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*South Dakota*  
**Conservation Digest**

DEPARTMENT OF GAME, FISH & PARKS





# South Dakota Conservation Digest

DEPARTMENT OF GAME, FISH & PARKS

Volume 80, Number 5

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“They’ll be curled up in a ball. Look for red. Good luck,” Kevin Robling offered a group as they began to search a field in Turner County. The night before, Robling, a big game biologist for Game, Fish and Parks (GFP), had been out with a spotlight, searching for deer. Having spotted a doe in the area, a search party was assembled to try locating her fawns.

Robling headed the statewide effort to better understand mortality and survival rates in both white-tailed and mule deer fawns. The goal: Collar 40 fawns in each of South Dakota’s four regions. The telemetric collars use radio signals to help researchers monitor fawn location and alert them if a fawn might be dead.

“There’s a switch inside the collar that has to be tripped,” said Julie DeJong, a wildlife resource biologist with GFP. Failure to periodically trip the switch by changing location doubles the relay frequency, signaling the fawn may be dead and giving researchers a chance to



determine the cause of death.

DeJong headed the Region 3 project, which faced an extra challenge: It is the only South Dakota region with no collared does. Other regions could monitor females to find fawns. But in DeJong’s region, teams had to scout

deer based on intuition, public tips and persistence.

Robling came from Rapid City to help Region 3 begin its daunting task, even staying in a tent four nights before area flooding sent him to drier shelter.

Brennan Borah, a Region 3 wildlife game technician, said private land yielded the best results, but searching could be slow.

# *A Big Search for Little Deer*



by Matthew Stoffel, Public Relations Intern - The Outdoor Campus

“It’s just a big timing game,” Borah said.

Public sightings weren’t always reason to celebrate, either. Some calls lifted hopes only to dash them. Several residents found recently-born fawns, Borah said, but had touched or moved them. No longer scentless, a handled fawn risks abandonment. The public was encouraged to defer the handling of fawns to officials.

The lack of collared does led to search parties wading through dry grass, shifting between anticipation with each dense clump and disillusionment as growth gave way to short vegetation or empty dirt. But however monotonous raking miles of field may have been, excitement was restored whenever a few words broke the tedium.

“Hey! Over here!”

Tucked in the grass, lying still and silent as it was surrounded by the search party, was a young fawn. Surrounding it proved needless; it didn’t fight or protest as Robling and DeJong stepped in to collar it.

“You have a 15 day window when you can catch them before they are too fast,” DeJong said. South Dakota’s east side has a birth pulse from late May to mid-June, with western region mule deer roughly two weeks behind. In the days shortly after birth the fawns are docile and can be handled by gloved GFP workers. But as they grow, nets are needed to catch the fawns.

“The older they get, the more ram-bunctious they get,” Borah said.

In the end, Region 3 collared 38 fawns in Lincoln, Turner and Minnehaha counties. Already, 15 collars have been recovered, with six definite and five likely cases of predation.

The collaring effort will be stronger than some previous projects as the entire state participated together. “This is good because we can actually compare [survival rates] and have one year as a basis,” DeJong said. “We need some numbers from here to tell if our populations are increasing or decreas-



ing.” According to DeJong, more accurate survival rate data will yield better population modeling.

This will lead to better informed decisions on how many deer tags should be available to hunters in years to come.

“We’ve really reduced the number of tags,” DeJong said. For the 2013 hunting season, Region 3’s Wildlife Management team proposed a reduction of 2,550 licenses and 2,900 tags, removing all antlerless tags in seven counties.

The 2013 reduction was caused by an outbreak of naturally occurring Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD), spread by biting midges that thrived in last year’s drought. The outbreak killed large numbers of white-tailed deer in Region 3 last summer and early fall. Though the midges were killed off by the frost of colder months, more than 1,000 dead deer sightings were reported to Region 3’s GFP in 2012 alone.

The choice to make a reduction in antlerless tags disperses the reduction amongst archery, muzzleloader and rifle hunters so cuts don’t isolate one group.

## *If you care, Leave Them There*

Visitors to the outdoors often find baby wildlife, seemingly alone or abandoned. While these people undoubtedly mean well, unfortunately their compassion is often misguided.

Most “abandoned” babies are simply unattended. At such times, there is no choice but to leave the young unattended.



**If you care,  
leave them  
there!**

# DOG DAYS

By  
Chris Hull



The term “dog days of summer” has never made sense to me. Father’s Day is for fathers. Mother’s Day is for mothers. I have had dogs all my life and every one of em HATED the Dog days. Too hot. Too muggy. Too hard to do much of anything.

The TRUE Dog Days are coming up!!! Grouse, Duck, Goose, Pheasant seasons...THOSE are the days that my dog lives for. This can be a very dangerous time for your four legged, fowl phenom, however. Late September, and heck even all the way through the pheasant opener can be downright hot. Especially if you are wearing a black, yellow or brown (What can I say, I’m a lab guy.) fur coat. Every year I hear of countless episodes where dogs are overheating, to the point of death.

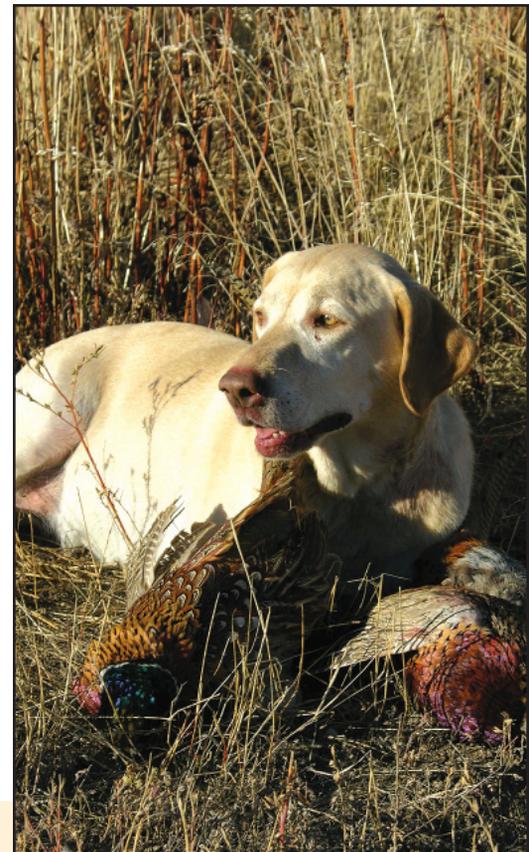
I have never seen a dog get to that point, but I have seen dogs overheat. It is easily done, especially early in the hunting seasons. Dogs can, and do, overheat, but fortunately there are plenty of easy steps to minimize the risks to old Rover.

## Pre-season Training

Getting a dog in hunting shape needs to be a year round exercise. One of the most common errors I see in hunting dog training is OVERFEEDING! Every dog is different, but in the off-season my dog, Layla, gets one cup of food in the morning and one in the evening. I try and weigh her every two weeks and adjust her food accordingly. Once Layla got to maturity, I talked to my veterinarian about her optimal weight and we keep her at that level.

Many vets and dog professionals say “Absolutely no table/people food,”, and I agree with that, but what are we, monsters? We can’t always say no to our droopy eyed pals. Layla rarely gets scraps, but a potato chip after a long hard day of work doesn’t hurt anything.

I live in Pierre, where 100 degree summer days are common. It’s hard to train a dog in that heat, but early morning or late evening swims and vigorous play sessions on the beach are a great



*Taking frequent rests is important for your dog during hot hunts.*

training tool. Also, late night games of fetch in a poorly lit yard seem to let the dog rely on her nose a little more. I know it has worked wonders with Layla.

Getting the dog out of the kennel, or the house in our case, just for lazy walks also helps a great deal. Just a few blocks every day will go a long way come fall. Also, if your dog is a house dog, it will toughen up her pads for the rough ground she will be tromping across come fall.

Training during cool periods is the best, however. Just be careful to not work the dog too hard right out of the gate. Like us, dogs need gradual increases in their workout regimens. I know I couldn't go out and run a half marathon without working up to it for some time. Fortunately, dogs who are in decent shape to begin with can quickly gain their stamina.

After a long workout, or hunt for that matter, don't be afraid to give your dog a good rubdown. My dog is to the point where she expects it. Shoulders, hips and neck rubdowns help to let the dog's muscles rebound quicker. Plus it's kind of a good "thanks for the hard work" gesture. My hunting companions used to all give me funny looks when I was doing this, but many of them are now following my lead.

### In the field

The keys to keeping your dog safe and healthy during those hot days are knowing the signs of dehydration and heat stroke and being prepared.

Days that are flat calm, sunny and/or humid are the toughest for dogs. Also, thick green cover can make it harder on them. Go slow (Most pheasant hunters go too fast anyway!), take lots of breaks, and make outings shorter on hot days. Seems simple enough, but I've seen plenty of cases of Rooster Fever, where guys forget about old Spot and keep going. The dog won't want to quit that is for sure.

Comb your dog often during the fall. It helps get rid of that dead/loose hair and thins their coat out.

Knowing the symptoms of dehydration and heat stroke is uber important as well.

- Excessive panting
- Sunken eyes
- Dry, Sticky or pale gums and a bright red tongue
- Anxious or staring expression
- Disorientation and confusion
- Increased heart rate and pulse
- Thick saliva
- Vomiting
- Difficulty breathing
- Collapse
- Coma

There is an easy test for dehydration. Pick up your dog's skin at his neck and then release it, it should pop back into place. In dehydrated dogs, the skin will remain in a ridge and the longer it stays that way the more severe the dehydration.

If your dog starts showing any of the signs for dehydration or heat stroke, you need to stop the hunt and take the following steps:

- Move your dog into the shade and provide him with some water, but don't allow him to drink to the point of vomiting.
- Put him in a bath, pour, or gently hose cool water on him. Ice packs

shouldn't be used because you can over-cool him.

- Massage him gently and flex his legs to encourage circulation.
- Move him to a place with air conditioning or put him in front of a fan. Air flow will help him to cool himself.
- Monitor his temperature with a rectal thermometer and contact the nearest emergency veterinarian.
- When your dog recovers from the heat stroke, schedule a thorough examination with your veterinarian to rule out organ damage.

I also recommend carrying a large bottle of rubbing alcohol. If your dog starts overheating, rub it on her stomach and armpits. It dissipates quickly and helps cool them down quickly.

Finally, carry plenty of water along. Dogs need about 4 times the amount you and I would.

If you are like me, hunting without a dog just isn't much fun, so we owe it to our furry friends to do all we can to keep them safe and healthy during the hunting season. Train early, know the signs, keep early season hunts short and carry plenty of water. Oh and give em a few extra scratches behind the ears after every hunt. They deserve it.



*If your dog starts to show signs of dehydration or heat stroke, stop hunting and take a few simple steps to assure the safety of the dog.*



Each fall thousands of people take to the fields, the marshes and the woodlands of South Dakota to pursue a variety of game. For some, their motivation to hunt may be social such as spending time with friends and family, for others it may be just to get out and enjoy nature's solitude, yet for others it may be to achieve a harvest and utilize great table fare. Regardless of the motivation, if appropriate safety measures are not taken, the experience may become tragedy.

In the fall of 2012, 21 South Dakota families and friends had their hunting experience quickly become tragedy. For three of these families, the experience unfortunately resulted in a fatality.

While, I have conflicted feelings about reporting that the number of hunting incidents is the lowest it has been since 1997 (18 incidents), I can't help but wonder if the

lower overall number is really a good thing? While it is good to see numbers down from last year (55 incidents), still having 21 families and friends impacted from the result of a hunting incident is not a good thing. This is especially true when most of these incidents could have been prevented.

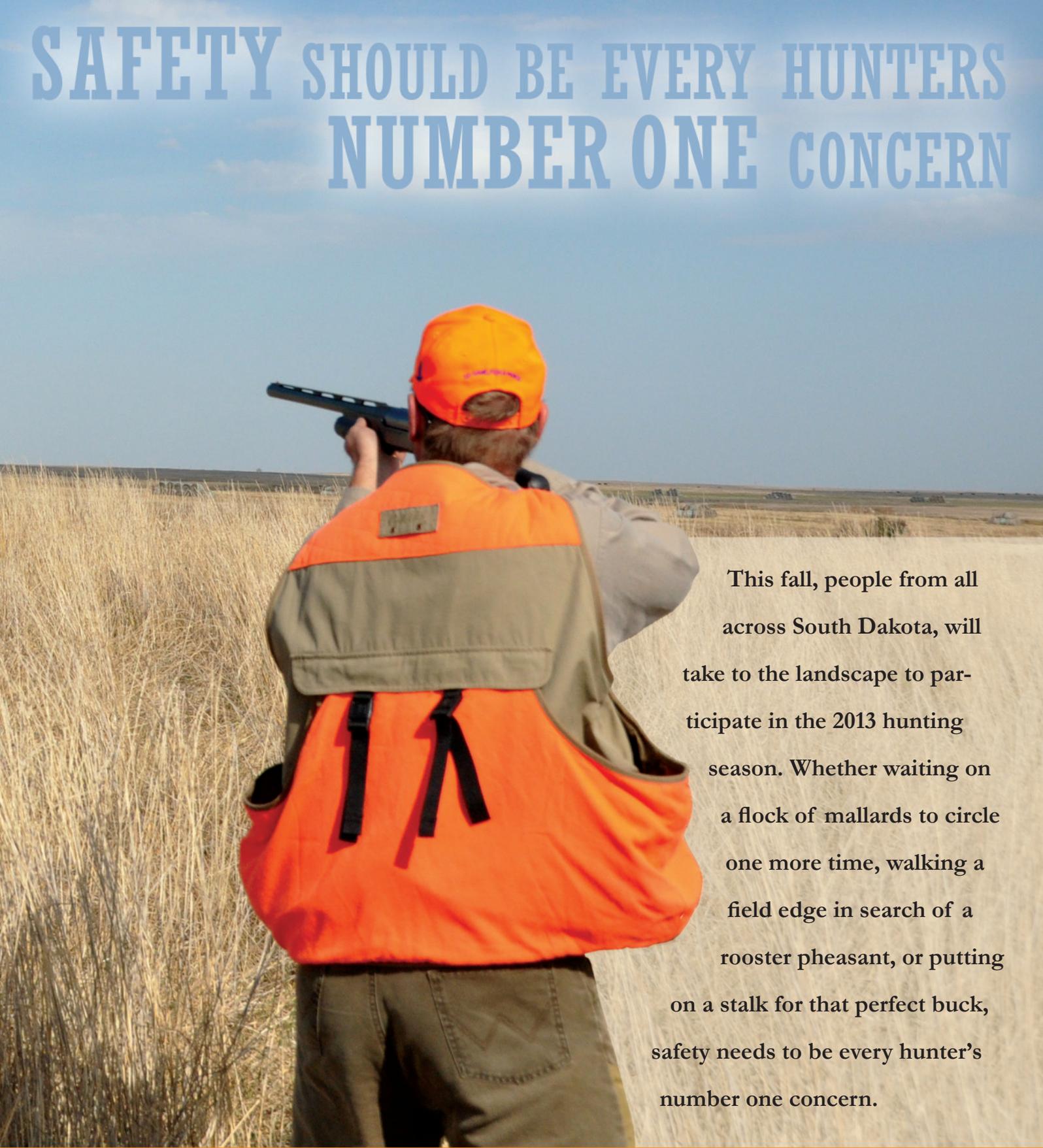
Overall, 18 of the 21 incidents were related to pheasant hunting and the other three incidents were related to Big Game (deer) hunting. One fatality resulted from a heart-attack, one from careless handling of a firearm and one from injuries sustained as a result of a treestand fall.

For more information and an incident-by-incident breakdown, visit [gfp.sd.gov/outdoor-learning/hunter-education/hunt-incidents.aspx](http://gfp.sd.gov/outdoor-learning/hunter-education/hunt-incidents.aspx) or use QR Code.



# 2012 Safest Hunting Year in

# SAFETY SHOULD BE EVERY HUNTERS NUMBER ONE CONCERN



This fall, people from all across South Dakota, will take to the landscape to participate in the 2013 hunting season. Whether waiting on a flock of mallards to circle one more time, walking a field edge in search of a rooster pheasant, or putting on a stalk for that perfect buck, safety needs to be every hunter's number one concern.

## South Dakota Since 1997

by Jason Kool, HuntSAFE Coordinator for SD GFP

# By following these safety-rules, hunters can assure themselves and others around them a fun and safe hunting experience.

**Rule #1** Know your safe zone of fire. Upland hunting in South Dakota is usually done in groups. You must be aware of where you are in the group and where the other hunters in your party are located at all times.

When pheasant hunters walk in a row during a party hunt, each individual hunter is responsible for every shot they fire. The hunter should be aware of where everyone in the party is located and when it is safe to fire on a bird. A good rule of thumb is this: A hunter should only fire on a bird within the 10 and 2 safety zone.

The safe zone of fire boundaries for each hunter is like the 10 o'clock and 2 o'clock position on a clock. Hunters should not fire on a bird that is not within this 10 and 2 safe zone of fire.

Hunters should be especially careful concerning the 10 and 2 rule when hunting in heavy cover. In these poor visibility conditions, hunters that could easily be seen in other conditions can get lost among the heavy cover. When hunting in a line with other hunters, the safe shot is the shot in the 10 and 2 safe zone of fire.



**Rule #2** Identify your target and what's beyond it. Remember, your shot doesn't just stop at the bird. In many hunting incidents the shooter swings on game and fails to observe their correct zone of fire which results in their shot striking a hunter in the background than for any other reason. Snap decisions are necessary when pheasant hunting. It is important that hunters know where everyone is before a pheasant flushes. Awareness is the key. If there is any doubt about safety, don't take the shot.

## UPLAND BIRD HUNTING

by Jason Kool, HuntSAFE Coordinator for SD GFP

## Rule #3

Make sure you see blue below the bird. An elevated shot can make up for a lot of other mistakes. This means seeing sky between a flying bird and the horizon line. By not taking a shot before there is blue below the bird, the shooter is guaranteeing that the barrel of the shotgun will be elevated when the shot is taken. In



the case that another hunter might be in line with the shot string, the shot will pass overhead. Of course, if a hunter is seen in the shooters line of sight, the only option is to not take the shot.

## Rule #4

Wear hunter orange and lots of it. Make sure that those around you can see you at a glance. Research has shown that in a variety of lighting conditions, hunter orange can be seen and recognized by other hunters. Wearing orange will not affect your hunt or let animals recognize you, it only affects how the other hunters see you...and they will as long as you are wearing hunter orange. Wear your hunter orange...and lots of it!

In HuntSAFE we often use “shoot/don’t shoot” scenarios to teach students about hunting safely. In the scenario at right, what would you do - Shoot or Don’t Shoot?



# SAFETY

# 25th Anniversary *of the* Walk-In Area Program



by Mark Norton

One of South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks' most successful programs, is set to celebrate its 25th birthday. A lot of changes have happened since the Walk-In Area program began in 1988 with just over 20,000 acres growing to the current size of over 1.25 million acres. But one thing that has remained the same through the years is that its success is built upon partnerships between local landowners, the local Conservation Officer (CO) and sportsmen. Without this partnership, the program would not exist. Landowners provide the land for hunting, the COs work with landowners to develop lease agreements and hunters provide the funding (via hunting license dollars and Pittman-Robertson Aid in Wildlife Restoration funds). Additionally, the behavior of hunters also plays a vital role in whether or not land stays enrolled in the program. One hunter acting unethically is all it takes to cause a landowner to withdraw his land from the program.

In the spring, landowners and COs meet to enroll new contracts and re-enroll existing contracts. One of the most common questions is "how much are the payment rates?" At the program's inception, the answer was pretty easy as we paid a block payment rate for a range of acres for any habi-

**Access to land is an important part of hunting and the Walk-In Area program has played a major role in placing South Dakota among the nation's best hunting locations.**

tat type. In 1999, we revised the block payment rate and divided the state into three payment zones (based on land prices, proximity to population centers and pheasant hunting potential) to further encourage enrollment in areas where we traditionally didn't have many Walk-In Areas. While this system was simple, it was difficult to secure and retain Walk-In Areas where pheasant hunting was the primary targeted species.

Then in 2004, we again revised our payment system to be more competitive in securing access on CRP and other permanent, undisturbed (unhayed, uncropped or ungrazed areas) habitat for pheasant hunting in the eastern part of the state while retaining the flexibility for landowners and COs in negotiating rates on large tracts of working lands (lands under some type of agricultural production) that provided quality hunting opportunity in the western part of the state. Un-

der this new system, we pay a base access fee of up to \$1 per acre for any acre of huntable land. (By definition, this would be any land that offers a reasonable opportunity to harvest game.) Plus a bonus payment of \$5 per acre for each acre of permanent



habitat left undisturbed during the contract year in areas with pheasant hunting potential (all of eastern South Dakota plus some tracts in western South Dakota counties with good local pheasant populations). In addition to the annual payment, we also paid an optional retention bonus of \$1 per acre per hunting season remaining in a CRP contract if the landowner voluntarily enrolled CRP for the duration of the CRP contract into the Walk-In Area.

Currently, our annual payment structure is the same, however we have increased the payment of the retention bonus to \$2.50 per acre per hunting season remaining in a CRP contract and opened it up to apply to lands that are in WRP with a maximum length of contract of 15 years. If the land is located in the southeast portion of the state this retention bonus has been increased to \$5 per acre per hunting season.

There are other reasons for landowners to enroll land into the Walk-In Area program. Many landowners don't have time to worry about who's hunting on their land. Many prefer not to have to drop whatever they are doing to answer questions about hunting and where folks should go to find game, especially on the weekends. Since hunters are asked not to contact the landowners participating in the Walk-In Area program, landowner contact with hunters is minimal. These areas are open to hunting by foot traffic only, vehicular traffic is limited to designated parking areas and trails only, boundary signs tell hunters where they can hunt on the property.

Many potential cooperators ask about liability. Current state law provides that private individuals who lease their land to the state for the recreational purposes are immune from normal, non-negligent or intentional liability (SDCL 20-9-14). In essence, what this means is that landowners are not taking on any additional liability burden over and above what they would have if they were not involved in the Walk-In Area program.

Landowners wishing to provide hunting access to the public through the Walk-In Area program should contact their local Wildlife Conservation Officer. The landowner and local CO can decide what will work best for the landowner's farm or ranch.

For the hunter, the Walk-In Area program answers a very important "where can I hunt" question fundamental to a successful hunting trip. With more folks "living in town," not all hunters are fortunate to know landowners in places they wish to hunt. That is one of the reasons why the Walk-In Area program was created in the first place.

The Walk-In Area program has been around for a number of years and its success was built upon the hard work of its partners, the private landowners. Without these partnerships, there would have never been a Walk-In Area program and continuing our rich hunting heritage will rely on fostering those partnerships.

*Mark Norton is a Senior Wildlife Biologist for the Department of Game, Fish and Parks, Division of Wildlife.*

# GFP Honors 3 Landowners for 25 Years of Hunting Access

The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department recently honored four individuals who have taken part in the agency's Walk-In Area program since its inception 25 years ago.

The program started in 1988 with 26 South Dakota landowners taking part. Now, 25 years later, three of those original 26 contracts still have land leased for Walk-In Area.

The four individuals involved in the three original contracts - Bud Thorpe, Dwight and Harold Wookey, and Robert Weber - were honored at the GFP Commission meeting on August 1.

"Their participation in the Walk-In Area hunting access program has significantly contributed to South Dakota's hunting heritage, culture, and economy," SD GFP Secretary Jeff Vonk said.

"Every year over 200,000 people hunt in South Dakota to spend time with family and friends, enjoy the great outdoors and provide food for their tables. Having a place to go hunting is a hunter's primary concern, and these landowners have opened up opportunities for so many people," Tony Leif, director of GFP's Wildlife Division, said. "Thank you to Bud, Dwight, Harold, Robert and everyone else who has partnered with Game, Fish and Parks and our Walk-In Area program over the past 25 years. Your cooperation has helped make this program a model for many other states."

# Welcome, Good Earth...

## Historic Site Now South Dakota's 13th State Park

July 19, 2013

Nearly 400 people gathered July 19 to watch South Dakota Gov. Dennis Daugaard and Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad dedicate Good Earth State Park at Blood Run, the first South Dakota state park in 40 years.

“Organized efforts to recognize this important cultural site began more than four decades ago,” said Gov. Daugaard. “Today we celebrate the culmination of those efforts with the dedication of South Dakota’s 13th state park.”



Good Earth State Park at Blood Run is located southeast of Sioux Falls and is part of the Blood Run National Historic Landmark. The landmark lies on both sides of the Big Sioux River at the mouth of Blood Run Creek and includes more than 3,000 acres of land in South Dakota and Iowa.

Iowa Governor Branstad said, “This is a wonderful example of a great public/private partnership. In Iowa, we are excited to partner with South Dakota to create a state park that encompasses two states.”

Blood Run is considered by archaeologists as the most significant Oneota cultural site in the Midwest. European explorers or early settlers are believed to have named the area Blood Run for the reddish flows of an area creek containing iron. The site served as an important gathering place and trading center for American Indians from 1350 to 1700 A.D.

Good Earth was officially designated as a state park during the 2013 Legislative Session, but the project has been in the works since the National Park Service first designated the Blood Run site a national Historic Landmark in 1970.

This is a special victory for Doug Hofer who has worked as state park director during much of the process.

“Partnerships have been integral to this project from the beginning,” said Hofer. “After so many years of work, it’s exciting to know that Good Earth is finally part of the state park system.”

Hofer says future plans for the park include a visitor center, hiking trails and programming focusing on the cultural and historical significance of the site.

For more information on Good Earth State Park at Blood Run, visit [www.gfp.sd.gov](http://www.gfp.sd.gov).



# 2013 HUNTING SEASON DATES

Hunting Season		September	October	November
Grouse			September 21 - January 1	
Sage Grouse		SEASON CLOSED		
Partridge			September 21 - January 1	
Ring-necked Pheasant			October 1 - January 1	
Youth only			← October 5 - 9	
Residents only			← October 12 - 14	
Quail			October 1 - January 1	
Cottontail Rabbit		September 1 - January 1		
Tree Squirrel		September 1 - January 1		
Crow		September 1 - October 31		The crow hunt
Common Snipe		September 1 - October 31		
Mourning Dove		September 1 - November 9		
Ducks	Youth only	← September 21-22		
	Low Plains North		September 28 - December 1	
	Low Plains Middle		September 28 - December 1	
	Low Plains South		October 12 - December 1	
	High Plains		October 12 - December 1	
Canada Geese	Unit 1	September 1 - December 16		
	Unit 2		September 1 - December 16	
	Bennett Co. <sup>1</sup>		October 19 - December 1	
Light Geese			September 28 - December 1	
White-fronted Geese			September 28 - December 1	
Sandhill Crane			September 28 - November 24	
Tundra Swan			September 28 - December 1	
Fall Turkey			October 1 - January 1	
Mountain Lion		NOT AVAILABLE		
Antelope - Archery		Aug 17 - Sept 27		Oct 14-31
Antelope - Rifle			← September 28 - October 1	
Deer	Archery <sup>2</sup>		September 28 - January 1	
	Muzzleloader <sup>2</sup>		September 28 - January 1	
	Youth		September 14 - January 1	
	Black Hills		Nov 1-30	
	West River <sup>3</sup>			
	East River		Nov 23 - Dec 8	
Elk - Black Hills		Archery: Sept 1-30	Rifle: Oct 1-31 <sup>5</sup>	

	December	January	February	Notes
ry 5				<sup>1</sup> Special permit required.
SEASON CLOSED				
ry 5				<sup>2</sup> Only antlerless deer licenses are valid
9 - January 5				Jan. 1 - 15.
9 - January 5				<sup>3</sup> Units in Gregory, Mellette, Ziebach, Dewey, and Corson counties have special season dates.
er 1 - February 28				
er 1 - February 28				
ing season is also open March 1 - April 30				
0				<sup>4</sup> Only antlerless deer licenses are valid
0				Dec. 28 - Jan. 5.
ember 24				
12 - January 16				<sup>5</sup> Antlerless elk season is Oct. 16 - 31 and Dec. 1 - 15.
November 2 - February 14				
December 22		← Jan 11-19		
er 22				
3				
er 22				
er 1 - January 31				
AT TIME OF PUBLICATION				
13				
January 15				
Dec 1 - Jan 15				
uary 15				
← Nov 16-Dec 1		← Dec 28 - Jan 5 <sup>4</sup>		
→		← Dec 28 - Jan 5 <sup>4</sup>		
Dec 1-15 <sup>5</sup>	← Antlerless only			



**Halloween can be a time of manufactured spooks and scares, but if you're looking for the real thing, you might try a visit to Fort Sisseton Historic State Park.**

**A ghostly boy, a tap on the shoulder, the sound of boots on the boardwalk, and a strange light in the Officers' Quarters are just some of the phenomena experienced by area residents at the historic Marshall County location.**

LeRon Knebel of Eden is a definite believer in the ghosts that are said to reside at Fort Sisseton.

"They're real. I've seen them," asserts Knebel, who spent four and a half summers as an overnight supervisor of inmates that were doing work at the fort. "You could talk to just about anybody that's worked out there, and they have some of the same stories."

Knebel related one instance where he and a trustee saw the same mysterious sight.

"It was about 4:30 in the morning and I was kind of dozing on my couch, which I wasn't supposed to

do, when a young kid about fourteen or fifteen years old came out of the bedroom. He had old knickers on and a cap like they wore in the old days. He came out and walked over to the TV set. The boys all got to watch a video every night, and they came in those little plastic cases. The kid picked one of them up and was looking at it. Then I moved just a hair, and he was gone."

Knebel thought he must have been dreaming—until the inmates got up the next morning.

"One of the guys came out and said, 'You saw that young kid last night, didn't you?' I played dumb and

said, 'What kid?' Then the inmate said he had seen the kid walk by every one of the bunks and look the inmates over and then come out to where I was. He described this kid to a T."

Ten days after that incident the television, which was wedged into a plywood case, ended up on the floor.

"I had a heck of a time getting it back into the case, but the television wasn't damaged," Knebel said. "We figured the young boy was back and didn't like TV. Then about a week later a picture in a glass frame came off the wall, hit the floor, and didn't even break."

# HAUNTED FORT

**Some believe  
Fort Sisseton's  
past inhabitants  
still walk the grounds**

*Original story by the Britton Journal. Adapted with permission.*



Photo © SD Historical Society

One of the inmates was so spooked by a strange encounter that he refused to return to work at the fort.

“One night a guy from Rapid City said that he had to call his wife, but she didn’t get home until 10:30 p.m.,” Knebel recalled. “I told him I would wake him up and he could use the phone for fifteen minutes. He went to make the call, but within five minutes he came running back, and his face was snow-white. He circled the room and circled the room, and I asked

him what was wrong but he wouldn’t talk to me.”

The inmate continued to act rather strangely, and finally, three days later, Knebel told him that he had to explain what was bothering him or he wouldn’t be allowed to come back next week.

“I’ll tell you what’s going on—and I’m not coming back here,” said the inmate. “When I was talking on the phone a black soldier came up and tapped me on the shoulder.”

His report does match up with the fort’s history: a troop of black soldiers, known as “buffalo soldiers,” served at the fort from 1884 to 1888.

There were also women and children at Fort Sisseton. Officers were allowed to have their families stay with them. These women and children have been rumored to still appear from time to time.

“When I was active with the Britton Community Theater, I stayed after practice one night to hang some wallpaper strips on our stage in the South Barracks,” said Britton resident Judy Gulleason, whose father, Robert Perry, was instrumental in restoration efforts at the fort. “I was up on the ladder and something caught my eye in the Officers’ Quarters right across the parade grounds.

I kind of laughed to myself and thought, ‘You’d think somebody was over there walking around upstairs in that building.’”

But Gulleason knew that nobody else was on the fort grounds that night. The caretaker – the only other person that should have been there - had told her that he was going to be gone.

“I could see this flickering light upstairs in the dormer windows, and as clear as a bell I could see what looked like a long white sleeve on a woman’s

arm, holding a candle. As it went along the five windows you could see it get dim with shadows in the back and then come forward again between the windows. I thought, ‘This is ridiculous!’” said Gulleason. “It had to be the shadows made by the moon in the trees. But I finally decided I’d just leave.”

It was then that she realized there was no moon that night.

“I don’t know if it was a ghost or not, but I did see something. And if other people have seen it, too, then what is it?” asked Gulleason. “Evidently, they are not trying to scare people away. My feeling is that maybe they are happy that we’ve saved the place.”

Gulleason did talk to area historian Norma Johnson about the history of the Officers’ Quarters. Johnson said that there would have been women in that building and that they would have had children sleeping upstairs. A mother’s late-night actions would have included checking on the children, or using the candle to burn bed bugs—a common infestation during the fort’s military years—off the walls.

Britton native Shelly Buhl also saw the light when she was working at the fort for the summer.

“We were always looking for it because we had heard the stories,” said Buhl. “My coworker Bridget Nordquist and I saw the light twice while we were working out there. It was a white light with a little bit of shadowing in the window. We could see it from the North Barracks. Of course, when we would go over and look, there was nothing there.”

Peggy Pearson, who lives east of Britton and drives by the fort every day on her way to work in Bristol, saw a different light.

“One time I was driving by and saw a light in the North Barracks,” said Pearson. “At first I thought somebody left a light on, but when I looked back it was turned off.”

Pearson hasn’t seen the light since, but every time she drives by in the dark she has to look. “I always look

that way wondering if I'm going to see something. I want to look, but I don't want to look," she laughed.

Dalaine Pleinis of Eden has worked at Fort Sisseton since 2008 and is often the first to arrive early in the morning – or so she thinks.

"Once or twice a week, when I go in early and it's still dark, I can hear somebody on the boardwalk. The door never opens but then after a little bit I hear footsteps back by the beds in the visitor center," said Pleinis. "It's been that way since I started working here. I just hope he likes my music!"

Eileen Warzeka, who lives on Clear Lake, also works at the fort and related a spooky incident.

"There were three of us sitting in the parlor in the Commanding Officer's Quarters. They used to have wired-in organ music there and kids could press a button and it would sound like an old-fashioned organ. All of a sudden we heard kind of a big thump that came from the basement, and then the music started playing. It was kind of eerie. There was nobody even close to the button, and we don't know what the thump



Photo © SD Historical Society

was. We kept saying it was ghosts. Maybe the commanding officer's wife didn't appreciate us sitting on her furniture."

Hauntings continue every day at Fort Sisseton. The sound of a horse whinny and the clang of harnesses carry across the parade grounds on occasion. Knocks are heard on doors but no one is there to answer them.

There are unexplained slaps on workers' shoulders, waltz music from the far-back of the barracks, and the sudden slamming and latching of doors.

"It takes a lot of belief to really think that there might be ghosts, but you do see and hear strange things," concluded Warzeka. "It's part of the fort's mystique."



Photo © Greg Gilbertson Photography

## Haunted Fort Tour

Join us next fall on October 18, 2014, for the park's first Haunted Fort Tour. Start the self-guided tour with a video recounting the experiences of people who have seen strange phenomena at the historic site. Then follow the creaking boardwalk through several of the fort's most legendary buildings. Keep your eyes open for the ghosts of children rumored to haunt the Schoolhouse, and see if you can catch a glimpse of the famous White Lady in the Commanding Officer's Quarters. Listen carefully for soldiers' footsteps on wooden floorboards. No need for spooky sound effects and monstrous costumes here - Fort Sisseton's long and lingering history provides everything you need for an evening of haunted fun.

A state park entrance fee is the only cost for admission.  
Contact the Fort Sisseton office at 605-448-5474 for more information.

# GREAT PLACES

Fiscal Year 2013 (July 2012 through June 2013)

## Parks and Wildlife Foundation Annual Report Highlights

Photo © Paul Schiller | Acts of Nature

By **Dick and Sue Brown**, SDPWF Development Directors

Many outdoor lovers across the State of South Dakota have long envisioned enriching our outdoor heritage at several of the State's most historic, scenic, and premier recreational sites. In December 2012, Governor Dennis Daugaard included three Outdoor Heritage projects in his budget address. "South Dakota's love for the outdoors," he said, "is something that we must pass on to our children and grandchildren. As we are able, we should invest in projects that will be assets for generations to come." The Legislature subsequently approved a special appropriation of \$4,000,000 for these Heritage projects. The SD Department of Game, Fish and Parks set aside nearly \$2,000,000. The Foundation was challenged to raise an additional \$3.1 million or more.

By the spring of 2013, South Dakotans and their guests around the world knew many new outdoor dreams would come true. The theme of the Foundation's FY 2013 Annual Report is "Visions to Reality."

The South Dakota Parks and Wildlife Foundation has worked with the private sector and many public entities over the last 28 years to enhance our outdoor life by providing financial and other support to the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks. Efforts have included stewardship of many land gifts for parks and wildlife production and money to help build the Sioux Falls and Rapid City Outdoor Campuses and the Mickelson Trail. The Foundation has also helped maintain and celebrate the history of Ft. Sisseton and Spirit Mound and the natural beauty and history of the Adams Homestead and Nature Area. Improvements and additions to many parks and water access areas have been financed entirely by the Foundation and its donors.

When Governor Daugaard challenged GFP, the State Legislature and the Foundation to put up the funds to make three major new heritage projects a reality, the response from all parties was enthusiastic.



*A group of donors surrounds Governor Daugaard as he signs the bill designating Good Earth State Park as South Dakota's newest outdoor asset in March 2013.*

### Good Earth State Park at Blood Run National Historic Landmark

State and local governments and individuals have tried for over three decades to purchase property in the Landmark for a Park. The Governor calls this site "South Dakota's top priority for conservation and resource protection." The area was a ceremonial and trading location for thousands of indigenous peoples from 1500 until well past 1700 A.D. Native American history at the site goes back over 8000 years. The Landmark is the largest and most significant repository of Oneota culture and history in the world. It was used by the Sioux for trading pipestone in the 1700s. It also is a place of great beauty and serenity just ten miles from Sioux Falls.

During the Fiscal Year, the Foundation stepped up its efforts to finance land purchases and improvements at what the Legislature officially named Good Earth State Park at Blood Run National Historic Landmark. In FY 2013, the Foundation secured commitments and donations from over 50 individuals, organizations and businesses for nearly \$1,000,000. This is half of the Governor's challenge to the Foundation, although the Foundation is working to secure donations over and above the challenge amount to enhance the presentation of the history and culture of the site. GFP is sure enough of the Foundation's eventual success to hire a firm to develop plans for a Visitors Center.

## Custer State Park Visitors Center and Theater

Another new Visitors Center is the focus of fundraising efforts for Custer State Park. The nearly two million annual visitors to the Park would benefit from a state-of-the-art introduction to the wildlife, geology, history, and other attractions of the Park. Park staff and visitors have long dreamed of a more dynamic orientation.

The Foundation has been challenged to raise \$1,000,000 for the new facility. Again, it is aiming for more contributions to further enhance the visitor experience and do justice to this world-class destination.

The State plans for a fall 2014 groundbreaking and an architectural firm has been hired to design the Center.



## Mickelson Trail Extension from Hill City to Mt. Rushmore

Trail enthusiasts have imagined a route approaching Mt. Rushmore since the Mickelson Trail first started attracting hikers and riders two decades ago. Eighteen miles of adventure and spectacular beauty await hikers, bikers and horseback riders for the future Trail extension. An initial goal of \$1,100,000 in private contributions has been requested by the State to finish an environmental impact study and to match Federal and other funds available for construction. During the 2013 Fiscal Year a feasibility study was completed and the Legislature and GFP set funds aside to match the Foundation's efforts.

## Other Foundation Projects

Thanks to the support of many donors, the Outdoor Campus East was furnished with a handful of new exhibits, more educational and recreational features were added to the Outdoor Campus East, and more of the oldest Mickelson Trail bridges were rebuilt. Many other outdoor projects and programs were also started or completed with Foundation contributions during the fiscal year.



Concept drawing of new Visitor Center near the Game Lodge by ARC International

*The way we tackle many visionary projects in South Dakota is through public-private partnerships. The Foundation is working with the private sector to turn visions into reality, and the work went well in FY 2013. We could not be doing this work without the help of Friends of South Dakota Parks and Wildlife. Thanks, Friends!*

*A full Report will be available at the Foundation's web site, [parkswildlifefoundation.org](http://parkswildlifefoundation.org) by November of 2013. Donations to any Foundation project can be made on line or by contacting Dick or Sue Brown, Development Directors, at 605-673-4017, 605-941-3156 or at [brownassociates@goldenwest.net](mailto:brownassociates@goldenwest.net).*



# Dakota Flora

## Wild Plum

by Dave Ode, GFP Botanist

“Kan’ta’sa wi,” the Lakota name for August, translates as the “Red Plum Moon,” for it is during the August moon that wild plums ripen from sour green drupes into the sweet red fruits that attract berry picking families – families of deer, families of wild turkeys, families of coyotes, and families of people. As a boy I remember those August days when my mother would host one of her communal jelly-making, or tomato-canning, or corn-freezing rendezvous with her sisters and friends. My cousins would come and we would all pick wild plums from our shelter belt. It’s a tradition that extends well beyond my family. Wild plum pits have been found in archaeological digs dating back thousands of years. Imagine a plum sauce on a Columbian mammoth steak.

What I call wild plums are also known as American plums (*Prunus americana*). They grow wild across most of the eastern two-thirds of central North America and are cultivated across an even greater area. Here on the Great Plains they typically grow in woody draws, floodplains, forest edges, streambanks, fence-rows, road ditches, and are commonly planted in farm wind breaks or shelterbelts. They are among the earliest shrubs to bloom, producing fragrant white flowers in April before their leaves emerge.



Wild plums flower in April before their leaves unfold, but their dense thickets provide cover for a wide variety of wildlife all year long. Photo © Matt Lavin

The scent of their flowers is overwhelmingly sweet and attracts insect pollinators, like honey bees from far and wide. Their habit of tillering into dense thickets makes them less than ideal for ornamental plantings, but makes them excellent cover for a wide variety of wildlife who seek shelter among wild plum’s thorny branches.

I’ve learned to respect the thorns on American plums. Anatomically they are not true thorns but thorn-like spurs, but they jab and tear just like thorns. During the summer of 1978 four of us biology students from Augustana College were conducting a vegetation study on public lands along Lake Francis Case. We hiked a lot of the Missouri River Breaks between Pickstown and Fort Thompson and bush-whacked through some dense woody draws and thickets. Cuts and scratches (along with rattlesnakes)

were a daily if not hourly occurrence. One day while basking on a beach after a swim in the reservoir, I noticed the stub of a sliver protruding from my thigh. When I pulled it out, I revealed a one-inch plum spur that had finally worked its way out after being embedded in my leg for at least several days.

In the western part of their range wild plums don’t grow very tall. Most of our plum thickets in western South Dakota don’t exceed ten or twelve



American plums produce thorn-like spurs that are sharp enough to puncture skin and tear clothing. Photo © Matt Lavin

feet tall, while east of the Mississippi River, American plums may grow into small trees reaching twenty or thirty feet. In my experience, American plum typically grows into a small, crooked trunked tree with a rounded crown of many branches. After about ten years without a major injury, the “parent tree” begins to fail and sends up a thicket of root sprouts or suckers, which in turn may develop into flowering and fruiting stems. One thicket that I remember as a boy died out entirely at its center and became a circle of plum bushes.

Blaine Martian has been the manager of the Big Sioux Nursery in Waukegan for 35 years and has probably had a hand in growing as many wild plums as anyone. Big Sioux will typically produce and sell between 50 thousand and 250 thousand one-year old, bare-root seedlings of wild plums each year. These plants are grown from seeds collected throughout the state and are sorted and grown in beds that correspond with various seed zones or regions of the state. Wild plum seeds germinate much more reliably if they receive a cold stratification treatment, so plant them in the fall, or refrigerate the seeds for several months before planting.

Over the years many cultivars of wild plums have been selected and named. One 1892 publication from the Michigan Horticultural Society describes 45 different named varieties of American plum. Most of these cultivars have gone by the wayside as fewer and fewer people planted wild plums as strictly ornamental or fruit trees, replacing them with more well-behaved non-suckering shrubs. However, at least one named selection remains commercially available. The federal Plant Materials Center in Bismarck, North Dakota has released a cultivar of American plum called “Prairie Red.” This specific strain of wild



Wild plums can vary in color from golden yellow to orange to bright red, but ripeness is best judged more by touch and taste rather than by color. Photo © D.J. Ode

plum has slightly larger and sweeter fruits. Wild plums are typically less than one inch in diameter and have rather thick, astringent skins, while Prairie Red plums are about one and one-half inches in diameter and generally have thinner, less sour skins.

American plums suffer from a few insect pests and diseases. Black knot (*Apiosporina morbosa*) is the most noticeable fungal disease and causes black swellings on twigs and branches. The best remedy is to prune off and dispose of all the diseased branches. Trunks of older American plums often have heartwood decay caused by fungi in the genus *Phellinus*, distinguished by fruiting bodies that look like hard, brown, shelf-fungi. The eastern tent caterpillar (*Malacosoma americanum*) commonly attacks the leaves of wild plums, along with cherries, apples and many other tree species. Most people recognize the white, cobwebby, silken tents formed in the forks of branches by tent caterpillars. Adequate control can often be obtained by simply removing the tents which provide a greenhouse-like environment for the hairy caterpillars and protect them from predators. A long wooden pole with a couple nails projecting out at a right angle from near the tip is a useful tool to help remove the tents. Not all

insectivorous birds will eat the fuzzy tent caterpillars. Brown thrashers are the only bird that I've personally observed eating them, but ornithologists have documented that cuckoos and orioles also eat tent caterpillars.

The fruits of American plum, of course, have many pests including humans. The juice of a perfectly ripe wild plum is sweet nectar beyond compare. During the Lewis and Clark expedition the company made camp near Chamberlain on September 3rd, 1804. William Clark called it their “Plomb Camp,” and wrote in his journal, “Great quantities of Plumbs of a most delicious flavour, I have collected the seed of 3 kinds which I intend to send to my brother...” Wild plums may be rendered into juice, jelly, jam, sauce, candy, preserves, and dried leathers. I've found Kay Young's book *Wild Seasons: Gathering and Cooking Wild Plants of the Great Plains* published by the University of Nebraska Press to be one of the best guides to preparing wild plums and other wild fruits. However you prepare them, you will be following in an ancient tradition that has been attracting people to plum trees for millennia. It's comforting to know that some things never change, and the sweetness of a plum is one of those things. 🌿



# Dakota Naturalist

## To Make a HUNTER

by Keith Wintersteen,  
Naturalist and Group Program Coordinator  
at The Outdoor Campus - West



Image © SD GFP

The road to becoming a hunter is long and rewarding. Those of us who took the traditional path fondly look back and recall our days as two legged bird dogs or pack mules. Only after proving ourselves worthy of trust and earning the respect of our mentors were we allowed to take up gun or bow and join the hunt. We were lucky to have a fam-

ily member or friend who was willing to invest the time needed to shape a hunter. What of those who yearn to hunt but have no mentor to rely on? A very few will seek out an experienced hunter and convince them to ‘adopt’ the novice and share their knowledge and experience. Fewer still are those who teach themselves how to hunt, relying on steely determination and

resourcefulness to gain the knowledge and skills needed to be safe and successful afield. Sadly, the largest group of would be hunters become people who have always wanted to hunt but couldn’t find a way to do it. It is primarily this group that the staff and volunteers at The Outdoor Campus-West in Rapid City have set out to help. It has been an eye opening, challenging and often humorous adventure thus far.

The program was developed by me and Kelsey Gilcrease of the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology. Kelsey’s near encyclopedic knowledge of biology and boundless energy proved priceless in outlining the course of study. She also had never been hunting but had always wanted to learn, which helped immensely when determining what was and wasn’t important to new hunters. The course was designed to introduce students to the history of hunting in North America and South Dakota, the North American model of game management, game and nongame wild-



Mike Kintigh provides instruction on range rules, safety and etiquette as well as tips for first time shooters.

life in South Dakota and a full Hunt SAFE course. It was designed to be a well-rounded, in depth introduction to the science and art of hunting.

Students met for two hours of classroom instruction every Saturday for five weeks. That was the plan. Like all great plans, it lasted 30 seconds into the first day. Class time was constantly extended to cover topics Kelsey and I had not thought of during the development of the outline and syllabus. Two hours of study became three, then four. It was becoming apparent that we had underestimated the sheer volume of material that students were interested in. A discussion of native grouse species and their habitat requirements led to discussions of habitat changes over time in South Dakota. This led to an explanation of short grass versus tall grass prairie which led us into a discussion of farming and ranching operations across the state.

The class discussion finally turned to the obvious: "How do I find a place to hunt?" There followed a lengthy discussion of various types of land ownership: private, county, state, federal and tribal. We had an interesting discussion of how best to approach a private land owner to gain hunting access. The class poured over United States Geological Survey, Bureau of Land Management and United States Forest Service maps. Students were fascinated by the variety and types of habitats available. One of the most useful tools for the students was the South Dakota Department of Game Fish and Parks interactive map system known as WILMA. The entire class learned to identify big game hunting units, terrain features, land use patterns and access routes. We studied two dimensional, topographic and satellite views of various hunting areas. One of the more creative members of the class asked if there was high resolution imagery which showed the

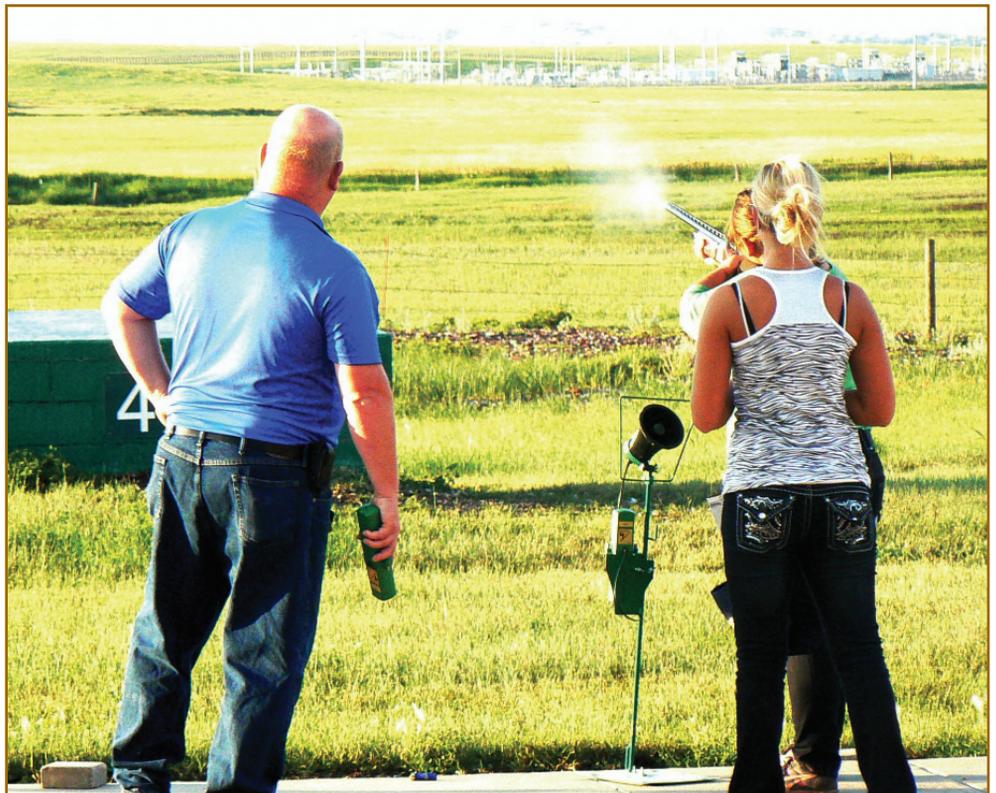
exact location of individual game animals. Another chimed in and declared that would be nothing short of cheating and hardly fair chase. They were slowly evolving into hunters.

The next phase involved training in the safe use of firearms. We brought out nonfiring training guns and showed the class various types of rifles and shotguns. Half of the class had never laid hands on a firearm of any type before enrolling in the class. They soon learned how to safely carry, load, unload and store firearms. The next step in their training was a trip to the Rapid City Trap Club's range for some live fire at moving targets.

The class met at the trap club and was given an introduction to the art, science and etiquette of trap shooting by Mike Kintigh and his daughter, Kylie. Mike is the Regional Manager in the Rapid City Game Fish and Parks Office and coach of the Rapid City Youth Trap team since 2004. Mike's daughter, Kylie, 4 time South Dakota

state ladies single champion and State handicap champion overall in 2007, proved invaluable as an instructor for the female shooters. A big help since 80 percent of our students were women. Guns at the ready, the shooters took their positions. There were a string of misses, understandable with first time shooters. Then one shooter pulverized a clay pigeon. Congratulations were offered. There was a sudden, subtle change in the students. They realized it was possible to hit a moving target and they were going to practice until they had the skill to do it. It was another step forward on the path to becoming a hunter.

Only two steps to go. We'll shoot a round of sporting clays for some realistic hunting practice then head to the fields in pursuit of sharptail grouse. Before we do that, we'll have one more class on how to clean and cook grouse. There's nothing like a meal of fresh game to spur new hunters on to the field in search of fresh game. 🐾



*Mike and Kylie Kintigh provide tips to Kristina Barker of Rapid City. Kristina, once an avowed vegan, has now turned hunter.*



# Natural Heritage

## Eskimo Curlew

By Eileen Dowd Stukel  
GFP Senior Wildlife Biologist

The federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) evokes strong feelings. Many of us are proud that we as a people value rare species and commit to save them from extinction. For others, the ESA is a legal hammer that impedes economic development and infringes on individual rights. ESA critics argue that this law is ineffective in saving species anyway. The Eskimo curlew enjoys full protection of the ESA, but to no avail, not because of the law's shortfalls, but because protection likely came too late.



Image courtesy of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and the Classic Collection of North American Birds.

Much of what we know about the Eskimo curlew came from North America's European settlers, early naturalists and market hunters. Prior to the formation of wildlife agencies, protective laws and biological data collection, natural resources were exploited with little regard to the future, either of wildlife populations or future human generations. As one plentiful resource was eliminated, users shifted to another. The decline and eventual extinction of the passenger pigeon likely shifted market hunting pressure more heavily to shorebirds, such as the Eskimo curlew. This species was highly prized for its delicate flavor, creating a demand in cities of the eastern U.S.

in addition to use by settlers to supplement their diets. The Eskimo curlew was hunted nearly year-round, an assault that was impossible to sustain for long.

The curlew's life cycle spans extreme ends of two continents. The birds bred in two areas of the Northwest Territories, Canada, with possible additional nesting areas elsewhere. Treeless tundra and grassy meadows are characteristic nesting habitat. Although few nests have been found or studied, they were described as simple depressions lined with vegetation. The female laid one, 4-egg clutch per season. Important foods on the breeding grounds were grubs, insects, ants and

fruit. By July, these highly gregarious birds started flocking together and moving east through Hudson Bay, reaching staging areas in Labrador and Newfoundland by August and September. The plant *Empetrum nigrum* is called black crowberry by botanists, but it has also been called “curlew berry” because of its great importance to Eskimo curlews as they staged on the northeastern coast of North America prior to their southerly migration.

Staging allowed the birds to build up fat reserves needed for the arduous flight south. This species has been called the doughbird, presumably describing the extensive fat layer on birds preparing for migration. Once physically ready and with favorable weather conditions, flocks flew south over the Atlantic Ocean for a typically nonstop trip to their wintering grounds in southern South America. Storms sometimes pushed birds into coastal areas along the way. Fishermen occasionally saw birds resting on the ocean’s surface during migration. Wintering grounds were flat, treeless grasslands or riparian areas, where Eskimo curlews shared space with other shorebird species, such as the American golden-plover.

Less is known about the spring northerly migration route. In March or April, flocks likely crossed the Andes, and then followed the Pacific Coast, with some birds stopping in coastal areas of Texas. Birds moved north through tallgrass and eastern mixed-grass prairie in the central U.S. and Canada. Spring migration was when this species was recorded in South Dakota, with most reports from the southeastern part of the state.

Records and descriptions from Nebraska are more detailed than those from South Dakota due to the efforts of an individual named Myron Swenk. Two excerpts from his works follow:

**“These flocks reminded the settlers of the flights of passenger pigeons and the curlews were given the name of ‘prairie pigeons.’ They contained thousands of individuals and would often form dense masses of birds extending for a quarter to a half mile in length and a hundred yards or more in width. When the flock would alight the birds would cover 40 or 50 acres of ground.”**

**“Mr. Wheeler states that in the latter seventies these birds would congregate on pieces of land which had not been plowed and where the grasshopper eggs were laid, reach down into the soil with their long bills, and drag out the egg capsules, which they would then devour with their contents of eggs or young ‘hoppers until the land had been cleared of the pests.”**

The gregarious nature of the Eskimo curlew may have made it especially vulnerable to overharvest. Shooters described whistling in a bird within a flock to shoot it. Other flock members often reacted by circling around and around until the majority of the flock was taken down. The heyday of market hunting of this species was from the 1850s until the 1870s, followed by an extremely rapid decline until sightings were very rare by 1900.

Today we know that spring hunting of a species can cause severe population declines by reducing the breeding population, but harvest is not believed to be the sole cause of the Eskimo curlew’s demise. The late 1800s was a

time of settlement and habitat conversion. Prairies were converted to agricultural fields, fire was suppressed in areas where it had functioned in an important disturbance and regeneration role, and some grasshopper species found in rangeland did not occupy the cultivated sites that replaced this habitat. The birds coped for a while, following plows to take advantage of exposed insects and exploiting abandoned fields and pastures. Shifting wheat planting from spring to fall was another blow, as was the extinction of the Rocky Mountain grasshopper. Some of the habitat on the wintering grounds was also converted for other uses, although at a lesser rate than occurred along the spring migration route.

Some scientists hypothesize that Eskimo curlews could not recover when the population reached some critical low level because of their dependence on specific habitats, their highly social nature and their conservative nesting production.

The last known specimen was collected in Barbados in 1963. Since then, sporadic sightings have kept hope alive that some Eskimo curlews remain. One challenge in evaluating credibility of sightings is that Eskimo curlews and young whimbrels are similar in appearance. A notable sighting of 23 individuals was reported in Texas on May 7, 1981. Extensive surveys of suspected breeding and wintering areas have revealed no Eskimo curlews.

Has the “doughbird” gone the way of the passenger pigeon and other species lost forever? The Endangered Species Act protects this species, if any still exist, but laws alone seldom save species. Learning from the past and humbly admitting that we do not understand all of nature’s complexities may be the most valuable lessons learned from the Eskimo curlew’s story. 



# ParkNotes

## STATE PARKS TAKING CAMPING RESERVATIONS THROUGH THE WINTER

PIERRE, S.D. – The Game, Fish & Parks Department is reminding campers that the end of the summer doesn't mean the end of camping at South Dakota state parks as the parks will continue taking camping reservations throughout the winter months.

"We now take reservations for stays year-round," said state park director Doug Hofer. "In the past, camping was on a first-come, first-served basis after Labor Day."

Campsites and cabins at Custer State Park can be reserved up to one year in advance, and up to 90 days prior to arrival at all other campsites and cabins.

Group campsites located at Custer State Park and Lewis and Clark Recreation Area can also be booked one year in advance. Group lodges that can be reserved one year ahead of time include:

- Lake Thompson Recreation Area near Lake Preston
  - Mina Lake Recreation Area near Aberdeen
  - Newton Hills State Park near Canton
  - Oahe Downstream Recreation Area near Fort Pierre
  - Palisades State Park near Garretson
  - Shadehill Recreation Area near Lemmon
  - Sheps Canyon Recreation Area on Angostura Reservoir near Hot Springs
- Camping reservations can be made online at [www.campsd.com](http://www.campsd.com) or by calling 1-800-710-2267.

## STATE PARK ENTRANCE LICENSES AVAILABLE FOR 2014

PIERRE, S.D. – The 2014 annual park entrance license for South Dakota's state parks and recreation areas is available for purchase starting October 1.

The 2014 park entrance license is valid from Oct. 1, 2013, through May 15, 2015. Purchasers of one license can also buy a second at half price. The license is required for entrance into designated state parks, recreation areas and lakeside use areas, although it does not cover camping costs or additional fees.

Entrance licenses can be purchased online at [www.campsd.com](http://www.campsd.com), at local state park offices or by calling the SD Division of Parks and Recreation at 605-773-3391.

The 2014 annual entrance license features a tent camped out at Lake Thompson Recreation Area.



## FORT SISSETON CELEBRATES A FRONTIER CHRISTMAS

LAKE CITY - Get in the holiday spirit at Fort Sisseton Historic State Park's Annual Frontier Christmas on Saturday, Dec. 14. Relive Christmas traditions from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. CST.

Throughout the day, visitors can make traditional Christmas ornaments and crafts at the North Barracks Visitor Center or egg-baked bread at the barracks' kitchen. Visitors can also stop by the mess hall to taste freshly churned butter.

A jingle bell and antique sleigh display will be set up near the North Barracks Museum area and local musicians will provide holiday music.

Join the fort's horse drivers for a sleigh or wagon ride through the fort grounds; see members of the Prairie Fiber Arts Guild demonstrate how wool and other natural fibers are made into clothing; and witness traditional wood-carving and old-fashioned rope turning.

"This is your chance to celebrate a time-honored holiday at an authentic 1864 military outpost," said Katie Ceroll, park manager. "The event is truly a fun-filled day offering pure homemade Christmas for all."

There is no cost to participate, but a park entrance license is required and can be purchased at the park. Concessions and craft vendors will be at the Library Schoolhouse throughout Saturday.

For more information, contact Fort Sisseton at 605-448-5474 or e-mail [FortSisseton@state.sd.us](mailto:FortSisseton@state.sd.us)



## **SKYLINE LOGGING ENHANCES BIG GAME HABITAT IN CROW PEAK GAME PRODUCTION AREA**

South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks is enhancing big game habitat found within the Crow Peak Game Production Area of the Black Hills near Spearfish with the help of skyline logging.

“Big game, such as deer and elk, depend upon plants on the forest floor for food and cover during the winter,” said Tim Bradeen, Habitat Resource Biologist for South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks (GF&P). “In this production area, the stands of Ponderosa Pine are too dense to allow for desirable plant species to grow under the pine canopy.”

If left to her own devices, Bradeen explains that Mother Nature would take care of thinning the forest through naturally occurring events like fire on the landscape. He says GF&P can duplicate the effect by thinning the dense stands through logging and opening up the canopy so sunlight can reach the forest floor. This encourages a healthy balance of plant diversity such as chokecherries, bur oak, aspen, Oregon grape, native grasses and wild flowers which big game species depend upon, and also helps control infestations of Mountain Pine Beetle.

“All plants compete for sunlight, and until now, on this production area the Ponderosa Pine has been winning,” Bradeen said.

To see highline logging first hand, visit the SDGFP YouTube channel or visit this link:

<http://youtu.be/6BIn5C5q260>. In the video Tim Bradeen demonstrates what a healthy forest understory looks like and discusses how plant diversity benefits all wildlife.

## **SOUTH DAKOTA PHEASANT SURVEY LOWER; HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES IMPROVE**

PIERRE, S.D. - Months of persistent drought in 2012, a cold, wet spring in 2013 and a reduction in habitat have impacted pheasant brood counts, according to a report released today by the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department. But officials note that South Dakota will still offer the best pheasant hunting experience in the country, with more than 1.1 million acres of public land available for pursuing birds within the state’s main pheasant range.

The department’s annual brood count surveys the number of pheasants per mile as a means to track pheasant numbers over time. The actual population size is estimated after the pheasant hunting season ends, with additional information gathered from hunter surveys and a winter rooster-to-hen ratio survey.

The 2013 report indicates an index of 1.52 pheasants per mile, down from 4.19 pheasants per mile last year.

“The annual brood count provides us with a year-over-year analysis tool,” said Travis Runia, GFP’s lead pheasant biologist. “Our numbers may be down from last year, but hunters will still be able to find birds.”

GFP conducts the brood route survey each year on select stretches of roads around the state. All pheasants are counted along each route, with particular attention to the number of broods.

“Much of the northern Great Plains experienced the same weather and habitat factors that impacted our brood counts,” Runia said.

Runia noted that lower brood counts in 1992 and 1997 still resulted in almost one million pheasants harvested in South Dakota each year. Since 1992, the

state has added 350,000 acres of public access within the main pheasant range, expanding hunting opportunities.

View the full survey at: [www.gfp.sd.gov/hunting/small-game/pheasant-outlook.aspx](http://www.gfp.sd.gov/hunting/small-game/pheasant-outlook.aspx)

## **NEW OPTION TO COMPLETE SOUTH DAKOTA BOWHUNTER EDUCATION**

PIERRE, S.D. - A new online bowhunter education course is now available to help South Dakotans improve their archery skills.

“This new, totally online option teaches safety in-the-field, bowhunting basics, shot placement and recovery techniques through easy-to-understand information, instructional videos and detailed illustrations,” Jason Kool, hunter education administrator for the Game, Fish and Parks Department, said.

All archery big game licensees ages 11-15, all first-time archery big game licensees regardless of age and all archery elk licensees are required to possess bowhunter education certification prior to obtaining an archery license.

“This opportunity meets the national and state bowhunter education program requirements and allows students to learn at their own pace,” said Kool.

This new online course is a partnership between GFP, the National Bowhunter Education Foundation and Kalkomey Enterprises allowing students to study for free, paying only \$30 when they pass the online course.

For those who are looking for a more personable approach to their completion of bowhunter education, the in-person classroom option is still available for free. Class listings for both options can be found under the Outdoor Learning section on the Game, Fish and Parks website [www.gfp.sd.gov](http://www.gfp.sd.gov).

Game, Fish & Parks  
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**SPROUTS "TRY IT" DAY**  
Ages 3-5

Over 400 smiling faces attended the 2013 Try It Day in August. This event was held at the Outdoor Campus-West in Rapid City. Check the website for more events like this!

[gfp.sd.gov/outdoor-learning/outdoor-campus](http://gfp.sd.gov/outdoor-learning/outdoor-campus)