

NDG&F March 24th Newsletter

Deer Meetings Generate High Interest

North Dakota's 2014 deer seasons will look pretty much the same as in previous years.

Through a series of public meetings and an open comment period that ran through March 17, however, deer hunters have provided a lot of input for the State Game and Fish Department to consider for 2015 and beyond.

"We told people at the meetings that it was very unlikely any major changes would take place this year," said Game and Fish wildlife chief Randy Kreil. "Aside from some possible adjustments to the total number of deer gun season licenses, we won't be recommending any changes in season structure or the number of licenses any one deer hunter can have."

Game and Fish wildlife managers will analyze the hundreds of written and verbal comments received, before deciding whether to pursue changes for 2015.

More than 800 people attended the eight deer meetings held around the state the last two weeks in February. Several hundred additional hunters either watched the final meeting broadcast online, or viewed a recorded version. Game and Fish received about 400 written online comments and many other direct emails and phone calls.

"We expected high interest in this process and the response we got was even above that," Kreil said.

"North Dakota hunters are passionate about our deer hunting tradition. Our long-term hope is that habitat trends will allow us to rebuild the deer population from where it is now to a level that is satisfactory to the deer hunting public. Most people seem willing to make some type of short-term licensing-related changes to help us do that. Because of the great response we've had, we have a lot of ideas to evaluate, some of which are new or variations of the current system."

Game and Fish set up the meetings and public comment process to explore some ideas for changes in deer license allocation the agency has received in recent years, in response to a declining deer population and fewer available licenses. In 2008 Game and Fish allocated nearly 150,000 licenses and in 2013 the total fell to 59,500.

While even at 150,000 licenses not every hunter could get a preferred license in a preferred unit, Kreil said the number of hunters who applied for a gun season license and didn't get one has increased significantly over the past years.

As with all issues, Game and Fish is open to continuing public input. The general department email address is ndgf@nd.gov; and phone is 701-328-6300.

Report Bald Eagle Nests

The State Game and Fish Department is asking for help in locating bald eagle nests in North Dakota. Game and Fish Department conservation biologist Sandra Johnson said the department is looking for locations of nests with eagles present, not individual eagle sightings. "Eagles are actively incubating eggs in March and April," Johnson said. "It is easy to distinguish an eagle nest because of its enormous size." Historically, Johnson said eagle nests were found along the Missouri River. Now, they have been observed in more than half of the counties in the state, mostly near streams and mid- to large-sized lakes. However, they are also found in unique areas such as shelterbelts surrounded by cropland or

pasture.

Johnson estimates the state has around 120 active bald eagle nests, possibly more.

Nest observations should be reported to Johnson at 701-328-6382, or by email at ndgf@nd.gov.

Observers are asked to not disturb the nest, and to stay away at a safe distance. "It is important not to approach the nest as foot traffic may disturb the bird, likely causing the eagle to leave her eggs unattended," Johnson said.

Whooping Crane Migration

Whooping cranes are in the midst of their spring migration and sightings will increase as they make their way through North Dakota over the next several weeks. Anyone seeing these birds as they move through the state is asked to report sightings so the birds can be tracked.

Whoopers stand about five feet tall and have a wingspan of about seven feet from tip to tip. They are bright white with black wing tips, which are visible only when the wings are outspread. In flight they extend their long necks straight forward, while their long, slender legs extend out behind the tail.

Whooping cranes typically migrate singly, or in groups of 2-3 birds, and may be associated with sandhill cranes.

Other white birds such as snow geese, swans and egrets are often mistaken for whooping cranes. The most common misidentification is pelicans, because their wingspan is similar and they tuck their pouch in flight, leaving a silhouette similar to a crane when viewed from below.

Anyone sighting whoopers should not disturb them, but record the date, time, location, and the birds' activity. Observers should also look closely for and report colored bands which may occur on one or both legs. Whooping cranes have been marked with colored leg bands to help determine their identity. Whooping crane sightings should be reported to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office at Lostwood, 701-848-2466, or Long Lake, 701-387-4397, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in Bismarck, 701-328-6300, or to local game wardens across the state. Reports help biologists locate important whooping crane habitat areas, monitor marked birds, determine survival and population numbers, and identify times and migration routes.

Game and Fish to Host Landowner Meetings

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department invites landowners to attend upcoming informational sessions about private land conservation program opportunities.

The sessions coincide with each of the eight district advisory board meetings scheduled around the state starting the week of March 31-April 4.

Starting at 6 p.m. before each advisory meeting, Game and Fish representatives, along with other partners, will discuss various conservation program options for producers, including what the Private Land Open to Sportsmen or PLOTS program can do for their land. Following a 15-minute presentation, biologists and other conservation partners will be available to discuss options one-on-one with landowners.

Advisory board meeting dates and locations are listed below. The advisory meetings start at 7 p.m. local time.

Landowners who are not able to attend any of the sessions but are interested in further program information can call the Game and Fish Bismarck office at 701-328-6300; or email ndgf@nd.gov.

District 1

Date: March 31

Location: Montana Dakota Utilities, Williston

District 7

Date: March 31

Location: Wildlife Club House, Turtle Lake

District 2

Date: April 1

Location: Senior Citizens Center, Makoti

District 4

Date: April 1

Location: American Legion Hall, Walhalla

District 5

Date: April 7

Location: Auditorium, Finley

District 8

Date: April 7

Location: Eagles Club, Dickinson

District 3

Date: April 8

Location: Lake Region College, Devils Lake

District 6

Date: April 8

Location: VFW, Valley City