

NORTH DAKOTA  
**OUTDOORS**

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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*The mission of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department is to protect, conserve and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitats for sustained public consumptive and nonconsumptive use.*

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The fall flight forecast of ducks from North Dakota is up 23% percent from last year and is the 15th highest fall flight from the state on record.

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### Front Cover

*Pronghorn buck in western North Dakota.  
Photo by Jesse Kolar.*



# WELCOME

## NEWS

AS BIRD  
NUMBERS  
CLIMB





**Hungarian partridge brood.**

By Ron Wilson

Last winter was hard on some of our big game species. The difficulty of dealing with feet of snow on the landscape for six months in places is reflected, for example, in the reduction of nearly 11,000 deer gun licenses compared to 2022.

This fallout is not a whodunnit. It's not a mystery why an untold number of animals starved or died of exposure. What's puzzling, but certainly welcome news, is how well North Dakota's upland birds – some native to the Northern Plains, others not – fared, considering the unfriendly circumstances.

So, what the heck?

"Just how birds survived such a tough winter, especially pheasants, is one of the big questions we've had from people. And, you know, it's OK to say we don't exactly know how or why," said Rodney Gross, North Dakota Game and Fish Department upland game management biologist. "But, we do have a few ideas based on past tough winters."

Gross said it's easy to compare last winter to the winter of 1997 because that was the last time North Dakota had over 100 inches of snow on the ground in places.

"The difference in those two winters is that last winter we didn't have those prolonged 40 below temperatures that North Dakota is famous for," he said. "And last winter we had a good warmup in January and there were some areas that cleared. So those birds, not just pheasants, could get out there, pluck around and dig up some food. Even though it was a long winter, they came through and we had a good population, good production last year, so we had kind of an excess of birds to pull through the winter."

Also, the northwest didn't have the snow central North Dakota had, so not everywhere was as severe, Gross added.

Heading into spring, Gross expected his pheasant crowing count runs to be mostly quiet. The noise he did expect was from his phone as people called in to report dead pheasants and other grassland birds.

"I know that sharp-tailed grouse and Hungarian partridge can winter better than pheasants, but we still had



**Nonnative ring-necked pheasants battle the elements thrown at them last winter.**

100 inches of snow on the ground and that's brutal," he said. "But I guess pheasants are tougher than I give them credit for. I wasn't as worried about grouse because they can burrow in the snow and stuff, but I was still pretty worried."

At times last winter, the landscape, especially in central North Dakota, looked like the surface of the moon. You couldn't see the top of the grass. Stubble fields were buried, and it was a wonder what pheasants were eating to get by. And with cattail sloughs packed with snow, where were birds hunkering to endure the elements?

"Thankfully, they have wings and can fly, without expending too much energy, to get to where they needed to go to feed," Gross said, "while deer and pronghorn had to trudge through all that snow, and if they weren't anywhere close to where there was winter food, they were in big trouble. And considering that we got so much snow in early November, a lot of the deer weren't necessarily in their winter ranges yet.

"Pheasants, on the other hand, they're basically there in November. They're grouped up. Even when we're getting into October, they're in their winter groups. They're by those cattails and places like that and they're set to go for winter, which is an advantage they have," he added. "On my drives to work a lot of mornings I'd pass pheasants and a lot of times all I would see was a tail feather sticking up out of the snow because they were burrowing down into the wheat stubble field getting that food. They're a lot more resilient than we give them some credit."

It wasn't until mid- to late May that Gross knew by looking at the pheasant crowing count data rolling in that things were going to be better than just OK.

"About that time, everyone has two crowing count runs in already, and I'm looking at the data, comparing, and thinking in my head, that even on my run, I think I heard more than

I did last year," Gross said. "And you go back and look and see that was indeed the case. And then you look at other people's and I'm finding increases. If I were a betting man going into spring, I would have a lot less money because I wouldn't have bet this would have been the case."

Another thing Gross wouldn't have bet on is the continued rise of Hungarian partridge. The last two to three years he said talk was that it was unlikely that partridge numbers would get any better that they were then.

"Well, they proved us wrong, and they did better again this year. Partridge numbers are tied with an all-time high, dating all the way back to 1991," Gross said. "I think we need to start telling people if partridge are on their bucket list, it's time to come to North Dakota because it shouldn't get much better. Like I said, we've been saying it wasn't going to get any better, but here we are."

Huns respond best, Gross said, during drier conditions, and these birds started their rebound in 2020, a drought year.

"Partridge nest later in the season compared to sharptails and pheasants. So, we're getting into July where their peak hatch is, and what happens during a drought, a grasshopper explosion. Well, it's pretty simple, when you hatch and you don't have any insects to eat, you're not going to survive. But if you hatch during a locust plague, you're golden," he said. "There's food everywhere, and when you can have a clutch of 20 as partridge can and your survival is going to be that good, it doesn't take very long in the numbers game for the population to come back up."

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*RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.*

# UPLAND GAME

## BIRD SURVEY

North Dakota's roadside surveys conducted in late July and August indicate pheasant, Hungarian partridge and sharp-tailed grouse numbers were up.

Rodney Gross, state Game and Fish Department upland game biologist, said survey conditions were exceptional this year, which might have led to increased observations, but survey conditions shouldn't have large effects on brood sizes or age ratios, which were also up.

Hunters, he said, should expect to find similar or higher numbers than last year, with good numbers of hatch-year birds in their bags.

Total pheasants observed (65 per 100 miles) are up 61% from last year and broods (7.5) per 100 miles are up 70%. The average brood size (6.3) is up 2%. The final summary is based on 282 survey runs made along 100 brood routes across North Dakota.

Observers in the northwest counted 13.5 broods and 113 pheasants per 100 miles, up from 11 broods and 96 pheasants in 2022. Average brood size was six.

Results from the southeast showed 5.4 broods and 49 pheasants per 100 miles, up from five broods and 29 pheasants in 2022. Average brood size was six.

Statistics from southwestern North Dakota indicated 9.8 broods and 86 pheasants per 100 miles, up from five broods and 48 pheasants in 2022. Average brood size was six chicks.

The northeast district, generally containing secondary pheasant habitat with lower pheasant numbers compared to the rest of the state, showed one brood and seven pheasants per 100 miles, compared to two broods and 18 pheasants last year. Average brood size was five.

Gross said sharptails had above average production and have rebounded back to the good years of 2011-15. He said hunters should expect to find a good ratio of hatch-year grouse in 2023. Much of the increase in sharptail observations was driven by a rebounding population in the southwest district.

Sharptails observed per 100 miles are up 116% statewide. Brood survey results show observers recorded 2.6 broods and 29 sharptails per 100 miles. Average brood size was six.

Partridge observed per 100 miles are up 200%. Observers recorded 2.4 broods and 36 partridge per 100 miles. Average brood size was 11.

Generally, Gross said, most of the partridge harvest is incidental while hunters pursue grouse or pheasants. But this year, partridge numbers looked impressive, as for the first time more partridge were observed than sharptails on brood routes.



Sharp-tailed grouse.



Pheasant brood.

# WORKING WITH *Partners*

By Ron Wilson

The welcoming committee on this day in early September at Engel's Point Wildlife Management Area in Nelson County include three white-tailed deer, a scattered and skittish collection of mourning doves and a dozen or so unidentifiable ducks sitting a football field away on Stump Lake.

In short order, the wild critters, both seen and unseen, melt into the native forest and elsewhere as 40 or so humans gather to celebrate the 265-acre addition to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's public land portfolio.

The property, made up of wetland and grassland habitat, native forest and cropland that will be converted to grass, was donated years ago by the late Orville Engel of Nelson County to today's owner, the Garrison Diversion Conservancy District. The Game and Fish Department's role in this convergence of partners, which also includes Nelson County, is to manage the WMA.

"The North Dakota Game and Fish Department takes a lot of pride in working with partners in projects like this," said Jeb Williams, Department director. "Working with partners is how we function now and into the future."





Aerial view of Engel's Point Wildlife Management Area near Stump Lake in Nelson County.



Engel's Point WMA was dedicated in early September to a crowd of about 40 people, including (from left) Cody Johnson, Nelson County Commission chairman, Jeb Williams, Game and Fish Department director, Duane DeKrey, Garrison Diversion Conservancy District manager, and Steve Forde, Nelson County Commission vice chairman.

Williams said that while we talk about agriculture and energy being the main economic drivers in the state, hunting, fishing and other outdoor pursuits on both public and private lands are certainly a cylinder in that economic engine.

"You can envision duck hunters spending time out here on this property, not to mention early morning bowhunters and others who will go into town, into the Friends & Neighbors Café to enjoy a nice breakfast, fill up with gas, all those different things that trickle down into the economy," he said.

Brian Prince, Department wildlife resource management supervisor in Devils Lake, said when Game and Fish committed to manage the property, a hurdle that needed to be cleared was public access.

"The Department required access to the site, which meant that a road was needed to be repaired in order to get the public to the site," Prince said. "That actually took an extended period of time due to some permitting issues and things like that. It was roughly a four-year process to bring this project to completion."

The wait was worth it.

"Engel's Point Wildlife Management Area is our newest wildlife management area in northeast North Dakota. There's native grassland on it. There's planted grassland. There are wetlands. There's also some woody oak habitat along the shoreline as well, which makes it really good wildlife habitat," Prince said.

"My crew and I have been seeing lots of deer sign on the site. I've even seen sharp-tailed grouse and other upland game birds and Stump Lake has phenomenal waterfowl hunting in the fall."

Duane DeKrey, Garrison Diversion Conservancy District general manager, said when he first visited the land eight years ago, he knew it was a problematic piece of property because of a collapsed barn, vacant house, and a noxious weed issue.

"Once I saw the property and saw the liability issues with it, I started thinking right away about what we were going to do. And I would say it was a good five- to six-year process from beginning to end for Garrison Diversion," DeKrey said. "Eventually, we engaged with Game and Fish and came up with the plan that you see here today, which is the highest and best use for the property. The public should love this place. We've got fishing on one side. We've got upland game hunting on one side. We've got tree stand areas for hunting deer. What more could they ask for?"

While some improvements have already been made to Engel's Point WMA, Prince said there is more work to be done.

"We are currently working on fencing the property and installing two parking areas. In the future, we're hoping to add more grassland habitat to the tract and decrease the number of cropland acres," he said. "And we have also been working on the noxious weed component that's out here. Leafy spurge has infested a large portion of the site, and we have released some spurge beetles to combat that invasion. The district also began a chemical control program to address Canada thistle issues."

Prince added that the Department is also working with Nelson County on their desires for the WMA, which include a bench on the point, mowed trail from the west shoreline of Stump Lake and the ability to maintain a boat dock.

"Engel's Point is just a gem in our district. We're looking forward to improving on that and just serving the public with another WMA in our wild-life management area system," Prince said.

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*RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.*





# GETTING INTO THE WEEDS

BY RON WILSON



Casey and Cayla on a successful pronghorn hunt earlier this fall.

A year ago in September, a seemingly unlikely duo at first glance launched the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's podcast, aptly named NDO Podcast where the "ND" stands for the obvious and the "O" stands for outdoors.

One of the twosome looks as if he hung up his helmet and shoulder pads not long ago, while the other could be mistaken for just walking off the soccer pitch from her midfielder position.

Mutt and Jeff, if you will. Physically, at least, a mismatched pair. Yet, when you get to know them, maybe by tuning into their audio program, or hanging with them inside or outside of this agency's walls, the unevenness fades.

Casey Anderson, Department wildlife division chief, and Cayla Bendel, Department R3 coordinator, are consummate conservation professionals and avid outdoor enthusiasts along the same level. They understand their constituency. They pursue the opportunities the Game and Fish offers.



Casey Anderson with son, Jesper, following a successful youth season deer hunt.

It didn't dissuade them when the gears started turning about launching a podcast that you couldn't swing a fox squirrel by the tail nowadays and not hit a podcaster sitting behind a microphone. The upside of reaching out in way that was once unlikely and unique to the agency outweighed the trendiness.

"I think it reaches a different audience at some level. The other thing it does is it allows us to give some more information as we go through podcasts," Anderson said. "We're talking a half-hour to an hour in a lot of cases with guests, experts, on various topics."

As Bendel put it, NDO Podcast affords them the opportunity to get into the weeds a little more no matter the topic — fish surveys, the ins and outs of State Trust Lands, the importance of hunter surveys, cooking what you harvest from a boat or in the field, the list goes on.

"I think it also showcases that we're human here at the Department," she said. "It's a little more informal than some of our other platforms ... we get to laugh a little."

Anderson added: "We've gotten into some non-science-based topics that we don't hit on all the time. For

instance, we recorded one with the wild game cook, and we just did one with some veterinarians talking about things that might matter to those running dogs in the field. So, we can dive into a few more topics that we wouldn't normally that are of interest to those who hunt and fish."

Of course, they've waded into the science end of things, the straw that stirs how the agency does business. Chronic wasting disease, an always fatal disease to deer and other cervids that will forever remain on the landscape, is a topic of note.

"CWD has been a big one. We've already done two podcasts on CWD that allowed us to get into a little more depth, allowed listeners to get to know Charlie, who is difficult not to trust because of his voice and his expertise," Bendel said in reference to Dr. Charlie Bahnson, Department wildlife veterinarian.

While recording, sitting with guests from Department staff to other folks from many walks of life, Anderson and Bendel play to their strengths. It's a dynamic that works.

"Cayla and I both like to laugh, so that helps. You know, we definitely have a different perspective, which is good. Kind of helps play off each other," Anderson said. "Of course,

Cayla and husband, Scott Clausen, bowhunting in the badlands.



Anderson packs a mule deer buck out of the badlands.



**ANDERSON'S TURN:** *"I've been a Game and Fish employee for almost 22 years and*

*sometimes you feel like you're living and breathing it no matter where you go. But I do spend as much time as I can outdoors. Hunting is more my thing ... I fish in the off season when hunting seasons are closed. I'm kind of a generalist hunter as I'll take the opportunity to hunt something that I've never hunted before. A few years ago, it was for Wilson's snipe. I got an opportunity to go after those shorebirds and didn't even realize I had them right on some of our land that we've got. Also, I'm into ranching a little bit. We have a ranch north of Bismarck with my wife and two boys, with another one on the way in November. We just spend a lot of time outdoors, whether it's fixing fence or chasing critters, or looking for puffball mushrooms. Unlike Cayla, my wife doesn't hunt with me near as much, but she's very, very supportive."*

she didn't grow up here and I didn't get very far. I still live 7 miles from the hospital I was born in, and my career obviously has been longer with the Game and Fish. I think those two things work well together."

Bendel said: "Casey just has so much expertise in everything in the Department. I always feel like he asks stronger questions, has that experience of what the public's been thinking or what is commonly a concern or talked about in forums. I try to kind of keep things organized and then try to throw in some humor that's not usually that funny."

Year-long followers who have tuned in to most, if not all, of the nearly 30 podcasts likely have a sense of who Anderson and Bendel are outside the agency's interior. Some, not so much. Here's a taste.

**BENDEL FIRST:**

*"Recently, I became a mother. Obviously, I'm an avid outdoors person. No matter what the season is, I want to be doing something outside. I'm very much a generalist and never doing any of it very well, but just trying to kind of fit in everything and soak in the seasons. Primarily that's been with my husband, my favorite person to spend time with outside. And now with the little one, Fischer. Our bird dog, Finley, is also a big part of our adventures, even if it's not bird hunting. I love cooking the wild game, but I think I would even do it without the meat. I mean, I love being out there and it's kind of the only way I decompress and get reinvigorated for another week of work."*



Bendel and son, Fischer, walleye fishing.

Who knows where this gig goes from here, how long they'll hit the red record button.

"When you get into social media and outreach type of stuff, things come and go," Anderson said. "I think as long as podcasts are relevant and something that people want to listen to, there's a place for it. I don't know, Cayla, do you want to shoot for 500 episodes?"

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RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.

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# ND OUTDOORS PODCAST

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



# WHERE ENGINEERING, BIOLOGY AND ART CONVERGE

BY RON WILSON





Aerial view of the modification of the low head dam near Drayton.

The last of eight low head dams built on the Red River since the early 1900s has been modified to ease safety concerns for river users and allow fish upstream passage.

Located northeast of Drayton, the newly tailored site at Drayton Dam on the Red is expected to meet the safety and environmental concerns of the handful of partners involved in the project.

"We are modifying these dams for two purposes. One is public safety by reducing the hydraulic roller and reduce drownings in these areas," said Bruce Kreft, North Dakota Game and Fish Department conservation supervisor. "From an environmental standpoint, we are trying to increase river connectivity by providing fish passage over these existing dams. This was done by creating steps with large rocks for those fish to be able to migrate up."

Partners who had the most combined input into the project include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, North Dakota Game and Fish, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Diversion Authority for the city of Fargo and the city Drayton.



Jim Job, Game and Fish Department outreach biologist, releases a catfish at Drayton Dam before the structure was modified.

The project didn't happen overnight as it was in the works for years.

"Originally, the city of Drayton came to us with interest in trying to find a way to preserve their dam, maintain it, and do it in a way that's environmentally friendly," said Elliot Stefanik, biologist and environmental planning section chief with the corps. "We talked with our partner agencies from North Dakota and Minnesota to see if there was an opportunity to fund and construct something like this. Although we talked about it for a long time, we never found that right combination of funding and authority to be able to construct until just recently."

The final product will be a win for river users and fish.

"What's really exciting is that this is a great day for the river and it's a great day for the city of Drayton," Stefanik said. "Those folks came to us and were really looking for ways to solve their issues with aging infrastructure and an aging dam. And we were able to do that in a way that really benefits the river and helps those folks with their dam and also maintain the social values of the area here."

"The boat ramp and the camping that happens here was really important to those folks to be able to maintain it," he added. "And I think the design that we have and the project we came up with, the solution we came up with, really helps to balance all those values."

Scott Gangl, Game and Fish Department fisheries management section leader, said before completion of the

project, the dam was a barrier to fish. Fish couldn't move up and down the river, especially at low flows very freely.

"By connecting the habitats, connecting the upstream with the downstream, it allows various fish species to now cross and move farther upstream at more times of the year and during more years when there's low flows instead of high flows," Gangl said. "There's also a huge safety aspect with the project that's important to note. Take the fish and the fishing out of the equation and these low head dams are a huge safety issue and they're a drowning hazard in many cases. Modifying these by filling in those scour holes and removing the dam itself, it's going to remove a lot of that drowning hazard and make it much safer for people."

While a number of fish species make their way up and down the Red at different times of years, the rock passageways were designed so the biggest-bodied fish, lake sturgeon for example, are able to complete their upstream migrations.

"We design around that large criteria because it's more difficult to pass a large fish than a small fish through a structure like this," said Nicholas Kludt, Red River fisheries specialist for Minnesota DNR.

"Because we have these large pools, that pool spacing allows room for 6- to 8-foot sturgeon to physically move up and down. However, when we get even closer to the bank, you see smaller gaps within the boulder placement. You'll also see lower velocities within those gaps. That's meant



for everything from our very small-bodied native fish up to species like walleye, northern pike, channel catfish and other traditional sport fish."

Kludt said the placement of individual boulders within the steps, or the weirs, is the confluence of where engineering, biology and art converge through the work of heavy equipment.

"Each individual boulder has a specific elevation that it needs to be placed ... it's actually quite complex. Each boulder is marked within the excavator with a GPS waypoint with a precise elevation at which that stone needs to be set," Kludt said. "We then pay attention to the orientation of that rock within the water to make sure we are achieving the best possible aspect of it to the river flow. And by doing that, we can ensure proper velocities, proper entrance and exit passages from the pools and maximize the fish passage benefit and overall habitat benefit of this site."

This marriage of engineering, biology and art is expected to be a boon for fish in the system as they will now, with much more ease, satisfy life cycles that were hindered during low water years.

"The Minnesota DNR has had a very active reintroduction program for lake sturgeon, and we've been modifying dams throughout the Red River over the years to improve that connectivity because lake sturgeon move upstream into the tributaries to spawn," Gangl said. "Drayton Dam is the last

mainstem dam on the Red River that provided blockage to those fish. By opening this up, it provides access to upstream reaches of the Red River and its tributaries to spawning. It's really allowing catfish, lake sturgeon and all species in the river to fulfill their life history, to fulfill what they are programmed by nature to do, which is to move upstream into those tributaries to reproduce and spawn."

Kludt said if you look at the site in totality, one of the longstanding attractions of Drayton Dam is ease of shore-fishing access. Even with the modifications, he believes that attraction has not been lost, but increased with the increased safety at the site.

"So, not only is the public access maintained, it's safer. We know from similar structures around the basin that the fishing experience below the former dam site will likely not diminish. In fact, it will remain largely the same as long as anglers are willing to adapt to the way that the flow moves through this area," he said. "Instead of it all coming over in a single sheet, it's now concentrated toward the middle. So, finding those downstream seams where the fish are going to be holding and feeding, you're going to have to do it a little differently than you may have before at this site, but it certainly can still be done, speaking from personal experience."

Gangl agreed, adding: "Drayton Dam has always been a very popular fishing area. People would fish right below the dam. I think that it will still have a fish attracting effect, but it's going to provide more fishing opportunities upstream as well. I think more of those bigger trophy catfish are going to move upstream. The sturgeon, the walleye, a lot of the fish in the river are going to move upstream. We've already got really good fishing in Fargo. We've got good fishing in Grand Forks. This might improve it and anglers just might see more of those larger fish that they're after."



A goldeye caught at Drayton Dam.

---

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.

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# BUFFALOBERRY PATCH



## ANS Reminders for Waterfowlers

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

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

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

Drain plugs on boats must remain pulled when a boat is in transit away from a water body.

In addition, hunters are reminded of a state law that requires motorized watercraft, including motorized duck boats, operated on state waters and not licensed in North Dakota, to display an ANS sticker, including an ANS fee of \$15 to be paid each calendar year.

For more ANS information, including regulations, or to purchase the ANS sticker, visit the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).



Bighorn sheep

## Record Applicants for BHS Licenses

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department allocated six bighorn sheep licenses for the 2023 hunting season, one more than last year.

A record 20,290 applicants applied for bighorn sheep. Prospective hunters were required to apply for a bighorn license earlier this year on the bighorn sheep, moose and elk application.

One license was issued in unit B1, one in B3, two in B4 and one in B5. In addition, one license, as authorized under North Dakota Century Code, was auctioned in May by the Midwest Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation, from which all proceeds are used to enhance bighorn sheep management in North Dakota.

## Duck Boat Safety

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

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

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



North Dakota roadkill.

## Deer on the Move, Motorists Beware

Motorists should watch for deer along roadways this time of year as juvenile animals disperse from their home ranges.

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

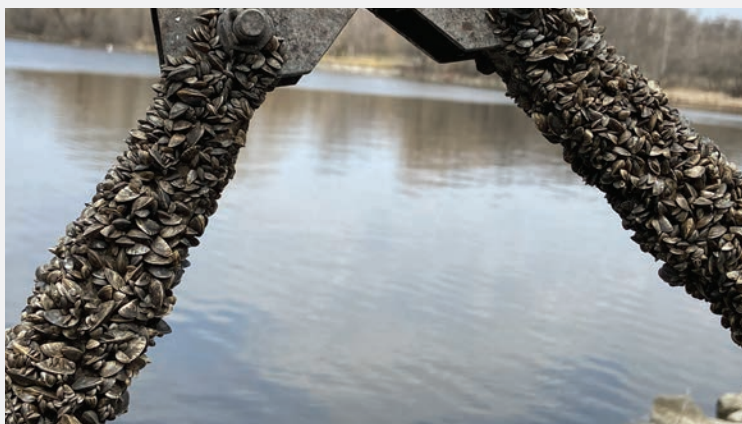
Motorists should be aware of warning signs signaling deer are in the area. When you see one deer cross the road, look for a second or third deer to follow. Also, pay attention on roadways posted with Deer Crossing Area caution signs.

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

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

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

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



Zebra mussels coat a boat lift.

## Inspecting for Zebra Mussels

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

Ben Holen, Department ANS coordinator, said water recreationists and property owners play a vital role in ANS prevention.

Zebra mussels attach to hard surfaces that are left in the water for long periods of time, first settling in tight spaces and areas that are protected from sunlight, Holen said. Equipment such as boat lifts and docks are high risk vectors for spreading ANS, especially zebra mussels.

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

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



Readying for the deer season.

## Deer Season Prep

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

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

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

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

The Department may periodically close these ranges for routine maintenance and improvements. The status of each range can be found on the Department's website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). The website also provides a detailed listing of other shooting facilities in North Dakota.

wardens and local law enforcement offices.

In addition, hunters are reminded to properly dispose of dead deer. A deer carcass transported outside of its respective gun unit must be disposed of via landfill or waste management provider.



## Order 2024 OUTDOORS Calendars

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is taking orders for its North Dakota OUTDOORS calendar, the source for all hunting season and application dates for 2024. Along with color photographs of North Dakota's wildlife and outstanding scenery, it also includes sunrise-sunset times and moon phases.

Calendars must be ordered online by visiting the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

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



Mike Anderson, Game and Fish Department video production supervisor, with a paddlefish from the Missouri River.

## Broadcast Milestone

North Dakota Outdoors video news program reached a milestone of 1,500 programs in September. The two-minute show first aired in October of 1994. Mike Anderson, video project supervisor, has had his hand, behind the camera and in front of it, in roughly 1,450 of the programs. The program runs on about 14 different television stations around the state.

## Permit Required to Possess Dead Deer

North Dakota Game and Fish Department enforcement personnel issues a reminder that a permit is required before taking possession of a dead deer found near a road or in a field.

- Only shed antlers can be possessed without a permit.
- Permits to possess are free and available from game



Whooping crane.

## Endangered Cranes on the Move

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

The whooping cranes that do make their way through

North Dakota each fall are part of a population of about 500 birds that are on their way from nesting grounds at Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada to wintering grounds at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, a distance of about 2,500 miles.

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

Other white birds such as snow geese, swans and egrets are often mistaken for whooping cranes. The most common misidentification is pelicans, because their wingspan is similar, and they tuck their pouch in flight, leaving a silhouette like a crane when viewed from below.

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

Whooping crane sightings should be reported to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service offices at Lostwood, 701-848-2466; Audubon, 701-442-5474; the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 701-328-6300; or to local game wardens across the state. Reports help biologists locate important whooping crane habitat areas, monitor marked birds, determine survival and population numbers, and identify times and migration routes.

## Historical Look at Waterfowl in North Dakota

The storied past of waterfowl in North Dakota is uniquely revealed in the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's publication, "The Duck Factory – A History of Waterfowl in North Dakota."

Certainly of interest to waterfowlers and other outdoor enthusiasts, the 213-page, full color, soft-cover publication is authored by Mike Jacobs and Erik Fritzell. The book traces the history of waterfowl species and their habitats in North Dakota.

"The Duck Factory" is an important story because of North Dakota's longtime and continuing contribution to the world of migratory birds, said Mike Szymanski, Department migratory game bird management supervisor.

"North Dakota is the most important state for breeding ducks," he added. "The contribution of ducks from North Dakota into the fall flight is unmatched by any other state, and its importance to duck hunters cannot be understated. Describing the history of waterfowl in North Dakota was a story that we felt was certainly worth telling."

The book is sold only online for \$24.99, including shipping, on the Game and Fish Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), by clicking on Buy and Apply, and then Shop.

## STAFF NOTES



*Pictured from left:* Tom Claeys, North Dakota Forest Service state forester; Kent Luttschwager, Game and Fish Department wildlife resource management section leader; Scott Peterson, Game and Fish Department deputy director; Dr. David Cook, NDSU president; Jonathan Tofteland, Game and Fish Department district warden; Scott Olson, Game and Fish Department wildlife biological technician; and Brian Prince, Game and Fish Department wildlife resource management supervisor.

## Trees Award Winners

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department and agency wildlife resource management supervisor, Brian Prince, were celebrated at the Trees Awards in Fargo in early September.

The Department received the 2023 Excellence in Government Trees Award, which is presented to an agency or division of government at any level that exhibits extraordinary effort and dedication in the conduct of programs and projects that result in a significant benefit to forestry.

"North Dakota Game and Fish Department has done just this, implementing forest improvement practices across the state for the benefit of wildlife," wrote Tom Claeys, North Dakota Forest Service state forester.

Prince, of Devils Lake, was honored as the 2023 Natural Resource Professional of the Year for his innovation and promotion of sustainable forest management in his region.

The Trees Awards recognize those who contribute in outstanding ways to forestry activities including fire mitigation, tree planting or environmental education. The Trees Awards are sponsored by the NDSU-North Dakota Forest Service and presented during the Trees Bowl at North Dakota State University.





Picture from left: Lt. Governor Tammy Miller; Cody Clemenson, North Dakota Forest Service forest steward specialist; Ron Davis, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa; Jodi DeLozier NDSU Extension Service extension specialist; Brian Prince, Game and Fish Department wildlife resource management supervisor; Kevin Kading, Game and Fish Department private land section leader; and Governor Doug Burgum.

## Roaming Bison Award

The Turtle Mountain Forest Management team was awarded the Roaming Bison Award in September at the 2023 Governor's Awards for Excellence in Public Service, which recognized team members across state government for their commitment in providing the highest levels of service to North Dakota.

The team, made up of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, North Dakota Forest Service NDSU Extension and Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, was recognized for their work to ensure that the unique and cherished forest area is managed sustainably for current and future generations.

## Agency Garners National Recognition

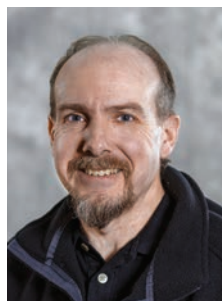
The Center for Digital Government announced the North Dakota Game and Fish Department and North Dakota Information Technology as winners of the 2023 Government Experience Awards.

Launched in 2021, the electronic posting project, spearheaded by Brian Hosek, Game and Fish Department business operations manager, is a tool for both landowners and hunters to identify posted lands digitally within the state. This results in reduced cost and effort to post land physically, while ensuring it meets legal posting requirements.

"State parcels have always been a top data priority for the state. There are numerous use cases for this information that benefit many citizens of North Dakota. The



Brian Hosek



Shane Wegner

state's electronic posting system is one example," Hosek said. "The collaboration and talent of this team, including Melvin Faris, NDIT and Shane Wegner, Game and Fish Department, has resulted in a successful outcome for electronic posting and the state parcel project."

## Longtime Bowman Warden Retires

North Dakota Game and Fish Department game warden, Art Cox, retired after 25 years with the agency.

"Art was an extremely valuable member of the Department and enforcement division," said Scott Winkelman, enforcement division chief. "Having spent his entire career stationed in Bowman, he had excellent insight and knowledge of the southwestern corner of the state, its residents, and all those who enjoyed hunting, fishing, trapping and boating there. Art's experience and knowledge will be missed."



Art Cox

## Dinges Moves to PLI

Andy Dinges was named the Game and Fish Department's west region private land initiative supervisor.

Prior to accepting the position, Dinges was a migratory game bird biologist for the Department for eight years.



Andy Dinges

## Pike Joins Lonetree Staff

Trevor Pike has been named wildlife biological technician for the Game and Fish Department at Lonetree Wildlife Management Area near Harvey.

Pike graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point with a degree in wildlife ecology and management.



Trevor Pike

## Rott Named to Fisheries Staff

Lucas Rott has been named fisheries biological technician for the Game and Fish Department in southeastern North Dakota.

Rott worked for several years as a long-term seasonal employee in Riverdale before securing his new position in Jamestown.



Lucas Rott



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# BACKCAST

By Ron Wilson

If you're watching from a prairie hilltop, one that we've yet to crest as that's where we guess the sharp-tailed grouse are loafing out of the tallish grass to evade the heavy dew this morning, you might be impressed.

While we look far from a well-oiled hunting team, we surely look like we've done this before.

Larry is casting left and right where the freshest cowpies and the dew-soaked and slow grasshoppers take him, and I'm wandering with my scratched 20-gauge casually thrown over my left shoulder like a seasoned hunter.

I'm thinking we should be featured in a hunting magazine somewhere and the caption for the photograph would read: "A graying hunter and his 7-month-old hunting buddy, maybe the old timer's last bird dog, ply public land on the Northern Plains for native sharp-tailed grouse."

Yet, if you hang around long enough on that prairie high spot, you'll eventually watch me step into three badger holes — no other critter I can blame the dirt work on — cleverly hidden in tall grass and buck brush.

After my third fall, wondering if it's safe, or worth it, to get back up and continue, Larry wanders over and licks my face with the same tongue he was using earlier on cow poop.

We're nine days into the sharptail and Hungarian partridge season and we've been on the ground five of them. We hunted the first three with family and the following two it's been just the two of us. The best teacher for Larry, like my other bird dogs when they were young, is putting his nose into the cone of grouse scent, which takes time and miles. And, if I believe my step-tracking device on my left wrist, we've clocked our share thus far.

Larry and I regroup and consider our options as I wipe my shotgun with the driest part of my shirt-tail after my third tumble. We can head back to my pickup or continue in the opposite direction in hopes of bumping one young bird that hatched sometime before summer that is as wet behind the ears as my pup.

I don't know what Larry looks like when he gets birdy, and I doubt he recognizes it either at this point, but when the grouse flushes to my right, I will say that while it's unlikely he got a nose full, he was at least in the vicinity.

His bird. His first bird. Dead bird.

We're back at my pickup and we've both been watered, consumed our fill, and I pull the sharptail from the back of my vest and give it to Larry for a hero shot to send to family.

After chasing him around the pickup a few times, he finally poses nicely near the front tire of my pickup, grouse in mouth and seemingly as proud as can be. I'm hoping he's thinking, as he puts it together, that this is cooler than carrying around the Northern flicker that crashed into one of our windows at home a few days ago.

No matter. I know there is some growing up to do, that he needs some work. And if I'm being honest, it goes for the both of us.

---

*RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.*



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*While on assignment in northeastern  
North Dakota to photograph the  
release of lake sturgeon into the  
Pembina River, the photographer  
hung around for the after-sundown  
activities, featuring a series of  
satellites streaking across the late  
evening sky between the Pembina  
Gorge and a night light show  
presented by the aurora borealis  
and the Milky Way.*

PHOTO BY ASHLEY PETERSON

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