

NDG&F May 24th Newsletter

First Fish Certificate

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is reminding parents to capture their little angler's first catch on a specially designed First Fish certificate.

First Fish has no qualifying weights or measurements. The only requirement is the successful landing of a North Dakota fish. Certificates are available to all who request them, and have ample room for all the important information, such as name, age, lake and a short fish story, plus a blank space for a photograph big enough to contain the smile of the happiest little angler.

Free certificates are available by contacting the Game and Fish Department at (701) 328-6300, or send an email to ndgf@nd.gov.

Missouri River System, Devils Lake Boat Ramps

Even though Lake Sakakawea and Lake Oahe are approximately 10 feet lower than last year at this time, anglers shouldn't have a problem finding public access points to launch a boat.

Bob Frohlich, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries development supervisor, said most of the main recreation areas will have a usable boat ramp and provide ample boating access. "Some of the main concrete ramps are out of the water, so anglers will have to use low-water ramps in those areas," Frohlich said. "While these low-water ramps will certainly be sufficient to get boaters on and off the water, anglers may notice that some may not be as wide or quite as nice as the primary ramps and may be located some distance from the other amenities in the area."

Many low-water ramps were installed through cooperative efforts during the previous drought, Frohlich said, and are now becoming usable once again as the water level approaches those same elevations.

At Lake Sakakawea, where fisheries biologists expect a banner open-water fishing season, all but two of the 34 recreation sites will have a usable ramp. Only Littlefield Bay and West Totten Trail will be unusable.

All 12 boat ramps will be usable on the Missouri River stretch from Garrison Dam to MacLean Bottoms.

"These ramps are usually more reliable as they are not dependent on a lake elevation," Frohlich said.

"The biggest problem with these river ramps is the 2 foot degradation in the river bed that occurred during the 2011 flood, so there's now 2 feet less water on each ramp with the same exact releases from the dam as there was pre-flood."

Seven of eight recreation areas will have operational ramps on Lake Oahe from Hazelton to the South Dakota state line. Only the Fort Yates ramp will be unusable. Although fishing may not be as good as last year on Lake Oahe, biologists expect anglers will have good success, albeit smaller fish.

Anglers in the northeast portion of the state are just starting to pull boats out of storage as Devils Lake and many other water bodies are just becoming ice-free. Frohlich said the Devils Lake Basin had above average moisture and is expected to be up 2 feet this summer. "All nine boat ramps are in exceptional shape and will be fully functional," he added.

A complete status report of [Missouri River and Devils Lake boat ramps](#) is on the Game and Fish website

at gf.nd.gov

Riverdale WMA Shooting Range Closed

The Riverdale Wildlife Management Area shooting range will close Monday, May 20 for approximately one week due to construction of a berm and general improvements. A closed sign will be posted at the entrance.

Interested users can check the [status of the range](#) by accessing the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov.

Riverdale WMA is located two miles southwest of Riverdale.

Threat of Exotics in State Waters Continues

Now that the ice has finally left North Dakota's lakes and rivers, boaters and anglers are starting to enjoy summer recreation opportunities. With more than 400 water bodies covering the state, outdoor recreationists are once again reminded to help prevent the introduction and spread of aquatic nuisance species in North Dakota.

Robert Timian, State Game and Fish Department enforcement division chief, said ANS violations include both warnings and citations. "Warnings serve a purpose in some occasions, but citations will become more commonplace this summer," he said. "We need to continue to send a message that we are serious about the introduction and spread of aquatic nuisance species in North Dakota."

Current law states all water must be drained from watercraft prior to leaving a water body, including livewells. This means fish, including bait, cannot be transported in a livewell containing water. However, bait buckets and/or any container of 5 gallons or less in volume can be used to transport legal live baitfish or other bait in water. All other fish species may not be held in water and/or transported in bait buckets/containers when away from a water body. Transportation of fish in or on ice is allowed.

In addition, no aquatic vegetation, or parts thereof, shall be in or on watercraft, motors, trailers and recreational equipment when out of water. Time out of the water needed to remove aquatic vegetation at the immediate water access area is allowed.

All built-in structures to boats, including livewells and bait compartments, and containers (bait buckets) used to transport legal live bait, must also be free of aquatic vegetation.

Public participation will ensure ANS is not transferred from one lake to another.

Some North Dakota Lakes Suffer Winterkill

Although this past winter stretched beyond the norm, snowfall throughout most of the state was far from record-setting. Therefore, the number of lakes suffering a fish kill was not extreme.

Scott Gangl, fisheries management section leader for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, said approximately 30 winterkills have been confirmed so far this spring. "Fortunately, the majority of these were considered minor/partial kills, meaning there are still desirable fish to catch in those lakes," he said.

However, Gangl mentioned a number of lakes scattered across the state that appear to have suffered a significant kill. These include Powers Lake (Burke County), Warsing Dam (Eddy County), Juanita (Foster County), Schlecht-Weixel (LaMoure County), Stanley Reservoir (Mountrail County), Buffalo Lake (Pierce County), Fenster Lake (Ramsey County), Island Lake and School Section Lake (Rolette County), Coal Mine Lake and Wolf Lake (Sheridan County), and Harvey Dam (Wells County).

“The severity of a die-off may vary by lake, but usually there are some fish left in the lake,” Gangl said.

“Most of the lakes that experienced winterkill are prone to die-offs. So while there was some disappointment in losing good fisheries, there weren’t many surprises.”

Fisheries personnel have already started or will soon restock lakes that experienced winterkill. “We are stocking with hatchery raised fish, or fish transported from another lake,” Gangl said. “These fish may take a while to grow to catchable size, but in two-to-three years there should be populations of fish for anglers to catch.”

Anglers can contact the local Game and Fish Department fisheries district offices to get more information on the status of these lakes, or to report fish kills that may not be on the list.

May Highlights Safe Boating

A public awareness campaign held annually in May emphasizes the need for boaters to wear life jackets.

Nancy Boldt, boat and water safety coordinator for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, said the message reinforces the importance of personal flotation devices.

“Facts prove there is no safety substitute for wearing a life jacket while recreating on public waters,” Boldt said.

Failure to wear a PFD is the main reason people lose their lives in boating accidents. Boldt said each year, about 700 people nationwide die in boating-related accidents. Nearly 70 percent are caused by drowning, and eight of 10 victims were not wearing a life jacket.

North Dakota law requires Coast Guard approved PFDs in the following circumstances:

On watercraft less than 16 feet in length, one wearable PFD must be on board for each person.

Anyone being towed on water-skis, surfboard, or a similar device must wear a PFD.

No person may operate or permit the operation of a personal watercraft without each person on board wearing a PFD.

Watercraft of 16 feet or longer must have one wearable PFD for each person on board, and one throwable flotation device.

On any vessel less than 27 feet in length, all persons 10 years of age or younger must wear a properly fastened, Coast Guard approved PFD.

Boaters are reminded to test life jackets for serviceability and fit. All straps and buckles must be intact and there should be no rips or tears in the fabric.