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The author hit a hot streak and couldn't stop, whipping up more than six dozen krystal flash jigs powered by memories of places past and hopes for a great spring filled with fishing. Simonson Photo.

Just one

"I bet you can't eat just one" was the long-time slogan of Lay's potato chips, and really with about half a century of food science and consumer studies behind the product at the time, the tagline for the easy-to-consume junk food was right on, and still probably is. The light and airy chip covered in just the right amount of laboratory-balanced salts and oils was impossible to resist, especially after the first one – or handful – was consumed. Whether it was a snack-sized bag at some summer picnic or a party-sized sack during the Superbowl, I was lucky if I could get by with just eating one package back in my heavier days, and even today, the temptation remains. Once I popped, the fun didn't stop. Wait, that's the Pringles tagline. Either way, I can see why I've been fighting the battle of the bulge for most of my adult life.

I have found some passions, however, that are less dangerous for my blood pressure, and once I get rolling this time of year, like destroying a sack of potato chips, I just can't seem to stop. I caught myself halfway through a different type of bag this weekend, but instead of the shimmer of grease on my fingertips, it was the sparkle of krystal flash in the webbing of my hands, along my desk, and at one point, sprinkled on the bridge of my nose and eyebrows, with an errant touch of the face. Glancing over at the pile of nearly 80 jigs clustered in rainbow fashion as I mowed through each color in the grab bag of 1/16 ounce collarless heads, I had to stop and check myself.

I'd been tying up crappie jigs for nearly three hours, pausing only occasionally to locate another hank of flash amidst the mix of pheasant tails, dyed bucktail



OUR OUTDOORS NICK SIMONSON

and other various dressing materials that were pulled from the unorganized bottom drawer of my desk and strewn about on the floor of my office. When I caught my breath, I stared at the prism of sparkling minnow imitators that had appeared, and I began to rewind through them until I reached the beginning and began to deploy them on the spring waters in my mind. First were the chartreuse tailed go-tos for the northern bay on the power plant lake which lights up with monster specks the first week in March, and their back-ups were all-orange models and gold-with-orange flash which seemed to do almost as well on the prespawn slabs, and sometimes even better when the sun was shining.

Next came the black-and-silver combination which in the river days of my youth slammed smallmouth bass on they Sheyenne River where my early fishing adventures began. When Northland discontinued the combination, I was without for many years until I began defying the fishing gods – who had obviously determined the pairing of jet black and twisted silver was far too powerful for mortal anglers – and created my own. Since then, it's the first jig I throw, particularly in those up-and-down days when cold fronts provide a case of lockjaw for spring-time smallies and the subtle shake is what it takes to turn their heads.

Following that, pink-and-pink and pink-with-moon were a perfect pairing for

panfish and the occasional rogue walleye that wandered into a late-summer crappie frenzy at the cabin. I capped off the thread-wrapping bonanza with some all-white heads with pearl dressing for those nights I'm able to be out where my addiction all began on Lake Ashtabula, chasing the plentiful and powerful white bass that swarm on warm summer evenings. I tallied up five purple-headed patterns caped with silver, a sort of fathead minnow imitator, before I got to the end of my creations that had come from my vise in but one sitting. There were 77 in all. A scattering of the violet shaded jigheads remained amidst a couple of off-colors I've yet to decide what to do with. The deep green would make a good perch pattern and use up the last of the chartreuse, orange and moon flash, while an odd off-gold left the last challenge I determined would be best saved for an hour later in the week.

Perhaps it was the way that all flies or lures take us back to the places we love, the bites we remember and the waters we wish to reconnect with, but once I was started, I simply couldn't stop. With each pattern, I found myself planning out the possibilities for fishing trips from the for-sure-stops on down to the hope-I-cans this spring and summer. The optimism of reliving similar successes with the same shades leading me to those fortunate places where the only decision to be made will be whether to make one more cast...in our outdoors.

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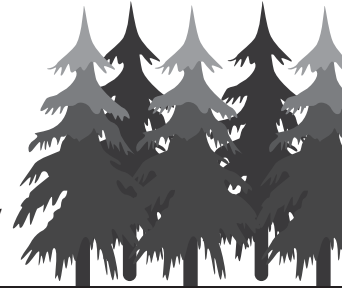
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Drive-Thru COVID-19 Testing: January 18

Free COVID-19 testing will be offered on Monday, January 18 in the WRT garage in Hazen on the corner of 1st St SW and Central Ave., Hazen. Testing will be offered from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. Those wanting to be tested are asked to enter from 3rd Avenue and form a line on 1st Street. Pre-registration at testreg.nd.gov is strongly recommended. DUI Seminar

The next 16 Hour DUI Seminar will be held February 4, 5, 6 & 6th. Please call Coal Country Community Health Center at 873-4445 to register by Feb. 3rd.



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Tips for bluegill success

By NICK SIMONSON

With a bump and a full pull of my spring bobber signaling a none-too-subtle bite, I set the hook on a whirling fish that took my line around the ice hole in a 720-degree spin, clicking and pulling off the slightly uneven edge of the cylinder. With sunlight still filtering through the trees, I didn't expect that kind of weight on the end of my line for at least another hour or so. As the fish battled its way to the surface, my jaw dropped when the eight-inch hole became eclipsed by a bluegill so big its tail was partially folded. It was a king royal bull, one of the biggest bluegills I'd pulled through the ice in recent memory. Complete with Frankenstein brow and the telltale hump of a true monster panfish, this bluegill marked the beginning of a new fishing challenge.

Hustling the fish over to my ice shack a few holes down the line I had been working, I set the bluegill's amber and purple body against the white of my stick-on tape measure. With no tail-squeezing required, the fish nearly hit ten inches. After sorting through a couple seven-inch crappies, another big bluegill followed suit. The iridescent violet panfish surfaced; a cookie-cutter outline of the previous one. Laying it to the tape, and with tail just slightly compressed, the blunt-faced fish nipped at nine inches. The monsters set out a start to a great evening of fishing, and served as solid reminders of what

it takes to land the biggest panfish in winter.

First, go small in your presentation. If you've ever examined a bluegill's mouth up close, you'll find that only the biggest ones have a maw made for minnows. Generally, they dine on tiny daphnia, nymphs and other small life forms. Jigs as small as 1/80 of an ounce are not uncommon. The tiniest jigs available for ice fishing pay big dividends when in pursuit of bluegill. For the most effective presentation, use the lightest line possible; one- and two-pound test are a good bet.

Second, for the fish I was catching, the bait had to hang horizontal, bluegills can be extremely picky and having what they want is important. Jigs like Lindy's Fat Boy and Genz Worm were ideal for presenting imitation maggots and the real things in a fashion that triggered bites. Make sure the knot where the line ties to the jig eye rests at the twelve-o'clock position for a perfect horizontal presentation. If you miss a strike, check your knot position when you don't receive a second strike shortly thereafter to make sure whatever bait they're biting on is riding right.

Third, when it comes to those strikes, they happen fast, and often are imperceptible on conventional rods, making a spring bobber a wise investment for panfishing. While I've preached the virtues of spring bobbers in the past, bluegill fishing is where they truly shine. The slightest twitch can signal a strike and even when I thought I imagined



Think small for big bluegills. Tiny jigs are the ticket and best mimic the size of the things bluegills most often eat, especially in winter under the ice. Simonson Photo.

the spring bobber moving, I set the hook, just to be safe. Many times, it resulted in a fish on the line.

Finally, eliminating line twist and lure spin resulted in more consistent bites. When hooked, bluegills will travel up to the hole in a circular fashion, putting a great deal of torque on the line, resulting in twist that causes lures to spin in a circle upon re-entry into the water. Here, you have two options to stop this phenomenon - cut and remove the bottom few feet of line and retie every-so-often or employ the smallest swivel available to prevent this line twist. Your jig will sit still in the water, and fish will not have to sit, wait and inspect your bait, giving them time to decide not to bite. Hopefully these hints will work for the rest of the ice season and connect you with the big ones when the bite is on.

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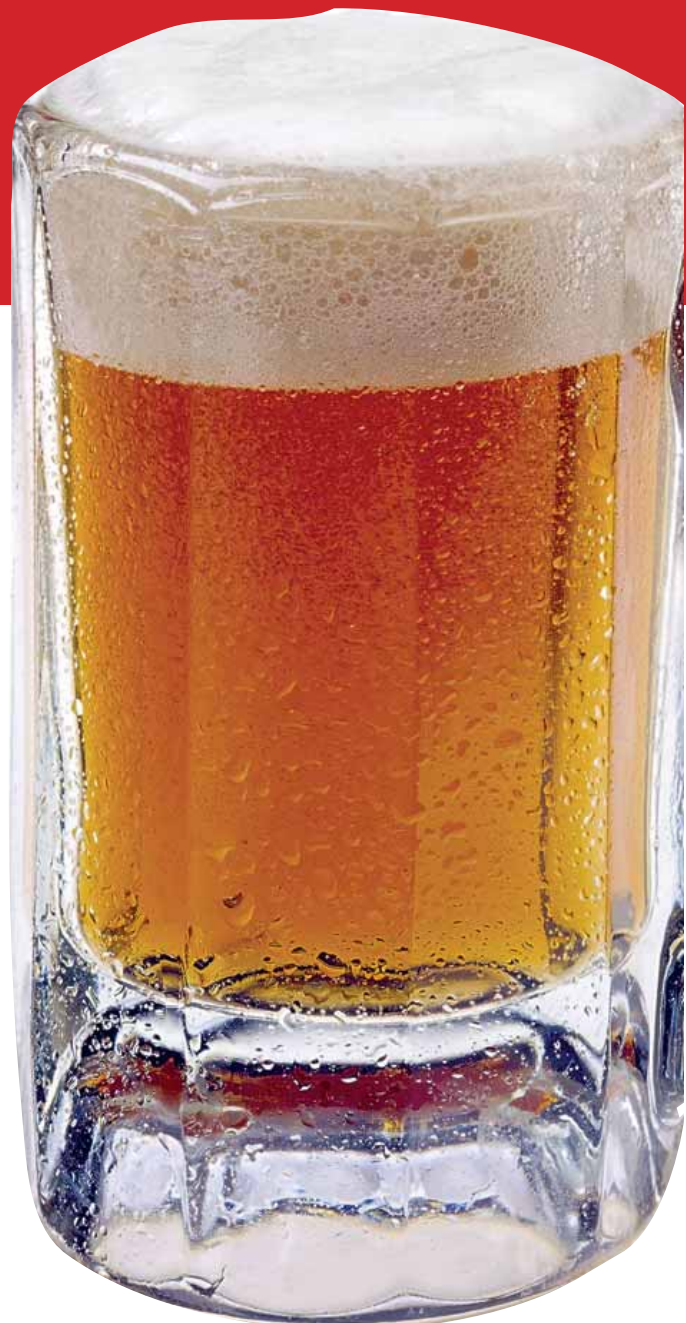
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Hunter surveys, wing submissions provide deep look at upland birds

By NICK SIMONSON

While the upland bird hunting seasons have ended in North Dakota, the work for the staff of the state's Game and Fish Department (NDG&F) is just getting underway in an effort to tally hunter hours in the field, their relative success and also the data from submitted samples to help gain the information needed through surveys and wings submitted by sportsmen. Through those hunter surveys and sample envelopes, biologists and staff can determine sportsman effort, estimated total harvest of pheasants, grouse and partridge and insight into the makeup of those populations in the most recently completed year. According to NDG&F Upland Game Management Supervisor Jesse Kolar, both resources provide more than just the numbers, but insight into trends, habitat initiatives and management practices of the agency.

SURVEY SAYS

Each winter the NDG&F sends out surveys to select hunters throughout the state to determine their participation in and success from upland hunting endeavors for pheasants, sharptailed grouse and Hungarian partridge. From that, agents get a bootstrap sampling of how many birds of each species were taken in the previous fall and gauge hunter efforts in the field.

"We try to get a feedback on one, how satisfied people are with their seasons, but also on how many total pheasants, partridge, [and] grouse are being shot each season, that information helps not only with our legal mandate to report those things in order to have hunting seasons, but it also helps us to evaluate how the trends are correlating with what we're seeing on our surveys and how hunters are experiencing numbers based on what our surveys are showing," Kolar explains.

WINGING IT

At the outset of the fall upland hunting season, sportsmen can request wing envelopes through the NDG&F and its offices around the state to catalog samples of wings, legs and various feathers of upland species to help biologists determine the estimated makeup of pheasant, grouse and partridge populations in the areas they hunt. By receiving the wings, legs and certain head feathers, biologists can determine the age structure of

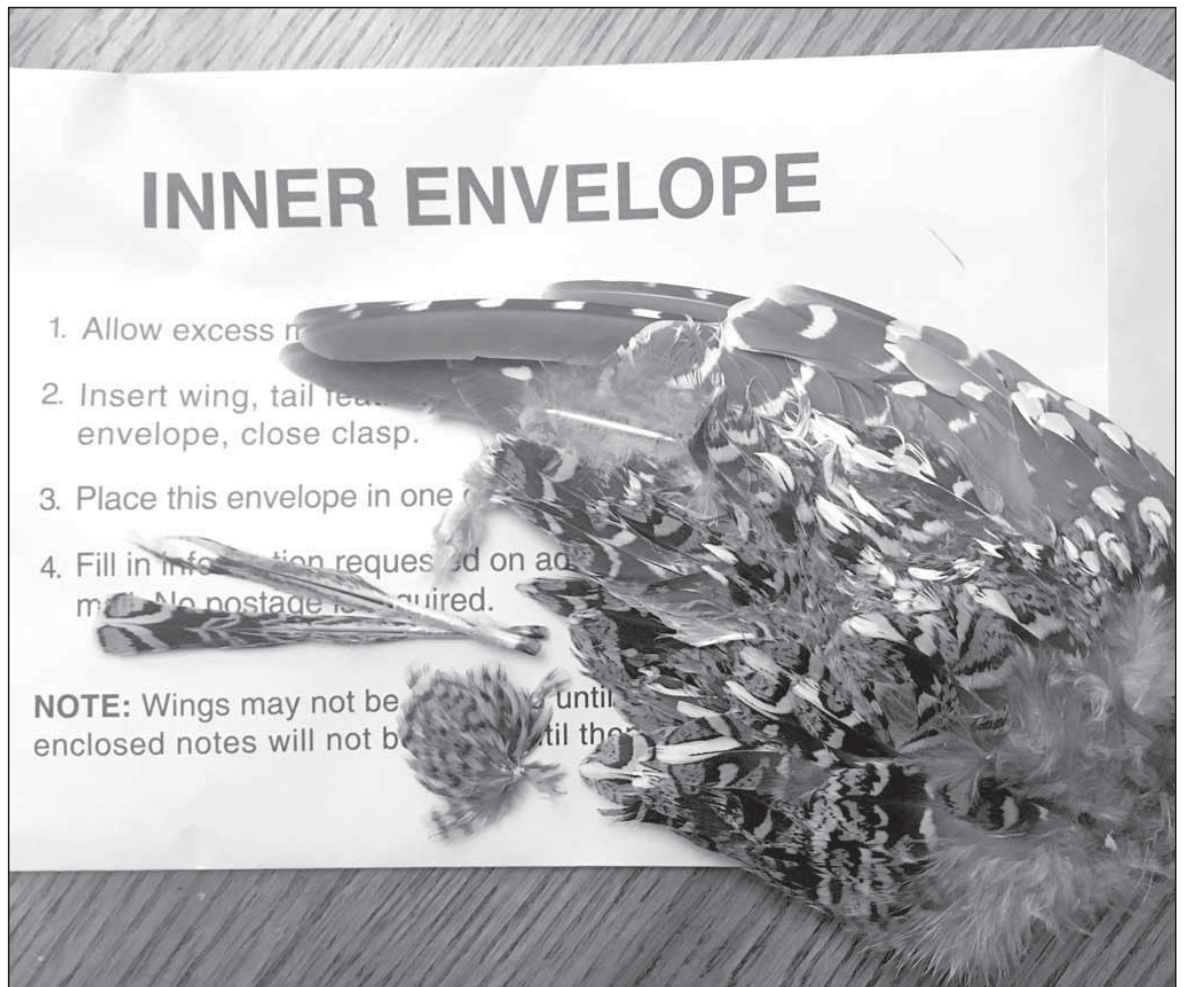
pheasants on the landscape, and can also determine the same for grouse and partridge along with the gender makeup of the populations during the season. On the average the department receives 2,000 to 4,000 pheasant wing samples, around 1,000 from sharptailed grouse and a few hundred partridge submissions each year, though those numbers have been off since the drought of 2017.

"That's an important sample we get and it has been a sample that we've been low on in the last few years, obviously with low numbers harvest has been lower, so we haven't been getting as many wings sent in from hunters as we normally did," Kolar states of those recent submission trends, "it doesn't take too long to go through each envelope and once we get rolling...we can usually go through 50 to 100 every hour, but we don't set up and do that every day, it's usually free afternoons here and there and it takes us a few months," he concludes.

DEEP DIVE

Beyond just knowing what's out there season to season and confirming spring and summer survey results, the data obtained from hunter surveys and wing submissions help the NDG&F in conjunction with other data to determine possible habitat efforts in certain areas and assist with management of state lands for upland game birds. In places where numbers are off, private land initiative efforts can be ramped up to improve areas of habitat to help sustain and rebuild pheasant and grouse populations. In the instances of getting a better understanding of the science and biology of upland game management, the average age can help determine hatch times and practices relating to improving survival.

"Recently we did an evaluation of all the wings that we've had since the 1950s and we were looking at nearly 200,000 total pheasant wings and 70,000 total sharptail wings, a lot of wings that we've aged and sexed over the years," Kolar related as part of a study to determine the prime hatching dates for sharptailed grouse, and it was discovered that about 30 percent of the young birds were vulnerable to haying practices into August, "that changed how we're managing our wildlife management areas; we've now shifted our haying date from mid-July to early August, so things like that are impacted directly from these numbers," he concluded.



The wing, tailfeathers and head feathers of a harvested sharptailed grouse are put in an envelope and submitted to the NDG&F. In total, the agency handles thousands of wings each year from the state's three major upland game species. Simonson Photo.

From the basics of hunter efforts and harvest composition to deeper biological concerns and management improvements, the two-tiered set of winter tools at the department's disposal go beyond days afield and the feathers on a wing. As a result of hunter participation in these efforts, the agency is better able to understand the intricate relation of habitat, birds, hunters and so much more on the prairie of North Dakota from season to season.

AUCTION

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 16: Hauser Angus Sale at 2 p.m. MT. Offering: 16 Black Angus Bulls and 25 Replacement Heifers. Location: Stockmen's Livestock Exchange - West Barn Dickinson, ND. www.wolffauctioneers.com.

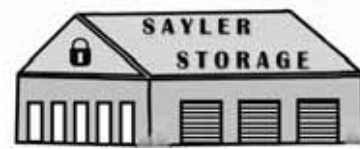
THURSDAY, MARCH 11: 1 p.m. CT. Offering 1488.19 Total Acres. Owner: Peter Konzak Family Land. Auction Location: Cobblestone Hotel and Suites, 1801 Hwy 2 East, Devils Lake, ND 58301. www.wolffauctioneers.com.

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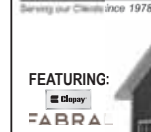


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CERTIFIED NURSING ASSISTANT – \$1,500 Sign on Bonus for Full Time positions, all shifts. Part-time CNA positions available, all shifts. Temporary Nurse Aide training is available. Call for details.

PAID FEEDING ASSISTANT – Part-time 5-7 every night or 7:30-12:30 Fri.-Sun. Must complete an approved Feeding Assistant training program. Call for details.

A.M. DISHWASHER – Part-time, 21 hours/week and every other weekend from 7 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

DIETARY PM COOK – Part time 30-35 hours/week 12 p.m. – 8 p.m.

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For further information, please call Human Resources at (701) 873-4322 or visit our website at: www.krcc-nd.org

Please submit resume to:

Human Resources
Knife River Care Center, 118 22nd St N
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