

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

\$2.00 August-September 2024



NORTH
Dakota | Game and Fish
Be Legendary.

DEPARTMENT DIRECTORY

Governor Doug Burgum

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION

Game and Fish Director: Jeb Williams
Deputy Director: Scott Peterson
Chief, Administrative Services: Kim Kary
Federal Aid Manager: Corey Wentland
Administrative Staff Officer: Justin Mattson
Administrative Assistant: Lynn Timm
Building Maint. Supervisor: Brandon Diehl
Administrative Officer: Melissa Long, Alan Peterson
Accounting Manager: Angie Morrison
Accountants: Kelly Wike, Ashley Hillerson
Business Operations Manager: Brian Hosek
Technical Operations Lead: Alan Reile
Data Scientist: Shane Wegner
Licensing Manager: Randy Meissner
Assistants: Amanda Anstrom, Tracy Price, Tana Bentz, Tanya Mikkelsen, Elizabeth Klein
Administrative Assistant – Dickinson: Stephanie Richardson
Administrative Assistant – Devils Lake: Lisa Tofte
Administrative Assistant – Jamestown: Tonya Kukowski
Administrative Assistant – Riverdale: Mattea Bierman
Administrative Assistant – Williston: Stephanie Wellman

CONSERVATION AND COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION

Division Chief: Greg Link, Bismarck
Communications Supervisor: Greg Freeman, Bismarck
Editor: *North Dakota OUTDOORS*: Ron Wilson, Bismarck
R3 Coordinator: Cayla Bendel, Bismarck
Digital Media Editor: Lara Anderson, Bismarck
Video Project Supervisor: Mike Anderson, Bismarck
Photographer/Videographer: Ashley Peterson, Bismarck
Marketing Specialist: Jackie Ressler, Bismarck
Information Specialist: Dawn Jochim, Bismarck
Graphic Artist: Kristi Fast, Bismarck
Education Supervisor: Marty Egeland, Bismarck
Education Coordinator: Jeff Long, Bismarck
Hunter Education Coordinator: Brian Schaffer, Bismarck
Outreach Biologists: Doug Leier, West Fargo; Greg Gullickson, Minot; Jim Job, Grand Forks
Conservation Supervisor: Bruce Krefl, Bismarck
Resource Biologists: John Schumacher, Aaron Larsen, Bismarck
Conservation Biologists: Sandra Johnson, Patrick Isakson, Elisha Mueller, Bismarck
Administrative Assistant: Amber Schroeter, Bismarck

ENFORCEMENT DIVISION

Division Chief: Scott Winkelman, Bismarck
Investigative Supervisor: Jim Burud, Kenmare
Investigator: Blake Riewer, Grand Forks
Operations Supervisor: Jackie Lundstrom, Bismarck
Region No. 1 Warden Supvr: Michael Sedlacek, Jamestown
District Wardens: Corey Erck, Bismarck; Andrew Dahlgren, Milnor; Erik Schmidt, Linton; Greg Hastings, Jamestown; Noah Raitz, LaMoure; Gavin Herbert, Steele
Region No. 2 Warden Supvr: Paul Freeman, Devils Lake
District Wardens: Jonathan Tofteland, Bottineau; Jonathan Peterson, Devils Lake; James Myhre, New Rockford; Alan Howard, Cando; Drew Johnson, Finley; Sam Feldmann, Rugby; Gage Muench, Grand Forks
Region No. 3 Warden Supvr: Joe Lucas, Riverdale
District Wardens: Ken Skuza, Riverdale; Michael Raasakka, Stanley; Connor Folkers, Watford City; Shawn Sperling, Minot; Keenan Snyder, Williston; Josh Hedstrom, Tioga; Riley Gerding, Kenmare; Clayton Edstrom, Turtle Lake
Region No. 4 Warden Supvr: Dan Hoenke, Dickinson
District Wardens: Kylor Johnston, Hazen; Zachary Biberdorf, Bowman; Courtney Sprenger, Elgin; Zane Manhart, Golve; Jerad Bluem, Mandan; Zachary Schuchard, Richardson
Administrative Assistant: Lori Kensington, Bismarck

WILDLIFE DIVISION

Division Chief: Casey Anderson, Bismarck
Assistant Division Chief: Bill Haase, Bismarck
Game Mgt. Section Leader: Stephanie Tucker, Bismarck
Pilot: Jeff Faught, Bismarck
Upland Game Mgt. Supvr: Jesse Kolar, Dickinson
Upland Game Mgt. Biologist: Rodney Gross, Bismarck
Migratory Game Bird Mgt. Supvr: Mike Szymanski, Bismarck
Big Game Mgt. Supvr: Bruce Stillings, Dickinson
Big Game Mgt. Biologists: Brett Wiedmann, Dickinson; Jason Smith, Jamestown; Ben Matykiewicz, Bismarck
Survey Coordinator: Chad Parent, Bismarck
Wildlife Veterinarian: Dr. Charlie Bahnsen, Bismarck
Wildlife Health Biologist: Mason Ryckman, Bismarck
Game Management Biological Technician: Ryan Herigstad, Bismarck
Wildlife Resource Management Section Leader: Kent Luttschwager, Williston
Wildlife Resource Mgt. Supvrs: Brian Prince, Devils Lake; Brian Kietzman, Jamestown; Dan Halstead, Riverdale; Blake Schaan, Lonetree; Levi Jacobson, Bismarck
Wildlife Resource Mgt. Biologists: Randy Littlefield, Lonetree; Rodd Compson, Jamestown; Judd Jasmer, Dickinson; Todd Buckley, Williston; Jake Oster, Riverdale
Wildlife Biological Technicians: Tom Crutchfield, Jim Houston, Bismarck; Dan Morman, Robert Miller, Riverdale; Jason Rowell, Jamestown; Scott Olson, Devils Lake; Zach Eustice, Williston; Colton Soiseth, Quentin Corcoran, Lonetree
Private Land Section Leader: Kevin Kading, Bismarck
Habitat Manager: Nathan Harling, Bismarck
Private Land Field Operation Supvrs: Curtis Francis, East Region, Andrew Dinges, West Region, Bismarck
Private Land Biologists: Colin Penner, Jens Johnson, Bismarck; Jaden Honeyman, Ryan Huber, Riverdale; Renae Schultz, Jeff Williams, Jamestown; Terry Oswald, Jr., Lonetree; Andrew Ahrens, Devils Lake; Erica Sevigny, Williston; Brandon Ramsey, Dickinson; Matthew Parvey, Devils Lake
Procurement Officer: Dale Repnow, Bismarck
Administrative Assistant: Alegra Powers, Bismarck
Lonetree Administrative Assistant: Diana Raugust, Harvey

FISHERIES DIVISION

Division Chief: Greg Power, Bismarck
Fisheries Mgt. Section Leader: Scott Gangl, Bismarck
Fisheries Supvrs: Russ Kinzler, Dave Fryda, Riverdale; Paul Bailey, Bismarck; Brandon Kratz, Jamestown; Aaron Slominski, Williston; Bryan Sea, Devils Lake
Fisheries Biologists: Todd Caspers, Devils Lake; Mike Johnson, Jamestown; Jeff Merchant, Dickinson; Zach Kjos, Riverdale
Fisheries Biological Technicians: Phil Miller, Devils Lake; Justen Barstad, Bismarck; Brian Frohlich, Riverdale; Lucas Rott, Jamestown; Ethan Krebs, Williston
Production/Development Section Supvr: Jerry Weigel, Bismarck
Aquatic Nuisance Species Coordinator: Benjamin Holen, Jamestown
Aquatic Nuisance Species Biologists: Mason Hammer, Kyle Oxley, Jamestown
Fisheries Development Supvr: Bob Frohlich, Bismarck
Fisheries Dev. Proj. Mgr: Wesley Erdle, Bismarck
Fisheries Development Specialist: Kyle Hoge, Jacob Heyer, Joe Fladeland, Bismarck
Administrative Assistant: Janice Vetter, Bismarck

ADVISORY BOARD

District 1Beau Wisness, Keene
District 2Travis Leier, Velva
District 3Edward Dosch, Devils Lake
District 4Karissa Daws, Michigan
District 5Doug Madsen, Harwood
District 6Cody Sand, Ashley
District 7Jody Sommer, Mandan
District 8Rob Brooks, Rhame



NORTH
Dakota | Game and Fish
Be Legendary.



Contributing photographers for this issue: Mike Anderson, Jesse Kolar, Sandra Johnson and Ashley Peterson.

Official publication of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (ISSN 0029-2761)

100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095

Website: gf.nd.gov • Email: ndgf@nd.gov

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

• Administration 701-328-6305

• *North Dakota Outdoors* Subscriptions 701-328-6363

• Hunter Education 701-328-6615

• The TTY/TTD (Relay ND) number for the hearing or speech impaired is 800-366-6888

Periodical Postage Paid at Bismarck, ND 58501 and additional entry offices. Printed in the United States

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
North Dakota OUTDOORS
100 North Bismarck Expressway
Bismarck, ND 58501-5095

Report All Poachers (RAP) 701-328-9921

In cooperation with North Dakota Wildlife Federation and North Dakota State Radio.

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

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2024 • NUMBER 2 • VOLUME LXXXVII

CONTENTS

- 2** | My 2 Cents
- 4** | 2024 Hunting Season Outlook
- 20** | An Issue of Loneliness
- 24** | Thousands of Acres Added to PLOTS
- 26** | Nice Pronghorn Bump
- 28** | Buffaloberry Patch
- 33** | Back Cast



Despite an abundant breeding population in the state, too many North Dakota hunters forgo the dove season. While the fast-flying birds can be difficult to hit at times, they provide an opportunity to get outdoors and hear your shotgun go off before grouse, pheasants and other birds come into play.

North Dakota OUTDOORS is published 10 times a year, monthly except for the months of April and September. Subscription rates are \$10 for one year or \$20 for three years. Group rates of \$7 a year are available to organizations presenting 25 or more subscriptions. Remittance should be by check or money order payable to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. Indicate if subscription is new or renewal. The numbers on the upper right corner of the mailing label indicate the date of the last issue a subscriber will receive unless the subscription is renewed.

Permission to reprint materials appearing in *North Dakota OUTDOORS* must be obtained from the author, artist or photographer. We encourage contributions; contact the editor for writer and photography guidelines prior to submission.

The NDGFD receives Federal financial assistance from the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the US Coast Guard. In accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the NDGFD joins the US Department of the Interior and its Bureaus and the US Department of Homeland Security in prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex (in education programs or activities) and also religion. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or you desire further information, please write to: ND Game and Fish Department, Attn: Chief of Administrative Services, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095 or to: Office of Civil Rights, Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, DC 20240.



Front Cover

North Dakota's archery season for deer opened in late August and bowhunters have until Jan. 5, 2025, to punch their tags before hanging up their gear.

PHOTO BY ASHLEY PETERSON, BISMARCK.



My 2 Cents

By Jeb Williams, Director

Hunter expectations heading into any fall season are always a big factor of what success looks like. I believe this summer's fishing is an example of that scenario. Does our memory quickly take us back to the 2023 fishing season where the walleye in our state were on a summer-long feeding frenzy with an appetite on par with a 16-year-old boy? If so, this year certainly was not comparable and left many labeling the fishing season as slow or even disappointing. But if 2023 didn't exist in the form that it did, how would we have felt about our fishing across the state?

This fall outlook provides a glimpse into what should once again feature some great fall opportunities. From many conversations over the last month, the talk seemed to gravitate toward the state's upland bird numbers and how this fall has the potential to be one of the better years we've seen in a while. I don't think it would be fair to label this fall in that category just yet, but I do believe bird hunters will experience the variety pack of upland opportunities they haven't experienced in a while.

The last few years, both in our data collection process and hunter harvest surveys, the gray partridge, more commonly known as Hungarian partridge, population has returned to numbers that we haven't seen for many years. A pleasant change for many who haven't experienced the random covey exploding nearly at their feet and within a few seconds their shotgun is empty, and all of the birds are still flying.

Anyway, the opportunity for a bag of sharp-tailed grouse, Huns and pheasant continues to be pretty good.

Speaking of change, there are several notable changes in place for this fall that you will likely notice. All of them came from public input and we always appreciate the

discussions and feedback we receive on a wide variety of issues and topics.

- A welcome change to the federal electronic duck stamp program. Hunters can purchase the e-stamp and that will be good for the entirety of the season and then in March the physical stamp will be mailed to you. Previously, the e-stamp was only good for 45 days after the purchase and then the actual stamp had to be carried with you when hunting.
- Another change archers will notice is the use of an electronically lighted sights that do not project light are now legal. This has been a topic of discussion for many years relating to how much technology should be allowed. This also now coincides with a recent vote by the Pope and Young Club which will allow a deer to be entered into the books if electronic sights were used in the hunt.
- The Department also made a change last year to our chronic wasting disease protocol which focused on testing a percentage of deer to help determine how widespread the disease is in a particular area. Having met the percentage goal in unit 2B, Game and Fish removed the baiting restriction in that unit.
- An area in Grand Forks county that was previously closed to sharp-tailed grouse hunting will now be open. This closure was to prevent incidental take of greater prairie chickens after they were reintroduced to the area in the early 1990s. However, sharp-tailed grouse have taken over the area and prairie chickens have all but disappeared, so allowing the increased hunting opportunity for sharptails only makes sense.

Best wishes on a safe and successful fall season.



Hunt for
TOMORROW

THE FUTURE OF HUNTING
DEPENDS ON OUR ACTIONS TODAY

gf.nd.gov/hunt-for-tomorrow





2024 HUNTING SEASON Outlook

By Casey Anderson

What a difference a year makes. Last winter was a welcome reprieve for all involved. People, livestock and wildlife were able to take a break from trying to survive winter's mean streak and slide into spring with the best chance to make things happen.

Of course, as winter was coming to an end, we started to wonder if the one good thing snow brings us, moisture, was going to be in short supply. Turns out, timely spring and summer rains have the landscape at the time of this writing looking pretty good over much of North Dakota. However, that habitat is in short supply and will slow down the recovery of wildlife populations compared to what we may remember from the past. This shortage will also undoubtedly reduce the ceiling that those populations could reach in the future if we, as citizens of North Dakota, choose to not do anything about it.

I have developed a new sense of determination to keep getting the word out on the importance of habitat to hopefully reduce the classic effect of "we don't know what we've got till it's gone." See, my wife and I welcomed a son in November and shortly after his birth I heard a song by Ian Munsick that struck a chord called "Indian Paintbrush." I encourage you to take a listen. There is a line in

the song that goes: "It breaks my heart to think that my son/might not ever get to see/the Indian paintbrush come in bloom again."

Boom, it hit me.

Game and Fish Department staff, me included, need to ramp up even more messaging and work on the ground to make sure this doesn't happen for future generations or sooner. However, the Department can't do it alone and those who read this likely have a stake in it as well. So, let's all step up and get to work and not let time go to waste.

Now, let's take a look at what hunting opportunities this fall may hold.

In the world of big game hunting, there is an up and down message. Deer licenses were lower again this year even with the milder winter. Not a surprise because not many fawns were born in summer 2023 and recruited into the population. After a bad winter, it takes a few years.

Moose populations are down a little from past winter tick outbreaks and the Department was being liberal with licenses to try and reduce the population to meet overall suitable habitat in areas and public tolerance. That's why in 2024 the Department reduced licenses to try to encourage a stabilization of the population.

Elk are doing well, and license numbers show that. Like moose, elk don't succumb to winter as easily as smaller species, so they are able to handle difficult weather better. So, elk hunting opportunities in North Dakota are as high as they probably ever been since hunting seasons started.

Following the results of the Department's aerial pronghorn survey, we've made available significantly more licenses than last year, which is good news for resident big game hunters. Southwestern North Dakota does have more intact habitat than many other parts of the state, which certainly helped the pronghorn rebound.

Upland game birds have an even better ability to bounce back, and our counts are showing that. Barring bad weather events this summer, especially hail, we should be poised to bring off a good hatch of upland birds of most species. So, hunting opportunities for most of these should be noticeably better than last year. We will be running brood routes into August, so pay attention to that information when it comes out.

Waterfowl don't bounce back as easily. It takes multiple things to line up to give them a population boost, including grass on the landscape and specific types of wetlands. Without snow last winter and its resulting runoff, the state was short on some of the smallest temporary wetlands important to kick off the waterfowl reproduction lifecycle. Some of the spring rains helped but time will tell if it was in time for waterfowl to increase populations and to what level. Even so, there will still be good opportunities to get out and harvest waterfowl in North Dakota this fall.

All in all, fall looks to be best for upland game hunting opportunities with good waterfowl potential. For those who drew a big game lottery license, congratulations. The populations may be on the rebound but your competition for harvesting deer will be less than in past years, so enjoy your opportunity. Good luck and happy hunting.

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

White-tailed deer



Ring-necked pheasant

UPLAND AND SMALL GAME

RING-NECKED PHEASANTS

Opens: Oct. 12

Closes: Jan. 5, 2025

Daily Limit: 3

Possession Limit: 12

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Pheasants, like a lot of wildlife, enjoyed what was considered a very mild North Dakota winter in 2023-24, with most of the state receiving little to no snow.

Results of the spring crowing count survey showed higher numbers of breeding roosters throughout the entire pheasant range. The number of roosters heard calling was up anywhere from 26-52% throughout the state's good pheasant range, reinforcing the Department's results from last summer's roadside counts that showed improved production of all upland birds.

Cover for nesting hens was above average in spring due to excess precipitation from timely fall and spring rains. Habitat was lush and green for early nesting attempts to be successful. However, June was cold and wet and it is expected that conditions during peak hatch were not favorable for high chick survival.

As of this mid-August writing, Department personnel are conducting late summer roadside brood counts, and preliminary numbers indicate hunters will see a similar number of birds this fall compared to 2023. There will not be as many young of the year birds available to hunters, but adult numbers are higher compared to last fall.

As always, hunters need to be mobile and willing to move to different locations to find localized optimal hunting opportunities. It's expected the northwestern and southwestern parts of the state will provide the best hunting opportunities this fall.

Rodney Gross, Upland Game Management Biologist, Bismarck

YOUTH PHEASANT

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

Opens: Oct. 5

Closes: Oct. 6

Daily Limit: 3

Possession Limit: 6

Shooting hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

WILD TURKEYS

Opens: Oct. 12

Closes: Jan. 5, 2025

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

The turkey population in many of North Dakota's hunting units has been higher than normal the past few years due to increased production in the western half of the state.

Last year, conditions were favorable for a successful turkey hatch, and Department surveys showed that. Turkey production in spring was good. Coupled with a high breeding population of hens, fall numbers were higher in parts of the state. The eastern part of the state has seen decreasing numbers of birds the last few years in response to the loss of quality turkey habitat.

Early reports from brood surveys indicated a slight decrease in the number of turkey broods on the ground, but more adults in the west. Turkey production is expected to be similar to last year.

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

Rodney Gross



Ruffed grouse

RUFFED GROUSE

Opens: Sept. 14

Closes: Jan. 5, 2025

Daily Limit: 3

Possession Limit: 12

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

The Game and Fish Department's spring ruffed grouse survey indicated a 45% increase from 2023 in the number of drums heard. This was the highest number of drums in the Turtle Mountains since 2009-10.

Ruffed grouse were not surveyed in the Pembina Hills in 2023, but observers were able to access routes in 2024 and numbers were up 52% from where they were in 2022. The Pembina Hills had a recent peak in 2020, and hunters still reported seeing fair numbers in 2022.

Ruffed grouse hunting should be above average in North Dakota this year.

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

Jesse Kolar, Upland Game Management Supervisor, Dickinson

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE

Opens: Sept. 14

Closes: Jan. 5, 2025

Daily Limit: 3

Possession Limit: 12

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

The sharp-tailed grouse index (weighted average by area surveyed) for 2024 was up 51% statewide from 2023, particularly in southwestern North Dakota (up 75%). The mild winter facilitated the increases, coupled with the most broods per



Wild turkey

mile observed since 2015. Some of the increases may also be due to survey conditions as access to survey areas was difficult in 2023, with snow persisting into May, compared to ideal survey conditions in 2024.

The Department's 2024 late summer roadside brood counts are showing lower rates of reproduction (brood size down 14.6%), fewer broods (down 8.3%) and lower densities (down 14.6%) compared to 2023. Conditions during roadside brood routes have been varied this year with a cool, dewy start (dew brings birds out of cover) followed by two weeks of hot, dry weather. Conditions might explain why biologists are seeing fewer grouse and broods despite the promising spring surveys; however, the average brood size and chick-to-adult ratios are more robust and aren't as sensitive to survey conditions.

The hatch was likely impacted this year by a cool, wet June with several significant rain and/or hailstorms across the state. Fortunately, a high number of adults are being seen during the surveys.

Statewide, sharptail populations continue rebounding from drought-induced lows in 2017-18 and are back to the 10-year average across the state.

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

One change in the sharp-tailed hunting regulations this year is the removal of the closed portion of the hunting unit in Grand Forks County. This area was closed to prevent incidental take of greater prairie chickens after they were reintroduced to the area. However, sharptails have taken over

the area, and prairie chickens have all but disappeared, so the area will be re-opened. The season will remain closed for prairie chickens, so hunters in Grand Forks county are encouraged to see identification pages on the Department's website (gf.nd.gov), and they should be prepared to pass up anything they are not able to identify as a sharp-tailed grouse with certainty.

Jesse Kolar

GRAY PARTRIDGE

Opens: Sept. 14

Closes: Jan. 5, 2025

Daily Limit: 3

Possession Limit: 12

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Although the Department does not have a spring index for gray partridge, commonly referred to as Hungarian partridge, biologists continue to hear reports across the state of how many partridge people are seeing. However, this is the first year since 2019 that reproduction surveys for partridge are trending down.

So far, biologists are seeing declines in brood size (down 33.5%), number of broods (down 36.4%) and densities (partridge per mile, down 46%). Partridge reproduction had been excellent for the previous five years, so despite declines, the population still looks healthy with higher-than-average numbers across the state.

Hunters rarely go "partridge hunting," but like last year, upland hunters could expect to put up a covey of partridge every one to two days (or more in some areas). One downside with lower reproduction is that the coveys will be smaller. Instead of seeing coveys of 12-15 birds, it's likely hunters will notice many more coveys with fewer than 10.

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

Jesse Kolar

TREE SQUIRRELS

Opens: Sept. 14

Closes: Feb. 28, 2025

Daily Limit: 4

Possession Limit: 12

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

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



Sharp-tailed grouse



Mule deer buck

BIG GAME

WHITE-TAILED DEER

Archery Opens: Aug. 30

Archery Closes: Jan. 5, 2025

Youth Gun Season Opens: Sept. 13

Youth Gun Season Closes: Sept. 22

Regular Gun Season Opens: Nov. 8

Regular Gun Season Closes: Nov. 24

Muzzleloader Opens: Nov. 29

Muzzleloader Closes: Dec. 15

The Game and Fish Department made available 50,100 licenses for the 2024 deer gun season, a decrease of 3,300 from 2023. Statewide hunter success for the 2023 regular gun season was slightly higher than 2022 at 55%, and below the goal of 70%.

Hunter observation and harvest indices indicate deer populations are stable to decreasing with populations below objectives in most units. Big game biologists were unable to conduct winter aerial surveys last winter due to lack of conditions required to effectively survey for white-tailed deer. Fortunately, last winter's mild conditions, along with an early green-up in spring, boded well for deer. These conditions generally equate to increased overwinter survival, healthier deer coming out of winter, and improved fawn production.

Loss of quality habitat continues to be a challenge for deer. These losses limit the potential for population growth and ultimately lower carrying capacity. Effects of this are most apparent in the eastern third of the state where CRP losses have been the greatest.

A total of 11 deer tested positive for CWD in 2023, nine of those were harvested by hunters during the regular gun season. All deer testing positive for CWD came from units where

the disease was previously detected. Units include 3A1 (three mule deer), 3A2 (one white-tailed deer), 3E1 (one mule deer and one white-tailed deer), 3E2 (two mule deer), and 3F2 (two mule deer and one white-tailed deer).

CWD surveillance for the 2024 season will primarily focus on units in the northeastern portion of the state. Hunters wishing to have their deer tested regardless of hunting unit may request a sampling kit online at the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov, visit a Game and Fish district office, or drop the head off at one of the Department's drop-off sites. Baiting restrictions will remain in place for hunting units 1, 3A1, 3A2, 3A3, 3A4, 3B1, 3C, 3D1, 3D2, 3E1, 3E2, 3F1, 3F2, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E and 4F.

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

Summary of deer licenses for 2024:

- Any antlered licenses decreased by 1,000.
- Any antlerless licenses decreased by 2,000.
- Antlered white-tailed deer licenses remained the same.
- Antlerless white-tailed deer licenses decreased by 300.
- 956 muzzleloader licenses were made available – 478 antlered white-tailed deer licenses and 478 antlerless white-tailed deer licenses. This is a decrease of 66 muzzleloader licenses from 2023.
- 160 "I" licenses were made available for the youth deer hunting season. "I" licenses are limited in number for units 3B1, 3B2 and 4A-4F, and are valid for any deer. There are unlimited "H" youth deer hunting licenses valid for any deer statewide except antlered mule deer in the above restricted units.
- 337 nonresident any deer archery licenses were made available, down 525 from 2023. The number of nonresident any deer archery licenses will remain at 337 in 2025.
- Residents ages 11, 12 and 13 who hold a statewide antlerless white-tailed deer license are no longer restricted to the youth deer season. This license is now valid during the regular deer gun season.

Benjamin Matykiewicz, Big Game Management Biologist, Bismarck

MULE DEER

Archery Opens: Aug. 30

Archery Closes: Jan. 5, 2025

Regular Gun Season Opens: Nov. 8

Regular Gun Season Closes: Nov. 24

Mule deer densities remained the same in 2024 compared to 2023 following record low fawn production in 2023, reduced harvest and a very mild winter in 2023-24. The 2024 spring index for mule deer in the badlands was 1% higher than 2023, but 4% below the long-term average.

Licenses remained the same as last year with 1,600 antlered licenses and 650 antlerless licenses available for the 2024 season. A mule deer buck license remains one of the most difficult licenses to draw but for those lucky few, it should result in a very high-quality hunt. Hunter success for mule deer bucks was 80% in 2023.

There remain many challenges facing the future population recovery of mule deer in the badlands. Encroachment of juniper in mule deer habitat, direct and indirect habitat loss due to oil development, predators and weather, including extreme winters, are all challenges facing long-term population recovery of mule deer in the badlands.

Bruce Stillings, Big Game Management Supervisor, Dickinson

PRONGHORN

Archery Only Opens: Aug. 30

Archery Only Closes: Sept. 22

Gun/Archery Season Opens: Oct. 4

Gun/Archery Season Closes: Oct. 20

North Dakota hunters will have considerably more pronghorn hunting opportunities this year thanks to a population increase following reduced harvest last year and a mild winter in 2023-24.

Biologists conducted aerial surveys of 13,340 square miles in early July and found that the number of pronghorn in the state increased by 31% from last year. Fawn production was 50 fawns per 100 does, which was higher than last year, but below long-term average of 59 fawns per 100 does. Pronghorn increased in all management regions except Western Bowman where numbers decreased by 12% from last year. Fawn production has been below average since 2020 in this region.

Hunting units 1A, 1D, 6A, 8A, 9A, 9C, 10A, 11A, and 13A will open in 2024 after being closed in 2023.

The Department made available 1,265 licenses in 2024, 845 more than 2023. Lottery licenses can be used during

the archery season (Aug. 30 (noon) – Sept. 22) with archery equipment or during the rifle season (Oct. 4 – Oct. 20) using legal firearm or archery equipment for those who do not hunt or harvest during the archery season.

The 2023 season saw 353 hunters harvesting 226 pronghorns for a success rate of 64%.

Bruce Stillings

BIGHORN SHEEP

For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, or the 2024 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's 2023 bighorn sheep survey, completed by recounting lambs in March, revealed a record 364 bighorn sheep in the grasslands of western North Dakota, up 5% from 2022 and 16% above the five-year average. The count surpassed the previous record of 347 bighorns in 2022.

Altogether, biologists counted 106 rams, 202 ewes and 56 lambs. Not included are approximately 40 bighorn sheep in the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park and bighorns introduced to the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in 2020.

Big Game biologists were pleased to see an increase in the survey for the sixth consecutive year.

The northern badlands population increased 5% from 2022 and was the highest count on record. The southern badlands population dropped to its lowest level since bighorns were reintroduced there in 1966.

Biologists were encouraged to see a record count of adult rams, and adult ewes and lambs were near record numbers. Unlike the population declines observed in most other big game species following the severe winter of 2022-23, the increase in the bighorn population was attributable to two factors: higher than expected survival of adults and lambs during the extreme winter conditions of 2022, and better



Whitetail deer in winter.

than anticipated lamb production and survival during 2023. Basically, bighorn sheep are incredibly hardy animals that can thrive during North Dakota's most frigid winters.

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

Currently, about 490 bighorns make up the populations managed by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, National Park Service and the Three Affiliated Tribes Fish and Wildlife Division, just shy of the benchmark of 500 bighorns in the state.

A bighorn sheep hunting season is open in 2024.

Brett Wiedmann, Big Game Management Biologist, Dickinson

MOOSE

For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department's website, gf.nd.gov, or the 2024 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.

The number of once-in-a-lifetime licenses for moose were reduced slightly in 2024 for this popular big game species. The reduction in licenses was due to an observed decrease in the population based on previous winter aerial surveys, a slight decrease in hunter success and a previous winter tick outbreak that impacted the population.

The reductions are in the northwestern region of the state for moose management units M9, M10 and M11 and are primarily for antlerless licenses. The number of moose licenses will be unchanged for moose units M5, M6 and M8 based on a stable population and good hunter success.

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

The Department made available 242 licenses for North Dakota's 2024 fall moose season. Expectations for the season are high as success for moose historically runs above 90%.

Jason Smith, Big Game Management Biologist, Jamestown

ELK

For season details, refer to the Game and Fish Department's website, gf.nd.gov, or the 2024 bighorn sheep, elk and moose hunting guide.

North Dakota's 2024 elk season features an increase in licenses from 2023. The primary increase in licenses were for elk units E1W, E1E and E3. This was in response to an increasing elk population in those areas and landowner tolerance concerns.

Licenses in elk units E2, E4 and E6 will remain the same as 2023. Elk numbers in these units appear stable based on aerial surveys of core habitat and minimum counts of winter herds.

The Department made available 833 licenses for North Dakota's 2024 elk season.

Elk hunting in North Dakota can be challenging, both mentally and physically. Although high when compared to other western states, success rates for North Dakota elk hunters averaged just over 60% in the last five years. Cow licenses are easier to draw but are the most difficult to fill. Hunters with cow licenses should be prepared for a challenge, with many days spent in the field.

The season outlook for elk in 2024 is expected to be good, with success similar to previous years. As always, making landowner contacts and preseason scouting are recommended as essential components to a successful elk or moose hunt.

Jason Smith

Bull moose





MIGRATORY BIRDS

Snow geese

North Dakota wetland habitats had an interesting spring and early summer coming out of a dry fall and winter, then receiving double or more the usual rainfall from late April through June. Wetland conditions dried considerably during late summer and fall of last year and were not good at all coming out of March. Settling conditions for breeding pairs of ducks looked very poor as migration began, but widespread rainfall started to change the story. By the time Department biologists ran the May breeding waterfowl survey, wetland conditions had improved substantially, but were still mostly "fair."

The 77th annual breeding duck survey conducted in May showed an index of 2.9 million ducks in the state. Wetland conditions across the state during the May survey varied from poor to good, logging the 32nd highest wetland index in the history of the survey. Overall, this year's breeding duck index was the 30th highest in the 77 years of the survey, down 15% from last year, but still 17% above the long-term average.

Indices for individual species, except for scaup (plus 23.2%), were similar to, or below those from 2023. Mallards were down 18.7% from 2023 and represented the 30th highest count on record. The wigeon index decreased 42.2%, shovelers and pintails decreased 38.1% and 28.7%, respectively; other decreases were 20.1% for canvasbacks, 12.9% for blue-winged teal, and 7.1% for redheads. Gadwall, green-winged teal, and ruddy ducks all had similar indices as last year.

Compared to average indices from 1994-2016, when water and abundant upland nesting conditions persisted on the North Dakota landscape, the total duck index for 2024 was down 28%. The mallard index for this year was well below (minus 42.2%) their average during 1994-2016, and other indices that were below the average from this comparative period, ranged from minus 48.6% (wigeon) to minus 24.2% (shovelers). Indices for this year that were above the 1994-2016 average ranged from plus 3.7% (canvasbacks) to plus 18.7% (redheads).

Wetland conditions began declining last summer and were quite poor when migration began this spring. As a result of habitat conditions that weren't all that good, along with declining continental populations of ducks, fewer breeding ducks settled in North Dakota this year. Abundant, widespread rainfall that began in late April and continued through June reinvigorated production opportunities for ducks. Despite improved conditions that came on late, the number of broods observed during the Department's July brood survey was down substantially (59%) from last year's count, 24% below the 1965-2023 average, and 51% below the 1994-2016 average. The average brood size was 6.2 ducklings, down 5% from last year's estimate.

Following the 32nd highest wetland index on the May survey, North Dakota's landscape got wetter and wetter through May and June across most of the state. July wetland counts were up 109% from last year, and 57% above the long-term average. Some of the extreme wetness was drying down as we came out of summer, but excellent wetland conditions should have persisted long enough for a contin-



Bull elk



Mallard drake and hen

ued nesting effort by ducks. These late nesting efforts could help shore-up a lackluster July brood index.

Overall, the fall flight forecast (based on the May breeding index and July brood index) of ducks from North Dakota is down 36% from last year and is the 31st highest fall flight from the state on record.

Numbers of temperate-breeding Canada geese, Western Prairie Canada geese and arctic nesting Tallgrass Prairie Canada geese, snow geese and Ross's geese all remain high, despite declines in abundance of central arctic light geese in recent years. Production of Canada geese in the state was strong this year, and large-type Canada geese in the state continue to be abundant. Early observations from the arctic indicate good conditions for breeding geese. More will be known about these populations after monitoring efforts during late summer and early fall.

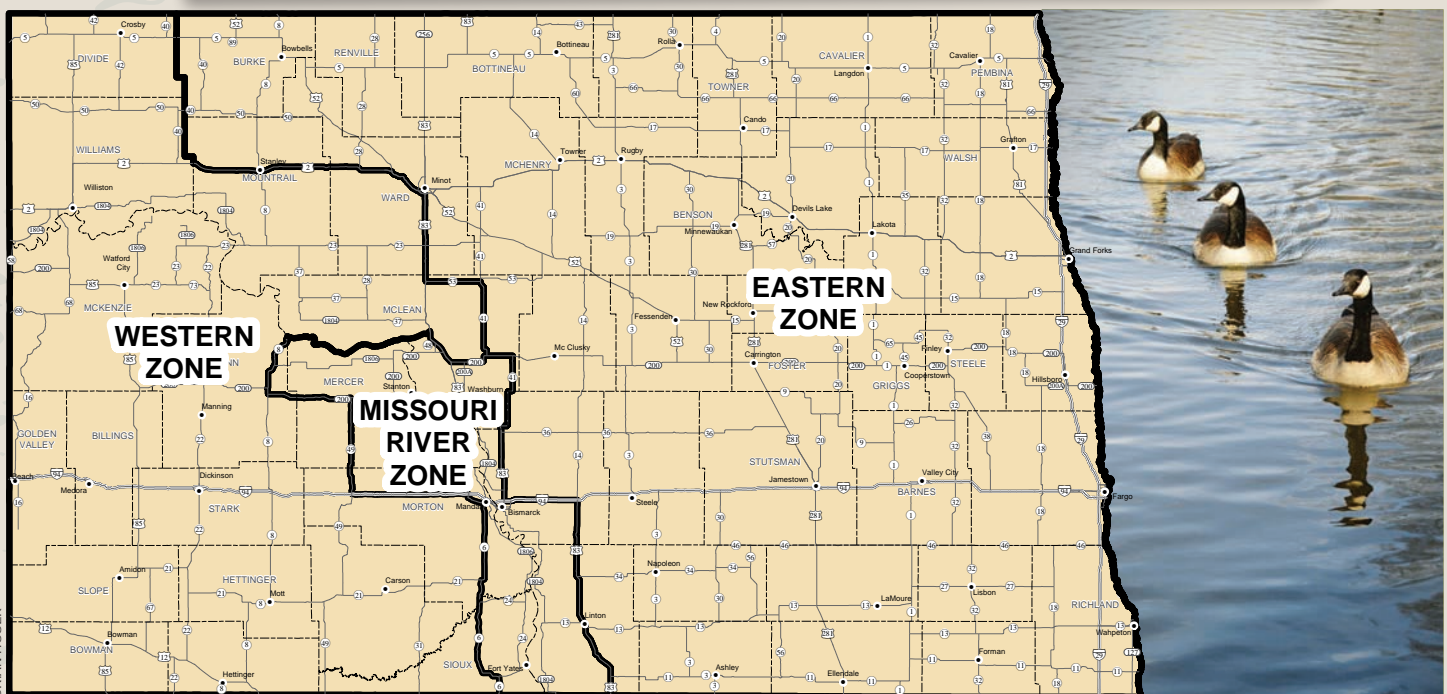
Hunters should expect favorable conditions for waterfowl

hunting in North Dakota this year. Canada goose hunting should be good, but timing of crop harvests is always a wild-card for early season hunting. Canada geese probably won't start grouping up and moving around much until September due to late reproduction efforts and later crop harvests. An overly strong duck migration isn't expected due to relatively dry conditions in Prairie Canada. Hunters should take advantage of early migrants like blue-winged teal during the first two weeks of the season as teal production appears to be good. North Dakota waterfowl hunting seasons are always affected by fall weather, and weather patterns from early to late seasons usually are not consistent from year to year.

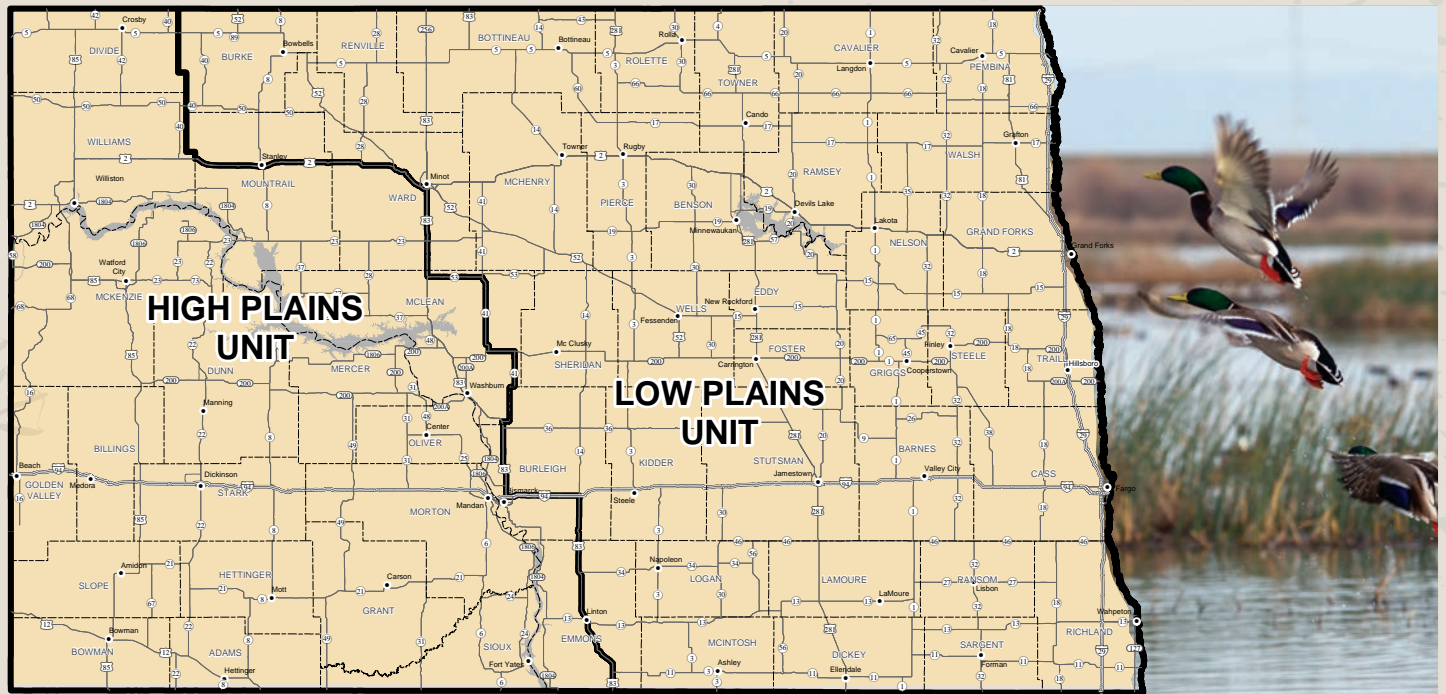
The Department's fall wetland survey will give one last look at wetland conditions in September.

Mike Szymanski, Supervisor, Migratory Game Bird Management, Bismarck

CANADA GOOSE HUNTING ZONES



DUCKS HIGH PLAINS/LOW PLAINS UNITS



YOUTH WATERFOWL SEASON

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

Opens: Sept. 14

Closes: Sept. 15

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Daily Limit: Ducks and geese – same as regular season.

SPECIAL VETERAN AND ACTIVE MILITARY WATERFOWL SEASON

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

Opens: Sept. 14

Closes: Sept. 15

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

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

EARLY CANADA GOOSE HUNTING

Opens: Aug. 15 (statewide)

Closes: Sept. 7 (Missouri River Canada Goose Zone), Sept. 15 (Western Canada Goose Zone), Sept. 20 (Eastern Canada Goose Zone)

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Daily Limit: 15

Possession Limit: 45

CANADA GOOSE REGULAR SEASON

Opens: Sept. 21 (residents only), Sept. 28 (nonresidents)

Closes: Dec. 27 (Missouri River Canada Goose Zone), Dec. 21 (Western Canada Goose Zone), Dec. 16 (Eastern Canada Goose Zone)

Daily Limit: 5 (Missouri River zone), 8 (all other zones)

Possession Limit: 15 (Missouri River zone), 24 (all other zones)

WHITE-FRONTED GEESE (Statewide)

Opens: Sept. 21 (residents only), Sept. 28 (nonresidents)

Closes: Dec. 1

Daily Limit: 3

Possession Limit: 9

LIGHT (SNOW) GEESE (Statewide)

Opens: Sept. 21 (residents only), Sept. 28 (nonresidents)

Closes: Dec. 27

Daily Limit: 50, no possession limit

Shooting Hours for all Geese: Half-hour before sunrise to 2 p.m. Exception: Shooting hours are a half-hour before sunrise to sunset on all Saturdays and Wednesdays through the end of each season. Starting Dec. 1, all-day hunting is also allowed on Sundays through the end of each season.



Blue-winged teal

REGULAR DUCK SEASON

LOW PLAINS UNIT

Opens: Sept. 21 (residents only), Sept. 28 (nonresidents)

Closes: Dec. 1

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

HIGH PLAINS UNIT

Opens: Sept. 21 (residents only), Sept. 28 (nonresidents)

Closes: Dec. 1

Opens: Dec. 7

Closes: Dec. 29

Shooting-hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

Daily Limit: Six ducks (including mergansers), which may include no more than five mallards (two of which may be hens), one pintail, two redheads, two canvasbacks, one scaup and three wood ducks. In addition to the daily bag limit of ducks, an additional two blue-winged teal may be taken from Sept. 21 through Oct. 6.

Possession Limit: Three times the daily limit.

SANDHILL CRANES

Opens: Zone 1 and 2: Sept. 14

Closes: Zone 1 and 2: Nov. 10

Daily Limit Zone 1: 3

Daily Limit Zone 2: 2

Possession Limit Zone 1: 9

Possession Limit Zone 2: 6

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to 2 p.m. Exception: Shooting hours are a half-hour before sunrise to sunset on all Saturdays and Wednesdays beginning Sept. 21 through the end of each season.

The mid-continent population of sandhill cranes has been in good shape over the past few years. The Northern Great Plains experienced a warm March, which spread out, and in some cases, sped up the northern migration of many bird species. As a result, it is more likely that some sandhill cranes had already flown past the survey area in the central Platte River valley of Nebraska when the annual spring survey was conducted. Survey numbers are not finalized for

2024, but last year's count was a record high.

In addition, the three-year population index used for guiding hunting season regulations has been increasing for several years now and is well above thresholds that would concern managers. Wetland conditions throughout much of North Dakota are also in good shape, which will provide plenty of options for roosting sandhill cranes during the fall migration.

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

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

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

Mike Szymanski

DOVES

Opens: Sept. 1

Closes: Nov. 29

Daily Limit: 15

Possession Limit: 45

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

North Dakota has an abundant breeding population of mourning doves and based on observations throughout the state, production was fair to good this year. Cool rainy weather in May and June may have impacted the early portion of the dove nesting season, but weather since has been more favorable for dove nesting. The Game and Fish Department also tallies mourning doves during late summer roadside counts, but that survey is still ongoing. Although survey numbers are not currently available, age ratios of juvenile to adult birds captured at banding stations in the state were indicative of fair production this year.

Dove hunters should find good opportunities in early September before cooler weather sets in throughout the state and pushes doves south. Hunters are encouraged to scout before the season to find the right mix of conditions conducive to concentrating birds. Hunters should look for areas with abundant harvested small grain or oil-seed fields that are near

shelterbelts or other diverse stands of trees. Doves also need to be within a few miles of water. Despite late planting, harvest of small grains and oilseed crops are projected to be near average, so hunters should have plenty of places to choose from in September for field hunting.

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

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

Mike Szymanski

CROWS

Fall Season Opens: Aug. 17

Closes: Nov. 4

Spring Season Opens: March 8, 2025

Closes: April 20, 2025

Daily Limit: No limit on crows.

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

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

SNIPE

Opens: Sept. 14

Closes: Dec. 1

Daily Limit: 8

Possession Limit: 24

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.

WOODCOCK

Opens: Sept. 21

Closes: Nov. 4

Daily Limit: 3

Possession Limit: 9

Shooting Hours: Half-hour before sunrise to sunset.



Coyote

FURBEARERS

For more season details, refer to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, or the 2024-25 Hunting and Trapping Guide.

Furbearer hunting and trapping opportunities will be plentiful again this season. Populations of most furbearer species are abundant and as such, furbearer harvest limits and timing of seasons are the same as the previous year. The only change to the furbearer regulations included a slight expansion to the open fisher trapping zone. Trappers are allowed to take fishers nearly statewide during the one-week season in late November, except for the Turtle Mountains Region, which remains closed to protect American marten.

The rural mail carrier survey continues to be one of our earliest indicators of furbearer population trends each year. This survey is voluntarily conducted by rural letter carriers during early April. They survey around 25,000 road miles looking for 10 of our most common furbearer species. We are grateful to those letter carriers who have assisted with this survey, which has been an asset in wildlife management in North Dakota for over 50 years.

Overall, population trends based on the rural mail carrier furbearer survey were a mix of increases and decreases compared to the previous year, illustrating the typical fluctuations expected in wildlife. This year's data indicated coyotes remain the bright spot in North Dakota with numbers similar or slightly higher than last year. Foxes continue to be outcompeted by coyotes in most places, although they are holding steady in the Prairie Pothole Region. Muskrats continue to struggle to reach higher numbers with only the eastern half of the state showing much promise, where their numbers are similar or slightly down from last year. And beavers appear to be below long-term averages but are up in the eastern half of the state compared to last year, particularly the Red River Valley.

Last year, hunters and trappers took 59 bobcats (50 in Zone 1 and nine in Zone 2), 43 fishers, 25 river otters and 14 mountain lions in Zone 1 (six in the early season and eight in the late season). Population trends for these species are estimated using data collected from the carcasses of animals taken during the hunting and trapping seasons. Trends indicate bobcat and fisher numbers are slightly up compared to the previous year and similar to their long-term averages. Otter and mountain lion trends are fairly stable.

As a reminder, successful fur harvesters of bobcats, fishers, river otters and mountain lions can now report their harvest online by logging into their Game and Fish account and clicking "New Registration." Online reporting is provided as another option, in addition to reporting by calling in or visiting a Department office.

Because many furbearer species are difficult to survey due to their secretive nature and naturally low densities, we continue to encourage anyone to report their sighting(s) of black bears, bobcats, fishers, martens, mountain lions, river otters and swift foxes. Information about sightings can be submitted online at gf.nd.gov/hunting/furbearers/furbearer-observation.

Stephanie Tucker, Game Management Section Leader, Bismarck

MOUNTAIN LION HUNTING

Zone 1 (early) Opens: Aug. 30

Closes: Nov. 24

Zone 1 (late) Opens: Nov. 25

Closes: March 31, 2025

Zone 2 Opens: Aug. 30

Closes: March 31, 2025

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

There is no mountain lion harvest limit in Zone 2.

Mountain lions may be hunted statewide by residents using legal firearms or archery equipment during regular hunting hours. Beginning Nov. 25, mountain lions may also be hunted by pursuing with dogs. Cable devices and traps are not allowed. The limit is one lion per hunter. Kittens (lions with visible spots), or females accompanied by kittens, may not be taken.

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

RIVER OTTER TRAPPING OR CABLE DEVICES

Opens: Nov. 25

Closes: March 15, 2025

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

Trappers must either contact the local game warden or Department field office or register their harvest online via their account to report their harvest within 12 hours and make arrangements to have their river otter tagged. For more information, see the North Dakota 2024-25 Hunting and Trapping Guide.

FISHER TRAPPING OR CABLE DEVICES

Opens: Nov. 25

Closes: Dec. 1

Open statewide except for the Turtle Mountains region, defined as the area bordered on the west by ND Highway 14, on the north by the Canadian border, on the east by ND Highway 30, and on the south by ND Highway 5. Limit one per person. Trappers must contact the local game warden or Department field office or register their harvest online via their account to report their harvest within 12 hours and make arrangements to have their fisher tagged. For more information, see the North Dakota 2024-25 Hunting and Trapping Guide.

BEAVER AND RACCOON TRAPPING, HUNTING OR UNDERWATER CABLE DEVICES

Open: Year-round.

For more information, see the North Dakota 2024-25 Hunting and Trapping Guide.



Muskrat

BEAVER AND RACCOON CABLE DEVICES ON LAND

Opens: Nov. 25

Closes: March 15, 2025

From March 16, 2025, through May 10, 2025, cable devices must be within 50 feet of water; must be no more than 4 inches off the ground and must have a stop restricting loop size to 12 inches or less in diameter.

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

WEASEL TRAPPING, HUNTING OR CABLE DEVICES

Trapping Opens: Oct. 26

Hunting and Cable Devices Opens: Nov. 25

Closes: March 15, 2025

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

MUSKRAT AND MINK TRAPPING, HUNTING OR CABLE DEVICES

Trapping Opens: Oct. 26

Hunting and Cable Devices Opens: Nov. 25

Closes: May 10, 2025

Muskrat huts may be opened for insertion of traps or cable devices; however, the huts must be restored to their approximate original condition to prevent freeze-up.

Beginning March 16, 2025, non-floating colony traps must be under at least 2 inches of water, and trapping or using cable devices on the outside of any muskrat house or structure of any size is prohibited; traps may be placed completely inside a muskrat house or structure of any size; foothold traps must be submerged under water at all times or must have a protective covering (except when used on float sets); body-gripping traps used in water can have no more than 2 inches of the trap above the water or must have a protective covering.

Beginning May 1, 2025, float sets must have a protective covering.

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



BOBCAT TRAPPING, HUNTING OR CABLE DEVICES

Zone 1: Nov. 9

Cable Devices Opens: Nov. 25

Closes: March 15, 2025

Beginning Nov. 25, bobcats may also be trapped using cable devices and hunted by pursuing with dogs.

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

Zone 2: Nov. 25

Closes: March 15, 2025

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

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

For more information, see the 2024-25 Hunting and Trapping guide.

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

Day Hunting and Trapping Open: Year-round

Night Hunting and Cable Devices Opens: Nov. 25

Closes: March 15, 2025

Red fox, gray fox and coyote may be hunted at any hour from Nov. 25 through March 15, 2025. Any hunter who engages in the hunting of red fox, gray fox or coyote during the time from a half-hour after sunset to a half-hour before sunrise, must hunt exclusively on foot.



Badger

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

BADGER TRAPPING, HUNTING OR CABLE DEVICES

Hunting and Trapping Open: Year-round

Cable Devices Opens: Nov. 25

Closes: March 15, 2025



701-328-9921

RAP (REPORT ALL POACHERS) PROGRAM.

This program encourages people to report wildlife violations, remain anonymous if they prefer, and receive monetary rewards for convictions based on their information.

Anonymous callers will be given a special code number and are not required to give their name. Rewards range from \$100 to \$1,000 depending on the nature and seriousness of the crime. **Call 701-328-9921.** Call this number only to report game and fish violations. The reward fund is supported by private donations. If you wish to donate to the RAP program, tax deductible contributions can be sent to RAP, *Box 1091, Bismarck, ND, 58502-1091.*

SMALL GAME, WATERFOWL, FURBEARER REGULATIONS

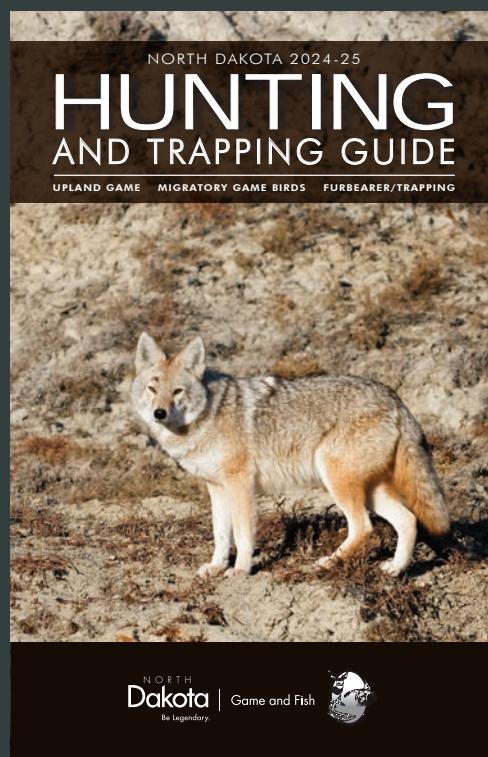
North Dakota's 2024 small game, waterfowl and furbearer regulations are set, and most season structures are similar to last year.

Noteworthy items include:

- Opening day for ducks, geese, coots and mergansers for North Dakota residents is Sept. 21. Nonresidents may begin hunting waterfowl in North Dakota Sept. 28.
- The prairie chicken and sage grouse seasons remain closed due to low populations.
- An area in Grand Forks County is open to sharp-tailed grouse hunting that was previously closed.
- Fisher trapping opportunities were expanded by reducing the boundary of the closed area to the Turtle Mountains.

- Shooting hours for sandhill cranes were extended on Saturdays and Wednesdays beginning Sept. 21 through the end of the season.
- The federal e-stamp is valid through the entire waterfowl hunting season.

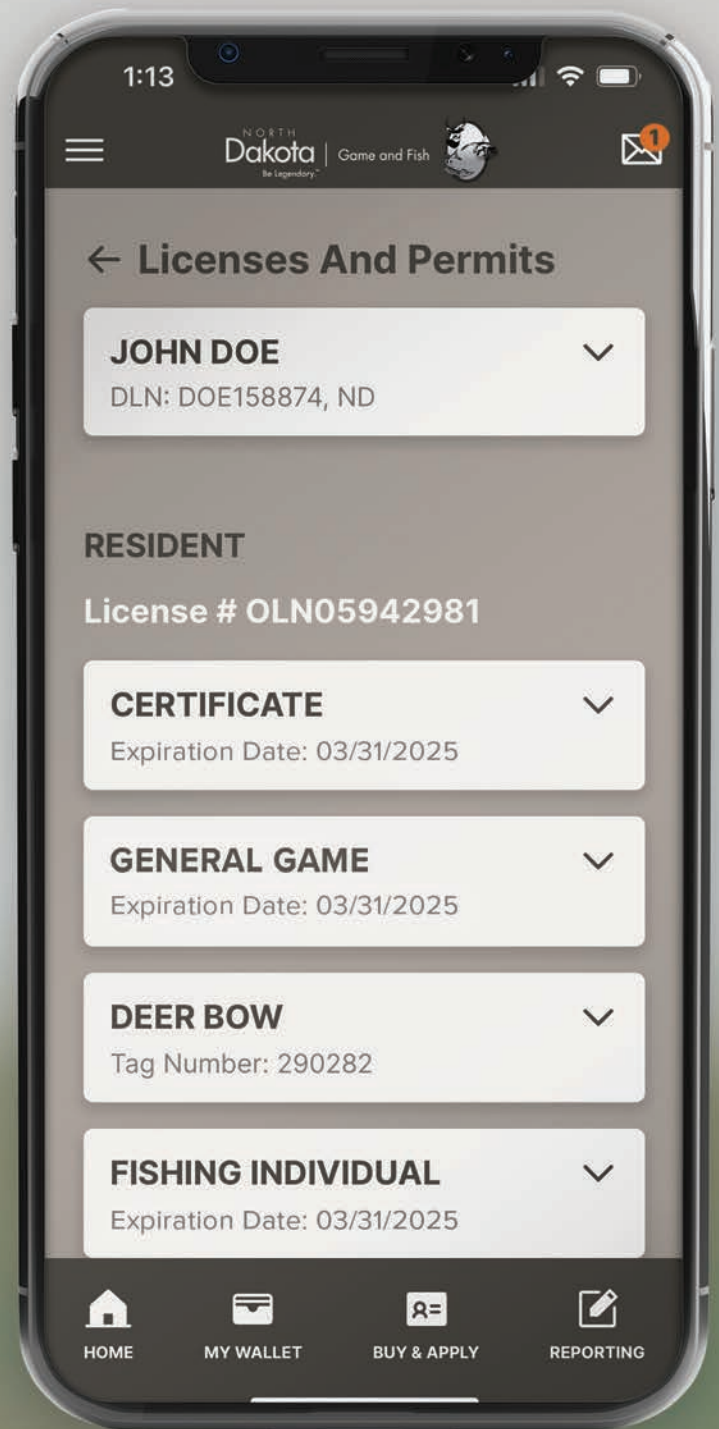
Hunters and trappers can find the North Dakota 2024-25 Hunting and Trapping Guide, which includes upland game, migratory game bird and furbearer/trapping regulations, on the Game and Fish website. For a complete listing of opening and closing dates, and daily and possession limits, refer to the table on pages 4-5 of the guide.



NOW AVAILABLE

NDGF MOBILE APP

- DIGITAL LICENSE STORAGE
- ONLINE PURCHASING
- NOTIFICATIONS/MESSAGING
- SUNRISE/SUNSET TIMES
- REPORTING



**NDGF IN
APP STORE**

NORTH
Dakota | Game and Fish
Be Legendary.





AN ISSUE OF LONELINESS

BY CAYLA BENDEL

“The farther one gets into wilderness, the greater is the attraction of its lonely freedom,” according to Theodore Roosevelt.

It’s no secret the badlands of North Dakota had a profound impact on the eventual president. What is surprising is that over a century later, that same landscape is still making people feel the exact same way; wild, unplugged, small and, as Roosevelt said, lonely. It’s something we don’t get to feel in our fast-paced daily lives and so we savor it, and we flock to it in summer with campers and mountain bikes, and in fall with bows and rifles. The conundrum, increasingly with many wild places, is how to manage access to these beloved resources, while maintaining the opportunity to experience the “lonely freedom” so many of us crave.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department was increasingly fielding concerns over just that as it pertains to deer hunting pressure in the badlands. We heard complaints about not only negative experiences due to too many people, but also biological concerns about the pressure being put on wildlife, specifically mule deer. And so, a task force was formed in 2023 to explore the issue further, consisting of Department staff, North Dakota Bowhunters Association and Backcountry Hunters and Anglers representatives, a badlands hunter, and a landowner. In addition to taking a deep dive into hunter harvest survey data the Department already collects, the group also commissioned a Colorado-based consulting company to conduct a specific survey to achieve three objectives: 1) Formally quantify hunting pressure in the badlands, 2) understand hunters’ willingness to tolerate other hunters and 3) determine which hunting regulation changes hunters are most amenable to. Surveys were sent to regular gun season mule deer hunters, nonresident any deer bowhunters, bowhunters who reported hunting activity in the badlands, and hunters with a gratis license for any of North Dakota’s badlands hunting units.

MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT

Of all hunters surveyed, 68% did not agree that there was too much bowhunting pressure in the badlands. Further, when asked if they were supportive of regulation changes to the bow season to reduce hunter congestion, 55% said no. Those people who did indicate pressure as a concern said it was at the access point versus while in their hunting spot. Simply put, despite increasing complaints about crowding, the majority of our badlands hunters actually did not identify it as a problem or are at least willing to tolerate elevated hunting pressure in exchange for liberal hunting seasons, unique landscape and public access to all that is the badlands. It became clear that making large regulation changes would not be favorable, at least at this time. Instead, smaller changes over time could be slowly implemented to address some concerns without sacrificing opportunities for all.

In evaluating hunter harvest survey data to unveil what was happening on the landscape during this time, it was clear the COVID-19 pandemic had also impacted hunters' experiences. In 2020 and 2021, outdoor recreation of all kinds exploded, including hunting. In the fall of 2021, resident bowhunter use of the badlands peaked with over 5,000 hunters reporting use of at least one badlands unit; 780 nonresident any deer bow licenses were issued, of which the majority hunt the badlands for mule deer; over 1,500 nonresident over-the-counter whitetail bow license users reported time spent in the badlands; and there were about 4,000 rifle licenses allocated in badlands units, for a total of almost 11,000 badlands deer hunters. Contrast that with 2023, the year this survey was conducted, and a season with reduced rifle allocations following an EHD outbreak and a tough winter, and the total number of badlands hunters was almost half.

It certainly seems we've reached a return to normal in participation levels since the COVID peak, and it is clear through fewer complaints and the survey results that some of the perceived issues have self-corrected, but that doesn't mean there are not small improvements that could be made.

NUMBERS GAME

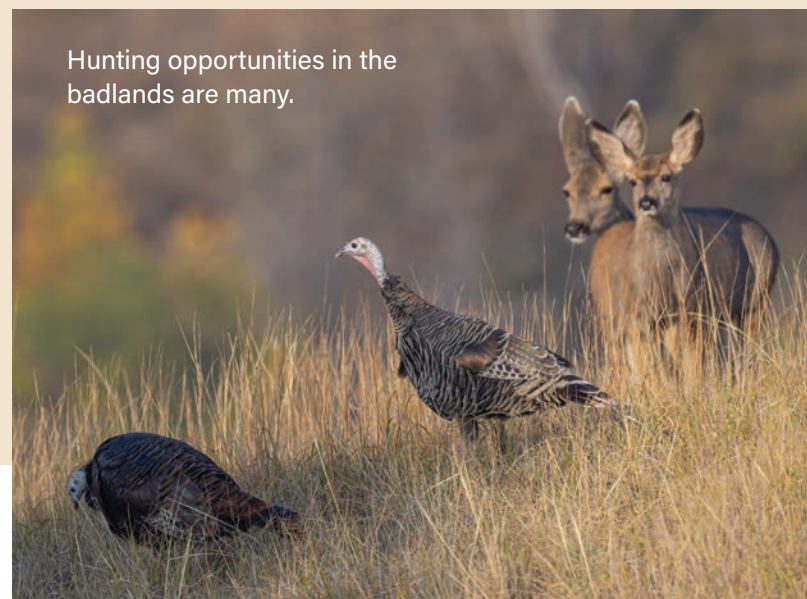
One other notable pattern discovered was disproportionate use of deer hunting units — 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E, 4F, 3B1 and 3B2 — in the badlands. Nonresidents wishing to obtain a bow license to hunt mule deer



Bowhunting in the badlands.

must enter the "Nonresident Any-Deer Bow lottery," the number of licenses available each year is 15% of the previous year's mule deer gun license allocation. While nonresidents who receive this license may hunt statewide, the majority hunt in the badlands, and most of all badlands bowhunters (residents and nonresidents) reported hunting in units 4C, 4D and 4B, in that order.

In 2023, for example, there were 862 nonresident any deer bow license holders with the ability to hunt any deer statewide, but 523 of them reported hunting in 4C for at least part of their season. But of the 862 licenses allocated, only 97 of those were truly biologically allocated from the mule deer population in unit 4C. Additionally, of the roughly 2,500 resident bowhunters who reported hunting in the badlands in the 2023 season, 811 reported spending time in unit 4C. Whether due to the excess pressure, the unit also had comparatively low success rates to other badlands units with 9% for residents and



Hunting opportunities in the badlands are many.



Mule deer bucks are the draw in the badlands for both resident and nonresident bowhunters.

8% for nonresidents, the only badlands unit where resident success was higher. Department biologists must account for some unknown bow harvest when making rifle tag allocations, but it is clear that effort and harvest are not evenly distributed across the badlands.

PATH FORWARD

The group discussed several potential changes to address some of these issues. The most agreeable changes were realigning nonresident any deer bow license numbers to 15% of the current year's mule deer gun licenses (rather than the previous year's), which would have to be done legislatively, and the possibility of somehow unitizing or zoning nonresident bowhunters.

Other actions debated were a delayed nonresident archery opener, closure of archery season during the deer gun season, and development of biological thresholds to determine seasons and license limitations.

Further discussion and public input will be had if anything is implemented at all. Regardless, the Department has a sound understanding of badlands hunters and a dataset to compare changes moving forward should the issue begin to worsen or resolve.

REAL SOLUTION

Of course, we would be remiss to not mention that habitat will always be the equalizer in any wildlife issue. In a time where CRP acres were at their peak, so were deer populations, deer tags and deer hunters. There were fewer unsuccessful applicants turning to the bow

and plenty of deer for all.

Populations are always more resilient and quicker to rebound from tough winters and disease outbreaks when quality habitat is abundant. Thus, the Department continues to remain steadfast to its mission to protect, conserve and enhance wildlife habitat while also exploring options for additional badlands hunting access.

Whether with a bow or a rifle (or a shotgun for sharp-tailed grouse), may you find time this fall to get lost in one of the most unique landscapes we're so fortunate to have in our back yard. And if you do run across another hunter, recreationist or rancher, may you smile and wave, acknowledging our shared love for the badlands and its inhabitants.

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





THOUSANDS OF ACRES ADDED TO

PLOTS

BY RON WILSON

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program has been around for nearly three decades.

Marked on the state's rural landscape by familiar triangular signs turned upside down, the program, in its simplest form, is an agreement between the Department and private landowners to allow walk-in access to hunters willing to venture beyond roadside ditches.

For the last handful of years, Game and Fish featured about 800,000 PLOTS acres around the state. With an agency goal of boosting that total by 20,000 acres for 2024, the Department's private land initiative staff did just that ... and kept going.

"Our field staff worked hard with great and willing landowners to increase the total by about 36,000 acres this year," said Kevin Kading, Department private land coordinator. "So, heading into fall we'll have about 836,000 acres on the landscape."

"We've got a lot of great landowners who work with us every year. We've had landowners in the program for 20 years or more, and we get new ones every year," he added. "The goal is to keep growing, try to find as many opportunities as we can for hunting access and additional habitat on the landscape."

With habitat conditions not where wildlife managers would like to see them over much of the state, adding several thousand acres of habitat to the mix is certainly a plus.

"We're always looking for ways to incentivize more habitat on the landscape and we do that by working with different partners to help landowners find the right programs, cost-share assistance, or whatever it might be, to put more habitat on the ground. That's been a big push for us the last few years," Kading said. "The PLOTS program is not just for pheasants. With some of these new acres, there's new habitat that will be great for other upland birds, big game hunting and some really good waterfowl hunting opportunities with the small wetlands in crop fields and grasslands."

Kading said the PLOTS program features about 25,000 acres of access for waterfowlers, which

allows hunters to drive into fields to set up their decoys and unload their gear. These tracts are identified with a special green "Attention Waterfowl Hunters" sign, allowing driving access.

One thing hunters will notice this fall, starting with the new PLOTS acres, is fewer PLOTS signs.

"Every PLOTS tract is still going to have signs on them, but there might not be a sign on every little zig and zag and every little corner because a lot of people are identifying these areas and their boundaries on their phones and phone apps," Kading said. "But the thing to keep in mind is the time and cost savings that goes along with that, which will be redirected toward increasing hunting access and adding more acres of wildlife habitat."

While the Game and Fish has for 27 years printed a PLOTS Guide and did so again this year, that may come to an end sooner than later, considering the ability to access the guide electronically has increased over time, while the demand for a printed guide has not.

"I compare this to going on a family vacation back in the day to now. When was the last time you drove on a family vacation and someone is holding a big map giving directions?" Kading said. "Today, people are using their phones or navigation systems in their vehicle. That's kind of the way things are going with this as well. There just isn't a high demand for the PLOTS Guide in the printed version anymore."

While change is likely in how hunters find PLOTS tracts locations down the road, what remains the same, Kading said, is the respect that needs to be shown to these private lands made available to hunters.

"We don't want to see the type of behavior that would influence landowners in the program to not want to be in it anymore," Kading said. "We ask hunters to pick up their empty shells, pick up their trash and other trash they see, keep gates the way you found them, those types of things. And if you see some activity that doesn't look right, just let us know and we'll do our best to try to find out what's going on."

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.

NICE PRONGHORN BUMP

BY RON WILSON



There were no surprises heading into the pronghorn hunting season last fall.

Following winter of 2022-23, an ugliness that hung around for six months, the Game and Fish Department made available just 420 licenses in eight of 17 hunting units after determining the population took a significant hit.

Heading into this fall following a much more agreeable winter, things are different.

"We just finished our recent annual pronghorn survey and we are pleasantly surprised," said Bruce Stillings, Department big game supervisor, of the 10-day aerial survey that is typically completed before mid-July.

"Overall, pronghorn are up about 30%, which is really

good news."

Stillings said if you rewind just a bit, the population saw a 40% decline following winter of 2022-23, which he described as one of the most extreme on record.

"Of course, last winter was very mild and we saw a nice bump in the population this summer," he said. "We had higher adult survival and then better fawn recruitment from fawns born in 2023. A nice increase overall."

The Game and Fish Department made available 1,265 licenses for this fall's hunting season, which is nearly 850 more than 2023.

Stillings said the buck to doe ratio is stable and the fawn to doe ratio was slightly better than 2023, but still well below the long-term average.



"But population increases didn't occur across the board. Pronghorn in Western Bowman Management Region, our prime pronghorn habitat, declined about 10% this summer compared to 2023," Stillings said. "And if you kind of look back the last few years, they've had some really tough weather conditions that have negatively impacted fawn production in 2021 and 2022. First, they dealt with extreme drought, followed by an extreme winter, and both can be equally as detrimental on fawn production. You don't have those younger-aged animals in the population, you don't have those prime-aged reproductive does in the population, so we're seeing that kind of domino effect of poor fawn production in the southwest in particular."

The aerial survey started about July 1 and five teams positioned around western North Dakota logged about 200 aerial survey hours in roughly 10 days.

"This year we classified just over 1,200 groups of pronghorns, which resulted in just over 7,000 animals. And that's the data we use to determine population abundance and demographics, expressed in buck to doe and fawn to doe ratios," Stillings said. "We get one chance to assess our pronghorn population. We've got very dedicated biologists that accomplish this task and know that the most comprehensive assessment of the population we can get is going to benefit hunting opportunities for our North Dakota residents."

Because pronghorn in North Dakota make a lot of weather-related movements in spring and later in fall, Stillings said there is a reason biologists survey the animals in summer.

"When we're assessing them in July, they've established their home ranges for summer, so that's the population within a unit that will be there during the October hunting season," he said.

While it's nice to see the state's pronghorn population take a step in the right direction, Stillings said there are always hurdles for an animal living on the far eastern edge of where it's supposed to be found on the continent.

"Any setbacks with weather and habitat, and our populations are going to show it the most," Stillings said. "Which means we're going to need non-extreme winters and the best habitat conditions that we can receive for fawning that summer. Those are the two key variables that we're going to need to see stable to increasing pronghorn numbers in North Dakota.

"We don't have the native rangeland like South Dakota, Montana and Wyoming, but the habitat that we have available — hayfields, crops, rangelands, badlands — all look really good this year, for the most part," he added. "One thing that was eye-opening to me, I kind of thought we had widespread rain throughout the west and there'd be good vegetative conditions throughout the entire range. And that's not the case. There are some areas that are still really dry, especially down in the extreme southwestern part of the state, and then some areas in the southern badlands and even in the northern badlands. So, those nice rain showers in spring and early summer, they weren't necessarily widespread."

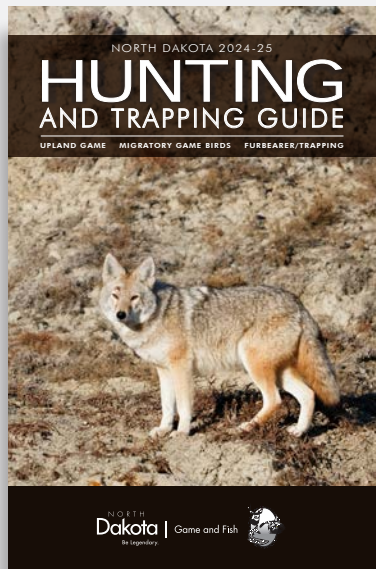
RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.



BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

New Hunting, Trapping Guide

Hunters and trappers can find the North Dakota 2024-25 Hunting and Trapping Guide, which includes upland game, migratory game bird and furbearer hunting/trapping regulations and other information, by visiting the state Game and Fish Department's website, gf.nd.gov. Printed guides are available at the usual license vendor locations.



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

When combined with fingerling production from Valley City National Fish Hatchery, 177 waters were stocked, providing a great boost in developing future fishing prospects across the state.

While producing nearly 12 million walleye fingerlings is significant for the one hatchery, Garrison Dam and Valley City combined efforts in 2017 to produce more than 12 million fingerlings.

"Traditionally, on large production years, significant numbers of walleye fingerlings would go to big systems like Lake Sakakawea, Lake Ashtabula and Stump Lake," Weigel said. "This year, no walleyes went to those waters, given very strong survival from last year's stockings. Just over 10 million fish went to up-and-coming smaller systems to enhance those fisheries along with taking advantage of rising lake levels at many prairie lakes due to the very wet spring."

Each spring, walleye eggs collected by fisheries personnel are taken to Garrison Dam and Valley City national fish hatcheries where they are hatched. After hatching, the walleye fry are stocked into production ponds and after a month of growth, 1-inch or longer fingerlings are collected and stocked across the state.

"Stocking conditions in 2024 were optimal given the wet spring and early summer, and cooler than normal temps," Weigel said. "The receiving waters were rich in invertebrates, critical food for the survival of the newly stocked walleye. Conditions are favorable for good survival and growth of young walleyes, which will continue to provide good fishing opportunities across the state for years to come."



Record Walleye Production Boosts Fisheries

Walleye fingerling stocking wrapped up with Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery setting a record with just short of 12 million fingerlings produced.

Distribution trucks traveled more than 12,000 miles over a two-week period in summer to stock the fish, according to Jerry Weigel, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fish production/development section supervisor.



Slowing the Spread of CWD

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

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

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

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



Duck Stamp Required

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

This year's 2024-25 federal duck stamp is available for electronic purchase through the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's website, gf.nd.gov, or license vendors registered with the Department's licensing system.

As a result of the Duck Stamp Modernization Act, the electronic stamp is now valid for the entire waterfowl hunting season. A physical stamp will be mailed in March 2025 to individuals who purchased the e-stamp.

Those interested in buying physical stamps can be purchased at many U.S. Postal Service offices or the Amplex website, and Amplex should be used for hunters wanting to support conservation by purchasing extra duck stamps.

The federal duck stamp costs \$25. An additional \$4 processing fee is added.

Get HIP Registered

Migratory bird hunters of all ages need to register with the Harvest Information Program prior to hunting ducks, geese, swans, mergansers, coots, cranes, snipe, doves and woodcock. Hunters must register in each state they are licensed to hunt.

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

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

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



Feathers for Science

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

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

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

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

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




Hunters interested in receiving wing envelopes should visit the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov, or contact the Department's main office in Bismarck at 701-328-6300 or email ndgf@nd.gov.

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

UPLAND GAME HUNTERS

We examine and measure feathers and/or legs from pheasant, grouse and partridge harvested by hunters to determine age and sex of each bird. We use this information to assess reproduction rates and sex ratios in our upland game populations. By contributing proper samples, you can help us monitor our upland bird populations to help improve future management of these species. **Thank you!**

DIRECTIONS: Place wings, feathers and legs in inner envelope, place up to 3 inner envelopes in this envelope and mail. Samples used by species are as follows:

Pheasant	Sharp-tailed Grouse	Partridge
 Wings out at line B B C Lower leg	 Feathers from top of head 2 longest tail feathers Wings out at line B	 Entire wing out at line A A

PLEASE DO NOT WRAP IN PLASTIC OR PLASTIC BAGS!

COUNTY WHERE SHOT: _____ DATE SHOT: _____

Pheasant _____ Sharp-tailed Grouse _____ Partridge _____

Name and Address of Hunter: _____

Check Here If You Want More Envelopes:

4/16/2024

WMA Equipment Restrictions

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department reminds hunters that tree stands, ground blinds and game

cameras cannot be placed on state wildlife management areas prior to August 20.

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

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

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

Fall Fire Danger Index

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Birds With Bands

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

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

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

Sandhill Crane Permits Required

North Dakota's sandhill crane season opens September 14 and continues through November 10.

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

PLOTS Guide Online

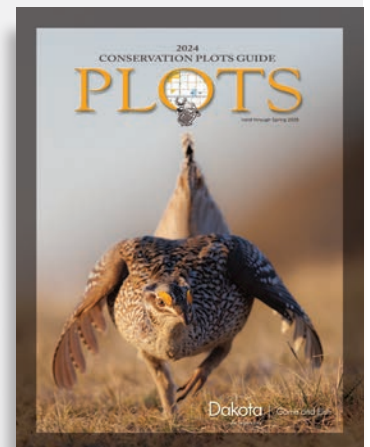
The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Private Land Open To Sportsmen Guide for 2024 is now available online at the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov.

The guide will feature about 836,000 PLOTS acres. Because PLOTS tracts can be added or removed from the program throughout the year, hunters are encouraged to use the Game and Fish mobile app or other mapping and browser-based applications to locate and identify these tracts. Map sheets are updated weekly on the department's website.

The PLOTS guide features maps highlighting these walk-in areas, identified in the field by inverted triangular yellow signs, as well as other public lands.

To maximize the use of hunter dollars, fewer signs will be placed on PLOTS tracts in the future. The cost savings will be directed to the addition of more habitat and access.

The free printed PLOTS guides will be available in late August at most license vendors and other locations throughout the state. The guides are not available by mail, so hunters will have to pick one up at a local vendor or Game and Fish offices, or print individual maps from the website.



Pull to the Right

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

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

To maintain positive landowner/hunter relations, Game and Fish Department officials said hunters should move to the right side of the road to allow wide farm vehicles to pass, park vehicles in a place that will not block a roadway, field approach or gate, pick up trash and empty shells, and not clean game in the road ditch or approach.



The contest is now open and the deadline for submitting photos is Oct. 1. For more information or questions, contact Patrick Isakson, Department conservation biologist, at pisakson@nd.gov.

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

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

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



WATCHABLE WILDLIFE

Photo Contest



Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest

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

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



Pictured from left to right: Tom Geerts, commissioner, Deven Laufer, commissioner, Jeff Merchant, Game and Fish Department, Todd Lutz, commissioner, Don Urlacher, chairman, Mark Anderson, board member and Gary Friedt, board member.

Hettinger County WRD Honored

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department recognized the Hettinger County WRD with the 2024 Certificate of Appreciation award for the group's ongoing efforts to maintain and improve local fisheries.

"Over the years, the WRD has been active and cooperated with the Department on development and maintenance of a wide variety of public use facilities on area lakes and recreation areas, including partnering with Game and Fish on boat ramps, courtesy docks, fishing piers, roads vault toilets and parking areas at sites such as Larson Lake, Mott Watershed Dam and, most notably, Indian Creek Dam," said Jeff Merchant, Department fisheries biologist.

Merchant added that the WRD has also been very supportive in providing the all-important role of ongoing maintenance and continues to undertake operation and maintenance of many of these facilities at the aforementioned recreation areas.

"As we all know, maintaining anything is as important as the initial construction and the WRD does an outstanding job in performing this task," he said.



Pictured from left to right: Todd Buckley and Casey Anderson, both Game and Fish Department, Kyle Dragseth, David Weltikol, Caleb Cornell and WREC director Sam Funk.

WMA Partnership Award

Kyle Dragseth, David Weltikol and Kaleb Cornell from the NDSU Williston Research Extension Center were recognized in July for the Game and Fish Department's Wildlife Management Area Partnership Award for their efforts on Lewis and Clark Wildlife Management Area.

The working relationship is a win-win for both entities, said Casey Anderson, Department wildlife division chief.

NDSU has a crop share permit from the Department to grow crops on approximately 500 acres of the WMA. The Department gets 30% of the crop left as standing food plots for wintering wildlife and to enhance hunting opportunities. NDSU WREC gets 70%, which is generally used for certified seed production.

The 12,150-acre Lewis and Clark WMA is Missouri River bottomlands and harbors pheasants, turkeys, white-tailed deer and moose. The habitat consists of cottonwoods, willows, grass plantings and an important mix of cropland.

"In addition, the Department often relies on their expertise for chemical, seed, timing, and crop varieties," Anderson said. "Also, they have large farm equipment to help in grass plantings and crop rotations. Dragseth, Weltikol and Cornell are committed to raising high quality crops for their program. However, they are also dedicated sportsmen and conservationists that truly enjoy working with the wildlife resource and Department staff."

Chronic Wasting Disease Proclamation

Big game hunters should note the 2024 chronic wasting disease proclamation for baiting and transportation requirements for deer, elk and moose as a precaution against the spread of chronic wasting disease.

Noteworthy items include:

- Deer gun hunting unit 2B is removed from the list of units where baiting is restricted after the minimum sampling requirement was met with no positive detections.
- No new units have been added to the baiting restriction list for 2024-25.
- Hunters are prohibited from transporting into North Dakota the whole carcass or parts, except the lower-risk portions, of deer, elk, moose or other members of the cervid family harvested outside of North Dakota.

State Game and Fish Department officials will conduct surveillance of the state by region on a four-year rotation. This year, the CWD surveillance effort will consist of deer gun units in northeastern North Dakota. Outside of this area, hunters can still have their animal tested by taking it to a Game and Fish district office, any deer head collection site (primarily located in the surveillance area) or using a mail-in self-sampling kit. A unit outside the annual surveillance zone is still eligible to have a baiting restriction removed if the sampling goal is met or can be added as a restricted unit if a positive is found.

STAFF NOTES

Warden Supervisor Retires

Mark Pollert, longtime North Dakota Game and Fish Department employee, retired after 33 years with the agency.

Pollert was a warden supervisor in Jamestown at the time of his retirement. He held the position in the agency's enforcement division since 2012.

"Mark was a devoted and tireless leader within the division during his tenure with Game and Fish," said Scott Winkelman, enforcement division chief. "Mark's commitment to North Dakota, the outdoors, the public, and fellow game wardens was unrivaled. He laid a solid foundation for all those following in his footsteps, and he will be missed during his well-deserved retirement."



Mark Pollert

Corcoran Joins Agency

Quentin Corcoran was hired in summer as wildlife biological technician at Lonetree Wildlife Management Area near Harvey.

Corcoran was working for the National Park Service at Knife River Indian Villages before his move to the agency.



Quentin Corcoran



BACKCAST

By Ron Wilson

It's been 17 years.

That's a long time between doing something and not.

In 2007, my father-in-law drew a cow moose tag, a once-in-a-lifetime license he filled opening morning after days of scouting, miles and miles of driving dirt roads and an untold number of phone calls to wildlife managers, game wardens and landowners in the unit he was allowed to hunt.

Now it's my turn. Same unit. Same animal. Same plan starting from scratch.

I know what some of you are thinking: "Of course, he drew a moose tag. He works for Game and Fish."

That's an old, tired, often-repeated argument that has nothing to do with it, but more to do with applying for a cow instead of a bull. Like drawing a doe tag rather than a buck, odds are better for those willing to forgo antlers.

Even so, getting a little lucky helped.

Back then, 17 years ago, I had a hard-side camper that popped out tent-like on both ends. I parked it for much of September in Sheridan County, called it moose camp, shot the occasional sharp-tailed grouse and spotted fewer moose while scouting for the Oct. 5 opener. It was a comfortable place to return to after chasing around the country from sunrise to sunset nearly two hours from home.

The camper is long gone, and I never replaced it with anything comparable, save for a six-person tent gifted to the family that I once set up in the back yard just to see what it looked like. I've never slept in it and it's doubtful I ever will. At this stage of my hunting career, sleeping on the ground has lost its appeal.

To be more mobile, likely many miles from home wherever the moose sign takes me, I envision cooking off my pickup's tailgate and sleeping in a reclined front seat. I've certainly done the former before and tested out the latter in our driveway and it wasn't horrible. While it's been years, it reminded me of the many nights of sleeping in a recliner with a toddler on my chest battling an earache.

Every year, when previewing the upcoming hunting seasons, our big game biologists, when addressing those who drew elk and moose tags, say preseason scouting and making landowner contacts is essential for a successful hunt.

They're not wrong. I don't know which task accounts for more, but both are essential. Putting in the miles looking over likely moose habitat and relying on the kindness of strangers to let you hunt their land certainly improves your odds.

I wrote this following the 2007 hunt: "On average, it's said that a cow moose weighs roughly 900 pounds. Up close that estimate seems a little light. Three hours later, after field-dressing, quartering and hauling the remains to the road, we're spent, and left wondering if the once-in-a-lifetime designation has to do with wanting to tackle such a large animal just the once."

After 17 years, I should be well-rested. Now I just need to get a little lucky.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.



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

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

Let's assume the buck that once carried this horn died. Saying that, he could have died in a number of ways, but the cause likely had something to do with the weather. Two winters ago, like a lot of animals in North Dakota, pronghorn struggled to negotiate the realities of months and months of snow and cold. These prairie speedsters and other animals caught a welcomed break last winter. A mild winter helped fuel a 30% rebound in a pronghorn population that took a 40% hit to the population following winter of 2022-23.

PHOTO BY JESSE KOLAR

connect with us
gf.nd.gov/connect



YouTube

