

North Dakota Outdoors

The current status of bighorn sheep in North Dakota

By Doug Leier / North Dakota Game and Fish Department

Without fail, when I think about bighorn sheep in North Dakota, big game biologist Brett Weidmann pops into my head. For good reason. Brett is the Game and Fish Department’s bighorn guru and has forgotten more about bighorn sheep than I’ll ever know. Brett is one of those guys I like to say is “living and working,” actually doing what many young kids dream of. While he spends his share of time behind the screen and in the office, his work puts him into the old-



Doug Leier

fashioned role of a biologist. Monitoring, studying, researching and learning about one of North Dakota’s smallest populations but highest interest species.

Here’s what we do know about the 2025 status of bighorn sheep in North Dakota

The latest numbers of North Dakota Game and Fish Department’s 2024 bighorn sheep survey, completed by recounting lambs in March, revealed a minimum of 350 bighorn sheep in the grasslands of western North Dakota, down 4% from 2023 and 6% above the five-year average. Despite a slight decrease from the record count in 2023, the 2024 survey was still the second highest count on record.

Altogether, biologists counted 105 rams, 199 ewes and 46 lambs. Not included are approximately 40 bighorn sheep in the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park and bighorns introduced to the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in 2020.

Brett was pleased to see the population remained near record levels for the seventh consecutive year.

The northern badlands population declined by 4% from 2023 but was the second highest count on record. The southern badlands population increased slightly but remained near its lowest level since bighorns were reintroduced there in 1966.

“We were encouraged to see adult rams and adult ewes near record numbers,” Brett said. “The streak of four consecutive record counts was broken due to below-average lamb recruitment in 2024, as lambs recruited into the population declined 21%



NDGF Ashley Peterson

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compared to 2023.”

Brett said the decline in lamb recruitment was likely not related to disease, but a combination of drought, predation and ewes recovering after several years of high lamb recruitment.

“Our state’s females have invested a lot of energy in rearing lambs the last four years, so sometimes they just need to take a break and concentrate on improving body condition,” he said.

Department biologists count and classify all bighorn sheep in late summer, and then recount lambs the following March, as they approach one year of age, to determine recruitment.

Currently, about 480 bighorns make up the populations managed by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, National Park Service and the Three Affiliated Tribes Fish and Wildlife Division, just shy of the benchmark of 500 bighorns in the state.

A bighorn sheep hunting season is tentatively scheduled for 2025. The status of the season will be determined Sept. 1, following the summer population survey.

Game and Fish issued seven licenses in 2024, and all hunters were successful in harvesting a ram.

A brief history of bighorn sheep in North Dakota

Bighorn sheep were first recorded by the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1805 along the Yellowstone River in what is now North Dakota.

Later, John J. Audubon wrote about bighorn sheep and the frustrations of trying to hunt these rams in the 1840s. Theodore Roosevelt also hunted the badlands for bighorn sheep during his time spent in North Dakota.

From Roosevelt’s time in the 1880s, to the first decade of the 1900s, bighorn sheep in North Dakota did not fare so well. Nor did any of the other big game species that inhabited the state.

Bison, moose, elk and bighorn sheep were extirpated from the North Dakota landscape. White-tailed deer, mule deer and pronghorn numbers declined to a point where they faced an unknown future.

Nearly a half century after their extirpation from the state, bighorn sheep were reintroduced to North Dakota’s badlands with stock from British Columbia. In 1905, the last reported bighorn sheep was killed near Grassy Butte. North Dakota did not have any wild sheep from that time until the mid-1950s, when state Game and Fish Department biologists transplanted bighorns from British Columbia to an area southwest of Grassy Butte.

It took another 20 years or so before the sheep population, through natural reproduction and further in-state and out-of-state transplants, expanded to the point where the Game and Fish Department could open a hunting season.

In Loving Memory of Jacob Riedman JUNE 16, 1993 - MAY 3, 2014

“ I will not forget you..... I have carved you on the palm of my hand.”

Isaiah 49:15

Forever in our hearts, Grampa & Gramma

PUBLIC NOTICE

Barnes County Commission Tuesday, June 17, 2025 8:00 A.M. Barnes County Courthouse

Commission Chambers – 2nd Floor (Approximate times – subject to change)

8:00 Roll Call / Pledge of Allegiance / Agenda corrections & additions

8:00 VC-BC Public Library – Annual Report

8:15 Planning & Zoning – 7 Variations / 1 CUP / Development Code Changes / Vehicle Request

8:30 Jack Ertelt – BC Sheriff’s Dept Criminal Trespass Arrest Policy

8:45 MIS – System I Server Replacement

9:00 Auditor’s Office – Approval of minutes / Board Appointments

9:15 Highway Department – County Surplus Property Bid Opening

9:30 Commission Discussion

We have implemented an option by which the public may tune in to the Commission meeting via teleconference. Simply dial the number below and follow the instructions for the conference ID. Please note, this is a Fargo number, so use of cell phone, rather than landline, is recommended, to avoid charges. As callers join the meeting, we will be “muting” them to avoid unnecessary feedback and background noise. Callers may use *6 to unmute themselves and speak to the commission.

Microsoft Teams meeting Join on your computer, mobile app or room device

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+1 701-409-8463,,52062393# United States, Fargo

Phone Conference ID: 520 623 93# Find a local number | Reset PIN

Please check the online agenda for updates : http://www.co.barnes.nd.us/

(June 13, 2025)

Park Board Meeting Tuesday, June 17, 2025 7:00 A.M. Barnes County Courthouse

Commission Chambers – 2nd Floor Minutes approved

New member (Chris Botz)

Monson Park Update and vote on leaving as is or finish original project.

-Email from Bobby is attached.

Parks starting wage

All sites moved to reservation

-County website updated brochures updated Roverpass updated

-1st live weekend was 5-16

-How we plan to handle same day reservations after 1pm cutoff

Proposed move from brochures to a QR Code to be scanned on smart devices

-Demo attached

Potential new hire (Amanda Anderson)

Additional items for discussion.

(June 13, 2025)

Barnes County has the following items for sale by sealed bid.

All interested bidders are required to submit sealed written bids to the office of the Barnes County Auditors' office located at 230 4th St NW prior to 5:00 PM on June 16, 2025. Bids received after 5:00 PM will not be considered. Clearly mark each envelope with the description of the item or bundle in which you are bidding on. Legibly include your full name, contact information, and bid amount. Bid opening will take place on June 17th during the regular commission meeting.

The Barnes County Commission reserves the right to waive formalities in any bid, and to accept the bid deemed to best serve the interests of the county. Items can be inspected Monday - Thursday by appointment at the Barnes County Highway Department located at 1525 12th St. NW, Valley City, ND. Call 845-8508 to schedule.

All items will be sold “As-is” with no warranty or guarantees. Payment required at the time of item pickup.

2013 Ford Taurus

Bundle 1) DeeZee full size pickup toolbox-dual directional opening, Safety Triangle set (8)

Bundle 2) Post pounders (2), CAT oil container & Hand Cart for jackhammer

Bundle 3) Ready heat knipco heater-unknown condition, Boat trailer roller (2), Tire chain parts

Bundle 4) Furnace-works, (21) Troffer lights

(June 6 & 13, 2025)

PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE CITY OF VALLEY CITY

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that the Board of City Commissioners will hold a public hearing at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, June 17, 2025, in the Commission Chambers at City Hall, 254 2nd Avenue NE, Valley City, North Dakota, for the purpose of considering the renewal of the City Renaissance Zone (RZ) Development Plan for the years 2025 to 2035.

Any interested person may appear and comments relevant to the RZ renewal will be heard at the above referenced time and place. Questions and/or written comments may be submitted to jhintz@valleycity.us or 701-845-8121.

The City’s RZ was established pursuant to chapter 40-63 of the North Dakota Century Code for the purpose of encouraging economic development in the City. Property and income tax incentives are available to projects within the RZ for large capital improvements to residential and commercial property, new residential and commercial construction, and in limited cases commercial leases and relocation of commercial enterprises. The City’s Development Plan for the next 10 years proposes to delete some areas within the RZ and expand to new areas identified for development, while keeping most of the existing RZ in place.

(June 6 & 13, 2025)

Aanenson named board president

From the NDHSAA

VALLEY CITY, N.D. – The North Dakota High School Activities Association Board of Directors approved officer nominations for the upcoming 2025-26 school year during a meeting held June 11 in Valley City.

Larimore High School Athletic Director Patti Aanenson will serve as Board President and Minot Public Schools Athletic Director Mitch Lunde will serve as Vice President.

Aanenson is the first female Board president in the 117 years of the North Dakota High School Activities Association, which was founded in 1908.

“I’m looking forward to a great year for our board and serving our member schools,” Aanenson said.

Aanenson has served as Athletic Director at Larimore High School since 2006 and has been a member of the North Dakota Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NDIAAA) and National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA) during her tenure as an Athletic Administrator. She served on the NDIAAA Board of Directors as Secretary from 2009 to 2019 and served two terms as NDIAAA State President. Aanenson served as Vice President of the NDHSAA Board of Directors



Photo Courtesy NDHSAA

Patti Aanenson. during the 2024-25 school year. She has served on the NDHSAA Board of Directors for three years as the Class B Northeast Representative.

Aanenson is a two-time NDIAAA Class B Athletic Administrator of the Year recipient (2016 and 2011).