The over looked and under appreciated Sandhill Crane

North Dakota Outdoors
By Doug Leier, Biologist
N.D. Game & Fish Dept.

Have you ever been sandhill crane hunting? Not just a chance opportunity when a few sandhills drifted through while goose or duck hunting. If you haven't I'd suggest it might be a new or different way to enjoy North Dakota outdoors this fall. Here's a little more information about these overlooked and under appreciated migrants.

About Sandhill Cranes

John Palarski, North Dakota Game and Fish Department migratory game bird biologist explains: "There are four populations of sandhill cranes that migrate through the United States — Rocky Mountain, Lower Colorado River, Eastern and Mid-continent."

The latter population of birds are those that color North Dakota's skies gray in spring and fall, and to the pedestrian looking for, say, color or size differences between one group to the next, there's not much to distinguish one population of sandhills from the others.

Most are differentiated just by where they are breeding and where their migratory paths take them.

"What's interesting about the Mid-continent population of sandhill cranes is that they have four main breeding affiliations or areas where they're breeding," Palarski said. "Some of those birds go up to western Alaska and eastern Siberia to nest, while some go into eastern Alaska and western Canada. Another group goes to far northern Canada, and the fourth breeding affiliation is kind of in that northwestern Minnesota area and eastern and central Canada as well."

North Dakota is an incredibly important stopover site for cranes making long-haul migrations to breeding grounds.

"What the cranes are looking for in North Dakota are our shallow wetlands where they can rest and refuel," Palarski said.

"Considering that some of these birds are migrating a couple thousand miles to places like Siberia, Alaska and northern Canada, North Dakota plays a key role during their migration."

The menu to refuel for the long flight north is diverse for these birds.

"Sandhill cranes are technically omnivorous. While we think of them eating a lot of grains, wetland seeds, vegetation, wetland plant tubers … they're also known to eat amphibians, reptiles and small mammals as well," Palarski said.

Cranes mate for life, biologists tell us, and hang with their dancing partner year-round.

"Typically, their clutch size is two. The chicks will leave the nest and begin foraging right after hatching," Palarski said. "But it takes around 65 to 75 days for them to actually fledge and be able to fly."

While North Dakota and its Central Flyway location plays a key role in helping shuttle cranes from wintering to breeding grounds in spring, the list of sandhills reportedly nesting in North Dakota over time is not long. Much of that has to do with an absence of large, shallow marshes, or bogs, in North Dakota that the cranes prefer for nesting.

"North Dakota has an affiliation with birds breeding in northwestern Minnesota, so we'll still have birds that occasionally drift over into North Dakota to nest," Palarski said.

Crane Hunting 101

Sandhill crane hunting is an often-overlooked option in North Dakota. These underappreciated visitors through North Dakota are very unique. Not just in size, sight and taste.

Their early September migration from Canada in North Dakota provides a different option between early Canada goose and regular waterfowl for hunters. The few thousand hunters each fall are part of a niche group. While small in numbers the draw for sandhill crane hunting can be less competition and congestion.

While the "flyings sticks" look like an easy target, crane hunters are all too familiar with the long necks and keen eyesight flaring many a flock. Most hunters choose a heavy load and magnum option to help balance the odds for efficient, clean kills taken from longer distances.

These birds are notorious for roosting and feeding in different locations. Just because you scout a field in the evening doesn't mean they'll use the same feed for a morning decoy hunt.

Space won't permit the full disclosure on cleaning, preparing and eating. I'll will say that I've made and eaten crane stir fry and jerky with a few other culinary experiments, all of which were better table fare than "roast crane."

A Look At Crane Hunting In North Dakota

1984 – 3,189 hunters, 4,367 cranes harvested

1994 – 2,497 hunters, 6,235 cranes harvested

2004 – 2,491 hunters, 3,967 cranes harvested

2014 – 1,743 hunters, 2,924 cranes harvested

2023 – 3,029 hunters, 5,419 cranes harvested

State maintains 2021 map not discriminatory; Tribes disagree

REDISTRICTING
Continued from page 1

The state of North Dakota wants the 8th Circuit's decision to stand. In previous court filings, attorneys for the state argued that private plaintiffs should not be allowed to destabilize state district maps. The state maintains that the 2021 map is not discriminatory.

The 8th Circuit is the only appellate circuit to rule that private plaintiffs cannot enforce Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. The court originally made this finding in a 2023 case, though the May decision reaffirmed and solidified the position.

The tribes argue that Congress had always intended for private citizens to be able to file lawsuits under the statute.

They also say the federal government cannot be counted on to police racial discriminatory voting practices on its own. The petition cites research that indicates the vast majority of cases brought under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act over the past several decades were filed by private groups like the tribes.

The U.S. Supreme Court has hinted that it may be interested in hearing the case in its upcoming term. In July, the justices agreed to prolong a temporary freeze on North Dakota's legislative district map, which prevents the appellate court's decision from taking effect.

This means that for the time being, voters in the 8th Circuit can still bring private lawsuits under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. It also indicates that North Dakota will likely keep Welte's map in place for the 2026 election.

Background

The lawsuit concerns two voting districts in northern North Dakota — District 9 and District 15.

Before the Legislature adopted the 2021 map, District 9 followed the boundaries of Rolette County. The county includes the Turtle Mountain Reservation and in 2020 had a voting age population that was 74% Native American, according to the Tuesday petition. Richard Marcellais, former chair of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, for years represented the district in the Senate.

Redistricting happens at least every 10 years to adjust district lines following the U.S. census. In 2021, North Dakota discovered it had to change the boundaries of District 9 to meet the minimum population requirement.

The 2021 map approved by the Legislature made District 9 bigger by adding Cavalier County and part of Towner Country. The district was also divided into two subdistricts, which each elected one representative to the House. District 9A was majority Native American and included most of Rolette County, including the Turtle Mountain Reservation. District 9B included a small portion of northern Rolette County, plus Cavalier County and most of Towner County, which made the subdistrict mostly white.

The plaintiffs argue that this made it much harder for Native voters in the district to elect leadership of their choice.

In 2022, Marcellais lost his bid for reelection, marking the first time since 1990 that there were no Native Americans serving in the Senate, the petition states. District 9 only elected one lawmaker backed by the tribes — Rep. Jayme Davis, a Turtle Mountain citizen who represented District 9A. Davis is also a Turtle Mountain citizen.

The Spirit Lake Reservation also opposed the 2021 district map. Over the objections of its leaders, it was placed in District 15, which only had a Native American voting population of about 23%, the petition states. District 15 also did not elect any candidates preferred by Native American North Dakotans in 2022, the plaintiffs argue.

The Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa and Spirit Lake Nation's 2022 lawsuit argued the maps denied them proper representation and asked to be placed in the same voting district.

Welte, the North Dakota federal district judge, granted the plaintiffs' request. His map, imposed in January 2024, places the two reservations into District 9. In the 2024 election, three Native American candidates from that district were elected to the state Legislature: Marcellais, Davis and Rep. Collette Brown, a citizen of the Spirit Lake Nation and plaintiff in the lawsuit. All three are Democrats.

Until 1922, North Dakota didn't allow Native Americans to vote unless they "severed their tribal relations" and assimilated to white culture, according to the petition. The first Native American wasn't elected to the state Legislature until 1970, it notes.

Public Notices

Meeting Notices

HARVEY RURAL AMBULANCE DISTRICT

The Harvey Rural Ambulance District will have a meeting Sept. 17 at the Harvey Ambulance Bay.

Agenda:
6 p.m. to 7 p.m. Public to review mill levy
7 p.m. to 8 p.m. Discussion
8 p.m. Regular meeting and vote

Doug Helm
HRAD President
(Publication dates: Sept. 6, 13, 2025)

NORWAY LAKE TOWNSHIP

Public Budget Hearing
September 22 at 8:30 p.m.
Richard Lynne's garage
For info call 701-202-6067
(Publication dates: Sept. 6, 13, 2025)

TWO RIVERS RURAL AMBULANCE DISTRICT, situated in the North Dakota counties of Eddy, Foster and Wells, will hold a budget hearing and board meeting on September 17, 2025, between 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. This will be held at the Community Ambulance Service of New Rockford, located at 818 1st Avenue North, New Rockford, ND. Board members will be present to answer any questions the members of the District have on the budget.

The budget for TRRAD is available for review prior to the hearing at the offices of the county auditors of Eddy, Foster and Wells Counties.

Board Meeting agenda items include treasurer's report, minutes and other reports from the board members.

(Publication date: Sept. 6, 2025)

NEW ROCKFORD RURAL FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

The New Rockford Rural Fire Protection District board of directors will meet on Wednesday, September 10 at 9 a.m. at the New Rockford Fire Hall.

(Publication date: Sept. 6, 2025)

WELLS TOWNSHIP

WELLS TOWNSHIP will hold a 2026 Public Budget meeting as newly required by HB1176 on Monday, September 15, at noon at the Harvey City Hall.

(Publication dates: Sept. 6, 13, 2025)

MANFRED TOWNSHIP
Public Budget Hearing:

There will be a special meeting, September 16 at 7.30 p.m. in the Manfred Museum for the 2026 Budget. Contact Sec./ Treas. for Budget information at 701-341-2001. Supervisor meeting to follow.

(Publication dates: Sept. 6, 13, 2025)

Notice of Intent to File Application

NOTICE OF INTENT TO FILE APPLICATION

The City of Harvey intends to file an application for federal financial assistance with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Rural Utilities Service. The City is applying for a Preevelopment Planning Grant to help study the existing water system. Any comments regarding this application should be submitted to the City of Harvey.

Karen Nordby, City Auditor
(Publication dates: Sept. 6, 2025)

PUBLIC NOTICES
Because you have a right to know.

Obituaries

Ruth 'Lib' Ardinger

August 1, 1930 - September 3, 2025

Ruth 'Lib' Elizabeth Ardinger, 95, of Hagerstown, MD and formerly of Drake, ND, went to be with the Lord Wednesday, September 3, 2025 at SMP Health St. Aloisius Hospital in Harvey, ND. Ruth has generously donated her body to UND's Deeded Body Program, helping future medical students learn. A Memorial Service will be held at a later date. In lieu of flowers, memorials are preferred to the Trinity Lutheran Church in Drake, ND: P.O. Box 316 Drake, ND 58736.

Ruth Elizabeth was born August 1, 1930 in Hagerstown, MD, daughter of the late Charles Andrew Ardinger and Mildred (Treager) Ardinger. As a resident of Maryland, she was a 1949 graduate of Hagerstown High School. She served in the United States Air Force during the Korean War and continued to celebrate her service to her country until her passing. Ruth was once married to Franklin Boswell, and to this union the couple welcomed a son, Bradley Jayson Boswell.

Ruth owned and operated a grooming shop in Williamsport, MD. She also had a kennel where she raised show stock, Black Danes and Pet Stock Poodles. Ruth also owned and operated pet and grooming shops in California and Arizona.

Ruth was an avid hunter and fisherman. She loved the outdoors, traveling, and camping. Woodworking was also a hobby that she loved. She was a member of the Trinity Lutheran Church in Drake, ND.

Ruth is survived by her daughter-in-law, Pastor Lori Boswell; grandsons, Colter and Ryder; great grandson, Jameson George Boswell, all of Yreka, CA; nieces, nephews and longtime friend, Margaret 'Marge' Catlett.

She was preceded in death by her son, Bradley Jayson Boswell; parents, Charles and Mildred Ardinger; sister, Dorothy (Charles) Beatty; brothers, George (Naomi) Ardinger, Lewis (Pearl) Ardinger; close nephews and nieces.

Arrangements are with the Bethke-Nelson Funeral Home of Drake, ND.

Online condolences may be left at www.nelsonfuneralhomesnd.com.

Donald Valent

June 23, 1932 - June 30, 2025

Don died on June 30, 2025. He was born June 23, 1932 in Fessenden, North Dakota, to Ralph and Anna (Wood) Valent.

He graduated from high school in Fessenden and then went to graduate with a degree in civil engineering from North Dakota Agricultural College in Fargo.

Don became the head of the Highway Department for the State of North Dakota. He designed many of their bridges. He received many recognitions and awards during his career.

He entered the U.S. Army in February of 1958. He was honorably discharged from the Army Reserves in September 1965 in Bismarck, North Dakota.

Don married Florrine Just on September 13, 1963, in New Salem, North Dakota. In their later years, Don and Florrine enjoyed spending winters in Needles, California.

In the fall of 2021 they moved to Laurel, Montana, to be close to family. We didn't think we could get the die-hard North Dakota man to move, but Don loved it from day one.

Preceding Don in death and waiting for him in heaven are his parents Ralph and Anna, his wife of 62 years, Florrine, brother Jimmy, sisters Marjory, Sylvia, Audrey, Doris, Maxine and Betty. Don is survived by his sister Beverly, his brother Richard (Rita), and may nieces and nephews, including Bonnie.

Obituary Policy

The Herald-Press publishes obituaries at no cost, but photos with obituaries require a $7.00 fee. Parties desiring specifically-worded funeral announcements may place them for a fee. The notices are bordered and, when possible, appear on the same page as the obituaries.

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