

NDG&F June 21st Newsletter

Spring Duck Index, Water Conditions Up

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual spring breeding duck survey showed an index of more than 4.5 million birds, an increase of 12 percent from last year and 107 percent above the long-term average (1948-2009). The 2010 index is the third highest on record.

All species, except for wigeon (-9 percent), showed an increase from last year. Pintails were up 10 percent and were at the highest level since 1970. Mallards were up 12 percent and were the fourth highest on record. The most significant increases were ruddy ducks (+162 percent), green-winged teal (+91 percent), scaup (+54 percent), and redhead (+33 percent).

In addition, all species were above the long-term average.

The spring water index was up 5 percent from 2009 and 76 percent above the long-term average. It was the fifth highest in survey history and the highest since 1999.

Mike Johnson, game management section leader, cautions that the water index is based on basins with water, and does not necessarily represent the amount of water contained in wetlands. "Water conditions were generally good throughout the state, with the abundant snow cover and significant spring rains filling most basins," he added. "The large number of ducks tallied during our survey is consistent with the well-above-average populations we have been carrying since 1994. These high numbers are the result of abundant Conservation Reserve Program nesting cover combined with the wet conditions that have been in place since the summer of 1993."

Additionally, reports indicate that much of the Prairie Pothole Region in South Dakota and Montana was in good shape this spring. While much of prairie Saskatchewan and Manitoba were dry at the time of spring migration and settling, Johnson said Saskatchewan has since experienced significant improvement in water conditions that should benefit renesting and brood survival for those birds that did settle.

However, nesting cover in North Dakota continues to decline. Since the beginning of 2007, North Dakota has lost more than 700,000 CRP acres, and projections for the next two years indicate up to another 1.7 million acres could be converted to cropland.

"This loss of our critical nesting cover will be disastrous for breeding ducks and hunting opportunities in North Dakota," Johnson said.

The July brood survey will provide a better idea of duck production and insight into what to expect this fall. Observations to date indicate that production will be improved across the state due to improved water conditions and increased wetland availability for brood production.

Fall Turkey Applications due June 30

Prospective turkey hunters are reminded that applications for this fall's season must be in the mail and postmarked before midnight June 30.

Interested hunters can submit a lottery application online, or print out an application to mail, at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov. Applications are also available at Game and Fish offices, county auditors and license vendors, or by calling (800) 406-6409. Only North Dakota residents are eligible to apply in the first lottery.

Individuals mailing applications to the department are advised to mail early because some post offices use the following day's postmark for parcels received after regular hours. The department's online application feature will be deactivated June 30 at midnight.

Family Fishing Days at Bismarck OWLS

Family Fishing Days are returning to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Outdoor Wildlife Learning Site. Trout, bluegill, and maybe another fish species or two, await.

Family Fishing Days are Saturdays and Wednesdays through the end of August. Fishing equipment can be checked out at the OWLS Pond, located adjacent to the department's Bismarck office, on Wednesdays from 9 a.m. – 7 p.m., and Saturdays from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. Fishing rods and basic tackle are available for use free of charge.

Trained volunteers on Game and Fish staff will be in the area to answer questions and check out equipment, but there will be little or no direct supervision. Children who aren't old enough to get to the pond on their own should not be left unattended.

The OWLS area is fairly primitive, with only a picnic shelter and benches upon entering the site. The area has no restroom facilities or running water. Users should bring water, sunscreen, folding chairs and appropriate clothing.

The Game and Fish Department is seeking volunteer instructors to assist with the program. Individuals at least age 18 with an interest in teaching kids to fish should contact the Game and Fish Department at 328-6300.

The OWLS pond is open to fishing year-round during daylight hours. There are no bait restrictions and anglers must practice catch-and-release only. The area is designed for wheel chair accessibility. Pets, glass bottles and alcohol are not permitted on the site.