

North Dakota Wildlife Federation

Flickertales

Spring 2026



Photo: Seth Owens

Advocating for the conservation of wildlife, habitat, and access for North Dakota's hunters, anglers, and other outdoor users.

North Dakota Wildlife Federation

The North Dakota Wildlife Federation (NDWF) is North Dakota's oldest, largest, and most effective conservation organization. NDWF was founded in 1935 by hunters, anglers, landowners, and other conservationists : who advocated for the conservation of wildlife, habitat, and access for North Dakota's hunters, anglers, and other outdoor users. Our dedicated affiliates, volunteers, and staff maintain this legacy.

Affiliates

Barnes County Wildlife Federation
Beach Firearms & Trap Club
Cass County Wildlife Club
Central Morton Sportsmen's Club
Eddy County Rod & Gun Club
Garrison Wildlife Club
Hannaford Conservation & Wildlife Club
Kindred Wildlife Club
Lewis and Clark Wildlife Club
Missouri Valley Shooting Sports Association
North Dakota Hunters Education Association
North Dakota Houndsmen Association
North Dakota Fur Hunters & Trappers Association
Red River Area Sportsmen's Club
Richland County Wildlife
Stutsman County Wildlife Federation
Tri-County Trap & Wildlife Club

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Derrick Rodgers, Treasurer, Valley City
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Photos: Mike LaLonde, Matt Patrias, Nick Simonson, John Bradley, Spring Bakke, Seth Owens



From the Executive Director

As Executive Director of the North Dakota Wildlife Federation, I want to share our growing concern about a series of recent federal decisions that collectively threaten the future of our public lands and wildlife.

The proposed reorganization of the U.S. Forest Service raises serious questions about transparency, local input, and on-the-ground capacity. Our national grasslands and forests already face mounting challenges, including invasive species, wildfire risk, and increased recreational demand. At the same time, we are seeing the loss of long-serving scientific experts whose institutional knowledge is critical to sound land management, alongside a shift away from career public servants toward more politically influenced positions. Structural changes that erode expertise and distance decision-making from those with deep, place-based knowledge risk weakening, rather than strengthening, effective stewardship.

At the same time, the United States Senate has voted to strip long-standing protections from the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. This landscape is not only an ecological treasure, but also a benchmark for what protected public lands can and should be. Undermining these protections sets a concerning precedent for other cherished places across the country.

Equally troubling are proposed cuts to funding for our National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and other federal land management agencies, as well as reductions in support for scientific research. These investments are not optional; they are foundational. Science guides wildlife management, informs land-use decisions, and ensures taxpayer dollars are spent effectively. Without it, we are navigating complex challenges without a compass.

Here in North Dakota, we understand the value of balanced, multiple-use public lands. Hunters, anglers, ranchers, recreationists, and communities all depend on healthy ecosystems and thoughtful management. Federal actions that reduce capacity, weaken protections, or sideline science ultimately make that balance harder to achieve.

NDWF will stand tall and urge federal leaders to recommit to collaborative, science-based decision-making and to maintain strong support for the agencies and programs that sustain our public lands. The long-term health of our wildlife, landscapes, and outdoor traditions depends on it.

-John Bradley, Executive Director



Message from Our President - Seeking Simplicity

April brings unpredictable weather—temperatures swing wildly from day to night, and each day feels different from the last. It's a time of mental torment for me. In a couple of weeks I will be chasing turkeys, one of my all-time favorite hunting pastimes.

Consumed with thoughts of open-water fishing, exploring shorelines of creeks, rivers, and waterways by canoe or foot. I make mental plans for weekend hiking trips, camping, and fishing. I look forward to planting my small vegetable garden and enhancing our rural acreage with controlled burns to make room for native grass and forbs. Some tasks are time-sensitive and must be completed by the end of May. I must prepare for the native bareroot shrubs and fruit trees we are planting. Trying to find enough time for all these joys, while also fulfilling commitments to the mundane, like my job, paying bills, home maintenance projects, mowing the yard, and other projects I'm committed to. It's no wonder summers on the northern plains are so short.

During the winter storm over Easter weekend, I discovered a three-part series on PBS called "Henry David Thoreau" by Ken Burns. It's a documentary that I highly recommend watching. I have books written by Thoreau that I had yet to read on my bookshelf, but after watching this series, I decided to move them to the front of my must-read pile.

Henry David Thoreau, after the loss of his brother John - his closest friend - was overcome with grief. With Ralph Waldo Emerson's permission, he built a tiny cabin on Emerson's land at Walden Pond, just outside Concord, Massachusetts. For two years, Thoreau lived in quiet contemplation, writing in his personal journal about life, nature, and the purpose of his existence. That journal later became the legendary book, "Walden."

Thoreau discovered through observation of nature that life is best lived with simplicity. He observed that many people trapped themselves in lifelong labor simply to maintain property, possessions, and comforts they did not truly need. We obligate ourselves with mortgages and debt, and then spend our entire lives constrained to others. We drift unconsciously in a life of mundane routine rather than live with awareness and purpose.

There are many quotes and insights from Thoreau's book Walden that caught my attention. Here are two:

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life."

"Our life is frittered with detail...simplify, simplify."

Thoreau never imagined how far-reaching his words would become. The documentary revealed that world-changing figures like John Muir, Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and Leo Tolstoy drew inspiration from Thoreau's philosophy. His two years immersed in nature not only transformed his own outlook but helped shape the world.

There is a correlation in this story that mirrors another transformative historical figure – Teddy Roosevelt. Seeking solace in nature is the medicine that helped heal Roosevelt's heartache. His experiences in nature transformed his life and set the course of our country in the pursuit of conservation. Roosevelt was instrumental in inspiring and establishing key federal agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Refuge System which continues to play a vital role in conservation and protecting America's natural heritage.

That's why it's essential for us to remain steadfast in defending and safeguarding the unspoiled beauty of nature and our wild places. Equally important is our support for the agencies and dedicated professionals who work tirelessly to protect these national treasures for generations to come, ensuring that the legacy of conservation continues and that the inspiration found in the natural world remains available to all.

If you need encouragement, or soul enriching healing, take time away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, and go experience nature. In the words of Henry David Thoreau - "Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads." - **Kerry Whipp, NDWF President**

Paddlefish Provide Unique Spring Opportunity

By: Nick Simonson

NDWF Board Member, Joe Keller
with a Paddlefish from 2021



At the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers at the start of May, you'll find a cadre of anglers looking to connect with one of those waters' most ancient and unique species of fish. However, it isn't the normal angling tactics that pay off when targeting paddlefish in North Dakota, as the filter feeders with the flat, elongated spatula-like snout that gives them their name typically can only be snagged through the process of casting heavy weights, large treble hooks, and ripping those setups back through the muddy spring waters to shore, according to Jeff Merchant, Fisheries Biologist for the North Dakota Game & Fish Department (NDG&F).

"They are a very unique fish. They're very long lived; we've aged paddlefish over 60 years. They spawn in late spring to early summer, and they're on that spawning run right now and that's when we have the season for them," Merchant explains of paddlefish, generally.

Male paddlefish are typically smaller, in the 20-to-40-pound range for the most part, while females can eclipse 100 pounds, with the North Dakota state record slot shared by two 131-pound fish caught in 2016 and 2024.

Following the damming of Lake Sakakawea, paddlefish became well established in the Missouri River and Yellowstone River upstream from the large reservoir, as flooded areas produced strong populations of zooplankton, the species' primary food source which they obtain by swimming mouth-open through the water and filtering the small lifeforms out via specialized structures on their gills. It's a bit of a journey to their desired spawning areas, where mature paddlefish will lay and fertilize eggs, and the young will hatch and go downstream with the current.

“They’re looking for flooded gravel bars in the lower Yellowstone River and also up in the Missouri River system to lay their eggs. After the eggs hatch the larval fish drift downstream to the headwaters area of Sakakawea as it’s where zooplankton is most abundant,” Merchant explains of the seasonal biology driving the season, and ultimately the numbers of paddlefish in the flow, adding, “the population is pretty stable. After the Garrison Dam was built, the paddlefish population had a boom with all the productivity in the reservoir and since then it’s been on the decline. But they are a long-lived species and the population tends to be driven by really good year classes, and those year classes don’t have to occur that often. The current population is really driven by a tremendous year class in 1995,” Merchant concludes.

The North Dakota paddlefish snagging season begins on May 1 and runs through May 21, unless the state quota for harvest is met earlier than the scheduled close. The activity requires a special tag to be in possession of a licensed angler. The tag can be purchased at any NDG&F district office, or online at gf.nd.gov and mailed to the angler, however the angler must have the tag in his or her possession prior to snagging and should account for delays in mailing when ordering one via the website. Anglers should also be prepared for the physical effort that goes into snagging paddlefish, as Merchant relates that it can be challenging.

“It’s a pretty physical activity, I’ve done it myself. You can spend a lot of time up there, casting and reeling, casting and then jerking that rod, and it’s a heavy rod, it takes a lot out of you. I know some groups will have just one rod and they’ll take turns casting it. Generally, to bring them in once you get them hooked, the smaller ones you have to stay on them and reel them in. Some of the bigger ones you almost have to let go in the current and keep pressure on them and eventually they drift to shore downstream a little ways,” Merchant states of the work involved in paddlefish snagging.

Fishing hours run from 7am to 7pm during each day of the paddlefish snagging season with Sundays, Mondays and Thursdays reserved as snag-and-release only days according to Merchant. If a quota is met in a season, the NDG&F will issue an announcement and the season will remain open for a few more days to snag-and-release only fishing, but in no instance later than the season’s closure date of May 21.

More information on paddlefish snagging, including designated areas of the Missouri River and Yellowstone River open to the activity, can be found at gf.nd.gov/fishing/paddlefish-snagging.

Simonson is the lead writer and editor of Dakota Edge Outdoors.





Helping North Dakota farmers strengthen cropland productivity and resilience with perennial grass cover.



Program Administration and Delivery

The program is administered by North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts and North Dakota Game and Fish, with local delivery through Soil Conservation Districts and partners.



Guiding Principles – The LEGACY Framework

- ✓ Land Stewardship
- ✓ Ecology and Energy
- ✓ Growth and Governance
- ✓ Agriculture and Access
- ✓ Conservation and Collaboration
- ✓ Yield and Your Future



Benefits of Perennial Cover

- ✓ Improved Soil Health
- ✓ Water Retention
- ✓ Wildlife Habitat



OPEN TO ALL CROPLAND

Program Details

- 5-year agreement to establish and manage grass.
- Annual rental payment based on the average county rental rate.
- Cost-share for grass seed and seeding - \$50/acre for seed | \$50/acre for establishment.
- \$10 per acre crop insurance premium reduction for every acre of perennial grass established.
- Optional \$15 per acre public access incentive through NDGFD's Private Land Open To Sportsmen program.

Contact Us



North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts

- ✉ lincolnnoakes@lincolnnoakes.com
- 🌐 ndascd.com/district-offices

North Dakota Game and Fish Department

- ✉ privatelands@nd.gov
- 🌐 gf.nd.gov/private-lands/contact

Record Count of Bighorn Sheep

Wed, 04/01/2026, NDG&F Staff

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's 2025 bighorn sheep survey, completed by recounting lambs in March, revealed a record 378 bighorn sheep in the badlands of western North Dakota, up 8% from 2024 and 10% above the five-year average. The 2025 survey was the fifth record count in the past six years. Brett Wiedmann, Department big game biologist, said 104 rams, 234 ewes and 40 lambs were counted. Not included are approximately 40 bighorn sheep in the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park and bighorns introduced to the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in 2020.

The northern badlands population increased by 8% from 2024 and was the highest count on record. The southern badlands population remained near its lowest level since bighorns were reintroduced there in 1966.

"Adult rams were near record numbers, but the ewe count surpassed the previous record by an impressive 14%," Wiedmann said. "Lamb recruitment and winter survival of lambs were both unfortunately well below average."

Wiedmann said numerous lambs were observed with clinical signs of pneumonia during the summer survey, which was likely the primary contributor to the poor lamb recruitment observed in 2025. According to Department veterinarian, Logan Weyand, it is not uncommon to experience episodes of low lamb survival when a population of bighorn sheep is exposed to certain pathogens.

"We know from annual disease testing that the state's population of bighorn sheep has not cleared bacteria introduced in 2014 that predisposes bighorn lambs to pneumonia, so highly variable rates of lamb recruitment in recent years are not surprising," he said.

Department biologists count and classify all bighorn sheep in late summer, and then recount lambs the following March, as they approach one year of age to determine recruitment. Currently, about 500 bighorn sheep comprise the populations managed by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, National Park Service and the Three Affiliated Tribes Fish and Wildlife Division.

A bighorn sheep hunting season is tentatively scheduled for 2026. The status of the season will be determined Sept. 1, following the 2026 summer population survey. Game and Fish issued eight licenses in 2025, and the Three Affiliated Tribes Fish and Wildlife Division issued two licenses, one to a tribal member and the second to a non-tribal member selected from the Department's pool of applicants. All hunters were successful in harvesting rams.

An Update on the OHF Grant: ND Prescribed Fire Program for Rangeland

By: Cara Greger, NDWF



The grasslands were formed by disturbance. Grazing by large herbivores (bison), large-scale fires, and extreme weather patterns (drought, low precipitation averages, high wind events) create the perfect environment for our prairie ecosystem. Generations of humans have been drawn to the great plains for hunting opportunities and agricultural uses. Current uses of the grasslands such as livestock production, tourism (which includes hunting, biking, hiking, horseback riding, etc...) rely on best management practices by those who manage the public, tribal, and private lands. Prescribed burning has benefits for livestock and wildlife.

Prescribed burning has been shown to improve nutritional value and consumption of rangeland plants. Protein content and digestibility of plants are

enhanced by a prescribed burn. Forage quantity, quality, height, and density increase with prescribed burns.

Animal performance improves in a number of ways with a prescribed burn. North Dakota State University (NDSU) studies have shown increases in stocker cattle weight gains, cow body condition scores, and increases in calf weaning weights. Another benefit is the reduction in tick and horn fly populations after prescribed burning.

We all know that prescribed burns can prevent large scale wildfires and make them less severe by reducing fuel loadings and volatile fuels such as Rocky Mountain Juniper, but this also benefits our rangelands. Reduction of woody encroachment species increases your palatable forage species, improves water quality and infiltration of water on rangeland. Some shrubs, such as snowberry/ buckbrush, will resprout and become palatable to wildlife and livestock. The animals will then eat the plant and control the spread of those shrubs.

To increase the use of prescribed burning for rangeland improvements, support for this practice is needed in ND with training, laws, and forming Prescribed Burn Associations (PBAs). This will create a

better understanding of the benefits of proactive fire management instead of reactive management during wildfire.

North Dakota Wildlife Federation (NDWF) received a North Dakota Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) grant to create a ND Prescribed Fire Program (NDPFP). The program is for working lands where livestock is being used to manage the land. Landowners who are interested in implementing prescribed burns are helped by the program paying for writing burn plans and implementing prescribed burns. The landowner must prepare the designated burn unit according to the burn plan as their in-kind match. The landowner must also be present for the burn and if not already trained must attend a prescribed burn training in person or online.

Since September of 2024, 12 landowners have signed up for 3221 acres in 10 North Dakota counties. Some landowners are using contractors, and some are working with local fire departments. 15 total burn plans have been written and 5 of the plans were paid for by the OHF grant. The other plans have been written by NDWF staff, Pheasants Forever staff, The Nature Conservancy staff, and Natural Resource Conservation Services staff. Kelli Kuska, Pheasants Forever Prescribed Fire Coordinator, and Cara Greger, NDWF Western ND Conservation Coordinator, designed and held trainings at Medora, Bismarck, Park River and Kindred in March 2025. On May 14, 2025, the training was held for the Golva Volunteer Fire Department. In February and March 2026, training sessions were held in Carson, Napoleon, and Beach. A total of 213 participants attended the trainings. Two Prescribed Burn Associations (PBAs) are being formed from work done by Kelli Kuska. Volunteer work days have been organized to get people out helping landowners prepare for their prescribed burns. In Billings County, volunteers worked for a landowner cutting down Rocky Mountain juniper, sage, and mowing breaks to secure the firelines for the proposed burn.

The OHF NDPFP is continuing to reach out to interested landowners and partners. The weather is monitored to see if burns can be conducted to meet the goals of the burn plan. NDWF staff will document the results with videos and pictures and check in with landowners to assess the success of the burn. This will be done with a survey that NDSU has developed. Follow up training will be held to help those who attended trainings to gather together to plan the next burn season. During the follow up meetings, questions can be answered, coordination can happen between those who want the experience or can help others to achieve their management goals. If North Dakota can follow the role model states such as Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Kansas to start forming PBAs, then organizations like PF and NDWF can help support those grassroots associations for improved habitat and better defense against wildfire situations.

To learn more about the North Dakota Prescribed Fire Program or to sign up for the program contact Cara Greger, NDWF Western Conservation Coordinator at cgreger.ndwf@gmail.com or call 320-808-4897. For more information check out the website <https://www.northdakotawildlife.org/prescribed-fire>

Catch the Biggest Bulls this Spring



Rare is the lake where bluegills start to approach the ten inch mark in catchable numbers. Perhaps it's a hidden pond, or a small slough stocked years ago that's just far enough out of the way that most anglers don't fish it. When you find a place like that, it's best to keep such a bite to yourself to extend fantastic fishing for those tall-tale-sized hump-headed deep purple panfish. More often, however, every lake has a few true bull-sized bluegills lurking in the ranks of the panfish that patrol its weedlines and summer shallows. There, the trouble isn't finding fish to catch, but rather, getting to those few big ones that are often outcompeted for your offerings by the sundry smaller specimens in the inverted panfish pyramid. What follows are tips for finding those big bluegills, and more importantly, catching them.

Go Big

Like with muskies, pike and walleyes, the bigger versions of each species often take larger baits than their smaller counterparts. For big pike and muskies, suckers of over a pound are reasonable offerings, compared to smaller baits the rest of the population will attack. Creek chubs might be the bet for trophy-sized walleyes as opposed to a standard fathead chubs for a stringer full of eater-sized fish.

Keep the same thing in mind for larger bluegills, as a combination of bigger lures such as 1/16 ounce jigs, as opposed to those 1/32- or 1/64-ounce offerings, will provide a target that is work for smaller panfish, but bigger ones could take down with their sizeable inhale. Consider larger baits, like crappie minnows and small leeches, as opposed to the usual chunk of nightcrawler or waxworm which is standard for panfish. While little bluegills can peck and pop at a bigger bait, it takes a bit more to strip the hook and a larger morsel helps target bigger panfish.

Get Deeper

Typically schools of bluegills will manifest in a vertical arrangement, with older, bigger fish near the bottom, and smaller, younger ones up top. There, the younger fish more aggressively rise on smaller insects and other natural prey as they patrol the surface, while bigger ones can focus on the larger items such as minnows, crayfish and insects found on the bottom. Cast out and away from the school and let your offering fall deeper, working it back into the area where the fish are, pulling it right through the lower strata of bluegills, where the fish are often bigger. Remember those heavier baits too can punch through a school of fish faster, avoiding the smaller snackers in favor of the feeding bulls nearer to the bottom.

This spring, no matter where bluegills are found, you can locate and catch the biggest by focusing on the size of your offering and where bulls relate to their prey and the rest of their school. Use bigger lures and baits to keep the smaller fish away, and work deeper areas where bigger bluegills lurk to find more success. And if you do find that secret pond where all the fish are closing in on that 10-inch mark, keep it to yourself and off social media!

Simonson is the lead writer and editor of Dakota Edge Outdoors.





Summary of accomplishments following the December 2025 Habitat and Hunting Access Summit

Increase PLOTS to 1 Million Acres (Active Now)

- Increase PLOTS by 40k acres annually with a 1m acre goal by the 2028 hunting season.
- Approximately 880,000 acres enrolled in PLOTS, an increase of 80,000 acres since 2023.
- Approximately 150,000 acres of prospective interest, anticipate 920,000 acres fall 2026.

Governor's Legacy Soil Health and Habitat Program (Active Now)

- An OHF grant of \$4.3 million, with \$2.2 million in matching funds from partners (**\$75,000 access incentive from NDWF**) was awarded in December 2025. Grant will cover approximately 10,000 acres
- Signup ended March 27th, 2026
- Over 18,000 acres offered
- Total cost request \$10,255.333.87
- Roughly half of the acres will be enrolled in PLOTS

Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) Projects (Active Now)

PATH (Public Access to Hunting) Proposal

- Submitted by Pheasants Forever in May 2025, awarded in June 2025
- Total OGF Funding: \$1.45 million; \$363,000 of matching funds from Pheasants Forever and \$5.8 million contribution from NDGFD
- Target enrollment of 10,000 acres of new PLOTS habitat and access

Western ND PLOTS

- Submitted by NDGFD to OHF in May 2025, awarded in June 2025
- Total OHF funding: \$1.5 million; \$500,000 matching funds from the NDGFD. **Matching funds (up to \$100,000) from NDWF.** 10-20 year agreements in western North Dakota
- Target enrollment of 20,000 to 40,000 acres of PLOTS

Private Forest Improvement and Protection Program

- Submitted by the NDGFD in November 2025, awarded in December 2025
- Total OHF funding: \$600,000; \$270,000 matching funds from the NDGFD and ND Forest Service. Offers financial assistance to private landowners in the Turtle Mountains to implement forest management practices and participate in 20-year forest protection agreements. PLOTS is optional, but there is incentivized enrollment for the entire 20-year term.

North Dakota Wetland Access and Restoration Project

- Submitted by Ducks Unlimited in November 2025; awarded in December 2025
- Total OHF funding: \$570,000 with \$480,000 in matching funds from DU and the NDGFD
- Total project cost is \$1.05 million
- Target enrollment, restoration of 100 acres of wetlands and 3,000 acres of PLOTS

Date Customization within Electronic Posting Platform (Available Now)

- Landowners pre-designate date windows upfront when electronically posting, e.g. “Electronically posted from 11/13/2026 through 11/29/2026.”
- In 2025, just over 14 million acres were electronically posted, if just 5% of those acres were opened via this option, that would equate to 700,000 acres of additional access.

In-App Communications (Available Now)

- Additional communication options for landowners who electronically post, instead of providing a phone number or email address they can opt into messaging feature within the NDGFD App Inbox for hunters to contact them

Hunt Link (Active Now)

- Facilitates connections between hunters and landowners with depredation issues and/or species-specific hunting requests. E.g. coyotes, antlerless deer, youth hunting, etc. Landowners designate their request and provide a form of contact information. Hunters access a mapping application to view landowners.

Habitat and Access Stakeholder Group (Active Now)

- The NDGFD developed the Habitat and Access Stakeholder Group fall 2025.
- The goal is to increase transparency, understanding, and communication regarding NDGFD habitat and conservation programs and hunting access initiatives on private lands. This is an informational group that will allow the NDGFD to receive feedback while building landowner/sportsman relationships
- Six representatives (3 landowners, 3 hunters) from four districts (NW, NE, SE, SW) will be selected by the NDGFD
- The NDGFD hosted meetings in each quadrant Fall 2025 and a statewide meeting in February 2026

Certified Wildlife Habitat

By: Kali Lee, NDWF



Create a wildlife-friendly landscape or garden space and the National Wildlife Federation will recognize it as a Certified Wildlife Habitat®.

Everyone can enjoy and protect wildlife where they live, learn, work, play, and worship. This program provides simple steps and a wealth of resources to create beautiful spaces that make a big impact for local and migratory species from small window boxes to vast habitat corridors. Implementing climate smart sustainable gardening practices benefits people and communities across North America.

Explore options below for the ways you or your organization can be part of the movement to increase even more wildlife-friendly acres across backyards, public gardens, school districts, corporate campuses, colleges and universities, places of worship, and community spaces across the country and at select sites across the world. All these efforts incorporate **Habitat Essentials** with **native plants**.

Learn how anyone, at any age, in any place, can help and receive recognition for their efforts through a few different certification options. Check out the list of benefits individuals receive when they certify at www.nwf.org/Native-Plant-Habitats/Create-and-Certify



P.O. Box 1442, Bismarck, N.D. 58502



P.O. Box 1091, Bismarck, N. D. 58502

Conservation Notes

Public Lands are Good for Ranchers in ND

Issue #126, February 2026

Livestock grazing is one of the many benefits of multiple-use public lands. Many ranchers in North Dakota and numerous other states rely on access to public lands to supplement their privately owned land. The general public also benefits from public lands for a wide variety of recreational opportunities including hunting, fishing, hiking, bird watching and camping. Carefully planned and managed grazing on public lands benefits grassland ecosystems and supports the many public uses on thousands of acres.

Local and state economics are aided by revenues generated from viable, long-term grazing of public lands. But bills introduced in Congress to sell public lands will be detrimental to North Dakota ranchers. These bills have been promoted as land sales for funding housing initiatives. The lack of safeguards in previous bills means developers could buy land and after 10 years use it for almost any purpose, e.g. luxury homes or resorts or their own hunting and recreational use. Because public lands with valid grazing rights were not exempt from sale, ranchers would need to try to buy the public land they depend on for their livelihood, daily operations and ranching heritage. Those benefitting from public land sales will be wealthy investors looking to buy recreational land for luxury homes and their own hunting and recreational use.

So, our Congressional delegation, Governor, State legislators, Grazing Associations and other public officials must oppose legislation that would benefit a few wealthy investors, not North Dakota ranchers. Sale of public lands will do irreparable damage to North Dakota ranchers and many others who rely on and use public lands.

For more information on this message or other conservation topics, contact: John Bradley, Executive Director, North Dakota Wildlife Federation, (jbradley.ndwf@gmail.com), Mike McEnroe, Past President, North Dakota Wildlife Federation(mcmcenroe@midco.net) or Rick Nelson, Past President, North Dakota Chapter, The Wildlife Society, (bluebill@bis.midco.net). For a complete list of Conservation Notes visit (ndctws.org)-library

Events

NDWF and our affiliates host educational and social events throughout the year. Check out our Facebook events page for details. Visit www.northdakotawildlife.org for upcoming board meetings information.

July 1st - 4th – Conservation Outreach at the Presidential Library Opening - Medora, ND

July 15th – Bismarck Ditch Chickens (Larks) Conservation Night with the Governor - Bismarck, ND

July 22nd – NDWF Summer Board Meeting via Zoom

July 31st - Dickinson Bird Dogs (Big Sticks) Conservation Night w/ Report All Poachers - Dickinson, ND

Make an Impact

For 90 years, the North Dakota Wildlife Federation has depended on donations from conservationists like you to support our work to protect North Dakota's abundant wildlife, our natural lands and waters, and our unmatched public access to the outdoors for future generations to enjoy. We are able to do so much to protect North Dakota's outdoor heritage because people like you decide to support our work. Your financial support is crucial to our ability to stand up to well-funded special interest groups at the North Dakota Capitol and in Congress. We need everyone who values North Dakota's outdoor heritage to get involved.



NDWF Membership Form

Individual Membership: \$15 - Associate/Business Membership: \$25 - Educational Organization: Free

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Make Checks Payable To:

North Dakota Wildlife Federation
PO Box 1091
Bismarck, ND 58502-1091