

North Dakota Outdoors Why High-Grading Isn't Legal In North Dakota

Every winter, as pickup trucks venture onto frozen lakes and steam rises from the first pour of coffee, the world of ice fishing reminds us why it remains one of North Dakota's cold-weather joys.

Beneath the surface, though, the biology of our fisheries shifts into a slower, more fragile state. Oxygen levels dip, fish metabolism changes, and the margin for stress narrows. A few drilled holes and a handful of jigs may look simple from above the ice, but every tug on the line has a biological impact below it. It's exactly why winter angling carries a responsibility that's easy to overlook, especially when the conversation turns to high-grading.

High-grading, for those who may not know the term, is the practice of continuing to catch and release fish after you've already kept a legal limit, hoping to "upgrade" to bigger or more desirable fish. During winter, it becomes even more problematic, both biologically and ethically.

Let me be perfectly clear. High-grading is not legal in North Dakota. For the health of the fish and fishery, it shouldn't be.

Most anglers don't intend to harm fish. Almost everyone I talk with genuinely believes in conservation and wants our fisheries to remain healthy for the next generation. But even good intentions don't change biology. Fish simply don't handle extreme winter catch-and-release well.

Cold air, even colder hands, and extended time on the ice can cause subtle but significant damage.

Take this common scenario: An angler catches a "keeper walleye," lands it on the ice to unhook it, debates whether it's worth keeping, watches it flop around a bit, and then decides it's "not quite big enough." Back down the hole it



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

goes. In January, after spending half a minute on ice crystals sharp enough to freeze-burn human skin, that same fish may swim away looking fine but never fully recover. Sublethal injuries from frozen gills or stressed internal organs often mean mortality happens hours or days later.

That's where the ethical part comes in. If your limit is five fish, but half a dozen more die after being released because you were looking for a thicker perch or a plumper walleye, you've unintentionally doubled your harvest. It's illegal in North Dakota, and it undermines the purpose of limits in the first place.

There's also the matter of time. Fish pulled from deep water during winter can experience barotrauma – swim bladder damage caused by rapid pressure changes. In warm weather, anglers have multiple techniques to reduce those effects. On the ice, options narrow. The



High-grading, for those who may not know the term, is the practice of continuing to catch and release fish after you've already kept a legal limit, hoping to "upgrade" to bigger or more desirable fish.
Photo Credit: NDGF

colder it gets, the quicker a fish's eyes, gills and fins begin to freeze. Decisions need to be made fast.

Some anglers argue that catch-and-release is the very heart of conservation. I'd agree – within reason. Catch-and-release only works when release means survival. Winter complicates that equation. The act of high-grading extends handling time, increases exposure to freezing air, and often leads to more deep-hooking as anglers sort through fish. It's not difficult to see how quickly good intentions can fall short.

So, what's the solution? It's not complicated. Keep what you plan

to keep, and release with purpose. If you're on the fence about a fish's size, make the decision quickly. Avoid laying fish directly on the ice. Keep your hands wet and your tools ready. And maybe most importantly, once you've kept your limit, consider switching to a different species or putting the rod down for the day. Limits are meant to be limits, not goals.

High-quality fisheries don't happen by accident. They're the product of intentional management and ethical angler choices. If we all handle fish with the same care we give our augers, heaters, and ice houses, we'll continue to see

strong perch, walleye and pike populations well into the future.

On a cold February afternoon, that's something worth warming up to.

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Newspapers

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cated to the wider public, participants in the initiative said.

"People think it should be free," Schoch said. "I think people forget about us. People forget about it until they really need us."

Piloting real action

The next step for the initiative is taking forward several pilot projects centered on succession planning, exploring new revenue models, providing print and digital samples for the next generation of news consumers, and developing ready-made promotions and content that can be adopted statewide.

Whether those have a deep impact or not depends on securing grant funding to take them forward, Wehrman said.

The hope is that these don't become moonshots, but practical, replicable interventions.

One of the most immediate concerns is the succession planning component, since so many independent publishers are close to retirement age.

Currently, while group-owned newspapers show stronger margins and sustainability, independent, family-owned papers are under pressure from owners nearing retirement, the high cost of printing and distribution, and the heavy reliance on revenue from public notices.

Younger journalists are interested in taking over the reins of these papers, but are constrained by a lack of training and the need for financing to sustain operations, the research found.

"Succession planning is something that we need to offer newspapers, because there is an urgent need for newspapers to change hands," Wehrman said.

Another aspect those involved in the initiative hope can gain traction is to meet demands of news consumers, particularly younger Gen Z and Millennial ones, for both digital and print versions of a newspaper.

Offering samples of those to non-subscribers may be one way to boost circulation.

"I think there's a lot of optimism coming out of this about all of the different ways the data gathered for this can be used, and a lot of excitement about the positive momentum going forward," Huber said.

Public Notices

PUBLIC NOTICE

Central Plains Water District will be holding its annual meeting on
February 18, 2025, at 10:00 AM at 105 Main Ave S, in Fessenden.
(January 24, 31 & February 7, 2026)

PUBLIC NOTICE

The North Dakota Game & Fish Department announces the following summary of regulations from amendment No. 1 of the 2025-2026 small game, waterfowl, and furbearer proclamation. The 2026 spring light goose conservation order will be in effect Feb. 21 - May 10, 2026. Only light geese may be taken. Light geese include snow geese, blue geese, and Ross's geese. There will be no daily or possession limit on light geese during the conservation order. Apply online at gf.nd.gov. A complete proclamation along with amendment No. 1 that contains regulations for the 2026 spring light goose conservation order is available from the NDGF Department, 100 N Bismarck Expy Bismarck, ND 58501-5095, Ph: (701) 328-6300, or online at gf.nd.gov.
(February 7, 2026)

PROCEEDINGS OF THE MARTIN CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING

Monday; February 2, 2026; 7:00 pm
City Hall
Martin City Council met at City Hall on Monday; February 2, 2026 at 7:00 pm.
Present: Mayor Milton Hase; Council members: Cindy Martin, and Tina Schmitt; Auditor Shonella Lerner.
Absent: Gus Grade, and Travis Monge.
Mayor Hase called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm.
Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD: none
MINUTES: Minutes from January 5, 2026 Regular Meeting were in council packet. M by Schmitt, MS by Martin to approve the minutes as presented. Upon VV, MC.
FINANCIAL REPORTS: Statement of Financial Position and Statement of Activities for January 2026 were in council packet and reviewed. M by Martin, MS by Schmitt to approve the financial reports as presented. Upon VV, MC.
OLD BUSINESS: Burn variance has been approved, no work done on lift station.
NEW BUSINESS: M by Schmitt, MS by Martin to adopt the Model Policy per NDLC forthe Public Comment Period. Upon VV, MC. M by Martin, MS by Schmitt to pay registration and hotel expenses for Auditor to attend the Spring Workshop in Dickinson. Upon VV, MC. New battery and terminals have been installed in the snow plow pickup.
BILLS: M by Schmitt, MS by Martin to approve the following bills for payment: OTCPO 564.90, CPWD 35.79, Circle Sanitation 1,011.25, Shane Hase 55.41, Lautt's Autobody 165.00, NAPA 11.99, Northern Tax 173.00, ND WSI 250.00, Kathleen Hase 100.00, Herald-Press 43.86. Upon VV, MC.
M by Martin, MS by Schmitt to adjourn the meeting at 7:24 pm. Upon VV, MC.
NOTE: These minutes are subject to correction and approval by Council.
Milton Hase, Mayor
Shonella Lerner, Auditor
(February 7, 2026)

FESSENDEN REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING

Monday, February 2, 2026
7:00 P.M.
City Hall Council Chambers
Present: Mayor Donna Young; Aldermen Joel Bartz, Vince Harshbarger, Jeff Johnson, Karl Mogren, Brian Schimelfenig, Ron Widiger, Paula Tweton, City Auditor, Jeff Roehrich, Public Works.
Guests: Lisa Bertrand, Stephanie McNaughton, Trevor McNaughton.
The regular meeting of the Fessenden City Council was called to order by Mayor Donna Young at 7 p.m.
Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
It was moved by Karl Mogren and seconded by Ron Widiger to approve the agenda. Motion carried on voice vote.
Moved by Jeff Johnson and seconded by Brian Schimelfenig to dispense with reading of the minutes from the previous meeting and to approve them; motion carried on voice vote.
Moved by Joel Bartz to approve bills; seconded by Widiger. Motion carried on roll call vote: All voting aye.
Moved by Bartz and seconded by Schimelfenig to table timecard reviewal until available from Black Mountain software. Motion carried on voice vote. Auditor instructed to obtain reports prior to next meeting.
Auditor: Paula Tweton stated that the City's 3 CDs at First International Bank and Trust (FIBT) had been renewed.
Public Works: A lengthy discussion was held regarding lead line replacement. Government funds for this project are available as 60%/40% loan forgiveness. Fessenden's share (40%) could be as high as \$100,000 or more. Factors affecting cost include site visit from engineer, requirement to adhere to all federal guidelines for projects funded by federal government, Department of Labor Davis-Bacon Wage Act which may require hourly wages of \$50 to \$60/hr and contractor payroll reports, and curb/street repair. Considering these factors, it may be more cost effective for the City to undertake the project itself thereby having more control over expenditures. Jeff Roehrich sent out letters and estimates about 60 properties will require lead line replacement. Schimelfenig suggested that costs incurred recently by homeowners required to replace lead lines could be obtained to give residents an idea of the cost. Also discussed were placement of water and sewer lines as code requires them to be 10 feet apart.
Regarding utilities, City is running approximately \$500 short per month for infrastructure/lagoon fee.
UNFINISHED BUSINESS:
Second reading of water/sewer ordinance performed on January 19, 2026, and published in newspaper.
Lagoon: Apex Engineering progress notes provided. Scherbenke has requested an extension of completion date. They continue to work on lagoon weather permitting.
Lead line replacement: As discussed previously in Public Works.
Drain: Moved by Ron Widiger and seconded by Bartz to remove \$1 drain fee from utility bill. Motion carried on voice vote, all voting aye. Moved by Johnson and seconded by Widiger to pass resolution to water/sewer ordinance to remove drain maintenance fee; motion carried on voice vote, all voting aye.
Sidewalk Ordinance: Discussion held regarding Silhan sidewalk which is in violation of city ordinance. Schimelfenig contacted ND League of Cities regarding the issue. Letter will be written to Mr. and Mrs. Silhan to be delivered by sheriff's office. New sidewalk must be poured and in place by July 2, 2026. City attorney to inform them of consequences of not replacing sidewalk. Mr. and Mrs. Silhan will have 30 to 60 days to present the Council with a written plan. Mayor Young reminded the Council that city attorney had told her that the City should back off on this issue and that the State would need to

step in.
Schimelfenig stated need for surveyor after frost is out to survey front line/southeast. Moved by Schimelfenig and seconded by Johnson to hire a surveyor to survey front line of 69 Elm Avenue S. and any adjacent parcels/lots owned by Mr. and Mrs. Silhan. Motion carried on voice vote, all voting aye.
Moved by Johnson and seconded by Mogren for Roehrich to compile list of contractors for sidewalks to obtain costs. Motion carried on voice vote, all voting aye.
Obstruction discussed and fine for such. If City removes sidewalk rubble, cost will be placed on property owner's special assessments.
Should Mr. and Mrs. Silhan provide a written plan and present it at the March 2026 meeting, City may consider extending deadline.
Public Policy: State of North Dakota has mandated cities to include a public comment section in meetings to ensure that citizens may voice their opinions. Moved by Widiger and seconded by Schimelfenig to approve public comment policy format. Motion carried on voice vote unanimously.
Employee Paid Meeting Attendance: Mayor Young objected to Public Works employee Jeff Roehrich being paid holiday overtime of \$60/hr for attending special city council meeting for second reading and vote on water/sewer ordinance for which only city council members and auditor needed to be present. Meeting was held on the evening of Martin Luther King Day. Mogren inquired how much holiday overtime pay was received by auditor. Tweton stated that she did not receive any holiday overtime pay. Historically, employees attend council meetings. Consensus was to make sure that no future meetings would be scheduled on a holiday.
Complaints: Mayor Young received text from resident who stated that 3 people had gotten stuck in snow in front of her house. Roehrich stated that area always filled up with snow. Harshbarger suggested sign to warn drivers.

Mayor Young read written complaint from Robbie Risovi who was unable to attend meeting. She stated that she had come to office to speak to auditor about liquor license. Jeff Roehrich was in office and questioned her as to what she wanted and stated that she could not obtain liquor license and would need to be closed. Later, Roehrich accosted her on the street and told her again that she could not obtain license and would need to be closed. Liquor license was obtained. Ms. Risovi stated that she was very upset and feared retribution because of her complaint but felt City Council needed to know about the incident.
Stephanie McNaughton presented written complaint regarding lead line evaluation at her home. Previous owners had not understood lead line form and had indicated pipes were lead. McNaughton re-tested lines which indicated copper pipes and sent pictures to Public Works employee Roehrich. Original evaluation had been sent in but Roehrich was unable to provide her with information as to whom it had been sent or an address in order to correct this evaluation. She indicated she did not want Roehrich in her home to test pipes as she had already done so. Schimelfenig stated that he surmised most cities allowed public works employees to enter residents' homes. Lisa Bertrand objected strongly to having Roehrich in her home stating that she lived alone and felt uncomfortable with the situation.
Relocation of Public Works Office: Auditor Tweton stated that she was scheduled for training on new software payroll program and informed Public Works employee Roehrich with whom she shares an office of this the preceding week. Policy was that office was to be closed during training sessions. Training needed to occur in office as Tweton needed access to printer for paychecks. Throughout the session Roehrich talked loudly while she was on phone with trainer making it difficult for her to hear to

the point that trainer asked "Who is that?" Tweton informed Roehrich twice that this had nothing to do with him. He persisted in speaking and while she was at printer he went over to her desk to look at her computer monitor. He returned to his desk and Tweton said, "Would you leave the room." Roehrich did not respond. She asked him again, "Would you leave the room" and he responded: "I do my sh--. You do your sh--." At that point, Tweton asked trainer if they could continue and get as much done as they could although Roehrich was still in the office. Roehrich left for the day while she was still on phone with trainer. Tweton was upset as she felt Roehrich had interfered with her ability to perform her job.
Mayor Young was concerned about Roehrich's behavior during Tweton's training as well as an incident that had occurred the previous year for which Roehrich had apologized to Tweton and did not repeat the behavior. Mayor Young was concerned about a pattern of behavior creating a hostile workplace environment and told Roehrich that he was to relocate his desk to the heated city shop on Vine Street by February 4, 2026, and that if he did not do so he could turn in his keys. Roehrich protested suitability of shop and Young said, "Make it work."

Widiger moved to adjourn; seconded by Harshbarger. Meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.
The next regular city council meeting will be held on Monday, March 2, 2026.
Public Comment: None.
It was moved by Widiger and seconded by Schimelfenig to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned at 8 p.m.
General Fund
Ottertail \$696.46
NDPERS \$853.94
NDPERS \$267.40
IRS Monthly Payment \$2,275.26
NDTC \$279.43
Fessenden Park Board \$725.10
Advanced Business Methods \$98.40

ABBREVIATED NOTICE OF INTENT TO AMEND ADMINISTRATIVE RULES RELATING TO AUDIOLOGY AND SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY

TAKE NOTICE that the North Dakota State Board of Examiners on Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology will hold a public hearing to address proposed changes to the N.D. Admin. Code at 12:00pm on Friday, March 13, 2026 at: <https://zoom.us/j/97332114101?pwd=zReZOG1Ua5rJlJhXL6oRUXoQHDqpt8.1>

A copy of the proposed rules may be obtained by writing the North Dakota State Board of Examiners on Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology at PO Box 1338 Bismarck, ND 58502 or calling 701-775-7165. Also, written comments may be submitted to North Dakota State Board of Examiners on Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology at the above telephone number or address at least 24 hours prior to the public hearing.

Dated this Friday of January 30, 2026
Brian Barrett

Visa	\$1,004.45	USPS	\$181.78
Municipal Fund		One Call	\$12.00
Double M Sanitation	\$6,835.00	RDO	\$89.35
Ottertail	\$455.91	Visa	\$102.07
Ottertail	\$143.74	Street Fund	
Ottertail	\$53.76	Ottertail	\$118.32
Ottertail	\$47.54	Ottertail	\$106.26
Central Plains Water Dist.	\$5,000.07	Ottertail	\$1,101.61
Central Plains Water Dist.	\$231.13	Tracy's Market	\$13.25
Apex Engineering	\$7,962.24	TOTAL BILLS	\$30,774.39
Jackson Services	\$780.48		

(February 7, 2026)

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