

**NORTH DAKOTA  
STATE REPORT**  
*June 2020*

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**Game and Fish to Close Offices to Public Access**

North Dakota Game and Fish Department offices will close to public access today at 12 p.m. Central Time, due to coronavirus disease health concerns. This includes the main headquarters and district/lab offices in Bismarck, and district offices in Devils Lake, Dickinson, Jamestown, Harvey, Riverdale and Williston.

Game and Fish offices will remain closed until April 6.

Outdoor recreational facilities, including boat ramps that are accessible on the Missouri River, the department's 229 wildlife management areas, and the pond and nature walk on the outdoor wildlife learning site adjacent to the main office in Bismarck, remain open.

While most Game and Fish staff will work remotely during business hours Monday through Friday, the main telephone line at department offices will be staffed. In addition, district game wardens will conduct daily patrols as regularly scheduled.

For hunter and anglers who are already familiar with Game and Fish, it's most likely business as usual as all hunting and fishing license purchases, boat registrations and lottery applications are conducted online. For others with questions, visit the Game and Fish website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), and search the many links and resources available that provide a user-friendly experience.

The moose, elk and bighorn sheep application deadline will remain at March 25. Applicants can apply online, or call 800-406-6409.

For questions, comments or concerns, contact your local Game and Fish office, or email [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov). In addition, stay connected with Game and Fish by following along on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

**Game and Fish Offers Up the Outdoors**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department encourages hunters and anglers to make mindful decisions on outdoor activities by following guidelines provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Customer, volunteer and employee well-being is of top priority. Earlier this week, Game and Fish canceled upcoming public gatherings such as the National Archery in the Schools state

tournament. In addition, late-season ice fishing tournaments have canceled events to minimize crowding, and several hunter education classes scheduled to begin in the next few weeks were canceled or postponed.

Students enrolled in any classes scheduled to start in March or April can find information on class status on the Game and Fish website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

With social distancing in mind, the Game and Fish Department encourages hunters and anglers to purchase licenses online, rather than making an in-person visit. The same philosophy applies to watercraft registrations. Contact a local Game and Fish office for assistance with a purchase or registration.

During this time of uncertainty, Game and Fish is offering several suggestions for students and parents to consider while K-12 schools and some businesses are closed due to public health concerns:

- Use free time to take the state's boating safety course. State law requires youth ages 12-15 who want to operate a boat or personal watercraft by themselves with at least a 10 horsepower motor, must pass the boating course. And parents, it's not just for kids. Some insurance companies give adult boat owners who pass the course a discount on boat insurance. The course is available for home study, and there is also an online version.
- New fishing licenses are needed starting April 1. Take care of that important detail online now so you're not scrambling to get that license just prior to your first fishing trip of the open water season.
- 2020 is the first year of the new 3-year boat registration period. If you have a motorized watercraft and haven't renewed yet, register online so you're ready to go when the ice goes off your favorite lake.
- March 25 is the deadline to apply for a moose, elk or bighorn sheep hunting license.

Since it's important to avoid crowds, North Dakota's outdoors is a great place for recreation. You can put a boat on the Missouri River right now, or still get in some ice fishing on lakes where ice is still safe for travel. If you're just looking for some exercise, take a hike on one of the department's 229 wildlife management areas.

### **Anglers and Social Distancing**

With a pleasant weekend in the forecast and a lot of North Dakotans anxious to do something outside, the State Game and Fish Department reminds anglers to practice social distancing, whether it's on shore, from a boat or on the ice.

"We encourage people to get outside and fish and enjoy the outdoors," said Game and Fish Director Terry Steinwand, "but we also need to practice the recommendations for minimizing the risk of spread of the COVID-19 virus."

Especially for anglers at popular shore-fishing locations, Steinwand said a good rule of thumb is that if you can reach out with a fishing rod and touch the person fishing next to you,

you're too close. "In other situations, we urge people to follow the 6-foot separation guideline as well," Steinwand added.

Over the next several weeks, Game and Fish will keep an eye on popular shore-fishing areas to assess the level of activity. "We depend on the public's awareness and willingness to cooperate," Steinwand said, "but we'll be monitoring, and if it appears that the recommendations are not being followed, we might have to consider closing access to those high traffic areas because of the risk involved."

To this point, Game and Fish has not restricted access to its public outdoor facilities such as wildlife management areas and fishing waters, but its office buildings are currently closed to public traffic. "We are continuing to handle phone calls and online traffic," Steinwand said, "so anyone who needs help or has questions can call or email us."

### **Online Hunter Education Certification**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is offering an online hunter education course for students who will turn at least age 12 on or before Dec. 31, 2020.

Education supervisor Marty Egeland said with most in-person hunter education classes canceled this spring due to the coronavirus pandemic, Game and Fish needed to find a way to get students certified for hunter education this year. "And with most classes held before the deer application deadline, we had to adjust the way we administer our classes," Egeland said.

The online course is available to students who were already enrolled in classes that were canceled, and also to qualifying students who were not previously enrolled in a class. A 25% discount is being offered for taking the online course.

Students who were already enrolled in a 2020 class that was canceled do not have to register with Game and Fish again. They will automatically receive an email with instructions to start the online course.

Prospective students who had not previously registered, can sign up through the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). After signing up for the class, the student will receive an email with further relevant information and instructions. The online portion of the class must be completed within two weeks of the class closing.

For both pre-registered and new students, when the online hunter education course and an accompanying virtual field day are completed, a temporary hunter education number will be provided, which will allow lottery applications and license purchases in 2020.

Each student will then have until Dec. 31, 2020 to attend one in-person class session, to take the official North Dakota Game and Fish Department hunter education written and practical exams. If this is not completed by the end of the year, the temporary hunter education number will expire and the student will have to retake the course in the future.

Game and Fish will notify students when dates and locations are established for these final class sessions.

Another option for anyone who wants to hunt in North Dakota in 2020, is a one-time exemption called an apprentice license. Individuals who are at least age 12 by the end of the calendar year, and who have not previously had an apprentice license, can apply for one and use that to purchase 2020 licenses without a hunter education number. An apprentice license holder must then complete the official hunter education course before being able to purchase hunting licenses in future years.

### **Paddlefish Snagging Harvest Season Canceled**

The North Dakota 2020-22 fishing proclamation has been amended and the state Game and Fish Department is canceling the upcoming paddlefish snagging harvest season due to the coronavirus pandemic.

However, the amendment does allow for the possibility of a one-week snag-and-release season May 15-21, which is two weeks later than the normal opening day.

Fisheries chief Greg Power said safety of snaggers, caviar processors and data collection staff are a major concern.

“Paddlefish snaggers concentrate in large numbers in a small area, and often participate in snagging while shoulder to shoulder,” Power said. “There is no realistic way to maintain proper separation.”

### **Paddlefish Snag-and-Release Season Open May 15-21**

A one-week paddlefish snag-and-release season will be open May 15-21 for anglers who hold a valid fishing license, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department announced today. However, if conditions warrant, Game and Fish may close the season with a 24-hour notice.

Game and Fish announced April 3 that the annual paddlefish snagging harvest season, which was scheduled to open May 1, was canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, the agency held open the possibility of a snag-and-release season in mid-May.

Fisheries chief Greg Power said with the state transitioning to North Dakota Smart Restart, snaggers should have an opportunity to participate in a snag-and-release season.

“Past history has shown that considerably fewer snaggers will participate, but this one-week season provides an opportunity for the avid snaggers,” Power said.

As with all outdoor activities, Power said it is still important to follow physical distancing guidelines.

“We will have signs in place at popular snagging areas, but obviously a lot falls on the individual to be smart and considerate,” Power said.

## **Fishing Tournament Permits Revoked**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has revoked all fishing tournaments for April and May due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Tournament sponsors were notified of possible rescheduling options if conditions, including public safety and open calendar days, present itself.

In addition, organizers of other permitted North Dakota fishing tournaments scheduled June through October are advised of the possibility of having their permit revoked if the COVID-19 conditions persist.

## **Deer Season Set**

North Dakota's 2020 deer season is set, with 69,050 licenses available to hunters, 3,550 more than last year.

As stated in the 2020-21 chronic wasting disease proclamation, hunters harvesting a deer in units 3A1, 3B1, 3F2, 4B and 4C cannot transport the whole carcass outside of the unit, with the exception that hunters can transport the whole deer carcass between adjoining CWD carcass restricted units.

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 3A1, 3A2, 3A3 north of U.S. Highway 2, 3B1, 3C west of the Missouri River, 3E1, 3E2, 3F1, 3F2, 4A, 4B and 4C.

## **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 up 7% from last year and 22% above the long-term average.

Biologists counted 2,364 mule deer in 267.3 square miles during this year's survey. Overall mule deer density in the badlands was 8.8 deer per square mile.

## **Deer Test Positive for CWD**

Eight deer taken during the 2019 North Dakota deer gun season tested positive for chronic wasting disease, according to Dr. Charlie Bahnson, wildlife veterinarian for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

All were antlered deer taken from areas previously known to have CWD – six from unit 3F2 and two from 3A1. Bahnson said six of the eight were mule deer, with two whitetails from unit 3F2. CWD was not detected in any deer harvested in the eastern portion of the state where hunter-harvested surveillance was conducted last fall. In addition, no elk or moose tested positive.

Bahnson said the eight positive deer put the total at 11 detected since Sept 1. As previously reported, two mule deer taken in September tested positive for CWD – one was harvested during the archery season from deer gun unit 4B and one during the youth season in

unit 3A1. CWD was also detected in a white-tailed deer from unit 3F2 that was euthanized in December following a report from the public that it appeared sick and was displaying erratic behavior.

### **2019 Deer Season Summarized**

A total of 57,949 North Dakota deer hunters took approximately 37,250 deer during the 2019 deer gun hunting season, according to a post-season survey conducted by the state Game and Fish Department.

Game and Fish made available 65,500 deer gun licenses last year. Overall hunter success was 64 percent, with each hunter spending an average of 4.3 days in the field.

Hunter success for antlered white-tailed deer was 64 percent, and antlerless whitetail was 58 percent.

Mule deer buck success was 78 percent, and antlerless mule deer was 79 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 68 percent, while doe hunters had a success rate of 65 percent.

Game and Fish issued 11,981 gratis licenses in 2019, and 9,767 hunters harvested 5,416 deer, for a success rate of 56 percent.

A total of 1,206 muzzleloader licenses were issued in 2019, and 1,040 hunters harvested 426 white-tailed deer (222 antlered, 204 antlerless). Hunter success was 41 percent.

A total of 27,582 archery licenses (24,902 resident, 2,680 nonresident) were issued in 2019. In total, 21,960 bow hunters harvested 8,978 deer (7,988 whitetails, 990 mule deer), for a success rate of 41 percent.

### **2019 Bighorn Sheep, Moose and Elk Harvests**

Harvest statistics released by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department show overall hunter success during the 2019 season for bighorn sheep was 100 percent, 87 percent for moose and 62 percent for elk.

The department issued four bighorn sheep licenses and auctioned one. All five hunters harvested a bighorn ram.

Game and Fish issued 475 moose licenses last year. Of that total, 449 hunters harvested 389 animals – 154 bulls and 235 cows/calves.

The department issued 487 elk licenses last year. Of that total, 449 hunters harvested 279 elk – 155 bulls and 124 cows/calves.