

NDG&F April 28th Newsletter

Earth Day Project

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is once again celebrating Earth Day by sponsoring clean-up days on public-owned or managed lands.

While Earth Day was recognized April 22, each member of a school, Girl Scout, Boy Scout, 4-H club or youth organization who participates in cleaning up public lands through May will receive a specifically designed conservation patch.

Last winter the Game and Fish Department sponsored a contest for students ages 6-18 to design a North Dakota Earth Day Patch. Winners receiving a pair of 10x42 binoculars in the three age categories were Emily Ehlert of Williston (6-9), Katie Ely of Bismarck (10-13), and Peyton Nielsen of Surrey (14-18). Ehlert's design was chosen the contest winner, and will be used on this year's Earth Day patch.

Groups participating in the Earth Day project are encouraged to take the following precautions to ensure safety: keep young people away from highways, lakes and rivers; and only allow older participants to pick up broken glass.

Interested participants are asked to contact Pat Lothspeich at 328-6332 to receive a reporting form for their project.

Spring Mule Deer Survey Complete

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department conducted its annual spring mule deer survey in April, and results indicate western North Dakota's mule deer population has increased 19 percent from last year. Bruce Stillings, big game supervisor, said the increase is a result of less severe winters the past couple of years, no harvest of antlerless deer in 2012 and 2013, and improved fawn production. The 2014 index is only 7 percent below the long-term average.

"Mule deer numbers are headed in the right direction, but in order to maintain further population growth we need to maintain a conservative management approach, with no antlerless mule deer harvest again in 2014," Stillings said.

Biologists counted 1,944 mule deer in 306.3 square miles during this year's survey. Overall mule deer density in the badlands was 6.3 deer per square mile, which is up from 5.3 deer per square mile in 2013, and slightly below the long-term average of 6.8 deer per square mile.

"Although this year's increase in mule deer is encouraging, there are long-term challenges facing mule deer in the badlands," Stillings said. "While fawn production increased in 2013, it is still below average. We also have encroachment of Rocky Mountain juniper, predators, winter weather and changes in habitat quality due to fragmentation and disturbance."

The spring mule deer index is used to assess mule deer abundance in the badlands. It is conducted after the snow has melted and before the trees begin to leaf out, providing the best conditions for aerial observation of deer. Biologists have completed aerial surveys of the same 24 study areas since the 1950s.

Summer BOW Set Aug. 8-10

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program is accepting registrations for the annual summer workshop Aug. 8-10 at Lake Metigoshe State Park, Bottineau. Enrollment is limited to participants age 18 or older. Workshop fees of \$150 cover instruction, program materials, use of equipment, all meals and lodging.

Participants can choose from more than 30 programs, including archery, canoeing, firearms, fly-fishing, kayaking, plant identification and trapping.

BOW workshops are designed primarily for women with an interest in learning skills associated with hunting, fishing and outdoor endeavors. Although open to anyone age 18 or older, the workshops are tailored primarily to women who have never tried these activities or who are beginners hoping to improve their skills.

Women interested in [attending the summer workshop](#) can register online, or print and mail an information brochure and enrollment form at the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov. More information is available by contacting Nancy Boldt at (701) 328-6312, or email ndgf@nd.gov.

RAP Auction May 3

Outdoor enthusiasts are reminded that the North Dakota Wildlife Federation's Report All Poachers auction is Saturday, May 3 at the North Dakota State Fair Center's 4-H hall in Minot.

Confiscated hunting and fishing equipment up for auction can be viewed between 12-2 p.m., immediately followed by the auction. Items include more than 70 rifles, shotguns and handguns; fishing equipment; bows; knives; spotlights; coolers and other miscellaneous merchandise.

More information, including a comprehensive list of items for auction, is available by visiting the wildlife federation's website at ndwf.org.

Proceeds from the auction fund the RAP program. The RAP line, 800-472-2121, offers monetary rewards for information that leads to conviction of fish and wildlife law violators. The RAP line is available 24 hours a day, and callers can remain anonymous.

Important Reminder for Boat Owners

One glance at a lake or river and you already notice several boats on the water. With that mind, boat owners are reminded that properly-fitted life jackets should be worn and not used as a comfortable seat cushion.

North Dakota Game and Fish Department boat and water safety coordinator Nancy Boldt said water temperatures in spring are extremely cold, and sudden immersion can cause serious problems.

"Spring weather is unpredictable, and a pleasant outing can turn quickly when windy conditions arise," Boldt said. "Wearing a life jacket will not only keep the individual afloat, but also insulates the body which in turn slows the loss of critical body heat caused by exposure to cold water."

In addition, Boldt said wearing a life jacket reduces the panic and allows a person time to evaluate the situation. "If you go into the water without one, you're struggling to do what a life jacket is designed to do," she said.

Missouri River Safety Day May 15

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department and Townsquare Media are sponsoring the Missouri River SPLASH – a recreation and boating safety event for everyone who enjoys the Missouri River.

The event is Thursday, May 15 in Mandan from 3-6 p.m. at Moritz Sport and Marine. Displays, hands-on activities, demonstrations, regulations, registrations and prizes are included.

The event is free, and people of all ages are invited to attend.

State law requires youngsters ages 12-15 who want to operate a boat or personal watercraft with at least a 10 horsepower motor to first pass the state's Boat North Dakota safety course. In addition, some major insurance companies give adult boat owners who pass the course a premium discount on boat insurance.

The Boat North Dakota safety course is free and available at the Game and Fish Department.

Sage Grouse Counts Remain Low

Results from North Dakota's spring sage grouse survey indicate the number of strutting males observed remains well below management objectives. Therefore, the sage grouse hunting season will remain closed in 2014.

Aaron Robinson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department upland game bird biologist, said biologists counted a record low 31 males on six active strutting grounds. Last year, 50 males were counted on 11 active leks in the southwest.

"South Dakota and eastern Montana witnessed a similar decline this year," Robinson said. "The last time we saw such a drastic decline in the region was because of West Nile virus in 2007-08. We may have had another outbreak in the region, but at this point it is only speculation."

Sage grouse are a long-lived species with low reproductive output, which makes population recovery slow. Currently, Robinson said, natural reproduction cannot keep up with natural mortality.

"We may also have reached a genetic bottle neck in terms of reproduction potential that may be a factor in the struggling population," he added. "Also, there are only six active leks for roughly 460,000 square acres of core sage grouse area. The densities of active leks may be limiting hens from finding males to breed."

Robinson said if another state is willing to provide some birds for a translocation, it may be the last chance to directly impact the population in North Dakota. "The success of such a project is not guaranteed, but it is our only option to increase the genetic diversity of our population," he said.

The potential for a successful nesting season is good this year due to abundant residual grass cover brought about by last summer's rainfall. "We have learned from recent research in North Dakota that sage grouse rely heavily on residual grass cover for concealment during nesting season," Robinson said. "Without grass cover, mortality of females on nests increases and the probability that the nest will be depredated also increases. The outlook for a favorable hatch this year looks optimistic for the limited number of birds we have in the state."

Sage grouse management in North Dakota follows a specific plan developed by a diverse group of participants. With the threats facing the species and the decline in population, Game and Fish Department biologists do not foresee a hunting season in the near future.

Sage grouse are North Dakota's largest native upland game bird. They are found in extreme southwestern North Dakota, primarily in Bowman and Slope counties.