

North Dakota Wildlife Federation

Flickertales

Winter 2025



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
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

This continues to be an exciting time to be part of the North Dakota Wildlife Federation! 2024 was a banner year for the Federation and we look to continue that momentum into 2025. As you can see throughout this newsletter, we are working hard on wildlife management policy, state and federal access issues, grazing lands initiatives, and so much more. The North Dakota Wildlife Federation spent a great deal of time and energy in the first month of 2025 at the North Dakota Capitol working to defend and enhance North Dakota's outdoor heritage. The biennial Legislative Session always demands a lot of our time and attention, but it is needed. Wildlife don't have a voice, so sportsmen and women need to speak up.

As in past sessions, our efforts in 2025 are paying off. The hard work of NDWF board members, staff, and our grassroots; combined with our constructive relationships with lawmakers and our strong coalitions with other conservation groups, is resulting in several major victories for wildlife and our outdoors. We are working to bring more dollars to wildlife habitat initiatives, looking at creative ways to increase access, and ensuring that our Game & Fish Department has the right tools to deliver programs into the future. The work is never finished, but as we near halftime, we are in good shape to secure more funding for habitat and access. You can rely on us to continue to fight to give everyone a voice on conservation -- it's the only way that future generations can experience what we enjoy today. As we look ahead to the second half of the session, we need you to stay engaged and fight for North Dakota's wildlife, habitat, and access.

John Bradley, NDWF Executive Director



Message from Our President

First, I want to thank everyone who came to our 90th Annual Convention in January. The renewed commitment to North Dakota's wildlife, habitat, and access at this annual meeting was inspiring. During our Saturday afternoon session, we had a panel discussion with three individuals: Land Tawney, Dave Dittloff (NDWF), and John Devney (Delta Waterfowl). The main talking points of this panel discussion were legislative engagement and strategy. There were two comments made by our panel that really caught my attention. Land Tawney spoke about the consequences of apathy, and John Devney said, "if you want to achieve your goal, you have to work harder than anyone else." These insights emphasized the importance of active participation and relentless effort in achieving our conservation goals.



We are a month into North Dakota's 69th Legislative Assembly and the list of conservation related bills has left us with a full plate. The past weeks have inundated us with bills that aim to deliberately strip the North Dakota Game and Fish Department of their ability to manage our Wildlife (SB 2137), expand hunting opportunities to special interests and non-residents (HB 1237), or flat out take away your ability to hunt on your own land (SB 2168). What is exceptionally disturbing is that some of these bills are coming from a faction of individuals claiming to represent you, the hunter.

There are many other important bills that we are tracking and testifying either for or against. We need your help. Don't be apathetic and let someone else be your voice. Contact your District Representative and Senator to voice your opinion. Testify either online or in person as these hearings are being heard. You can put as much effort into it as you have time for, but as Woody Allen said, "The first step to success is showing up."

Go to LEGISLATURE | northdakotawildlife.org to stay up to date and sign up for NDWF Action Alerts.

- *Kerry Whipp, NDWF President*

Wing Survey Likely to Confirm Upland Success

By: Nick Simonson



Generally favorable fall conditions allowed upland hunters across North Dakota access to the state's acres to find partridge, grouse and pheasants in 2024, making for a good season. As upland wing surveys get underway, agents of the North Dakota Game & Fish Department (NDG&F) will get a better understanding of not only how populations of the state's upland birds are setting up as winter begins to wane, but also how sportsmen fared in the field, according to RJ Gross, NDG&F Upland Game Biologist.

"Any upland hunting season that you can comfortably hunt up until the last day I think is a success just in that. In North Dakota, there's been years we've had blizzards in October and November, and you have to go through feet of snow to get anywhere. As far as that the weather was just about perfect," Gross relates, adding, "as far as bird numbers, I thought there were lots of pheasants. In my experience there were plenty of birds to be had."

A temperate start to fall produced ample opportunities in September and early October for sharptailed grouse and Hungarian partridge. The two species were down slightly in the agency's 2024 summer roadside brood counts from their decadal highs tallied in 2023. The total partridge observed two

summers ago tied a record in the survey, meaning that the smaller upland birds were still plentiful in the most recent season, and according to reports, were still often encountered by hunters.

“I saw a bunch of partridge and I heard people saw good numbers of partridge. I know they were down a little bit, as far as we’re looking at our surveys, but that was also a tie of an all-time high, so even being down a bit is pretty good numbers,” Gross reports on partridge prevalence in the state.

Pheasant populations remained strong across the Peace Garden State, as the birds recovered from setbacks in drought years of 2017 and 2021 and a tough winter in 2022-23. Overall, the habitat that remained on the landscape provided good nesting cover in spring and was still intact after a temperate summer. While dry conditions did drag on in the western quarter of the state, grassy areas on opening day in October held birds for hunters to pursue and kept them for much of the season. However, habitat, Gross suggests, is not the major concern that hunters are facing throughout North Dakota, particularly in the northwestern quarter of the state.

“Access, that’s kind of becoming a limiting factor. It seems ever since Covid, the secret you could say is out for North Dakota,” Gross explains, “pheasant numbers were up obviously, and there’s a lot of pheasant hunters who come here, so that’s getting a little bit tougher. I’ve heard some grumblings,” he explained about the growing pressure and limited public access in the state. With a solid harvest, Gross and the rest of the upland team at the agency will set to work in February on reviewing those wings from birds sent in by hunters throughout the season. Through their review of those samples during the next two months, the NDG&F will get a better understanding of age ratios, approximate hatch dates, bootstrap harvest numbers and other important information which will help assess the population of partridge, grouse and pheasants as they headed into winter, and the data will help confirm the spring crowing count and summer survey numbers and the trends suggested through those samples from last year.

“[The wing analysis] is another metric that we can use that backs up our late summer roadside counts. Looking at the adult-to-juvenile ratio, last year was really good, it was almost three-and-a-half juveniles per adult bird that we got turned in for the wings. We usually get between 5,000 on a bad year, to 10,000 of those just for pheasants turned in. I would assume it would be a little bit lower, but I think production this year was better than most people thought, and hopefully that will come through when we go through the results,” Gross concludes.

The NDG&F typically releases wing survey results and an estimate of total harvest from the previous season in mid-May of each year.

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

Cross Country Skiing the Maah Daah Hey

By: Cara Greger

North Dakota Badlands sunsets are amazing, endless fiery bursts of color on the horizon. I recently moved to a rural rental property that is surrounded by the Dakota Prairie Grasslands US Forest Service land and have views of the Theodore Roosevelt National Park about a mile south. I also bought cross country skis for this winter. I hope I get to use them. Hope is a strong word. What gives us hope? Well for me it is the simple things like buying that pair of cross-country skis to use this winter. I bought my husband skis for Christmas about 9 years ago. His office was then located near groomed trails in a Minnesota State Park. We had used CC skis which we borrowed from the Bonanza Education Center near Clinton, MN. It was something we enjoyed but rarely did because you had to travel to a place with a groomed path.



We had a few pairs of snowshoes which were good for the deep snows of Minnesota. I used to teach classes on lacing Ojibwe style snowshoes at the Minnesota State Park where I worked. I enjoyed snowshoeing more than skiing and it was easier to just go out my back yard and snowshoe through our shelterbelt on our little 8-acre patch of prairie. Since moving to western North Dakota 2 years ago, I have only had good snowshoeing conditions once. My husband used his skis a couple times last winter by cruising on the Little Missouri River. I accompanied him on one of his adventures, and while I lagged behind walking, I thought, next year I will get myself skis for Christmas. I've concluded deep snows that require snowshoes aren't as common in western ND compared to my last home. Finding the right conditions where you need snowshoes may not happen, but you can count on the river

freezing up with a nice dusting of snow for skiing. I am hoping to have a nice winter where my husband and I can enjoy cross country skiing on the Little Missouri River.

We are experiencing our first winter in our rural residence, known locally as the Lindbo flats area or Pleasant Valley located along Government Creek. I am reading a book written by Lola Fuge Lindbo about her family homesteading here. She lived on the very farm site where I now call home. She describes the people, places, and lives of the European settlers of the Badlands. It is interesting trying to figure out which butte she is describing and wondering if it is the same butte that I am gazing at out my window. At our home there are remnants of old wagons her family may have used and an old stove made from rocks that still stands. Hope and hard work helped the families of the Badlands make it their home.

The stories of the Badlands are told in many ways. Indigenous people, explorers, cattlemen, fur trappers, homesteaders, oil investors, visitors, and many others have been making trips to the Badlands for centuries. All have stories to tell of the hope and fears of being in this magical landscape. The extremes of this landscape create unimaginable beauty but also hazards that must be prepared for.

There is a proposal to create a Maah Daah Hey Monument. This designation would help tell the stories of Native Americans whose stories haven't always been shared about how the Badlands have shaped their lives, culture and hopes. The designation will protect areas of the Badlands that many ranchers, residents, hunters and visitors have enjoyed, called home, and made a livelihood from for decades. Current management would not change but there would be funding to tell stories and protect the current management for generations to come. To learn more, go to <https://www.protectmdh.com/>

The other important work being done to create hope for the beautiful area we call home is the Grasslands Act. The North American Grasslands Conservation Act was introduced in the House of Representatives on October 9th, 2024, by 2 Republicans and 2 Democrats that represent 4 states. The Grassland Act addresses the need to protect our declining grassland ecosystems and highlights how grassland bird populations have decreased by more than 40% since 1966. The Act also tackles the problem of dwindling grazing lands which is affecting America's ranching community. The Act would work similar to North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) and "would create a landowner-driven, voluntary, incentive-based program to conserve America's critically imperiled grasslands."

To learn more about the NAGCA go to <https://actforgrasslands.org/>

All of us who have lived in, visited, and enjoyed the beauty of the Badlands have hopes. Our hope may be of a different form and our lives may not be the same lived experience, but we are united in the love of the Badlands and the grasslands in and around the buttes, coal seams, creeks, and wild rugged hills. Time to save and tell all the stories of the Badlands. And hopefully, I will get to use my skis this winter.

Western Monarch Population Numbers Signal Need for Intervention, Collaboration

Cait Fallon Jan 30, 2025



WASHINGTON, D.C. — The latest count of western monarch butterfly populations is a clear sign of a species in trouble. The Xerces Society's [annual Western Migratory monarch butterfly count](#) recorded only 9,119 butterflies, the second worst year in the organization's count. This is an approximately 96 percent decline from last year's count of 233,394 butterflies at 256 California overwintering sites and demonstrates the timely importance of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife's proposal to list the monarch butterfly as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. "This is a historic and pivotal moment; the future of this irreplaceable insect species and its unequalled migration is at stake, and these numbers cannot be taken lightly. This latest count and the federal proposed listing confirm the need to tailor species-specific conservation measures and to combat climate change," said Dr. Rebeca Quiñonez-Piñón, senior scientist for the National Wildlife Federation.

"Volunteers with the Western Monarch Count have been tracking this population for 30 years, and during that time we've watched their numbers decline to the point where they are at risk of disappearing entirely," said Emma Pelton, an endangered species biologist with the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. "Monarchs need action now, and that means protecting their overwintering sites on the coast, restoring their breeding habitat inland, and addressing the overuse of pesticides."

The latest species status assessment states that the eastern monarch population's extinction probability ranges from 48 percent to 69 percent within the next 60 years. The predictions for the western monarch are even more dire, with a 98 percent to 99 percent probability of extinction within 60 years. Climate change, excessive pesticide use, and habitat loss are the primary threats to the western migratory monarch populations. Longer and more severe droughts threaten western monarch breeding habitats and the availability of water, nectar, and host plants like native milkweed.

Listing the monarch as threatened under the Endangered Species Act would provide tailored conservation initiatives that prioritize protections for overwintering habitat and allow for restoration of critical breeding grounds. While we wait for this decision to be finalized, our efforts to provide habitat for monarchs and other [native pollinators](#) can start at home and in our communities. Through the National Wildlife Federation's [Native Plant Habitats](#), individuals, schools, community groups, and local governments can all create native habitat in urban and suburban areas to increase habitat connectivity and provide stepping stones for the monarchs during their migration.

Risk for Winterkill Low at Season's Midpoint



While ice formation on many lakes in North Dakota came early this year, with fishable hardwater available shortly after Thanksgiving, agents of the North Dakota Game & Fish Department (NDG&F) aren't anticipating much in terms of winterkill this season as conditions have moderated since then, and a large portion of the state remains snow-free as of Jan. 31. These factors, as well as others, set the stage for a good chance of survivability for the state's fish populations, according to Paul Bailey, NDG&F South Central Fisheries District Supervisor.

"[The chance for winterkill] is really low right now, given where we're at. Water levels are still pretty good in many of our lakes around the state, which is one factor that impacts the likelihood of winterkill occurring," Bailey explains, adding "another one is the amount of snowfall that we've had. That snow acts as a light barrier on top of the ice preventing light penetration into the water, where we can still get some photosynthesis and oxygen production happening by the plants and algae that are still alive in the lake."

Winterkill varies by water body, based on not only the features of the lake, but also in the fish species which reside in it. Those lakes with inflowing water – be it a river, creek, or even small seeps on the

shorelines - typically don't suffer winterkill as badly or as often as more stagnant bodies. Further, deeper lakes often don't winterkill as frequently as shallower ones. Across fish species, trout are the most sensitive to low dissolved oxygen, beginning to stress physiologically when the threshold goes below 5 parts per million (ppm). Walleyes and northern pike tend to show negative effects at 3.4 and 2.8 ppm respectively, with perch and bluegills being impacted at around 1.5ppm. Bullheads and fathead minnows can survive in waters where dissolved oxygen is 1 ppm or less.

Even certain areas of lakes can suffer winter kills while the main body remains unaffected, such as small, shallow bays which are limited in connectivity to the rest of the water. In such places, partial winterkills can occur if schools of fish cannot get out of the area as dissolved oxygen levels drop. These situations are also not likely this year, according to Bailey, as surface conditions on the ice on much of the state's lakes will allow for at least some oxygenation of the water via algae and remaining plants in those Shallows.

"Right now, a lot of our lakes don't have that thick layer of snow, which allows more oxygen production within the lake itself, so that's another factor benefiting us right now. Just the overall winter severity being a little bit less has certainly reduced the winterkill threat," he states.

Each year in February, the NDG&F checks dissolved oxygen levels on bodies of water to determine spring management requirements, in case those lakes lose some or all of their fish populations. Still a couple weeks out, it's likely concerns will be minimal in relation to recent winters such as 2022-23, which saw more than 50 lakes in the state suffer full or partial winter kills.

"We're a little bit away from kicking off [oxygen sampling], typically we see our lowest dissolved oxygen levels occurring in that mid-February timeframe. Then after that, the sun starts getting higher in the sky, daylight increases and we start getting a little melting, getting rid of some of that snow on top of the ice. Really historically where we see the low point in dissolved oxygen levels in many of our lakes and where most winter kills are to occur is that mid-February timeframe. So that's the timeframe we often conduct most of our dissolved oxygen monitoring. So, we're a few weeks away from that, but it's looking pretty good out there, based just on the eyeball test," Bailey concludes.

Following those surveys of dissolved oxygen levels in at-risk lakes, the agency posts waters where winterkill is a possible concern at: <https://gf.nd.gov/fishing/winterkill-watch-list>. No lakes suffered any major winterkill in 2024.

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

#HaltTheHeist

By: NWF Staff



Our nation's public lands provide us with innumerable benefits: habitat for wildlife, protection of important Indigenous sites, and endless opportunities for solace and recreation. But now these lands are in jeopardy.

The State of Utah filed suit against the United States—and 13 states supported it—claiming the federal government unconstitutionally holds more than 18.5 million unappropriated acres of public land in the state. At the same time, Utah launched a multipronged advertising campaign to convince people that this is a good idea.

But the devil is in the details. While these 14 states claim they only want to manage these lands, history shows that, given the opportunity, states sell off their public lands. Utah has sold more than 4 million acres. Idaho has sold more than 1.7 million acres. New Mexico has sold more than 4 million acres. If states get their hands on our public lands, they will sell them.

And it gets worse. These 14 states claim they only want to own Bureau of Land Management lands, but they also claim that the federal government can only constitutionally own property for military bases and the nation's capital. By that logic, the federal government couldn't own any BLM lands in Utah. Nor could it own national parks, monuments, forests, or wildlife refuges anywhere in the United States.

Fortunately, in January, the U.S. Supreme Court announced it would not hear this case— which is very good news— but we know that Utah is now very likely to file this lawsuit in federal district court. So we must remain vigilant.

Let's be clear: this is about the potential disposal and selloff of our public lands, which would forever remove our ability to use these lands and carry on outdoor traditions. That means that if Utah were to prevail, the very idea of public lands in the United States could come crashing down. It's time for Americans to defend one of our nation's best ideas - public lands!

Wildlife Benefits of Virtual Fence use for Livestock Management

By: Cara Greger



When my family adopted two lab puppies in 2013, we decided to buy a PetSafe Wireless pet containment system. Dan trained the two little pups to learn where the boundary was and hear the warning call (audible cue) and then test the boundary and feel the shock (electrical cue). The training went smoothly and kept the dogs in our yard for the most part. We lived along US Highway 12, a two lane, heavily used by semi-trucks road that we had lost other dogs on because they got away from their fence or chain or were just tempted by dead animal smells from across the road. We had 8 beautiful acres we wanted the dogs to be able to explore and we were not around all the time. It was so much better than a chain link fence, keeping them kenneled all the time, or other methods used in the past.

When I moved to Belfield and started my work with the North Dakota Wildlife Federation (NDWF), I started working with ranchers. I started researching and hearing about new ranch management techniques. Soil health, Precision Agriculture, Precision Livestock management, and so many more new ways to make the animals, the environment and the food humans eat healthier. One way to achieve these goals was the implementation of Virtual fencing. Virtual fencing can help managers move cattle over their pasture to have better utilization of the grass. Managers can make sure that disturbance is equal within a given pasture. In a rotational system, this would make all the cumbersome cross fencing unnecessary. Less impediments for wildlife travel or collisions with fencing materials. The other exciting use is to protect riparian areas from overgrazing and not having to fence out areas. Virtual fencing allows for the controlling of the distribution, timing and duration of livestock grazing on rangelands. Border fences are still recommended for the safety of livestock and humans.

Research is being done by many land grant universities including North Dakota State University (NDSU) and South Dakota State University (SDSU) on the effectiveness of using virtual fences. Researchers look at how wildlife habitat is affected, how forage is used and the health of the animals.

Results have been encouraging and are being shared at events being held in North Dakota. I attended a workshop at the Hettinger Research Center where staff from NDSU and SDSU shared their findings. A rancher from Bison, SD also shared his experience using virtual fences with his sheep herd. Then we were able to look at the equipment and practice putting on collars. An NRCS representative shared how there are new government cost share programs to help land managers with costs. A representative from Gallagher company showed the virtual fence product that they sell and answered any questions about the product.

How does Wildlife benefit from Precision Livestock Management? Permanent fencing can result in management limitations, land fragmentation, wildlife risks, and is a major financial investment for ranchers and land management agencies. Permanent fences provide no flexibility in changing pasture size, manipulating grazing distribution, or protecting sensitive habitats within a pasture. So if your management goals are to manage riparian health, post-fire vegetation recovery, or improve livestock distribution which all in turn help wildlife habitat, there are new technologies in precision livestock management to help. Virtual fencing is one such technology.

Learn more about this exciting technology:

<https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/pubs/az2079-2024.pdf>

<https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/sites/default/files/2024-09/Effectiveness%20as2241-6.pdf>

Virtual Fencing Rangelands Gateway serves as a great hub to find all things virtual fencing.

<https://rangelandsgateway.org/virtual-fence>

Here is the current cost tool that Dr. Ryan Reuter from Oklahoma State University created.

<https://reuter.shinyapps.io/vfcostr/>

Here is a great YouTube series put together by Oregon State University and The Nature Conservancy.

<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLXJvsDubulbOzpsiVIPJ9LdWwshhs4UPF&feature=shared>

If you want some podcasts to listen:

Agriculture Applied: More than Dirt

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/2rFufCSyB5OwTGG8yWx2Rj?si=VDPSzPbKQ-mtMnx-fgmNVw>

Working Ranch Radio Show

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/09yLiSsfgEkG962LQToG9E?si=OV3c8Mw0Tq-xEcWXDFXhCQ>

Down to Earth: The Planet to Plate Podcast

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/3AkDGMryZh0metWdqPQ0Da?si=jBpGb43WSwKrmxjhCBUs>

Secretary Burgum Has Opportunity, Responsibility to Steward Wildlife, Lands, Natural Resources with a Balanced Approach

Mary Jo Brooks Jan 30, 2025



WASHINGTON, D.C. — The bipartisan confirmation of former North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum to lead the Department of the Interior provides an opportunity for collaborative, balanced, and responsible stewardship of our nation’s public lands and waters.

“The National Wildlife Federation congratulates Secretary Doug Burgum on his confirmation and looks forward to working with him collaboratively on stewarding America’s lands and waters so wildlife can thrive, rural communities prosper, and all Americans can enjoy opportunities for hunting, fishing, hiking, and other outdoor recreation,” said [Collin O’Mara](#), president and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation.

“At his confirmation hearing, Secretary Burgum made clear that he understands the importance of a balanced and collaborative approach in responsibly managing public lands for multiple uses, including wildlife conservation and outdoor recreation, and the Department’s obligations to uphold Tribal treaty rights and sovereignty. Now more than ever, our nation is depending on Secretary Burgum’s leadership for science-driven wildlife recovery and management, habitat restoration that supports community resilience, appropriately-sited low-emission energy, and reductions in pollution through common-sense carbon and methane management so that our lands and waters flourish for generations to come.”

Protect Your Rangeland from Woody Encroachment

Join us to learn from experts and local producers on how to control woody encroachment, like juniper, on your rangelands

SPEAKERS INCLUDE

MIKE GERBIG- DICKINSON NRCS

BENJAMIN GEAUMONT- NDSU RESEARCH ASSOCIATE/ PROFESSOR WILDLIFE AND RANGE

DR. DILLON FOGARTY - NDSU ASSISTANT PROFESSOR NATURAL RESOURCE SCIENCES

LITTLE MISSOURI RANCH SUPPLY DEMONSTRATION OF EQUIPMENT THAT GRINDS UP WOODY PLANTS

WHERE: MARMARTH COMMUNITY CENTER, 911 MAIN ST, MARMARTH, ND 58643

WHEN: FEBUARY 19, 2025

TIME: 1:00- 4:00 PM

NDSU

EXTENSION
SLOPE COUNTY

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

LILY MCFADDEN- LILLIAN.MCFADDEN@NDSU.EDU 1-701-879-6270

CARA GREGER- CGREGER.NDWF@GMAIL.COM OR 1-320-808-4897



COUNTY COMMISSIONS, NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY AND U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATING. NDSU DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE IN ITS PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES ON THE BASIS OF AGE, COLOR, GENDER EXPRESSION/IDENTITY, GENETIC INFORMATION, MARITAL STATUS, NATIONAL ORIGIN, PARTICIPATION IN LAWFUL OFF-CAMPUS ACTIVITY, PHYSICAL OR MENTAL DISABILITY, PREGNANCY, PUBLIC ASSISTANCE STATUS, RACE, RELIGION, SEX, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, SPOUSAL RELATIONSHIP TO CURRENT EMPLOYEE, OR VETERAN STATUS, AS APPLICABLE. DIRECT INQUIRIES TO VICE PROVOST FOR TITLE IX/ADA COORDINATOR, OLD MAIN 201, NDSU MAIN CAMPUS, 701-231-7708, NDSU.EOAA@NDSU.EDU. THIS PUBLICATION WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE IN ALTERNATIVE FORMATS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES UPON REQUEST, 701-231-7881. TO REQUEST AN ACCOMMODATION, PLEASE CONTACT LILY MCFADDEN AT 701-879-6270 BY FEBRUARY 5TH TO MAKE ARRANGEMENTS.

EXPLORE Act Signed into Law

By Nick Simonson

Last week, after the Senate passed it via unanimous consent in December, President Joe Biden signed into law House Resolution 6492, better known as the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act. Aimed at opening more access for hunters and anglers on federal lands, and encouraging better promotions of those opportunities by the agencies that manage them along with more and better access for disabled individuals, veterans and active military and youth in the outdoors, the bi-partisan EXPLORE Act was a bill more than a decade in the making, according to Paul Sanford, Director for Equitable Access Policy for the Wilderness Society.



“The EXPLORE Act is really broad - the biggest in a generation - sweeping recreation policy legislation that will improve access to the outdoors for youth, families, people with disabilities, veterans, active duty service members and people who live in nature-deprived areas,” Sanford explains, adding that in 2014 after discussion on the base matters of access in the act, “a coalition of organizations came together to work on this issue, and we started drafting legislative text in 2016.”

The EXPLORE Act combines multiple pieces of legislation brought up over the past decade under one banner bill, and in the process preserves and advances a number of opportunities to open the outdoors to people of varied backgrounds across the nation.

Additionally, the act helps smaller communities leverage grants for parks and places of outdoor recreation within their bounds which allow for increased access to lands and waterways.

“One of the things that EXPLORE does is that it makes permanent a program called the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Grant Program. This program provides funding to local communities to establish new parks and improve existing parks to enhance recreational access, so that five additional cities in the Dakotas will be eligible to apply for grant funding,” Sanford points out, adding, “the EXPLORE act extends the Every Kid Outdoors program, which provides every fourth grade student in

America a park pass, so they and their families can visit places like Theodore Roosevelt National Park without paying a fee. So we're really happy it made it across the finish line."

While the road to approval by congress wasn't always easy, and a number of legislative ideas were combined, introduced, discussed and debated, with even a last minute attempt by Texas Senator Ted Cruz to scuttle the legislation, the Wilderness Society and other nonprofit conservation groups worked to set it up for success. The approval via unanimous consent prevented any last minute introductions of more advantageous language some organizations were hoping for, most were satisfied at what the enacted language has accomplished and perhaps even more so, what it stands for.

"EXPLORE clearly establishes the principle that recreation, hunting, and fishing are amongst the highest uses of our public lands and waters. It's an acknowledgment of the contribution that recreation makes to the national economy and the physical and mental health of all Americans. So, we see it as a commitment by congress to maximizing recreation opportunities in our parks and forests and ensuring those opportunities are available for generations to come," Sanford concludes.

More information on the EXPLORE Act and the Wilderness Society can be found at wilderness.org.



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



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Conservation Notes

ND Game and Fish Department PLOTS Program Building on Success

Issue #109, January 2025

Ninety-three percent of land in North Dakota is privately owned. In 1997, the Game and Fish Department (GFD) recognized that access was a critical need for hunters. In response to that need, GFD developed the Private Lands Open to Sportsmen or PLOTS program. The program was initiated to provide hunting access for walk-in hunting on private lands. Landowners are paid by GFD to voluntarily enter into agreements ranging from 2 years to 30 years using funds from the sale of hunting licenses. At present, there are 837,000 acres of PLOTS lands, down from the record high of 1 million acres in 2017. No state tax dollars are used to fund PLOTS Agreements.

But, in its 28th year, the PLOTS program needs some updating to keep working effectively for hunters and landowners. GFD is in the process of identifying ways to increase hunter access. Several features could be modified or added to the PLOTS program to attract more landowners to participate and improve habitat on PLOTS lands. Other access programs could be developed to complement the PLOTS program and open additional access opportunities for hunters.

GFD should use the results of the recent Habitat and Access Summit with additional input from hunters and landowners to improve and expand the PLOTS program and other complementary access programs. The sooner these improvements can be implemented, the sooner hunters will realize the benefits of additional access.

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

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.

April 5 – NDWF Board Meeting, Big Spenders Event, Valley City
January 9th - 10th, 2026 – NDWF Annual Convention, Location TBD

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:

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