

OUTDOORS

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21st NASC takes to Rainy River Aug. 17

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

Competitors in Birchdale's North American Sturgeon Champion Aug. 17 have a chance to catch-and-release a trophy 7-foot river monster and net nearly \$2,000.

In its 21st year, the catch-and-release-only tournament at Nelson Park serves as a fundraiser for upkeep and maintenance of the Birchdale Community Building, a gathering place for a variety of clubs, organizations and other community functions.

"The North American Sturgeon Championships is truly a family event," organizer Mike Hanson told The Journal. "It gives folks of all ages an equal opportunity to win the cash prize that

this year is estimated to be anywhere from \$1,700 to \$2,000 plus. It doesn't matter if you're 9 or 99, you can be optimistic that this tournament will potentially provide you with the fish of a lifetime."

Hanson said the event taps into the thrill anglers of all species are seeking. "Angler's of all stripes hanker for the big trophy and without question the past indicates that there is a legitimate opportunity for a 7 footer and everyone knows that there lurks more than one Rainy River monster that would measure a foot or more beyond that," said Hanson.



Mike Hanson

Rookies to sturgeon fishing are hooked on the sport the first time they experience "the sheer physical power that accompanies setting the hook," said Hanson, which "guarantees a smile that that no smirk can delete."

But he also said no other summer activities encourages living in the summer moment by relaxing and feeling carefree like sturgeon fishing.

Hanson said bait for sturgeon fishing can be the stuff of legend. "It is always remarkable all the stories about different baits and secret concoctions invented in home workshops and garage laboratories, though most folks just use a gob of night crawlers, deceased minnows or other time proven remedies," he said. "We

have overheard discussions with the word propellant and an array of sprays in them and at least one recollection of 'it exploded in the refrigerator.' So we encourage everyone to join us, be safe, and practice catch-and-release."

The contest runs from 3-7 p.m. and participants are urged to launch their boats early to avoid congestion at the Rainy River access.

Fish caught in the contest will be judged by verification officials in flagged boats circulating among angler boats on the river. When an entrant hooks a fish, they are asked to immediately wave a red flat to notify and draw the attention of the verification officials who will come to the contestant's boat.

Fishing for the cham-

pionships is only allowed between the green buoys placed in Rainy River to the east and west of the Nelson Park boat landing. Organizers ask boat pilots to respect other boats by restricting wakes.

Prizes will be awarded for length only. Only entrants who have paid the \$15 fee (\$10 for anglers age 17 and less) may hook, fight and land fish during the contest.

The longest fish measured will bring the person who catches it half of the entry fees paid for the event. Last year's event brought the winning angler \$1,708; the 2011 award was \$1,820; 2010, 1,955; and 2009, 1,760.

Second and third place fish win their angler \$50 gift certificates for use at Nelson's Store in Birchdale. Ben Burgess Enterprises

will provide youth prizes at the contest. Door prizes will also be awarded.

Refreshments and food will be sold by the Birchdale 4-H Club as a fundraiser for club activities.

Organizers remind anglers that Ontario has closed its sturgeon harvest season.

Failure to release fish caught will result in disqualification from the tournament.

"The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has issued permit No. 13-217-T01 with an emphasis on 'CATCH & RELEASE' and all sturgeon measured must be released immediately," states organizers in a flier for the championships. "It is absolutely vital that we all cooperate to ensure the future of this event."

Grouse counts decline, later spring nesting may help hatch

DNR STAFF REPORT

Ruffed grouse drumming counts were down across most of the bird's range, according to the annual survey conducted by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

"This decrease was not unexpected because the ruffed grouse population is still in the declining phase of its 10-year cycle," said Charlotte Roy, DNR grouse biologist. "Drum counts peaked most recently in 2009."

Drumming counts dropped from 1.1 to 0.9 per stop in the northeast, which is the forest bird's core range in Minnesota. Counts in the northwest declined from 0.9 in 2012 to 0.7 drums per stop in 2013. Drumming counts did not change significantly in the central hardwoods or southeast, with an average of 0.9 and 0.4 drums per stop, respectively.

Ruffed grouse populations, which tend to rise and fall on a 10-year cycle, are surveyed by counting the number of male ruffed grouse heard drumming on established routes throughout the state's forested regions. Drumming counts are an indicator of the ruffed grouse breeding population.

This year, observers recorded 0.9 drums per stop

statewide. The averages during 2011 and 2012 were 1.7 and 1.0 drums per stop, respectively. Counts vary from about 0.8 drums per stop during years of low grouse abundance to about 1.9 during years of high abundance.

The number of birds present during the fall hunting season also depends upon nesting success and chick survival during the spring and summer. Drumming did occur later this year because of the late spring, suggesting that nesting likely occurred later than normal.

"Later nesting would have pushed the hatch out a bit, hopefully beyond the spring rains," Roy said. "Time will tell if that occurred and the impact on production."

Minnesota frequently is the nation's top ruffed grouse producer. On average, 115,000 hunters harvest 545,000 ruffed grouse in the state each year, making it the state's most popular game bird. During the peak years of 1971 and 1989, hunters harvested more than 1 million ruffed grouse. Michigan and Wisconsin - which frequently field more hunters than Minnesota - round out the top three states in ruffed grouse harvest.

One reason for the Minnesota's status as a top grouse producer is an abundance

of aspen and other ruffed grouse habitat, much of it located on county, state and national forests where public hunting is allowed. An estimated 11.5 million of the state's 16.3 million acres of forest are grouse habitat.

For the past 64 years, DNR biologists have monitored ruffed grouse populations. This year,

DNR staff and co-operators from 14 organizations surveyed 117 routes across the state.

Sharp-tailed grouse counts decrease slightly

Sharp-tailed grouse counts in the northwest, the bird's primary range in Minnesota, were similar to 2012. Counts in the east-central region declined significantly.

Observers look for male sharptails displaying on traditional mating areas, called leks or dancing grounds.

Despite several years of declining numbers, this year's statewide average of 9.2 grouse counted per dancing ground was similar to the long-term average since 1980. The 2009 average of 13.6 was as high as during any year since 1980. During the last 25 years, the sharp-tailed grouse index has been as low as seven birds counted per dancing ground.

Minnesota fishing and hunting licenses go mobile

DNR STAFF REPORT

Forgot to buy your license? Then connect to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources mobile licensing page to purchase select fishing and hunting licenses via your smartphone.

"This service is a convenience for people who need a license when they're on the go," said Steve Michaels, DNR license program director. "Not every type of license is offered but the mobile purchase site is ideal for people who have yet to purchase a fishing, small game or state stamp validation and suddenly discover that they need one."

Customers who purchase off the mobile site won't receive a conventional paper license. Instead, they'll receive a text message or email that serves as proof of a valid fish or game license to state conservation officers.

More than 1,100 sales of electronic licenses have been logged since the mobile site's soft launch in late June.

"The site isn't, as yet, full service," Michaels said.

"There are features and products in the works. Even so, mobile license purchasing is a convenience DNR has not offered before and the sales numbers show our customers are responding."

License types available for purchase on the mobile site include short-term angling, individual angling, resident combination angling, resident individual sports, resident combination sports, small game and state stamp validations. Any license that requires a site tag such as deer or turkey is not available for mobile purchase.

Once a customer purchases and receives mobile license information by text, email or both, he or she must be able to provide the email or text information to a DNR enforcement officer upon request as proof of a valid license.

Mobile device users will automatically be identified when visiting the DNR website at www.mndnr.gov/buyalicense and selecting the "purchase" button at the bottom of the page.

Minnesota residents 21 and older who never have purchased a hunting or fishing license can't pur-

chase a license electronically. They should initially purchase from a license agent or call DNR at 888-646-6367 and provide their driver's license number so electronic purchasing can be enabled.

The mobile site is for purchasing only. It is not a mobile version of the complete DNR website.

All licensing information such as seasons, dates, times, eligibility or restrictions should be reviewed before a mobile purchase is completed.

Similar to the licenses purchased via the DNR website or by phone, a 3 percent convenience fee will be added to the customer's order total.

License dollars are the fiscal foundation of fish and wildlife management in Minnesota. License revenue is dedicated to managing 5,400 fishing lakes, thousands of miles of rivers and streams, 1,400 wildlife management areas and more than 150 field conservation officers. Buying a license means lakes are stocked and managed, fish and game laws are enforced and conservation efforts happen on the ground.



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