

## **NDG&F September 10th Newsletter**

### **Bighorn Sheep Numbers Increase**

While many of the state's western big game populations remain at low population levels, bighorn sheep numbers are strong, according to Brett Wiedmann, big game biologist for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in Dickinson.

A July-August survey in western North Dakota showed a minimum 299 bighorn sheep, a slight increase from last year and just 17 below 2008's record summer survey. "Our bighorn sheep population remained stable following three epic winters, so we're pleased to see an increase subsequent to last winter's mild conditions," Wiedmann said.

The current population includes a good number of young rams, Wiedmann added, which should lead to increased hunting opportunity in future years as these animals start reaching maturity. In 2012, Game and Fish reduced the number of sheep licenses from six to four, due to a declining number of mature rams.

Survey results revealed 89 rams, 155 ewes and 55 lambs – a record 251 in the northern badlands (an increase of 18 from last year) and 48 in the southern badlands (down nine). "Bighorn sheep are doing very well in the northern badlands but continue to struggle south of the Interstate," Wiedmann said, while noting that a record 51 lambs were observed in the north, but only four in the south. "Despite poor lamb numbers in the southern badlands, the total number of lambs observed this summer was just shy of the record count in 2008," Wiedmann said. Biologists suspect that chronically low lamb survival and declining numbers throughout the southern herds persists due to pathogens introduced from domestic goats in the late 1990s that resulted in an extensive die-off of bighorn sheep.

The department's survey does not include approximately 30 bighorn sheep that inhabit the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

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, Game and Fish Department biologists count and classify all bighorn sheep, a process that takes nearly six weeks to complete as biologists locate each bighorn herd in the badlands by tracking radio-marked animals from an airplane, and then hike into each band in order to record composition data using a spotting scope and binoculars. Biologists then complete the annual survey by recounting lambs in March to determine lamb recruitment.

North Dakota's bighorn sheep hunting season opens Oct. 26 and continues through Nov. 8

### **Large Duck Flight Expected**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's May and July waterfowl surveys indicate hunters can expect another large fall flight. Opening day for North Dakota residents is Sept. 22 for ducks, coots, mergansers and geese. Nonresidents may begin hunting waterfowl in North Dakota Sept. 29.

Mike Johnson, game management section leader, said North Dakota's fall flight – breeding ducks and

the young they produce in the state – is based on data from the May breeding duck survey and the July brood survey. “This year’s production was up from last year, and there are strong indications for a good fall flight this year,” Johnson said. “However, late summer has been dry and hunters should scout their favorite areas to check water conditions prior to the opener.”

The brood index from the Game and Fish Department’s annual mid-July survey was up 110 percent from 2011 and exceeded the long-term average by 155 percent. Average brood size was 6.9 ducklings, down 0.8 from last year. The long term average is 7.1 ducklings per brood. The water index observed during the survey was down 48 percent from last year, but still 10 percent above long-term.

Results from the May breeding duck survey indicated the duck index was up 16 percent from 2011 and exceeded the long-term average by 112 percent. Water conditions in May were down 57 percent from 2011 and 6 percent from the long-term average.

Resident hunters must possess a general game and habitat license and a fishing, hunting and furbearer certificate. In addition, hunters age 16 and older must have a small game license and federal duck stamp.

Nonresidents must purchase a nonresident waterfowl license, including the general game and habitat license, and certificate. Hunters age 16 and older must possess a federal duck stamp. Nonresident youth hunters from states that provide a reciprocal licensing agreement for North Dakota residents, qualify for North Dakota resident licenses. See the 2012 North Dakota Waterfowl Hunting Guide for details.

All migratory bird hunters are reminded to register with the Harvest Information Program prior to hunting. Hunters who purchase a license through the state Game and Fish Department website ([gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov)) or instant licensing telephone number (800-406-6409) can easily get HIP certified.

Otherwise, hunters must call (888) 634-4798, or access the department’s website, and record the HIP number on their fishing, hunting and furbearer certificate. Those who registered to hunt the spring light goose season or the early Canada goose season in North Dakota do not have to register with HIP again, as it is required only once per year in each state hunted.

Hunters should refer to the waterfowl hunting guide for season regulations including licensing requirements, dates, bag limits, season zones and nonresident hunting zones.

### **BOW Waterfowl, Bow Hunting Space Available**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is still accepting registrations for Becoming an Outdoors-Woman workshops in 2012.

Waterfowl hunting is scheduled Oct. 6-7 in Bismarck. Participants are instructed in firearm and waterfowl safety, shotgun shooting, waterfowl identification, water/field decoys and gear, and techniques for decoying and calling waterfowl. A mentored hunt is featured Oct. 7. Participants must possess a hunter education certificate, current hunting licenses and provide hunting clothing, boots or waders. Workshop fees of \$20 include instruction, program materials and use of equipment. No lodging is provided.

A bow hunting workshop for women with no or minimal archery experience is set for Oct. 24-28 at Lake Metigoshe State Park. Participants will achieve the necessary education, experience and confidence to archery hunt alone. Participants must have previously taken the beginning archery course or have

demonstrated a minimum level of proficiency, and must provide their own archery equipment.

Workshop fees of \$135 include lodging and instruction.

BOW workshops are designed primarily for women with an interest in learning skills associated with hunting, fishing and outdoor endeavors. Although open to anyone age 18 or older, the workshops are tailored primarily to women who have never tried these activities or who are beginners hoping to improve their skills.

[Women interested in attending a workshop](#) can enroll online, or print an information brochure and enrollment form, at the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). More information is available by contacting Nancy Boldt at (701) 328-6312, Brittany Fish at (701) 527-3075, or email [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov).