

NDG&F May 9th Newsletter

Spring Mule Deer Survey Complete

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department conducted its annual spring mule deer survey in April and results indicate western North Dakota's mule deer population has decreased for the fourth consecutive year.

Biologists counted 1,756 mule deer in 293.8 square miles during this year's survey. Overall mule deer density in the badlands was six deer per square mile, which is down from 7.8 deer per square mile in 2010 and less than the long-term average of 6.9 deer per square mile.

Three years of harsh winter conditions have increased adult mortality and reduced production. The last two years have resulted in the two lowest production rates ever documented, and biologists expect this year's production to be similarly low.

Conversely, white-tailed deer abundance in the badlands has increased during the last five years.

The spring mule deer index is used to assess mule deer abundance in the badlands. It is typically conducted after the snow has melted and before the trees begin to leaf out, providing the best conditions for aerial observation of deer. Biologists have completed aerial surveys of the same 24 study areas since the 1950s.

Sage Grouse Counts Remain Low

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 2011.

Aaron Robinson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department upland game bird biologist, said biologists counted a record low 63 males on 12 active strutting grounds. Last year, 66 males were counted on 15 active leks in the southwest.

"Given the increased population in sharp-tailed grouse this year in the southwest, we were expecting the same by sage grouse," Robinson said.

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.

"Our numbers are declining at a consistent rate of about 5 percent a year," Robinson said.

Sage grouse management 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. If the spring breeding population increases above 100 males, Game and Fish Department biologists will evaluate if a hunting season is plausible given the threats facing the species in North Dakota.

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.

Missouri River Safety Day Set for May 19

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department, Cumulus Broadcasting and Gate City Banks are again sponsoring the Missouri River SPLASH – a recreation and boating safety event for everyone who enjoys the Missouri River.

The event is Thursday, May 19 in Mandan from 3-7 p.m. at Moritz Sport and Marine. Displays, hands-on activities, demonstrations, regulations, registrations and prizes are included.

The event is free, and people of all ages are invited to attend. Individuals who bring a completed boating safety exam to the event are eligible to win a prize.

State law requires youngsters ages 12-15 who want to operate a boat or personal watercraft with at least a 10 horsepower motor to first pass the state's Boat North Dakota safety course. In addition, some major insurance companies give adult boat owners who pass the course a premium discount on boat insurance.

The Boat North Dakota safety course is free and available at the Game and Fish Department, or in Bismarck and Mandan at any local boat dealer, all Gate City Bank locations, and at Cumulus Broadcasting.

Trout Stocked in State Waters

North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel are in the process of stocking roughly 70,000 rainbow and brown trout in more than 55 waters statewide.

Jerry Weigel, fisheries production and development supervisor, said stocking efforts of the 11-14 inch trout will be completed by May 12. Included are 3,500 1-to-3 pound rainbows from state hatcheries in Wyoming.

"The Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery trout were on average among the largest spring trout ever shipped," Weigel said.

In addition to the Turtle and Missouri rivers, counties with fishing waters receiving trout are:

Adams – North Lemmon, Bolke Dam

Barnes – Blumers Pond, Hatchery Kids Pond, Moon Lake

Bottineau – Strawberry Lake

Bowman – Lutz Dam, Holocek Dam

Burke – Northgate Dam

Burleigh – McDowell Dam, OWLS Pond, Wilton City Pond, Cottonwood Park Pond

Cass – North Woodhaven Pond

Cavalier – Langdon City Pond

Divide – Baukol-Noonan Dam, Baukol-Noonan East Mine Pond

Golden Valley – Beach City Pond, Camels Hump Lake

Grand Forks – Ryan Park Pond

Grant – Raleigh Reservoir, Sheep Creek Dam

Hettinger – Castle Rock Dam, Mott Watershed

McIntosh – Blumhardt Dam

McKenzie – Watford City Park Pond

McLean – Custer Mine, Lightning Lake, Riverdale City Pond

Mercer – Harmony Lake

Morton – Crown Butte Dam, Fish Creek Dam, Gaebe Pond, Harmon Lake, Krieg's Pond, Nygren Dam, Porsborg Dam

Mountrail – Stanley Pond

Renville – Glenburn Pond

Richland – Mooreton Pond

Rolette – Hooker Lake

Slope – Davis Dam

Stark – Dickinson Dike, Belfield Pond, Slater Pond

Ward – State Fair Pond, Velva Sportsmen's Pond

Williams – Iverson Dam, Kettle Lake, Kota-Ray Dam, McGregor Dam, East and West Spring Lake Ponds (Williston)

To find out more about North Dakota trout lakes, contact your local Game and Fish Department office, or visit the fishing link at the department's website, gf.nd.gov.