

NORTH DAKOTA STATE REPORT

June 2019

Terry Steinwand, Director
North Dakota Game and Fish Department
100 N. Bismarck Expressway
Bismarck, ND 58501

2019 Legislative Session

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department tracked 40 outdoors-related bills during the 2019 legislative session, 21 of which were passed by both chambers and signed into law. Some bills of note include:

HB 1021 – Included in the Information Technology Department's appropriation, during the 2019-21 interim, a 14 member land access committee (with nine voting members) will study access to public and private lands for hunting, trapping, fishing and related issues, including trespass violations and penalties, and provide recommendations regarding a land access database with capabilities of electronic posting. The study committee may establish a trial electronic posting and hunter access information system in up to three counties prior to Aug. 1, 2020, and report findings and recommendations to the 67th legislative assembly.

HB 1246 – Defines the eligibility requirements relating to gratis licenses for hunting big game and to provide a legislative study.

SB 2293 – Creates an aquatic nuisance species program fund in the state treasury. Effective Jan. 1, 2020, establishes an ANS fee of \$15 for each motorized watercraft registered in North Dakota to run concurrent with the three-year watercraft registration period. For motorized watercraft operated on waters in North Dakota but not licensed in North Dakota, an ANS fee of \$15 to be paid for each calendar year and to display an ANS sticker on their watercraft. Effective April 1, 2020, establishes a \$2 surcharge on each resident fishing license and combination license, with the exception of the resident 65 and older fishing license, permanently or totally disabled fishing license, or a disabled veteran fishing license. In addition, includes a \$3 surcharge on each nonresident fishing license and each nonresident waterfowl license.

Deer Season Set

North Dakota's 2019 deer season is set, with 65,500 licenses available to hunters this fall, 10,350 more than last year.

In total, antlered mule deer licenses increased by 450 from last year, antlerless mule deer by 700, antlered whitetail by 700, antlerless whitetail by 1,250, "any antlered" by 3,150 and "any antlerless" by 4,100.

In addition, muzzleloader licenses increased by 184 and restricted youth antlered mule deer licenses increased by 45.

Mule deer doe licenses are available in unit 4A for the first time since 2011.

As stated in the 2019-20 chronic wasting disease proclamation, hunters harvesting a deer in units 3A1, 3B1 and 3F2 cannot transport the whole carcass, including the head and spinal column, outside of the unit, with the exception that hunters can transport the whole deer carcass between units 3A1 and 3B1 during any open deer season.

Also in the CWD proclamation, it is unlawful for an individual to hunt big game over bait, or place bait to attract big game for the purpose of hunting, in deer hunting units 3C west of the Missouri River, 3E1, 3E2, 3F1, 3F2, 3B1, 3A1, 3A2 and north of N.D. Highway 2 in unit 3A3.

Spring Mule Deer Survey

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department completed its annual spring mule deer survey in April, and results indicate western North Dakota's mule deer population is down from last year, but still 14 percent above the long-term average.

Biologists counted 2,454 mule deer in 298.8 square miles during this year's survey. Overall mule deer density in the badlands was 8.2 deer per square mile, compared to 10.3 in 2018.

Although mule deer density was lower than 2018, big game management supervisor Bruce Stillings said the population is above objective and remains at a level able to support more hunting opportunities this fall.

"The 2019 spring results show that mule deer have recovered nicely following winters of 2009-11, which led to record low fawn production and a population index low of 4.6 mule deer per square mile in 2012," Stillings said. "The population recovery is due to no antlerless harvest for five years, combined with milder winter conditions during 2012-2016, which led to good fawn production since 2013. However, the long-term health of the population will depend on maintaining high quality habitat."

Deer Test Positive for CWD

A white-tailed deer found dead just south of Williston in late February has been confirmed positive for chronic wasting disease, according to Dr. Charlie Bahnson, wildlife veterinarian for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

"This is unfortunate news because it means CWD is much farther south than the positive deer harvested this past fall in the northwest corner of deer unit 3A1 in Divide County," Bahnson said.

CWD is a fatal disease of deer, moose and elk that can cause long-term population declines if left unchecked. Since 2009, 14 other deer have tested positive for CWD in North Dakota – 13 from Grant and Sioux counties in hunting unit 3F2 in the southwest, and the other taken last fall from the northwest in Divide County.

The deer found near Williston is the first documented case of a mortality due to CWD in North Dakota.

“All 14 previous detections were perfectly healthy-looking deer that were hunter-harvested before they got sick,” Bahnson said. “This deer was severely emaciated and had an empty digestive tract, which is unusual even in starvation cases that can occur in harder winters like this one. This deer stopped trying to forage some time ago.”

Targeted Deer Test Negative for CWD

Samples of deer taken by targeted removal two weeks ago south of Williston have all tested negative for chronic wasting disease, according to Dr. Charlie Bahnson, wildlife veterinarian for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

Following detection of CWD in a deer found dead in February, Game and Fish removed an additional 52 deer for testing. “It was really important to figure out how big of a problem we had on our hands,” Bahnson said. “These test results are the best we could have hoped for, given the circumstances. We know now that CWD is there, but infection rates appear to be low.”

2018 Deer Season Summarized

A total of 48,717 North Dakota deer hunters took approximately 31,350 deer during the 2018 deer gun hunting season, according to a post-season survey conducted by the state Game and Fish Department.

Game and Fish made available 55,150 deer gun licenses last year. Overall hunter success was 64 percent, with each hunter spending an average of 4.4 days in the field.

Hunter success for both antlered and antlerless white-tailed deer was 64 percent.

Mule deer buck success was 81 percent, and antlerless mule deer was 83 percent.

Hunters with any-antlered or any-antlerless licenses generally harvest white-tailed deer, as these licenses are predominantly in units with mostly whitetails. Buck hunters had a success rate of 69 percent, while doe hunters had a success rate of 65 percent.

Game and Fish issued 13,098 gratis licenses in 2018, and 10,785 hunters harvested 5,832 deer, for a success rate of 54 percent.

A total of 1,022 muzzleloader licenses were issued in 2018, and 900 hunters harvested 349 white-tailed deer (176 antlered, 173 antlerless). Hunter success was 39 percent.

A record 28,824 archery licenses (26,318 resident, 2,506 nonresident) were issued in 2018. In total, 22,666 bow hunters harvested 8,914 deer (7,927 whitetails, 987 mule deer), for a success rate of 39 percent.

Pronghorn Hunters Successful

Hunter success during last fall's pronghorn hunting season was 81 percent, according to statistics provided by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

Game and Fish issued 1,081 licenses (701 lottery and 380 gratis), and 976 hunters took 792 pronghorn, consisting of 761 bucks, 28 does and three fawns. Each hunter spent an average of 2.7 days afield.

Two percent of the harvest occurred during the archery-only portion of the season.

2018 Bighorn Sheep, Moose and Elk Harvests

Harvest statistics released by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department show overall hunter success during the 2018 season for bighorn sheep was 100 percent, 92 percent for moose and 65 percent for elk.

The department issued two bighorn sheep licenses and auctioned one. All three hunters harvested a bighorn ram.

The department issued 329 moose licenses last year. Of that total, 319 hunters harvested 294 animals – 138 bulls and 156 cows/calves.

The department issued 418 elk licenses last year. Of that total, 380 hunters harvested 248 elk – 135 bulls and 113 cows/calves.

NASP State Tournament Results

A record 820 archers competed in the North Dakota National Archery in the Schools Program state bull's-eye tournament March 22-23 in Minot.

Oakes students claimed top honors in the elementary (grades 4-6) and middle school (grades 7-8) divisions, while Hankinson received the top prize in the high school (grades 9-12) division.

Winning teams and the top 10 individuals qualify for the national tournaments, scheduled for May in Louisville, Ky and June in Salt Lake City, UT. The Game and Fish Department and North Dakota Youth Archery Advisory Council contribute a total of \$3,000 in travel assistance to the first place team in each division, and \$1,000 to the overall male and female individual winners. In addition, a total of \$20,000 in college scholarships was awarded by the NDYAAC to the top five overall scorers in both boys and girls divisions.

Bighorn Sheep Population Declines

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's 2018 bighorn sheep survey, completed by recounting lambs in March, revealed a minimum of 283 bighorn sheep in western North Dakota, up 7 percent from 2017 and equal to the five-year average.

Altogether, biologists counted 84 rams, 161 ewes and 38 lambs. Not included are approximately 20 bighorns in the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

Scholarships Available for Students

The North Dakota Game Wardens Association, Ray Goetz Memorial Fund and Kupper Chevrolet are providing scholarships to a graduating high school senior or current higher education student, majoring in fisheries, wildlife management or law enforcement.

Applicants must be North Dakota residents, and have maintained a 3.25 grade point average. Scholarships will be awarded this fall upon proof of enrollment.

Game and Fish Pays \$658,000 in Property Taxes

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department recently paid more than \$658,000 in taxes to counties in which the department owns or leases land. The 2018 in-lieu-of-tax payments are the same as property taxes paid by private landowners.

The Game and Fish Department manages more than 200,000 acres for wildlife habitat and public hunting in 51 counties. The department does not own or manage any land in Traill or Renville counties.

Spring Turkey Season Set

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is offering 6,025 wild turkey licenses for the 2019 spring hunting season, 370 more than last year.

Eleven of the 22 hunting units have more spring licenses than in 2018, seven have fewer and three remain the same. Unit 21 (Hettinger and Adams counties) is again closed in 2019 due to lack of turkeys in the unit.

First-time spring turkey hunters ages 15 or younger are eligible to receive one spring license valid for the regular hunting season in a specific unit. To be eligible, the youth hunter must be 15 or younger on opening day of spring turkey season, and have never received a spring turkey license in North Dakota.

Some Lakes Suffer Winterkill

North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries biologists investigated winterkills at several lakes this spring, and some were considered significant enough to affect the quality of fishing. Biologists will continue to monitor suspect lakes and other fisheries throughout the spring.

A total fish kill means all fish died, a significant kill is when the game fish population is greatly reduced and a partial kill means dead fish were observed but catchable numbers of game fish are still present.

Some lakes that were sampled that showed partial winterkill include Pipestem and Jamestown reservoirs (Stutsman County), Green Lake (McIntosh County), Woodhouse Lake (Kidder County), Patterson Lake (Stark County), Crooked Lake and Scooby Lake (McLean County).

Minor winterkills were noted in some other lakes but weren't significant enough to affect fishing. Information of all waters actively managed by Game and Fish is available by visiting the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov. This page will be updated as other lakes are surveyed.

Confirmed lakes with total or significant winterkill are listed by county. For more information on individual lakes, or to report fish kills that may not be on the list, anglers can contact the local Game and Fish district office.

- Burke – Powers Lake (significant), Short Creek Dam (significant)
- Burleigh – Mitchell Lake (total)
- Eddy – Battle Lake (significant)
- Emmons – Baumgartner Lake (total), Jake's Lake (total)
- Foster – Juanita Lake (significant)
- Griggs – Carlson-Tande Dam (significant)
- Hettinger – Larson Lake (total), Mott Watershed Dam (total)
- Kidder – Etta-Alkaline Complex (significant), Leno Lake (total), Rafferty Lake (total), Remmick Lake (significant)
- Logan – Logan (Mueller) WMA (significant)
- McInstosh – Lehr WMA (total)
- McKenzie – Leland Dam (significant), Sather Dam (significant)
- McLean – Coal Lake (total)
- Morton – Crown Butte Dam (total)
- Pierce – Buffalo Lake (significant)
- Richland – Grass Lake (significant)
- Rolette – School Section Lake (significant)
- Sargent – Bergh Slough (significant), Fiala Lake (significant)
- Stutsman – Gaier Lake (significant), Sunday Lake (significant)
- Walsh – Matejcek Dam (significant)
- Wells – Harvey Dam (significant)
- Williams – Cottonwood Lake (significant), McGregor Dam (significant), Tioga Dam (significant)

Catchable Trout, Catfish, Pike Stocked

North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel have already stocked dozens of local community fisheries with catchable trout, catfish and pike, with additional lakes still to be stocked in early- to mid-May.

Approximately 10,000 11-inch rainbow trout, 600 2- to 4-pound rainbow trout, 1,200 adult catfish, 1,100 adult pike and 1,100 1- to 3-pound cutthroat trout were recently stocked in community fisheries around the state.

Fisheries production and development section leader Jerry Weigel said these stockings put catchable fish in waters that are easily accessible and many have fishing piers, and in or near communities throughout North Dakota.