

NDG&F March 5th Newsletter

Despite Decline of Smelt, Fishing on the Missouri River System Should be Good

Hydroacoustic surveys conducted by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department and South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks last July showed exceptional smelt populations in Lakes Sakakawea and Oahe. However, record releases from Garrison and Oahe dams resulted in substantial losses of smelt from the reservoirs during the later stages of summer.

Dave Fryda, Missouri River System supervisor for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, said entrainment rates with the record flows were very high and reduced the smelt population in both reservoirs.

“Smelt numbers in July in Sakakawea were equivalent to the good years of the late 1990s and early 2000s, and Oahe had possibly its best smelt reproduction in at least a decade,” Fryda said. “As coldwater habitat declined and smelt concentrated lower in the reservoirs during August and September, losses accelerated. It appeared most young-of-the-year smelt in Lake Oahe were lost, as well as a significant portion of the adult population.”

Smelt losses for Lake Sakakawea were also substantial, Fryda said, but likely not as severe.

“Now we are coming into spring knowing we lost quite a few smelt in both reservoirs,” Fryda added.

“Given high to record number of fish predators, smelt spawning conditions this spring will be critical. We have good water levels in both reservoirs, habitat conditions should be good and we still have plenty of adult smelt in both systems. If we can pull off a good smelt spawn, especially in Oahe, we could recover very quickly.”

Despite losses of smelt, Fryda said there is some good news in the short-term for anglers as both reservoirs have healthy walleye populations and northern pike abundance has never been higher.

“Fishing should be good this summer in Oahe and the Garrison Reach of the Missouri River because of the suppressed forage issues and the high numbers of walleye and pike,” he added. “In addition, both reservoirs have a lot of young walleyes out there, and they likely will be on the bite.”

Spring Turkey Drawing Held, Licenses Remain

The 2012 spring wild turkey lottery has been held and more than 700 licenses remain in nine units. The governor’s proclamation allows a maximum of two licenses, and hunters who did not apply in the first drawing are also eligible.

Licenses remain in unit 03, Benson and Ramsey counties and a portion of Pierce County; unit 06, Bowman County; unit 19, Grant and Sioux counties and portions of Morton County; unit 25, McHenry County and portions of Pierce and Ward counties; unit 31, Mountrail County; unit 45, Stark County; unit 47, Eddy, Foster, Kidder, Sheridan, Stutsman and Wells counties; unit 51, Burke County and portions of Renville, Bottineau and Ward counties; and unit 99, Mercer and Oliver counties.

Licenses are issued on a first-come, first-served basis beginning March 8. Hunters can [download and print an application](#) by accessing the North Dakota Game and Fish Department’s website, gf.nd.gov, or

request an application by calling (701) 328-6300. Online applications will be available March 8. Only North Dakota residents are eligible to apply.

The spring turkey season opens April 14 and continues through May 20.

Remaining Deer Samples Negative for CWD

The remaining North Dakota deer samples tested for chronic wasting disease are negative, according to Dr. Dan Grove, wildlife veterinarian for the State Game and Fish Department. A mule deer doe taken last fall in western Grant County during opening weekend of the deer gun season had tested positive for CWD.

In all, more than 2,500 targeted and hunter-harvested samples from 2011 were sent to a lab at Michigan State University.

Since the Game and Fish Department's sampling efforts began in 2002, more than 22,000 deer, elk and moose have tested negative for CWD. The three deer to test positive were mule deer taken from unit 3F2 in southwestern North Dakota. The first two were during the 2009 and 2010 deer gun seasons. All three were within 15 miles of each other.

The hunter-harvested surveillance program annually collects samples taken from hunter-harvested deer in specific regions of the state. In addition to unit 3F2, samples during the 2011 deer gun season were collected from units in the central third of the state.

The Game and Fish Department also has a targeted surveillance program that is an ongoing, year-round effort to test animals found dead or sick.

CWD affects the nervous system of members of the deer family and is always fatal. Scientists have found no evidence that CWD can be transmitted naturally to humans or livestock.

North Dakota Bighorn Sheep License to be Auctioned

The Midwest Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation will auction a North Dakota bighorn sheep license at its annual fundraiser and banquet March 17 in Bloomington, Minn.

North Dakota has auctioned a bighorn sheep license each year since 1986 to fund sheep projects in the state, raising more than \$890,000.

Last year's license sold for \$41,000. One hundred percent of the proceeds from the license sale are used to enhance management of North Dakota's bighorn sheep.

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