

# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS



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



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Paul Bailey, Game and Fish Department fisheries supervisor in Bismarck, with a walleye netted in fall at West Lake Napoleon.

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

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](http://gf.nd.gov) • Email: [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov)
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- *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

OCTOBER 2024 • NUMBER 3 • VOLUME LXXXVII

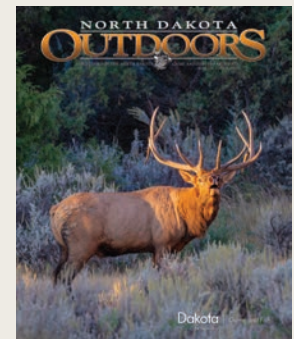
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*North Dakota OUTDOORS* is published 10 times a year, monthly except for the months of April and September. Subscription rates are \$10 for one year or \$20 for three years. Group rates of \$7 a year are available to organizations presenting 25 or 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.

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### Front Cover

Rutting bull elk in the badlands.

PHOTO BY JESSE KOLAR, DICKINSON.



# MAKING A GOOD IMPRESSION

An early season bow-hunt in south central North Dakota.



BY RON WILSON

**I**t's hunting season.

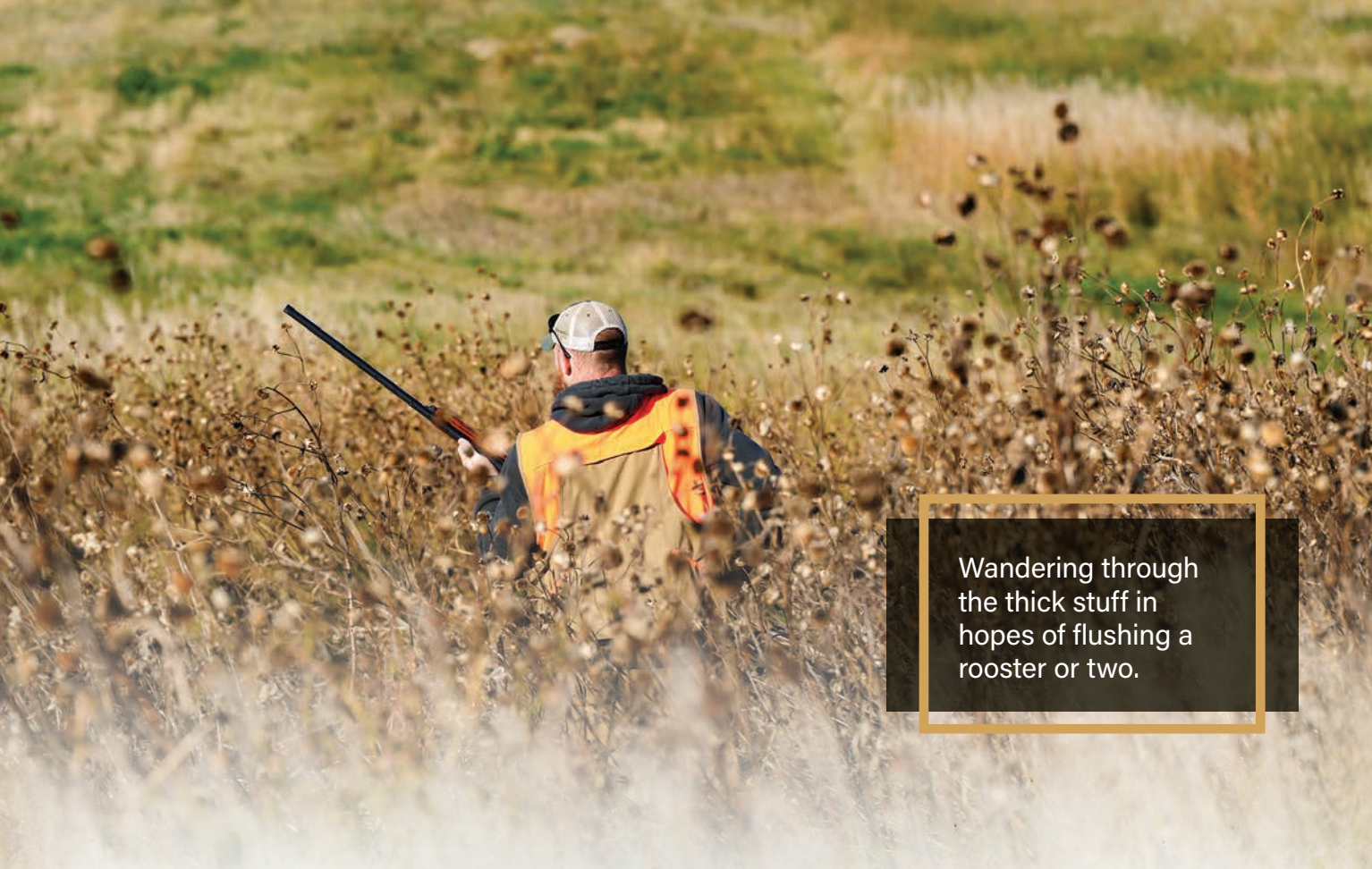
That means something in North Dakota. It resonates with those who have kept their bird dogs in shape over summer, shot an untold number of arrows at 3-D targets and can't wait to bust out the hunter orange because, well, 'tis the season.

"North Dakota consistently ranks at the top when it comes to per capita participation in hunting and fishing, which is certainly an indication of what it means to many of the people who live here ... it's an indication of our culture," said Jeb Williams, North Dakota Game and Fish Department director. "North Dakota is still very much a rural state and hunting and fishing activities are impactful and play a big role in rural areas. We're just blessed to have the culture that we do that provides such a great hunting and fishing atmosphere."

While Game and Fish made available fewer deer licenses this year than even last year when extreme winter conditions steamrolled the state's deer herd, Williams said hunting opportunities are still many this fall.

"There's always going to be something in North Dakota providing really good opportunities" he said. "I think the variety pack of bird hunting opportunities should be as good as we've had in a number of years for pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse and Hungarian partridge. Our partridge numbers over the last several years have really shown an increase. We've seen that both in our data collection process and our hunter harvest surveys. And, of course, waterfowl are always going to provide some good opportunities when you consider the combination of our resident birds and the fall migratory push that usually comes in that November time frame."

No matter the forecast for whatever species, North Dakota's uplands and wetlands will host an untold number of hunters this fall, and Williams encourages everyone to treat the land, landowners and other hunters with respect.



Wandering through the thick stuff in hopes of flushing a rooster or two.

"This is one of those topics that always needs to be discussed because hunting and fishing are activities that do require good behavior, and we want to make sure that people are doing the right things and are looked upon in a positive way because it reflects on everybody," he said. "And we also have to remember that the many people who aren't necessarily involved in hunting

and fishing and trapping and all the outdoor activities, they support these regulated activities, so it's important to continue to make sure that we play that role of ethical hunters and anglers."

That role includes being safe, as well.

"People still get excited when they're in the field, as well they should, but along with that sometimes comes accidents. People get to moving a little too fast, they get distracted by pheasants flushing in different directions," Williams said. "Those skills and applicable tools that many hunters were taught in our hunter education courses to make sure everyone makes it home safely goes a long way in improving the experience of everyone in the field."

While it's no secret that hunting in North Dakota, a state where 93% of the land is privately owned, is getting more challenging in terms of access, Williams encourages hunters to knock on a door, make a phone call to a landowner.

"We are fortunate in North Dakota that the opportunity still exists as responsible hunters to visit with landowners about hunting their land," he said. "There are still a lot of hunting



Safety is a priority no matter the hunting season.

opportunities that exist in North Dakota if hunters are willing to form those relationships."

At the time of this writing, nearly mid-September with the grouse and partridge seasons opening statewide, there was a red flag warning for much of southwestern North Dakota and portions of the central part of the state. This is a concern for those who live in those areas and should be of concern for all who recreate in the outdoors this fall.

"It seems that no matter the year, it's more common than not that western North Dakota is going to be pretty dry come opening of hunting seasons, whether that's late August, early September. There's going to be dry spots out there and that's concerning to landowners when you have additional traffic and people driving in areas where there's taller vegetation, parking in areas where there's vegetation ... any of those things are concerning," Williams said. "This year the vegetation did have an opportunity to grow pretty well early on as adequate moisture coupled with pretty cool conditions made for some good habitat conditions in western North Dakota. But then mid-July came, and the rain quit, and high temperatures set in. There is some extra concern out there, so a reminder to hunters about those conditions goes a long way."

Along similar lines, Williams reminds hunters that they will likely encounter landowners harvesting crops, moving from field to field, and ushering cattle from here to there.

Ring-necked pheasant in fall.



"Even though some of the row crop harvest comes a little later, hunters will still be in the field, and they'll certainly come across bigger machinery, combines, semis, tractors and grain carts at times traveling back roads going from field to field," he said. "We ask hunters to pay attention to that extra activity on some of those rural roads. Hunters pulling to the right or stopping on an approach is always appreciated."

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*RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.*

Pronghorn in western North Dakota.





Walleye fingerlings by the millions are raised each year at Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery before being stocked in North Dakota waters.



# FINGERLINGS IN THE MILLIONS

BY RON WILSON

Let's start with some numbers.

The working relationship between the North Dakota Game and Fish Department and Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery reaches back more than 60 years. In 2024, the hatchery produced a record of nearly 12 million walleye fingerlings that were released in about 180 lakes across the state.

In his 28 years of focusing his efforts on walleyes at Garrison Dam, Jerry Tishmack, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service fisheries biologist, has raised about 245 million fingerlings, which is equal to 40-plus tons.

Some perspective. During Tishmack's tenure, more walleye fingerlings have been raised and shipped out of the hatchery near Riverdale than any state or province in North America.

While there is some natural reproduction going on in North Dakota waters, you could speculate that maybe half of the walleyes caught by anglers over time originated in the hatchery, further solidifying its significance to meeting the expectations of walleye anglers across the state and beyond.

"Even if you were to say half — half that are naturally produced and half came from the hatchery — that's still a crazy contribution from this hatchery," said Jerry Weigel, Department production/development section supervisor,

who, along with other Game and Fish personnel, have for years driven about 1,000 miles for every million fingerlings stocked. "The other thing is the overwhelming majority of the 200-300 new lakes that we've added over the last several decades didn't have fish in them. So, if it wasn't for the hatchery and the ability to stock and get some fish established, there wouldn't be any walleyes in those lakes."

Tishmack, a Raleigh, N.D. native, started at Garrison Dam in 1992 after spending a few years as a Game and Fish Department fisheries technician in Devils Lake.

"Jerry took over all pond production in 1996 and for many of those years he was the sole person in charge of filling, stocking, fertilizing and draining all 64 ponds," Weigel said. "As

2024 70% SURVIVAL



Jerry Weigel (left), Game and Fish Department, and Jerry Tishmack, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, watch as walleye fingerlings are emptied into stocking tanks readied for transport.

the growth of fishing waters occurred across North Dakota, so did the demand for more walleye fingerlings. Each year a new record would be set at 10 million fingerlings, then 11 million ... the bar to ask for more kept increasing.

"This being a government operation, we run kind of lean as there's not a great big team of people who are involved with this process," he added. "Because Jerry hasn't transferred to other hatcheries and moved around, coupled with expanding need for more fish, you create an environment for somebody to be a part of raising an incredible number of fish over those three decades."

With 430-plus managed waters on North Dakota's landscape, Tishmack said the request from Game and Fish to raise more and more walleyes keeps increasing, giving hatchery personnel a reason to max out the capacity at the hatchery.

"In the past 12-15 years, we've been raising every walleye we can here basically, because everybody loves walleyes and everybody wants them," he said.

Aside from the hard-earned knowhow and science of raising fish, a contributing factor in the hatchery meeting demands and setting a new record for walleye produced is that two-thirds of the 64 hatchery are ponds lined with fabric.

"We ran into issues where these earthen ponds started leaking, so the solution was to put geo-fabric

liners to stop the leaking. And what we found was that we don't necessarily raise more fish versus an unlined pond, but we raise larger fish," Weigel said. "But more importantly, we got rid of the variability. There were times where an earthen pond returned very few fish. Not sure why. We almost never see that with a lined pond. This has been an evolution over the last several decades to get to this point. Once all the ponds are lined, the potential to break 12 million is pretty good if we have the request and need for that many fish."

Even so, the stars have to align to raise walleye fingerlings into the millions.



The walleye spawn is where it starts. Eggs taken from female walleyes are raised in the federal fish hatchery.

"Everything has to line up. This year we had over 70% survival and that's absolutely phenomenal. Are we ever going to see over 70% survival again? I'm not so sure we will. Our average over the past 10 years is 60%. And when I started this program, our average was below 50%. So, our survival is increasing," Tishmack said. "Is it because we're learning? Is it because of the liners? I'm not so sure about that, because the liners don't make better survival, they make healthier, larger fish. I don't think that's contributing to our survival increase. Considering we had 70% survival this year, it's going to be tough to beat that."

Knowing that 180 waters were stocked with walleye fingerlings this year alone, Tishmack understands the value that has across a state where walleye is king.

"Think about the economic impact of that. In all reality, the money it does cost the government, federal and state, to raise these 12 million fish to stock in 180 lakes, the economic impact is so much greater," he said. "Think of the boat fuel, tackle, fishing gear, bait, all that contributing to the local economies of this state. I don't know what the ratio is, but they're probably easily quadrupling their dol-

lar for the money it costs to raise these fish here."


With more managed fishing waters than ever scattered across North Dakota and a continued interest by anglers to explore the many fishing opportunities, Weigel understands the importance the Game and Fish Department and Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery play in making good while the getting is good.

"Game and Fish staff, as well as the folks here at the hatchery, are anglers and we like to enjoy the end product of what we do and we're so fortunate in North Dakota because having the fish is just one of the components," Weigel said. "The other is water. And we're just so fortunate that this wet period keeps going. We have lakes that are still getting larger, still rising, and have a crazy amount of food.

"There's never been more walleye fisheries and fishing opportunities in North Dakota than there is today. It is the best of times," he added. "I'm not saying this is as good as it gets. It could still continue to get better, but it's pretty darn amazing. A big part of it starts right here at the hatchery."

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*RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.*



It's only a guess if this nice Devils Lake walleye is the product of natural reproduction or raised in the hatchery. It likely doesn't matter either way to this angler.

# WINNMA

## GRASSLAND RESTORATION

BY RON WILSON





Bill Haase (left) and Levi Jacobson, both with the Game and Fish Department, stand in the waist-high and taller forbs and grasses at Robert W. Henderson Wildlife Management Area near Bismarck.

**W**hat separates the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's more than 200 owned or managed wildlife management areas is townships, counties, miles.

What makes the 200,000-plus WMA acres found across the state similar is a concentrated effort to improve wildlife habitat and provide opportunities for hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts.

Robert W. Henderson WMA, located just 6 miles east of Bismarck, is a good example of this effort. Five years ago, 100 acres of the roughly 550-acre WMA was a mat of Kentucky bluegrass.

"The bluegrass got to be about 6- to 10-inches tall then it just matted itself out," said Levi Jacobson, Department wildlife resource management supervisor in Bismarck, of the land that was previously farmed. "We were grazing it aggressively to try and bust through some of that and bring some of the native plants back and we just weren't gaining ground. So, we had the neighboring landowner come in and farm it for three years with soybeans, corn and soybeans again."

After the last harvest, Jacobson and crew in May 2022 planted a diverse, native mix of 13 forbs and 10 grasses to mimic the native prairie that once dominated the landscape.

"The first year it was planted it was really dry and we didn't know how successful the plant-

ing would be as it often takes a couple years to express vegetation above ground as most of the growth is put into establishing roots," Jacobson said. "And then this year, with all the moisture it really blew up and looks really good."

Earlier in summer, some of the native species were shoulder-high and taller, with an impressive undergrowth. The wildlife in the area, from deer to pheasants, to many other bird species, should benefit.

"We try to go heavy on the forbs and the wildflowers because those are going to produce food and the grass is going to provide a lot the cover," Jacobson said. "The forbs bring in the insects. Those pheasant chicks, in this quality brood rearing habitat, need insects for the first few weeks of their life."

While the native species have thrived at Henderson and other WMAs thanks to timely rains in spring and summer, Bill Haase, Department assistant wildlife division chief, knows that Mother Nature is unpredictable in any given season.

The habitat at Henderson WMA was in ideal shape for this hen pheasant and her brood earlier in summer.



"We know we are going to get droughts, but the beauty of these native species is that the root systems go really deep into the ground," Haase said. "And that's the difference between these native species and, say, Kentucky bluegrass or some other invasive species where that root is only maybe just 6 inches ... it's a big difference. The hope is that these native species outcompete those other species and withstand droughts and tough conditions."

North Dakota's native prairies are a vanishing, yet a vital component on the state's landscape. But, Haase stressed, once native prairies are broken, we never truly get them back.

"There'll be hundreds of species that are naturally existing on those native prairies, so we're trying to mimic what was lost," he said. "Even so, we planted just 23 species here in an effort to get back to what it looked like in its native state, but we'll never quite get back there. That's something to keep in mind. It's important to wildlife, the Department and hopefully sportsmen and women

to maintain those native prairies on the landscape because they're disappearing."

While that has been somewhat of a never-ending battle as more than 75% of the state's native grasslands have been lost over time, the Department continues its effort to enhance wildlife habitat on WMAs around the state.

"Plant diversity and adequate cover are essential for our WMAs. Invasive cool season grass species, such as Kentucky bluegrass and smooth brome, continue to invade our grasslands and often choke out other species, leaving a monoculture of poor habitat," Jacobson said. "And once that happens, wildlife reproduction is really limited as well as hunting opportunities. There's not much that's going to stay in a couple inches of short grass while you're out hunting. So, these diverse, big, tall stands of grass are pretty important."

Like at other WMAs, Jacobson said the Department works with ranchers who graze a portion of the WMA every year.

"The cattle are rotated through different pad-

**“THERE’LL BE HUNDREDS OF SPECIES THAT ARE NATURALLY EXISTING ON THOSE NATIVE PRAIRIES, SO WE’RE TRYING TO MIMIC WHAT WAS LOST.”**

**BILL HAASE**



docks every couple weeks, which allows time for vegetation to recover and provide regrowth for the fall hunting season,” he said.

While what’s going on at Henderson is a good thing for wildlife that need this type of habitat in all months of the year to complete their life cycles, more of this is needed in a state that is 93% privately owned.

“This is certainly something a private landowner can do, and we have programs in the Game and Fish Department, or other programs through other agencies, to help those landowners out,” Haase said. “While our PLOTS program requires public access, there are others that don’t. For those landowners who are looking to put some areas that aren’t as productive for crop production back into grass, which they can utilize it for haying or livestock production, there are a lot of programs for that as well.”

While the newish 100-acre planting at Henderson certainly safeguarded whitetail fawns during the warmer months and offered a buffet of insects for pheasant chicks zig zagging through the under-

growth, Jacobson said the native plant species will continue to show their worth when winter snow arrives during the leaner months.

“Before the grassland renovation, you couldn’t have hidden a field mouse,” Haase said. “The fruits of the labor will be seen no matter the time of year.”

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*RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.*



Mike Anderson, Department video project supervisor, conducts an interview a few years ago in Dickinson on a Game and Fish Department elk study in western North Dakota.





# BRINGING THE OUTDOORS INDOORS

BY RON  
WILSON

North Dakota Outdoors video news program turned 30 this month, impressively marking decades of nearly uninterrupted coverage of all things outdoors in the state.

Mike Anderson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department video project supervisor, has helped shuttle the 2-minute weekly segment from field to viewers for 29 of those 30 years.

Airing for the first time in 1994, the program was initially on a make-or-break trial for a year before becoming part of the Department's permanent budget.

At the outset, NDO's show was a tough sell to TV stations in the state because they were an unproven product trying to slip into local news coverage that was aired, unlike today, at just 6 and 10 p.m.

"The TV stations had legitimate concerns. Were we going to produce a high-quality program? Was it going to be consistent? Was it going to be ready to air every week?" Anderson said. "It was not only hard to get on those stations, but to maintain those stations over the years."

The last to climb on board was WDAY in Fargo. "I've been trying to get on there for about 27

years, and now we're part of their local news every week for about the last three years, which is great," Anderson said.

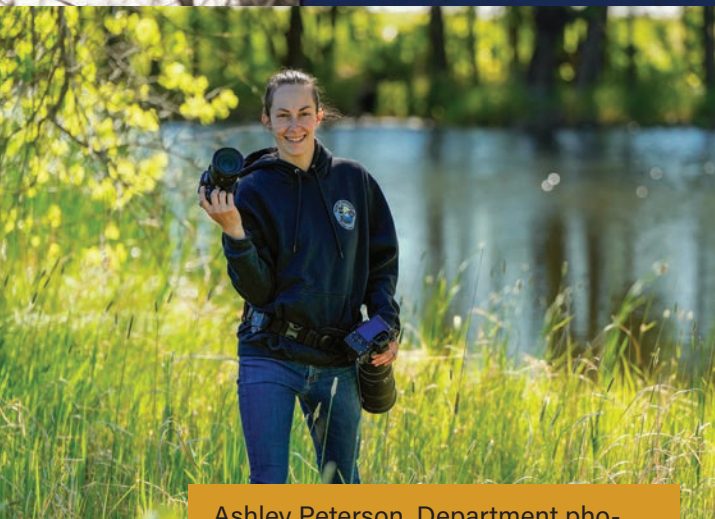
Greg Freeman, Department communications supervisor, said the program's reach is impressive as it broadcasts the agency's message to inform hunters, anglers and others who recreate outdoors.

"We are on 12 television stations across North Dakota, parts of South Dakota, Montana, Minnesota and into Canada, connecting with over 100,000 viewers each week. In addition, it's shared across the stations associated social media outlets. That's coverage we can't get from

30  
years



Mike Anderson interviews RJ Gross, Department upland game biologist, in studio.



Ashley Peterson, Department photographer/videographer, has been with the Game and Fish for nearly 6 years.

any of our other communication platforms," Freeman said. "And then when you combine it with our magazine, webcast, podcast, blogs, newsletter, social media and marketing efforts, it would be hard-pressed for a hunter or angler to go a couple days without encountering some of our outreach efforts."

Like the other divisions within the Game and Fish Department, the video crew runs lean. For 16 years, beginning in 2001, Anderson shot and edited the show's content, while Tom Jensen was the writer and voice behind the program. Today, Ashley Peterson, Department photographer/videographer, can be found behind the camera shooting video for the program and photos for the magazine, while Anderson continues his longtime duties, plus script writing and narration.

"Without the cooperation of our communications team and other agency staff, the work just wouldn't be getting done," Anderson said. "Just this morning I did interviews with fisheries personnel doing fall fishery production work and 20 minutes later I was interviewing a game warden. That kind of cooperation is what makes this work."

The video news program provides people of North Dakota and elsewhere an inside look at the many functions of the Game and Fish from, say, big game research, fish spawning and stocking and hunter education.

"Being part of a team that goes into the field, captures this stuff and presents it to the public is pretty special," Anderson said.

After 29 years of being behind a camera, the experiences have been many. Even so, as a longtime viewer of the program, you have to ask about some of what stands out.

"Our bighorn sheep releases are days in the field that I won't forget ... seeing those majestic animals being released in western North Dakota, knowing all the work that took biologists and crew to get them there is pretty neat," Anderson said. "Being on a crew that hiked into a mountain lion den in the badlands to tag kittens, while the big female made sure that we

knew that she was hanging close, was exciting and unnerving. Yet, I brought the footage back to Bismarck, edited it, sent it to the TV stations so anyone in North Dakota who watched it got to see what I saw."

Like with any other job, with the interesting comes the grind.

"Deadlines. Deadlines. Deadlines. With this you're constantly planning and thinking ahead. Today, it's mid-September, but my mind is already thinking about what needs to be done by the end of October," Anderson said. "There's a lot of logistics involved with lining up interviews all over the state because we cover every corner of North Dakota. Then again, we can't complain because we're seeing and filming a lot of things first-hand that most people don't get to experience."

Out of the hundreds of interviews the video news program crew has done around the state, Anderson said he's only had two people cancel in nearly three decades.

Blame it on COVID, he said.

The changes in the equipment, especially in lenses and cameras, the latter of which have gotten lighter and easier to pack into the badlands, follow pheasant hunters through cattails, or haul with the other gear to a sage grouse blind in the dark, are staggering.

"Back in the day, I didn't think the video we were getting with the equipment we had could get any better, but the quality is nothing like it is today," Anderson said. "Ashley gets the credit because she provides the technical and the research with the equipment to ensure that we get awesome video and photos. That's a job in itself to keep up with the modern technology and equipment."

As of this mid-September writing, Anderson is editing episode 1,557 about this fall's pheasant season. Then it's on to number 1,558 and so on.

"In the beginning, I guess I never saw myself doing this for 29 years, but here we are," he said. "We call what we do a job, but it's way more than that."

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*RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.*



Mike Anderson on a sage grouse lek in southwestern North Dakota.



Tom Jensen was the Department's video news director for about 17 years. He retired in 2017.



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# BUFFALOBERRY PATCH



## Seven Bighorn Sheep Licenses

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department allocated seven bighorn sheep licenses for the 2024 hunting season, one more than last year.

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

In total, 19,889 applicants applied for bighorn sheep. In 2023, a record 20,290 hunters applied for a chance to hunt.

Prospective hunters were required to apply for a bighorn license earlier this year on the bighorn sheep, moose and elk application.



## ANS and Waterfowlers

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

Hunters must remove aquatic plants and plant fragments

from decoys, strings and anchors; remove aquatic plant seeds and plant fragments from waders and other equipment before leaving hunting areas; remove all water from decoys, boats, motors, trailers and other watercraft; and remove all aquatic plants from boats and trailers before leaving a marsh or lake.

In addition, hunters are encouraged to brush their hunting dogs free of mud and seeds.

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

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

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

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



## Duck Boat Safety

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

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

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



## Watch for Deer

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

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

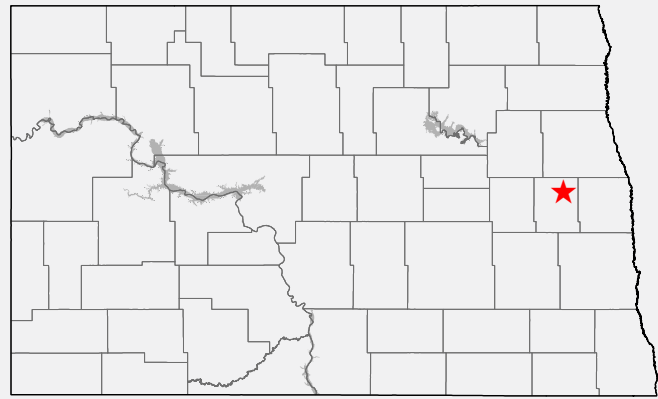
When you see one deer cross the road, look for a second or third deer to follow. Also, pay attention on roadways posted with Deer Crossing Area caution signs.

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

In addition, a permit is required before taking possession of road-killed deer. Permits are free and available from Department game wardens and local law enforcement.

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

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



## Zebra Mussels Found in South Golden Lake

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department confirmed the presence of invasive zebra mussels in South Golden Lake, Steele County, after detecting zebra mussel veligers in routine net samples.

Ben Holen, Department aquatic nuisance species coordinator, said follow-up sampling found additional adult mussels in the 331-acre lake that is a popular recreation destination located 13 miles southwest of Hatton.

Due to its immediate downstream connection, North Golden will be listed with South Golden Lake as Class I ANS infested waters. These lakes join Lake Elsie, Twin Lakes, Lake LaMoure, Lake Ashtabula, lower portion of the Sheyenne River, and the Red River in this designation. Emergency rules will go into effect immediately to prohibit the movement of water away from the lake, including water for transferring bait. Notices will be posted at lake access sites.

Zebra mussels are just one of the nonnative aquatic species that threaten our waters and native wildlife. After using any body of water, people must remember to follow North Dakota regulations:

- Remove aquatic vegetation before leaving the water access and do not import into North Dakota.
- Drain all water before leaving the water access.
- Remove drain plugs and devices that hold back water and leave open and out during transport.
- Do not import aquatic bait into the state. For Class I ANS infested waters, aquatic bait cannot be transported away from the water. In all other areas, bait must be transported in a container that holds 5 gallons or less. It is illegal to dump unused bait on shore or into the lake.

In addition to North Dakota regulations, the Game and Fish Department strongly recommends the following:

- Avoid mooring watercraft in zebra mussels infested waters.
- Clean – remove plants, animals and excessive mud prior to leaving a water access.
- Drain – drain all water prior to leaving a water access.
- Dry – allow equipment to dry completely or disinfect before using again. This includes boat docks and boat lifts. North Dakota Administrative Code states that "All docks, lifts and related equipment must be dried and left out of water for at least 21 days before they may be placed in another water."

For more information about ANS in North Dakota, options for disinfection, or to report a possible ANS, visit [gf.nd.gov/ans](http://gf.nd.gov/ans).



## Check for Zebra Mussels

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

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

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

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

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



## Prepping for Deer Season

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

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

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

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

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

## Dead Deer Permit

A permit is required before taking possession of a dead deer. Only shed antlers can be possessed without a permit.

Permits are free and available from North Dakota Game and Fish Department game wardens and local law enforcement offices.

In addition, hunters should properly dispose of dead deer. Carcass waste cannot be left on public property, including roadways, ditches or wildlife management areas.

If transported outside of its respective gun unit, carcass waste must be disposed of via landfill or waste management provider. This requirement does not apply to heads dropped off at chronic wasting disease collection sites, or lymph nodes submitted for CWD surveillance.

## Order 2025 OUTDOORS Calendars

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is taking orders for its *North Dakota OUTDOORS* calendar, the source for all hunting season and application dates for 2025. Along with color photographs of North Dakota's wildlife and outstanding scenery, it also includes sunrise-sunset times and moon phases.

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



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

## Whooping Crane Migration

Whooping cranes are migrating south, and sightings will increase as they make their way into and through North Dakota this fall. Anyone seeing these endangered birds as they move through the state is asked to report sightings so the birds can be tracked.

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

Whoopers stand about five feet tall and have a wingspan of about seven feet from tip to tip. They are bright white with black wing tips, which are visible only when the wings are outspread. In flight they extend their long necks straight forward, while their long, slender legs extend out behind

the tail. Whooping cranes typically migrate singly, or in groups of 2-3 birds, and may be associated with sandhill cranes.

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

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

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

## STAFF NOTES

### Ressler Earns Governor's Award

Jackie Ressler, Game and Fish Department marketing specialist, was awarded the 2024 Governor's Pioneer Award in September for her efforts to increase the Department's social media presence, create new partnerships and lead marketing campaigns on crucial topics such as aquatic nuisance species, job recruitment, boater safety, hunting and fishing participation and more.



Jackie Ressler (left) and Gov. Doug Burgum.

"Team North Dakota members continue to excel in serving our state's citizens and delivering on our shared purpose: to Empower People, Improve Lives and Inspire Success," said Gov. Doug Burgum. "The record number of nominations we received this year — over 1,400 submissions across more than 55 agencies — highlights the exceptional work of our team members. We are incredibly grateful to these individuals and their teams for their dedication and unwavering commitment to our state and its citizens."



**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.



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



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# BACKCAST

By Ron Wilson

**B**uffaloberry Patch has been a fixture in the back of the magazine for roughly 40 years. Home each issue to a collection of shorter pieces that are informative to those who recreate outdoors is something, after having a hand in *North Dakota OUTDOORS* for more than two decades, I'm naturally familiar with.

My understanding of the actual shrub, a staple over much of the landscape we roam, is limited. What I do know, like a lot of hunters have long figured out, is that the thorny buffaloberry plant "bites." I've snagged flannel shirt sleeves an untold number of times while kicking around patches as big as my living room trying to flush sharp-tailed grouse.

As grouse hunters, we gravitate to the patches of buffaloberries in early season as the sun rides higher and temperatures rise because that's where some of the birds, not all of them, head to the shade and loaf during the heat of the day.

The drawback to this gameplan is where in the heck do we start, and does it really matter? This neck of McKenzie County we're hunting is big country and the buffaloberry patches are many in places, seemingly outnumbering the critters drawn to them.

With miles under our belts and sweat riding down our backs, I pause on a hilltop and watch as my boys and their younger legs kick through the buffaloberries

and flush two sharptails hunkered in the shade. Both birds fall dead in calf-high yellow grass not 30 yards from the tangle of thorns and face-slapping branches.

Holding the birds in one hand by their feathered legs, the grouse swing by Jack's side with each step. We agree, as we make our way over another hill to meet Nate, that we expected to see more birds considering the country we covered, but a two-bird hike is never a bad thing.

As we field dress the birds back at the pickup, we inspect their crops and find them, like the birds shot earlier in the morning, stuffed with grasshoppers and seeds that we can't begin to identify.

We rinse out the inside of the birds, wash my pocketknife and hands of blood, and I think of the red buffaloberries that make the shrubs pop as they decorate the arid hillsides.

But not this fall. While the hardy, cold- and drought-tolerant shrubs look for the most part like we remember them, we have to poke through the branches to find even a few of the blood-red berries that give them their distinctive appearance.

Maybe we're early and the fruit will turn while we're home chasing grouse in Burleigh County, I wonder out loud, but a quick search on my phone when we have decent reception back at camp says the berries ripen by late summer.

I'm not a botanist, nor do I even know one personally, but if I had to guess the lack of ripened fruit is weather related ... late frost, not enough of this, too much of that.

I read where according to folklore that an abundant crop of berries is a sign of a cold, snowy winter. While they didn't specify what kind of berries, I'm going to hang my hat on the coming months being tolerable.



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RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

North Dakota Outdoors Magazine  
North Dakota Game and Fish Department  
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your address, call 701-328-6300 or  
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*Mike Johnson, Game and Fish Department fisheries biologist in Jamestown, holds a virile crayfish from Big Mallard Marsh in September. The crayfish was found in a trap net while Department fisheries personnel conducted a fall fish reproduction survey. North Dakota has two species of crayfish. The aforementioned virile and the calico. Johnson said these crayfish are found in a lot of waters in North Dakota, but not all of them.*

PHOTO BY MIKE ANDERSON



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