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Fall Turkey Season Set, Online Applications Available by June 12

North Dakota's fall turkey season is set with 6,805 licenses available to hunters, according to Stan Kohn, upland game management supervisor for the state Game and Fish Department.

This year's figure is down 17 percent from last year. However, an additional 1,300 licenses may be used in specific hunting units if turkey reproduction is exceptionally good this spring.

Harvest and population data in 2008 from hunting units in the southwest indicate turkey numbers have decreased due to last year's poor production and chick recruitment. In addition, Kohn said aggressive hunting seasons since 2003 have started to stabilize turkey numbers in many units.

"These lower turkey numbers are actually what we have been trying to achieve, allowing for more landowner tolerance of turkeys yet providing hunting licenses for most applicants," Kohn said.

Last winter's above average snowfall combined with this spring's rain is a benefit because of the improved habitat conditions in much of the state, Kohn said. "And if weather conditions remain warm and dry during the nesting and early brooding period, better production and increased brood survival can be expected this summer in many parts of the state," he added.

Another change from last year is the number of hunting units. Since 2003, the state has been divided into 29 turkey units. This year, several smaller units in the eastern part of the state are combined into larger units, reducing the total number of units to 22 for this fall.

"This will allow hunters more area within a unit to pursue birds, and provides the department with a larger area to collect additional population data for better management options," Kohn said.

An experimental hunting season will be reinstated for the USDA-ARS Northern Great Plains Research Lab in Mandan. A maximum of 30 licenses will be available. These licenses will be available at the Game and Fish Department once a person first obtains a permit from USDA-ARS.

An experimental turkey bow hunting season will continue within the city of Bismarck to help control a growing population of birds in residential areas. A maximum of 25 licenses will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis to individuals who are licensed to bow hunt deer within the city. These licenses will be available at the Game and Fish Department in Bismarck once a person has a valid city archery permit.

Hunting units 21 (Hettinger and Adams counties) and 53 (Divide and Williams counties) will remain closed to fall turkey hunting in 2009 because of low turkey numbers. The fall wild turkey season extends from Oct. 10 through Jan. 10, 2010. Prospective hunters, including gratis applicants, can apply online, or print out an application to mail, by June 12 at the state Game and Fish Department's website, gf.nd.gov.

Lottery applications will be available in mid-June from Game and Fish Department offices, county auditors and license vendors.

Applications are also accepted at the department's toll-free licensing line, (800) 406-6409. A service fee is added for license applications made over the phone.

Applications for the fall season must be postmarked no later than July 1. Only North Dakota residents are eligible to apply in the first lottery. Nonresidents can apply for fall turkey licenses that are still available following the first lottery.

Walleye Tagging Continues at Devils Lake

The final year of a three-year project is underway at Devils Lake as North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel recently tagged 1,000 walleye.

A total of 3,000 walleye were tagged for the project, which allows biologists to gather information on walleye movements, total fish mortality between years, angling mortality rates and differences in mortality rates between sexes.

This year's tags are blue – while last year's were yellow and in 2007 orange – and are attached by wire to the top of the fish. The tag does not need to be sent in, just the information: tag number, kept or released, date caught, length, location and angler's name and address.

Anglers catching a tagged fish are encouraged to report it online at the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov. Also, tag return cards can be filled out at bait shops around the lake, or anglers can bring in the information or call the Devils Lake Game and Fish office at 662-3617.

A follow-up letter will be sent to the angler with information such as when and where the fish was tagged, and fish length at the time it was tagged.

New State Record Buffalo Caught

Joshua Bartz's catch on May 30 is the first entry on North Dakota's list of state record fish since 2007. The Bismarck angler arrowed a 51-pound, 4-ounce buffalo from the Missouri River near Fox Island in Bismarck.

The 44-inch fish shattered the old record of 40 pounds, 6 ounces taken by Trey Opp of Mandan in 2007 at Heart Butte Reservoir (Lake Tschida).