

HUNTER'S HAVEN

2024

North Dakota is a hot spot for hunting of all kinds - duck, geese, pheasant, sharp-tail grouse, moose, whitetail deer and more. Read all about current and upcoming seasons.



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Central McLean News-Journal and The Leader-News

October 17, 2024



30 years of Feathers for Science

Game & Fish's upland wing envelope program staying consistent

BY RYAN SCHLEHUBER
Beulah Beacon Editor
&
TYSON MATTHEWS
McLean County Independent Editor

For the past 30 years, the North Dakota Game & Fish Department's Upland Wing Envelope program has played an intricate part in the study and management of state birds, and thanks to hunters, it has been progressing well. And hunters can help in the effort to manage upland game birds in the North Dakota by collecting feathers from harvested birds and sending in wing envelopes.

ND G&F biologist will take in as many sharptail and partridge feathers as hunters are willing to send in. The more feathers, the more data.

Sgt. R.J. Gross, one of two Game & Fish Department's upland game biologists out of Bismarck, is in charge of collecting and going through between 8,000 to 9,000 envelopes of bird feathers each year. These feathers are then processed and examined to study all sorts of information from birds such as sharp-tailed grouse, gray partridge, ringed-neck pheasants, turkeys and ruffed grouse.

Receiving enough pheasant feathers is usually not a problem, but collecting sharptail and partridge feathers can be more of a challenge.

"We just don't get as many grouse or partridge, probably because they're just not hunted as much," Gross said. "Pheasants are more popular, probably be-

cause we have so many of them." That data, according to Gross, provides a lot of biological information about the birds and how healthy their populations are. Biologists can determine sex and age ratios from wings and tail feathers, survival, nesting success, hatch dates and overall production.

"With these collected feathers, it helps us back-date what's going on with their populations," he said, "how they're molting their feathers, how many weeks ago when they were hatched, things like that. This helps with our late summer roadside count age ratios and county level harvest age structures."

Gross said, with the data from the wing envelopes sent in by hunters, G&F can find peak hatch dates for these birds and provide valuable information for farmers with haying season.

"Haying is a big source of mortality for young chicks," Gross said. "They can't fly for a couple weeks and are unable to escape through cover fast enough to get out of the way of the equipment. So, pushing haying dates back long enough lets them grow up enough that they can fly and escape."

Gross said, typically, G&F receive a lot of partridge feathers but not as many as sharp-tailed grouse, but it isn't because the sharped-tail are struggling.

As far as population health goes, Gross said pheasants are doing the best, and partridge numbers have also been really good in

the last couple years. The grouse population took a small hit earlier this summer, likely due to a cold, wet stretch in late June.

"We did lose a few chicks in that stretch, but we still had quite a few adults there," he said.

Gross is hoping the Upland Wing Envelope program continues to grow, or at least maintains the level of consistency it has seen lately. The program used to be bigger in the early 2000s, but that was only because there were more hunters, he said.

"We had a really bad drought then, and the bird population dipped," he said. "So as the population moves up and down, so too does the hunting participation."

The 8,000 to 9,000 envelopes are a good, solid number, and with 15,000 to 25,000 non-residential hunters hunting in the area, combined with local hunters, Gross sees room to grow with the program.

"It's been going well for the better part of 30 years," Gross said, "and I expect it to continue like that."

Hunters interested in receiving wing envelopes should visit the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov, or contact the department's main office in Bismarck at 701-328-6300



The North Dakota Game & Fish Department's Upland Wing Envelope program has been ongoing for roughly the past 30 years. Thanks to participating hunters collecting the feathers of many of the state's upland birds, the department sees between 8,000 to 9,000 envelopes a year. (Ron Wilson | ND Game & Fish Department)

or email ndgf@nd.gov.

Hunters can also get wing envelopes at Game and Fish District offices in Devils Lake, Jamestown, Dickinson, Williston and Lonetree Wildlife Management Area near Harvey.

Hunters can also get wing envelopes at Game and Fish District offices in Devils Lake, Jamestown, Riverdale, Dickinson, Williston

and Lonetree Wildlife Management Area near Harvey.

Or pick up an envelope locally at the Riverdale and Turtle Lake offices.

Riverdale District Game Warden: Kenneth Skuza - C: 701-848-6026

Turtle Lake - District Game Warden: Clayton Edstrom - C: 701-720-0278

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2024 North Dakota Hunting Season

BIGHORN SHEEP SEASONS

General Season Nov. 1-Dec. 23
Bighorn sheep hunting is only available by permit lottery.

ELK SEASONS

Archery/Bow Sept. 6-Sept. 29
General Season Sept. 6, 2024-Jan. 5, 2025*
**Season dates vary by zone. Elk hunting is only available by permit lottery, and dates may vary by region.*

MOOSE SEASONS

Archery/Bow Sept. 6-Sept. 29
General Season Oct. 11-Nov. 3
Moose hunting is only available by permit lottery, and hunting may be limited to specific regions.

PRONGHORN SEASONS

Archery/Bow Aug. 30-Sept. 22
General Season Oct. 4-Oct. 29
Pronghorn hunting is only available by permit lottery and may be limited by region.

DEER, MULE & WHITE-TAILED SEASONS

Archery/Bow Aug. 30, 2024-Jan. 5, 2025
General Season Nov. 8-Nov. 24
Deer hunting is only available by permit lottery.

DEER & WHITE-TAILED ONLY SEASON

Muzzleloader Nov. 29-Dec. 15
Deer hunting is only available by permit lottery.

CANADA GEESE SEASONS

Canada Geese - Resident:
Eastern Zone: Sept. 21-Dec. 16, 2024
Western Zone: Sept. 21-Dec. 21, 2024
Missouri Zone: Sept. 21-Dec. 27, 2024
General Season - NonResident Sept.. 28-Dec. 16
**Season dates vary by zone. is only available by permit lottery, and dates may vary by region.*

TURKEY SEASON

Fall General Season Oct. 12, 2024-Jan. 5, 2025
Turkey hunting is only available by permit lottery.

SMALL GAME SEASONS

Tree Squirrel Sept. 14, 2024-Feb. 28, 2025
Hungarian Partridge Sept. 14, 2024-Jan. 5, 2025
Ruffed Grouse Sept. 14, 2024-Jan. 5, 2025
Ring-Necked Male Pheasant Oct. 12, 2024-Jan. 5, 2025
Weasel - Traps Oct. 26, 2024-Mar. 15, 2025
Weasel - (Firearms, Cable Devices, Archery) Nov. 25, 2024-Mar. 15, 2025
Bag limits, special seasons and hunting regulations for North Dakota hunting seasons do vary based on animal and seasons. For more information on obtaining licenses, permits and regulations, visit the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website.

North Dakota Game and Fish

20 EHD cases reported in deer in Stark County area

Game & Fish requesting assistance in tracking small outbreak

COMPILED BY
RYAN SCHLEHUBER
Center Republican Editor

As many as 20 reports have come into North Dakota Game & Fish recently of white-tailed deer found dead in the northern portion of Stark County. A number of these have been confirmed as a result of EHD. Officials are asking for assistance to better track the extent and severity of the small outbreak according to Dr. Charlie Bahnson, Game & Fish wildlife veterinarian. Stark County is less than 100 miles west of Oliver County. Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) is a disease in deer that is also known to many deer

hunters as “bluetongue.” It is a serious viral disease of deer that is spread by biting flies. Outbreaks occur seasonally with the life cycle of the insects that spread the virus and usually peak in late summer to early fall. The severity of outbreaks varies regionally and annually with drought and other factors, and deer in some regions have more natural immunity to the virus, according to the National Deer Association. EHD primarily affects white-tailed deer, but other big game species are susceptible. The virus is not a danger to humans; however, hunters should not shoot or consume deer that appear sick. “EHD is a viral disease trans-

mitted by biting gnats,” said Bahnson, in a Game & Fish press release. “We see a low level of EHD most years. It typically stays fairly localized, but every so often it can intensify into a significant die-off. The combined outbreak in 2020 and 2021 was probably the worst in memory, with extensive mortality across much of western North Dakota.” Dr. Bahnson said the recent outbreak is not nearly as alarming as it was in 2020 and 2021; however, he said the Game & Fish Department is monitoring the situation closely and is requesting the public to report any sick or dead deer through the department’s online reporting system at gf.nd.gov/mortality-report.

Be fire aware

Officials asking recreationists to be aware of fire conditions

BY KELLI AMELING
Associate Publisher

After an outbreak of wildfires in western North Dakota, which resulted in fatalities, state officials are asking outdoor enthusiasts to be pay attention to fire conditions. In a press release issued Oct. 8 by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, officials ask hunters, recreationist and all outdoors people to be aware of the daily fire index. “While hunters are always our eyes and ears in North Dakota’s rural areas in fall, it will be especially true this weekend with the highly anticipated pheasant season opening,” stated Jeb Williams, North Dakota Game and Fish department director in the release. “We encourage hunters who spot a fire caused by whatever means to report the situation immediately to law enforcement officials. We also encourage hunters to carry

fire extinguishers, shovels, water and other tools. And it goes without saying to extinguish and discard smoking materials appropriately, not from a vehicle.” However, Williams advised against individuals who are not trained in fire fighting to attempt to fight against an out-of-control fire. The most current wildfires and fire danger index can be found at NDResponse.gov. According to the release, the daily index is issued by the National Weather Service to alert the public to conditions that may be conducive to the accidental starting or spreading of fires. “In addition, county governments have the authority to adopt penalties for violations of county restrictions related to burning bans,” the release stated. “These restrictions apply regardless of the daily fire danger index and remain in place until each county’s commission rescinds the ban.”

The ND Game and Fish Department asked for those recreating outdoors this fall: Be aware of current burn restrictions. Make sure your chains aren’t dragging when hauling boats, campers or trailers. Don’t drive or park vehicles on dry grass - this includes OHVs. Never leave campfires unattended and be sure they are completely extinguished. “Anyone recreating outdoors is asked to remain vigilant as dry conditions and wildfire risk remains high,” stated North Dakota Parks and Recreation Director Cody Schulz in the release. “We are grateful for the numerous first responders, local officials, and landowners for their efforts to battle these wildfires, and we encourage everyone that if they see something – a spark that ignites nearby grasses, or smoke in any vegetation or trees – to say something immediately by calling 9-1-1.”

Hunting Hours

Hunting hours are 30 minutes before sunrise (except opening day) to 30 minutes after sunset. Hunters must cease any hunting activity, leave any stand or blind, and must be in the process of leaving the field at the close of shooting hours.
North Dakota Game and Fish





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Where to hunt?

Public Lands *(Special Regulations May Apply)*

- U.S. Forest Service National Grasslands
 - U.S. FWS National Wildlife Refuges
 - U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
 - ND Forest Service
 - ND Department of Trust Lands
- ND Game and Fish State Wildlife Management Areas
 - Bureau of Land Management
 - U.S. FWS Waterfowl Production Areas

Note: Not all lands owned by the agencies listed below are open to hunting. Please review the current hunting guides and PLOTS guide for specific lands open to hunting. Contact the North Dakota Game and Fish Department or the manager of the land on which you wish to hunt if you have questions.

State Wildlife Management Areas

State wildlife management areas are located throughout the state. Unless otherwise specified, WMAs are open to hunting, fishing and trapping. Check the current hunting and fishing regulations and proclamations for details. Most WMAs are ideal for nature study, hiking, and primitive camping.

Waterfowl Production Areas

Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; about 263,000 acres in North Dakota. Almost all WPAs are found north and east of the Missouri River. Generally they are less than 640 acres, but some are larger.

National Wildlife Refuges

Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, these public lands encompass more than 200,000 acres. Many refuges allow deer and upland game hunting. Hunting opportunities vary, so contact individual refuges for details. Wildlife refuges are also excellent sites for wildlife viewing. Many have auto tours and interpretive sites.

Information on specific refuges is available at each refuge headquarters.

Note: Use of nontoxic shot for all types of bird hunting is required on all land managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

State Trust Lands

Managed by the State Department of Trust Lands, North Dakota has more than 700,000 acres of state school trust lands, formerly known as state school land. Much of this land is leased for agricultural purposes, primarily cattle grazing. School trust land is generally open to hunting. However, operators leasing the land may close access if livestock is present. Department of Trust Lands public access information.

U.S. Forest Service

The U.S. Forest Service manages three national grasslands in North Dakota, totaling about 1.1 million acres. The largest, the Little Missouri National Grasslands, is about 1 million acres and contains much of western North Dakota’s badlands. Much of this land is leased for agricultural use, but is open to public access.

Bureau of Land Management

The BLM manages nearly 70,000 acres in North Dakota, much of it in the western part of the state. Much of this land is leased for agricultural use, but it is open to public access.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The Corps of Engineers manages more than 500,000 acres, much of which is under the water of the state’s major reservoirs like Lake Sakakawea and Lake Oahe, and a number of smaller lakes. The Corps manages some of the land surrounding these reservoirs, with public access usually available. The Corps also leases many thousands of acres to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department for use as wildlife management areas.

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

The USBR manages close to 100,000 acres, much of which lies along the Garrison Diversion Canal project. A good share of this land is open to public access, while vehicle use on some roads is restricted.

North Dakota Forest Service

The state forest service owns land, primarily small parcels, in the Turtle Mountains and Pembina Hills. These areas are generally open to public access.

A Note About Private Land Access in North Dakota

While public land provides varied opportunities for hunters and anglers in North Dakota, much of the state’s hunting takes place on private land. Permission is always required to hunt private land that is posted.

Private Lands

(Around 93% of North Dakota lands are in private ownership.)

Unposted Lands Hunting Allowed

Private land that is not physically or electronically posted and is not otherwise restricted to hunting by law may be hunted without landowner permission.

Posted Lands No Hunting

No hunting is allowed, without permission from the landowner or leasee, on private lands in North Dakota that have been legally posted either with physical signs or electronically.

Identifying Posted Lands

Note: If land is posted physically but not electronically, it will not be indicated on maps. In the field, hunters must determine if land has been physically or electronically posted prior to entering.

The offline mobile application option (Avenza) can be used in areas where cellular service is unavailable. This application works with a smartphone's GPS to display the device location on a map.

Landowner contact information is available when using the online options of the map applications. To view information, click on the land parcel or right click on the map and click “Find data on map.”

Private Land Open to Sportsmen Walk-In Hunting Allowed

Working together, private landowners and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department provide hunting access to many private lands via Private Land Open to Sportsmen agreements. Lands open to hunting under these agreements are posted with PLOTS signs and can be found via the North Dakota Hunting Atlas or the PLOTS Guide.

Note: Property enrolled in this program changes annually.

Season Restrictions

Deer Bow: See Special Herd Reduction Deer Bow Seasons. During the regular gun season orange clothing is required of all bowhunters and anyone accompanying apprentice license holders. Nonresidents are restricted to species of deer described on license. For residents, any deer is legal.

Youth Deer: Residents who turn age 11, 12 or 13 in 2021 – antlerless whitetailed deer only. Residents who turn age 14 or 15 in 2021 – any deer is legal. No unit restrictions, except in units 3B1, 3B2, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E and 4F, a special license is required to hunt antlered mule deer. Those possessing restricted antlered mule deer licenses may hunt only in their designated unit the entire season. Orange clothing required for youth hunters and mentors. Each youth hunter must be under direct supervision (must be able to have unaided verbal contact) of an adult who is prohibited from carrying a firearm or bow while accompanying the youth hunter during the youth season.

Deer Gun: Restricted to type of deer and unit described on license. Type of deer includes species and sex. See map on back for unit descriptions. Note exception for white-tailed deer hunters in units 4B, 4C, 4D and 4E (see below). Orange clothing required for all hunters, and for anyone accompanying apprentice and youth license holders.

Muzzleloader: Restricted to antlered or antlerless white-tailed deer only as described on license. No unit restrictions. Orange clothing required for hunters, and for anyone accompanying apprentice license holders.

Source: North Dakota Game and Fish

Source: North Dakota Game and Fish





Local entrepreneur launches hunting-centered business

Zero Altitude

BY: ETHYN WILLIAMS-CALVERT
ethyn@nordaknoth.com

Garrison resident Forrest Hirsch has taken his passion for hunting and turned it into a business venture, launching Zero Altitude.

The new enterprise, based in Garrison, focuses on introducing people to the joys of hunting and helping both seasoned and novice hunters reconnect with the great outdoors.

With a focus on mentoring and providing hands-on experiences, Hirsch aims to make Zero Altitude a unique offering in the hunting community.

The idea for Zero Altitude has been in the works for some time, but the journey to launch wasn't without its setbacks.

"We intended on launching, and then ended up moving houses, so that delayed the launch year," Hirsch said, acknowledging the challenges of balancing personal life with his business aspirations.

The concept behind Zero Altitude is simple yet ambitious: to create a space where people of all ages and skill levels can experience hunting in a supportive and engaging environment.

Hirsch is particularly focused on encouraging younger sportsmen and women to step into the field.

His son, Brookston, has played a pivotal role in this initiative.

"Brookston has still been my guinea pig to see what is all needed to bring younger sportsmen and women out in the field," he noted, emphasizing the importance of passing down the tradition to the next generation.

Zero Altitude isn't just a solo endeavor for Hirsch.

His brother, Jaaron, despite moving to Minnesota, remains actively involved in the business. "Jaaron moved to MN but is still part of Zero Altitude," Hirsch said, highlighting the family connection that underpins the venture.

One of the aspects that sets Zero Altitude apart is Hirsch's approach to the experience itself. He's not interested in running a guide service, at least not at this stage.

"Not a guide service but may have to consider that in the future; but I'd rather not be a guide. I am afraid guiding would trash the fun out of it for me," he explained.

His goal is to maintain the joy and authenticity of hunting, focusing more on mentorship and creating memorable experiences rather than just leading hunts.

Since 2022, Hirsch has been steadily building up his inventory of gear, with an eye toward expanding the services Zero Altitude can offer.

"I have been accruing more gear since '22 to bring people out. We are still considering a 'rental service' but with our main goal of recruiting and retraining new hunters as well as getting 'old' hunters back in the blind," he said.

The idea of a rental service is still on the table, but the primary focus remains on fostering a community of hunters who appreciate the outdoors.

Hirsch's efforts aren't limited to a specific age group. He's taken children as young as three out into the field and has plans to expand his reach to include younger adults who have never hunted before.

"This year, I plan on taking

out some younger adults who have never waterfowl hunted before, and I'm bouncing the idea around to get some older adults out, but I just need to assess if I've got the right gear and what kind of liability coverage I would need," he said.

Despite his enthusiasm and long-term vision, Hirsch is realistic about the pace of growth for Zero Altitude.

"I would like to expand faster, but with life, extracurricular activities for the kids, and again just life happening, it will be a slow build. I think with my kids getting older, I'll offer to take them and their friends out," he shared.

This gradual approach allows Hirsch to balance his personal commitments with his passion for the business.

Forrest and his wife, Jenny, both hold Zero Altitude close to their hearts, viewing it as more than just a business.

Their shared vision is about creating connections and helping individuals experience the wonders of nature.

"Zero Altitude is still neat and dear to Jenny and I, and our main goal is to get individuals connected to God's grand creation," Hirsch said, summarizing their mission.

As Zero Altitude grows, Hirsch remains committed to his vision of creating a community-centered around hunting that welcomes both newcomers and experienced hunters. With his dedication to mentorship and fostering a love for the outdoors, Zero Altitude is more than a business—it's a way to share a passion and create lasting memories in the wild.

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Conservation improvements unite all

BY CARA GREGER
Western North Dakota
Conservation Coordinator

On a beautiful August morning with a slight chill in the air, eight others and I are going up and down ravines and carrying our tools and clip aprons. Aspen, sage, creeping juniper, prairie grasses and wildflowers are our backdrop as we climb and descend the coulees of western North Dakota followed by the hum of a Bobcat with a winder which spools the barbed wire and removes the fenceposts we cannot through our efforts of leaning back and forth on them until the soil relinquishes its prisoner.

The Kostecky ranch located just east of Grassy Butte has amazing habitat for elk, mule deer, grouse, pheasants, pronghorn and other wildlife. Logan Kostecky has been working with the Mule Deer Foundation (MDF), the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGF), the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), and the North Dakota Wildlife Federation (NDWF) to make improvements to his family’s ranch which benefit both his livestock and local wildlife.

Logan and has a strong passion for both and wanted to take down three miles of fence that

had caused injuries to wildlife and fragmented their habitat. He is working with MDF and NDWF to replace a mile and half of old fence with wildlife friendly fencing and remove another mile and half of the barrier altogether.

Volunteers from Rainbow Energy Center coming from Underwood, ND; a volunteer from Minot Air Force base; MDF staff; NDWF staff; and the Kostecky family teamed up for the project. The Bobcat company provided the machine at no charge to assist in pulling posts and winding wire.

Logan’s parents, John and Brenda, own the ranch and Logan is in the process of taking over the family business. Supporting young ranchers as they do so is key to protecting North Dakota grasslands that benefit both operations and conservation in the generational shift occurring on the landscape. North Dakota is losing its grasslands and by connecting with ranchers, conservation organizations like NDWF can save the prairies we have left. The work done near Grassy Butte preserves and improves these areas for mule deer, grouse, pheasants, elk and pronghorn antelope.

Logan is an avid hunter, and each year allows hunting on his land with permission, includ-



Volunteers combine their muscle with help of machinery from Bobcat to help remove three miles of fencing near Grassy Butte on the Kostecky ranch to improve conditions for wildlife along with the family’s cattle herd. (DEO Photo by Cara Greger/NDWF)


ing elk hunters lucky enough to draw one of the state’s once-in-a-lifetime tags. Throughout the autumn deer seasons Logan gives permission to different hunters each weekend. He has signs posted with his phone number so hunters can call and ask. Additionally, each year Logan hosts a participant from The Outdoor Adventure Foundation – a Fargo-based organization which offers

hunting and fishing adventures to young people suffering from major, life-threatening illnesses and disabilities, as well as injured veterans - to come and hunt on his land. Typically, his guest is a young person with cancer or other serious illness.

Working with private landowners and ranch operators is a winning combination for conservation. This creates a connection

between hunters and landowners which benefits both and most of all benefits the species of wildlife we want to protect.

Cara Greger is the Western North Dakota Conservation Coordinator for the North Dakota Wildlife Federation and a Dakota Edge Outdoors Contributing Writer. Learn more about her efforts and that of the organization at northdakotawildlife.org.



SCALING SOIL HEALTH — IN THE — PRAIRIE POTHOLE REGION

A REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Ducks Unlimited in partnership with United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is announcing a sign-up period under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

DU is accepting applications until enrollment reaches capacity.

Scaling Soil Health in the Prairie Pothole Region RCPP is a voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers to help improve soil health, establish grasslands, and enhance rotational grazing capacity on working lands in North Dakota. This program prioritizes the establishment of grasslands and enhancement of existing grazing systems. Areas with high densities of wetlands will be emphasized. Successful applicants will develop 3-5 year management plans to achieve objectives. Applicants will also be expected to collaborate with project partners to collect and share data associated with applied practices, and to attend learning opportunities to maximize benefits achieved from applied conservation practices.

PAYMENTS

Under RCPP, eligible participants will receive cost-share assistance on approved practices. During the first three years of native grass establishment, producers are eligible to receive a rental payment as the land transitions from cropland to grazing land. Payments are made annually every fall.

APPROVED PRACTICES

- Grass Restoration (w/3-year deferral payments)
- Cover Crops
- Fencing
- Rangeland Planting
- Hay & Pasture Planting
- Conservation Cover

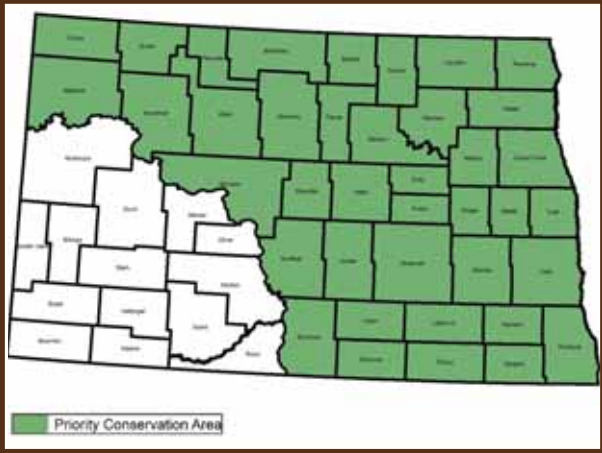
OTHER PRACTICES

- Livestock Pipeline
- Water Well
- Heavy Use Protection
- Watering Facility
- Pumping Plant
- Weed Treatment

ELIGIBILITY

This RCPP is available in the Prairie Pothole Region of North Dakota. Areas having the highest wetland densities will be prioritized. The primary focus is planting marginal cropland to diverse native perennial grasses and enhancing grasslands through grazing.

PRIORITY CONSERVATION AREA





TO APPLY, CONTACT:

Sam Krohn,
Conservation Programs Biologist

Ducks Unlimited
(701) 934-1635
skrohn@ducks.org





Salmon run in North Dakota?

Guided tour on the North Country Trail

TYSON MATTHEWS
McLean County Independent Editor

Did you know you can watch chinook salmon run upstream right here in Lake Sakakawea State Park?

Back in 1976, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department started stocking Chinook salmon in Lake Sakakawea, and ever since fishermen and women have been trying to hook them ever since.

Every year, the Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery in Riverdale hosted two separate hikes on a part of the North Country Trail. (The North Country Trail runs from Middlebury, Vermont, and ends up in our backyards near Lake Sakakawea.) One hike was a longer five-mile hike, the other a shorter one-and-a-half miles.

But the best time to catch them is starting in late July, preferably in the morning from 9 a.m. to noon.

“At the end of July, August, you’re going to need downriggers to get down to that 60, 70, 80, 100 feet of water. Usually around Labor Day, the beginning of September, the fish start moving shallow, and at that point, anybody can catch them offshore casting out crankbaits, casting out a bobber with a worm, a bobber with egg sacks,” said Russ Kinzler, fisheries supervisor for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. (Quoted from a story on KFYP in August 2023.)

After meeting up at the fish cleaning station and walking down the NCT a bit, the group meets up with the Salmon Run Trail and follows that along to where the salmon are running.

Our hike leader Mark Zimmerman chats as we hike the trail, giving tips and relaying stories about fish, trails, and hatchery.

The channel is small but there they are, fighting their way against the current. They are large fish, some weighing around 10 pounds each.

The children on the hike squeal each time a salmon comes into sight.

Zimmerman was worried there may not be any out since citations had been few recently.

“Oh, his head is sticking up,” Zimmerman says and points towards the water. “Do you see him? He’s coming right under there.”



One of the Chinook Salmon’s back just out of the water making his way back towards the hatchery upstream. (Tyson Matthews)

The group is spread out between a small bridge and the shore waiting in anticipation.

Aaron Von Eschen, the Project Leader at the Garrison Dam Fish Hatchery, explained more about the salmon running up the river.

“It is not a river; it is a drainage ditch of the hatchery. The water flowing in there is temporary depending on the time of year when we divert water through it to attract the salmon to run up it, or if we are draining ponds,” Van Eschen said. “It is still Missouri River water though that has passed through the hatchery from Lake Sakakawea.”

Many of the salmon below the dam will travel down to Lake Oahe in South Dakota and mature in the reservoir before returning, some will stay below the dam where the discharge creates a cold-water habitat for them to remain.

“Juvenile salmon will imprint to specific water chemistry during critical stages of their development,” Von Eschen said. “These young fish will imprint to the hatchery water which allows them to find their way back when they mature.”

Salmon run up the channel every year, they return as adults usually between the ages of one and three. Each year portions of

several year classes return.

Once the salmon make their way up the channel, there is a discharge pipe underground where the water flows from the external kettle to the creek, they follow the flow of water until into the kettle where they pass through a barrier that limits movement back out.

In the kettle, there are many salmon just waiting to be checked out by the Game and Fish Department and hatchery staff.

The hikes together had about 35 people attend that brisk but sunny morning.

The Garrison Dam Fish Hatchery and the North Country Trail host events throughout the year.

The 2024 Salmon Run hike was October 12 and 13.



The “river” that the salmon make their way back up year after year to their spawning grounds. (Tyson Matthews)



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‘Who are you learning from and who are you teaching’

Washburn outdoorsman turns family hunting, fishing trips into children’s book

BY KELLI AMELING
Associate Publisher

Being in the outdoors has turned into more than just a “get-away” for a local Washburn man. It became a family affair offering unforgettable memories and a livelihood to support his family.

Jeremy Olson said he began fishing when he was a toddler living in the Minot area, and in his almost 50 years of life, has never stopped doing what he loved.

“My biggest accomplishment is raising four kids in the outdoors as a family,” Olson said.

Family Traditions

For many years, Olson used the outdoors as an escape – enjoying the silence and turning off the world. However, his mindset changed once he had a family as he wanted to teach them everything he had learned about the Great Outdoors.

Instead of an escape, the outdoors became the place for family trips, teaching moments and creating many memories.

“My daughter has the biggest fish in the house,” Olson said, laughing. “But the boys won’t tell you that.

At just 46” inches high, Olson said his daughter, Morgan, caught a 44-inch pike.

Including Morgan, Jeremy and his wife, Kirsten, raised four children including Daniel, Peter and Andrew.

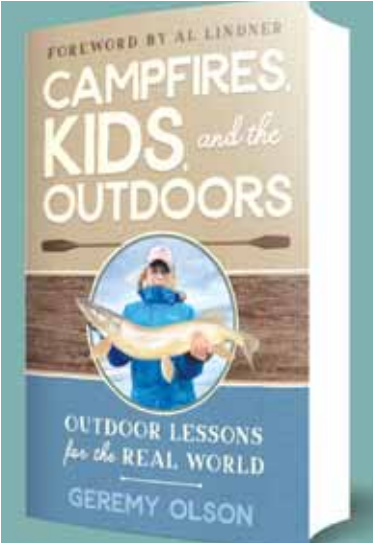
Jeremy said the outdoors became a resource for teaching life lessons, having life-long memories and making it a part of the family’s livelihood. Because of that, he got to spend more time doing what love with his family.

“Hunting and fishing also put food on our table for our family,” Olson said of an important reason he wanted to teach his family how to hunt and fish. “There are times we wouldn’t have the food we had without hunting and fishing.”

One of the life lessons Jeremy said the recreational hobbies has taught not just himself but the rest of his family is that “sometimes, life isn’t fair.”

“Because life isn’t fair – there are a lot of hard things in life, but when you do things together, you can get through anything,” Jeremy said.

Upon moving to McLean County, Jeremy said he and his fam-



“Campfires, Kids and the Outdoors: Outdoor Lessons for the Real World” can be purchased anywhere books and audiobooks are sold, with links on Jeremy Olson’s website at GOSpeaks.live. (Photo provided by Jeremy Olson)

ily are “spoiled” with what the outdoors has to offer.

Principle of Life

When it comes to others who are starting to dabble in hunting or fishing, Jeremy encouraged them to “never give up.”

“Growing up in North Dakota, I have never caught a walleye,” he said, acknowledging that has not stopped him for developing a passion and teaching others. “There have been lots of times I never caught a fish.”

However, he said a bad habit in the sport is keeping secrets, and he encourages those getting started to find someone who is willing to teach them what they know.

“Learning can be hard, but a principle in life is to pay attention to who you are learning from and ask who you are teaching,” Jeremy said. “People should be teaching others how to be in the outdoors and keep teaching what they know.”

In an effort to do that himself, Jeremy wrote a book called, “Campfire Kids and the Outdoors: Outdoor Lessons for the Real World.”

Livelihood

Outside of his outdoor hobbies, Jeremy runs his own sound and lighting business, which he had to put on hold during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

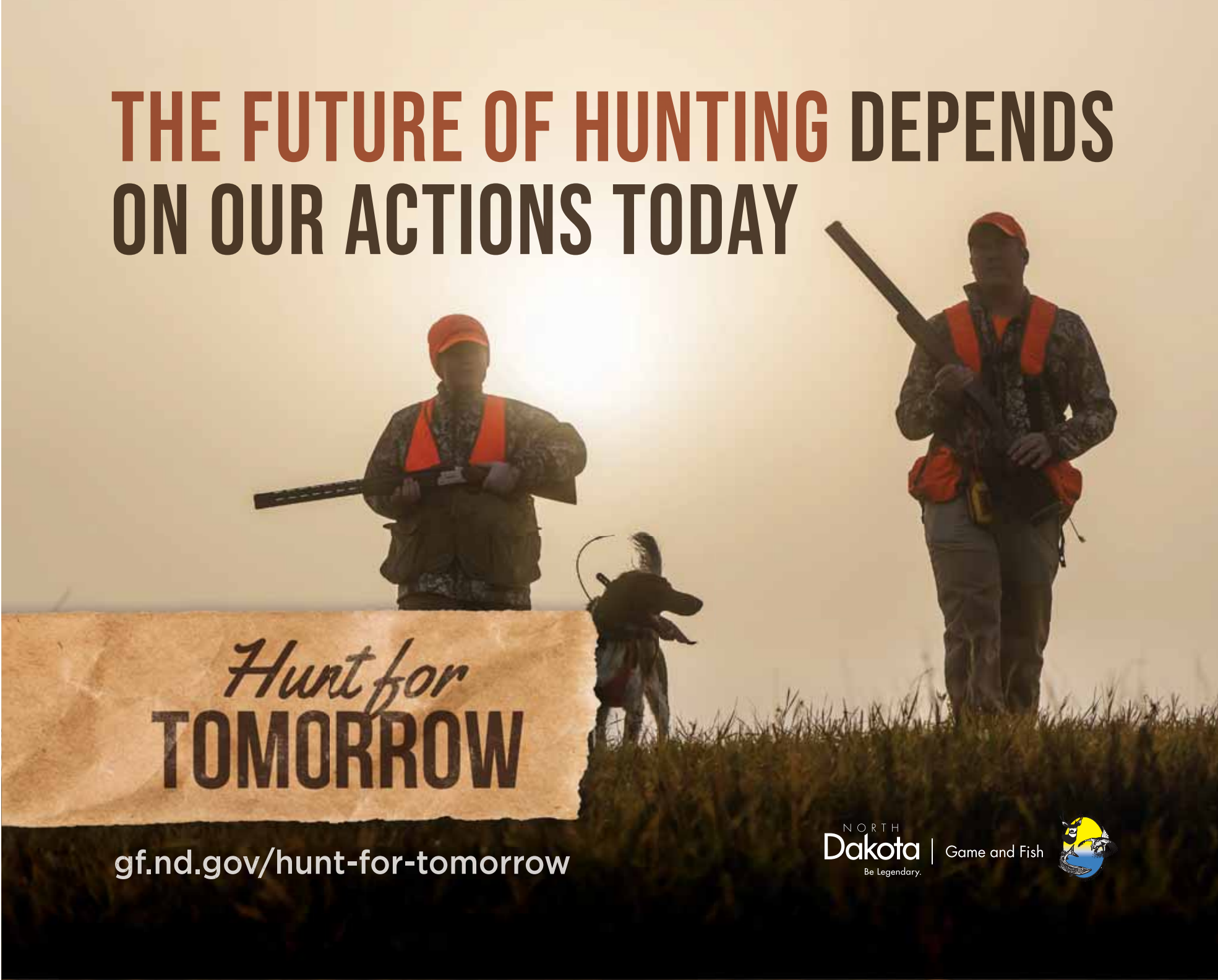
It was during that time Jeremy decided to take his lifelong

hobbies and turn it into a livelihood by writing his book as a way to teach others about the outdoors and encourage them to have the experience he has had as an avid outdoorsman.

“Campfires, Kids, and the Outdoors is far more than a hunting and fishing book,” according to his website GOSpeaks.live. “It’s a cover-to-cover guide to teaching kids life lessons in the woods and fields, on the water, and under the stars. Each chapter echoes Jeremy Olson’s lifetime of experience raising kids to appreciate and navigate the majesty of nature, not by fearing it, but rather by instilling knowledge, decision making, and confidence. His treasure trove of photos captures the magic of family time spent together in the outdoors, and the joys of ending the day by sharing stories and observations before the hypnotic glow of a seductive campfire.”

Jeremy said the book can be purchased anywhere books and audiobooks are purchased, with links on his website to Missouri Tackle, Amazon and Barnes and Noble.

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The Audubon Refuge will be hosting events that cater to outdoorsmen and women

BY TYSON MATTHEWS
tyson@nordaknorth.com

- October 7-24: National Wildlife Refuge Week**
Take part in “Walk for the Wild” at the Refuge.
- November 25: Hunter’s Brunch**
It’s the opening day of the upland bird hunting on the Refuge, and they will be offering a free brunch to hunters.
- December 22 & January 1: Holiday Hike Time**
Enjoy a walk at the Audubon Refuge and learn about Christmas traditions.
- Throughout the year:**

The Audubon Refuge offers an array of other events and opportunities throughout the year with Migratory Bird Week, Blue Goose Day, a Fall Festival, and an opportunity to watch the salmon run in Lake Sakakawea State Park.

Pheasant Fun Facts

BY NICK SIMONSON
Dakota Edge Outdoors

The North Dakota pheasant hunting season opens Oct. 12, and the youth pheasant weekend is just a couple of days away on Oct. 5 and 6. That means the wait is almost over for another autumn afield, and with good numbers of birds forecasted in state agency surveys, the excitement is building with each passing sunset.

Wherever you might be after sunrise stomping a cattail slough, working the grassy edge of a cut wheat field, or sleeping soundly in bed waiting for a later meet-up with your hunting buddies, here are a few fun facts about the bird that drives me, and many other hunters, mad at this time of year.

- On flat ground, a pheasant can run at speeds of eight to ten miles per hour. Once in the air, the birds can attain speeds of 45 miles per hour, though it often seems faster with a good tail wind behind them.
- The ringneck pheasant is not native to either North Dakota or the United States. The first several hundred birds were brought over from China to the Willamette Valley of Oregon in 1881 and successfully took root in that region, before spreading throughout much of the United States in the decades that followed.
- Removal of up to 90 percent of the roosters in a population of pheasants produces no significant reduction in offspring the next year, as hens remain the vital part of the equation in producing more chicks.
- Pheasants are a polygamous species. The average rooster will have a harem of three to seven hens and is capable of mating with several dozen hens in a spring courtship season without loss of fertility.
- There are several rare mutations in pheasants that will cause them to be mottled or completely black, or on the other hand, albino. The odds of seeing or even shooting such an oddly colored bird are extremely low
- Phasianus colchicus torquatus is the Latin name for the ringneck pheasant. Phasianus was the name of a river in Europe where great numbers of pheasants lived within

the bounds of its valley, and lends itself to the modern English name for the bird. Colchicus was the latin name of the area surrounding the river. Torquatus, loosely translated from latin, means “adorned with a collar.”

- A hen ringneck can lay up to four clutches of eggs over a summer, but will only hatch one set of young each year. The primary goal of the hen is to produce young from the eggs. She will only lay new eggs if the first set was destroyed. Hens do not produce two sets of young. If juvenile pheasants seem small late in the summer, it is because they were a late hatch, and not a second set of young birds.
- The ringneck pheasant is the official state bird of South Dakota.
- Pheasant chick diets consist of such delicacies as spiders, slugs and beetles. Later in the season, as fall approaches, young pheasants turn to grains like corn and wheat, as well as soybeans for nutrition.
- Nationally, the years of 1941 through 1945 boasted the largest pheasant populations of all time, due primarily to the lack of men hunting during World War II. Shortly after the war, the populations were put back in check by hunters returning home from overseas.
- The current daily limit for roosters in North Dakota is three. There have been times in the past two where the bag limit has been two. This number is adjusted by the Game and Fish Department as they see fit in accordance with surveys, but has remained untouched for more than 20 seasons, as removing roosters has little impact on overall populations.
- Pheasant season is the latest-opening upland game bird season in North Dakota. The reason for this is so that young pheasants have time to grow into their adult plumage. This further helps hunters distinguish between the males and females of the species, as only roosters may be shot.

Using these facts, you can fight pheasant fever off for just a few more days until the crisp fall morning air and the crow of a flushing rooster let you know it is time to take aim at the wildest bird around.

Simonson is the lead writer and editor of Dakota Edge Outdoors.

G&F offering grants for local high school trap leagues

Grant options are up to \$1,000

BY KELLI AMELING
Associate Publisher

In an effort to help support local trap leagues in the state, the North Dakota State Game and Fish Department will award grants for the league.

The grant option is up to \$1,000 with a 75/25% split to the awarded team, meaning if \$1,000 of eligible items are purchased, the grant would reimburse the team \$750, according to the application documents.

Eligible items include gear and equipment such as eye and hearing protection, vests, shell bags and magnetic barrel rests.

“The department also helps sponsor the North Dakota High School Clay Target League state tournament,” according to the Game and Fish website. “This sponsorship takes the place of grants to existing high school trap teams that Game and Fish had been providing through its Encouraging Tomorrow’s Hunters youth event/project program. ETH grants will still be used for youth hunting activities and other youth shooting activities that fall outside of the high school clay target league.”

League advisors can download a grant application but going to the Game and Fish website, clicking on “Resources” and navigating to “Grants.”

“Existing teams that have re-

ceived grant dollars in the past are not eligible to apply for grants this year,” the application stated. “In exchange, Game and Fish will funnel those dollars into a significant sponsorship of the state tournament.”

Other grants from the North Dakota Game and Fish Department include:

- Encouraging Tomorrow’s Hunters Grant, which provides funding for clubs and organizations that conduct youth shooting and hunting activities.
- National Archery in the Schools Program Grants, providing assistants to schools with getting a NASP program started.
- Shoot Range Grant, which is a

shooting range enhancement grant covering items such as berms, benches, target hanger and throwers and more.

Locally, there are five trap teams representing McLean County including South Prairie, Max, Garrison, Turtle Lake and Wilton.

The teams compete in multiple conference events in both the fall and spring seasons.

“The USA Clay Target League is a nonprofit corporation and the nation’s leading independent provider of clay target shooting sports to secondary and postsecondary schools,” the league’s mission stated. “The League’s priorities are safety, fun, and marksmanship—in that order.”

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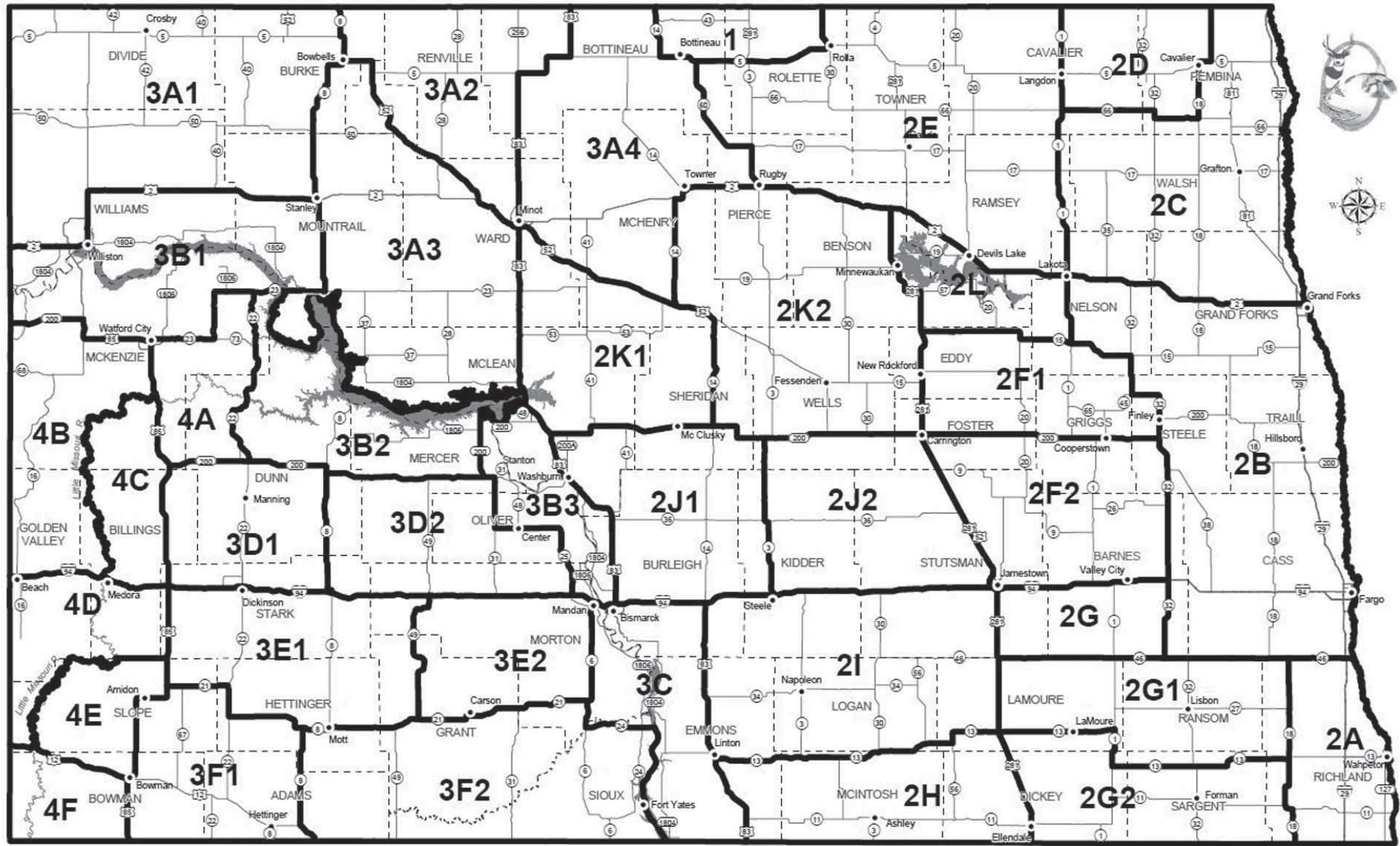
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Deer Gun Hunting Units

North Dakota Game and Fish Department
Deer Gun Hunting Units



Source: North Dakota Game & Fish Department 2019

All units are bounded by interstate highways, U.S. highways or North Dakota state highways as noted on the map, with the following exceptions:

- Western half of boundary between units 2F1 and 2L** – Eddy County No. 1 heading east from its junction with U.S. Highway 281 at Sheyenne to its junction with ND Highway 20.
- Boundary between units 3A3 and 3B2** – North shore of Lake Sakakawea. Except for Mathews (deTrobriand) Island and Mallard Island; all islands are part of Unit 3B2. Mathews (deTrobriand) Island is part of Unit 3A3. Mallard Island is part of Unit 3B3.
- Boundary between units 3B2 and 3B3** – South shore of Lake Sakakawea heading west from U.S. Highway 83 to a point on the shore directly north of where ND Highway 200 turns southward (west of Pick City), then south to ND Highway 200. Mallard Island is part of Unit 3B3.
- Boundary between units 3F2 and 3C** – The junction of ND Highway 6 and ND Highway 21 heading south on ND Highway 6 to the junction with ND Highway 24, then east on ND Highway 24 and continuing east to a point on the west shore of the Missouri River, then following the Missouri River shoreline south to the South Dakota border.
- Boundary between units 4B and 4C** – The Little Missouri River.
- Boundary between units 4D and 4E** – The northern Slope County line heading west from its junction with U.S. Highway 85 to the Little Missouri River, then south on the Little Missouri River to U.S. Highway 12.

Source: www.huntingseasonhq.com

Electronic and Physical Posting Information

Electronic Posting
To electronically post land, landowners (or individuals authorized by the owner of land) must designate the land they want posted by logging into their account (gf.nd.gov/myaccount) and posting the land under the "Land Parcels - Electronic posting" section

Annual Electronic Posting Enrollment and Effective Dates

- Enrollment Period: Starts February 7 and Ends July 1
- Effective Date Range: Starts August 1 and Ends July 31
- *Electronic posting must be renewed annually.

Previous participants who wish to post electronically for the following season may renew, add or modify posting designations during the enrollment period.

Physical Posting (Rule Highlights)

- Signs must be placed alongside the public highway or the land giving notice that hunting is not permitted on the land.
- The name of the person posting the land must appear on each sign in legible characters.
- Signs must be readable from the outside of the land.
- Signs must be placed conspicuously not more than 880 yards [804.68 meters] apart.
- If land is entirely enclosed by a fence or other enclosure, posting of signs at or on all gates through the fence or enclosure constitutes a posting of all the enclosed land.

Source: North Dakota Game & Fish Department

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Focus on safety when hunting this fall

BY DOUG LEIER
Dakota Edge Outdoors

The top outdoors priority changes with the seasons but this word carries over no matter the day, month and time of year. Safety. Summertime in and on the water. Winter ice safety and cold weather. Fall hunting and gun safety.

I'll never tire of reminding hunters the size of a deer, bag of pheasants or memories in the field are all for naught if a hunting incident or accident takes place. Forgetting your shells or gun can make for some funny memories. A trip to the ER never has nor will.

Optional hunter education began in North Dakota in the 1970s. In 1979 the state legislature made hunter education mandatory and required that all people born after 1961 complete a certified course in order to purchase a hunting license.

Over 250,000 hunters have taken and passed hunter safety in the nearly 50 years the course has been offered in North Dakota. Inevitably, each year I'll be asked about personal exemptions. "I'm former military, do I really need to take gun safety?"

In all honesty, part of my response is not meant to be disrespectful but, in the mili-

tary, there is gun safety but in hunting we are also training for safe and responsible gun safety, which never involves pointing a firearm at another person as your target.

Let that sink in for a minute and you'll better appreciate the unique and importance of working to make all hunters safer.

Here's a short list for all to take note of:

1. Treat every firearm with the same respect due a loaded firearm.
2. Control the direction of your firearm's muzzle.
3. Be sure of your target and what is beyond it.
4. Be sure the barrel and action are clear of obstructions.
5. Unload firearms when not in use.
6. Never point a firearm at anything you do not intend to shoot.
7. Never climb a fence or tree, or jump a ditch or log, with a loaded firearm.
8. Never shoot a bullet at a flat, hard surface or water.
9. Store firearms and ammunition separately.
10. Avoid alcoholic beverages or other mood-altering drugs before or while shooting.

What's not on the list is just as important. The common mindset I remind hunters is tough to

describe but a mentality of "it won't happen to me." We hope it doesn't. But it has and unfortunately will happen. Hopefully not to anyone, but just assuming since you grew up in an era where loaded firearms in vehicles and shooting from a pickup were accepted and nothing like that will ever happen to you is just not acceptable and shouldn't be tolerated.

Please use common sense and never forget once the trigger is pulled you can't undo what happens next.

While many think of guns, deer and pheasants, hunter safety also includes duck and goose hunters on the water. There are hunting jackets available with life jackets already built in. 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.

Stay safe, obey the rules, and enjoy the great outdoors.

Leier is an outreach biologist with the North Dakota Game & Fish Department.



You Have to Work for It. Walleyes are a tougher find on the Missouri River, as water temperatures have not cooled as quickly as in most seasons. Other fish such as pike and catfish are on the bite, however. (Photo by Dakota Edge Outdoors)

Fall Slowdown

BY MIKE PELUSO
Dakota Edge Outdoors

Things are developing slower with the walleye fishing than what I had hoped for so far this fall on the Missouri River near Bismarck.

We just are not seeing those magical cooling water temperatures with the abnormally warm weather we are experiencing. My hope is with the shorter days and cooler nights we will get there.

If you just like to catch fish, the river isn't bad that way. If you are looking for walleyes only, that has been a grind. Everyday I've been out so far has

been different. There have been a few really nice fish caught just not an overabundance of them.

Jigs and minnows have been what I've been using and my jig supply has taken a beaten this past week with all the northern pike, gar and catfish. Like I said if you just like catching fish that is definitely happening.

I have only a couple opens left towards the end of the month but will continue to guide through November, weather permitting.

Mike Peluso is a Dakota Edge Outdoors contributing writer and a licensed ND fishing guide specializing in walleyes on the state's premier waters.

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