

NDG&F November 2nd Newsletter

Fall Mule Deer Survey Completed

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's fall mule deer survey indicated the population continues to recover in the badlands.

Biologists counted 2,157 (1,958 in 2014) mule deer in the aerial survey in October. The buck-to-doe ratio of 0.42 (0.50 in 2014) is similar to the long-term average of 0.43 bucks per doe, while the fawn-to-doe ratio of 0.84 (0.95 in 2014) is slightly below the long-term average of 0.90 fawns per doe.

"The buck-to-doe ratio remains stable, and we had another year of good fawn production," Stillings said. "Overall, the numbers are encouraging."

While mule deer numbers look promising 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.

Permit Required to Possess Dead Deer

North Dakota Game and Fish Department enforcement personnel are issuing a reminder that a permit is required before taking possession, or any part, of a dead deer found near a road or in a field, such as a road kill, including the skull with antlers. Only shed antlers can be possessed without a permit.

Permits to possess are free and available from game wardens and local law enforcement offices.

In addition, hunters are reminded to properly dispose of dead deer. Harvested deer cannot be left on the side of a roadway or in a ditch, and deer parts cannot be discarded in commercial dumpsters.

Plan Ahead to Protect Hay and Winter Feed Supplies

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is encouraging farmers and ranchers to plan ahead to protect hay, grain and winter feed supplies from wildlife, according to Kevin Kading, private lands section supervisor.

Even with today's low deer populations, severe winter conditions can result in wildlife depredation to livestock feed supplies or stored grain, Kading said.

Producers are encouraged to store hay in a manner and location that prevents or reduces damage by wildlife. For example, stacking bales rather than leaving them scattered across a field can help reduce damage and make the bales easier to protect. Stacking bales inside a fence, if possible, can prevent wildlife from gaining access to them. Ranchers have also used a protective barrier of round straw bales surrounding the bales to prevent wildlife damage, Kading said, and a number of other options are

available to producers to minimize or reduce wildlife depredation, including allowing hunters access to land to ensure a proper harvest of animals.

In recent years, grain producers are starting to store more grain in bags. These bags are generally used for temporary storage and are not designed to prevent wildlife damage. While they are vulnerable no matter where they are located, Game and Fish recommends placing them away from good winter wildlife habitat, and in an area where they are accessible if weather conditions deteriorate. Placing electric or other fencing around the bags prior to winter conditions can also help.

One solution that producers have come up with is to simply bury the bags with snow, or to open up areas in the field with a loader to attract deer and other wildlife away from the grain bags.

Unfortunately, Kading said, grain bags or other feed supplies left in an open field are difficult for Game and Fish to address. "There are very few options available," Kading added, "this is why we stress the importance of being as proactive as possible."

Planning early is the best way to reduce problems, Kading said. "If producers wait too long, snow and deteriorating weather conditions could make it difficult to store hay and feed supplies properly," he said.

The Department will assist producers with wildlife depredation problems, but cannot compensate producers for losses. The Department has temporary and permanent fencing options available for livestock producers experiencing chronic depredation problems.

For help or more information on how to protect hay, grain and winter feed supplies, contact the Game and Fish Department at 701-328-6300.

Feral Pig Sightings Must be Reported

Landowners or hunters who happen to encounter feral pigs in North Dakota must notify the State Board of Animal Health immediately. Shooting of feral pigs is illegal in North Dakota unless a person is protecting property or livestock.

Casey Anderson, assistant chief of wildlife for the State Game and Fish Department, said state law requires reporting of feral pigs to help the BOAH eliminate these nuisance animals.

"We have had numerous situations since 2008 where feral swine have been detected in North Dakota and we take these reports very seriously," Anderson said. "With the upcoming deer hunting season approaching, we want to let people know they need to report immediately if they see feral pigs or observe signs such as rooting."

Anyone who observes or suspects the presence of feral pigs should call the BOAH at 701-328-2655, Game and Fish Department at 701-328-6300, or USDA Wildlife Services at 701-250-4405.

Feral pigs can threaten domestic livestock, crops, public safety, natural habitat and wildlife. Anderson said they often become nocturnal if pressured which makes removal efforts more difficult. "They are very hardy and resilient," he added, "that's why immediate action is essential."

A landowner may eliminate wild pigs on his or her land if they pose an immediate threat, but must contact the BOAH within 24 hours. The landowner must follow any instructions given by the board regarding the handling, preservation and disposal of the carcass.