

## **NDG&F September 14th Newsletter**

### **Game and Fish Summarizes Pheasant Brood Data**

North Dakota's roadside pheasant survey conducted in late July and August indicates total birds and number of broods are up statewide from 2014.

Stan Kohn, upland game management supervisor for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, said the survey shows total pheasants are up 30 percent from last year. In addition, brood observations were up 23 percent, while the average brood size was up 9 percent. The final summary is based on 259 survey runs made along 105 brood routes across North Dakota.

"Our late summer roadside counts indicate pheasant hunters are going to find more birds in the southern half of the state this fall, with the southwest having the strongest population of young roosters," Kohn said. "Hunters will also find average habitat conditions on the landscape."

Statistics from southwestern North Dakota indicate total pheasants were up 34 percent and broods observed up 31 percent from 2014. Observers counted 25 broods and 207 birds per 100 survey miles. The average brood size was 6.2.

Results from the southeast show birds are up 27 percent from last year, and the number of broods up 21 percent. Observers counted eight broods and 62 birds per 100 miles. The average brood size was 5.5.

Statistics from the northwest indicated pheasants are down 18 percent from last year, with broods down 32 percent. Observers recorded six broods and 46 birds per 100 miles. Average brood size was 6.3.

The northeast district, generally containing secondary pheasant habitat, with much of it lacking good winter cover, showed two broods and 15 birds per 100 miles. Average brood size was 4.3. Number of birds observed was down 17 percent, and the number of broods recorded was down 7 percent.

The 2015 regular pheasant season opens Oct. 10 and continues through Jan. 3, 2016. The two-day youth pheasant hunting weekend, when legally licensed residents and nonresidents ages 15 and younger can hunt statewide, is set for Oct. 3-4.

### **Bighorn Sheep Survey Shows Mixed Results**

Results from this summer's bighorn sheep survey indicate North Dakota's bighorn population has increased from last year, despite the ongoing presence of pneumonia.

North Dakota Game and Fish Department big game biologist Brett Wiedmann said the July-August survey showed a minimum of 304 bighorn sheep, an increase of 6 percent from 2014. Results revealed 87 rams, 159 ewes and 58 lambs. The department's survey does not include approximately 30 bighorn sheep that live in the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

"This year's slight increase can be attributed to better-than-expected lamb recruitment over the past couple years, prior to the disease outbreak of 2014," Wiedmann said.

However, the pneumonia-related die-off that occurred in 2014 appears to have resurfaced again this summer.

“Despite no documented pneumonia-related mortalities since last January, the disease reoccurred last month,” Wiedmann said. “Similar to last year, we were pleased with the initial results of the survey as high lamb numbers were recorded, coupled with no signs of clinical disease among the adult segment of the population. However, significant signs of disease began to occur in mid-August as the survey was nearing its completion.”

Wiedmann noted that the bighorns showing evidence of disease this summer were from the same herds that were most affected last year. “Unfortunately, these are three of our core herds in the northern badlands, so we’ll have to once again closely monitor the impacts of pneumonia, as many adults and lambs showing signs of disease in August likely will not survive the winter,” he said.

Those herds in the northern badlands that were not affected by last summer’s die-off appeared healthy again this summer, and achieved very high female-to-lamb ratios.

Game and Fish wildlife veterinarian Dr. Dan Grove said it is too early to tell the severity. “Since summer 2014, mortalities have not yet been catastrophic,” Grove said. “However, the outbreak is ongoing, and we detected a virulent strain of bacteria last year that was collected from both dead and live-sampled bighorns. Consequently, the recurrence of pneumonia this summer may be more apparent when females and lambs are recounted next March.”

The Midwest Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation pledged \$20,000 to the department to help monitor effects of the die-offs.

Each summer, Game and Fish Department biologists count and classify all bighorn sheep, a process that takes nearly six weeks to complete as biologists locate each bighorn herd in the badlands by tracking radio-marked animals from an airplane, and then hike into each group to record demographic data using a spotting scope and binoculars. Biologists then complete the annual survey by recounting lambs in March to determine lamb recruitment, or lambs that survive the first winter.

### **Landowners Seek Doe Hunters**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is currently working with landowners in 12 hunting units across the state who would like to host hunters with antlerless deer licenses in 2015.

Participating landowners are located in hunting units 2C, 2I, 2J2, 2K1, 2K2, 3A4, 3B3, 3C, 3D2, 3F1, 4B and 4E.

The program is not intended for buck hunters, but designed to direct hunters with antlerless licenses to specific areas to reduce deer populations.

Interested hunters can get their [name on a list of possible participants](#) by accessing the Game and Fish Department’s website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). Hunters who do not have Internet access can call the department’s main office in Bismarck at 701-328-6300.

Hunters will provide their address, hunting unit(s) where they hold valid antlerless licenses, and if using rifle, muzzleloader or bow. From this list the department will select the number of hunters landowners have agreed to host. These hunters will be sent the landowner’s name, phone number and any information relating to the landowner’s specific situation.

Hunters must have a valid 2015 deer gun license – the Game and Fish Department does not provide a hunting license with this program.

Not everyone who signs up will end up with a new place to hunt, because not everyone's schedule will match up with a landowner's, and more people will likely put their name on the list than there are openings. Currently, participating landowners have openings for about 120 doe hunters.

North Dakota's 2015 regular deer gun season runs from Nov. 6-22. In addition, the archery season extends through Jan. 3, 2016; the youth season is Sept. 18-27; and muzzleloader runs from Nov. 27 – Dec. 13.