

North Dakota outdoors: North Dakota Outdoors in numbers

By Doug Leier



I was compelled to jot down some interesting numbers that pertain to North Dakota’s outdoors as Jeb Williams, Game and Fish Department director, recently addressed the joint Senate and House Legislative Natural Resource committees.

Did you know the Game and Fish Department manages 439 fishable waters which make up 851,462 acres? For comparison

sakes, North Dakota is made up of 70,704 square miles. Land is 68,900 square miles, while water is 1,804 square miles; of those there are 1,330 square miles that are considered fishable.

Fourteen million fish were stocked in those waters last year (second highest on record), including 37 community fishing ponds in urban areas providing more proximate fishing access to underserved anglers.

Also, recent numbers showed that 142,272 residents and 55,379 nonresidents bought fishing licenses in 2024.

In 2024, the state permitted 84 fishing tournaments, 41 of which were nonprofit. A total of 7,719 anglers participated and the tournaments paid \$25,000 in conservation fees and \$2.2 million in entry fees.

In addition, access to North Dakota’s fisheries by boat is aided by 294 boat ramps installed and maintained through various local partnerships.

Among the many responsibilities of the department’s wildlife division, agency staff manages nearly 222,000 acres on 243 wildlife management areas. Of that, 103,761 acres are owned and 117,747 are leased.

As a measure of hunting, the universally required general game license sales broke down to 100,832 residents and 49,567 nonresidents for 2024. The 2024 deer gun allocation was 50,100 and deer bow sales in 2024 broke down to 23,993 residents and 3,113 nonresidents.

Looking at the deer hunting numbers; our youth deer broke a record in 2024 with 6,503 licenses issued at age 11 for antlerless deer and at age 14 for any deer.

Looking at the popular private land program for comparison’s sake: from 1999-2001, the budget was \$250,000 and now for 2023-25 is over \$27 million. This includes the important Private Land Open To Sportsmen program, which featured 836,000 acres in 2024. Also within that included the Working Lands program at 506,568 acres; CRP Access at 204,815 acres; Habitat Plots at 61,729 acres; and the Wetland Reserve Program at 41,518 acres.

The wildlife division oversees the department’s chronic wasting disease surveillance efforts and the effort to increase education and awareness of the disease. In 2009, the first positive test was found. Looking at the testing from the last data shows that from 2000-22, more than 47,000 animals were tested and in 2023 more than 2,500 animals were tested.



Did you know the Game and Fish Department manages 439 fishable waters which make up 851,462 acres? Submitted photo

Did you know the department’s hunter education program has certified 250,000 graduates, which figures to an average of about 5,000 per year.

The enforcement division consists of 39 fulltime game wardens covering 70,698 square miles. North Dakota is the 19th largest state but the 47th in terms of game wardens.

For comparison, South Dakota has 87 conservation officers.

These wardens in 2024 made 39,531 resident field checks and 13,626 nonresident field checks. Also, 2,401 citations were issued, and 71 safety and assistance responses were logged with 131 landowner complaints taken.

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