

# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS



PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
\$2.00 February 2024



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A record number of Canada geese were estimated along the Missouri River System during the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual midwinter waterfowl survey in early January. The full story on the annual survey can be found on page 22.

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**Dakota** | Game and Fish  
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Contributing photographers for this issue: Mike Anderson, Sandra Johnson, Jesse Kolar, Ashley Peterson and Ty Stockton.

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# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

*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.*

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

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### Front Cover

*A cow moose pauses during a gentle January snow east of Bismarck. Photo by Ashley Peterson.*



# My 2 Cents

*By Jeb Williams, Director*

What a difference a year makes. While winter is far from over, our fish and wildlife resources have been given a much-needed reprieve from the record setting winter of 2022-23. While most of the state at this time last winter was completely covered with significant snowpack, most of the state today is brown with maybe some patches of snow here and there.

All of us who make North Dakota our home know how much “we” like to talk about the weather. While the reasons vary of why that is, our changing weather patterns sure make it an easy conversation piece. Let’s hope come April and May we will be talking about the timely rains that have hit the landscape and that our growing season is off to a good start.

During the winter months, Department staff is consistently consumed with collaborative efforts with a wide variety of the public. Whereas every other year a good chunk of time is spent working with the North Dakota legislature on policy and budget issues, which impact our agency and the sportsmen and women who are the Department’s funding source.

While we consistently strive to take the opportunity to thank our partners for what they do to help support the Department’s mission, we are also working with groups and providing them the opportunities to discuss how to better balance the interests and desires of more conservation actions while being mindful of how some are impacted by those actions.

An example is while many may appreciate the growing number of elk in parts of the state, North Dakota’s landmass is largely held in private ownership and navigating the balance between increased opportunities and landowner tolerance is not something the Department takes lightly. Point being, this is one of many examples where having an open dialogue to discuss the pros and cons of various issues at least provides an opportunity for additional understanding and education to everyone involved in those conversations.

While we are early in the new year, I think it’s safe to say we are off to a good start and even if winter does decide to kick in, I’m hopeful we are late enough into the game that the good condition animals are currently in will be enough to see them through and not impact the reproductive success of many species.

I believe 2024 is setting up to be a great year for many outdoor adventures. The fishing should once again be “fire” (teenage slang) and considering the upland game bird success in 2023 was as high as we have seen in several years, there’s hope that will continue into the coming fall.

And if the weather holds and Mother Nature gives us somewhat of a pass this winter, that will have a positive impact on our big game species, especially deer, that need a break after disease setbacks and the winter of 2023.

SEARCH

ND OUTDOORS

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# ND OUTDOORS PODCAST

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## DEER LOTTERY DISCUSSION EP. 24

[GF.ND.GOV/NDO-PODCAST](https://gf.nd.gov/n-do-podcast)

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



**FOLLOWING A TOUGH WINTER, THE GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT MADE AVAILABLE JUST 1,600 MULE DEER BUCK LICENSES AND 650 DOE LICENSES IN 2023, WHICH WAS 3,500 FEWER LICENSES THAN 2022.**

# DEER DRAWING 2023

By Ron Wilson

**W**hile nearly 11,000 fewer licenses were made available for the deer gun season in 2023 following a long and difficult winter that was especially tough on deer, the process remained the same to draw a license.

The format used to present the results of the deer drawing – plus drawings for pronghorn and spring and fall turkey – is consistent with the last four years.

The tables provided show the first-choice results in the first lottery. Using deer hunting unit 2J1 for any antlered deer as an example, the numbers read like this: 798 hunters with zero bonus points applied for an any antlered deer license and 188 were successful in drawing a license (188/798); 426 hunters with one bonus point applied and 235 were successful (235/426); 134 hunters with two bonus points applied and 100 were successful (100/134); and on it goes.

In short, the tables show the results for those hunters with the same number of bonus points applying for a particular license in a particular hunting unit.

It's important to note that the deer lottery results do not include the 1% of licenses state law requires the Game and Fish Department to make available for nonresident applicants every year.

Those nonresidents who do apply for a deer gun license in North Dakota compete only against other nonresident hunters for that 1%.

Also of note, the results in the 2023 deer gun lottery show only those hunters who were in the drawing, not those hunters who bought bonus points and had no intention of hunting deer last fall.

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RON WILSON IS EDITOR OF *NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS*.

# 2023 DEER LICENSE LOTTERY RESULTS

UNIT	UNIT / TYPE	POINTS											TOTAL APPS.	
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+		
1	Any Antlered Deer	34 / 409	74 / 246	40 / 104	20 / 39	7 / 8	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	807
1	Any Antlerless Deer	122 / 137	6 / 7	5 / 5	0 / 2	0 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	152
2A	Any Antlered Deer	76 / 558	93 / 322	23 / 63	16 / 22	1 / 1	4 / 4	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	970
2A	Any Antlerless Deer	212 / 228	23 / 23	5 / 5	1 / 1	0 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	258
2B	Any Antlered Deer	38 / 1,065	71 / 716	76 / 510	68 / 383	221 / 249	15 / 19	2 / 3	1 / 4	0 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	2,950
2B	Any Antlerless Deer	424 / 599	42 / 65	38 / 46	17 / 20	10 / 12	3 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	745
2C	Any Antlered Deer	49 / 808	61 / 582	69 / 341	38 / 149	90 / 104	7 / 9	4 / 5	0 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1,999
2C	Any Antlerless Deer	189 / 286	29 / 34	15 / 18	5 / 10	4 / 4	0 / 0	2 / 2	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	355
2D	Any Antlered Deer	119 / 546	170 / 373	88 / 142	18 / 27	10 / 10	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1,098
2D	Any Antlerless Deer	111 / 115	11 / 11	1 / 1	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	128
2E	Any Antlered Deer	37 / 678	66 / 451	71 / 270	30 / 98	51 / 53	3 / 3	0 / 1	1 / 2	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1,557
2E	Any Antlerless Deer	133 / 210	24 / 32	9 / 13	4 / 4	0 / 0	0 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	260
2F1	Any Antlered Deer	233 / 845	320 / 519	85 / 113	17 / 21	4 / 4	0 / 0	0 / 0	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1,503
2F1	Any Antlerless Deer	233 / 244	14 / 14	9 / 9	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	267
2F2	Any Antlered Deer	119 / 771	198 / 545	143 / 288	61 / 93	38 / 38	2 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1,738
2F2	Any Antlerless Deer	346 / 360	36 / 40	13 / 19	4 / 4	0 / 0	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	424
2G	Any Antlered Deer	112 / 485	140 / 227	28 / 37	3 / 6	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	757
2G	Any Antlerless Deer	121 / 144	15 / 15	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	161
2G1	Any Antlered Deer	60 / 972	83 / 709	79 / 302	38 / 146	57 / 62	2 / 3	0 / 0	1 / 1	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	2,196
2G1	Any Antlerless Deer	236 / 508	48 / 72	8 / 13	5 / 7	2 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	603
2G2	Any Antlered Deer	248 / 859	352 / 545	168 / 196	25 / 27	6 / 6	0 / 0	0 / 0	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1,634
2G2	Any Antlerless Deer	351 / 354	30 / 30	5 / 5	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	390
2H	Any Antlered Deer	363 / 939	325 / 414	53 / 58	6 / 7	1 / 1	0 / 0	1 / 1	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	1 / 1	1 / 1	1,422
2H	Any Antlerless Deer	135 / 135	6 / 6	3 / 3	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	145
2I	Any Antlered Deer	166 / 1,026	268 / 669	184 / 292	57 / 83	9 / 11	4 / 4	3 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	2,088
2I	Any Antlerless Deer	270 / 277	26 / 26	10 / 10	3 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	316
2J1	Any Antlered Deer	188 / 798	235 / 426	100 / 134	28 / 36	3 / 3	1 / 1	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1,399
2J1	Any Antlerless Deer	163 / 171	12 / 13	8 / 8	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	193
2J2	Any Antlered Deer	145 / 818	255 / 564	114 / 186	31 / 41	3 / 4	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1,613
2J2	Any Antlerless Deer	260 / 267	30 / 34	5 / 6	1 / 1	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	309
2K1	Any Antlered Deer	102 / 725	203 / 517	176 / 286	57 / 90	51 / 54	3 / 3	3 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1,678
2K1	Any Antlerless Deer	203 / 208	21 / 22	12 / 13	0 / 0	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	245
2K2	Any Antlered Deer	105 / 1,046	157 / 772	159 / 479	89 / 230	70 / 73	3 / 5	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	2,607
2K2	Any Antlerless Deer	310 / 316	25 / 31	10 / 12	7 / 8	1 / 1	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	369
2L	Any Antlered Deer	111 / 324	74 / 110	32 / 37	7 / 7	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	480
2L	Any Antlerless Deer	72 / 74	9 / 10	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	85
3A1	Any Antlered Deer	846 / 2,062	796 / 992	193 / 208	29 / 31	9 / 9	3 / 3	3 / 3	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	3,309
3A1	Any Antlerless Deer	200 / 202	13 / 13	3 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	218
3A2	Any Antlered Deer	827 / 1,180	348 / 365	59 / 61	15 / 15	3 / 3	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1,625
3A2	Any Antlerless Deer	286 / 286	15 / 15	3 / 3	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	305
3A3	Any Antlered Deer	196 / 1,225	400 / 920	236 / 376	64 / 87	11 / 13	3 / 4	2 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	2,628
3A3	Any Antlerless Deer	335 / 342	38 / 39	12 / 12	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	394
3A4	Any Antlered Deer	245 / 1,158	370 / 785	207 / 319	101 / 129	38 / 41	2 / 5	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	2,438
3A4	Any Antlerless Deer	457 / 472	31 / 36	7 / 8	0 / 1	1 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	519
3B1	Antlered Mule Deer	15 / 608	26 / 439	27 / 215	13 / 65	14 / 17	2 / 3	0 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1,348
3B1	Antlered Whitetail Deer	18 / 325	22 / 219	36 / 122	10 / 32	10 / 11	1 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	711
3B1	Antlerless Mule Deer	45 / 67	13 / 14	3 / 3	2 / 2	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	87
3B1	Antlerless Whitetail Deer	23 / 24	4 / 4	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	30
3B2	Antlered Mule Deer	49 / 283	71 / 206	18 / 37	4 / 7	1 / 1	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	535
3B2	Antlered Whitetail Deer	105 / 108	16 / 18	2 / 2	2 / 2	1 / 1	0 / 0	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	132
3B2	Antlerless Mule Deer	49 / 51	13 / 13	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	64
3B2	Antlerless Whitetail Deer	19 / 19	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	21
3B3	Any Antlered Deer	35 / 285	96 / 280	36 / 73	6 / 15	5 / 5	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	659
3B3	Any Antlerless Deer	105 / 111	11 / 15	2 / 2	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	130
3B3	Antlered Whitetail Deer	9 / 84	44 / 168	2 / 3	1 / 1	1 / 1	0 / 0	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	258
3B3	Antlerless Whitetail Deer	32 / 32	10 / 10	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	43



# 2023 DEER LICENSE LOTTERY RESULTS

UNIT	UNIT / TYPE	POINTS											TOTAL APPS.	
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+		
3C	Any Antlered Deer	13 / 350	43 / 500	27 / 155	14 / 49	8 / 10	1 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1,066
3C	Any Antlerless Deer	174 / 184	20 / 26	4 / 4	2 / 2	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	217
3D1	Any Antlered Deer	84 / 365	123 / 218	60 / 83	13 / 17	7 / 7	1 / 1	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	692
3D1	Any Antlerless Deer	57 / 58	8 / 8	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	68
3D1	Antlered Whitetail Deer	29 / 55	38 / 40	2 / 2	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	98
3D1	Antlerless Whitetail Deer	3 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	3
3D2	Any Antlered Deer	122 / 471	185 / 338	83 / 116	16 / 21	1 / 1	0 / 2	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	950
3D2	Any Antlerless Deer	108 / 108	9 / 9	1 / 1	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	119
3D2	Antlered Whitetail Deer	48 / 65	14 / 14	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	80
3D2	Antlerless Whitetail Deer	8 / 8	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	8
3E1	Any Antlered Deer	61 / 501	164 / 421	77 / 153	31 / 48	15 / 16	2 / 2	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1,142
3E1	Any Antlerless Deer	124 / 126	12 / 13	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	140
3E1	Antlered Whitetail Deer	41 / 149	92 / 142	5 / 7	0 / 0	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	299
3E1	Antlerless Whitetail Deer	7 / 7	4 / 4	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	12
3E2	Any Antlered Deer	200 / 607	255 / 358	67 / 80	9 / 12	4 / 4	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1,061
3E2	Any Antlerless Deer	190 / 195	19 / 20	3 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	218
3E2	Antlered Whitetail Deer	94 / 132	19 / 21	0 / 0	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	154
3E2	Antlerless Whitetail Deer	12 / 12	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	14
3F1	Any Antlered Deer	131 / 404	161 / 234	46 / 55	12 / 12	3 / 3	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	709
3F1	Any Antlerless Deer	69 / 69	7 / 7	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	78
3F1	Antlered Whitetail Deer	116 / 117	5 / 5	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	122
3F1	Antlerless Whitetail Deer	3 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	3
3F2	Any Antlered Deer	1,013 / 1,133	148 / 148	18 / 18	6 / 6	3 / 3	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1,309
3F2	Any Antlerless Deer	128 / 128	6 / 6	1 / 1	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	136
3F2	Antlered Whitetail Deer	130 / 130	3 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	133
3F2	Antlerless Whitetail Deer	7 / 7	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	8
4A	Antlered Mule Deer	4 / 349	6 / 293	14 / 253	10 / 171	46 / 95	17 / 22	3 / 4	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1,188
4A	Antlered Whitetail Deer	49 / 144	59 / 77	21 / 26	2 / 2	1 / 1	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	252
4A	Antlerless Mule Deer	21 / 22	5 / 5	3 / 3	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	31
4A	Antlerless Whitetail Deer	16 / 16	3 / 3	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	22
4B	Antlered Mule Deer	2 / 758	7 / 726	11 / 586	18 / 499	94 / 357	70 / 174	23 / 47	10 / 15	3 / 4	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	3,166
4B	Antlered Whitetail Deer	121 / 133	23 / 23	14 / 14	3 / 3	0 / 0	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	174
4B	Antlerless Mule Deer	74 / 86	5 / 6	2 / 5	1 / 2	1 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	101
4B	Antlerless Whitetail Deer	5 / 6	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	7
4C	Antlered Mule Deer	1 / 590	2 / 560	7 / 478	6 / 340	42 / 339	54 / 245	35 / 116	9 / 24	3 / 5	1 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	2,699
4C	Antlered Whitetail Deer	82 / 142	20 / 21	11 / 12	4 / 4	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	180
4C	Antlerless Mule Deer	29 / 82	5 / 8	4 / 5	0 / 1	3 / 3	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	100
4C	Antlerless Whitetail Deer	3 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	3
4D	Antlered Mule Deer	0 / 567	8 / 550	8 / 443	12 / 408	59 / 318	67 / 184	44 / 75	2 / 9	0 / 0	1 / 2	1 / 2	1 / 2	2,558
4D	Antlered Whitetail Deer	128 / 143	15 / 15	10 / 10	4 / 4	1 / 2	1 / 1	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	176
4D	Antlerless Mule Deer	70 / 97	7 / 8	6 / 6	1 / 2	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	114
4D	Antlerless Whitetail Deer	9 / 9	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	11
4E	Antlered Mule Deer	7 / 330	18 / 294	31 / 224	19 / 115	49 / 80	9 / 12	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	1,056
4E	Antlered Whitetail Deer	71 / 71	13 / 14	4 / 4	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	90
4E	Antlerless Mule Deer	39 / 47	3 / 4	0 / 0	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	52
4E	Antlerless Whitetail Deer	1 / 1	0 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	2
4F	Antlered Mule Deer	38 / 176	61 / 116	28 / 38	4 / 4	4 / 4	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	338
4F	Antlered Whitetail Deer	94 / 94	6 / 6	2 / 2	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	103
4F	Antlerless Mule Deer	20 / 20	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	22
4F	Antlerless Whitetail Deer	3 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	3
MUZ	Antlered Whitetail Deer	0 / 2,101	0 / 1,563	1 / 1,496	0 / 1,256	9 / 1,104	13 / 1,128	34 / 1,182	41 / 995	41 / 735	56 / 643	305 / 1,632	13,835	
MUZ	Antlerless Whitetail Deer	192 / 612	210 / 305	48 / 61	11 / 11	11 / 11	6 / 6	8 / 8	6 / 6	4 / 4	3 / 3	6 / 6	1,033	

## HOW THE LOTTERY WORKS

There are always questions concerning the Game and Fish Department's lottery.

Using deer as the example, though turkey works the same way, this is how it works.

If you fail to draw your first license choice in any given year, you receive a bonus point. You do not have to apply in the same unit, or for the same deer type each year, to qualify. You get an additional bonus point each year you apply and do not receive your first license choice.

You receive additional chances in the drawing for each bonus point accumulated. For points one through three, you are entered in the drawing two times the number of points you have. So, if you have two points you would get four additional chances to be drawn, compared to a person who got his or her first choice the previous year. If you're both competing for the same license, you have five chances, he or she has one.

When you accumulate four or more points, the number of additional chances is determined by cubing your bonus points. So, when you have four points, you will be in the drawing 64 additional times, 125 times if you have five points, and so on. Bonus points are accumulated if you do not draw your first license choice. You do not receive bonus points in years you do not apply.

Each drawing is still random, but the more bonus points you have, the better your odds. When you receive your first license choice, you lose your bonus points and start over. Bonus points can only be earned, or used, in the first drawing for each species in each year.

The license lottery consists of four separate drawings, one for each choice on the application. First, we hold a drawing for the first unit/first deer choice. When those are issued, we draw for the first unit/second deer choice, then the second unit/first deer choice, and finally the second unit/second deer choice.

## 2023 SPRING TURKEY LOTTERY RESULTS

UNIT	POINTS											TOTAL APPS.
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+	
02	149 / 374	86 / 120	19 / 22	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	518
03	45 / 45	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	46
04	91 / 124	29 / 30	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	154
06	14 / 14	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	14
13	318 / 318	6 / 6	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	324
17	349 / 382	36 / 36	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	420
19	222 / 222	6 / 6	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	229
25	721 / 721	4 / 4	0 / 0	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	726
27	704 / 806	119 / 120	6 / 6	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	932
30	682 / 682	16 / 16	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	698
31	27 / 27	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	27
37	493 / 738	201 / 205	15 / 15	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	958
40	20 / 57	19 / 25	3 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	85
44	82 / 82	4 / 4	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	87
45	77 / 77	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	77
47	24 / 28	4 / 4	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	32
50	214 / 488	141 / 154	20 / 21	3 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	666
51	356 / 356	3 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	359
53	127 / 155	14 / 14	3 / 3	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	173
98	289 / 541	124 / 139	8 / 8	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	688
99	188 / 234	27 / 27	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	261

## 2023 FALL TURKEY LOTTERY RESULTS

UNIT	POINTS											TOTAL APPS.
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+	
02	8 / 117	12 / 49	7 / 17	9 / 12	5 / 5	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	200
03	22 / 22	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	24
04	108 / 108	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	110
06	14 / 14	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	14
13	174 / 174	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	175
17	105 / 138	50 / 50	10 / 10	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	198
19	130 / 130	3 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	133
25	221 / 221	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	223
27	313 / 313	41 / 41	7 / 7	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	361
30	238 / 239	8 / 8	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	247
31	21 / 21	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	21
37	262 / 270	53 / 53	5 / 5	0 / 0	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	329
40	21 / 21	5 / 5	5 / 5	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	31
44	36 / 36	1 / 1	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	38
45	76 / 76	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	76
47	8 / 8	2 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	10
50	151 / 171	54 / 55	11 / 11	1 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	238
51	135 / 135	3 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	138
53	74 / 74	15 / 15	3 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	92
98	155 / 183	55 / 56	17 / 17	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	256
99	35 / 59	15 / 17	6 / 6	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	82

# 2023 PRONGHORN LOTTERY RESULTS

UNIT	UNIT / TYPE	POINTS											TOTAL APPS.
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+	
02A	Any Pronghorn	0 / 256	0 / 202	0 / 196	1 / 195	2 / 214	3 / 141	0 / 100	0 / 56	3 / 45	1 / 26	1 / 15	1,446
02B	Any Pronghorn	0 / 202	0 / 229	0 / 238	0 / 196	1 / 214	3 / 151	2 / 112	3 / 79	4 / 57	1 / 45	0 / 15	1,538
03A	Any Pronghorn	0 / 88	0 / 75	0 / 65	0 / 69	2 / 66	0 / 51	3 / 39	0 / 25	4 / 23	5 / 16	1 / 5	522
03B	Any Pronghorn	0 / 211	0 / 206	0 / 187	0 / 182	4 / 176	4 / 142	2 / 131	3 / 81	1 / 55	7 / 57	6 / 29	1,457
04A	Any Pronghorn	0 / 310	0 / 360	0 / 330	0 / 328	3 / 267	3 / 189	6 / 196	4 / 124	1 / 60	2 / 27	5 / 20	2,211
04C	Any Pronghorn	0 / 86	0 / 78	1 / 67	3 / 64	3 / 42	2 / 39	5 / 20	3 / 19	5 / 9	1 / 6	2 / 3	433
05A	Any Pronghorn	0 / 166	0 / 97	0 / 95	0 / 93	4 / 73	3 / 50	6 / 39	1 / 19	0 / 9	2 / 6	1 / 2	649
07A	Any Pronghorn	0 / 264	0 / 190	0 / 178	0 / 146	2 / 117	1 / 95	2 / 51	0 / 44	1 / 15	2 / 8	0 / 6	1,114

JUST EIGHT HUNTING UNITS WERE OPEN FOR THE 2023 PRONGHORN SEASON.



## 2023 LOTTERY NOTES

The number of deer gun licenses made available to hunters:

- 2016 – 49,000 deer gun licenses.
- 2017 – 54,500 deer gun licenses.
- 2018 – 55,150 deer gun licenses.
- 2019 – 65,500 deer gun licenses.
- 2020 – 69,050 deer gun licenses.
- 2021 – 72,200 deer gun licenses.
- 2022 – 64,200 deer gun licenses.
- 2023 – 53,400 deer gun licenses.

Drawing a buck license in 2023 was, again, not easy. Randy Meissner, Game and Fish Department licensing manager, said after 11,810 resident gratis licenses and 534 nonresident licenses were subtracted from the overall license allocation, just 21,460 buck licenses were available for the 61,914 hunters who applied for them as their first choice in the lottery.

## 2023 LOTTERY STATS

### DEER

- 75,117 – Number of people – not including 12,085 gratis applicants – who applied for deer gun lottery licenses, down from 76,783 in 2022.
- 42.65 – Percent of successful applicants, excluding gratis and nonresidents, for deer gun and muzzleloader licenses.
- 20 – Maximum number of bonus points for any applicant (nonresident mule deer buck applicants).
- 12,520 – Applicants with four or more bonus points.
- 13.74 – Percent of applicants with four or more bonus points.
- 53.35 – Percent of applicants with four or more bonus points who applied for a muzzleloader buck license.

### TURKEY

- 7,412 – Number of spring turkey licenses available to hunters, down from 7,647 in 2022.
- 84.6 – Percent of successful applicants for the spring season.
- 81.8 – Percent of applicants who received their first license choice for the spring season.
- 4,435 – Number of fall turkey licenses available, up from 3,975 in 2022.
- 72.3 – Percent of successful applicants for the fall season.
- 70.8 – Percent of applicants who received their first license choice for the fall season.

### PRONGHORN

- 8 – Number of hunting units open in a limited pronghorn season.
- 420 – Number of licenses available to hunters, down 1,550 from 2022.
- 9,375 – Number of people who applied for available licenses, down 6,306 from 2022.

# 2023 ENFORCEMENT DIVISION REVIEW

By Scott Winkelman

In our mission to protect and preserve North Dakota's natural resources, while lending guidance and aid to those who enjoy the outdoors, 2023 was a good year.

One of the standout accomplishments of our enforcement division in 2023 was our swift and effective response to multiple search and rescue operations. In the face of challenging weather conditions and diverse terrains, our officers demonstrated exceptional skill and commitment to ensuring the safety of outdoor enthusiasts. Their efforts undoubtedly saved lives and reinforced our division's reputation for excellence in emergency response.

Behind the scenes, our enforcement division undertook and successfully concluded several large, long-term investigations, targeting illegal activities that posed a threat to North Dakota's wildlife and ecosystems. The

meticulous efforts of our officers led to the apprehension of individuals involved in wildlife trafficking, poaching and other illicit activities. These victories not only uphold the principles of conservation but also send a clear message that illegal actions will not go unpunished.

Recognizing the vital role of a well-trained and motivated team, we implemented strategies to enhance recruitment and retention. We focused on creating a supportive and rewarding work environment, providing ongoing training opportunities, and fostering a strong sense of camaraderie among officers. These efforts resulted in a more robust and resilient team, ready to face the challenges of protecting North Dakota's natural resources.

As I look back on the accomplishments of our enforcement division in 2023, it's evident that the dedication and hard work of our team left an indelible mark on the conservation efforts of North Dakota. The multiple successful search and rescue operations, the completion of complex investigations, and the improvements in recruitment and retention collectively contribute to a legacy of excellence that will undoubtedly continue in the years to come. The North Dakota Game and Fish enforcement division remains steadfast in its commitment to safeguarding the state's wildlife and preserving its natural beauty for future generations.

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SCOTT WINKELMAN IS THE GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT'S CHIEF WARDEN.

Corey Erck, Department game warden, checks a hunter's license during the first week of the pheasant season.





From left, Scott Peterson, deputy director, Jonathan Tofteland, game warden, and Jeb Williams, director.

## TOFTELAND NAMED WILDLIFE OFFICER OF THE YEAR

Jonathan Tofteland, North Dakota Game and Fish Department district game warden in Bottineau, is the state's 2023 Wildlife Officer of the Year. Tofteland was honored by Shikar-Safari Club International, a private conservation organization that annually recognizes outstanding wildlife officers in each state.

In a nomination letter sent to Shikar-Safari, chief warden Scott Winkelman said Tofteland's district includes the Lake Metigoshe area along with the rest of Bottineau County and the Turtle Mountains.

"Warden Tofteland patrols by vehicle, boat, ATV and snowmobile to accomplish his enforcement goals in all seasons. He has assumed extra duties, such as taser instructor, and has proven his dedication to his chosen profession by serving as treasurer on the North American Wildlife Enforcement Officers Association Museum board," Winkelman said. "He has a tremendous grasp of the area within his district, the landowners therein and the natural resources that he is sworn to protect. Warden Tofteland is always willing to assist neighboring wardens with any investigations."



In addition, warden Mike Sedlacek, of Fargo was named North Dakota's Boating Officer of the Year. His district includes rivers, lakes and reservoirs in eastern North Dakota. Chief game warden Scott Winkelman said warden Sedlacek is experienced, knowledgeable and dedicated, makes good decisions and serves the citizens in an outstanding manner.

Also, district game wardens Sedlacek; Erik Schmidt, Linton; James Myhre, New Rockford; Shawn Sperling, Minot; Ken Skuza, Riverdale; Keenan Snyder, Williston; Courtney Springer, Elgin; Zane Manhart, Golva; and investigator Blake Riewer, Grand Forks, were recognized for their efforts as field training officers for committing countless hours to training new wardens.

## TURKEY FEDERATION NAMES SCHMIDT TOP WARDEN



Erik Schmidt, North Dakota Game and Fish Department district game warden, Linton, was named the National Wild Turkey Federation's Wildlife Officer of the Year for 2023. Scott Winkelman, Department chief warden, said Schmidt is well-deserving of the award as he is a dedicated warden and is unwavering in his efforts to safeguard North Dakota's natural resources and those people who participate in the outdoors.



# 2023 SUMMARY OF VIOLATIONS

BIG GAME	
Illegal taking/possession of big game	37
Failure to wear fluorescent orange	14
Tagging violations	30
CWD violations	16
Killing wrong species or sex	10
Shining big game	15
Other big game violations	29
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>151</b>

SMALL GAME	
Using gun able to hold more than 3 shells	70
Hunting before/after legal hours	12
Illegal possession/taking	10
Exceeding limit	51
Failure to leave identification or sex of game	66
Killing wrong sex or species	6
Wanton waste	32
Other small game violations	76
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>323</b>

BOATING	
Use of unlicensed or unnumbered boat	122
Failure to display boat registration	164
Operating without lights at night	27
Inadequate number of PFDs	215
Water skiing violations	10
Reckless or negligent operation	16
Operating vessel under influence/intoxicated	5
Other boating violations	175
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>734</b>

FISHING	
Exceeding limit	109
Fishing in closed/restricted area	1
Fishing with illegal bait	11
Paddlefish violations	3
ANS violations	98
Other fishing violations	130
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>352</b>

FURBEARER	
Furbearer violations	29
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>29</b>

GENERAL	
Use of motor vehicle off established trail	39
Hunting on posted land without permission	49
Aid in concealment of unlawful game	3
Loaded firearm in a motor vehicle	37
440-yard violation	9
Littering	5
Hunting in unharvested field	6
Other general violations	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>168</b>

LICENSING	
Hunting/fishing/trapping without proper license	250
Failure to carry license on person	289
Misrepresentation on license application	21
Other licensing violations	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>575</b>

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS/REFUGE	
Failure to obey posted regulations	26
Tree stand violations	9
Possession of glass beverage containers	6
Camping violations	1
Prohibited use of motor vehicles	5
PLOTS access violations	17
Other WMA/refuge violations	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>67</b>

MISCELLANEOUS	
Possession of controlled substance	24
Possession of drug paraphernalia	20
Minor in possession	20
Criminal trespass	63
Other miscellaneous	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>138</b>

COMMERCIAL	
Commercial violations	11
Total	11
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>2,548</b>

## INCIDENTS 2023 - TOP 10 COUNTIES

(An incident is defined as any situation that requires a response from a game warden. It does not have to be a crime. The situation could be, for example, a stranded angler.)

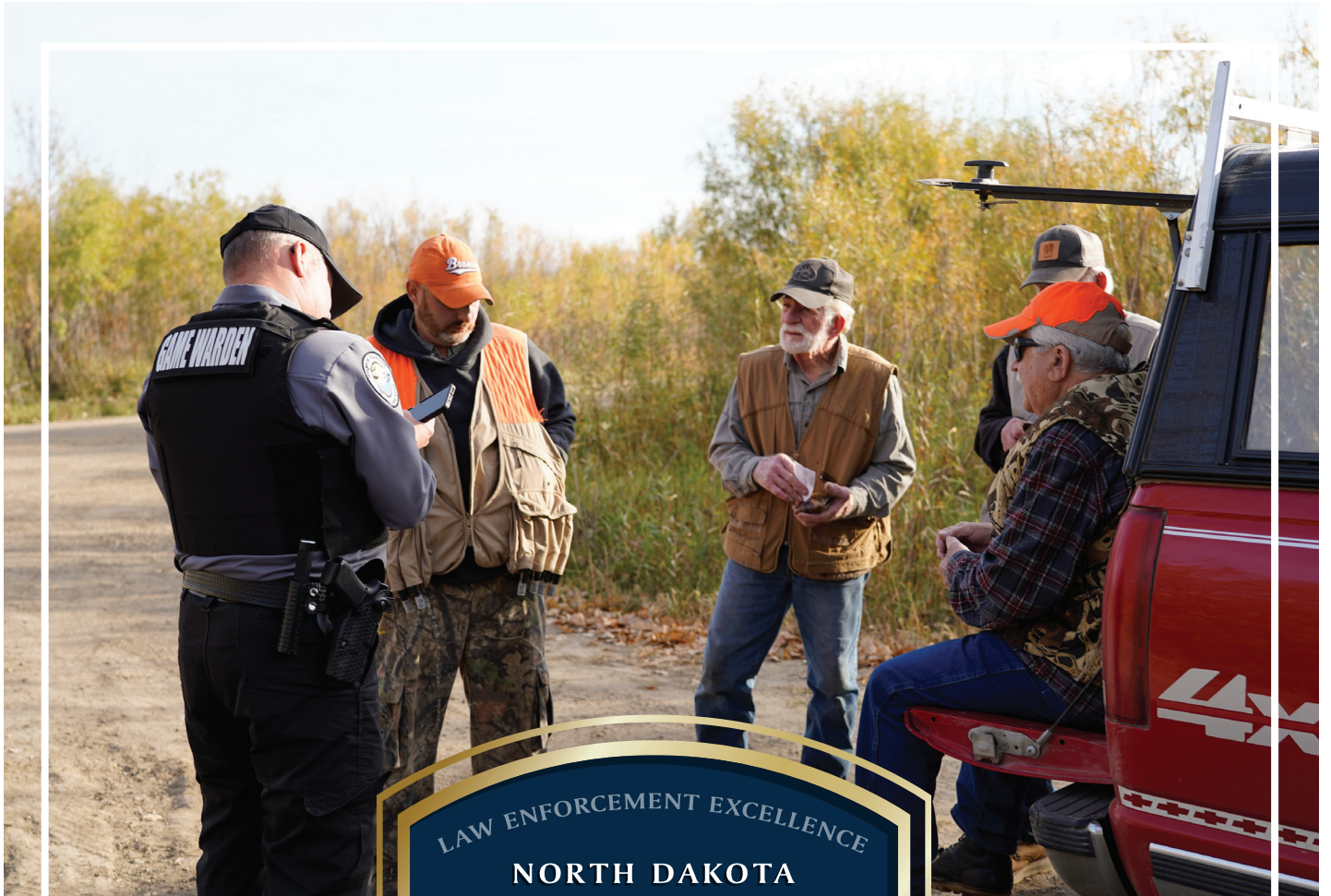
- Ramsey - 197
  - Barnes - 192
  - Williams - 170
  - McLean - 165
  - McKenzie - 153
  - Cass - 149
  - Mountrail - 144
  - Burleigh - 137
  - Ward - 132
  - Stark - 122
- Total - 3,229**

## CITATIONS 2023 - TOP 10 COUNTIES

- Ramsey - 262
  - Williams - 141
  - Benson - 131
  - Barnes - 129
  - Mountrail - 114
  - Burleigh - 104
  - McKenzie - 98
  - Logan - 77
  - Stark - 77
  - McLean - 74
- Total - 2,548**

“In 2023, our wardens made 53,411 field contacts, which is a significant number because it shows that we are reaching a lot of people recreating in the field or on the water. A field contact is any time one of our wardens interacts with someone in the field while checking their license, bag limit, whatever. These interactions allow our wardens to answer questions and point people in the right direction. As I've said before, it's a friendly interaction and is good all around.”

SAID SCOTT WINKELMAN, CHIEF WARDEN.



LAW ENFORCEMENT EXCELLENCE

NORTH DAKOTA

**BEHIND  
THE  
BADGE**

GAME AND FISH

For an inside look into the life of a game warden,  
check out Behind the Badge.

[gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov)



# TRIMMING A **BLOATED** BULLHEAD POPULATION

By Ron Wilson

**T**he North Dakota Game and Fish Department introduced a predator into a Morton County lake in 2023 in hopes of controlling a bloated bullhead population that provides little value to anglers.

The introduction of thousands of channel catfish into the 278-acre Sweet Briar Lake last spring was the start of a two-year collaborative study with the University of North Dakota.





*"Every lake only has a certain amount of energy within that system, and there's only a certain amount of space for the fish in there."*

"Sweet Briar Lake was a good candidate for this study because it does have a dense population of bullheads. While it is still a very popular fishery, close to the large population center of Bismarck-Mandan, the quality of fishing just isn't where we want it to be right now," said Paul Bailey, Department south central district fisheries supervisor. "The bullhead population has really impacted the angling value of Sweet Briar Lake, so it was a good

candidate lake for us to investigate this technique. We've had success using channel catfish to control black bullhead populations in some smaller fisheries, so this was an effort to try and scale up this operation to see if we could have success controlling black bullheads in a larger fishery."

Sweet Briar isn't the only North Dakota fishery that has an abundance of bullheads, which isn't a good thing when you consider a lake can harbor only so much life.

"Every lake only has a certain amount of energy within that system, and there's only a certain amount of space for the fish in there," said Tyler Bennett, UND master's student conducting the field sampling in the study. "When you have these overabundant black bullhead populations, that takes away space and productivity that can go into your more desirable game fish populations like walleye, northern pike, yellow perch or bluegills."

Bailey added that while the goal is to significantly trim the bullhead population, an added benefit is the thousands of catfish released into the lake over time will also provide some value to anglers.



Tyler Bennett, UND master's student holds a black bullhead (left) and a channel catfish netted from Sweet Briar Lake for research purposes.

The roughly 4,000 catfish, weighing about 2 pounds on average, stocked in Sweet Briar for the study were trapped in Lake Oahe in April 2023.

"It was a big undertaking and that represented just shy of 10,000 pounds of catfish," Bailey said. "It was a pretty labor-intensive process, which is another reason we would like some better guidance on this to make sure that we're spending our manpower and our resources in the best way possible to utilize these catfish for controlling nuisance bullhead populations."

In spring, Bennett and crew conducted a mark-recapture estimate on bullheads in the lake. Of those bullheads captured in nets, they clipped the adipose fins on fish longer than 6 inches.

"And what we ended up finding out is that there are a lot of bullheads in Sweet Briar," Bennett said. "Our population estimate was

over a quarter million. That's an extremely large population for a 200-plus acre lake. That's just the fish greater than 6 inches and there was probably as many, if not more, smaller bullheads that we didn't take into consideration."

Throughout the study, Bennett and Department fisheries personnel have netted a number of catfish. These fish were then taken to a lab to determine what was making up their diet.

"So, once we have that information, we can then see what's the importance of black bullheads to a channel catfish's diet in Sweet Briar," Bennett said. "Are bullheads an important prey item for channel catfish? If so, to what extent? And do we then expect to see the channel catfish then predate so heavily on bullheads that that population might collapse?"

It's been revealed in the still-young study that, yes, channel catfish are preying on Sweet

Briar's abundant bullhead population, but they're also opportunistic when it comes to eating.

"So far, we've seen that these catfish have certainly fed fairly well on black bullheads, especially when we initially stocked them this spring," Bailey said. "Then these catfish tended to shift their diet a little bit during summer, eating more crayfish, and because we had a good hatch of grasshoppers, they were eating grasshoppers that ended up in the lake."


In spring, when the catfish were introduced to Sweet Briar, Bennett said bullheads made up about 40% of total mass within a catfish's diet. The hope was, as the grasshopper population thinned, along with other summertime foraging items, that the catfish would return to concentrating on bullheads.

Because fisheries managers have so few tools to manage troublesome bullhead populations in North Dakota waters, it's hoped the findings from the two-year study will reveal a solution.

"What we wish to gain is some better guidance on how to use this technique of using channel catfish to control bullheads," Bailey said. "If so, we'll be able to apply it to other lakes that are having issues with bullhead overabundance, with the idea of improving angling opportunities in those waters as well."

RON WILSON IS EDITOR OF NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS.

*"It was a big undertaking and that represented just shy of 10,000 pounds of catfish."*



Channel catfish netted in spring during pike spawning operations on Lake Oahe.



## HUNTER EDUCATION

# Quarter Million Graduates and Counting

By Ron Wilson

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's hunter education program, required of anyone born after Dec. 31, 1961, is on pace to hit 250,000 graduates sometime this spring.

This milestone is significant for a program that got its start in the state in 1979.

"Hitting a quarter million graduates is a testament to all our volunteers from Grand Forks to Bowman who teach hunter ed in their communities. And some of them have been teaching since the program's inception," said Brian Schaffer, Department hunter education coordinator. "It's really quite the accomplishment in a state that doesn't even have a million people living in it, that over the last 40 or so years we've taught over a quarter million hunter education students and made hunting safer, not just for hunters, but for everyone in North Dakota."

Hunter education was developed in the 1950s in different parts of the country and

**VOLUNTEER HUNTER EDUCATION INSTRUCTOR, WILLIAM BAHM OF ALMONT, AND THE MANY OTHERS JUST LIKE HIM AROUND THE STATE ARE THE BACKBONE OF THE GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT'S LONG-RUNNING HUNTER EDUCATION PROGRAM.**



implemented in North Dakota 40-plus years ago by state law, with the goal of reducing the number of accidents occurring in the field.

"Primarily in the 1950s, it was looking at reducing the number of fatalities that were occurring and it's done a great job of doing that nationwide," Schaffer said. "What we want people to take away from hunter ed is the basics of firearm safety.

"A lot of students are handling firearms for the first time in hunter education. Handling firearms safely isn't something you learn in a classroom in 14 hours, it's something you need to be dedicated to for your entire life," he added. "It's important for everyone to remember that hunter education and firearm safety is every-

one's responsibility. Sometimes that's just a simple conversation with people we are hunting with or for you to think about it before you load your firearm and head into a field."

While the primary focus of the program is firearm safety, whether that's storing firearms in the home, transporting them in a vehicle or using them out in the field, students are also being introduced to wildlife conservation, landowner relations and basic safety in the field as a hunter.

The Game and Fish Department offers two options for fulfilling the hunter education requirement in North Dakota.

"The first option is what the majority of people have taken over the last 40-plus years and that's the traditional course, which is 14 hours of in-person learning. The number of days can vary, but the total is 14 hours of instruction with some of our volunteer instructors," Schaffer said. "The other option, which is gaining popularity just due to busier lives and busier schedules, is our home study option, which still requires two meetings in person, the first night and the last night.

"The first night we go over North Dakota specific information, and then it's heavily focused on firearm handling and how to be safe in the field with firearms," he added. "And then you go home, and you have two weeks to complete the online material at your pace. Then you come back on the last night of class, and you are required to take and pass the same written and practical exam as a traditional class student."

**TWO HUNTER EDUCATION STUDENTS AT AN IN-PERSON CLASS OFFERED IN ALMONT EARLIER THIS WINTER.**





One of the biggest hurdles for students is simply finding a hunter education course to fit their schedules. Understanding that, now is the time to find a course near you.

“With our hunting season wrapped up, people aren’t really thinking about the next hunting season, but with hunter education, the vast majority of our classes are taught from about the middle of January through June,” Schaffer said. “That was historically the case just due to everyone being in the deer lottery in June. While we started teaching a few other courses, trying to get courses developed throughout summer, the vast majority still occur during the winter months here in North Dakota. If you used the apprentice option last year or you’re in need of hunter education, now would be the time to start looking.”

Schaffer said some of North Dakota’s smaller communities offer just one to two courses per



**BRIAN SCHAFFER, DEPARTMENT  
HUNTER EDUCATION  
COORDINATOR, HELPS OUT AT AN  
IN-PERSON CLASS IN ALMONT.**

year. And in the larger cities, like Bismarck, Grand Forks and Fargo, hunter education courses can fill up quick.

"It's important to get into those classes the earlier the better if it fits your schedule," he said. "But just because you don't get into that first one in some of our larger locations, that doesn't mean there's not going to be more courses available throughout the year. The online course listing only shows current courses that are available, and we don't list those courses more than two to three weeks out ... so keep an eye out."

The Game and Fish Department's hunter education program has long been driven by dedicated volunteers across the state. Some, as Schaffer mentioned, have taught young (and old) would-be hunters for 40-plus years, while others are pretty new to the fold. Yet, like the sometimes-difficult task of finding a class that fits the student's schedule, luring new volunteers into the mix can be challenging.

"We're always looking for people with a passion for sharing our knowledge, educating students and fostering North Dakota's long and storied hunting heritage," Schaffer said. "And it's not just teaching a 14-hour course in your community. If you just want to be involved a little bit and, say, help out on test night in your community, just give us a call and we can start that process. There's a way to get involved in your community and we certainly appreciate any help we can get."

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RON WILSON IS EDITOR OF *NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS*.



## A Course Near You

If you were born after 1961, are 12 years or older, you must take an in-person or home study certified hunter education course before you can get a firearm or bowhunting license in North Dakota.

Individuals interested in taking a hunter education class in 2024 must click on the education link at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). To register for a class, click on "enroll" next to the specific class, and follow the simple instructions. Personal information is required. Classes are listed by city and can also be sorted by start date. Classes will be added throughout the year as they become finalized.

Individuals interested in receiving a notice by email or SMS text message when each hunter education class is added, can click on the "subscribe to news and alerts" link below the news section on the Game and Fish home page. Check the box labeled "hunter education" under the education program updates.

Students must turn 12 during the calendar year to take the home study course, and age 11 during the calendar year to take the traditional in-person class.

**HUNTER EDUCATION CLASSES**  
**[gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov)**



# BUFFALOBERRY PATCH



## Record Number of Geese Tallied in Survey

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual midwinter waterfowl survey in early January was a record breaker.

During the aerial midwinter survey, one of the longest running coordinated migratory bird surveys in North America, biologists counted more than 300,000 Canada geese.

"Our old record was about 222,000 Canada geese, so we blew that out of the water," said Mike Szymanski, Department migratory game bird management supervisor.

Compared to last year when winter came early and stayed late, there was a lot more open water along the Missouri River System to hold birds. Last winter, for example, Lake Sakakawea iced over on Dec. 18, making it one of the earliest dates for freeze up in recent years.

"We had a really nice December ... a lot of areas were almost 10 degrees above average for the entire month of December," Szymanski said. "There was a lot of open water under nice conditions, with no foraging restraints on the birds. That translated into our wintering waterfowl estimates. Last year, we really didn't need to survey any of Lake Sakakawea because of early freeze up. But this year the lake was open from about the Van Hook Arm down to the dam and the U.S. Highway 83 causeway."

Interestingly, biologists counted more than 9,000 snow geese during the survey.

"That was kind of surprising. We've always had some snow geese here and there, but most years we have zero," Szymanski said. "To have sizable numbers like that is pretty interesting."

Also, biologists typically see around 5,000 to 10,000 mallards during the survey. During this year's midwinter count, the tally jumped to 43,000 birds.

While that sounds like a sizeable increase, Szymanski said the number of mallards tallied, in the grand scheme

of things, was simply a drop in the bucket when it comes to continental populations.

"We really don't have that many mallards in North Dakota during the midwinter survey," he said.

All states in the Central Flyway participate in the midwinter survey during the same time frame to reduce the possibility of counting birds more than once.

"What we learn in the surveys is used primarily to estimate some of the species that we don't have very good breeding count estimates for, especially arctic nesting birds," Szymanski said. "It also helps paint a picture of waterfowl distributions, kind of in the middle of hunting season for some of the wintering states. And also changes in wintering distributions over time."



## Winter Wildlife Advice

Wildlife managers urge outdoor enthusiasts to consider where they recreate during North Dakota's leanest months to spare already stressed animals simply trying to survive the elements.

This advice is true during any Northern Plains winter.

Game and Fish Department managers understand North Dakotans want to get outdoors and have fun in winter because we have several months of it. Even so, the tougher the winter is, it is important that people riding snowmobiles, shed hunting, cross-country skiing or doing whatever are cognizant about where wildlife are and to view them from a distance.

That means waiting to shed hunt until later in the spring so that you're not pushing deer in and out of thermal cover where they're trying to just conserve energy. Animals forced into the open are exposed to the elements a lot more, which adds further stress. Also, people need to realize that harassing wildlife from snowmobiles or other machines is illegal in North Dakota.

It's common for snowmobilers and others to ride in areas where snow has accumulated, such as near shelterbelts and other wooded habitat because that's where the drifts are, but people also must realize there could be deer or other wildlife within those areas to get out of the weather. So, every time animals are pushed from



those areas, it increases the amount of energy they expend to survive the next day.

These same warnings, for shed hunters, skiers and others, also apply on Game and Fish Department owned or operated wildlife management areas where many animals gather to weather the winter months.



## Spring Light Goose Conservation Order

North Dakota's spring light goose conservation order opens February 17 and continues through May 12.

Residents must have a valid current season 2023-24 (valid through March 31) or 2024-25 (required April 1) combination license, or a small game, and general game and habitat license.

Nonresidents need a 2024 spring light goose conservation order license. The cost is \$50 and is valid statewide. Nonresidents who hunt in the spring remain eligible to buy a fall season license. The spring license does not count against the 14-day fall waterfowl hunting season regulation.

In addition, nonresident youth under age 16 can purchase a license at the resident fee.

A federal duck stamp is not required for either residents or nonresidents.

Resident and nonresident licenses are available online at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

Hunters must register annually with the Harvest Information Program prior to hunting in each state. The HIP number can be obtained online. The HIP number obtained for North Dakota's spring conservation order is also valid for North Dakota's fall hunting season.

The spring conservation order is only open to light geese – snows, blues, and Ross's. Species identification is important because white-fronted and Canada geese travel with light geese. The conservation order is closed to whitefronts, Canada geese, swans and all other migratory birds.

## Youth Conservation and Leadership Summer Camp

The 1st Battalion of North Dakota Waterfowl Brigade will take place June 3-7 at the 4-H Center in Washburn.



NDWTFL is a hands-on, five-day, immersive learning experience for youth ages 13-17. The camp is designed to educate participants about the importance of wetland ecosystems, waterfowl biology, flock dynamics, shooting skills and safety, stewardship, public speaking, leadership development, and more.

The deadline to apply is March 15.

NDWTFL is a program of Texas Brigades, a Texas-based 501(c)(3) focused on educating and empowering adolescents to become conservation ambassadors.

Additional information and applications can be found at [texasbrigades.org/applications](http://texasbrigades.org/applications).



## Hunter Harvest Surveys Important

While North Dakota's 2023 hunting seasons have come and gone, hunter success, or lack thereof, still matters to wildlife managers.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has conducted hunter harvest surveys for more than a half-century, using the findings to help manage the state's wildlife populations.

Thousands of surveys are sent annually, and participation is strongly urged because hunter harvest plays a noted role, for example, in setting hunting license numbers for the upcoming season.

Hunters are surveyed about their hunting activity because understanding how many animals were removed from the population is an important ecological piece of information. The information collected from the hunter harvest surveys are compared against where the Department stands with its harvest objectives at any point in a given year. And that can mean, in some cases, license increases. But ultimately these surveys are important because they inform the recommendations passed along to the governor during the proclamation setting process.

Thousands of big game, small game, waterfowl, swan, turkey and furbearer questionnaires will be emailed to randomly selected hunters. A follow-up survey will be mailed to those who did not respond to the first survey.

Not everyone who, say, receives a hunter harvest survey for the 2023 deer gun season will have harvested a deer, but those hunters still need to fill them out and return their surveys.

The surveys are designed so that a random sample of hunters receive them, and it's understood that some hunters weren't successful, which in a lot of ways is just as important as knowing who did harvest a deer.

The hunter harvest surveys are short and take very little time to complete. A follow-up survey will be mailed to those who did not respond to the emailed survey.

The more surveys returned to the Department from hunters, the more robust the statistical information is to help produce better harvest estimates.



## Big Three Lottery

Elk, moose and bighorn sheep applications must be submitted online before midnight March 27.

To apply online, visit the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). Paper applications are not available. Hunters who have received a license through the lottery in the past are not eligible to apply for that species again.

In 2023, 26,386 people applied for the 253 moose licenses; 24,091 applied for the 559 elk licenses; and 20,290 applied for the five bighorn sheep licenses.

## STAFF NOTES



### Jensen Retires from Agency

Bill Jensen, longtime North Dakota Game and Fish Department employee, retired in January after 33 years with the agency.

Jensen was a big game management biologist in Bismarck at the time of his retirement.



### Krebs New Fisheries Hire

Ethan Krebs was hired earlier this winter as a fisheries biological technician for the Game and Fish Department in Williston.

A graduate of Valley City State University, Krebs spent three summers as a fisheries seasonal in Riverdale and was later hired as a long-term seasonal before accepting the promotion in Williston.



From left, Emily Spolyar, Pheasants Forever, and Nate Harling.

### Harling Wins PF Award

Nate Harling, Game and Fish Department habitat manager, received the Pheasants Forever Wildlife Partner of the Year award in January.

"From the field to the board room, to the capitol building, Nate Harling is on the frontlines of creating habitat. He's shown time and time again that there's no one more willing to roll up their sleeves alongside us to work through challenges and find creative solutions," said a Pheasants Forever spokesperson. "His thoughtful way of analyzing and approaching things makes every team and project he's committed to better. Not to mention, he's a passionate hunter. The wildlife of North Dakota and those who care about that wildlife are lucky to have Nate Harling sharing his time, talent, and passion with us."



# BACKCAST

By Ron Wilson

**M**y office is located at the south end of Game and Fish headquarters in Bismarck. I haven't moved since I walked into the building 20 years ago.

Two of the maps that hang on one wall frame a shoulder mount of a mule deer buck. The maps provide quick insight and the locations of Game and Fish Department wildlife management areas and managed fishing waters.

On the opposite side of the room, three large bookshelves house multiple copies of *North Dakota OUTDOORS* magazines dating back to the early 1930s, hundreds of photographic slides, old black and white prints, three outdated dictionaries and a first-place trophy for a 4-H club crow control contest from 1947.

Over time, I've seen deer, geese, ducks, squirrels and wild turkeys out my office window. While I can't see Hay Creek from here, I know where it's at and I remember hanging over the wooden railing of the small bridge in 2011 as chinook salmon, seemingly so out of place that far from the Missouri River, went through the motions of spawning for naught.

While biologists at the time knew how the salmon ended up where they did, by exiting the Missouri and pointing their noses upstream for roughly 6 miles in Apple and Hay creeks, I still scratch my head at the illogical route I took to get here. In this office. Working for this agency.

As I look back, which is something I can't help as the end of my career is way closer than the beginning, I'm certain Bill had much to do with it.

This is the way I remember it: Roughly 30 years ago I was sitting in a mammalogy class at the University of North Dakota, a required course to complete a wildlife

biology degree that I was certain would get me hired at the Game and Fish Department. During a break in, say, examining the skull structure of *Sylvilagus floridanus* (eastern cottontail), Bill Jensen, Game and Fish big game biologist, gave a presentation on trapping mule deer in the badlands for research purposes.

It was a good presentation, teamed with some slides of him wrestling mule deer to fit them with radio collars. Cool stuff. Inspiring to those of us who envisioned ourselves wandering the rugged up and down of the badlands doing similar work.

During the question-and-answer part of his talk, one of my classmates asked for advice on getting hired at the agency. Bill asked for a show of hands of those of who did summer intern work at the Game and Fish? The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service? Ducks Unlimited? And so on. I was the only student who didn't raise their hand.

I understood what he was saying, the significance of getting your foot in the door before the door was open. As an older than average student — easily the oldest in the class — it was obvious I was up a creek, didn't even know where the door was located.

I switched majors before Bill made the drive home from Grand Forks to Bismarck.

I was reminded of this when Bill announced his retirement earlier this winter after 33 years with the Department. While I certainly won't make it that long, I did have the chance to thank him for helping me eventually find the door.

---

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

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North Dakota Game and Fish Department  
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Bismarck, ND 58501

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You just never know what Mother Nature is going to toss our way here on the Northern Plains. Last winter, ice anglers struggled to get on many of their favorite waters as 100 inches of snow or so blocked access. While waiting for things to finally freeze up and make for safe fishing conditions was an issue earlier this winter, accessing Game and Fish Department managed waters hasn't been a concern so far.

PHOTO BY TY STOCKTON



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