

NDF&G September 4th, 2009 Newsletter

Bighorn Sheep Population Remains High

North Dakota's bighorn sheep population is in excellent shape, according to Brett Wiedmann, big game biologist for the state Game and Fish Department in Dickinson.

A July-August survey in western North Dakota showed 309 bighorn sheep, down only seven from last year's record summer survey. "Last year I remarked that our bighorn sheep population was thriving, so needless to say I am very pleased with our current numbers," Wiedmann said. "In fact, I feared our counts would be much lower due to the severity of last winter. However, despite the extreme conditions, the adult segment of our population is in great shape, along with a surprisingly high number of lambs."

Survey results revealed 98 rams, 161 ewes and 50 lambs – 242 in the northern badlands (an increase of 10 from last year) and 67 in the southern badlands (down 17). "To help bolster the southern herds, this winter we plan on translocating sheep from the northern population," Wiedmann said. "We will relocate some of the Montana sheep (transplanted to North Dakota in January 2006) that continue to do very well."

Annual bighorn sheep survey statistics are not recorded using a calendar year, but instead are done over a 12 month period beginning each April and ending the following March. Each summer, typically in August, Game and Fish Department biologists count and classify all bighorns, a process that takes nearly six weeks to complete as biologists radio-collar three-to-five sheep in each herd, locate them from an airplane, and then hike into each band in order to record population demographics using a spotting scope and binoculars. Biologists then recount lambs in March to determine lamb recruitment.

North Dakota's bighorn sheep hunting season opens Oct. 9 and continues through Oct. 25. Five licenses were issued.

Deer Season for Youth Ages 12-15 Opens Sept. 18

Friday, Sept. 18 at noon signals the start of a nine-and-a-half day deer hunting season for youth ages 12-15. According to state law, licensed youth ages 12 and 13 are allowed to hunt statewide, but for only antlerless white-tailed deer. First-time deer hunters age 14 or 15 with a "youth season" license can hunt statewide for any deer, except for restricted licenses and units in western North Dakota.

Fourteen and 15-year-olds with special "youth season" licenses may also purchase and use additional concurrent season antlerless deer licenses during this youth deer season. Hunters must follow the unit and species restrictions listed on the license.

After opening day, hunting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset. Solid daylight fluorescent orange vests or coats, and hats are required for all young hunters and their adult mentors. Each youth deer hunter must be under direct supervision of an adult while in the field.

In addition to the deer license, hunters must possess a general game and habitat license and hunting certificate. The season closes Sunday, Sept. 27.

Youth Waterfowl is Sept. 19-20

North Dakota's two-day youth waterfowl season is Sept. 19-20. Legally licensed resident and nonresident youth waterfowl hunters age 15 and younger may hunt ducks, geese, coots and mergansers statewide.

The daily bag limit and species restrictions for the youth season are the same as for regular duck and goose seasons.

Resident and qualifying nonresident youth waterfowl hunters must possess a general game and habitat license and a fishing, hunting and furbearer certificate. (Nonresidents from states that do not provide a reciprocal licensing agreement for North Dakota residents must purchase the entire nonresident waterfowl license package.) In addition, all youth hunters must be Harvest Information Program certified, and youth ages 12 and older need to have passed a certified hunter education course. Hunters age 15 and younger do not need a federal duck stamp.

Hunters who purchase a license through the North Dakota Game and Fish Department can easily get HIP certified. Otherwise, hunters must call (888) 634-4798, or log on to the Game and Fish website at gf.nd.gov, and record the HIP number on their fishing, hunting and furbearer certificate.

Shooting hours for the youth waterfowl season are one-half hour before sunrise to sunset. An adult at least 18 years of age must accompany the resident youth hunter into the field, and a licensed adult is required to accompany a nonresident youth hunter. The two-day weekend hunt does not count against a nonresident adult hunter's 14-day regular season waterfowl dates.

Sandhill Crane Season Opens Sept. 19

North Dakota's sandhill crane season opens Sept. 19. Hunters are urged to use caution and identify birds to prevent shooting at whooping cranes as they begin their fall migration.

The sandhill crane season is open through Nov. 15 in unit 1 (west of U.S. Highway 281), and through Oct. 25 in unit 2 (east of U.S. Highway 281). Limits are three daily and six in possession in unit 1, and two daily and four in possession in unit 2. Shooting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to 1 p.m. each day through Oct. 31. Beginning Nov. 1, shooting hours are extended until 2 p.m. each day.

In addition to other licenses required, prospective hunters need a \$5 crane permit. Hunters can apply online, or print out a resident or nonresident application for mailing, at the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov. Harvest Information Program certification is required. To get HIP certified, access the department's website, or call (888) 634-4798.

Hunters can also send the permit fee, along with personal information, including height, weight, sex, social security number, date of birth, color of hair and eyes, and hunter education number and state issued, to Crane Permit, NDGF, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501.

Swan Hunt Lottery Held, Licenses Remain

North Dakota's swan lottery has been held and more than 500 licenses remain. Only hunters who do not have a swan license for the 2009 season can apply, as regulations limit hunters to one license per year.

First-come, first-served licenses can be purchased online at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov. Hunters may also request an application by calling the department's Bismarck office at (701) 328-6300.

The statewide tundra swan hunting season is Oct. 3 – Jan. 3, 2010. North Dakota residents and nonresidents are eligible to apply. The fee is \$5 for residents and \$25 for nonresidents.