

## **NDG&F July 13th Newsletter**

### **Pronghorn Season Set, Online Apps Available**

North Dakota's 2015 pronghorn hunting season is set, with 410 licenses available in three open units, according to Jeb Williams, wildlife chief for the State Game and Fish Department.

Along with unit 4-A, which was the only open unit in 2014, units 3B and 4C will hold a limited number of licenses. A total of 250 licenses are available in 4-A, 100 in 3B and 60 in 4C. All licenses are valid for any pronghorn.

Similar to last year, the three units will have a season that is split into an early "bow-only" portion, and a later gun/bow season.

The bow-only portion of the season is from Sept 4 (noon) – Sept. 27. Anyone who draws a license can hunt pronghorn with a bow in the unit printed on the license.

From Oct. 2 (noon) – Oct.18, hunters who still have a valid license can use legal firearms or bow equipment, and again must stay in the assigned unit.

Survey results indicated the number of pronghorn in the primary range was similar to last year, Williams said.

"Pronghorn in the three units have maintained a high buck-to-doe ratio, so we are having another limited season to take advantage of a surplus number of bucks and provide hunting opportunity, while still encouraging population growth," Williams said.

Game and Fish biologists surveyed more than 9,900 square miles, which covers 100 percent of the primary range for pronghorn in North Dakota. The buck-to-doe ratio remained stable at 44 bucks per 100 does.

Only North Dakota residents are eligible to apply for a 2015 pronghorn license. Williams said people who have accumulated bonus points and choose not to apply this year will not lose their points.

In addition, state law allows youth who turn age 12 on or before December 31, 2015 to apply for a license.

Applicants can apply online at the Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). Paper applications will be available the week of July 20 for printing off the website, and from Game and Fish offices, county auditors and license vendors, or by calling 800-406-6409.

The pronghorn license fee is \$30, and the deadline for submitting applications is Aug. 5.

### **Spring Breeding Duck Numbers Tallied**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual spring breeding duck survey conducted in May showed an index of 3.6 million birds, down 25 percent from last year, primarily due to weather conditions that resulted in an early migration.

Migratory game bird supervisor Mike Szymanski said the spring migration was well ahead of normal due to open fields and warm temperatures. "Early migrants such as mallards, pintails and northern shovelers didn't stay long due to the dry conditions," Szymanski said.

Survey results indicated all species decreased from their 2014 estimates, except ruddy ducks (up 20.6 percent) and green-winged teal (up 11.5 percent), while wigeon remained unchanged at record numbers. Mallards were down 17.3 percent, shovelers down 48.7 percent, pintails down 43.6 percent and blue-winged teal down 29.3 percent. However all species, with the exception of pintails, were above the long-term average (1948-2014).

"The large number of ducks tallied during our survey is still 55 percent above the long-term average, and is consistent with the well-above-average populations we have been carrying for more than a decade," Szymanski said.

While the spring water index showed a decrease of 47 percent from 2014, Szymanski said frequent rains in the weeks following the survey have since filled many wetlands and ditches.

"Conditions coming out of May into June were much wetter than what we observed during the week of the survey," Szymanski added. "Substantial rainfall occurred in mid-May throughout most of the state, and wet conditions persisted through most of June."

The water index is based on basins with water, and does not necessarily represent the amount of water contained in wetlands or the type of wetlands represented.

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

"Our observations to date indicate that production will again be high across the state due to improved water conditions since the survey and increased wetland availability for brood production," he said.

### **Spring Ruffed Grouse Numbers Improved**

North Dakota's spring ruffed grouse survey indicated a 44 percent population increase statewide compared to 2014, according to Stan Kohn, upland game bird supervisor for the State Game and Fish Department.

The number of male grouse heard drumming in the Pembina Hills was up 86 percent from last year, while the Turtle Mountains had a 35 percent increase. No drumming males were heard in McHenry County (J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge), where they have not been heard since 2006.

The statewide average number of ruffed grouse drums heard per best stop was 0.94, up from last year's count of 0.65. The last year statewide spring drumming counts were higher than 2.0 was in 1999.

"Ruffed grouse in North Dakota seem to adjust their numbers depending on habitat quantity and quality in an area and amount of food available," Kohn said. "In states with good continuous aspen/birch forest

habitat, ruffed grouse numbers usually rise and fall around 9- to 10-year cycles, but because the habitat in North Dakota is so fragmented, we haven't seen these 10-year fluctuations in many years."