

**NORTH DAKOTA
STATE REPORT**
June 2021

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

Big Walleye Verified as State Record

A 16-pound, 6-ounce walleye caught March 13 by Dickinson angler Jared Shypkoski is the new state record, according to North Dakota Game and Fish Department personnel.

Shypkoski reeled in the 33-inch fish in the Eckroth Bottoms area of upper Lake Oahe.

The previous record of 15 pounds, 13 ounces was taken in 2018 by Neal Leier of Bismarck, approximately 30 miles upstream on the Missouri River near the Fox Island boat ramp.

New Legislation

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department tracked 21 outdoors-related bills during the 2021 legislative session, nine of which were passed by both chambers and signed into law.

The following bills take effect Aug. 1. A complete list of bills is on the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov.

HB 1017 – Appropriates \$92,368,134 to the Game and Fish Department for the biennium beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2023. Passed House 81-13. Passed Senate 46-1.

HB 1081 – Relates to access and activities on trust lands and provides a penalty. Passed House 68-25. Passed Senate 40-7.

HB 1113 – Requires written permission from the owner of the property, or an individual authorized by the owner, to place bait for the purpose of attracting wildlife and to install camera/video equipment that must have identification. In addition, provides a penalty. Passed House 94-0. Passed Senate 47-0.

HB 1218 – Nonresidents who own land in North Dakota may hunt during the first seven days of the pheasant season on land they enroll in the PLOTS program. Passed House 92-0. Passed Senate 46-1.

HB 1221 – Adds clarification to section 47-05-17 of century code, relating to an exemption from prohibition against severing hunting rights from surface estates. Passed House 65-26. Pass Senate 45-2.

HB 1242 – An individual who was issued an apprentice hunter validation license in 2020-21 may receive another. Passed House 91-0. Passed Senate 45-2.

HB 1411 – An individual may use an artificial light to pursue on the individual's premises at any time throughout the year any predatory animal attempting to destroy property. Passed House 92-2. Passed Senate 47-0.

SB 2036 – Legislative management shall continue to study the electronic land access database and application during the 2021-22 interim and expand it to all counties. Passed Senate 45-2. Passed House 91-2.

SB 2144 – Allows the owner or an individual authorized by the owner the option to designate land as posted or closed to hunting in an online database and provides a penalty for trespass. Passed Senate 44-2. Passed House 89-3.

Game and Fish Offices Open to Public Access

North Dakota Game and Fish Department offices, except for Riverdale, are open to public access after being closed to walk-in traffic since last spring due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Riverdale office will remain closed to walk-in traffic since it does not have an administrative assistant. Individuals will need to call ahead and make an appointment or contact the Bismarck office for assistance.

Following the North Dakota Smart Restart guidelines, outdoor enthusiasts must sign in upon entering for contact tracing purposes, and face coverings are recommended.

Hunters and anglers are reminded that all **hunting and fishing license purchases**, boat registrations and lottery applications are conducted online, including gratis deer applications. In addition, licenses can be purchased at more than 140 vendor locations throughout the state.

For more hunting, fishing, trapping and boating information, visit the Game and Fish website at gf.nd.gov.

Deer Season Set

North Dakota's 2021 deer season is set, with 72,200 licenses available to hunters, 3,150 more than last year.

In total, any-antlered licenses increased by 1,500 from last year, any-antlerless by 1,250, antlered whitetail by 100, antlerless whitetail by 100, antlerless mule deer by 200 and antlered mule deer licenses remained the same.

In addition, muzzleloader licenses increased by 60 and restricted youth antlered mule deer licenses remained the same.

As stated in the 2021-22 chronic wasting disease proclamation, hunters harvesting a deer in units 3A1, 3A2, 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, 3A4, 3B1, 3C west of the Missouri River, 3E1, 3E2, 3F1, 3F2, 4A, 4B and 4C.

A deer carcass or boned-out meat must be accompanied by the head to the final place of storage, with the following exception: tag as currently required, then take two pictures using a cell phone with location, date and time stamp turned on. One picture of the entire animal at the kill site with tag attached, and a second picture of a closeup of the tag so that tag information is readable. If you leave the deer head in the field at the kill site, after taking pictures and saving them, the ear or antler with the tag attached must be cut off and accompany the meat or carcass while in transport. The photographs of the tagged deer must be shown to any game warden or other law enforcement officer upon request.

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 similar to last year and 21% above the long-term average.

Biologists counted 2,671 mule deer in 306.3 square miles during this year's survey. Overall mule deer density in the badlands was 8.7 deer per square mile.

Big game management supervisor Bruce Stillings said he is encouraged with current mule deer densities across the badlands.

“But we are concerned that mule deer are beginning the summer with poor rangeland conditions due to the extreme drought across the western part of the state, which could negatively affect fawn survival,” Stillings said.

The spring mule deer survey is used to assess mule deer abundance in the badlands. It is conducted after the snow has melted and before the trees begin to leaf out, providing the best conditions for aerial observation of deer. Biologists have completed aerial surveys of the same 24 study areas since the 1950s.

Cleaning Stations and ANS

In a continuing effort to stop the introduction and spread of aquatic nuisance species, particularly zebra mussels already anchored in some North Dakota waters, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department installed a boat cleaning station near the Red River in Grand Forks and at Lake Ashtabula and Lake Metigoshe.

The self-serve, waterless CD3 units are free and open to the public and include a high-powered air hose, broom, wet/dry vac, a tool for removing vegetation from underneath boat trailers and flood lights to illuminate the cleaning process in low light.

Ben Holen, Game and Fish Department ANS coordinator, said the CD3 unit installed at the North Landing boat ramp in Grand Forks likely won't be the only one found along the Red as another could be installed later near Wahpeton.

Lake Ashtabula and the Red River are popular recreational destinations that have zebra mussels. Larval-stage veligers were discovered in the Red River more than a decade ago and adult zebra mussels were found for the first time there in 2015.

Holen said the CD3 units, like the one installed in Grand Forks, are designed to minimize the chances of the larval-stage and adult exotic mussels from hitching a ride out of the Red River to waters elsewhere.

“Understanding this, we certainly encourage people coming off the river to use this free cleaning stations wherever they are installed,” Holen said. “These units are designed to get your boat clean, drained and dried pretty quickly.”

Zebra Mussels Found in Moss Balls at Pet Stores

Zebra mussels were recently found in moss balls at some pet stores in North Dakota and several other states. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is urging customers who recently purchased moss balls to properly dispose of them by placing in a bag, freezing solid and discarding into the trash. It's important to not put moss balls down the toilet or drain.

North Dakota pet stores that received the contaminated shipment have been notified and have removed the moss balls from shelves.

For additional aquarium decontamination instructions, visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service website at <https://www.fws.gov/fisheries/ANS/zebra-mussel-disposal.html>.

Paddlefish Snagging Season Opens May 1

North Dakota's 2021 paddlefish snagging season opens May 1 and is scheduled to continue through May 21. However, depending on the overall harvest, an early in-season closure may occur with a 24-hour notice issued by the state Game and Fish Department.

Paddlefish Snagging Season to Close

Effective Sunday, May 9, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department has closed the state's 2021 paddlefish snagging season to any additional harvest to provide long-term protection of the paddlefish population.

An additional seven-day snag-and-release season will begin Monday, May 10 and run through Sunday, May 16. Paddlefish snaggers with an unused paddlefish tag can continue snagging during the additional snag-and-release season but must release all fish immediately. If a snagger has already used their tag on a harvested paddlefish, they are not allowed to participate in the additional snag-and-release period.

Snag-and-release will be open only in that area of the Missouri River starting on the north shore from the Confluence boat ramp then east (downstream) to the pipeline crossing (river mile

1577), and on the south shore from the Confluence with the Yellowstone River then east (downstream) to the pipeline crossing (river mile 1577).

Paddlefish snagging is allowed only from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. Central Time during each day of the additional seven-day season. The use or possession of a gaff on snag-and-release days is illegal.

Record Count of Bighorn Sheep

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's 2020 bighorn sheep survey, completed by recounting lambs in March, revealed a record 322 bighorn sheep in western North Dakota, up 11% from 2019 and 13% above the five-year average. The count surpassed the previous record of 313 bighorns in 2008.

Altogether, biologists counted 97 rams, 170 ewes and 55 lambs. Not included are approximately 40 bighorn sheep in the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park and bighorns recently introduced to the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation.

Big game biologist Brett Wiedmann was pleased to see an increase in the survey for the third consecutive year.

"The increase in the 2020 count reflects lessening effects of bacterial pneumonia that was detected in 2014," Wiedmann said.

The northern badlands population increased 13% from 2019 and was the highest count on record. The southern badlands population declined again to the lowest level since 1999.

"We were encouraged to see the count of adult rams increase after declining the last four years, and adult ewes were at record numbers," Wiedmann said. "Most encouraging was a record lamb count corresponding with a record recruitment rate."

Game and Fish 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.

Department staff, in conjunction with biologists from the Three Affiliated Tribes Fish and Wildlife Division, also reported that the bighorn sheep that were translocated in January 2020 from Rocky Boy's Reservation in Montana to the Fort Berthold Reservation performed exceptionally well their first year in the state. Only one adult ewe died but 19 lambs were recruited. Consequently, the population increased from 30 to 48 in the first year.

There are currently more than 400 bighorn sheep among populations managed by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, the National Park Service and the Three Affiliated Tribes Fish and Wildlife Division. Wiedmann said the last confirmed native bighorn sheep in North Dakota was killed in 1905, and Theodore Roosevelt reported that bighorns were scarce by the time he hunted them during the 1880s.

“So, it’s likely there are more bighorns today than before North Dakota’s statehood in 1889,” he added. “It really illustrates the historical significance of this year’s count.”

Game and Fish Violations Talled

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department’s enforcement division has tallied the number of hunting, angling and boating citations for 2020, and failure to carry a license was the number one violation.

Game wardens issued more than 2,600 citations last year. Counties with the most violations were Ramsey (320), Williams (163) and McKenzie (128).

The most common violations and number issued were:

- Boating (659): inadequate number of personal flotation devices (261); use of unlicensed/unnumbered boat (138); and failure to display boat registration (108).
- Licensing (515): failure to carry license (306) and hunting/fishing/trapping without proper license (182).
- Small game (377): using shotgun capable of holding more than three shells (96) and exceeding limit (68).
- Fishing (315): aquatic nuisance species violations (84) and exceeding limit (65).
- Miscellaneous (227): criminal trespass (76); minor in possession (46); and possession of a controlled substance (33).
- General (226): hunting on posted land without permission (72); loaded firearm in vehicle (59); and use of motor vehicle in restricted area (47).
- Big game (170): illegal taking/possession of big game (72); tagging violations (17); and failure to wear fluorescent orange (15).
- Wildlife management areas/refuge (165): PLOTS access violations (60) and failure to obey posted regulations (57).
- Furbearer (21): use/possession of illegal snares (8) and harassing with motor vehicle (6).