

## **NDG&F June 27th Newsletter**

### **Fishing Opportunities Plentiful**

Families looking to enjoy an outdoor outing over the Fourth of July weekend need to look no further than a local fishery.

Greg Power, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries chief, said high water levels across much of the state are a benefit to most lakes and fish populations. "Fishing opportunities are abundant on a statewide level," Power said. "The fish populations are high in many areas, and the opportunity is there for people to catch fish. Never has the state had so many different water bodies to fish."

However, Power emphasizes that anglers should check ahead regarding the status of boat ramps. "Access roads have been an issue in some areas and some ramps are inundated in a few locales," Power added. "However, shoreline fishing opportunities are still abundant statewide."

Although most boating access sites on the Missouri River are currently underwater, most ramps on Lake Sakakawea and Oahe are still functional. Likewise, most ramps at Devils Lake are now fully operational.

"Good fish populations should equate to good fishing," Power said, "and we encourage the public to participate."

A complete list of [North Dakota fishing waters](http://gf.nd.gov) is available on the Game and Fish Department website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

### **Pheasant Crowing Counts Completed**

North Dakota's spring pheasant crowing count survey revealed a 14 percent decrease statewide compared to last year, according to Stan Kohn, upland game management supervisor for the state Game and Fish Department.

The only area of the state showing an increase was the southwest, up 5 percent from 2010. The number of crows heard in the northwest was down 17 percent, while counts in the southeast were down 30 percent. In the northeast where there is less pheasant habitat, the counts fell 36 percent.

Kohn said severe winters, poor production and loss of Conservation Reserve Program acreage have contributed to the decline in crow count numbers for the third year in a row.

"Three consecutive long winters with heavy snowfall have not been conducive to winter survival," Kohn said. "In addition, after a tough winter hens enter spring stressed and in poor condition to begin reproduction, which may affect the number of eggs laid."

Poor production the last three springs led to fewer young birds entering the population in the fall. "Poor production is a result of cool, wet weather at the time of hatch, which causes higher than normal

mortality on chicks,” Kohn said. “I anticipated the southwest to have higher crow count numbers than the other pheasant districts because good numbers of pheasants were observed in this area last winter.”

Loss of CRP has decreased nesting and brooding cover, and Kohn said this has been most noticeable in the southeast where a decrease in CRP acres the last three years probably has had a significant effect on the number of pheasants produced. “Couple that with the number of acres of small grains removed from the landscape and replaced by row crops, lower pheasant numbers are expected,” he said.

In addition, predators could also have an adverse effect on pheasants. “I don’t have specific data to show a direct effect, but we do have an increase in mammalian predators on the landscape this spring, and they do eat eggs and meat to survive,” Kohn said. “I suspect they may be affecting pheasant populations in some localized areas.”

On the positive side, Kohn said pheasant hens are finding better quality nesting and brooding cover on the uplands this spring. However, high water will likely minimize lowland nesting attempts in many areas, so a strong renesting effort will be needed for good production.

“However, on dry upland sites the native, warm-season plants are doing extremely well this spring and one would anticipate a good number of insects and eventually grasshoppers to become available with a good legume habitat component this summer,” Kohn said. “June weather so far hasn’t been the best for hatching chicks, but warm evening temperatures have been good. Recent downpours in some areas may jeopardize small chicks in localized spots, but we have not experienced large scale hail storms in the primary pheasant range yet this spring. So at present, we are in a wait-and-see process on how production turns out this spring for all our upland game birds.”

Spring crowing count data is not always a good indicator of the fall population. It does not measure population density, but provides an index of the spring rooster population based on a trend of number of crows heard. Brood surveys, which begin in mid-July and are completed by September, are a better indicator of the summer’s pheasant production and provide insight into what to expect for a fall pheasant population.

Pheasant crowing counts are conducted each spring throughout North Dakota. Observers drive specified 20-mile routes, stopping at predetermined intervals, and counting the number of pheasant roosters heard crowing over a two-minute period during the stop. The number of pheasant crows heard is compared to previous years’ data, providing a trend summary.

### **Fireworks Prohibited on Wildlife Management Areas**

Fourth of July is a time for celebration, with many families getting together to enjoy a holiday weekend of fun-filled activities often culminating in a fireworks display. With that in mind, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department reminds citizens that lighting fireworks on state wildlife management areas is prohibited.

Wildlife management areas are a popular destination for many, according to Jeb Williams, wildlife resource management supervisor. “We encourage people to get out and use our public lands, and to look at the habitat and watch for the wildlife,” Williams said.

The primary objective of a wildlife management area is to enhance wildlife production, provide hunting and fishing opportunities, and offer other outdoor recreational and educational uses. Only activities that would not disrupt the intentions of how these areas are managed are encouraged, and a fireworks display is not compatible.

Excessive noise and commotion that come with fireworks disturbs wildlife, and their explosive nature is a potential source of wildfires. Chances of a wildfire developing are greatly enhanced when explosives, such as fireworks, come in contact with tall grasses in rural areas.

A complete list of the [WMA regulations](#) is available on the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](#).

Some of the regulations include:

- Unless otherwise designated, the use of motorized vehicles is restricted to constructed roads, well-worn trails, and parking areas normally used for passenger cars.
- Watercraft cannot be left unattended unless it is used on a daily basis.
- Littering or the disposal of waste material is prohibited, except in garbage containers where provided.
- Property may not be removed without a permit from the Game and Fish Department.
- Commercial enterprise, including guiding, is prohibited except by lease or permit from the Game and Fish Department.
- Camping for longer than 10 consecutive days is prohibited.
- Group activities involving more than 25 people require a permit issued by the Game and Fish Department.
- Training of bird and gun dogs is prohibited April 1 through Aug. 15.
- Glass containers are prohibited.
- Fireworks, model rocket engines, or combustible or explosive materials are prohibited.
- Baiting wildlife for any purpose is prohibited.

### **Game and Fish Summarizes 2010 Pheasant Season**

More pheasant hunters in the field in 2010 didn't correlate to an increase in roosters in the bag.

Last fall's pheasant harvest was 552,800, down from 651,700 in 2009. The number of hunters increased 4 percent to 91,900. The number of resident hunters was up 3 percent to 61,100, while nonresident pheasant hunter numbers increased 7 percent to 30,800. Birds bagged per hunter decreased from 7.4 to 6.0, and each hunter spent an average of 4.9 days afield.

Counties with the highest percentage of pheasants taken by resident hunters were Hettinger, 7.3; Burleigh, 6.1; McLean, 6.0; Stark, 5.2; and Morton, 4.5.

Top counties for nonresident hunters were Hettinger, 23.9 percent; Bowman, 6.2; McIntosh, 5.1; Dickey, 5.0; and Divide, 4.4.

Annual pheasant season statistics are determined by a mail survey of resident and nonresident hunters.

### **New State Record Buffalo Caught**

Keith Huschka's catch on June 19 is the first entry on North Dakota's list of state record fish in 2011. The Dickinson angler caught a 54-pound buffalo from the Heart River in the tail waters of Heart Butte Dam.

The 42-inch fish broke the old record of 51 pounds, 4 ounces taken by Joshua Bartz of Bismarck from the Missouri River in 2009.

### **Family Fishing Days Resumes at Bismarck OWLS Pond**

Family fishing days at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Outdoor Wildlife Learning Site in Bismarck will resume on Wednesday, June 29. The popular family event was postponed because of flood-related efforts.

Family fishing days are held Wednesdays and Saturdays through August. Hours are 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 and 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.