

NDG&F July 16th Newsletter

Angler Survey Tallied

Last year's historic flooding conditions caused a slight decline in fishing license sales, but it didn't keep anglers from wetting a line.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual angler survey revealed 137,000 resident licenses were sold last year, down 2 percent from 2010-11. However, angler participation and effort actually increased.

Greg Power, fisheries chief, said the small drop in license sales comes as no surprise as many of the state's water bodies were affected by high water in 2011.

"Access was limited on many waters during peak fishing months," Power said. "Furthermore, residents of Burleigh and Ward counties were hit hard by Missouri and Mouse River flooding, and these two counties historically are by far the highest in terms of license sales."

The survey indicated 111,000 (up 9,000 from previous year) resident anglers fished open water, while 48,000 (up 15,000) residents fished through the ice. "Access was the key for the big increase in winter anglers," Power said. "We didn't have the severe winters like we had the previous three years."

The number of nonresidents coming to North Dakota to fish has stabilized at 23 percent of total license sales the past decade. A total of 41,000 (1,000 fewer) nonresident licenses were sold in 2011-12, but the number of nonresidents who actually fished increased from the previous year. In addition, Power said there has been a notable shift toward nonresidents purchasing annual instead of short-term licenses.

Nonresident license sales in the rapidly growing counties of Stark, Williams and Ward nearly doubled the past two years.

While Lake Sakakawea, Devils Lake and the Missouri River/Lake Oahe are the three major fisheries in North Dakota, numerous small lakes and rivers play a large role for anglers as well. "More than 300 small lakes, reservoirs and rivers account for nearly 50 percent of all fishing effort and are very important locally," Power said.

The state has a strong tradition and heritage of fishing, and statistics reveal this will continue. "We have decent water levels across most of the state and fantastic fish populations," Power added. "Unless North Dakota experiences a severe and prolonged drought, fishing should remain good to very good at least for the next few years."

Pronghorn Population Continues to Decline

North Dakota Game and Fish Department biologists recently completed the 2012 pronghorn population survey, which revealed the statewide population is 20 percent lower than last year. Therefore, the Game and Fish Department is recommending the pronghorn hunting season remain closed in 2012.

Bruce Stillings, big game supervisor in Dickinson, said the statewide population estimate has dropped to approximately 3,600 pronghorn. "Pronghorn in all four management regions decreased in numbers from last year and are well below population objectives," he said.

According to Stillings, three severe winters from 2008-10, and virtually no fawn recruitment during 2009-11, left an aging population with few prime-aged breeding females. "The result was another poor fawn crop, but there were signs of recruitment with more yearlings being observed this year," he added.

The recent scenario is similar to the large-scale pronghorn decline in the late 1970s. Three consecutive harsh winters beginning in 1977 prompted Game and Fish to close the season for four years, finally reopening in 1982.

The aerial survey is flown in late June/early July after young-of-the-year are born and visible. Five airplanes covered more than 11,000 square miles of aerial transects within pronghorn habitat.

Biologists will continue to monitor pronghorn numbers in the future, and will reopen the season when the population returns to a level capable of withstanding a harvest.

The 2012 pronghorn season will be closed to both gun and archery hunters. Applicants who have accumulated preference points will maintain their current points.

Fur Harvester Classes Scheduled

Monday, July 16, 2012

The North Dakota Cooperative Fur Harvester Education program is sponsoring a fur harvester education class in Bismarck, Dickinson and Jamestown for anyone interested in trapping or hunting furbearers.

The free 16-hour course is set for Bismarck Aug. 14 (5:30-9:30 p.m.), 16 (5:30-9:30 p.m.) and 18 (8 a.m.-5 p.m.) at the Game and Fish Department.

The class in Dickinson will be held at the Game and Fish district office on Aug. 25 and Sept. 1 from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

The course in Jamestown will run Sept. 4 (5:30-9:30 p.m.), 6 (5:30-9:30 p.m.) and 8 (8 a.m. – 5 p.m.) at the Game and Fish district office.

Students will learn about traps, trapping and snaring techniques, furbearer biology and fur care. A field day is also included where students will make a variety of land, water and snare sets.

Upon completion, graduates are issued a certification card that is recognized by any state requiring trapper education prior to purchasing a license.

Anyone interested in signing up for the class should access the Game and Fish Department website at gf.nd.gov, click on the online services link, and “online course enrollment” under the hunter education heading.

For more information contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s wildlife services division at (701) 250-4405.