

NDF&G August 3rd, 2009 newsletter

Early Canada Goose Season Opens Aug. 15

An early hunting season intended to reduce local Canada goose numbers in North Dakota opens statewide Aug. 15.

Last year was the first time the early season opened in mid-August. Before, opening day was Sept. 1. The earlier opener is permitted under the framework provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which allows states to open what is considered a “management take” season on Canada geese as early as Aug. 1st. Despite liberalized Canada goose seasons the past several years, the statewide population remains high, with numbers well above population goals. The growing population has resulted in increased reports from landowners concerning depredation on crops and nuisance problems.

During the past decade, hunters have been able to take advantage of longer Canada goose hunting seasons, maximum bag limits and expanded shooting hours. While these strategies have resulted in considerable increases in harvest, the population remains above objective levels.

Any Canada goose hunting days added in August do not count against the 107-day federal framework. Therefore, the mid-August opening date does not affect the length of the early Canada goose or regular waterfowl seasons.

Normal licensing requirements for the regular season, including a federal duck stamp, apply to the early season. Nonresidents who hunt in Sargent and Richland counties during the early season may do so without counting against their 14-day regular season license.

Hunters should refer to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov, for additional information and regulations, including Harvest Information Program certification and bag limits.

Sage Grouse Counts Low, Season Remains Closed

Results from North Dakota’s spring sage grouse survey indicate the number of strutting males observed remains well below management objectives. Therefore, the sage grouse hunting season will remain closed in 2009.

A record low 69 males were counted on 17 active strutting grounds. Last year, 77 males were counted on leks in the southwest.

The number of males counted on leks each spring has gradually declined since 2000. In 2008, spring counts dropped dramatically throughout North Dakota’s sage grouse range. The specific cause of the decline was unknown, but West Nile virus was suspected. There is no indication that hunting has caused a decline in the population.

Management of sage grouse in North Dakota has followed a specific plan developed by a diverse group of participants. The plan outlines hunting harvest objectives for the species with a recommendation that the hunting season close if the spring census indicates fewer than 100 males in the population. When the spring breeding population increases above 100 males, North Dakota Game and Fish Department biologists will recommend the season reopen.

Sage grouse are North Dakota's largest native upland game bird. They are found in extreme southwestern North Dakota, primarily in Bowman and Slope counties.

Swan Hunt Applications Available

Online applications for North Dakota's 2009 tundra swan licenses are available and the deadline for applying is Aug. 19.

North Dakota residents and nonresidents are eligible to apply. Hunters can print out an application for mailing, or submit a lottery application online at the state Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov.

Paper applications will be available the week of Aug. 3 from Game and Fish offices, county auditors and license vendors, or by calling (800) 406-6409. A service fee is added for license applications made by phone.

The statewide tundra swan hunting season is Oct. 3 – Jan. 3, 2010. A total of 2,200 licenses are available. Successful applicants will be issued a tag to take one swan during the season. Since swans are classified as waterfowl, nonresidents may hunt them only during the period their nonresident waterfowl license is valid.

Prairie Chicken Applications due Aug. 12

Prairie grouse applicants are reminded to specify which zone they intend to hunt when applying for the 2009 season. The deadline for applying is Aug. 12.

The prairie grouse hunting season will be held Oct. 10-18 in portions of Grand Forks County (north unit) and in southeastern North Dakota (south unit).

A decline in prairie chickens in the southeast has caused North Dakota Game and Fish Department biologists to reduce the number of licenses available in the south unit to 30. A total of 50 licenses will again be awarded to hunters in the north unit.

To apply, hunters need to send a postcard with their name, address, phone number and choice of hunting unit (north or south) to Prairie Chicken Application, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, N.D. 58501. Only North Dakota residents are eligible to apply.

Only one application per postcard and one application per hunter is permitted. Successful applicants will be notified through the mail.