

North Dakota Wildlife Federation

Flickertales

Fall 2023



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
Cass County Wildlife Club
Central Morton Sportsmen's Club
Eddy County Rod & Gun Club
Garrison Wildlife Club
Hannaford Conservation & Wildlife Club
Hiddenwoods Sportsmen's 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

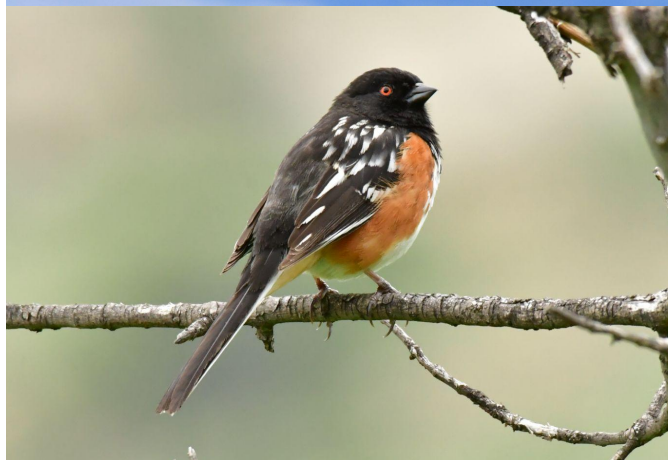
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Photos: Mike LaLonde, Matt Patrias, Nick Simonson, John Bradley



From the Executive Director

I hope your fall has been filled with whistling wings, rooster flushes and the sights and sounds of migrating birds getting out of dodge from the cold and snow. The Federation has been incredibly busy this year - advocating for fish and wildlife habitat, working with partners to put habitat on the ground, and meeting new hunters and anglers and bringing them to the conservation table. Our wildlife, habitat, and access didn't happen by accident, hunters and anglers need to continue to engage in the process to secure North Dakota's outdoor traditions into the future.

The Federation is committed to growing the conservation movement in North Dakota. In April, we added a Western ND Conservation Coordinator to organize hunters, anglers, and landowners, while securing and improving wildlife habitat. Located out of Belfield, Cara Greger, has a robust background in land management and conservation education. She has hit the ground running and has made numerous landowner connections and has been working with shooting and wildlife clubs in the area. Folks can get a hold of her at cgreger.ndwf@gmail.com.



We had one of the toughest winters on record and our deer herd took the brunt of it. In order for our deer and other game populations to bounce back quickly we need an investment in quality wildlife habitat. It's still the only proven way for sustained population numbers. While deer numbers look grim for the opener, we know that wildlife and habitat can still be a uniting force and that our nation has invested in wildlife on the brink before.

Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) has been reintroduced in the Senate. Inches from the finish line last session, RAWA is a bold, bipartisan solution that will help thousands of at-risk species by investing in cost-effective, collaborative efforts that match the magnitude of the wildlife crisis. If you haven't contacted Senators Hoeven and Cramer and Representative Armstrong, now is a good time! The passage of RAWA would be the most significant conservation bills passed in decades and would provide game changing money for North Dakota's wildlife.

Lastly, 2023 is a Farm Bill year! The Farm Bill is America's largest investment in conservation on private and working lands and therefore the best opportunity for farmers and ranchers to better steward the resources that support our nation's food supply and our wildlife. In 2021, Farm Bill-funded conservation programs touched over 45 million acres, an area roughly the size of North Dakota. We'll be calling on our congressional delegation to make a serious investment in CRP acres and other popular conservation programs.

We'll need every hunter and angler to get our goals across the finish line. By working together and finding bipartisan solutions and investing in cost-effective, collaborative efforts, we can save wildlife and save our sporting traditions.

-John Bradley, Executive Director, jbradley.ndwf@gmail.com

Message from our President

The 2023 upland hunting season has gotten off to a good start. The weather has been fantastic, with cool and often frosty mornings, then warming to flannel shirt weather in the afternoon. Quill (my golden retriever) and I have taken full advantage. We started our September with dove hunting in harvested oat fields. These small grain fields are getting harder to find, but if you are lucky to access one, you will likely find a golden ticket for dove.



Sharptail Grouse hunting has been a bit more challenging. There are certainly birds out there, and we have bagged a few, but the numbers are fewer than I hoped. Pheasant on the other hand have been a pleasant surprise. We have hunted some PLOTS acres that have been very productive. But if you want to get any shooting in, you better follow the adage, “the early bird gets the worm”. Have a thermos of hot coffee and be waiting and ready at least 30 minutes before shooting hours. Otherwise, fellow hunters will beat you there.

The one thing I have found to be very disappointing, red is overtaking my OnX map. Acres I have successfully hunted the past several seasons are now closed. I have made efforts to gain access, but have either been politely rejected, or my requests have gone unanswered. I have concluded that PLOTS, WMA’s and WPA’s are my best hope at getting in the field. Which brings me to my first point. We need to find a way to increase funding to bolster these acres. If you think I’m being overly pessimistic, listen to episode 27 of the ND Outdoors Podcast with Kelly Armstrong. You will find that our politicians, even though some claim to be hunters and anglers, do not have our back. They overwhelmingly support industry, oil and gas, and unbounded agriculture. The only way this will change is if we (Outdoors Men and Women) come up with some unique ideas to increase public access acres.

This brings me to my second point. We need to hear from our membership. Our affiliated club directors, At-large Directors and Executive Directors have a responsibility to gather at least once a quarter to discuss matters confronting our hunting, fishing, and outdoor heritage. It is important that we take these responsibilities seriously. Please make a point to join us in Fargo at our Annual Meeting and Convention (January 5,6,7th). I hope to see you there, but in the meantime happy hunting.

See you on the prairie.

- Kerry Whipp, NDWF President

Enhancing Prairie Health:

The Role of Prescribed Burns in ND

By: Seth Owens



North Dakota's vast prairies, home to diverse flora and fauna, are vital ecosystems for wildlife, agriculture, and ranching. Yet maintaining the health and biodiversity of these prairies is a constant challenge, especially when invasive species threaten to dominate their diversity. One proven method for revitalizing and preserving prairie lands is the use of prescribed burns.

Prescribed burns are carefully planned and controlled fires that are intentionally ignited to manage ecosystems. In North Dakota's prairies, they are particularly valuable in areas that haven't been burned for three or more years, where low plant diversity, a thick layer of thatch, and invasive species have become significant concerns.

Prairies with limited plant diversity, especially in terms of forbs (flowering plants), need fire and disturbance to provide adequate habitat and food sources for wildlife. A diverse plant

population is essential for supporting various species and maintaining ecosystem health. Over time, a layer of thatch can accumulate in prairies, hindering new plant growth by blocking sunlight and preventing moisture from reaching the seedbed. This limits the germination of dormant seeds.

Additionally, invasive species like Kentucky bluegrass, smooth brome, and woody brush and shrubs can quickly outcompete native vegetation, disrupting the ecosystem's natural balance. Prescribed burns offer several benefits in addressing these challenges in North Dakota's prairies.

By burning away thatch and reducing the density of invasive species, prescribed burns create open spaces in the understory. This allows more sunlight and moisture to reach the seedbed, promoting the germination of dormant seeds that may have been in the soil for decades. Native

grasses and forbs benefit from prescribed burns, as they have evolved with fire as a natural part of their life cycle. These plants quickly recover and thrive in the post-fire environment, gaining a competitive edge over invasive species. As native species flourish following prescribed burns, plant diversity in the area increases. This enhanced plant diversity offers a variety of food sources for both wildlife and cattle, akin to providing a well-rounded diet.

Prescribed burns offer numerous advantages for wildlife. They rejuvenate prairie vegetation, restoring critical habitat for a wide range of wildlife species, including birds, insects, and mammals. The increased plant diversity resulting from prescribed burns provides a broader range of food sources for herbivorous wildlife, contributing to a healthier and more robust wildlife population. Ground-nesting birds, such as grouse, partridge, quail, and pheasants, rely on open prairie habitats with balanced thatch cover for nesting, and prescribed burns create suitable nesting sites for these species.

Cattle and livestock also benefit from prescribed burns. The increased plant diversity resulting from prescribed burns offers a wider array of forage options for cattle, enhancing the nutritional value of their diet. Additionally, prescribed burns help control invasive species that compete with valuable forage plants, improving the quality of grazing lands and increasing overall grazing land productivity.

In conclusion, prescribed burns play a vital role in managing and preserving North Dakota's prairies. They effectively address issues like low plant diversity, thatch accumulation, and invasive species by opening up the understory, promoting native species' growth, and increasing plant diversity. These benefits, in turn, have positive ripple effects for both wildlife and cattle, making prescribed burns a valuable conservation tool in preserving the health and vitality of North Dakota's prairie ecosystems. By employing this approach, we can ensure that these precious landscapes continue to thrive for generations to come.

Seth Owens is a Dakota Edge Outdoors contributing writer and the Education and Outreach Coordinator for North Dakota Pheasants Forever.



Youth Waterfowl Weekend *Builds Hunters &* *Conservationists*

By: Nick Simonson

North Dakota's youth waterfowl weekend is Sept. 16 and 17, and with some impressive upticks in duck populations this year, the special focus of the two-day season for young and novice hunters, and the benefits it provides, many are looking forward to this year's opportunity. For those mentors looking to take young waterfowlers into the field, there hasn't been a better season to do so in the past five years, as spring and summer tallies conducted by the North Dakota Game & Fish Department (NDG&F) showed significant increases over those counts from 2022. In total, May breeding ducks surveyed in the state were up 1.5 percent from the previous year and were 39 percent higher than the average over that of the running mean between 1948 and 2022. This summer's brood counts continued the positive trend with major jumps, up 79 percent compared to 2022, and 88 percent higher than the 1965-2022 average index. According to Mike Szymanski, NDG&F Migratory Game Bird Management Supervisor, many popular species that nest on the water fared the best.

"We had record production this year based on the numbers of broods that we observed on our survey routes. We have 18 of these 30-mile routes that cover the prairie pothole region in North Dakota and diving ducks were really off the charts this year, especially redheads and canvasbacks, and a lot of that has to do with them being over-water nesters," Szymanski relates, adding, "our wetland conditions were fantastic for those species, as well as for coots and grebes and other species that nest over water."

While some drying out has occurred on the landscape, Szymanski expects that good conditions will remain for young hunters hitting the field this weekend for their first waterfowl adventures. Some expansion of muddy areas around the shores may provide a bit of a challenge, but plenty of popular duck species that provide good hunting are available, following a successful summer brooding period.

"We are drying up a fair bit across the state, especially working from north to south. It's just been getting drier and drier in the northern tier of the state. So, there's going to be some challenges there. I would suspect that in quite a few areas hunters are going to experience some mud margins," Szymanski posits ahead of the agency's fall wetland surveys starting next week, "but with all of our good production we had in the state for ducks this year and actually a large number of ducks hanging around in general, it's looking pretty good, at least to start things off," he adds. Szymanski stresses

that the youth waterfowl weekend is a great opportunity for young hunters to get their best shot at ducks and find early success in their hunting efforts. It's a stance that Ben Romans, Ducks Unlimited Communication Coordinator shares, providing novices a low-stress opportunity that is all about bringing them into the fold.

"These weekends are really special because you don't have the added pressure in the field of other hunting parties and there's not that stress to hurry up and beat someone into the field or fill your limit. So, you can leave the gun at home, focus on the kids, make the experience about them, and teach them some lessons along the way," Romans suggests about the unique, youth-focused nature of the two-day season.

Additionally, being able to connect the dots between why and where they are seeing their favorite ducks, and what attracts them and allows them to live there helps build a strong understanding of conservation and the ethic that goes beyond just pulling the trigger. Romans suggests that in the process of enjoying youth hunting weekends like the upcoming one, young hunters will carry with them not only the memories of time outdoors, but also how those opportunities come to be and what they can do to preserve them.

"I'll speak from experience, when I take my boys into the field one of the things we talk about is how everything is related. When we're going to go duck hunting we're going to talk about wetlands and why they're important and why native grass around the wetland is important, and how the ducks benefit," Romans explains, "mixing it in as well with some memorable moments, stuff they're going to remember for the rest of their life, they're going to take home and they're going to remember what their dad or mentor taught them," he concludes.

Ducks Unlimited in North Dakota offers a free youth waterfowl trailer, loaded with both duck and goose decoys, along with layout blinds and other gear young hunters would need for a successful setup. Interested mentors can contact the main Ducks Unlimited office in Bismarck to check on the availability of the trailer, available dates to use it and get more details on the program by calling (701)355-3500.

The North Dakota youth waterfowl weekend is Sept. 16 and 17 with hunting hours running 30 minutes before sunrise to sunset. During this time resident and nonresident youth waterfowl hunters 15 and younger can hunt ducks, geese, coots, and mergansers statewide. The daily bag limit and species restrictions are the same as for regular duck and goose seasons, but the additional two blue-winged teal allowed during the first 16 days of the regular season are not allowed during this weekend. Resident and qualifying nonresident youth waterfowl hunters must possess a general game and habitat license. For more information visit gf.nd.gov/hunting/youth/waterfowl.

An Attack on North Dakota's Public Lands

By: Brock Wahl, ND Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Public lands in North Dakota are at risk.

The North Dakota Trust Lands Completion Act, sponsored by Sen. Hoeven (R-ND) and Rep. Kelly Armstrong (R-ND), along with Sen. Kevin Cramer (R-ND) as a cosponsor, the entire North Dakota congressional delegation is seeking to pass legislation that would facilitate the transfer of some federal public lands to the state of North Dakota.

In seeking to consolidate lands within Tribal Reservations, the North Dakota Trust Lands Completion Act would allow the swap of state trust lands inside reservation boundaries with a potentially significant amount of federal public lands - Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands - outside of the reservations.

Tribal Reservations would be awarded lands held in trust by the Department of the Interior, and the state of North Dakota would gain new lands outside of Tribal Reservations expressly intended to generate revenue through development. As a result, public land owners would be stuck with the short end of the stick as BLM lands would be lost with no new federal public land acres to replace them.

This is harder to swallow in a state like North Dakota, where sportsmen and women already have limited options to hunt public lands. According to BLM's testimony, there are only 58,000 surface acres of BLM lands in our entire state, and since this bill would make approximately 37,000 surface acres of state lands and 186,000 mineral acres within the boundaries of the Tribal Reservations eligible for transfer, we could see a significant portion of North Dakota's federal public lands at risk for transfer and development in exchange (37,000 acres is 64 percent of the 58,000 acres).

Even more worrisome, nowhere in the valuation process is public use or recreational value considered, and the public hunter could be left out of the parcel identification and transfer approval process entirely as there are no guardrails to require that sort of transparency.

The bill also does not specify what federal acres or mineral rights would be targeted for transfer to the state, or which public lands will be prioritized for transfer, so the negative impact to North Dakota's hunters and anglers could be even more outsized depending on

the parcels and their appraised valuation. At this point, North Dakota hunters don't even know which public lands we stand to lose.

As a reminder, the state manages trust lands solely for profit, not for multiple use, and North Dakota could develop prime hunting and fishing habitat and/or close state lands to public entry entirely. So once federal public lands are transferred to the state, hunters and anglers lose.

This bill could mean a bum deal for North Dakota's hunters. Contact Representative Armstrong and Senators Hoeven and Cramer and ask that, at the very least, safeguards be added that protect the public's interest in our public lands.

2023 Farm Bill: Good for Wildlife, Good for People

By: Lew Carpenter, NWF

The Farm Bill is arguably one of America's largest investments in conservation on private and working lands and critically important, too, for hunters and anglers. While public lands present great opportunities to fish and hunt, the game we chase depends on the health of the entire ecosystem, which means supporting farmers and ranchers to better manage natural resources as they provide food for the country.



The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) recently released its **2023 Farm Bill Platform**. Within are 10 Top Priorities using robust conservation funding to build on past successes.

NWF's Top Priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill

1. Increase Conservation Title Baseline Funding to Meet Producer Demand and Protect and Build on Conservation Funding Provided in The Inflation Reduction Act.
2. Prevent Conversion of Native Grasslands Through a Nationwide Sodsaver Provision.
3. Better Align Crop Insurance with Conservation Practices that Reduce Risk and Save Money. Remove barriers to, and provide incentives for, adopting risk-reducing conservation practices within the crop insurance program to lower crop insurance costs and

increase on-farm resilience.

4. Improve Equity in the Delivery of Conservation Program Funds and Technical Assistance.
5. Maintain the Linkage Between Conservation Compliance and Crop Insurance Premium Subsidies and Improve Enforcement of These Provisions.
6. Improve the Conservation Reserve Program.
7. Maximize Conservation Program Benefits to Wildlife, Climate, And Water and Support for Public Access Programs.

8. Optimize Carbon Sequestration in Ecologically Appropriate Ways and Create Climate-Smart Forestry Opportunities.

9. Improve Wildlife Connectivity and Movement.

10. Enhance USDA's Data Collection, Measurement, and Analysis Systems.

“In 2021, Farm Bill-funded conservation programs touched more than 45 million acres, an area larger than the entire state of Oklahoma. Working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, farmers, ranchers, foresters, and private landowners are able to conserve, protect, and restore wildlife and pollinator habitat, sensitive grasslands and wetlands, adapt and mitigate the effects of climate change, improve soil health, increase the quality and quantity of water, and create more resilient communities,” according to the platform. “It is critically important for the 2023 Farm Bill to build on past successes with robust conservation funding to address the unprecedented challenges facing our ecosystems, wildlife, and people.”

And while the nature of land-based conservation offers an easier connection to Farm Bill benefits, fishermen and the waters they ply are impacted as well by what happens upstream. “While the Farm Bill funds aspects you’d typically expect in agriculture and food policy, such as subsidies and crop insurance, it also houses the federal government’s largest investment in private lands and waters conservation, known better as the Conservation Title,” said Connor Bevan, Inland Fisheries policy manager for the American Sportfishing Association (ASA). “The Conservation Title funds several programs that allow farmers to voluntarily dedicate a portion of their lands to conservation programs, conserving private lands and the waters that run through them throughout the country. While fisheries may not be the most obvious beneficiary of agricultural conservation, programs within the Conservation Title help expand angler access, create cleaner waters and produce healthier fisheries. The impacts of Farm Bill conservation programs range from mitigating sedimentation in freshwaters to preventing hypoxia in marine waters.”

The National Wildlife Federation works to ensure that there is adequate funding for programs to help farmers install and maintain conservation practices on their land, as well as land set aside for conservation and wildlife uses. At the end of the day Farm Bill conservation programs are highly popular with farmers and ranchers - and beneficial to taxpayers. The National Wildlife Federation is working to ensure that conservation does not continue to be limited due to lack of funding.

Lew Carpenter is the Director of Conservation Partnerships for the National Wildlife Federation's independent state affiliates in Arizona, Wyoming, Nevada, Colorado, Nebraska, and New Mexico. An avid hunter now, he came to it later in life, in his early thirties while editing Western Outdoors Magazine in California.

“Catfishin’ the Red”

By: Mike McEnroe



Growing up in Fargo 60+ years ago, the idea of a great day fishing in the Red River would have been an oxymoron. I was wrong! As the winner of the “Crush Some Cats” guided fishing trip in the NDWF winter raffle, I got to enjoy a catfishing excursion on the Red at Grand Forks with guide Brad Durick. Joining me were Terry Allbee and Rick Warhurst, both from Bismarck, Lewis and Clark Wildlife Club and NDWF members. We met Brad at the Little John boat ramp in East Grand Forks, and after being greeted by a bald eagle, we launched the boat and headed downstream (north).

We walleye fishermen quickly found out that catfishing on the Red is a very different . Brad put out six identical heavy-duty rod/reel combos, loaded with 30 pound line, two each baited with dead frogs, suckers, or ciscos. The baits were cast into deeper holes, 15-25 feet deep, along the main channel. For walleye anglers sensing the slightest tick or twitch on your line and setting the hook, that’s the wrong approach with cats. Some of the cats nibbled and gummed the bait for 5 minutes before finally

latching on. Brad cautioned us not to touch the rod until it was bent over nearly double; then don't set the hook! Just reel!

With six rods out we decided just to take turns when a fish bit. Rick won the first fish opportunity, and brought in a 3# catfish about 10 minutes after launch. The day was warm, eventually reaching 95 degrees, sunny and humid. At 3 pm, after 7 hours, we called it a great day! We caught about 25 catfish; Rick was the big fish winner with a couple of 13 #ers; Terry caught a Red River walleye to save his reputation, and Mike caught a drum to share the species diversity award with Terry. We kept about ten cats in the 3-6# range for eating; released a couple of smaller ones and probably a dozen in the 7-13# range. Big cats have monster heads and mouths that could swallow a football.

The day produced a couple more bald eagle sightings, a red-tailed hawk, a wood duck brood and a couple deer, including one that swam the Red from the Minnesota side into North Dakota. This was all within the confines of the Red River channel bordered by cottonwoods within the Grand Forks-East Grand Forks city limits.

As the day had progressed we peppered Brad with questions about catfishing, baits, rods, techniques, the Red River, fishing pressure (in 7 hours we saw one boat, and it turned around when it saw us). Brad is a storehouse of knowledge and has lots of fishing "tales". Catfishing the Red is a lot different than catching catfish in the Missouri River below the tailrace. After arriving home and each keeping and cleaning a few "cats", we can attest to them being good in the fry pan and on the plate. Thanks to Brad Durick for a "Grand Day" in Grand Forks, and to the NDWF for a great raffle prize.



Brad Durick is a Dakota Edge Outdoors contributing writer and licensed ND fishing guide specializing in trophy catfish on the Red River in and around Grand Forks.

701-739-5808

<https://redrivercatfish.com/>

A Farm Bill for North Dakota

By: John Bradley



Despite the hard winter in North Dakota, North America's most recent glacial period ended about 10,000 years ago. As the ice sheets decayed, they left thousands of shallow depressions across the northern part of the continent. Today, those potholes and kettles fill with water, either each spring or permanently, and create the important wetland and grassland habitats that have come to define North Dakota and the rest of the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR). The area is home to more than 50 percent of North American migratory waterfowl, with many species dependent on the potholes for breeding and feeding.

Regrettably, grasslands in the PPR are being converted to cropland at a rate faster than the Amazon rainforest is disappearing. This is partially because of the need to feed a growing population, but also due to government policies that over-incentivize expansion into marginal lands, with taxpayers often footing the bill for unrealized plantings. Thankfully, the 2014 Farm Bill implemented a trial program called Sodsaver. Implemented in six states, Sodsaver is designed to align cropland expansion with market demand. Simply put, if a farmer chooses to convert never-farmed, native sod into cropland, their crop insurance premium subsidy assistance is reduced for four years, or until they can prove the new cropland is productive.

Thankfully, lawmakers in our neighboring states - Senators John Thune (R-SD) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) - are attempting to expand Sodsaver nationwide through the American Prairie Conservation Act, which should be included in the 2023 Farm Bill. The bill would build and improve on the success

of the pilot Sod saver and level the playing field for farmers in the PPR with the rest of the country. Not only would this bill be a significant step in preserving grasslands in the United States, it would also save tens of millions of taxpayer dollars.

Just as crucially, this Farm Bill must protect funding for vital agriculture conservation programs. Farm Bill conservation programs are so popular that farmers with legitimate conservation needs are routinely turned down. Nationally, as many as 75 percent of qualified applicants are turned away, meaning demand for conservation on 13.8 million acres goes unmet because of inadequate funding every year.

Agriculture conservation programs are key for farmers and ranchers and rural communities throughout North Dakota as well as around the country. Hunters remember the days of peak CRP acres and the boon those grasslands were to pheasants, grouse, turkeys, and deer. Programs dedicated to habitat, soil, and water help resolve resource concerns and enable sustainable practices that aren't only beneficial for landowners, but for hunters and anglers, hikers, and everyone else who enjoys North Dakota's natural beauty.

Luckily for North Dakota, \$20 billion in additional funding for these critical Farm Bill Programs passed through Congress and was signed into law last year - a historic investment in private land conservation that is supported by a coalition of over 600 organizations representing ag-centered businesses, hunters, anglers, farmers, ranchers, and conservation organizations. Now, as Congress negotiates the details of the 2023 Farm Bill that could cost more than \$1 trillion, it's more important than ever that the \$20 billion for conservation programs does not get cut out from the Farm Bill. Rarely are programs so broadly supported, and needed, as these.

This funding represents the largest investment in agriculture conservation since the Dust Bowl. Delivering this funding on the ground to farmers and ranchers is crucial to conserving our state's soil, water, and wildlife so our children and grandchildren have a chance to enjoy these natural resources. Congress made a promise to deliver on this once-in-a-generation opportunity to fundamentally improve conservation across the country – now it's time to follow through.

Despite Dips, Deer Hunting Rides High

By :Nick Simonson



The number of deer tags and the size of North Dakota's deer herd is down following a tough winter season of 2022-23, but those who were lucky enough to pull a license for the upcoming firearms deer season opener at noon on Fri. Nov. 10 are staring down the square on their calendar with excitement.

While the number of deer hunters taking to the field this fall across the country will also likely be off from the highs seen during the pandemic autumns of 2020 and 2021, the pastime as a whole is still the best the nation has ever had thanks to a number of factors according to Kip Adams, Chief Conservation Officer of the National Deer Association (NDA).

"Hunters are very lucky. We have really strong deer populations across much of their range and tremendous age structure on both the buck and doe sides, so hunters have a lot to be looking forward to this year," Adams states.

What's more, hunters nationwide are taking a sharper look at letting younger bucks go, and resultantly, harvesting more mature deer than ever before. As part of NDA's annual surveys that go into their Deer Report publication each January, an average of 41 percent of the bucks harvested across America last fall were aged 3.5 years old or older, where such data is available. In the 34 years of surveys conducted by the organization, no season has been higher than that ratio reported in the fall of 2022. This is evidence that more and more hunters are passing on younger bucks and letting them grow to provide better hunting down the road.

"This has really changed over the last couple of decades. Coming out of last season, more than 40 percent of the bucks that we shot across the United States were at least 3.5 years old – that means three, four or five years or old. It's the highest percentage of all time. So, hunters regardless of if they're in Maine, or Florida, or the Dakotas or anywhere in between, they understand the benefit of protecting some of those younger bucks. What we have today is arguably the best age structure in the buck side of the population than we've had in 150 years," Adams explains.

Also, as part of those surveys NDA discovered that 90 percent of all deer harvested come from private lands. This further correlates with the fact that North Dakota is more than 93 percent privately owned, and ties hand-in-hand with recent efforts by wildlife management agencies such as the North Dakota Game & Fish Department and non-government organizations such as NDA to help preserve, protect and promote new habitat on private acres, whether they are conservation lands, pastures or working parcels. Through those efforts, herds which move from parcel to parcel and onto public land and public access areas provide hunting opportunities for all.

“Public land is very important, and we need to do everything we can to get more of it for people, but we also need to understand that most deer are going to be shot on private land. So, it’s a good thing that you see more state wildlife agencies today doing more engagement with private landowners. They have private landowner programs for both access and enhancing habitat,” Adams relates.

With improvement on the habitat front through these private land initiatives, Adams is also confident that hunters, biologists, and management agencies can stem the spread of chronic wasting disease (CWD) and hold the prion-based deer illness at bay, as promising control and cure options are just over the horizon. Through the efforts of sportsmen, their vigilance and obedience of laws and restrictions play a vital role in limiting the transmission of the disease.

“I fully believe that CWD is one of the greatest threats to the future of deer hunting, and a vast majority of wildlife professionals agree with that. I think the good part of this is that we’re starting to see some successes on the CWD front, relative to learning new things to keep it from spreading,” Adams explains, adding that hunters play a big part in that, “every single day that we go hunting, hunters can engage in that fight: they cannot move high-risk parts out of disease zones, they can make sure that they get deer sampled, they can talk to their buddies so they know not to move things where they’re not supposed to. There’s a lot that hunters can do in this fight,” he concludes.

Following the fall hunting season, NDA will publish the 2023 Deer Report in January of 2024. Therein hunters can see how things compare with last season and begin the process of planning their hunts for next fall based on the statistics, information and results that drive deer hunting. More information on the national deer association can be found at deerassociation.com.



Nick has been a freelance outdoors journalist for over 17 years, and his writings are published in over 50 periodicals and websites throughout the upper Midwest. His weekly column, [Our Outdoors](#), has been syndicated for 20 years in a number of newspapers, websites and media throughout the upper Midwest. His diverse interests include upland hunting, bow hunting, trap shooting, fly tying, lure making and multi-species angling. Nick is involved with the Missouri River Clay Target League and serves as an At-Large Board Member for the North Dakota Wildlife Federation.



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



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

Conservation Notes

Improving the 2023 Farm Bill

Issue #90, September 2023

The Farm Bill is vitally important legislation that touches every North Dakotan resident. It is especially important for its impact on wildlife habitat. Habitat loss in North Dakota is the driving force (more than weather and disease) for reduced deer, duck, pheasants, and other game numbers. Conservation provisions of the Farm Bill have the potential to address this habitat loss. The Federal Crop Insurance Program (CIP) of the Farm Bill is an irreplaceable tool for agricultural producers to manage risk against financial losses caused by market conditions and adverse growing season conditions. Farm Bill provisions can and should work together with North Dakota's agricultural economy and our rural infrastructure to ensure a resilient landscape for wildlife, their habitats, and our local communities.

Unfortunately, Federal Crop Insurance provisions result in more North Dakota native prairies, marginal lands and wetlands plowed and planted despite their low yield. Yet native prairie, marginal lands, and wetlands provide wildlife habitat, clean water, pollution and flood retention. Currently, farmers must agree to fundamental soil and wetland conservation provisions to protect wetlands and reduce soil erosion in exchange for receiving certain farm program benefits. The next Farm Bill needs to strengthen conservation compliance provisions in order to receive crop insurance premium subsidies, ensuring taxpayer money encourages good stewardship. Conservation compliance can help turn the tide of habitat loss on marginal agricultural lands and prevent significant amounts of soil erosion. It must be expanded in the 2023 Farm Bill.

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.

Nov. 14th - Carbon Cowboys Film, 201 Main St N, Belfield, ND, at 12 p.m. MT

Nov. 14th - District 1, 2306 121X Ave NW, Watford City, at 7 p.m. CT

Nov. 20th - District 8, Eagles Club, 31 1st Ave E, Dickinson, at 7 p.m. MT

Nov. 21th - District 7, NDGF Auditorium, 100 N E Bismarck Expy, Bismarck, at 7 p.m. CT

Nov. 27th - District 3, Esmond Fire Hall, 216 2nd Ave N, Esmond, at 7 p.m. CT

Nov. 28th - District 4, Fordville American Legion, 208 Main St N, Fordville, at 7 p.m. CT

Jan. 5-7th - NDWF Annual Meeting, Fargo

Make an Impact

For over 80 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