

NDG&F June 10th Newsletter

Spring Breeding Duck Numbers Tallied

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual spring breeding duck survey showed an index of 3.9 million birds, down 17 percent from last year but still 73 percent above the long-term average (1948-2012).

Mike Szymanski, waterfowl biologist, said blue-winged teal and gadwall saw the largest decline. "Blue-wings are coming off near-record highs, so it's not unexpected to see the drop," Szymanski said.

Blue-winged teal were down 38 percent and gadwall 28 percent. However, they are both well above the long-term average – blue-winged teal 42 percent and gadwall 59 percent.

"Duck numbers are still really good, well above long-term averages," Szymanski said, while mentioning that total duck numbers for 2013 are similar to estimates over the past decade.

Scaup showed a notable increase from last year, while mallards, pintails, shovelers and canvasback were essentially unchanged.

The spring water index was up slightly from 2012. The water index is based on basins with water, and does not necessarily represent the amount of water contained in wetlands.

Water conditions were good in larger wetlands, but many shallow wetlands were on the verge of drying up the week the survey was conducted. "The somewhat poor wetland conditions probably resulted in losing ducks to Canadian nesting grounds," Szymanski said. "A big factor was probably that our smaller, shallow wetland basins were not holding much water throughout much of the state and the larger wetlands were all frozen when ducks were migrating through North Dakota."

Szymanski said water conditions were much better in the northern half of the state. "Duck numbers were down roughly 30 percent in the south central and southeastern areas of the state due to dry conditions," he said. "However, breeding and reneating conditions aren't reflected well in our data this year as most of the state got several inches of rain the week following our survey. That won't change duck numbers, but it will mean better conditions for breeding and raising young."

Additionally, the loss of CRP acres was evident during the survey, Szymanski said, as massive stretches of land conversion to cropland were obvious. "The loss of grass will hurt production of ducks and other grassland nesting birds," he added. "However, the recent overly wet conditions will also help bridge the gap a little bit for ducks."

Breeding was running behind from previous years as more pairs were present and nesting was just getting underway during the survey, Szymanski said. "But we won't really know how the ducks did until we conduct the July brood survey."

The July brood survey will provide a better idea of duck production and insight into expectations for this fall.

Game Warden Exam Set for July 15

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has scheduled an examination to select candidates for the position of district game warden. The test is at 10 a.m., July 15, at the department's main office in Bismarck.

Applicants must register to take the exam by submitting a letter of intent to chief game warden Robert Timian, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501 5095. Letters of intent must be submitted before 5 p.m., July 12.

Applicants must be at least 21 years of age and have a bachelor's degree. Other requirements are a current North Dakota peace officer license, or eligibility for a license, and a valid driver's license. Candidates must have excellent interpersonal skills in communications and writing, and must not have a record of any felony convictions.

Game wardens enforce game and fish laws and related regulations in an assigned district and other locations as determined by the department. Wardens normally work alone under varied conditions, at all hours of the day, night and weekends. In addition to law enforcement duties, wardens assist in the areas of public relations, education programs, and hunter and boat safety education.

Game warden duties also require the ability to perform physically demanding tasks involving lifting and carrying large, heavy objects, walking and running over uneven terrain and tolerating adverse weather and other environmental conditions.

Selection procedures following the test may include an evaluation of the application, a structured oral interview, background and reference checks, and psychological and medical examinations.

The salary for beginning game wardens through training is \$3,400 per month. Upon successful completion of training, the salary is \$3,899 - \$6,498 per month. Wardens also receive the state benefits package, including travel allowance. Uniforms and other equipment are provided.

Summer Safety on the Water

Failure to wear a personal flotation device is the main reason people lose their lives in boating accidents.

The National Safe Boating Council warns boaters that most drowning victims had a life jacket available, but were not wearing it when they entered the water. "It is difficult to put a life jacket on once you are already in the water," said Nancy Boldt, boat and water safety coordinator for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. "The single most important part of safety on the water is wearing a personal flotation device."

North Dakota law requires all children ages 10 and younger to wear a personal flotation device while in boats of less than 27 feet in length. The law also requires all personal watercraft users to wear a life jacket, Boldt said, as well as anyone towed on skis, tubes, boards or other similar devices.

Water users should make sure to wear life jackets that are the appropriate size, and in good condition. It is also important that children wear a PFD while swimming.

When purchasing a PFD, Boldt suggests considering the most prevalent water activity. Water skiers and tubers should wear a life jacket with four nylon straps rather than one with a zipper, because straps are stronger than zippers upon impact with water. Anglers or persons paddling a canoe should opt for a PFD

that is comfortable enough to wear for an entire outing.

Water skiers and tubers are reminded it takes three to ski and tube. When a person is towed on water skis or a similar device, an observer other than the operator is required on the vessel.

It is important for swimmers to know water depth, as serious injuries can occur from diving into water. Large objects hidden below the water's surface can lead to significant injury.

North Dakota boaters also are reminded that marine VHF radios are an important part of boat safety that should not be improperly used by operators. Boldt said they are intended for boat operators who are in distress and facing an emergency situation.

Regulations to help ensure safe boating this summer are found in the 2012-14 North Dakota Fishing Guide. A more comprehensive listing is available in the North Dakota Boat and Water Safety Guide or the Boat North Dakota education book. These guides are available online at the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov, by email at ndgf@nd.gov, or at a local Game and Fish Department office.