

**NORTH DAKOTA  
STATE REPORT**  
*June 2025*

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**New Legislation**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department tracked 20 outdoors-related bills during the 2025 legislative session, 14 passed 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](http://gf.nd.gov).

**HB 1017** – Appropriates \$114,864,690 to the Game and Fish Department for the biennium beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2027.

**HB 1082** – Defines farmed elk as mammals of the North American elk genus and species (*cervus canadensis*) confined in a manmade enclosure designed to prevent escape.

**HB 1094** – Nonprofit organizations eligible to apply for special allocation big game hunting licenses for fundraising must be exempt from federal income taxation under section 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(19), and must contribute at least 20% of the net proceeds of any raffle of a license to a conservation-related project.

**HB 1147** – A resident disabled veteran who has at least a 50% service-connected disability qualifies for the \$3 combined general game, habitat, small game and furbearer license.

**HB 1174** – The Department may establish educational and community outreach programs to promote public understanding of fisheries and wildlife management and promote interest in pursuing careers in fields employed by the Department, including by job shadowing of field activities.

**HB 1260** – Fifteen percent of the total mule deer gun licenses made available in the current year must be made available as nonresident any-deer bow licenses.

**HB 1412** – The director shall provide that each application for a deer lottery license contains the option for an unsuccessful applicant to donate the license fee to the Private Land Open To Sportsmen program.

**HB 1470** – Increases the fees of some hunting and fishing licenses, and changes hunting guide and outfitter requirements.

**HB 1598** – An individual, while hunting big game or small game, other than waterfowl or cranes, may not use a motor-driven vehicle on any land other than an established road or trail without the written permission of the landowner, unless that individual has reduced a big game animal to possession.

**SB 2137** – The Department may not adopt a rule or implement a policy prohibiting or restricting the use of supplemental feed on private property for hunting a big game animal. Has a sunset clause of July 31, 2029.

**SB 2155** – The number of pronghorn gratis licenses issued may not exceed one-half of any pronghorn licenses available. In addition, if the individual is unsuccessful in the landowner lottery, that application may be included in a lottery for remaining licenses.

**SB 2216** – A waterfowl habitat restoration electronic stamp is required for every resident and nonresident to hunt waterfowl at a fee of \$5. In addition, creates a waterfowl habitat improvement fund for improving and restoring waterfowl habitat and supporting youth hunting programs.

**SB 2245** – Allows the hunting of waterfowl from a floating craft without a motor propelled exclusively by paddle, oars or pole; or with a motor if the craft is at rest and the motor has been turned off.

**SB 2309** – Allows the statewide antlerless white-tailed youth deer license to be issued as an antlerless license through governor's proclamation.

### **CWD Test Results**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department tested 1,456 animals for chronic wasting disease during the 2024 sampling season. Game and Fish confirmed 17 deer tested positive for CWD, 15 of which were taken by hunters and two were clinical deer confirmed through diagnostic examination.

Positive cases came from units 3A1 (seven mule deer), 3E1 (one mule deer), 3E2 (one mule deer), 3F2 (four mule deer and two whitetails), 3B2 (one mule deer) and 3B3 (one whitetail). CWD was not previously detected in units 3B2 or 3B3.

Sampling efforts fell short of the 10% goal in units where CWD surveillance was concentrated.

Game and Fish will use its 2024 surveillance data to guide CWD management moving forward. Regulations related to CWD are set annually by proclamation.

CWD is a fatal disease of deer, moose and elk that remains on the landscape and can cause long-term population impacts as infection rates climb.

More information about CWD can be found by visiting the department's website, [gf.nd.gov/cwd](http://gf.nd.gov/cwd).

### **Bighorn Sheep Population Stable**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's 2024 bighorn sheep survey, completed by recounting lambs in March, revealed a minimum of 350 bighorn sheep in the grasslands of western North Dakota, down 4% from 2023 and 6% above the five-year average. Despite a slight decrease from the record count in 2023, the 2024 survey was still the second highest count on record.

Altogether, biologists counted 105 rams, 199 ewes and 46 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 biologist Brett Wiedmann was pleased to see the population remain near record levels for the seventh consecutive year.

The northern badlands population declined by 4% from 2023 but was the second highest count on record. The southern badlands population increased slightly but remained near its lowest level since bighorns were reintroduced there in 1966.

"We were encouraged to see adult rams and adult ewes near record numbers," Wiedmann said. "The streak of four consecutive record counts was broken due to below-average lamb recruitment in 2024, as lambs recruited into the population declined 21% compared to 2023."

Weidmann said the decline in lamb recruitment was likely not related to disease, but a combination of drought, predation and ewes recovering after several years of high lamb recruitment.

"Our state's females have invested a lot of energy in rearing lambs the last four years, so sometimes they just need to take a break and concentrate on improving body condition," he said.

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 480 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 tentatively scheduled for 2025. The status of the season will be determined Sept. 1, following the summer population survey.

Game and Fish issued seven licenses in 2024 and all hunters were successful in harvesting a ram.

## **2024 Deer Season Summarized**

A total of 42,416 North Dakota deer hunters took approximately 23,300 deer during the 2024 deer gun hunting season, according to a post-season survey conducted by the state Game and Fish Department.

Game and Fish made available 50,100 deer gun licenses last year. Overall hunter success was 55%, with each hunter spending an average of 4.7 days in the field.

Hunter success for antlered white-tailed deer was 49% and 44% for antlerless whitetails.

Mule deer buck success was 80% and 78% for antlerless mule deer.

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 61%, while doe hunters had a success rate of 56%.

Game and Fish issued 11,920 gratis licenses in 2024, and 9,484 hunters harvested 4,199 deer for a success rate of 44%.

A total of 956 muzzleloader licenses were issued, and 790 hunters harvested 232 white-tailed deer (116 antlered, 116 antlerless). Hunter success was 29%.

A total of 27,102 archery licenses (23,993 resident, 3,109 nonresident) were issued in 2024. In total, 22,449 bowhunters harvested 5,794 deer (4,884 whitetails, 910 mule deer) for a success rate of 26%.

## **ANS Awareness Week**

May 4-10 is Aquatic Nuisance Species Awareness Week in North Dakota in an effort to raise the public's understanding of the preventative steps recreationists need to follow to stop the introduction and spread of ANS in the state's waterways.

ANS are nonnative plants, animals or pathogens that can affect the ecology of our lakes and rivers and the economic and recreational value of those waterways.

State Game and Fish Department ANS coordinator Ben Holen said ANS awareness week is comprised of state and federal agencies highlighting the ongoing efforts taking place in North Dakota.

"The pathways of ANS introductions are vast, so it is important to relay ANS awareness across diverse platforms to reach many unique water users," he said. "Raising awareness is a collaborative approach among partners and conscientious citizens."

North Dakota currently has low numbers of aquatic nuisance species. Other than zebra mussels, just a few invasive plants and animals – curly leaf pondweed, Eurasian watermilfoil, flowering rush, and grass, bighead, silver and common carp – are found in some state waters.

To fight the introduction and spread of unwanted invasives, Holen said some of the shared burden falls on water users. The Game and Fish Department encourages anglers, pleasure boaters and others to clean, drain and dry all equipment after every use. Clean and remove all plants or animals from watercraft or equipment prior to leaving any recreational area. Drain and remove water from all equipment prior to exiting designated access points. Not draining water can be extremely hazardous and may cause negligent transportation of ANS to various locations. Afterwards, verify that all equipment is completely dry before using again.

### **Elk, Moose, Bighorn Sheep Applications Online**

Elk, moose and bighorn sheep applications are available online at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). The application deadline is March 26.

A total of 960 elk licenses are available to hunters this fall, an increase of 127 from last year.

Unit E7 was created after discussions with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, landowners and hunters to manage a growing elk herd in and surrounding the J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge. Nontoxic ammunition is required while hunting on the refuge. General lottery license holders from E7 will be able to hunt in unit E1W beginning Nov. 24.

Licenses in units E2 and E3 increased due to a stable to increasing elk population. Licenses in elk units E1W, E4 and E6 remain the same. Licenses in unit E1E will have the same number of any licenses but fewer antlerless licenses than 2024.

A total of 296 moose licenses are available, an increase of 54 from last year.

Licenses in units M10 and M11 increased slightly to align with the observed population in these units. Licenses in units M6, M8 and M9 remain the same as the moose population appears to be stable with good hunter success in these units. Licenses in M5 were reduced slightly. Moose units M4 and M1C will remain closed due to a low moose population in these units.

A bighorn sheep hunting season is tentatively scheduled for 2025, depending on the sheep population. The status of the bighorn sheep season will be determined Sept. 1, after summer population surveys.

Unit B2 was created, adjusting the boundaries of units B3, B4 and B5. This was done to encourage the harvest of select sheep populations.

Bighorn sheep applicants must apply for a license at the same time as moose and elk, but not for a specific unit. Once total licenses are determined for each unit in late summer, the bighorn lottery will be held and successful applicants will be contacted to select a hunting unit.

Because the bighorn sheep application fee is not refundable as per state law, if a bighorn season is not held, applicants would not receive a refund.

Elk, moose and bighorn sheep lottery licenses are issued as once-in-a-lifetime licenses in North Dakota. Hunters who have received a license through the lottery are not eligible to apply for that species again.

### **Deer Season Set, Apply Online**

North Dakota's 2025 deer season is set, with 42,300 licenses available to hunters, down 7,800 from last year.

In addition, muzzleloader licenses decreased by 150 and restricted youth antlered mule deer licenses remained the same.

Casey Anderson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife division chief, said population, harvest and survey data indicate the state's deer population is stable to decreasing throughout the state.

"The state's deer population continues to recover from the 2021 EHD outbreak and the severe winter of 2022-23, which limited population growth despite reduced gun licenses during 2023 and 2024 hunting seasons," Anderson said. "Modest license allocations are intended to maintain hunting opportunities while encouraging population growth in the state."

High-quality deer habitat is not abundant, which has limited the potential for population recovery. If CRP contracts continue to expire, Anderson said 85% of the once 3.4 million acres present in 2007 will be lost by 2026.

The spring mule deer survey showed western North Dakota's population is 14% lower than last year despite a reduced harvest and consecutive mild winters.

North Dakota's 2025 deer gun season opens Nov. 7 at noon and continues through Nov. 23.

### **Spring Turkey Season Set**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is offering 8,547 wild turkey licenses for the 2025 spring hunting season, 410 more than last year.

Eight of the 21 hunting units have more spring licenses than last year, two have fewer licenses and 11 remain the same.

Unit 21 (Hettinger and Adams counties), which has been closed for several years due to a low turkey population because of a lack of quality habitat, has been extended into units 44 and 06 to allow for more opportunities.