

# Leave the baby animals in the wild

North Dakota Outdoors  
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Springtime into early summer is when we start seeing baby birds, bunnies, fawn deer, ducklings and goslings making their way into the world. While it's heartwarming to spot these tiny creatures, many people don't know what to do when they come across one. Whether you're walking through the woods, across the prairie or in your own back yard, it's important to know what to do and even more what not to do.

**1. Baby Birds: Leave them where they are.** One of the most common wildlife encounters during spring is finding a baby bird on the ground. This can be alarming, especially if it appears to be abandoned or injured. However, before jumping into action, consider a few things.

**Do:** If you find a baby bird that is still featherless or covered with very few feathers (a nestling), gently place it back in its nest if you can find it. Most birds won't abandon their young if they've been touched by humans.

**Don't:** Don't assume the bird is abandoned simply because it's on the ground. Many young birds, known as fledglings, leave the nest before they can fly but still rely on their parents for feeding and protection. In fact, fledglings are often seen hopping around on the ground, learning how to navigate the world. Intervening by taking them home or keeping them from their parents can be harmful. Let the parents continue their work.

**2. Baby Rabbits: Leave them alone.** Baby rabbits are one of the most misunderstood animals. It's natural to feel compelled to help a baby rabbit you come across, especially if it's all alone in the grass.

**Do:** If you find a baby rabbit that appears to be unharmed, leave it alone. Mother rabbits typically only visit their nests once or twice a day to feed their young, so the babies may

seem abandoned when they are, in fact, just waiting for mom to return.

**Don't:** Don't try to "rescue" the baby by picking it up and taking it home. The mother rabbit may avoid the nest if it smells human scent on the babies. Your best bet is to leave the rabbit in its natural environment and let nature take its course. In some cases, people mistakenly "rescue" baby rabbits that are just fine and might actually cause more harm by disturbing the nest.

**3. Baby Ducklings: Keep the family together.** Baby ducks, like other baby wildlife, are cute, but they also need their parents. Ducklings are often found near bodies of water, where they can quickly get into trouble if separated from their mothers.

If you come across baby ducklings and the mother is nearby, chances are she'll guide them back to safety. Sometimes a mother duck can be found across the road from her ducklings and she will do her best to bring them safely back together.

**Don't:** Never take ducklings home. While it may be tempting to raise them as pets, wild ducklings need to stay with their mothers to learn vital survival skills. It's illegal to take wild animals from their natural habitat.

**The Bottom Line: Let nature take its course.** Whether it's a fawn, baby bird, rabbit, or duckling, the key to handling these situations is restraint. If the animal appears healthy and capable of surviving on its own, the best thing you can do is leave it where it is. In most cases, nature has already provided the best care it can offer.

Animals are resilient, and often, the best way to help is by not getting involved. Keep in mind that your well-meaning actions could inadvertently disrupt a fragile ecosystem or prevent young from receiving the proper care from parents.

So, next time you come across a baby animal, remember in many cases, the best "rescue" is to step back and let nature do its job.

SYTTENDE MAI  
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Elbow Lake. The land surface is described as gently rolling, the soil is a dark, sandy loam, very fertile and good for raising small grains, corn, potatoes, grasses, livestock, and even fruit. Knut and his wife Ingeborg settled in a homestead there where they both made their home until they died.

The population of Stony Brook in 1878, six years after they moved there had grown to 578 consisting largely of persons either born in Norway or born of Norse parents.

The year was 1872 when Knut, Ingeborg, and their six children Nils, Hans, Ragnhild, Andrew, Tollef, and Mary came to Stony Brook. Knut and his family along with Nils N. Brevig Sr. and his family of Valborg Norway were one of the original settlers of Stony Brook and once again they became prosperous farmers. Knut planted a grove of trees on his farm, built a log cabin and other buildings aided by his energetic and always busy wife Ingeborg. Knut helped build the church, school, library, and was on the governing board of the Stony Brook municipality. Both Knut and Ingeborg were very active in the church.

Knut and Ingeborg's children also did well. Their son Hans K. Vigen also prospered as a farmer, having a fine farm with modern buildings and improvements. He was married twice, both wives died young. He had 3 children. Hans held many offices of trust in Stony Brook. He also played the accordion just like my Dad did. Hans is Dad's uncle so it is possible my Dad learned to play the accordion from him. It is said that Hans Vigen was afraid of neither man, beast, nor devil so Hans was also the local

Constable. When he was a lad him and his brother Andrew went down to the Indian camp and the Indians invited them to a meal of muskrat meat which they enjoyed. Hans also traded with the Indians although neither could understand the others language so they used sign language.

A younger son Andrew K. Vigen bought a tree claim from C.O. Kolle and he enlarged the grove. He erected good buildings on his farm. He was one of the most strenuous workers in Stony Brook and was ably aided by his good wife Georgine. He became the owner of a fine farm but he eventually sold out and moved to Canada where two of his sons had taken homesteads. He purchased a section of land up there. Andrew and his wife Georgine had 8 children.

Another son Tollef K. Vigen is the owner of a fine farm also. He acquired part of the old homestead of his father, Knut O. Vigen, and part consists of other land he bought. He planted a nice grove of trees and he erected modern and substantial farm buildings, doing all the building and carpenter work himself. He married Karine Gerhardson and they had 8 children.

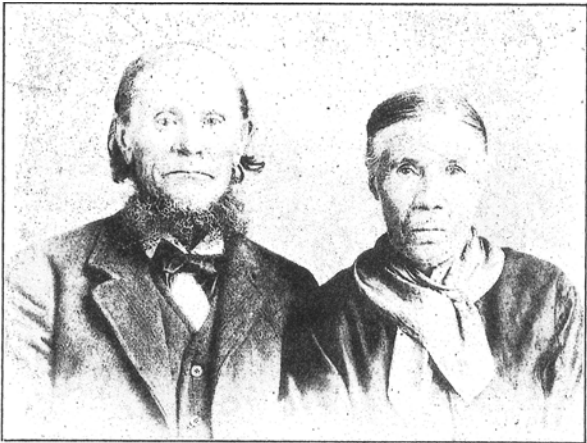
The fourth son Nils K. Vigen (my great grandpa) bought some land which he improved to some extent and then bought another farm which he has improved by planting a grove of trees and erecting some buildings. Nils married Anna Sannan, a widow, and they had 4 children; Clara (my grandma), Louis, Arndt, and Sander. Nils and his wife Anna were very active in their church and the Stony Brook community. Nils held the office of Supervisor and road overseer, he was also a carpenter and a builder. There is no further record that

I could find of the daughters Ragnhild and Mary. I assume they married and their names are changed.

When a person immigrated from Norway to America they needed a sponsor in America and they had to prove they could provide for themselves and would not be a burden to the state. My great grandpa Nils would sponsor Norwegian men and he would bring them to his farm by Stony Brook where they would work for a year or so to learn how to farm on the prairies. This is where my grandpa Severin and his brothers came to learn to farm. So that is how my grandpa and grandma met as grandpa married Nils's daughter!

What's interesting about all this is that many of the homesteaders who came to Wells County, Benson County, and other parts of North Dakota, came through Stony Brook township. If this describes your ancestors I suggest you get the book History of Stony Brook Township by Louis O. Foss. There are a lot of stories of recognizable names in it.

My grandparents Severin and Clara after they married homesteaded in Wells County, North Dakota and they had 8 children. Norris, Cora, Sanster, Ernest, Muriel, Elmer, Agnes, and Ethel. Elmer is my dad, he married Lorraine Olson Lindbo and they had 6 children. Duane, Arlyss, Darrell, Bradley, Cheryl, and Mark. My Mom and Dad farmed the land my grandparents homesteaded on. And so now we're down to



Darrell Hovland's great, great grandpa and his wife, Ingeborg.

my generation and the family tree keeps growing. As you can see I came from a long line of farmers and I am very proud of that heritage.

Many of you may remember the Sannan family, they lived just a quarter mile from us in Fram township. There were 5 brothers and their mother. The 5 brothers were quite often referred to as the "Sannan boys" even though they were all as old as my Dad and older. The Sannan's were the best people ever put on this earth.

My great grandpa's wife Anna was the widow of Lars Sannan who was killed in a well digging accident in Stony Brook in the late 1890's. So indirectly we are related to the Sannan's. Next year I will write more about the Sannan's and will also write about my Mom's family, the Olson's and Lindbo's, who also came from Norway.

So until then as our old friend Paul Harvey would say "Now you know the rest of the story!" And as our other old friend Olaf Harvey would say "Goddag!"

Thanks for letting me share my story with you.

*Source for this story is the History of Stony Brook Township by Louis O. Foss.*

# POLARIZATION and EXTREMISM

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE  
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"I think those two things will have an immediate impact," Armstrong said early Saturday.

The property tax package is funded with earnings from the state's \$12 billion Legacy Fund. Armstrong said if lawmakers allow the fund to continue to grow, it could put most homeowners on a path to paying zero property taxes within a decade.

"What a legacy for our kids and grandkids, to be able to have a significant amount paid toward their property tax," said House Majority Leader Mike Lefor, R-Dickinson.

House Minority Leader Zac Ista, D-Grand Forks, told his colleagues he's glad they spent more time on the "real issues facing North Dakotans" this year than they had in recent years, referring to culture war issues that dominated much of the 2023 session.

"Let that be the start of a positive trend for our body, and let us commit to resisting the pull of polarization and extremism," Ista said.

Some, including Armstrong, said the Legislature missed an opportunity to do more to address the state's housing and workforce needs.

"But those are tough issues, so we always have more time for that," Armstrong said.

## State hospital, behavioral health

Legislators approved \$300 million to construct a new State Hospital in Jamestown, which will replace an outdated facility. The project will provide 140 beds to serve people in need of acute mental health services.

Rep. Jon Nelson, R-Rugby, who chaired the division of the House Appropriations Committee that handled the budget for Health and Human Services, said that project is critical for the state. Lawmakers had considered reducing the funding to \$285 million, but ultimately approved \$300 million. The Office of Management and

Budget will oversee construction of the project.

"It was our highest priority in our section with the Human Service budget," Nelson said.

Lawmakers approved other investments in regional behavioral health services, including nearly \$13 million to create 24 new in-patient acute psychiatric beds in Grand Forks and \$1.5 million for 10 beds in Williston.

Legislators also fully funded the Free Through Recovery and Community Connect programs that help people with recovery support.

## Prison overcrowding

The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation budget includes \$28.4 million for payments to county and regional jails, which are housing inmates due to crowding at state prisons. The department is looking to staff and operate unused space in Grand Forks County's new jail expansion for some state prisoners. Armstrong's administration secured a letter of intent from the Grand Forks County Commission to enter into an agreement, with terms still being finalized.

The budget also includes more than \$35 million to complete the Heart River Correctional Center in Mandan, the first state prison designed for women. Another \$8 million is dedicated for a temporary facility to add beds for the Missouri River Correctional Center and \$20 million to design and plan a new medium-security prison that's proposed to be built next to the State Penitentiary.

A group of three bills backed by the corrections department aims to keep people out of the criminal justice system and lead to a lower recidivism rate after inmates are released.

The recidivism rate was a point of discussion as Attorney General Drew Wrigley backed what he called a truth-in-sentencing bill. Senate Bill 2128 sought to make sure inmates in the state prison system spend most of their sentence behind bars, but it was defeated in the House.

## Education funding

K-12 education was a major topic for lawmakers, but proposals to establish private school vouchers or Education Savings Accounts did not survive the session. Armstrong vetoed one bill because it only affected private school students, and lawmakers defeated a more comprehensive bill, in large part due to the high price tag.

Lawmakers did approve a bill establishing public charter schools in North Dakota for the first time.

Legislators voted down proposals to provide free school meals to all students, an idea that was strongly supported by the public.

Lawmakers did include \$7.3 million in the Department of Public Instruction budget to make free lunch available to students from families within 225% of the federal poverty level. That's an increase from 200% of the poverty line that was funded in the 2023 session. It means a family of four with an income of about \$72,000 would qualify for free school lunches.

The Together for School Meals coalition has said it's deeply disappointed the Legislature did not pass universal school meals.

"Free school meals is a policy supported by 79% of North Dakotans and championed by over 80 local organizations committed to ending child hunger," said Amy Jacobson, executive director of Prairie Action ND and a member of the coalition. "This bill had the power to put real money — an estimated \$850 per child per year — back into the pockets of hardworking parents."

The overall Department of Public Instruction budget contains a 2.5% increase of the per-pupil payment for each year of the biennium, raising it to \$11,349 in fiscal year 2026 and \$11,633 the following year. The Senate advocated for 3% each year.

Legislation signed by Armstrong will make public K-12 schools phone-free, requiring

personal electronic devices to be stowed and inaccessible during instructional time. The law takes effect Aug. 1.

## Culture war bills

Lawmakers debated several controversial issues that ultimately failed. A resolution urging an end to same-sex marriage passed the House but later was defeated in the Senate.

Lawmakers also defeated a bill to require the display of the Ten Commandments in schools and public colleges and rejected a resolution that declared the kingship of Jesus Christ.

The Legislature spent a considerable amount of time on policing the content in public libraries and bathrooms at public schools.

Armstrong vetoed a bill that addressed content in public libraries and K-12 schools, which expanded on legislation approved two years ago. Failure to comply could have cost the library or school state funding and resulted in criminal charges.

"The bill imposes vague and punitive burdens on professionals and opens the door to a host of unintended and damaging consequences for our communities," Armstrong said in his veto message.

Armstrong signed a bill that prevents K-12 public schools from building new all-gender, multistall bathrooms. Lawmakers added an exemption for existing restrooms after schools complained they would have to spend millions to bring their facilities into compliance. Schools could be fined if they don't comply with the bathroom policy and other regulations in the same section of code, including a requirement for schools and teachers to inform a students' parents if they learn the child is transgender.

The governor also signed a bill that amends Century Code to state "words used to reference an individual's gender mean the individual's sex," a proposal some critics called discriminatory to transgender and intersex North Dakotans.

## Property rights

Landowner groups and local government officials argued with lawmakers this session to maintain local control, though frequently ended up on the losing side of the debate.

House Bill 1258 gave the Public Service Commission more authority over setback rules on large electrical transmission lines, taking away authority from townships and counties.

A man wears a hat advocating for local control during a legislative hearing at the North Dakota Capitol on Jan. 30, 2025. (Jeff Beach/North Dakota Monitor)

Sen. Terry Wanzek, R-Jamestown, represents an area where a large power line is planned. A township created a half-mile setback from residences, and Wanzek said such rules hinder the project and threaten others like it across the state.

House Bill 2321, which aimed to strengthen the position of landowners in negotiations with oil and infrastructure developers by helping them recoup legal fees, had support in the Senate but ultimately failed in the House.

The bill was sponsored by Sen. Jeff Magrum, R-Hazleton, who represents an area where the controversial Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline is routed. His other bills to strengthen landowner rights and limit carbon capture development made little headway.

On the final day of the session, lawmakers approved a bill that aims to keep North Dakota on the forefront of rare earth mineral development. The Northwest Landowners Association argued the bill is unconstitutional.

## Loss of lawmaker

During the session, House members mourned the loss of Rep. Josh Christy, R-Fargo, who died in February at age 43.

Last week, Armstrong signed two bills sponsored by Christy, who had developed a niche in the Legislature on the subjects of artificial intelligence and