

## **NDG&F June 20th Newsletter**

### **Spring Duck Index Remains High, Water Conditions Up**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual spring breeding duck survey showed an index of more than 4.1 million birds, down slightly (-9 percent) from last year but 85 percent above the long-term average (1948-2010). The 2011 index is the ninth highest on record.

Wigeon (+15 percent), blue-winged teal (+12 percent) and pintails (+4 percent and the highest since 1970) were the only ducks to show an increase from last year. However, all species except scaup were well above the long-term average.

Shovelers were down 13 percent from last year's record high. Mallards were down 4 percent, but had the sixth highest count on record. Indices for all other species were below that of 2010, with the most significant decreases for ruddy ducks (-62 percent), lesser scaup (-58 percent) and redhead (-33 percent).

"Redheads and ruddy ducks were at record highs last year, and scaup numbers were also well-above average," said Mike Johnson, game management section leader. "So their decline was not surprising."

The spring water index was up 31 percent from 2010 and 128 percent above the long-term average. It was the second highest in survey history and the highest since 1999. The water index is based on basins with water, and does not necessarily represent the amount of water contained in wetlands.

"Water conditions were exceptional throughout the state, with abundant snow cover and significant spring rains filling most basins," Johnson said.

Additionally, reports indicate that all of the Prairie Pothole Region in the United States and Canada (from Iowa to Alberta) has excellent water conditions this year. "To our knowledge this is an unprecedented occurrence, at least since surveys have been conducted," Johnson said.

However, nesting cover in North Dakota continues to decline. During the survey, Johnson noted many large tracts of grassland and Conservation Reserve Program land that had been converted to cropland since last year, or were in the process of being plowed. "North Dakota currently has about 2.6 million acres of CRP, which is down about 22 percent from 2007," Johnson added. "Projections are that nearly 400,000 acres will be lost in 2011, and an additional 1 million acres will be lost in 2012-13. The loss of critical nesting cover will be disastrous for breeding ducks and hunting opportunities in the future."

The July brood survey will provide a better idea of duck production and insight into expectations for this fall. Observations to date indicate prospects for high production across the state due to excellent water conditions and increased wetland availability for brood production.

## **Summer Safety on the Water**

Failure to wear a personal flotation device is the main reason people lose their lives in boating accidents.

The National Safe Boating Council warns boaters that most drowning victims had a life jacket available, but were not wearing it when they entered the water. "It is difficult to put a life jacket on once you are already in the water," said Nancy Boldt, boat and water safety coordinator for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. "The single most important part of safety on the water is wearing a personal flotation device."

North Dakota law requires all children ages 10 and younger to wear a personal flotation device while in boats of less than 27 feet in length. The law also requires all personal watercraft users to wear a life jacket, Boldt said, as well as anyone towed on skis, tubes, boards or other similar devices.

Water users should make sure to wear life jackets that are the appropriate size, and in good condition. It is also important that children wear a PFD while swimming.

When purchasing a PFD, Boldt suggests considering the most prevalent water activity. Water skiers and tubers should wear a life jacket with four nylon straps rather than one with a zipper, because straps are stronger than zippers upon impact with water. Anglers or persons paddling a canoe should opt for a PFD that is comfortable enough to wear for an entire outing.

Water skiers and tubers are reminded it takes three to ski and tube. When a person is towed on water skis or a similar device, an observer other than the operator is required on the vessel.

It is important for swimmers to know water depth, as serious injuries can occur from diving into water. Larger objects can be hidden below the water's surface, potentially leading to a significant injury.

North Dakota boaters also are reminded that marine VHF radios are an important part of boat safety that should not be improperly used by operators. Boldt said they are intended for boat operators who are in distress and facing an emergency situation.

Regulations to help ensure safe boating this summer are found in the [2010-12 North Dakota Fishing Guide](#). A more comprehensive listing is available in the [North Dakota Boat and Water Safety Guide](#) or the [Boat North Dakota](#) education book. These guides are available online at the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), by email at [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov), or at a local Game and Fish Department office.

## **Space Available for BOW**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department is still accepting registrations for three Becoming an Outdoors-Woman workshops in 2011.

The 17th annual summer workshop is scheduled Aug. 12-14 at Lake Metigoshe State Park, Bottineau. Participants may take several programs including archery, canoeing, field dressing big game, introduction to firearms, fly-fishing, kayaking, navigating outdoors, duck decoy painting, Dutch-oven cooking, global positioning system, plant identification, and tracking and trapping. Workshop fees of \$135 cover instruction, program materials, use of equipment, all meals and lodging.

Catfishing the Red River is set in Grand Forks Aug. 27-28. Participants must have a valid fishing license, and will learn about identification, tackle, gear and techniques for fishing catfish in the Red River. Workshop fees of \$50 include instruction in all sessions, program materials and use of equipment. No lodging is provided.

A waterfowl hunting workshop is scheduled Oct. 1-2 in Bismarck. Participants will learn firearm and waterfowl safety, shotgun shooting, waterfowl identification, water/field decoys and gear, and techniques for decoying and calling waterfowl. October 2 will feature a mentored hunt. Participants must possess a hunter education certificate, current hunting licenses and provide their own hunting clothing, boots or waders. Workshop fees of \$20 include instruction, program materials and use of equipment. No lodging is provided.

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.

To receive an [information brochure and enrollment form](#), access the Game and Fish website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or contact Nancy Boldt, BOW coordinator, at (701) 328-6312; or email [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov).