

## **SOUTH DAKOTA STATE REPORT**

*June 1, 2010*

Jeff Vonk, Secretary  
South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks  
523 E. Capitol  
Pierre, SD 57501

### **Pheasant Population Status**

Pheasant hunters who took to the field in South Dakota found abundant birds during the 2009-2010 hunting season. The estimated pre-hunt population of 8,520,000 birds was the fifth highest during the last 45 years and slightly above the ten year average. The pre-hunt population was down from nearly 10,000,000 birds in 2008. Approximately 70,000 resident and 97,000 non-resident hunters bagged nearly 1,650,000 roosters during the 79 day season. This was the seventh highest harvest in the last 45 years and slightly above the ten year average. Harvest during the 2009-2010 pheasant season was 12% lower than the previous year and reflects the decrease in the 2009 August roadsides brood surveys which is likely related to habitat loss through reduction of statewide CRP acres.

### **Canada Goose Management**

In December, 2009, the Wildlife Division created a Canada Goose Management and Depredation Working Group (WG) as a public involvement mechanism to bring together a diverse group of citizen representatives to assist in the development of recommendations for managing overabundant resident Canada geese. The WG was comprised of sportsmen, landowners, and citizens who had an interest in the management of resident Canada geese. The primary objective of the eight member WG was to foster communication between the Wildlife Division and agricultural producers and sportsmen and to identify specific ideas, opportunities and potential solutions to address Canada goose management and depredation challenges.

Four public meetings were held in December, 2009 and January, 2010 in eastern SD and approximately 100 producers and sportsmen provided valuable input to the WG and the Wildlife Division. In addition, an updated draft of the "South Dakota Resident Canada Goose Management Plan" was posted on the Department's website for public comment in January, 2010. As expected, there were different opinions expressed during the WG meetings and the updated management plan on how to reduce the resident Canada goose population in order to reduce crop damage and meet the population objective of 80,000 – 90,000 birds. However, there was a general consensus that increasing the daily bag limit during the early fall Canada goose hunting season, increasing access for hunters, and using fencing, buffer strips and feeding stations to alleviate goose depredation should be implemented or continued. In 2010, the Wildlife Division will implement an August managed take in 16 eastern SD counties from August 14-29 and increase the daily bag limit from 5 to 8 during the September portion of the Canada goose hunting season. We also plan to work with other Central Flyway states and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service on the possibility of increasing the daily bag limit during the regular Canada goose hunting season.

### **2009 Walk-In Area Program for Hunter Access**

A record level of almost 1.25 million acres of private land was enrolled in the Walk-In Area program for the 2009 hunting season. Despite the net increase in acres statewide, the 2009 enrollment contained 6,069 less acres in permanent, undisturbed habitat for pheasant hunting in eastern South Dakota than in 2008 and 31,318 acres less acres of permanent, undisturbed habitat compared to 2006. This decrease in permanent, undisturbed habitat was due to primarily CRP contract expirations in 2007-09. In 2008, GFP implemented the Controlled Hunting Access Program (CHAP) which provides additional flexibility for the landowner and more control of the number of hunters using the area. Thirteen CHAP areas totaling 16,887 acres were enrolled statewide in 2009.

### **Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)**

In November of 2009, the SD James River Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) received final approval and sign-ups began. This initiative is to enroll 100,000 acres within the watershed to address environmental issues and establish wildlife habitat. Along with the habitat established, landowners will receive an additional payment on top of the CRP payment from the state which allows public access for hunting and fishing. All acres enrolled within the CREP program must include the access component.

Enrollment in James River Watershed CREP has gone well in 2010. Over 20,000 acres are either under contract or in progress of being approved at an annual cost to Game, Fish, and Parks of approximately \$655,000. Of the acres under contract, average enrolled acreage size is 110 and over 70% are 10-year contracts. Enrollment has been most popular in the northeast part of the James River Watershed where wet conditions have made it difficult for farmers to get into their fields for 2 years in a row.

### **Mountain Lion Public Meeting and Management Plan Update**

The Wildlife Division conducted eleven public meetings around the state from late March to mid-April, 2010 to provide information about mountain lion management and gather public input that will be used to update South Dakota's Mountain Lion Management Plan. A total of 396 people attended the public meetings and 355 (90%) completed a questionnaire handed out at the meeting. The results of this questionnaire were compiled and will be included in a final report. Where appropriate, this data was compared with the results from a scientific survey of Black Hills citizens conducted in late fall of 2008 (Gigliotti, et al., 2009) or results from a scientific survey of South Dakota citizens conducted in 2002 (Gigliotti, et al., 2002).

Input gathered from the 11 public meetings will be incorporated with the revised mountain lion management plan. The draft plan will be posted on the GFP website to gather additional input on the plan and management of mountain lions in South Dakota. A final management plan will be complete by August when the mountain lion season is considered by the Commission.

### **Winter Impact on Wildlife**

The winter of 2009-2010 presented some challenges for resident wildlife. Winter habitat and food sources had been reduced, and in some areas, depleted to the point where wildlife mortalities and depredation to stored crops and feed sources occurred. Overall, pheasants were stressed over much of the state, with known mortalities documented in areas with marginal winter cover. It is difficult to assess the overall effect of the winter conditions experienced, but information to be obtained from the August roadside brood surveys will provide additional information as to the overall impact.

Field staff spent a considerable amount of time working with landowners to address complaints primarily caused by deer, but other species included elk, antelope, turkeys and pheasants. The department received several hundred deer complaints, with most of these complaints being addressed by short-stopping deer with corn and alfalfa, stack yard panels, and other non-lethal control methods. Depredation pool hunts were used on 36 sites, which allowed the Department to work with landowners and use hunters to harvest a specific number of deer while hazing deer at the same time. Over 340 hunters participated in the depredation hunts and 979 antlerless deer tags were issued. While not all tags resulted in a harvested animal, many problem animals were removed and the pressure provided by the hunters continued to haze deer away from feed until weather conditions improved.

### **National Archery in the Schools Program Reaches 100 schools**

South Dakota became the 22<sup>nd</sup> state in the nation to reach 100 schools participating in the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) in March of 2010.

NASP is designed to teach international style target archery in the 4<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in an in-school curriculum format. The core content of the program includes safety training, archery technique, equipment knowledge, mental concentration and self discipline to all student participants in the program. Before presenting the two week archery unit of study, teachers must attend and successfully complete a minimum of eight hours of safety and archery proficiency training.

NASP began in South Dakota in Feb. of 2007 with an initial training of 12 pilot schools. Since this initial training, NASP has grown consistently across the state. South Dakota urban school districts have incorporated the program into all of their school district's middle and high school PE programs. Rural school districts are also eagerly participating in the program. Fourteen schools located within the boundaries of the Pine Ridge American Indian Reservation are also providing NASP to their students.

### **STEP OUTSIDE Expands in South Dakota**

Partnerships between local communities, sportsman's clubs and South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks is producing big dividends to youth interested in outdoor recreation. The STEP OUTSIDE program has been scheduled in over 20 local communities in the first half of 2010.

The STEP OUTSIDE program, introduced by the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), began in South Dakota in 2005 in six pilot locations. The program continued in most of the pilot areas and experienced slow growth before exploding across the state in 2010. This program introduces youth to various shooting sports and other outdoor activities during a one day, community sponsored, event. Activities include shot gunning, rifle shooting, target and 3D archery, BB gun shooting, introduction to waterfowling, fishing and many more possible activities.

It is anticipated that up to 2,000 youth will participate in the program during the summer of 2010. Specially outfitted trailers have been purchased by GFP to provide equipment to communities wishing to conduct an event. Safety training is also provided by GFP to volunteer instructors who wish to participate in the program.

### **GFP Joins Angler Legacy Program**

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks has joined forces with fifteen other states through the Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation (RBFF) in an effort to recruit anglers. The Anglers' Legacy

program is part of the RBFF campaign, “Take Me Fishing”. Anglers’ Legacy Ambassadors are asked to take a pledge that they will introduce one new angler to recreational fishing during the next year, whether it is a family member, friend or co-worker. Game, Fish and Parks fisheries staff, in conjunction with sportsman’s groups, will utilize outdoor shows, the SD State Fair, and the SD Outdoor Expo as venues for recruiting new Ambassadors.

Surveys done by an independent research firm indicate that Anglers’ Legacy Ambassadors take significantly more newcomers fishing than non-ambassadors since the program began. This directly impacts the sale of fishing licenses and fishing and boating equipment, all of which, through increased tax revenue, helps support the management of fisheries resources. With more than 185,000 anglers taking the pledge since the programs inception in May of 2006, Anglers’ Legacy is beginning to make its mark on angler recruitment.

### **Aquatic Nuisance Species Program Developing**

South Dakota became eligible for Federal funding for its Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) program following the completion of a state ANS management plan in December 2008. Field efforts at identifying new ANS infestations, monitoring current infestations and informing and educating the public of ANS threats began in the spring of 2009. Training for fisheries staff and ANS interns on ANS identification, boat inspections, and field sampling was conducted in May 2009.

South Dakota has largely been able to avoid major ANS infestations, though a number of ANS species, including Asian carp, Eurasian water milfoil, curlyleaf pondweed, purple loosestrife, and European Rudd exist in the state. In the spring of 2009, after providing training for GFP fisheries staff and interns; we began our first summer of monitoring.

One of the most significant findings to come from the first summer’s monitoring efforts was the detection of Asian clams in Lewis and Clark Lake, the lowest reservoir on the mainstem Missouri River system, near Yankton, South Dakota. Because of the detection of this significant ANS threat, GF&P was able to alert staff at Gavin’s Point Federal Fish Hatchery, which draws water for its facility from this source. Gavin’s Point staff conducted a risk assessment following discovery of Asian clams in hatchery ponds and decisions to stock fish from Gavin’s were based on this risk assessment. Stocking of paddlefish into Lake Francis Case has been canceled until treatments can be identified that are shown to effectively kill juvenile Asian clams. Rearing practices for other species raised in ponds at the hatchery have been adjusted to avoid the possibility of transporting live juvenile Asian clams as well.

### **Cleghorn Hatchery Receives McConaughy Brood Stock**

Cleghorn State Fish Hatchery, in Rapid City, is serving as the backup brood source of McConaughy rainbow trout for the national fish hatchery system. The strain originated in Lake McConaughy, NB and provided an exceptional natural fishery for large rainbow trout until an introduction of striped bass wiped out the population. If Ennis NFH loses their broodstock to disease or hatchery mishap, Cleghorn will become the only hatchery with McConaughy trout broodstock.

Demand is low for McConaughy rainbows nationwide but the strain has great importance in South Dakota. This strain is a more “wild” rainbow trout and fisheries managers request that they are stocked into areas that will support long term survival and possibly natural reproduction. They are used in Black Hills streams, Deerfield Reservoir in the Black Hills and in the Missouri River below Lake Oahe.

Rainbows have limited spawning success in the Black Hills but over the last several years multiple year classes of McConaughy rainbow trout have been sampled in Ditch Creek and the South Fork of Castle Creek above Deerfield Reservoir. This has been confirmed through genetic testing and has led to a masters research project starting this summer to evaluate the strain and its contribution to the Deerfield Reservoir fishery.

### **Economic Impact of Missouri River Fisheries Assessed**

The Missouri River Reservoirs contain quality fish populations and provide ample angling opportunities, which in turn, contribute significantly to the local and state economies in the Dakotas. Angler use and harvest surveys are frequently used to evaluate pressure and harvest on these fisheries, but also provide a means of evaluating the economic impact of that fishery. In 2009, angler use and harvest surveys were conducted on all sections of the Missouri River system in North and South Dakota. Estimated total economic impact in 2009 was 77 million dollars for the Missouri River system in the Dakotas. Average daily expenditures for a day of fishing for both states were taken from the 2006 National Survey of Hunting and Fishing conducted by the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

The recent increase in water yield in the Missouri River basin and the subsequent increase in water levels in Lake Oahe have improved angler access throughout the reservoir. This increase in access availability was mirrored on Lake Sakakawea in North Dakota. Currently, almost all Lake Oahe boat ramps in North and South Dakota are in usable condition after the most current rise in water levels and has resulted in increased use of the reservoir. In 2009, anglers spent an estimated 343,000 boat days fishing Lake Oahe compared to 155,000 boat days in 2003, when access was limited because many boat ramps were out of water. During the last drought, GFP spent approximately 5 million dollars extending boat ramps so anglers could launch their boats on Lake Oahe. Use of State Parks along Lake Oahe was also down during the recent drought with parks use closely related to availability of boat access and angler use.

Water level management, water yield, and system storage along with environmental conditions all affect fish population dynamics in the Missouri River reservoirs. Production of both sport fish and prey fish species can be influenced by water management actions. GFP staff are involved in many of the Missouri River work groups including the Missouri River Association of States and Tribes (MoRAST) Annual Operating Plan technical team, which makes recommendations to the Corps of Engineers on annual operation of the Missouri River system.

### **Construction begins on new outdoor learning facility**

GFP purchased 33 acres just within the city limits of Rapid City for The Outdoor Campus-West and accompanying regional office headquarters. The education portion of the building will host classes and meetings, but will serve primarily as a gateway to the campus property for programs and activities.

GFP broke ground on the facility in early February. Wet spring conditions have done little to slow progress at this stage, with forms and landscaping taking shape. Basic costs for construction were bid at just over \$10 million. Construction is expected to be completed in April of 2011.

Programming for the facility will be center on the Division's mission, along with the Core Concepts for Conservation Education approved by AFWA. Programs will be split amongst hunting, fishing, outdoor skills and outdoor education concepts.

This will be the second outdoor education facility in South Dakota. An existing facility in our most populous city, Sioux Falls, has been in operation for 15 years. An estimated 100,000 people visit the facility each year and over 35,000 individuals of all ages take part in educational activities.

### **GFP Updates Website**

Staff, working with an outside contractor, have developed a new look and feel for the GFP website. After several months of work, the new site went live in early May. The goal of the updates were to make navigation more customer friendly for the thousands who seek information from the website each month. The process of website enhancements will continue through coming months with rewriting of text on existing pages to make the information easier to access. Technology will play a major role in future website enhancements as we draw on our GIS system to provide concise and current hunting and fishing information.

### **GFP Utilizes Increase in Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Funds**

The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) welcomed the opportunity to utilize some additional Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration (PR) funds, which was a result of above average sales of firearms and ammunition during the Federal Fiscal Year 2009. South Dakota has received an approximate 11% increase each year in PR since Federal Fiscal Year 2006. In Federal Fiscal Year 2009, South Dakota received a 30% increase from the previous year, which amounted to an additional \$2.6 million dollars.

GFP is very excited about the opportunity that the "Bump" in PR funds is providing to South Dakota. Currently, GFP has purchased a 400 acre tract titled the Wetlands America Trust Game Production Area (GPA) in Sanborn County, a 228 acre tract titled the William Moe GPA in Brookings County, and a 361 acre tract titled the Cooper Ranch GPA in Custer County. These areas will allow GFP to manage the existing habitat on these tracts specifically for wildlife production, develop additional wildlife habitat and allow expanded public hunting and wildlife related public use opportunities.

Some other projects that GFP is currently working on include the construction of a Regional shop, cold storage building and research lab facilities in Rapid City and one more possible land acquisition in the southwestern part of South Dakota.

### **Work Nearing Completion in Development of IMPACT Project**

Over the past 3 years, the Division of Wildlife has worked with 15 state fish and wildlife agencies and 3 regional conservation law enforcement associations to develop an interpersonal communications skills training program for conservation law enforcement officers. Given the criticality of interpersonal communication skills in delivering effective conservation law enforcement services, this training program will help agencies develop and deliver an effective communications training program to agency conservation enforcement staff. Each cooperating partner has provided up to \$5,000 to help support development of the IMPACT Program. The consultant producing the training program has delivered 3 of the 5 training DVDs to date and several states have scheduled training for supervisors, administrators, field training officers and conservation law enforcement staff.

Agencies who are interested in hearing more about this communications training program should contact Emmett Keyser, Assistant Director – Field Operations with SD Game, Fish and Parks - Division of Wildlife.