

NDG&F November 4th Newsletter

Salmon Spawn Goal Reached

Fisheries crews completed their annual salmon spawning operation on Lake Sakakawea after collecting 1.9 million eggs, easily surpassing their goal of 900,000.

Russell Kinzler, North Dakota Game and Fish Department Missouri River System biologist, said two thirds of the eggs came from Lake Sakakawea and the remainder from the Missouri River below Garrison Dam. The average size of Lake Sakakawea females was about 5.7 pounds, about 1 pound smaller than 2012. The Missouri River females, which are typically larger than the lake fish, averaged 7.5 pounds.

“The 2013 salmon spawning run was a success with good numbers of fish available throughout the run,” Kinzler said. “We were able to exceed our own egg collection goals early, which enabled us to provide assistance to South Dakota and Montana in meeting their egg needs for 2013.”

Plans for 2014 are to stock Lake Sakakawea with 200,000 salmon, with none scheduled for the river below Garrison Dam, Kinzler said.

Chinook salmon begin their spawning run in October. Since salmon cannot naturally reproduce in North Dakota, Game and Fish Department and Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery personnel collect eggs and transport them to the hatchery.

Once the eggs hatch, young salmon spend several months in the hatchery before being stocked in Lake Sakakawea.

Fall Mule Deer Survey Completed

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department’s fall mule deer survey indicated production in 2013 was higher than in 2012.

Biologists counted 1,761 (1,224 in 2012) mule deer in the aerial survey in October. The buck-to-doe ratio of 0.46 (0.37 in 2012) is similar to the long-term average of 0.43 bucks per doe, while the fawn-to-doe ratio of 0.74 (0.59 in 2012) was the highest since 2009, but still below the long-term average of 0.91 fawns per doe.

Bruce Stillings, big game supervisor in Dickinson, said the combination of no antlerless harvest and milder winter conditions over much of mule deer range in 2011 and 2012 has provided conditions needed to begin mule deer population recovery in the badlands.

“In addition, substantial rainfall this spring provided much improved habitat conditions for fawning this year compared to 2012,” Stillings said.

While it is encouraging to see mule deer numbers increase for the short-term, Stillings said challenges remain for continued population growth, including changes in habitat quality due to fragmentation and disturbance, predators and weather.

The fall aerial survey, conducted specifically to study demographics, covers 24 study areas and 306.3 square miles in western North Dakota. Biologists survey the same study areas in the spring of each year to determine population abundance.