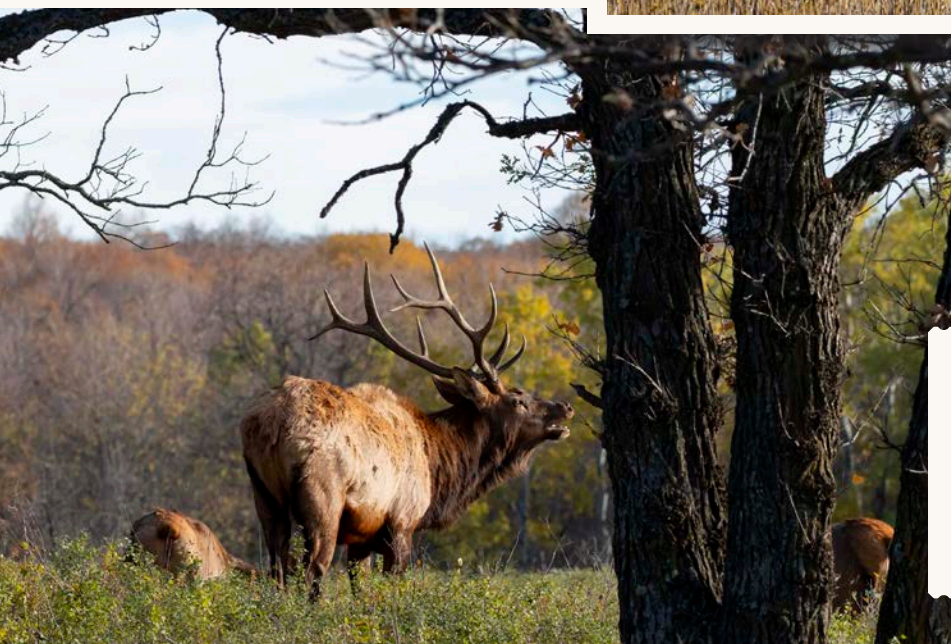


GAME RUNNER-UP

Hungarian Partridge
Bruce Hagen, Devils Lake, ND
Photo taken near Penn, ND

GAME RUNNER-UP

Pronghorn
Tom Krebs, Regent, ND
Photo taken in Hettinger County, ND



GAME RUNNER-UP

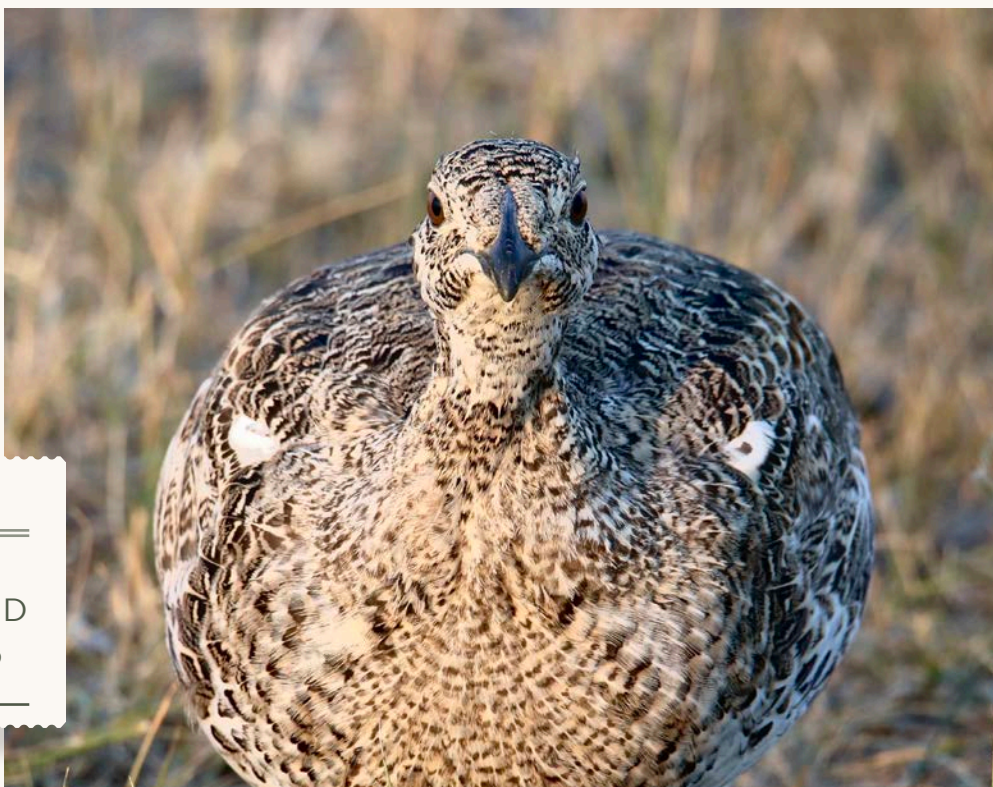
Elk
Jill Edinger, Carrington, ND
*Photo taken at White Horse Hill NGP,
near Devils Lake, ND*

GAME RUNNER-UP

Sage Grouse

Cindy Nagle, Fargo, ND

Photo taken near Rhame, ND



GAME RUNNER-UP

Moose cow and calf

David Schultz, Minot, ND

Photo taken near Grano, ND



GAME RUNNER-UP

Raccoons

Matthew Sorum, Fargo, ND

Photo taken near Fargo, ND



GAME RUNNER-UP

Mink

Lugene Gerber, Bismarck, ND

Photo taken in Burleigh County, ND



NONGAME WINNER



Snowy Owl
Matthew Sorum, Fargo, ND

Photo taken near Fargo, ND

NONGAME RUNNER-UP

White-breasted Nuthatch
Tom Lidahl, Fargo, ND

Photo taken near Fargo, ND



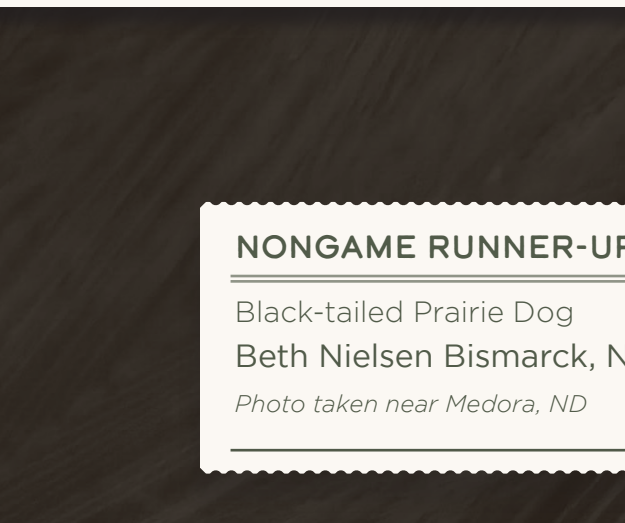


NONGAME RUNNER-UP

Red-necked Grebe

Dale Rehder, West Fargo, ND

Photo taken near Eckelson, ND



NONGAME RUNNER-UP

Black-tailed Prairie Dog

Beth Nielsen Bismarck, ND

Photo taken near Medora, ND



NONGAME RUNNER-UP

Yellow-headed Blackbird

Mike Saunders, Fargo, ND

Photo taken near Stirum, ND





NONGAME RUNNER-UP

Western Grebes

Mike Saunders, Fargo, ND

*Photo taken at Kraft Slough, near
Grand Forks, ND*



NONGAME RUNNER-UP

Great Horned Owl

Annie Goldade-Laughlin,
Breckenridge, MN

Photo taken near Fargo, ND

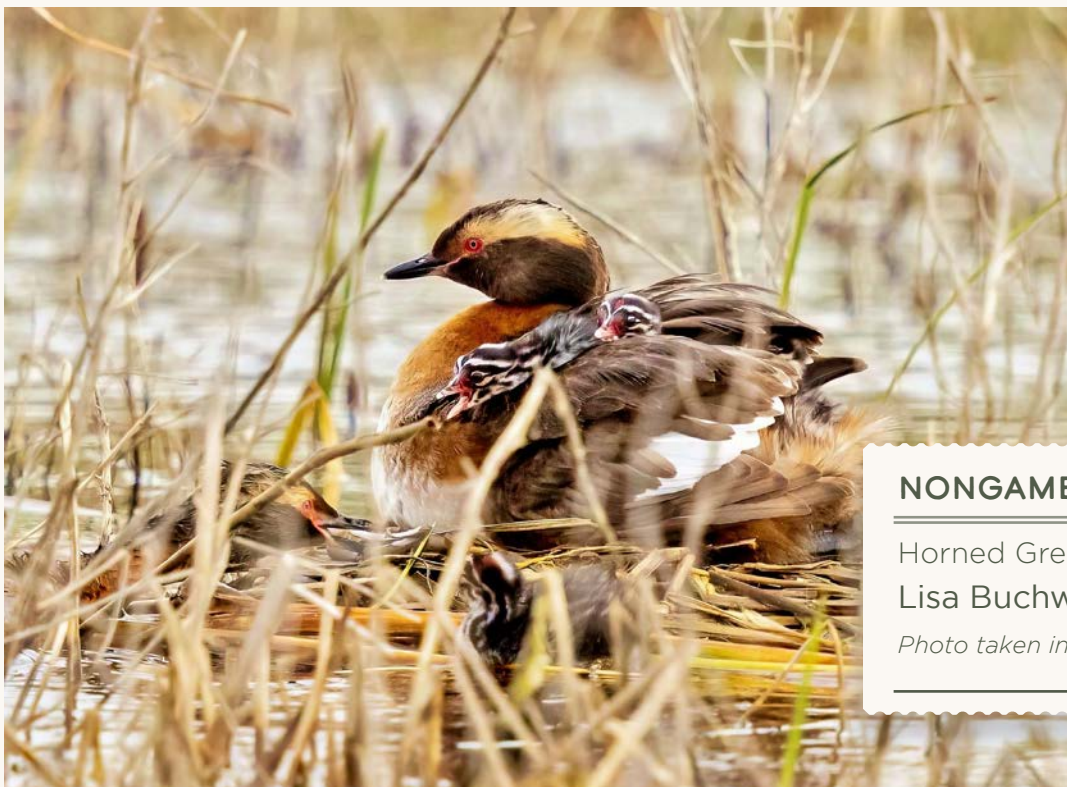


NONGAME RUNNER-UP

American Bison

Michael Ranum, Bismarck, ND

Photo taken in Theodore Roosevelt National Park



NONGAME RUNNER-UP

Horned Grebe

Lisa Buchweitz, Langdon, ND

Photo taken in Cavalier County, ND



PLANTS AND INSECTS WINNER



Goat's Beard

Katherine Plessner, Verona, ND

Photo taken near Verona, ND

PLANTS AND INSECTS RUNNER-UP

Purple Coneflower

Amanda Egenes, Killdeer, ND

*Photo taken in Killdeer Mountain Wildlife
Management Area, Dunn County, ND*

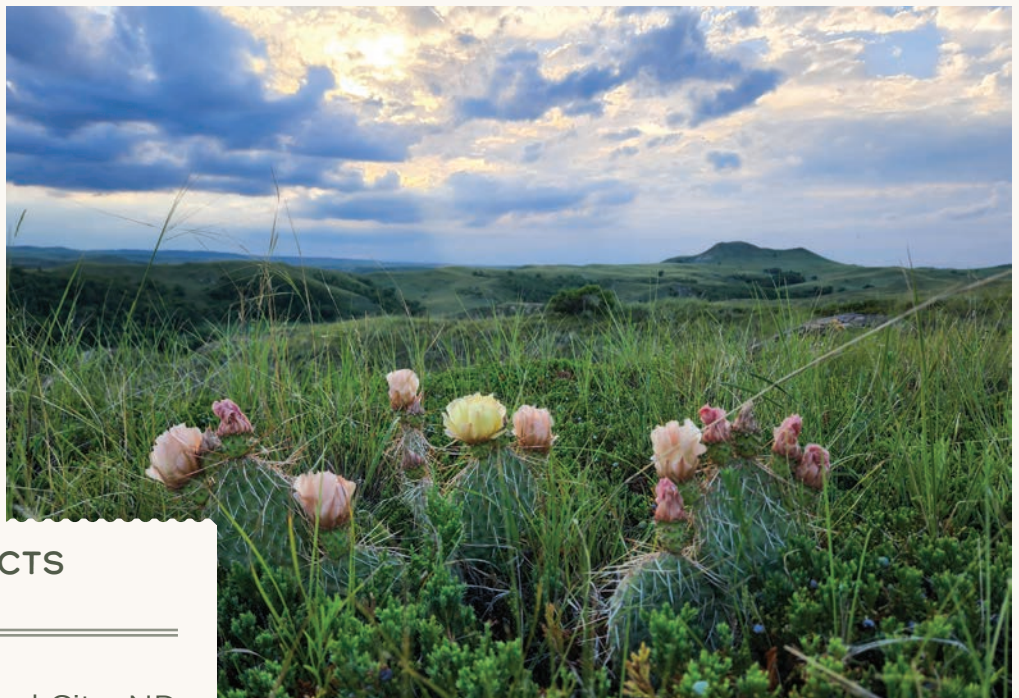




PLANTS AND INSECTS RUNNER-UP

Ten Petal Blazing Star
Dale Rehder, West Fargo, ND

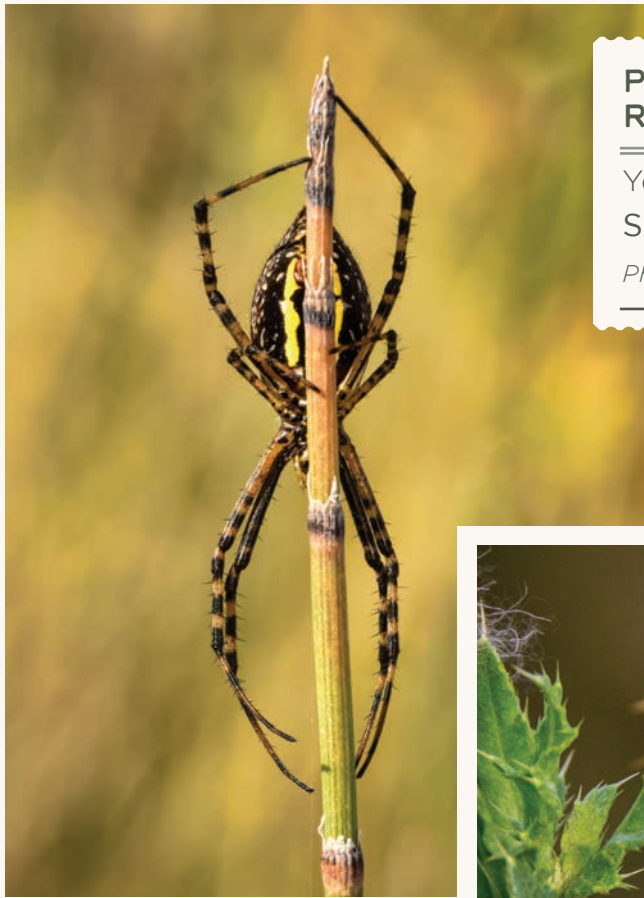
*Photo taken in Theodore Roosevelt
National Park*



PLANTS AND INSECTS RUNNER-UP

Prickly Pear Cactus
Lori Schettler, Watford City, ND

Photo taken in McKenzie County, ND



PLANTS AND INSECTS RUNNER-UP

Yellow Garden Spider

Sharron Watson, Buxton, ND

Photo taken in Rural Buxton, ND

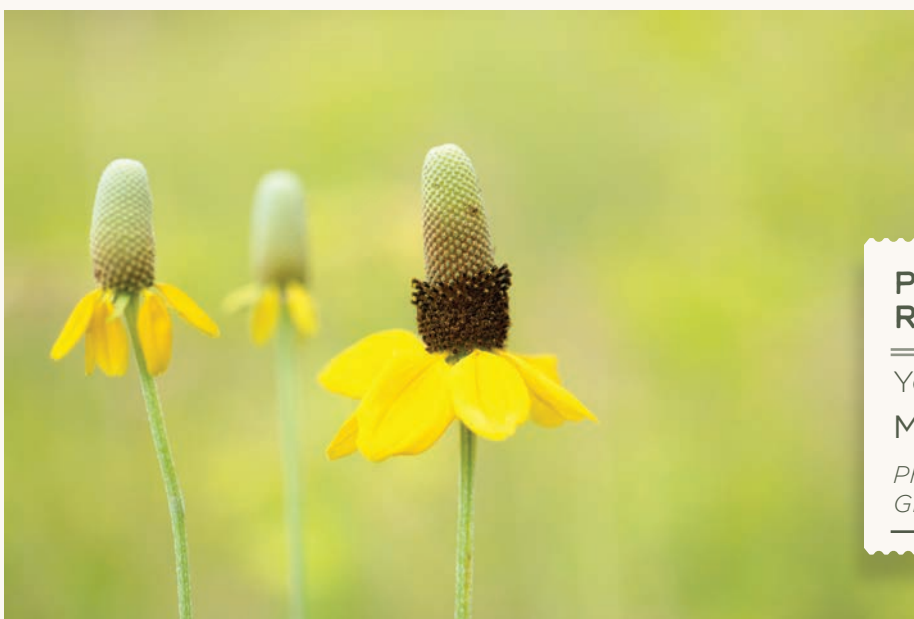


PLANTS AND INSECTS RUNNER-UP

Sulfur Butterfly

DeVane Webster, Bismarck, ND

Photo taken in Sheridan County, ND

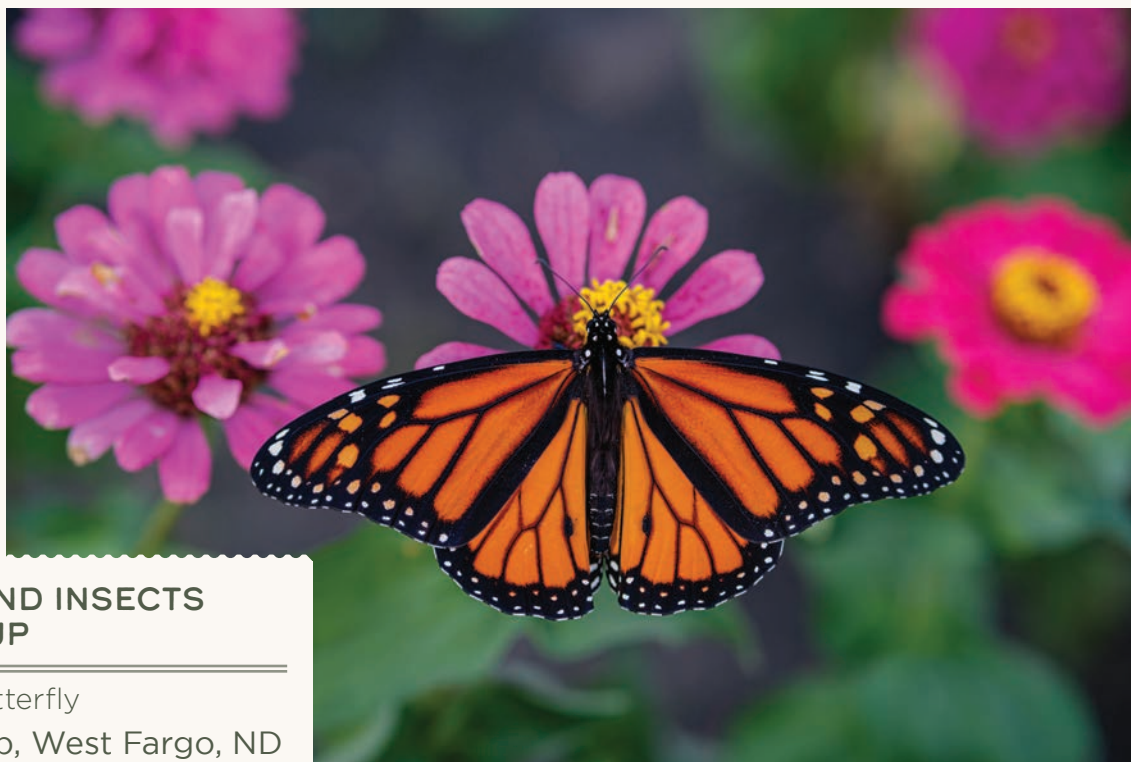


PLANTS AND INSECTS RUNNER-UP

Yellow Coneflower

Mike Saunders, Fargo, ND

Photo taken in Sheyenne National Grasslands



PLANTS AND INSECTS RUNNER-UP

Monarch Butterfly

Rita Frovarp, West Fargo, ND

Photo taken in West Fargo, ND



PLANTS AND INSECTS RUNNER-UP

Eastern Tiger Swallowtail on
Purple Coneflower

Mark Broden, Grand Forks, ND

Photo taken near Grand Forks, ND



BUFFALOBERRY PATCH



Tentative 2023 Season Opening Dates

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department annually provides its best estimate for opening dates to help hunters prepare for hunting seasons.

Dates become official when approved by governor's proclamation. Tentative opening dates for 2023 include:

Spring Turkey	April 8
Dove	Sept. 1
Deer and Pronghorn Bow, Mountain Lion	Sept. 1
Sharptail, Hun, Ruffed Grouse, Squirrel	Sept. 9
Youth Deer	Sept. 15
Youth Waterfowl	Sept. 16
Early Resident Waterfowl	Sept. 23
Youth Pheasant, Regular Waterfowl	Sept. 30
Pronghorn Gun	Oct. 6
Pheasant	Oct. 7
Fall Turkey	Oct. 14
Mink, Muskrat, Weasel Trapping	Oct. 28
Deer Gun	Nov. 10
Deer Muzzleloader	Dec. 1

Wildlife Feeding Concerns

Tough winter conditions thus far in North Dakota have some citizens concerned about the stress on wildlife.

Kevin Kading, state Game and Fish Department private land section leader, said harsh winters often generate conversations and questions about feeding wildlife, particularly deer and pheasants.

"The Department does not promote winter feeding and does not have a winter-feeding program," Kading said. "We recognize that many people care deeply about wildlife, and it can be difficult to watch nature play out, but feeding operations, good intentions and all, can actually do more harm for wildlife than good."

Supplemental winter feeding does not benefit entire

populations. Individuals and smaller groups of animals may receive some benefit, but often there are negative impacts such as congregating animals, drawing animals from long distances and away from good winter cover, increased predation, disease concerns, spreading of noxious weeds and feeding costs.

A poorly conducted feeding operation can kill more animals than it helps. For example, feeding animals on or near roadways can lead to wildlife-vehicle collisions. Providing feed that is too "hot" for deer, such as corn, which is high in sugars and starch, can lead to acidosis, rumenitis and ultimately death. And even individuals with the best of intentions who start feeding wildlife early in the winter often stop due to the amount of time and expense required, leading to the loss of animals that have become dependent on the handouts.

While it's not uncommon for wildlife to die from exposure to cold, they rarely die from starvation. Knowing this, the Department promotes habitat development that can provide critical winter thermal cover. Food plots should also be considered and planted near adequate winter cover. One alternative to feeding wildlife is for landowners, wildlife clubs and others to plow open areas of harvested grain or row crop fields to allow animals access to waste grains and other materials. These areas are also the first to melt when there is a break in the weather.



NDO Calendar Available

The 2023 *North Dakota OUTDOORS* calendar is available for ordering online at the state Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov.

The calendar features outstanding color photographs of North Dakota wildlife and scenery, and includes season opening and application deadline dates, sunrise-sunset times and moon phases.

Calendars are also available via mail order. Send \$3 for each, plus \$1 postage, to: Calendar, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095.

The calendar is the *North Dakota OUTDOORS* magazine's December issue, so current subscribers should have already received it in the mail.

Fish House Regulations

Winter anglers are reminded that any fish house left unoccupied on North Dakota waters must be made of materials that allow it to float.

Other fish house regulations include:

- Fish houses do not require a license.
- Occupied structures do not require identification. However, any unoccupied fish house must have an equipment registration number issued by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, or the owner's name, and either an address or telephone number, displayed on its outside in readily distinguishable characters at least 3 inches high.
- Fish houses may not be placed closer than 50 feet in any direction to another house without consent of the occupant of the other fish house.
- All unoccupied fish houses must be removed from all waters after midnight, March 15.

Anglers should refer to the North Dakota 2022-24 Fishing Guide for other winter fishing regulations.

Coyote Catalog Available

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department and North Dakota Department of Agriculture have again opened the Coyote Catalog, a statewide effort designed to connect committed hunters and trappers with landowners dealing with coyotes in their areas.

Landowners can sign up on the Department of Agriculture website, nd.gov/ndda/. Hunters and trappers can sign up at the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov.

Anyone who registered for the Coyote Catalog in the past must register again to activate their name on the database.

Throughout winter, hunters or trappers may receive information on participating landowners, and they should contact landowners to make arrangements.

Landowners experiencing coyote depredation of livestock should first contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services. The Coyote Catalog will remain active through March 31.

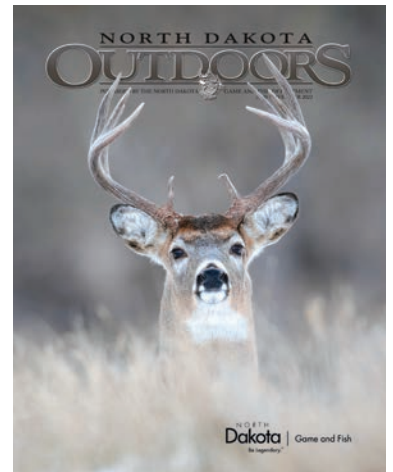
For more information, contact Ryan Herigstad at Game and Fish, 701-595-4463 or rherigstad@nd.gov; or Colby Lysne, at the Department of Agriculture, 701-390-7515 or clysne@nd.gov.

NDO Subscriber Alert

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department will no longer mail subscriber renewal notices for North Dakota OUTDOORS as the majority of subscribers renew their subscriptions online at gf.nd.gov.

Subscribers will receive an email from the Department as a reminder that time is coming to renew their subscriptions.

Also of note, don't miss an issue of NDO by changing your address online on the Department's website. Each month we receive a number of magazines with "no longer living at this address" return labels. Act now to ensure you stay updated with all the latest issues from the Game and Fish Department.



2023-25 Watercraft Registrations

North Dakota watercraft owners should note that 2023 is the first year of a new three-year registration period.

Watercraft registrations must be renewed online by visiting My Account at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's website, gf.nd.gov. A credit card is required.

The price to register motorboats in North Dakota under 16 feet in length, and all canoes, is \$18; motorboats from 16 feet to less than 20 feet in length is \$36; and motorboats at least 20 feet in length is \$45. Fees are prorated.

The 2023-25 watercraft registration cycle begins Jan. 1 and runs through Dec. 31, 2025.

In addition, a state law created in 2019 requires an aquatic nuisance species fee of \$15 for each motorized watercraft registered in North Dakota to run concurrent with the three-year watercraft registration period.

For motorized watercraft operated on state waters and not licensed in North Dakota, the law establishes an ANS fee of \$15 to be paid for each calendar year, and to display an ANS sticker on the watercraft.

New watercraft owners can attach the required documentation, such as the bill of sale or proof of taxes paid, with the online purchase, or send in the required documentation via standard mail.

STAFF NOTES

Lee Retires, Fryda Fills Position

Jason Lee retired after 31 years with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. Lee joined the Department in 1991 and at the time of his retirement, he was the north central district fisheries supervisor in Riverdale, a position he held since 2007.

Dave Fryda, Missouri River System supervisor since 2007, filled the position vacated by Lee.



Jason Lee



Dave Fryda

BACKCAST

By Ron Wilson

Hunters who fancy some “tracking snow” for North Dakota’s deer gun season got their wish ... and then some.

I’m not opposed to it. But from where we stand, glassing deer nearly a mile east of us on the entrance to a two-track that dead ends where federal and state lands butt up against one another, there’s easily more than a foot of snow on the level and closer to 2 feet or more where it’s drifted in.

This much snow carpeting the landscape with more than half of the deer season in front of us changes things. While the deer do stand out against the white landscape making them much easier to locate, they’re bunched up near cover and food a considerable hike, even in snowshoes, which we don’t own, from the main gravel road. Either we find a way to them and worry about getting the dead animal back to the pickup later, or simply call it a day and ponder the what ifs on the hour-long drive back to town.

Before I can say out loud that it’s doable, that the wind is right for intercepting the deer between cover and food if we hurry, my son is throwing on an extra layer of orange and stuffing extra ammunition into his front pocket.

It appears I’m sitting this one out.

I argue to no one from the front seat of my pickup with the windows rolled up and the heater turned to a comfortable setting, that, yeah, two hunters sneaking across the landscape are likely easier to spot than one and it’s probably foolish to harvest two deer under the circumstances. So, Jack, going alone, makes sense.

Truth is, we both knew without saying it that I would simply slow him down.

First, over the fence, then around a cattail-ringed slough where snow has piled and will remain until spring. He’s hiking mostly uphill now, and I lose him briefly when he dips into a fold in the landscape that goes without notice until you watch someone hike in and out of it.

Without binoculars from this distance, he looks like this lone, colorful dot seemingly moving imperceptibly, but with a destination in mind. I’m envious of the distance his

19-year-old legs have eaten in the snow in what seems like minutes.

I want to text, tell him what the deer are doing, how things look to be unfolding from where I sit. I don’t, knowing already how this is going to end.

Through binoculars, I watch him kneel, shoulder his rifle, but I don’t hear the shot.

“I’m gonna need help,” he texts.

“I know. Let me figure it out.”

I’ve taken a dead end section line that runs between the PLOTS land he’s hunting and the private land where the deer are heading to feed. We drove the trail opening week-end, pre-snowstorm, without incident, but now I have it in four-wheel, doing my best to keep the tires in the tracks created by the landowner hauling his second-cutting.

Finally, we’re sliding the deer on a sled, zigging here and there to avoid the drifts. Our path, as we stop to take a breather and take a look back, looks like we’ve been drinking. The sled is better suited for grade school kids zipping down a hill than hauling a deer. The animal keeps falling partway off, making this more difficult and slower than it should be.

This is the easy part, I tell my son between heavy breaths, because I don’t know how I’m going to turn the pickup around in all this snow.

We finally make it to the fence and can hear the unmistakable rumble of a tractor coming our way. By the time we kick away snow with our boots and negotiate the deer and sled under the bottom strand, the landowner scoops out a place for us to turn the pickup around.

“Put the deer in the bucket and I’ll load it into your pickup,” he yells out of the open door on the tractor’s cab.

I wave him thanks, but I want to hug him, knowing that’s not exactly the gesture Game and Fish officials envisioned when encouraging hunters to do what’s necessary to build better landowner-hunter relations.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.

North Dakota Outdoors Magazine
North Dakota Game and Fish Department
100 N. Bismarck Expressway
Bismarck, ND 58501

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your address, call 701-328-6300 or
go to gf.nd.gov/buy-apply.

*More than 1,900 deer heads
crossed these tables in the
North Dakota Game and Fish
Department's lab in Bismarck,
where Department personnel
removed the lymph nodes from
hunter-harvested deer from
the 2022 season to be used
in testing for chronic wasting
disease.*



ASHLEY PETERSON

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gf.nd.gov/connect



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