



QUAIL AND UPLAND WILDLIFE FEDERATION

THE HABITAT GUIDE

VOLUME 17 ISSUE 6 • JULY 2026

Notes from the Dashboard:

It's hot, so what about equipment?

By Craig Alderman — It sure is hot in the Midwest, over 100 degrees ambient for days, hot wind making things just plain miserable. Of course, this is in prime haying and harvesting time when tractors, combines, trucks, UTVs and people begin running as fast as possible. These are 14-, 18-hour days or more until the work is done.

Does the heat affect equipment? You bet, and if you are not watching the gauges, general operation and performance including grease locations, the expense can quadruple in a blink when everything stops.

Most cooling on the equipment comes from water-cooled radiators whose external vents/screens/filters are the first thing to plug up while haying, harvesting or operating in the field when seeds begin to drop with chaff and dust creating their own weather system. Air-cooled engines in some ATVs and UTVs just do not make the cut.

Check your water/anti-freeze daily, and have a backup supply in the ready position or someone who can bring it quickly. UTVs, ATVs and side-by-sides all seem to have a low tolerance for excessive heat while running hard in the fields. We have had to hose down the radiators, blow out screens and haul them back to the barn at times when they just give up, and I'm talking the newest models out there.

NOTE HERE: If it has a radiator or filters in the field while haying or harvesting it needs to be periodically cleaned.

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Does drought and high heat impact wildlife movement?

From the editor — We are in the grips of a serious heat dome here in the Midwest, ambient temperatures are 100 or more with heat index 115 to 117. That is hot no matter what anyone says.

Our once flooded flash streams are totally bone dry, ponds are down 60% or more and decreasing daily.

So, what impact does it have on wildlife?

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Continued from Page 1 — HOW? **Carry one of the new 18V or 20V handheld blowers** with the highest flow rate you can find. Milwaukee, Dewalt, Mikata and Ryobi all make their version. Carry one with a full battery. Blow off all the exterior screens, filters and grills, which means take a break, drink something and clean off the screens and filters. It does not take long but can literally allow you to keep working. Blow out the cab, too, just cover your drink or sammich first.

Hot tires get heat cracks; spray them down and wipe them (sidewalls) with Armor All daily — that is what it was invented for.

Balers get really hot, too, and if they catch on fire, it means a total loss unless you carry several good fire extinguishers and fire cloths which you should have installed on all pieces of equipment.

Grease turns liquid under extreme temperatures (fields can reach well over 120 to 140 degrees or more) when metal, bearings and fittings are so hot they will burn your hands. Pay attention to the temperature range of grease and oil, and lubricate when it's cool. **Again, the new 18V handheld auto grease guns are a farmer's wish come true.**

Finally, my favorite. If it has a battery, or several, check the water levels in all cells regularly. Hot weather can literally suck the moisture out of the batteries and once lost, amperage continues to decline from low or no water, then you have to buy a new battery. **ONLY use distilled water**, to top off batteries. Carry the weird funnels to get to the cells if need be, but always, check the battery levels!! Have a few gallons of distilled water at the ready.



Craig Alderman is the Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation founder and executive director. Reach him at admin@quwf.net.

Continued from Page 1 — In excerpts from Mark Smith, a Research Scientist and Research Professor at the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute (CKWRI) it does affect how and when they move.

“Drought drastically reduces the amount of food and water available to wildlife in their environment. CKWRI has revealed some interesting insights into how carnivores deal with drought. They looked at several common species; the coyote and the bobcat. GPS collars showed that coyotes travelled less overall but ended their day farther from where they started during the drought, probably moving towards areas with more food and water”.

“Bobcats did not change where they started and ended their day but they moved more overall to find enough resources. During drought both species were more active at night. However, bobcats were most active at dawn. The data also indicates that the negative conflict between coyotes and bobcats increases as they rely on the same resources, at the same time, in the same place.”

Here at the QUWF farm, we see deer staying well in the shade all day, coming out at sunset, and cameras show the movement is very nocturnal with videos revealing 2-5 a.m. movements including their fawns. Turkeys with poults are bugging more at the pre-sunset time in wildflower areas before heading to the roost and not out in the direct sunlight during the day.

Now we have to get through August, normally the hottest month.



Vermont F&W to hold bear rule hearings

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board will hold two public hearings on proposed changes to Vermont's bear hunting regulation.

The changes proposed by the Fish and Wildlife Board would eliminate the consecutive "early" and "late" seasons to create one bear season extending from September 1 through the last day of the regulated deer seasons.

The proposed rule would require the purchase of a bear tag to take a bear during the bear season. The bear hounding season would extend from September 1 for Vermont residents and September 15 for nonresidents, through the second Sunday after the start of regular November deer season. The proposed changes would allow a second bear tag in annually specified Wildlife Management Units and prohibit the intentional taking of a sow bear accompanied by a cub or cubs.

Two public hearings have been scheduled to solicit input on the proposed rule changes:

August 24 at 6:30 p.m., at St. Andrews Episcopal Church, 1265 Main Street, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819. **This meeting has a hybrid option.** To join the meeting remotely, please use the [link](#) on Vermont Fish and Wildlife's [website](#) under [Board Rules](#).

August 27 at 6:30 p.m. at Bennington Elks Lodge, 125 Washington Ave., Bennington, VT 05201.

Reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities are available upon request. Individuals making such requests should provide a description of the requested accommodation and must include their contact information. Please send an e-mail to hannah.smith@vermont.gov or call 802-461-8187 (voice), 1-800-253-0191 (TTY).

Public comments can be submitted via email to ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov through September 4, 2026. More information on the proposed rule changes is available online at: <https://www.vtfishandwildlife.com/about-us/fish-and-wildlife-board/board-rules>



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Iowa habitat makeover at Rathbun area

Hunters, hikers and birders often appreciate more remote experiences and to that point, the Rathbun Wildlife Area doesn't disappoint. To describe the newly acquired 356-acre wildlife area in southeastern Lucas County as off the beaten path might be an understatement.

With parking available at Lucas County Conservation Board's adjacent Slab Castle Wildlife Area, this parcel is the final piece connecting Chariton to Lake Rathbun – a 17 mile stretch of state, county and federal land.

"This area is already good, but has the potential to be even better," said Heath Van Waus, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Rathbun Wildlife Unit.

The DNR is partnering with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and the Lucas County Conservation Board to manage this area along with the neighboring parcels for the same type of habitats across boundaries.

"We're taking a slow approach to this area because it's so new, using practices that we know will improve the quality of habitat – removing invasives, using prescribed fire – then watch how it responds," Van Waus said. "The area has had a major facelift over the last 18 months."

That facelift began with removing and grinding out autumn olive, honeysuckle and cedars, followed by prescribed fire on 320 acres, including through the timber and on the old grasslands.

"It's been at least 20 years since some of this has seen fire – some of it may never have – and it's been responding really well," he said.

Entering its second growing season, the restored prairie is taking hold. Round headed bush clover, gray headed cone flower, showy tic trefoil are visible as are the bees and sounds of grassland birds.

Walking out on a hillside, a seven-acre potential remnant prairie, once covered under autumn olive and random cedars and pin oaks, is starting to show through the mulch. It has had fire on it twice. The openness at ground level is good for turkey poults and quail chicks – the prairie flowers bring in protein rich bugs and the plant densities allow the chicks to navigate with ease.

As if on cue, a quail, perched on dead tree branch, is whistling every few seconds. A few feet away, a goldfinch joins in on this steamy July morning.

The meandered portion of the Chariton River flows through the south section of the area. The bottomland had a network of old berms, covered under dense vegetation, that held the potential for a future wetland.

"We're looking at using some of the existing berms to restore wetlands here, but needed to inspect the condition of those berms before we could do that," he said.

Driving east along the long main berm, two turkeys that had been hiding in the thick grass along the berm nervously flew away. Pulling out onto the county gravel road heading north, a hen pheasant with 10-quail sized chicks flew in to the safety of a nearby cornfield.





Another severe winter hampers UP deer herd

This past winter, with its heavy snowfall, marks the third severe winter in Michigan's Upper Peninsula in the past five years and could significantly impact the peninsula's white-tailed deer population.

Wildlife biologists from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources conducted field necropsies of vehicle-killed deer in late winter and spring and documented widespread signs of starvation.

Biologists look inside leg bones of deer to examine bone marrow fat as an indicator of nutritional status. Deer that are exhibiting a red, gelatinous marrow have no fat reserves and often succumb to starvation.

The U.P. logged 111 days with at least 12 inches of snow on the ground this winter, making it one of the harshest seasons in the past quarter-century for the deer herd.

Mid-March blizzards dumped 3 feet of snow on parts of the U.P. in two days, adding to the already prodigious snowpack, and lingering snow on the ground persisted into mid-May.

The DNR uses cutting-edge technology called the Snow Data Assimilation System, or SNODAS, to monitor snow depth as part of the agency's extensive deer management.

This winter severity index, which measures snow depth from Nov. 1 to April 30, is a product of the National Snow and Ice Data Center, which is part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Biologists characterize a severe winter as one with 90 or more days with a U.P.-wide average snow depth of at least 1 foot.

Deep snowpack makes food scarce for deer, hinders their movement and causes them to use up the fat reserves they built up over the late summer and fall.

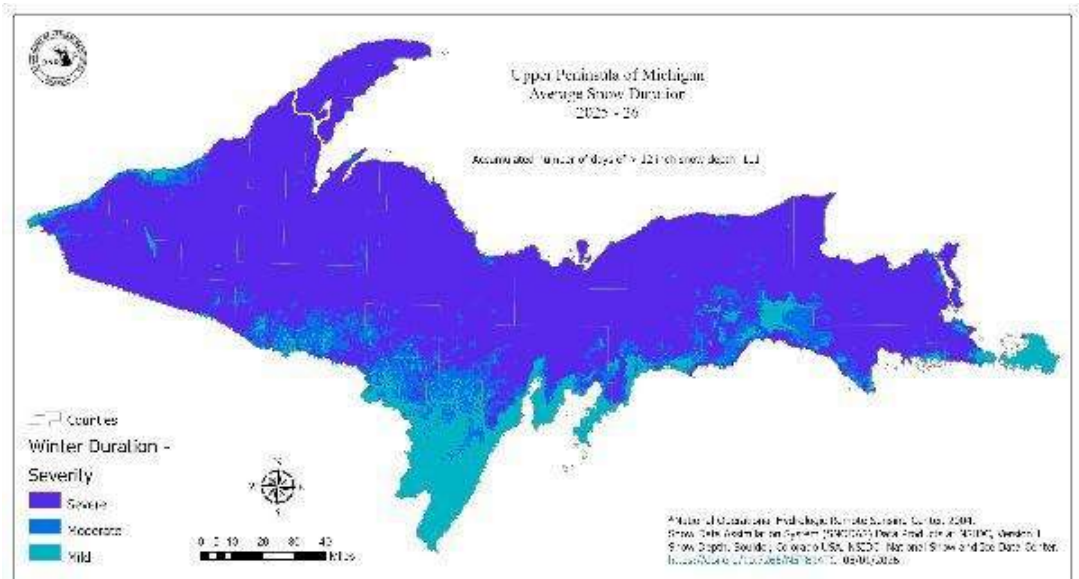
"Generally, the longer the duration of deep snow, the more impacting the winter is likely to be on wildlife," said David Jentoft, a DNR wildlife biologist in Sault Ste. Marie. "And a longer, persisting winter – for example, deep snow present in April – tends to have a strong negative impact on deer survival."

Two or more severe winters in a row are particularly hard on deer.

The winter of 2025-26 was the fourth-most severe winter since 2003.

The previous winter, 2024-25, was classified, overall, as moderate across the U.P., yet large portions of the peninsula saw severe winter conditions, meaning deer in these areas have now experienced two severe winters in a row.

And while the winter of 2023-24 was extremely mild, the two winters before that – 2021-22 and 2022-23 – were also severe.



Continued on Page 7

Continued from Page 6 — Brian Roell, a DNR wildlife biologist based in Marquette, conducted many field necropsies on deer in the U.P. earlier this year and found extensive signs of starvation.

Roell said many people believe that once the snow melts, deer are safe, but the reality is that deer continue dying from starvation in April and even into May.

When a deer's bone marrow fat gets dangerously low, the animal cannot recover, even when it has access to food. The deer continues to get weaker and slower until it dies on its own or from predation.

"It's going to hit the fawns first," Roell said. "They're younger; they're weaker."

In addition, malnourished does may not be able to give birth, and if they do, fawn weights could be dangerously low. That means fewer deer joining the herd.

At that point, the does will be giving birth to fawns that are compromised," Roell said. "And mom doesn't have the milk to sustain them."

Managing the herd

A severe winter generally leads to a less successful buck harvest the following hunting season, according to DNR deer harvest surveys. On the flip side, a mild winter generally leads to a more successful buck harvest the following season.

Since 2012, the U.P. has experienced three severe winters in a row twice – during the winters ending in 2013, '14 and '15 and again during the winters ending in 2018, '19 and '20. The buck hunter success rate decreased somewhat significantly after each of those severe winters, hitting a 23-year low of 20% in '15.

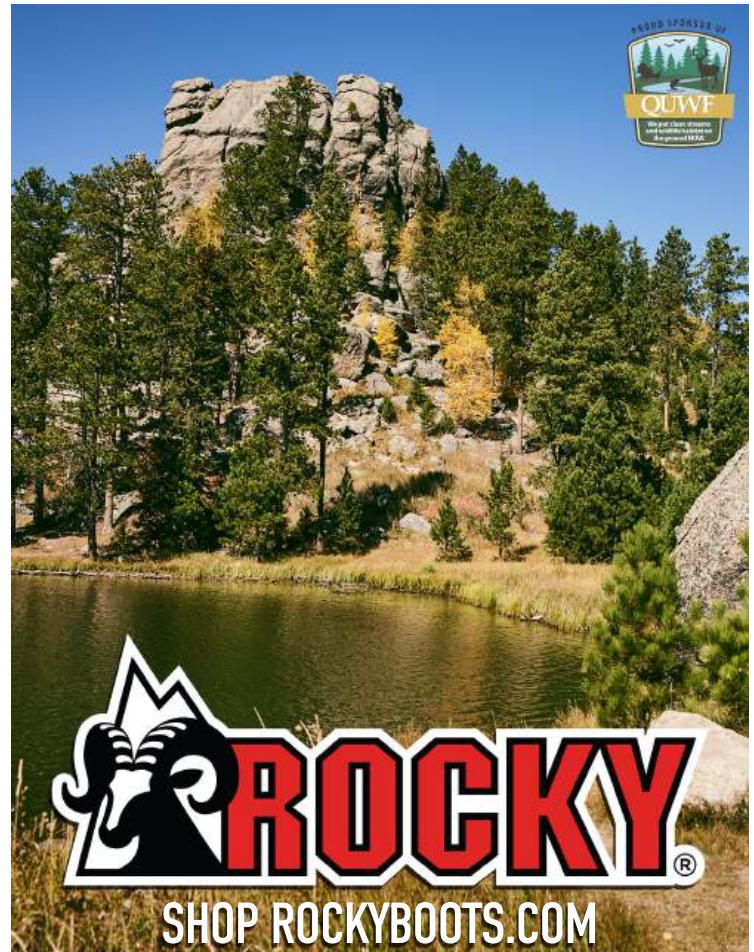
Hunter surveys and the snow depth-monitoring technology both help inform the DNR's [deer management efforts](#). Hunting is the primary tool used to manage the size and distribution of the deer population in both the Upper and Lower peninsulas.

Managing deer habitat is also critical. The DNR's Wildlife Division works with landowners, businesses and organizations to improve habitat for deer in the U.P.

To survive severe winters in northern latitudes, deer migrate to forest landscapes called deer wintering complexes or deer yards. These areas generally consist of dense stands of conifer trees, such as cedar and hemlock, that provide shelter and above-ground food, or "browse."

The DNR owns and manages dozens of deer wintering complexes in the U.P. and works with timber companies and private landowners to manage other lands that deer use as winter range. About 80% of deer wintering area is private land, making this collaboration imperative.

"Quality winter habitat is crucial to helping deer survive winter in the U.P.," said Kristie Sitar, a DNR wildlife biologist in Newberry.



North Dakota releases fall flight forecast

Duck brood numbers are up 55% from 2025, and North Dakota Game and Fish Department migratory game bird biologists expect a fall flight of ducks about 9% higher than last year.

The fall flight forecast is based on information collected during the department's annual May breeding duck survey and July duck brood survey, which together estimate the number of adult ducks and ducklings expected to enter the fall population.

John Palarski, department migratory game bird management supervisor, said timely rains during late May and June greatly improved brood-rearing habitat across parts of North Dakota.

"The 2026 mid-July water index was up 36% from last year, creating favorable habitat during much of the nesting and brood-rearing period," he said. "Far northwestern North Dakota received considerable rainfall and was noticeably wetter than last year. Additional precipitation in the Devils Lake area created excellent wetland conditions in northeastern North Dakota, where intact seasonal and semi-permanent wetlands provided high-quality brood habitat."

Palarski added that although temporary water was abundant in some areas this year, North Dakota's long-term duck production continues to depend on intact prairie wetlands.



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Report reveals shooting sports market defined by higher costs

The report reveals a market that cannot be explained by a single headline. While new firearm unit sales declined modestly compared with a year ago, retail revenue increased as consumers shifted toward higher-priced products. At the same time, dealers continued to reduce inventory, suggesting a more disciplined approach to stocking and working capital.

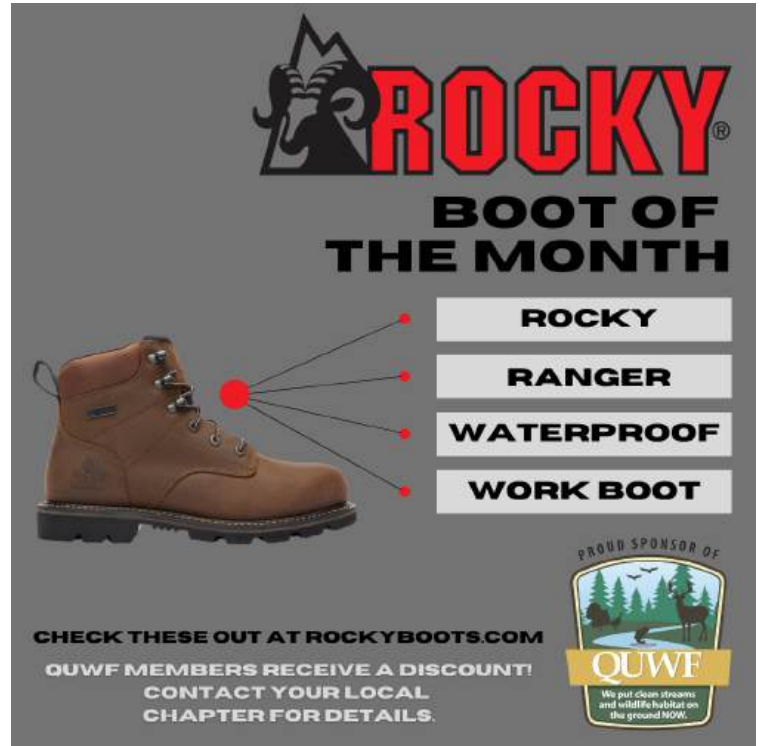
Several trends stood out during the quarter:

- Rifle demand moved in the opposite direction of the broader firearms market.
- Premium products continued to outperform entry-level offerings in several major categories.
- Shotguns faced broad-based pressure, while other categories showed pockets of meaningful strength.
- Suppressors delivered the strongest growth in the report as regulatory changes and improved processing times continued to reshape consumer demand.
- National background-check growth was heavily influenced by activity in a single state, demonstrating why NICS alone may not provide a complete picture of underlying retail performance.

"The headline may be background checks. The real market is what consumers actually buy, what they pay, and what remains on dealers' shelves," said Kaleb Seymour, Chief Strategy and Analytics Officer at Gearfire.

Retail data is based on automated sales and inventory feeds from more than 2,000 retailers across the United States.

Same-store sales trends referenced in the report are drawn from a subset of retailers that have consistently reported since 2023, while inventory analysis reflects month-end stocking levels from approximately 400 large independent point-of-sale dealers.



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TWO HISTORIES ONE NEW LEGACY

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Guide ARK directory now live, applications open

The Arkansas Office of Outdoor Recreation announced today that the Guide ARK Directory, the state's official listing of verified outdoor guides, is now live and available for the public to explore at <https://www.arkansas.com/plan-your-trip/plan/guide-ark-program>.

The new directory allows residents and visitors to search for licensed, insured and vetted outdoor professionals offering guided experiences in hunting, fishing, paddling, hiking, climbing and cycling across Arkansas.

"Arkansas' outdoors are among our greatest assets, and the people who share them with others are just as important. Guide ARK connects visitors with trusted professionals who help create safe, memorable experiences while supporting local businesses and communities across our state," said Shea Lewis, secretary of the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism. "This program is another way we're investing in Arkansas' outdoor recreation economy and ensuring more people discover why The Natural State is unlike anywhere else."

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Continued from Page 9 — Although the directory is now available, the Arkansas Office of Outdoor Recreation emphasized that applications remain open for guides who want to be included.

Outdoor professionals can apply at no cost by submitting proof of licenses, insurance, safety certifications and business registration.

Approved guides will renew annually to remain listed.

"Outdoor guides play a critical role in how people experience Arkansas," said Katherine Andrews, director of the Arkansas Office of Outdoor Recreation. "The launch of the Guide ARK Directory helps connect visitors with qualified professionals while creating new opportunities for guides to grow their businesses. By elevating and promoting these businesses, we're strengthening Arkansas' outdoor recreation economy and supporting the communities that depend on it."

Businesses that join Guide ARK receive visibility on [Arkansas.com](https://arkansas.com), as well as exposure through state travel guides, newsletters, Welcome Centers and state parks.

Members also receive a digital stamp and decal for use online and in their place of business, along with access to promotional toolkits, tourism data and potential invitations to trade shows, marketing campaigns and the annual Governor's Conference on Tourism and Outdoor Recreation.

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Federal rule reestablishes incentives for species recovery

A policy recommendation long championed by the Property and Environment Research Center (PERC) and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) was officially implemented by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. USFWS has rescinded the use of the blanket 4(d) rule under the Endangered Species Act, a critical step toward more effective, incentive-driven species recovery.

"For too long, the blanket rule treated threatened species the same as endangered ones, dulling incentives for recovery," said Jonathan Wood, PERC vice president of law and policy. "By restoring a tailored approach, the Service can better reward progress and encourage proactive conservation."

PERC and RMEF have long argued that recovering species requires stronger incentives for habitat restoration and stewardship. Under a one-size-fits-all framework, states and landowners—whom these imperiled species rely on—have little reason to invest in improvements if regulatory burdens remain the same regardless of a species' status.

The two organizations filed a [joint lawsuit](#) in 2024 against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, arguing the agency's use of the blanket rule impaired species recovery and ignored science. Additionally, they filed a [public comment](#) in 2025 supporting the proposed rescission of the blanket rule.

A more flexible approach allows for a "roadmap to recovery," where incremental progress is met with regulatory relief. This structure empowers local partners, rewards conservation success, and ultimately accelerates species recovery.

Continued on Page 13



Continued from Page 12 — "Smart policy should recognize improvement," said Blake Henning, RMEF chief conservation officer. "Aligning regulations with a species' status is a commonsense way to motivate the very actions that lead to recovery."

Mule deer surveys show favorable fawn recruitment

HELENA – While an early spring across the state made the work of FWP wildlife staff more challenging, it also may have helped mule deer populations -- including fawn recruitment. That was the case when biologists were conducting their spring mule deer surveys.

"Overall, the mule deer population is on the upswing, and we are cautiously optimistic," said Brian Wakeling, FWP's game management bureau chief. "Just because it is trending upwards, though, doesn't mean that the trend will necessarily continue. In most places, we are still below long-term averages, and our objective remains to increase mule deer numbers."

Mule deer surveys occur post-hunting season, usually in December and January, and again in the spring to estimate winter survival. They are just one way FWP responds to the concerns of hunters about herd health.

"When we have an open winter, mule deer herds are not restricted to smaller areas of winter range and can begin exploring wider ranges earlier in the spring," said Wakeling said. "Because they are not concentrated as much, they can be more difficult to find the numbers we are used to when classifying and enumerating individuals."

Spring surveys have two primary goals: to count the total number of deer in a trend area to compare with long-term averages, and to track fawn-to-adult ratios to determine winter fawn survival. Fawns that survive their first winter are considered recruited into the population. Biologists record the number of fawns per 100 adults to generate recruitment ratios. These ratios can help inform FWP on overall winter survival, how the population is faring as it enters the summer season, and what the potential for growth might be in the upcoming year.

According to Wakeling, the spring survey showed favorable fawn recruitment overall, but there are still places in the state where recruitment and populations have not yet responded positively.

"The recent rains and favorable range conditions increased nutrition and body condition for mule deer this year and will play an important role in ensuring good overwinter survival next year, regardless of winter severity," Wakeling said.

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QUWF welcomes All veterans. All the time.

The Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation was formed to focus on and help veteran landowners, veteran sportsmen, and all veterans who are interested in the great outdoors.

QUWF staff will help all veterans find and get benefit assistance through the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) or other resources.

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Continued from Page 13 — In north-central and south-central Montana, biologists reported above-average fawn recruitment but still lower-than-average population trends.

"Several years of poor conditions got us to this point, and it will take a few consecutive good years to see significant recovery," said Cory Loecker, Region 4 wildlife manager. "But we couldn't ask for better weather than what we've gotten so far this year."

In northeastern and southeastern Montana, surveys generally indicated strong recruitment and an increase in populations.

"The past few years we have received favorable moisture during key periods, which improved habitat and forage across southeastern Montana and has helped out the mule deer as they have been recovering from multiple years of severe drought," said Brett Dorak, Region 7 wildlife manager.

And in western and southwestern areas of the state, biologist reported that warm winter weather likely helped mule deer winter survival and fawn recruitment in many areas.



Nebraska fall turkey permits available Aug. 10

Hunters may begin purchasing 2026 Nebraska fall turkey permits at 1 p.m. Central time Aug. 10.

A fall turkey permit is valid statewide, and each hunter may have no more than one fall permit per calendar year. Also:

- The fall bag limit allows the take of one turkey of either sex with a shotgun or archery equipment.
- Fall turkey permits are valid only for the year they are purchased.
- All turkey harvests must be reported via Telecheck. Visit OutdoorNebraska.gov/hunt/telecheck/.
- The fall turkey season is Oct. 1-Nov. 30.
- Permit prices are \$34 for residents, \$158 for nonresidents, \$8.50 for youth, \$18.50 for resident landowners, and \$80.50 for nonresident landowners.

Visit the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's permitting site, GoOutdoorsNE.com, or a permitting office to purchase permits starting Aug. 10.

For more information on turkey hunting in Nebraska, visit OutdoorNebraska.gov. View the 2026 Turkey Guide on the website.



Notes from the Road:

Are your fields dirty? Mine are.

By Nick Prough — Many times, landowners and farmers especially want clean looking fields, field edges and pastures/hayfields in order for their farms to “look clean” or nice for them or the passerby. I am the first one that says, yes, we need to control invasive plant species such as Sericea Lespedeza and Johnsongrass on all the tracts of land a landowner has, and I have spent a significant portion of the past 10 years of my career helping landowners do just that on many different tracts of land.

However, when it comes to some wildlife friendly annual weeds, forbs and wildflowers, we must all learn that we need to have our fields be just “a little dirty.” When I talk about dirty fields, I mean ones that aren’t a monoculture of just one type of grass or species of plant and to allow some actual plant diversity to be in that specific field. This isn’t a new concept, but as I was telling a landowner just the other day, I believe that it is a concept that many have forgotten over the past few years.

With Roundup Ready crops, the farmer has become used to seeing that monoculture of the clean bean field or corn field, and while this serves its purpose for production agriculture, it often is less desirable for wildlife especially after harvest of the crops. However, in a non-crop field situation, such as in a native warm-season grass stand or even a mixed cool-season grass, diversity helps you not only in grazing pastures or hayfields with more species that can thrive under different weather conditions, but it also significantly helps wildlife by having a wide variety of plant species for food at different times of the year as well as for cover for many different wildlife species.

I know I pass and even do site visits on landowners who have the farm “all slicked up” and mowed short, and just the monoculture of grass exists, but those farms are lacking the diverse plant species and structure that their “dirty field neighbor” has. I can bet you more often than not by far that the dirty neighbor’s field has more wildlife using and utilizing his fields than the slick clean landowner does. I have seen this countless times all over the country and know it to be fact beyond a shadow of a doubt.

In fact, some of the most heavily populated tracts for quail in western MO where I have spent most of my career are often the dirtiest farms. One term often associated with this slick field concept is recreational mowing, and it is when you mow just to mow.

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Continued from Page 16 — Now, I for one know that mowing and brush hogging fields can be a useful management tool when it is for a specific goal and objective you are trying to reach or done every few years to control the unwanted woody species that may be encroaching on the field but to mow every spring and fall just to “slick it up” and then wonder why you haven’t seen as many quail or turkeys in your fields is often the outcome.

Once again, I remind you that some of the best farms I have been seeing and hearing many quail and turkeys on this early summer are definitely on some of the “dirtier farms.” So, resist the urge to mow just to mow and instead let some diversity grow in your fields when and where you can. No neighbor and the passerby will barely notice if at all, but the wildlife will thank you over and over again by continuing to utilize and even expand on your dirty fields.

Keep up all the great work out there that each of you, your landowners, your chapters and conservation partners are doing on crucial wildlife habitat projects, youth field day events, nest predator removal, as well as all your other conservation outreach efforts, you are working on in your local communities each and every day, as you are definitely ... “Making a Difference for Wildlife, One Acre at a Time”!



Nick Prough is the QUWF chief wildlife biologist and wildlife partnership coordinator. He can be reached at chiefbiologist@quwf.net.

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Mark your calendars: Residents and out-of-state visitors can legally ride Michigan's 4,000 miles of off-road vehicle trails, routes and six scramble areas on two back-to-back days, Aug. 15-16, without an ORV license or trail permit.

[Free ORV Weekend](#) is a great opportunity to explore [the state's designated ORV trails and routes](#), but remember that all other ORV rules and laws still apply, and [the Recreation Passport](#) is required where applicable. You also must provide your own ORV.

Typically, there's an entrance fee at Holly Oaks ORV Park in Oakland County (although no Recreation Passport requirement), but the fee will be waived for the weekend.

As always, when you enjoy Michigan's outdoors, do your part to help prevent the spread of [invasive species](#) by cleaning mud and plant material from your ORV, trailer and gear.

Find places to ride, rules and regulations, ORV events and more at Michigan.gov/ORVinfo. Before you go, review safety and trail etiquette information at Michigan.gov/RideRight and ride home safe to your family and friends.

Heading to [Silver Lake ORV Area](#) this summer and fall? Be sure to watch [this safe-riding video](#) featuring this special spot that offers a unique and thrilling ride different from traditional ORV trails. This quick video shares critical safety tips you need to know before you navigate the 450-acre scramble area.

Consider purchasing an [ORV license or trail permit](#) for the season. Fees generated through the sale of ORV licenses and trail permits are reinvested back into the ORV system. These important funds help pay for trail brushing, signage, maintenance, bridge and culvert construction, maintenance of trailhead amenities and other expenditures.

Questions? Contact [Jessica Roehrs](#) at 517-331-3790.



Getting ready to bush hog? Service the transmission

Now that the fawns are roaming and not trying to hide, and the turkey poults are well on their way to being a good size, flight capable and quail nesting should be about over, it may be time to cut the fields back in preparation for fall planting of food plots with the Bush Hog or rotary cutter.

First of all, during the waiting months, I have been spraying for invasives like sericea lespedeza, thistle and my personal favorite, poison sumac. Sumac really causes me a dribbling, sneezing and general irritation conditions, even wearing a good breathing air filter. I'm spot spraying but that is another article.

Now to servicing the bush hog transmission before use, I do have the Bush Hog brand. The big issue is not always the blades, which might be ugly to look at but are not ready for replacement. If you have to replace blades if one broke or is totally unbalanced, start about 10 days before repairs by spraying the large nuts through the top plate with a good break free/penetrating oil. It REALLY makes a difference. It may still take a large breaker bar with a helper pipe but they break much easier. ALWAYS replace the nuts and bolts with new ones.

Depending on how old it is I'm guessing you have never replaced the transmission oil? It should be done every 2 to 3 years for top maintenance. **First note: THERE IS NO DRAIN PLUG.**

Continued on Page 20

THIS ONE SETS ITSELF APART

The advertisement features a black and white photograph of a Ruger RXM handgun. The handgun is positioned diagonally across the frame, resting on top of its disassembly manual. The manual is open, showing a detailed diagram of the firearm's internal components and a corresponding numbered list of parts. The background is dark and textured, possibly a wooden surface. In the bottom right corner, there is a circular logo featuring a stylized bird or wing design around a central letter 'R'. To the right of this logo, the text 'RXm™' is prominently displayed above the words 'SHOP NOW'.

RUGER RXM

RUGER
SHOP NOW

Continued from Page 19 — Again, spray the access bolt on the top and the oil level plug on the lower side, several days before doing the service with penetrating oil. I'm guessing you have never removed them, so you do not want to strip them.

You have to manually pump out the old oil through that top access bolt with a drain pump which can be obtained at most auto parts stores or on Amazon. These are not expensive. They do make one that can be manual or used with air pressure to get the oil out. Make sure you get it all and the pump is totally down in the transmission as far as it can go.

Also make sure you buy the hydraulic oil first, it is normally a 90 weight and available at auto parts stores. Check your manual to see how much you will need and then get another extra.

Fill through the top access hole with the bottom level plug out. Fill it SLOWLY and make sure the entire bush hog is on level ground. When it reaches the level check point, wait a bit to make sure it is full, then replace the fill level bolt and the top access bolt on the transmission. It is serviced.



Look for any loose bolts and nuts, especially on the front and rear guards which you should have installed, check for the proper adjustment, on level ground. The front of the Bush Hog should be 2-inches above ground contact and level across to the tractor. Also know, the actual blade is spinning about 1-inch above the bottom of the bush hog side rail

Use the tractor rear three-point lift control lever to lift the Bush hog for setting. The three-point can be checked for proper adjustment on the tractor by measuring from the center of the tractor lift arm pin on top, to the center of the lift arm pin where the Bush Hog attaches. The measurement should be the same on level ground for both sides.

My lift arms measure 19.5- inches on each side from top pin center to lower pin center, on level ground to ensure both lift arms on each side are level to each other and the tractor. **This is required for any attachment you may use other than a bottom plow which may require a different length on the cutting side.**

I use a white paint marking pen and write the measurement on the tractor. I also write the bolt sizes near the bolts so I'm not chasing socket sizes, along with marking proper tire pressure since reading them on the tire sidewalls covered with dust and mud is a challenge for old eyes.

The rear should be 3 to 4-inches above ground contact, adjust by the rear wheel settings.

When you are confident with the settings, adjust the stop on the tractor rear lift handle so the Bush Hog does not go lower and contact the ground.

Grease the PTO shaft on both ends and the wheel shaft and axle. You should also check the clutch breakaway setting in case the clutch is rust welded and not able to move if required. Check your owner's manual for the proper check settings and how to free-up a frozen clutch.

Take care of your equipment, and it will last much longer indeed.

North Dakota Pronghorn season set for October

The 2026 pronghorn hunting season is set with 1,310 licenses available in 18 units, the same number as last year. Biologists flew 15,292 survey miles in June and July to estimate pronghorn populations and set tag allocations. The statewide population increased 12% from 2025 but conservative harvest strategies continue to encourage population growth.

Each unit will once again have a season that is split into an early bow-only portion, and a later gun/bow season.

The bow-only portion of the season is Sep. 4 (noon) – Sept. 27. Anyone who draws a license can hunt pronghorn with a bow in the unit printed on their license.

From Oct. 2 (noon) – Oct. 18, hunters who still have a valid license can use legal firearms or archery equipment, but must stay in their assigned unit.

Only North Dakota residents are eligible to apply for a pronghorn license. Applicants must be at least 12 on or before Dec. 31.

Hunters can [apply online](#) at the Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov. The application deadline is Aug. 5.

A close-up photograph of a Ruger American Rifle Generation II. The rifle is black with a textured finish. A hand is visible holding the magazine. The scope is mounted on top. The text "RUGER AMERICAN RIFLE" and "GENERATION II" is visible on the rifle's body.

RUGER AMERICAN® RIFLE

GENERATION II

LEARN MORE>

First-come, first-served deer gun licenses available

Ninety-five deer licenses are available in unit 3F2 for North Dakota's 2026 deer gun season. These licenses will be issued on a first-come, first-served basis beginning Aug.12 at 10 a.m. Central time. Residents and nonresidents who have not already received a lottery or landowner license [are eligible to apply](#) online by visiting the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov.

Hunters who want to purchase additional licenses may do so Aug. 26 at 10 a.m. Central time. At that time, any [remaining licenses](#) will be issued as a concurrent season license, which can be used during the archery season with a bow; deer gun season with a bow, rifle or muzzleloader; or during the muzzleloader season with a muzzleloader. However, youth under age 14 (at the end of the calendar year) will be issued a concurrent season license for archery only. There is no limit on the number of concurrent season licenses a hunter can purchase.

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JOIN THE QUAIL AND UPLAND WILDLIFE FEDERATION, ITS CHAPTERS, AND ITS MEMBERS IN SUPPORTING AMERICAN WORKERS AND COMPANIES USING AMERICAN RAW MATERIALS BY PURCHASING THEIR PRODUCTS. NO TARIFFS!



CAN'T TELL IF IT'S FROM CHINA?

LOOK AT THE BARCODE. IF THE FIRST THREE NUMBERS ARE 690, 691, OR 692, THE PRODUCT WAS MADE IN CHINA. IF THE UPC BEGINS WITH 00 THROUGH 09, IT'S USA MADE.

Ruger Firearms: Rifles & pistols *QUWF Habitat Sponsor
Henry USA: Rifles & shotguns
Bear and Son Cutlery: All Bear and Son & Bear Ops products are built in Alabama
Easton Arrows: Hunting & target arrows
Hornady Ammunition: Rifle & pistol ammo, personal defense, personal safes
Liberty Safe Co: Gun safes & accessories
WeatherTech: Truck & cab foot liners, bed liners & vehicle accessories
Truax Inc: Grain drills & planters *QUWF Habitat Sponsor
CornholeGame.com: Game boards
InvaderConcepts.com: Chest holsters & accessories, made in Montana
Allegiance Flag Co: showallegiance.com
Rotopax: Mountable container systems
WoodMaxx: PTO & Skid Steer MX series wood chippers, American made with American parts, veteran founded & focused *QUWF Habitat Sponsor
TuffJug.com: Diesel and gas containers made in Idaho

Pronghorn, mule deer field day set in Goodwell, OK

Learn more about pronghorn and mule deer ecology and management at a free field day event Aug. 7, 2026, at Oklahoma Panhandle Research and Extension Center in Goodwell.

[Oklahoma State University Natural Resources Extension](#), in collaboration with the [Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation](#), the [Mule Deer Foundation](#) and the [North American Pronghorn Foundation](#), will present the latest information related to pronghorn and mule deer in western Oklahoma.

The day will begin at 9 a.m. with presentations; a free lunch at 11:30 a.m.; then afternoon presentations and a Q/A session ending at 2 p.m.

Deadline to RSVP is July 31. Go to <https://bit.ly.PronghornMuleDeer2026> to register. Topics will include ecology of pronghorn and mule deer, research updates, management for both species, and livestock grazing management and virtual fencing. The research center is at [2878 OPSU Farm Road](#), south of E0285 Road.



THE HABITAT GUIDE

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The Habitat Guide accepts story suggestions from readers. Some story information appears as gathered from interviewees. The Habitat Guide assumes no responsibility for the credibility of statements made by interviewees.

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Weathermen need help! Watch for wooly bears!

WOOLY BEAR CATERPILLAR WINTER PREDICTIONS



HARSH WINTER. THE MORE
BLACK THE MORE HARSH



MODERATE WINTER



MILD WINTER. THE MORE
BROWN THE MORE MILD



WINTER BEGINS HARSH. ENDS MILD
(MORE BLACK NEAR HEAD)



WINTER BEGINS MILD. ENDS HARSHLY
(MORE BLACK NEAR TAIL)