

NDF&G January 15th Newsletter

Seven Hunting Incidents Reported in 2009

Seven hunting incidents involving North Dakota hunters in 2009 is half of what has occurred annually over the past decade. Furthermore, three of the seven were not even hunting-related shooting incidents, according to Jon Hanson, hunter education coordinator for the state Game and Fish Department.

Of the four hunting-related shooting incidents, three involved shotguns and one involved a rifle. None were fatalities. The other three incidents involved two handgun victims and one fatal heart attack victim.

“While we won’t be completely satisfied until we are incident free, only four hunting-related shooting incidents are encouraging compared to past years,” Hanson said.

North Dakota has averaged 14 hunting incidents since 2000. In 2008, 10 were reported. The number of shotgun incidents is consistently higher than those with a rifle, Hanson said, with shooter swinging on game the number one factor over the last three years.

“Since 2006, shooter swinging on game, careless handling, victim out of sight of shooter, and discharge in/around a vehicle contribute to 86 percent of all incidents in North Dakota,” Hanson said.

The average age of people involved in 2009 hunting-related incidents remains on average, with the shooter age 34 and victim 42. Two of the shooting-related incidents involved residents, and two involved nonresidents.

Game and Fish Completes Mid-Winter Bald Eagle Survey

The number of bald eagles observed in early January along a stretch of the Missouri River was down significantly compared to past years.

Patrick T. Isakson, nongame biologist for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, said 12 bald eagles were counted during the annual mid-winter survey, an area of the river covered from Bismarck to the Garrison Dam. The average number of bald eagles observed during the past decade is 43. Last year, the survey was canceled due to the weather, while in 2008 a record 85 were tallied.

The number of bald eagles wintering in the state depends on the amount of open water and availability of prey. “Approximately 90 percent of the river is now covered with ice, which limits the number of ducks and geese in the state,” Isakson said, while mentioning that waterfowl is a main food source for wintering eagles this time of year.

Eagles are relatively easy to spot, as they prefer to perch in large cottonwood trees along the river. Adult bald eagles have a white head and tail and a dark brown body, while immature bald eagles are brown with irregular white plumage. Adults gain their full plumage at three years of age. Golden eagles have a gold cap on their head.

Each winter biologists nationwide conduct similar surveys to estimate the number of bald eagles wintering in the lower 48 states. Each state completes the survey as close to the target date as possible to make certain that birds are not counted twice.

Watchable Wildlife Checkoff on State Tax Form

North Dakota taxpayers with an interest in supporting wildlife conservation programs are reminded to look for the Watchable Wildlife checkoff on the state tax form.

The 2009 state income tax form gives wildlife enthusiasts an opportunity to support nongame wildlife like songbirds and birds of prey, while at the same time contributing to programs that help everyone enjoy all wildlife.

The checkoff – whether you are receiving a refund or having to pay in – is an easy way to voluntarily contribute to sustain this long-standing program. In addition, direct donations to the program are accepted any time of year.

To learn more about Watchable Wildlife program activities, contact the North Dakota Game and Fish Department at 328-6300; or e-mail ndgf@nd.gov.