

**NORTH DAKOTA
STATE REPORT**
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Terry Steinwand, Director
North Dakota Game and Fish Department
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Bismarck, ND 58501

Idle-Speed-Only Zone Established on Missouri River

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has established an idle-speed-only restriction for boaters on the Missouri and Heart rivers in the Bismarck-Mandan area.

At a special meeting Tuesday morning, both Burleigh and Morton county commissions voted to recommend that Game and Fish establish the idle-speed zones, for safety reasons and to protect private property.

Game and Fish Director Terry Steinwand approved the official proclamation Tuesday afternoon, putting the idle-speed restriction in effect immediately. Because of much higher flows expected to come down the river from Garrison Dam for an extended time, the idle-speed zone will be in place until further notice, according to Game and Fish enforcement chief Robert Timian.

On the Missouri River, the north boundary of the idle-speed-only zone is the power lines approximately 1,000 feet south of the Steckel (Wilton) boat ramp, about 23 river miles north of Bismarck. The southern boundary is the MacLean Bottoms Wildlife Management Area boat ramp about 19 miles south of Bismarck.

The idle-speed-only zone on the Heart River starts at the confluence of the Heart and Missouri south of Mandan, and extends upstream to the ND Highway 6 bridge.

Idle-speed-only is defined as operating a boat or other watercraft at the slowest possible speed necessary to maintain steerage.

CRP in North Dakota

Few programs in the past half century have been as important to fish and wildlife in North Dakota as the Conservation Reserve Program. Farmers and ranchers are familiar with the farm bill conservation program, but many options are unexplained to landowners.

With that said, the Game and Fish Department has partnered with Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service to create and fund five farm bill and conservation program biologist positions around the state to assist landowners and sustain wildlife habitat.

The struggle continues as CRP contracts expire. North Dakota lost more than 400,000 acres in 2007, 100,000 in 2008, 180,000 in 2009, and another 200,000 in 2010. By 2013, another 1.2 million acres are projected to expire.

Remaining Deer Samples Negative for CWD

The remaining 3,600 North Dakota deer samples that were tested for chronic wasting disease are negative, according to Dr. Dan Grove, wildlife veterinarian for the State Game and Fish Department.

In all, more than 4,200 targeted and hunter-harvested samples from 2010 were sent to a lab at Michigan State University. One mule deer taken last fall in unit 3F2 in western Grant County tested positive for CWD, the second positive sample from a North Dakota animal. The first was taken during the deer gun season in 2009, also from a mule deer in unit 3F2.

The hunter-harvested surveillance program annually collects samples taken from hunter-harvested deer in specific regions of the state. In addition to unit 3F2, samples during the 2010 deer gun season were collected from units in the eastern third of the state.

In addition to hunter-harvested deer, the Game and Fish Department has a targeted surveillance program that is an ongoing, year-round effort that tests animals found dead or sick.

Since the department's sampling efforts began in 2002, more than 20,000 deer, elk and moose have tested negative for CWD.

CWD affects the nervous system of members of the deer family and is always fatal. Scientists have found no evidence that CWD can be transmitted naturally to humans or livestock.

North Dakota's Deer Season Set

North Dakota's 2011 deer season is set with 109,950 licenses available to hunters this fall, 6,825 fewer than last year and the lowest since 2001.

Randy Kreil, wildlife chief for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, said a continued reduction in deer numbers was evident in nearly all of North Dakota, except for some prairie units in the southwest.

"Declining deer numbers are indicative of three successive difficult winters resulting in high deer mortality and extremely low reproductive success," Kreil said. "This, combined with nearly a decade of aggressive deer management when large numbers of antlerless licenses were issued in many units, lowered the state's deer population down to, or in some units below, management goals."

Available deer licenses by unit will either remain the same or slightly decrease, with the exception of some units in the southwest where deer populations remain above management objectives and winter mortality was least evident.

As a result, landowners in the southwest requested an early doe season in an effort to ensure an adequate harvest. Therefore, the 2011 deer proclamation offers a special herd reduction gun season for antlerless deer in units 3E1, 3E2, 3F1, 3F2 and 4F. Antlerless license holders can hunt with a gun in their respective unit from Sept. 23 through Oct. 7, in addition to the regular deer gun season.

A special herd reduction season is implemented in an area north of Bismarck along the Missouri River. A total of 200 antlerless licenses are available on a first-come, first-served basis beginning Aug. 1. Interested hunters must provide written permission from a landowner in the area before a license is issued. These licenses are valid in all open seasons with the appropriate firearm or archery equipment, with the exception of centerfire rifles which are not allowed in this area for public safety reasons.

The mule deer population in the badlands also felt the bite of three severe winters, with survey numbers 23 percent below last year and 38 percent below 2007. As a result, significantly fewer mule deer licenses are available in 2011.

The number of licenses available for 2011 includes 4,550 for mule deer, a decrease of 2,725 from last year; 2,108 for muzzleloader, down 82 from last year; and 250 restricted youth antlered mule deer, a decrease of 70 from last year. The number of nonresident any-deer archery licenses will decrease to 682 in 2012.

Kreil recommends hunters turn in applications for the first lottery because last year all but three units were sold out, and licenses for this year are reduced even further.

Total deer licenses are determined by harvest rates, aerial surveys, deer-vehicle collision reports, depredation reports, hunter observations, input at advisory board meetings, and comments from the public, landowners and department field staff.

2010 Deer Gun Season Stats

North Dakota deer hunters took approximately 67,000 deer during the 2010 deer gun hunting season. Overall hunter success was 64 percent.

Game and Fish made available 116,775 deer gun licenses in 2010, with more than 99 percent issued to hunters.

Hunter success for antlered white-tailed deer was 68 percent, and antlerless whitetail was 63 percent.

Mule deer buck success was 68 percent, while mule deer doe hunters had a success rate of 70 percent.

Hunters with any-antlered or any-antlerless licenses almost exclusively harvest white-tailed deer. These buck and doe hunters each had a success rate of 64 percent.

Hunters drawing a muzzleloader license had a success rate of 46 percent, while young hunters during the youth season had a success rate of 55 percent.

Paddlefish Snagging Season

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department announced today that the state's 2011 paddlefish snagging harvest season has been closed (May 16) to protect the paddlefish population level.

The 2010-12 fishing proclamation allows for the Game and Fish Department director to close the snagging season early if it appears more than 1,000 paddlefish will be harvested. If the season had remained open through the intended closing date of May 31, the harvest cap of 1,000 fish would have been exceeded substantially, putting additional pressure on the existing population.

An additional snag-and-release season will run for a seven-day period from Wednesday, May 18 through Tuesday, May 24. Effective Wednesday, May 18 snag-and-release is legal only in that area of the Missouri River starting on the north shore from the Confluence boat ramp then east (downstream) one-half mile, and that area of the Missouri River starting on the south shore from the Confluence with the Yellowstone River then east (downstream) one-half mile. Both areas have boundary signs.

NASP State Tournament Expands

The number of students participating in North Dakota's National Archery in the Schools Program has more than doubled in one year, based on the number of student archers who competed in this year's state tournament.

Jeff Long, NASP coordinator for the State Game and Fish Department, said 295 student archers participated in the 2011 state tournament, compared to 143 in 2010. North Dakota's first NASP state tournament was held in 2009, when 71 student archers participated.

"All total, 11,800 arrows were released during this year's state tournament," Long said. "I couldn't be happier with how this program has taken off in only a few short years."

NASP is a national program that helps schools incorporate archery target shooting into physical education curriculums. The Game and Fish Department provides grants to help schools purchase equipment.

The 2011 state tournament was held March 26 at the VFW All Seasons Arena in Bismarck.

The first-place team and top five boys and girls in each division qualify for the national tournament in Louisville, Kentucky. Additionally, teams that achieve minimum scores set by NASP also qualify for the national tournament.

First-place teams received a trophy and five dozen arrows, and will receive \$2,500 in travel assistance if the school decides to send the team to nationals.

Overall male and female winners received a plaque and a special edition bow. In addition, each will receive \$750 in travel assistance if they choose to attend the national tournament.

Spring Spawn Successful

Weather conditions didn't deter fisheries crews from wrapping up another successful spring spawn.

Jerry Weigel, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries production and development section leader, said despite the latest start on record, department staff, along with personnel from the Garrison Dam Fish Hatchery, waited for ice to vacate the walleye collection sites on Lake Sakakawea and Devils Lake.

"With the help of the late spring blizzard, strong winds blew everything open," Weigel said. "There has never been a time when we didn't collect walleye eggs in April, but this year we got our first nets set May 2 and the first eggs were collected May 4."

The record water levels on Devils Lake made netting extremely difficult, so crews collected all 60 million walleye eggs from Lake Sakakawea over a 10-day period. "Catches of more than 1,000 walleye a day on Lake Sakakawea made for large egg takes," Weigel said. "Given the great catch on Sakakawea no eggs were collected from Devils Lake this spring."

A healthy northern pike population is a main reason fisheries crews were able to complete spring spawning efforts in short order under less than ideal weather conditions.

Scott Gangl, Department fisheries management section leader, said crews wrapped up taking northern pike eggs in just six days. "Our crews battled rain, snow and sleet," Gangl said. "Despite the weather, everything else was like clockwork."

Crews collected more than 19 million eggs from Beaver Bay (Lake Oahe), and Alkali and Spiritwood lakes (Stutsman County).

"Oahe has been full the past couple years so we were able to collect a lot of eggs from Beaver Bay," Gangl said. "The high water level has really benefited our spawning operation the last two years."

Bighorn Sheep Auction License

North Dakota's bighorn sheep license garnered the highest bid among states offering an auction license at the March 5 Midwest Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation annual meeting in Bloomington, Minn.

North Dakota's 2011 bighorn sheep auction license, which allows the winning bidder the rare privilege of pursuing a North Dakota bighorn on a self-guided hunt, sold for \$41,000. An additional \$15,000 was dedicated to sheep management in North Dakota.

One hundred percent of the auction license proceeds are used to enhance bighorn sheep management in North Dakota.