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LANDOWNERS *Matter*

GFP Enhances Elk Depredation Programs

The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission recently approved the first-ever elk management plan for South Dakota. Based on information obtained from a public opinion survey, several stakeholder group meetings and public comments which were solicited for several months, the overall management approach moving forward is to increase the elk herd in the Black Hills based on elk numbers in most elk hunting units. Dependent upon the specific management unit, GFP identified management directions based on current elk numbers within those units. In 2015, some units are expected to slightly increase while others are to maintain the current elk numbers. A critical component to successfully managing elk in South Dakota is to cooperatively work with landowners and producers to reduce or alleviate elk damage to private property. Private lands provide important habitat for elk in many areas and sportsmen and women rely on private lands for hunting.

Additionally, sportsmen and women hold elk hunting opportunities in South Dakota in high regard and in 2014 there were more than 27,000 elk applicants. It is because of these

considerations GFP operates a comprehensive wildlife damage management program. Since 2000, GFP has spent more than \$2.6 million cooperatively working with landowners and producers to address elk depredation on private lands.

In 2013, GFP conducted surveys of landowners, hunters and applicants in current elk hunting units. This survey indicated 67 percent of hunters and 58 percent of landowners were willing to pay an additional \$5 in application fees, if the funds generated were used to enhance elk depredation programs on private lands to increase the social tolerance. In 2014, the South Dakota legislature approved the \$5 increase which now makes the non-refundable application fee for elk, bighorn sheep, and mountain goat a total of \$10. The 2015 application period will be the first time these additional funds are collected.

Earlier this spring, GFP initiated several enhanced depredation programs. "GFP has earmarked additional funds from the increase in the non-refundable application fee specifically to cooperate with private landowners and producers to address elk depredation on private lands," GFP wildlife damage program

administrator, Keith Fisk said. "We implemented these enhanced program features during the spring of 2015." GFP annually works with 50 to more than 100 landowners (depending upon the year) in elk hunting units in the Black Hills and the prairies of South Dakota to reduce impacts to private property from elk. The volume of work varies annually due to weather events, elk populations, changes to elk habitat and seasonal variations. These additional funds will allow GFP to continue to work cooperatively with landowners as the population increases.

GFP works in five primary program areas to address elk depredation with cooperating landowners and producers. In exchange for these services, producers are asked to sign an agreement that states they allow free reasonable elk hunting access to non-family members who obtain proper permission and that they do not charge anyone for elk hunting access. The level of assistance provided to landowners and producers is determined by several components such as the number of elk, the severity of the damage or amount of elk usage that occurs on the property, and the elk population objective in the area.

Five main programs in which producers or landowners can participate:

Food Plots: GFP provides payments to producers where alfalfa or other crop-fields are used as food sources for elk.

Hayland Areas: GFP provides payments to producers where hayfields are used as food sources for elk. These fields are required to be hayed annually. This program is designed to work on hayfields. Grazing areas or pastures do not qualify.

Protective Stackyards/Panels: GFP provides cost-share assistance to producers with elk damage to stored-feed (i.e. hay or ground livestock feeds) by providing long-term solutions like permanent stackyards or portable panels to protect supplies.

Cable/Replacement Fence Materials: GFP provides cost-share assistance to producers with elk damage to fences. These funds provide protective cable, which is installed along the top of fences, protecting them from damage when elk cross fences. These funds are also used to provide replacement fence materials such as wooden posts and wire to repair or replace elk-damaged areas of fence.

Hazing Efforts: GFP provides hazing devices and assistance in areas where producers are impacted by elk and hazing can be effective. GFP utilizes

propane cannons, pyrotechnics and other hazing devices to keep elk away from certain areas for short durations of time. During hunting seasons, hunters are an effective way to manage elk on properties where the animals cause damage. Once hunting seasons are closed, if conditions warrant, GFP can initiate depredation pool hunts where unsuccessful hunters are utilized to remove a small number of elk.

The success of these programs relies on the cooperation of producers and landowners. Elk depredation is complex and not all areas and circumstances are best suited for the same program. Often a combination of programs is the most effective solution for a particular area. "GFP is excited to offer these enhanced programs and wants to continue to cooperate with landowners and producers who experience elk damage," said Fisk. "Over the past 15 years GFP has a history of cooperatively working with landowners and producers to find reasonable solutions to elk damage on private lands. We are committed to continue those efforts."

Landowners and producers experiencing elk damage and need assistance or have questions about GFP's elk depredation programs are encouraged to contact their local Wildlife Conservation Officer or the Regional GFP Office in Rapid City at 605.394.2391. ■



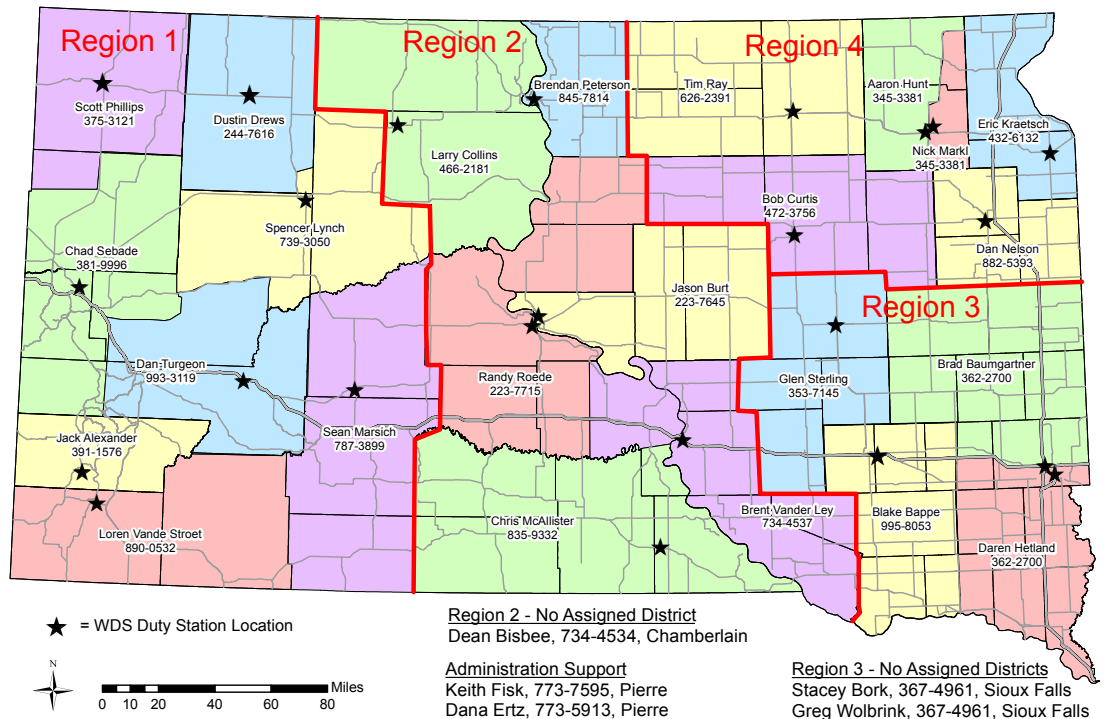
The Wildlife Damage Management Program (WDM) is designed to work directly with landowners and producers to reduce wildlife damage to crops, livestock, stored feed and more. Landowners throughout the state call on their wildlife damage specialist to help them with problems or concerns.

"GFP has 27 full-time wildlife damage specialists across the state who work with landowners to address wildlife damage complaints," said WDM program administrator, Keith Fisk. "It is important for landowners to understand the types of services we provide and the accountability of the funds used to provide these services."

The WDM program spent more than \$2.23 million in 2014. This money is spent directly responding to more than 2,500 requests for assistance, impacting nearly 2,000 landowners. A summary of the programs, assistance available and budget is available online.

gfp.sd.gov/agency/information/docs/2014WildlifeDamageAnnualReport.pdf

2015 Wildlife Damage Management Program



New Guy, New Approach



Hitting the ground as the new cabinet secretary for the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks has been an exciting and fast-paced experience. My priority has been to get out, visit field offices and staff, check out our state parks and meet with as many sportsmen and women, and landowners as possible.

I am a South Dakota guy. I was born in Deadwood and graduated from Spearfish High School. My father was an avid hunter; when he wasn't working for the Homestake Sawmill, he was exploring the Black Hills. My first outdoor memories center around him shooting and hunting.

I graduated from Montana State University with a Bachelor of Science in Fish and Wildlife Management. In 1979, I began an incredible career with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and had the opportunity to see and do things most folks in my profession only dream about. Alaska was good to my family and will always hold a special place in my heart.

Today I have my dream job; which allowed me the chance to come home. Reacquainting myself with the lands and the people of this state in this capacity is truly an honor. I realized when I took this job, however, my clock would be ticking. I have a lot I want to accomplish. I am a firm believer that everything starts and ends with communication. Communicating with producers, sportsmen and women, special interest groups, legislators, staff and anyone with a vested interest in South Dakota's natural resources is critical. We are moving forward with the implementation of an agency-wide strategic plan which will serve as a guiding document to help us achieve specific goals and tasks in years to come. A key component of that roadmap

is bridging the gap between the hunting and fishing community, and the agriculture community. Myself and my staff have already set the stage for a level of collaboration with the South Dakota Department of Agriculture that has never been attempted before and I anticipate it will only improve as we work on soil conservation and water concerns throughout the state. I look forward to keeping you and other producers well informed on how that evolves. You will also see me encouraging the investment and participation in the state's recently-developed Wildlife Conservation Fund. I want these programs to be accessible and to be well-suited for producers, sportsmen and women, and the people of this state.

Workforce development and a diverse school of thought certainly play a part when we look at our recruitment efforts. Educational programming is vital to this agency as we push to fortify outreach efforts on encouraging South Dakota's youth to participate in outdoor activities.

I look forward to the changes and challenges ahead. There is a lot to do, more than what I have mentioned here, but I can't imagine a workload anywhere else I would look forward to more. At the same time, I want to ensure we provide customers with the most timely and pertinent information. If there is something you would like us to address in future Landowners Matter issues, please contact us at wildinfo@state.sd.us and we will do our best to address your suggestions.

I look forward to working with you in the future,

Kelly Hepler

Turn in Poachers (TIPs) Program Benefits Landowners

The South Dakota Turn In Poachers (TIPs) Program was started in 1984 with the help of concerned sportsmen and women throughout the state two large bull elk were found killed and left to waste in the Black Hills. Within



one year, the program generated significant public interest and it was so successful it was implemented statewide. TIPs is a private, non-profit organization run by Wildlife Protection Incorporated. The program

is funded through donations from the big game license application check-off, private individual/group donations and through court-ordered restitution. Rewards are paid in cash once an arrest is made and informants can remain anonymous.

Miller conservation officer Cory Flor received information from a Hand County landowner that included trail camera photos

of a large whitetail buck, taken the day prior to the 2013 East River Deer season. The landowner also supplied photos of what appeared to be the same deer, shot on the second day of the deer season by a nonresident hunter. Knowing that it is extremely difficult for a nonresident to secure an East River buck tag, Officer Flor began an investigation in January 2014.

The results were eye opening. It turned out the suspect, a North Dakota resident, applied as a South Dakota resident for Buffalo County buck tags in multiple East River Deer drawings. Joined by another hunter, the suspect hunted on private land without permission and without proper licenses in Hand County. The two repeated this

TURN IN POACHERS CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

trend for multiple years, eventually killing the buck whose picture was originally captured by the landowner of one of the areas hunted by the suspects. This case could not have been made without the information supplied by the concerned landowner. More than \$8500 in criminal fines and civil damages were levied in this case for the illegal taking of three deer, one of which reached "trophy" status.

All it takes is one call to the TIPS Hotline, 1.888.OVERBAG (683.7224) to make a difference. According to Andy Alban, GFP law enforcement administrator, the hotline has made a difference over the years by providing a conduit between landowners and conservation officers. "Our statistics over the last year show that we've had a 52 percent success rate when you look at the number of TIPS investigations (170) and associated arrests (89)," Alban explained. ■

2014 - LANDOWNER ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE REQUESTS

Shoot too close to dwellings/livestock (660')	126
Spotlight	87
Trespass	251
Miscellaneous	166
Total	630

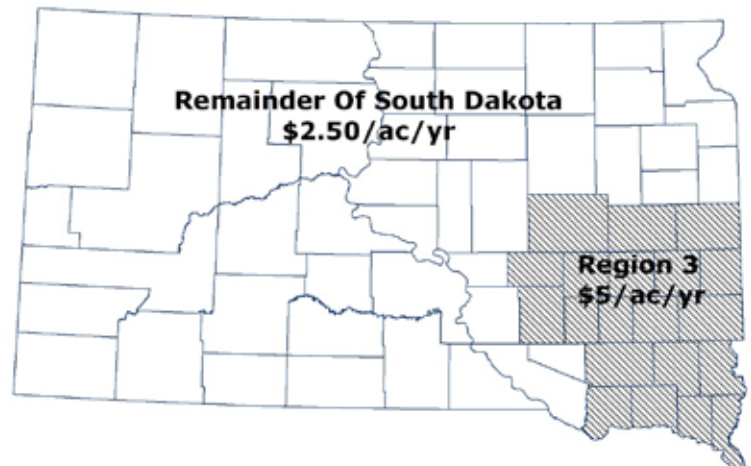
2014 - MOST FREQUENT VIOLATIONS ENCOUNTERED

Fishing without a license
Insufficient number of PFDs (life jackets)
Trespassing to hunt
Possession of alcohol by a minor
Spotlighting
Possession of drug paraphernalia
Fish length limit violation
Possession of marijuana
Over limit of fish
Driving off roads on GFP lands

Conservation Program Signing Bonus for Walk-In Areas

Landowners with land under contract with any USDA conservation program that creates undisturbed cover are eligible for a newly implemented Conservation Program Signing Bonus (CPSB) if they enroll those acres in South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks' (GFP) Walk-In Area (WIA) program. The highly successful WIA program leases private land for unlimited public hunting access - in 2014, over 1.25 million acres across the state were enrolled.

Through the new CPSB, GFP is offering a one-time upfront payment of \$2.50/ac/year or \$5/ac/year for all undisturbed USDA conservation program lands placed in the WIA program (see map). Examples of USDA conservation program lands that would provide undisturbed habitat include Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Wetlands Reserve Program, and pollinator plantings, tree belts, food plots etc. through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) or Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Because these lands provide high quality undisturbed habitat for wildlife and hunting opportunities, GFP is specifically targeting these areas for enrollment in the WIA program. Landowners must enroll a minimum of 80 acres in the WIA contract to ensure reasonable boundaries. The CPSB would only be paid on the undisturbed USDA conservation program acres though.



The CPSB also promotes enrollment of multi-year WIA contracts. Thus, a CRP participant enrolling in the CPSB must place their CRP acres in WIA for the remaining length of their CRP contract. The maximum WIA contract length is 15 years, but if a WIA contract is cancelled early the cooperator would be required to repay the entire CPSB.

The CPSB is the result of a three year \$1.5 million grant GFP received from the United States Department of Agriculture through its Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP). VPA-HIP is a national program that was authorized in the Farm Bill to increase public recreational opportunities on private land. *Contact your local conservation officer for more information (see page 7).* ■

USDA CONSERVATION PROGRAM REACHES 1 MILLION ACRES WITH HELP FROM SOUTH DAKOTA LANDOWNERS AND PARTNERS

A national conservation program that restores high priority wildlife habitat has surpassed 1 million acres with the recent enrollment of land in La Moure County, North Dakota.

The initiative, known as State Acres For wildlife Enhancement (SAFE), is a part of the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), a federally funded voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers to place environmentally sensitive cropland in grassland conservation.

South Dakota has played a significant role in the achievement, enrolling the first SAFE contract in the country back in 2008. Since then, South Dakota producers have enrolled over 100,000 acres into the Pheasant Habitat SAFE and Western South Dakota Grassland Wildlife Habitat SAFE projects. Farm Service Agency staff and Pheasants Forever Farm Bill biologists helped landowners enroll these critical acres throughout the state.

SAFE focuses on establishing key plant species that help not just soil and water, but also are beneficial to wildlife habitat. SAFE projects provide habitat for wildlife that may be endangered, suffering population declines, or that provide value to the local community. The habitat created by SAFE also creates recreational opportunities for sportsmen, which stimulate South Dakota's rural economy each fall.

Agricultural producers can submit offers to voluntarily enroll acres in CRP contracts for 10-15 years. In exchange, these producers receive annual CRP rental payments, sign-up incentives and cost share assistance focused on establishing, improving, or creating higher quality wildlife habitat.

Less than 7,500 acres are still available for enrollment in South Dakota's SAFE projects. Interest in enrollment has been high and additional acreage allocations will be requested as needed.

Producers can offer land for enrollment in SAFE and other CRP programs by contacting their local FSA county office at offices.usda.gov or inquire with a Pheasants Forever Farm Bill biologist gfp.sd.gov/wildlife/private-land/docs/farm-bill-biologists.pdf. ■

South Dakota Farm Bill Biologists



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Weed Control In Your CRP

Mike Blaaid: Pheasants Forever Biologist

Everyone who has ever dealt with grass plantings, pastures or pollinator plots, knows that weed control can be difficult at times. On my farm the biggest problem I have is with Absinthe Wormwood. I have searched for the right combination of chemical and timing and after 3 years I believe I am finally starting to make some progress. With regards to trying to get weed problems under control remember this: It doesn't happen overnight and don't expect it to. It can and will take years to get your problem under control, and miss one year and you can really set yourself back.

The best resource I have found to date is the SDSU Extensions 2013 Weed Control for Pasture and Range (a spot treatment guide can be found at igrow.org/up/resources/03-3020-2012.pdf). This guide will cover the how, what and when of spraying your Noxious weeds. I cannot stress Noxious enough. In my experience working with producers, and with my own weed problems, we tend to spray more than is needed. There are many desirable plants in our CRP planting and pastures that we should try to save. One that comes to the top of my mind as I write this is Common Milkweed. Common Milkweed is the most important plant for Monarch Butterflies in our area and the more selective we get with which chemicals we use and where we use them is important for plants and butterflies alike. If you're interested in spot treating your grass, I have found a very useful tool called a weed wiper. It is essentially a sponge soaked in chemical and attached to the front of a tractor or ATV. I find that I not only save money on chemical but I can be much more selective on what plants I am killing. Weed wipers would be an excellent option for weed control on planting that are a mix of grass and forbs.

Canada Thistles can also be a problem when it comes to establishing CRP seedings, especially when we are required to be planting more diverse mixes. Luckily it can be dealt with rather easily. One of my favorite options is a fall spraying when most of the other plants have already gone dormant. This can be the best time to spray all invasive weeds, but also an excellent time to get ahead of a thistle problem. Thistles take nutrients and try to store them in their roots in the fall. Typically right after a light frost, is the time when a chemical treatment will be most effective. *Contact your local farmbill biologist (see map on page 5) for more information.* ■



ATV with 10' Weed Wiper attached to front.



10' Area between red lines was treated with the Wiper and Milestone fall of 2014. As you can see I missed a couple spots in blue.

DON'T MISS OUT!



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2015

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Elk Management Plan for South Dakota

As previously mentioned, the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission formally adopted the Elk Management Plan for South Dakota (2015-2019) at their April 2015 meeting.

"This plan serves as the guiding document to ensure elk populations and their habitats are managed appropriately; addressing both biological and social tolerances while considering the needs of all stakeholders," stated Tony Leif, director of the GFP division of wildlife. "Staff will continue to work closely with private landowners, the Black Hills National Forest, Wind Cave National Park along with sportsmen and women to overcome challenges and take advantage of opportunities regarding the future of elk management in South Dakota."

The elk management plan provides important historical background and significant biological

information for the formulation of elk management over the next five years. Current elk survey methods and management tools are presented, along with a thorough discussion of objectives and strategies to guide management of this resource. This plan is a working document for staff to be amended as new biological and social data provide opportunities to improve management of elk resources.

The plan outlines a Black Hills population objective (excluding Custer State Park and Wind Cave National Park) at 7,000 wintering elk, with a range of 6,000 to 8,000 elk depending on habitat conditions. The Custer State Park population objective is at 800 wintering elk, with a range of 700 to 900 elk. ■

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