North Dakota Wildlife Federation

Flickertales

Fall 2026



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
Dickinson Clay Target Club
Eddy County Rod & Gun Club
Finley Wildlife 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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From the Executive Director

Finding Common Ground in the Outdoors



Another election season has come and gone. The signs are coming down, the political advertisements have finally stopped filling our televisions, and the talking heads have moved on to the next controversy. But the divisions that seem to define so much of our public life don't disappear overnight.

Sometimes the best thing we can do is step away from all of it.

This fall, a trip to Minnesota's Chippewa National Forest offered a welcome reminder of that. Among the towering pines, aspen stands, and winding forest trails, the priorities seemed a little simpler. Find the grouse, watch the dog work, listen for the unmistakable whistle of a woodcock taking flight, and enjoy a few hours in the woods. Avoiding the deer ticks was another priority, although they proved nearly as persistent as the political advertisements we'd just escaped.

Public lands like the Chippewa National Forest are special because they belong to all of us. They provide places to hunt, fish, hike, camp, and simply get away. They offer opportunities for families to make memories, old friends to reconnect, and new generations to develop an appreciation for the natural world. Access to these places should never be taken for granted. They are part of our shared outdoor heritage, and protecting them is a responsibility we all share.

Hunting is also a communal experience. It's about more than filling a game bag. It's the conversations along the trail, the stories around a tailgate, watching a good dog work, and sharing an experience with people who might see the world differently than you do. Out in the woods, political affiliations and partisan talking points tend to take a back seat to the things that actually matter.

The outdoors ignite us. They remind us why we care about clean water, healthy forests and prairies, abundant wildlife, and access to the places that make life in the Upper Midwest special.

We may disagree about plenty of things. That's part of living in a diverse country and a healthy democracy. But we can still find common ground in the places we love and the natural resources we share. Hunters, anglers, hikers, farmers, ranchers, and families all have a stake in protecting our land, water, and wildlife.

The election is over. The work of conservation continues. Maybe we can carry a little of that common ground from the prairies back into our communities.

After all, there is more that unites us out there than we sometimes remember.

- John Bradley, Executive Director

Message from Our President

The Future of North Dakota's Hunting Heritage Depends on Habitat

North Dakota has a hunting heritage worth protecting. From chasing sharp-tailed grouse across the prairie to watching mallards work a North Dakota slough, hunting is woven into our state's identity. It brings families together, supports rural communities, and connects generations to the land. But the future of these traditions depends on something we cannot take for granted: quality wildlife habitat.

Across North Dakota, we are seeing troubling signs in several of our game populations. Our white-tailed deer herd remains well below historic levels following years of disease outbreaks and low fawn recruitment. Deer hunting license numbers have been reduced as populations struggle to recover. Sharp-tailed grouse numbers remain a concern, with recent surveys showing populations decline. Waterfowl face similar challenges. In 2026, North Dakota's spring breeding duck index fell below its long-term average for the first time since 1993.

These are not isolated wildlife management issues. They reflect a changing landscape. Millions of acres of grassland have disappeared from North Dakota, wetlands continue to face pressure, and the loss of native prairie, shelterbelts, and quality cover makes it increasingly difficult for wildlife to thrive.

With more than 90% of North Dakota privately owned, private landowners are essential to the solution. Farmers and ranchers are our most important partners in conservation. We need to work alongside them, not against them, developing practical programs that make habitat restoration economically worthwhile. Prescribed grazing, grassland restoration, wetland protection, wildlife-friendly fencing, and improved soil health can benefit both agricultural operations and wildlife populations.

However, these efforts require investment. Existing programs are important, but we need to expand them and explore new sources of dedicated conservation funding. The North Dakota Outdoor Heritage Fund is an excellent example of how public investment can support meaningful projects on private lands. Increasing its funding, alongside expanding partnerships with state agencies, conservation organizations, and landowners, would allow us to accomplish much more.

At the North Dakota Wildlife Federation, we believe conservation and agriculture can work together. We also believe hunters, anglers, landowners, and all North Dakotans share an interest in healthy wildlife populations and productive landscapes. Our hunting heritage will not be sustained by simply issuing licenses or adjusting season limits. It will be sustained by investing in the land that supports our wildlife. **- Kerry Whipp, President**





Preserving the Best Pheasant Pelts



It happened more than a decade ago. My wife won a 20 gauge over-under at our local Pheasants Forever banquet and gifted the featherweight shotgun to me. In my hands, it felt tiny, but it snapped to my shoulder with a quickness and a natural flow unlike any other shotgun I had ever mounted. It just felt right in the cool of the spring air as I mounted it outside my house when we returned from picking it up after the event. After a few rounds of trap and a couple quick adjustments by the gunsmith later in the summer, the little 20 gauge became my go-to gun, and it has remained my number one in the safe since that autumn.

My biggest fear at the time, not being the most accurate shot, was that the gentleman's gauge would not be as effective on the pheasants I was pursuing around my home in southwestern Minnesota. I would soon learn, however, that it wasn't the gun that was responsible for putting the birds down, but rather the user and the combination of shells and the shiny extended chokes installed at the end of each barrel. It was my first gun outside of the fixed barrel Wingmaster 870 12 gauge which I had inherited from my father, and with the new scattergun came a selection of four silver chokes in a bright orange box which helped gently guide me into learning more about patterning, pellet clouds, and just how my style of hunting impacted what shells I'd use and how I'd deploy them.

Behind my pointing labs, I started with an improved cylinder and a modified choke in the early goings of each pheasant season as the birds would get up relatively close in most cases, making the more open first barrel effective at nearer ranges and the follow-up shot from the second barrel a bit better when birds moved downrange. I can still recall my first double with the gun in a drenching rain as two roosters rose from some soaked autumn sweet clover, ending my day with a two-bird Minnesota limit almost as quickly as my walk began. In fact, had I just walked out to the spot instead of sneaking around for the wind, I might have been done in two minutes and not ten!

With my return to North Dakota, and a wider array of upland game, including sharptailed grouse, the gun stuck with me for those early season adventures. The reduced weight of the sub-six-pounder

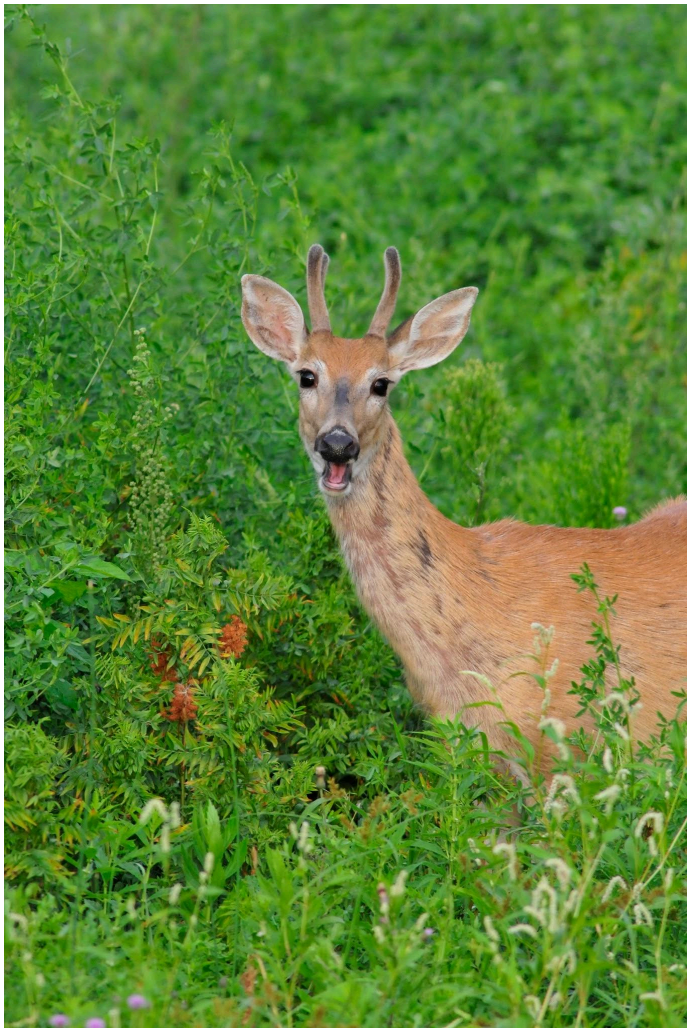
made treks through the hills of the Missouri River breaks feel like a breeze, and soon the game in my pouches was the far heavier load to carry. The same held true for return trips to northern Minnesota and the pursuit of ruffed grouse on a four-day-weekend each year, as the long walks through the woods only required a reset of the chokes to a skeet and improved cylinder setup for the closer-flushing thunderbirds. For pheasants, I settled into the early-season Improved Cylinder/Modified setup, and then a Modified/Improved Mod choke combination after deer season ended. The latter I special ordered in addition to the factory issued options. Admittedly, a smaller gun isn't for everyone. There are those who like a bigger shell, a stronger payload and the comfort of something that might not kick as hard when deploying the more powerful ammunition available for upland game these days. But for me the 20 gauge has worked and has changed the way I hunt. I know I may not be able to take an effective long poke at a far-flushing rooster, and that's fine. The limits of my little gun add to the experience of my hunt and make those boundaries part of a game whose focus has changed significantly for me over the past decade or so, feel as acceptable as the crook between my chest and shoulder do on the stock of the gun.

With each tailfeather in my cap, I've found I have less to prove to myself and the little gun I tote on each adventure. Next fall, I'll likely reserve the shiny-capped barrels as a backup to my son's efforts in the field, and that will be a satisfactory transition as well. But as for now, another upland season is underway for me and my reliable 20 gauge over and under, which despite a few scratches in the blue and a nick on the stock, shoots just as pretty as it did more than a decade ago and hopefully will continue to do so this season, reinforcing the decision made and the turn to a different kind of challenge in the field.

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

NDWF Supports Targeted Deer Season Changes and Calls for Continued Habitat Investment

NDWF Staff



BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Wildlife Federation (NDWF) supports the targeted deer hunting restrictions announced by Gov. Kelly Armstrong and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in response to an ongoing epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) outbreak affecting white-tailed deer in southwestern and south-central North Dakota.

The changes prohibit antlerless white-tailed deer harvest in gun units 3C, 3E1, 3E2 and 3F2 across all license types. Hunters holding eligible deer licenses in designated units may also choose to return their licenses for a refund and restored bonus points, or donate the license fee in exchange for a bonus point, where applicable.

NDWF recognizes the importance of deer hunting to North Dakota's outdoor heritage, local economies and hunting traditions. At the same time, the state's deer population continues to recover from the significant losses experienced during the 2021 EHD outbreak. Protecting the remaining breeding population is essential to rebuilding healthy, sustainable deer herds for the future.

"North Dakota's deer hunters have a significant stake in the long-term health of our wildlife populations," said John Bradley, executive director of the North Dakota Wildlife Federation. "We understand how difficult it is for hunters to see changes to a season they have been planning for, particularly when deer numbers

are already below where we want them to be. Targeted restrictions that protect does and give deer populations an opportunity to recover are an important part of responsible wildlife management."

NDWF also emphasizes that harvest restrictions are only one part of the long-term solution. Continued investment in quality wildlife habitat is essential to rebuilding North Dakota's deer herd and helping wildlife populations withstand future disease outbreaks and other challenges. Protecting and restoring grasslands, wetlands, and other critical habitats provides deer with the food, cover and healthy landscapes they need to survive and reproduce.

"Responsible harvest management and habitat conservation must work together," Bradley said. "If we want healthy deer populations and quality hunting opportunities for future generations, we need to give deer both the opportunity to recover and the habitat they need to thrive. Investing in private land habitat is an investment in North Dakota's hunting heritage and the future of our wildlife."

Since early August, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department has received nearly 160 reports documenting approximately 350 wild ungulate mortalities, primarily white-tailed deer. Although reported mortality remains below the levels observed during the severe 2021 outbreak, the current outbreak is concerning given the reduced deer population entering this year.

EHD is a naturally occurring viral disease transmitted by biting midges. It is often fatal to white-tailed deer and can also affect mule deer, pronghorn and elk. The disease has been documented in North Dakota for decades, with the state's first recorded outbreak occurring in 1962.

NDWF encourages hunters to review the Game and Fish Department's EHD mortality map and updated license-return information before making decisions about their hunting licenses. Because EHD impacts can vary considerably within individual hunting units, hunters should also consult local landowners and other knowledgeable contacts when evaluating conditions in their hunting areas.

NDWF encourages hunters to stay informed about the latest season changes and follow guidance from the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. The Federation also urges continued collaboration among state

agencies, landowners, hunters and conservation organizations to protect critical habitat and support the long-term recovery of North Dakota's deer populations.

For additional information, hunters can visit the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's license-change information and consult the department's EHD mortality map.



Partners Work Together to Bring Beaver Back to Western North Dakota Ranch

By: Cara Greger, NDWF



BEACH, N.D. – A collaborative conservation project north of Beach is working to restore beaver activity, improve stream and rangeland health, and strengthen the landscape's natural ability to retain water.

Trish and Donnie Feiring, who manage approximately two miles of Dry Creek on their ranch, have partnered with several conservation organizations and agencies to begin restoring beaver habitat and encouraging the return of beavers to the area. The project centers on constructing three Beaver Dam Analogs (BDAs), low-tech structures designed to mimic the natural benefits of beaver dams and help restore stream function.

The project was made possible through a Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) agreement administered by the local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office, which incorporated the three BDAs into the Feirings' conservation plan.

The Feirings identified several goals for the project, including restoring a historically present beaver population, improving the hydrology of their land, and increasing water retention across the landscape. They also see potential benefits for wildfire resilience, as improved water retention and future beaver activity could help maintain wetter conditions and provide a natural buffer to the west of their ranch.

Dry Creek flows into Beaver Creek to the north, which eventually joins the Little Missouri River. Improving the health and function of these smaller waterways can provide benefits throughout the larger watershed.

Cara Greger, Western Conservation Coordinator for the North Dakota Wildlife Federation (NDWF), helped bring together partners to turn the Feirings' vision into action. The project included the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), NRCS, Pheasants Forever, the U.S. Forest Service's Dakota Prairie Grasslands, and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

NWF's Beaver Conflict Resolution Program works with the Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) to implement practical, low-tech solutions that help restore stream systems and support coexistence with beavers. Through a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant, NWF provided funding for the MCC crew and leadership for the project.

Each partner contributed to making the work possible. NRCS administered the CSP agreement and helped secure necessary permits. Willow switches were harvested from a nearby Wildlife Management Area, while Donnie Feiring provided straw bales and soil for construction. The Montana Conservation Corps crew constructed the three BDAs, and Pheasants Forever joined the project for a hands-on workday while documenting baseline conditions and project implementation to support future monitoring.



"This project is a great example of what can happen when landowners, conservation organizations, and local, state, and federal partners come together around a shared conservation goal," said Cara Greger, Western Conservation Coordinator for NDWF. "The Feirings have a clear vision for improving their land, and these low-tech restoration practices are a practical way to begin bringing more water back into the landscape."

With construction complete, partners will monitor the site over time to evaluate how the BDAs influence stream conditions, water retention, vegetation, and overall rangeland health. The project will also provide an opportunity to learn how these restoration techniques can support landowners interested in improving watershed function and restoring beaver habitat in western North Dakota.

The North Dakota Wildlife Federation works with landowners, agencies, and conservation partners to protect and improve North Dakota's wildlife, habitat, and outdoor traditions. Projects like the Feirings' demonstrate the value of voluntary, locally driven conservation and the important role that healthy streams and working lands play in sustaining North Dakota's natural resources.

NDWF Applauds Refuge Review, Emphasizes Investment in Workforce

By: NDWF Staff

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Wildlife Federation (NDWF) welcomes the announcement by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Brian Nesvik and Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum at Audubon National Wildlife Refuge outlining recommendations to strengthen the National Wildlife Refuge System.

NDWF views the review as an important opportunity to improve the management, stewardship, and long-term effectiveness of America's national wildlife refuges. Successful conservation requires more than protecting land on a map. It requires active habitat management, strong partnerships, and a skilled, adequately staffed workforce equipped to deliver results for wildlife and the American people.

"We appreciate the focus on practical, on-the-ground conservation and the recognition that our national wildlife refuges are working landscapes that require active management," said John Bradley, Executive Director of the North Dakota Wildlife Federation. "But successful stewardship ultimately depends on people. We need to invest in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service workforce, stabilize staffing levels, and ensure refuge employees have the resources, training, and support necessary to carry out this important mission."

The Federation supports recommendations to strengthen field staffing, improve workforce training, establish clear management expectations, and increase accountability for habitat management plans and conservation outcomes. Redeploying personnel closer to the work on the ground can improve effectiveness, but it must be accompanied by a sustained commitment to recruiting, retaining, and supporting qualified employees. Experienced refuge managers, biologists, law enforcement officers, and maintenance personnel are essential to maintaining habitat, providing public access, and carrying out the Refuge System's mission.

NDWF also welcomes the review's recognition of hunting and fishing as integral components of the Refuge System. National wildlife refuges provide essential habitat for migratory birds, waterfowl, and countless other species while offering important opportunities for hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching.

The review's emphasis on partnerships beyond refuge boundaries is equally important. Wildlife does not recognize property lines, and successful conservation often depends on collaboration with private landowners, agricultural producers, state agencies, and nonprofit conservation organizations. Strengthening the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and dedicating staff to work directly with conservation partners can advance habitat objectives across entire landscapes.

In North Dakota, where national wildlife refuges are essential to the Prairie Pothole Region and the continent's migratory bird populations, these partnerships are particularly valuable.

"Conservation doesn't stop at the refuge boundary," Bradley said. "We have tremendous opportunities to bring landowners, agencies, and conservation organizations together around shared goals. A strong, well-supported Fish and Wildlife Service workforce is essential to making those partnerships successful and ensuring our refuges remain productive for future generations."

NDWF is ready to implement the review's recommendations and put meaningful action and investment into wildlife habitat that make the National Wildlife Refuge System successful.

Go Where the Grass Grows



The first in a string of waterfowl production areas northwest of town was a small square, just 40 acres or so connected to the main road by a small walkable easement style strip with a two wheel track to access the federal parcel. I had walked it last fall while visiting the area, and to my surprise in the space just at the northern edge of the pheasant range, I had flushed a pair of hens as my dog got hot running the small draw up to a couple of willows on the edge of the just-cut field. We wandered around the prairie pond at the middle, which hosted ducks, geese and swans, stomping through cattails and sliding through field grass, turning the small space into a two-mile hike. I made the mental note and marked the place on my map for future reference.

This year, conditions were similar with the golden carpet of corn chafe bounding the western border of the WPA, which was a solid stand of grass this autumn, likely spurred by idyllic summer conditions. A slight southerly wind sent us down along the edge of the winding cattail slough, working the adjacent grasses and the scent that the circular spin of my dog's tail confirmed it was present once again. As we advanced to the far corner pinch-point, a hen rose as he pursued her into the green-and-gold vegetation along the edge of the reeds, and then another bird got up into the eastern sun.

Blinded by the glare of the perfectly aligned rays and unsure of the target, I traced the form of the shadow until I heard the tell-tale cackling of a young rooster. With the click of the safety, my bottom barrel blasted its salvo from my shoulder and the bird tumbled into the far edge of the cattail finger. It was only a matter of seconds and Ole had our quarry on the way back to my hand in the small space tucked between the black dirt fields. While I wasn't necessarily shocked to see the pheasants on this parcel again this season, I was pleasantly surprised to have one in the game pouch of my vest as a result of our trek into the grassy square.

It was once again a reminder that where a combination of habitat exists, preserved and protected for not only wildlife, but also for those who hunt, is where you'll find action in the field. Whether it's pheasants, deer, ducks, grouse or other game species, grass in the ground often equals punched tags and heavy game vests. In regions where farming often demands more from the earth, those spaces which leave parts of it undisturbed are where the game will reside, whether its size is just 40 acres, or 400, or 40,000.

Wherever there is grass, or swamp, or forest, or, like the small pothole water we wandered once again, a mix of everything and a sampling of all, that's the best place to start when it comes to hunting. Odds are, with a little study of an overhead map, and a bit more effort of wandering the yellow, or red or green squares of public access on that particular atlas, you'll find what you're after. Because beyond locating those colored spaces in a book or online, it's knowing that where the grass grows is what will provide you your best idea as to the likelihood of continued success…in our outdoors.

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

NDWF AFFILIATE CHALLENGE: ND WATERFOWL BRIGADE

North Dakota WATERFOWL BRIGADE

CHALLENGE OVERVIEW

NDWF is challenging affiliate clubs to recruit cadets for the ND Waterfowl Brigade. For every youth who submits a Cadet application, your affiliate club is entered into a drawing for $5000. Former cadets can come and present to your meetings or events to encourage recruitment.
Deadline to apply is March 15, 2027.
Camp will be held in June 22-26, 2027.

NORTH DAKOTA WILDLIFE FEDERATION



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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

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Conservation Notes

Draining Protected Wetlands is Wrong

Issue #135, October 2026

The Department of Interior has committed to revising federal regulations by loosening wetland protection rules under the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Act of 1934. This Act, often called the Duck Stamp Act requires hunters 16 years old and older to purchase and carry an annual Duck Stamp when hunting.

Duck stamps provide funds to combat severe wetland destruction and decline of waterfowl populations. These protections are provided by land purchases and long-term wetland easement contracts and become part of the National Wildlife Refuge system.
Tens of thousands of landowners have accepted and benefited from this program. Over 1.3 billion" non-tax" dollars have been collected to date with 98% of the money deposited into the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund to be used for wetland protection.

Senator Kevin Cramer is trying to force the Department to revise federal rules that protect the wetlands under contract by allowing expanded tile drainage in the wetland's watershed. The result of such action will destroy or drain the protected wetland. Wetland protection programs, funded by sportsmen, have provided economic alternatives to widespread wetland destruction. The benefits to the country from the wetland's resources are substantial and have been accomplished without tax dollars and through credible contacts with thousands of landowners. Efforts to reduce protection for these wetlands are designed to accommodate a few landowners who don't accept the benefits of the program, or the wetland protection property rights covered by the easement contract. This non-sense should not be accommodated.

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(memcenroe@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

Quill by Name, Quills by Nature

By Kerry Whipp



A hunter smiles when his dog finds a bird,
But finding me is the last thing preferred.
I don't bark, fly, run, or whine,
Yet one sniff too close and I'll redesign your canine.
What am I?

Five years ago, my wife and I named our Golden Retriever puppy Aquila—Latin for Eagle—and called her Quill for short. We have always named our dogs after constellations, each with a special meaning to us, and so we can look into the night sky for comfort in future years. For our energetic female golden, Aquila seemed fitting. I don't put much stock in old wives' tales or superstitions, but the irony of that nickname would soon become apparent, again and again, leaving me to wonder whether there might be a mystical connection to a name.

The very first night we brought Quill home, I set an alarm to wake me every few hours to take Quill out for potty training. Groggy and bleary-eyed, I retrieved her from her kennel and took her out the front door into the moonlit yard. Rose bushes, peonies, and evergreen shrubs lined the house. As we walked down the steps to the lawn, I heard a rustling. I turned, expecting a raccoon. Instead, there sat a very large porcupine. In all our years living there, I had never seen one on our property—and now one was right outside our front door. Quill thought she was being greeted by a new friend and bounded toward the spiny creature without fear or concern. Thankfully, I had her on a lead. The porcupine gave a snobby huff, then slowly waddled across the yard while Quill bounced and pulled at the leash, wanting to follow. We returned to the house and as I crawled back into bed, my wife asked if everything was okay. I replied, "Yeah, but there was a porcupine outside our front door." Only later would that first-night experience seem like a strange foreshadowing of what was to come.

The following year was Quill's first official upland hunting season. I had taken her on a 4-day camping and hunting adventure out by Williston. We spent our time hunting PLOTS and other unposted private land. Quill was showing promise and quickly understanding our shared goal. It was late morning at our second stop. We had two birds in the game vest and only needed one more to close out the day. We were walking a cattail slough in a harvested wheat field when we came upon a rock pile. Quill was working the rock pile intently.

Suddenly Quill let out a sharp “Yipe!” She back peddled from the rocks shaking her head and pawing at her muzzle. At first, I suspected a skunk, but when I approached, I could see dozens of spines protruding from her nose and muzzle. I spent the next several minutes sitting on Quill, holding her down as I used pliers to pluck the spines from her face. Luckily, she avoided getting any in her eyes or inside her mouth. After both of us had a chance to regroup and let our heartrates settle, we were back on the move. Quill stayed by my side for a short while, but it wasn’t long before she was working for birds again. I was concerned this negative experience would influence her hunting future, but I think I came away more rattled than she did.

On Halloween morning this year, it was damp and dreary, with dense fog and rain forecast for the afternoon. Quill and I set out for Kidder County to hunt some promising PLOTS acres for pheasant. We covered a lot of miles through cattails and along fencelines. She flushed numerous hens, but the roosters remained elusive. On our last stretch, around a large wetland surrounded by heavy cattails, Quill pushed and tunneled through the cover. Two hen pheasants erupted, but she stayed in that same spot, working with determination. She appeared briefly, circled back, and stopped with only her hind end visible. Her tail was up and wagging. She pawed and pounced at the tangled cattails, and I foolishly assumed she had a rooster pinned. “Fetch it up!” I commanded. Quill stepped back and turned to look at me with wide eyes. Then she turned toward the cover and barked. Quill doesn’t bark unless something is wrong. I called her off and approached. There in the cattails was a huge porcupine, which I guessed weighed 15–20 pounds, its long, spiny quills puffed out in defense. Quill had more sense than I did: instead of following my instructions, she had hesitated. She sat next to me while the beast huffed and snorted at us. I looked down and praised her. She looked back up, still wide-eyed and alarmed. “No bird! Let’s go home and get lunch.” Quill marched off ahead, happy to oblige. Whatever connection there might be between a dog and her name, this time Quill wasn’t the one who needed the lesson.

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.

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