

NDG&F July 26th Newsletter

Swan Hunt Application Available Online July 28

The online application for North Dakota's 2010 tundra swan license lottery will be available July 28 on the state Game and Fish Department's website, gf.nd.gov. The deadline for applying is Aug. 18.

Paper applications will be available by Aug. 1 from Game and Fish offices, county auditors and license vendors. Hunters can also apply by calling (800) 406-6409. A service fee is added for license applications made by phone.

The statewide tundra swan hunting season is Oct. 2 – Jan. 2, 2011. North Dakota residents and nonresidents are eligible to apply.

A total of 2,200 licenses are available. Successful applicants will be issued a tag to take one swan during the season. Since swans are classified as waterfowl, nonresidents may hunt them only during the period their nonresident waterfowl license is valid.

Sakakawea's Coldwater Conditions Improve, Smelt Spawn Success Unclear

With improved water conditions and a productive environment for both predators and prey, Lake Sakakawea is steadily turning the corner on the road to recovery, but it's not quite there yet.

Sakakawea's last good smelt year-class was hatched in 2005, and before that it was 2002. North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries biologists would like to add 2010 to that short list, but it's too early to judge this spring's smelt reproduction.

"The moderately strong 2008 year-class is mature now, and our fisheries crews noted a lot of spawning smelt this spring, much more than the past three years," said Scott Gangl, fisheries management section leader. "With rising water levels conditions were right for a good spawn. Unfortunately, very strong winds during and after the spawn stirred up the lake and may have killed a lot of eggs. We will know how well the 2010 spawn was if and when those fish show up in our lake-wide acoustic survey."

Meanwhile, anglers have been reporting clouds of baitfish, mostly adult smelt, throughout the lake.

With the return of water to Sakakawea, the coldwater habitat essential to the survival of smelt, chinook salmon and other species has improved dramatically. Water levels reached an all-time low on Sakakawea just five years ago.

The new water has increased productivity in the reservoir, and fisheries biologists noted a major increase in rainbow smelt growth from the previous year. While smelt numbers haven't increased

significantly yet, the average size of individual fish is larger than before, meaning there's more poundage of forage for predators to eat.

Gangl said salmon numbers in Sakakawea should be similar to the past couple of years. To help the forage base rebound, biologists stocked fewer salmon, about 67,000 each year from 2007-09. With improved conditions, more than 200,000 hatchery-raised chinook salmon smolts were planted last month in the reservoir, but these fish won't show up in the fishery for a couple years.

"There is more food in the lake right now for salmon," Gangl said. "Their body condition last fall was much better than recent years. We should see improvements to the salmon fishery in the years to come."