

NDG&F January 31st Newsletter

Great Lakes Wolf Population Delisted

The recent decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to remove the Great Lakes population of gray wolves from federal protection might not seem as important in North Dakota as some of the other states in the Midwest, but it is significant nonetheless.

Stephanie Tucker, North Dakota Game and Fish Department furbearer biologist, said this development is important because it means the Great Lakes population has recovered enough to no longer warrant protection by the Endangered Species Act. "However, the Great Lakes population region delisting only includes the portion of North Dakota east of U.S. Highway 83 and the Missouri River, thus complicating their management status in our state," Tucker said.

Due to this action, the management of wolves found roaming through the eastern portion of the state will fall back to the State Game and Fish Department under state management guidelines as a protected furbearer. The complicating aspect of the decision is that wolves moving through western North Dakota (west of Highway 83 and the Missouri River) still remain under federal protection because that area falls between the Great Lakes and Rocky Mountain boundaries.

"Although we do get rare sightings in North Dakota, we don't have a resident wolf population in the state, or enough suitable habitat to support one; therefore, we have no plans to allow a hunting season on wolves at this point," Tucker said. "The upside is that under state management, we now have the flexibility to deal with any issues that may arise with the occasional transient animals moving through North Dakota."

State law provides a provision for landowners to protect their property from depredation by a state-managed furbearer. Therefore, landowners in eastern North Dakota could shoot a wolf posing a threat to livestock. However, west of highway 83 and the Missouri River, wolves are still an endangered species under stricter federal protection. Subsequently, landowners in that part of the state must first contact proper federal authorities before taking action on their own.

"Our hope is that in the near future, additional delisting action by the Fish and Wildlife Service will address western North Dakota," Tucker said. "Then the confusion over split management status in our state will be eliminated."

Midwinter Waterfowl Survey Reveals Record Numbers

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual midwinter waterfowl survey in early January showed 279,000 birds, a record high for the number of ducks and geese wintering in the state.

Mike Szymanski, migratory game bird biologist, said an estimated 90,000 Canada geese were observed on the Missouri River, and another 70,500 were scattered on Lake Sakakawea, which was completely open east of the Van Hook Arm. After summarizing the numbers, a record 190,000 geese were tallied statewide.

"This year's survey was highly abnormal, and numbers of waterfowl within the state were probably underestimated because of the open water and lack of snow statewide," Szymanski said. "The lack of snow cover was especially important in keeping these birds around."

A mild, dry fall with record-setting warm temperatures kept the birds here longer than usual, Szymanski said, with snow geese remaining in the southern half of the state until early December.

In addition to the record number of geese, mallards reached an all-time high as 88,000 were counted statewide, with 31,000 on Devils Lake.

Survey conditions were generally good, Szymanski said, with record-setting high temperatures in January bringing daytime highs of 15-30 degrees above normal.

“This year’s survey results are a dramatic turnaround from the last three severe winters when less than 36,000 total waterfowl were observed statewide each year,” Szymanski said.

Nonresident Any-Deer Bow Licenses

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department will have 682 any-deer bow licenses available to nonresidents in 2012. However, pending the final proclamation, antlerless mule deer may not be legal to harvest within a large area of western North Dakota.

The deadline for applying is April 1. A lottery will be held if more applications are received than licenses available. If licenses remain after April 1, they will be issued on a first-come, first-served basis.

Applicants can apply together as a party. A separate check is required for each application.

The [nonresident any-deer bow application](#) is available at the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov. The application must be printed and sent in to the department.

The number of nonresident any-deer bow licenses available is 15 percent of the previous year’s mule deer gun license allocation. The Game and Fish Department issued 4,550 mule deer licenses in the 2011 deer gun lottery.