From marlin to mackerel, Gulf anglers out of luck

PENSACOLA, Fla. — Anglers hoping to hook blue marlin, tuna, swordfish, mackerel and other prizes catches in sport fishing tournaments along the Gulf Coast are mostly out of luck because of the massive oil spill fouling the waters.

At least a dozen tournaments have been canceled. It’s not only costing fishermen a chance to win nice purses, but organizers, bars, restaurants are out thousands of dollars.

Kevin Sluder, chairman of Pensacola’s July 4th International Billfish Tournament, called off the 40th annual version because the federal government has closed almost a quarter of the Gulf to fishing because of the five-week-old spill.

“I’m literally sick to my stomach thinking about this. I just hope they get it cleaned up and we aren’t talking about this being canceled again next year,” said Sluder, 32, and his father, a former tournament chairman.

Gulf waters are home to mammoth fish, prized by contestants in all the tournaments. Just two years ago, the top catch in the Pensacola tournament was a 751-pound blue marlin and an 891-pounder was once caught. The big fish are displayed at the end of the city’s Palafox Pier for onlookers to photograph before the sunsets and the fireworks break over Pensacola Bay.

But since an explosion aboard an oil rig on April 20 that killed 11 workers, a blown-out well has spewed more than 7 million gallons of crude into the water, tournament sponsors have no choice but to call off their contests.

Large mahi and whahoo are normally found off the sea shelf in blue water near the site of the explosion, said Scott Delaney, the club’s vice president of tournaments for Alabama’s Mobile Big Game Fishing Club. The big fish feed on smaller ones, which feed off the complex ecosystems formed around the drilling rigs, he said.

Fishermen spend hours making their way more than 100 miles from the coast and spend days fishing.

His tournament, scheduled for this weekend, has been kicking off the season for 34 years. It was canceled in early May.

The cancellations will hit businesses all over the region that cater to fishermen.

“It’s just like the food chain there in the Gulf, you’ve got that same economic food chain here on the shore. You got the captains, the marinas, so much impact,” Delaney said.

Danny Pitalo, a tournament organizer who owns two fishing supply stores in Biloxi, Miss., is holding a cobia tournament this weekend that has postponed three times since mid-April. He expects about 60 to 70 participants, down from more than 100 most years. He said cobia, grouper, amber jack and red fish can still be caught close to shore.

But he had to cancel the city’s annual billfish tournament, which had been scheduled for the weekend of June 12. It was to be the first time the tournament had launched from Biloxi since Hurricane Katrina wiped out the marina in 2005.

The tournament holds the Gulf Coast record for the largest blue marlin at 1,045 pounds. Pitalo said the huge fish was caught near where the rig exploded.

“That was a real hot spot,” he said, laughing.

Delaney worries about what will happen once the leak is stopped and cleanup begins.

“I’m not a scientist but I know there is going to be such a trickle-down effect because the ecosystem is so diverse from bottom to top,” he said. “The blue marlin might be OK, but the fish it feeds on and the fish that fish feeds on all the way down. I think it’s just going to be devastating.”
Executive Director's Update by Chris Hesla

South Dakota has been fortunate this year in receiving moisture for good habitat. Although, in some areas, too much moisture. It is so green and there are so many pheasants running in the road ditches. In some of the areas I have traveled they look like swarms of ants running in the ditches. I am looking forward to the end of August to see the results of the G&F’s Annual Pheasant Brood Survey.

This month’s Out_of_Doors features the annual winners of the National Wildlife Week Poster Contest. It never ceases to amaze me year after year the unique posters SDWF gets from the affiliates. This year there were 22 entries in the contest which makes it difficult to pick the winners. I want to thank the affiliates and the schools that choose to participate in our contest.

As I am writing this column, there are over 95 young adults and many volunteers out at Camp Bob Marshall enjoying the camps 49th year. I cannot say thank you enough to the many volunteers that give their time to teach conservation to our young adults and the never ending clubs, organizations and individuals that help send these young adults to camp.

We also have to reappoint committees. This is a volunteer positions and appointment is for 1 year. Some committees SDWF will be sending out the 2010 Pheasant Hunt and Buffalo Shoot raffle tickets very soon. PLEASE support SDWF and purchase tickets when you receive the offer in the mail.

The 21-gun winners where listed on the front page of this issue, thank you to all who won and those that bought a chance to win a new gun.

It is looking like it is going to be a great year for wildlife and the outdoors here in South Dakota. It saddens me greatly to see the reports and read the forecasts for the Gulf Coast, I believe that the damage caused by the oil, will take a very very long time to recover from if it ever does?

President’s Column by Rieck Eske

It’s that time of year again for our Annual State Convention and Elections. This year we are holding our Convention in Britton, South Dakota. August 28th and 29th.

I believe that I am repeating myself here but we really need to show support for the SDWF. The Federation does a lot for all Sportsmen, weather it is habitat, conservation issues or legislative issues, youth education. We are a major force in South Dakota and we need to come together and unite as one.

The Federation can use your help, run for an office or director. This year we will elect a President, 3 Vice Presidents, and 2 West River Directors at large and 2 East River Directors at large and a couple of District Directors. The Officers terms are for 1 year. The Directors at Large are for 2 years and the Directors are for 4 years.

You also have the opportunity to run for the following positions:

OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

PRESIDENT

DISTRICT 1 - Paul Vinatieri

E-Mail: rieck.eske@sdstate.edu

DISTRICT 2 - Ross Jensen

E-Mail: putzier@nvc.net

DISTRICT 3 - Marc McClellan

DISTRICT 4 - Tom Putzier

DISTRICT 5 - Dave Nauman

DISTRICT 6 - Andrew Linder

DISTRICT 7 - Ross Jensen

DISTRICT 8 - Harvey Malon

DISTRICT 9 - Maurice Olsen

DIRECTORS AT LARGE (Appointed)

REGION 1 - Bill Antonides

E-Mail: bkwgto@aol.com

REGION 2 - Rieck Eske

E-Mail: sdwf@mncomm.com

REGION 3 - Lanny Thomas

REGION 4 - Greg Reilly

REGION 5 - Arnie Lorig

REGION 6 - Talley Thomas

REGION 7 - Charles Dieter

REGION 8 - Dave Nauman

REGION 9 - Jennifer Pelej

alt. DELEGATE TO NWF - Lanny Thomas

DELEGATE TO NWF - Rieck Eske
Deer Harvest Declines in South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota hunters reported mixed results for the 2009 deer seasons, with weather and unharvested crops playing major roles.

Harvest surveys compiled by the Game, Fish and Parks Department show that last year was the first year the statewide deer harvest has fallen in the last ten years.

GFP Game Harvest Survey Coordinator Corey Huxoll said an estimated 69,000 white-tailed deer and 18,000 mule deer were harvested during the 2009 hunting seasons, for a total of more than 87,000 deer. That is a reduction of more than 4,000 deer from 2008, but still 41,000 more than the 46,000 deer harvested in 1999.

Reducions in the harvest of East River Deer, Muzzleloader Deer, Youth Deer and Black Hills Deer accounted for most of the decline, with an offsetting increase in the West River Deer harvest. Both whitetail buck and doe harvest estimates declined from 2008 by 1,600 and 2,779 respectively. The mule deer buck harvest also decreased from 2008 by 624; however, the mule doe harvest increased by nearly 800. Mule deer accounted for about 20% of the total harvest.

The overall deer harvest success declined statewide from 48 percent in 2008 to 43 percent last year. Harvest success ranged from 23 percent at Sand Lake Refuge to 75 percent for West River Special Buck.

Information for surveys is collected in a random post-season sampling of hunters, and Huxoll says the department thanks them for the important role they play in helping gather harvest information for all game species in the state.

“It is only through the cooperation of hunters completing harvest report cards that we are able to assess the success of the harvest for each of the deer seasons,” Huxoll said. “Hunter surveys are an efficient, scientifically sound and cost-effective method for assessing harvest mortality on wildlife populations that GFP is responsible for managing.”

The 2009 Big Game Harvest Projections Report can be accessed through the GFP website at http://gfpgfp.sd.gov in the “Hunting” section under “Harvest Reports,” or it can be requested by mail or in person in printed form from: Game, Fish and Parks Commission, 523 E. Capitol Ave., Pierre, SD, 57501.
SDWF Announces Wildlife Week Poster Winners

SDWF announces the winners of the annual Wildlife Week Poster Contest. Many of our affiliates from across the state selected their local winning posters and entered them into the statewide competition. This year’s contest had a lot of entrants and the winning selections were made with great difficulty.

SDWF pays $25, $15, and $10 to each 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winner, respectively, from all six grades.

**1st grade:**
1st Place, Naomi Sherd, Whetstone Sportsmen
2nd place, Jill Hofer, High Plains Wildlife Federation
3rd place, Ethan Rislov, Grass Lakes Conservation Club

**2nd grade:**
1st place, Dusty Volk, Lake Campbell Wildlife Club
2nd place, Ruth Howard, High Plains Wildlife Federation
3rd place, McKenzie Seidell, Whetstone Sportsmen

**3rd grade:**
1st place, Natalie Strei, Whetstone Sportsmen
2nd place, Kylie Carlson, Marshall Co. Sportsmen’s Club
3rd place, Triston Haigler, High Plains Wildlife Federation

**4th grade:**
1st place, Audrey Maunu, Whetstone Sportsmen
2nd place, Emily Hight, High Plains Wildlife Federation
3rd place, Callie Fleming, Grass Lakes Conservation Club

**5th grade:**
1st place, Gordon Orth, Lake Campbell Wildlife Club
2nd place, Wyatt Stevens, Jerauld County Game and Fish
3rd place, Kierstin Bublitz, Whetstone Sportsmen

**6th grade:**
1st place, Tegan Meidinger, Lake Campbell Wildlife Club
2nd place, Trinity Brunsen, Jerauld County Game and Fish
2010 Wildlife Week Poster Winners!
Out Of Doors  6  June 2010

PIERRE, S.D. – In an effort to control crop depredation by Canada geese, the South Dakota Game Fish and Parks Commission has decided to allow hunters to participate in an August Canada Goose Take Season this year.

The season will be held in 15 counties of 32.

The August Canada Goose Take Season will be held in Brookings, Clark, Codington, Day, Deuel, Hamlin, Grant, Kingsbury, Lake, McCook, Marshall, Miner, Minnehaha, Moody and Roberts counties.

Hunters participating in the special August season will not need the Federal Migratory Bird Stamp, but all other restrictions are the same as those in effect for the Early Fall and Regular Canada Goose seasons.

At a whopping 25 pounds, the pot-bellied, 41-inch-long walleye looks as though it belongs in a freak show. Could one really grow that big?

Yes, says the Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame in Hayward, Wis., which has reinstated the monster as a world record.

As with many old records, this one came with controversy. The whopper was caught in 1960 in Old Hickory Lake in Tennessee by Mabry Harper. In 1996, however, the hall of fame removed it from its records, based on a report that claimed the walleye couldn’t have measured as long as claimed. “The thrust of this report was a comparison of the length of his fish to an assumed size of Harper’s hands,” the hall of fame reported.

But officials said the actual size of Harper’s hands was unknown. The hall decided to do an internal review of its 3,000 world records over the past several years and investigated the Harper walleye. It said a Tennessee historical society presented key evidence. “Once we delved through this new documentation, we realized it not only greatly supported the Harper walleye’s validity, but it also disproved the theory which led to the walleye’s removal in 1996,” the hall said.

Evidence included a photo of the walleye’s head with a ruler atop it and a 1960 affidavit from a Tennessee game warden attesting that he had checked the scale on which the walleye was weighed and measured it himself.

Last week, the hall of fame reinstated the walleye as the all-tackle world record. The International Game Fish Association also lists it as their all-tackle world record.

The 25-pound behemoth is 7 1/2 pounds heavier than Minnesota’s record walleye, a 17 1/2-pound walleye caught in 1979 in the Seagull River in northeastern Minnesota.
LA CONNER, Wash. - Three-inch deep water would seem to be about the last thing Dave Hedlin would want to see on the field where he grows cucumbers, potatoes and other crops near northern Washington's Skagit Bay.

But for the past three years, the third-generation farmer has taken part in an experiment that contradicts everything he's known about farming. For a fee, he agreed to flood about 20 acres to provide wetland habitat for migratory shorebirds, a move researchers hoped would also result in more productive farmland.

“Our grandparents spent all their time trying to keep this land well-drained and dry,” said Hedlin, who acknowledged skepticism when conservationists offered to pay him to flood part of his farm.

The effort, called Farming for Wildlife, included Hedlin and two other nearby property owners. Early results have been so positive that organizers at The Nature Conservancy, a group that works to protect land and rivers throughout the world, plan to replicate it in other parts of the country.

Hundreds of shorebirds fattened up in the flooded field during spring and fall migrations, and the farmers noted a spike in nitrogen, a key plant fertilizer, in their fields.

“We absolutely want to replicate it,” said Julie Morse, an ecologist with The Nature Conservancy. “You could do it anywhere as long as there’s a water source and you build berms to hold the water.”

The Skagit River Delta, about 60 miles north of Seattle, was once covered in estuarine and freshwater wetlands, providing rich habitat for birds and other wildlife. Over the past century, much of it was diked and drained for farming.

Despite the habitat loss, an average of 35,000 migratory birds stop in the Skagit delta on the Pacific Flyway.

“A hundred years ago, they had places like this along the entire length of the Pacific Flyway,” said Kevin Morse, The Nature Conservancy’s north Puget Sound program director. Now, “their options and feeding places are extremely limited.”

Buying land to create habitat wasn’t feasible because no one wanted to sell, so Morse said his group offered to rent land from farmers under the program. He declined to say how much farmers were paid, but said the group had an overall three-year project budget of $350,000 to cover the leases and all expenses related to the flooding and studies.

Funding for Farming for Wildlife came from private donations and a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grant. The effort will be expanded this year with money from donors and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, which is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The flood rentals are separate from other federal programs that pay farmers to set aside thousands of acres for long-term conservation. Many farmers have stopped participating in those programs, opting to put land back into production to take advantage of relatively high crop prices.

The Skagit Bay program, and a similar effort backed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the Klamath Basin of southern Oregon and northern California, are more attractive to some farmers because the wetlands will be drained after a few years.

In Skagit Bay, freshwater is typically pumped onto fields. In the Klamath Basin, freshwater is gravity-fed from a nearby lake.

Benefits seen in Klamath, too

Ron Cole, refuge manager for the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuge Complex, said about 5,000 to 8,000 acres of private farmland are now periodically flooded in a region once filled with shallow lakes and marshes.

Though no studies have quantified benefits, Cole said farmers have reported higher crop yields, better control of weeds and pests and reduced need for fertilizers and fumigants.

Flooding drives away harmful soil pests and bacteria, and increased levels of nitrogen helps soil fertility.

The program could be especially helpful to farmers who want to pursue organic certification, which requires that pesticides not be applied for three years. About 15,000 acres of private land have been converted to organic through the Klamath Basin effort, called Walking Wetlands, a change that should help farmers fetch premium crop prices, Cole said.

Researchers at Oregon State University are studying benefits to farmers and birds.

“We’re also looking at what would it take to get more farmers to participate in such a program,” said Christian Langpap, an assistant professor in OSU’s agricultural and resource economics department.

He thinks a wetland crop rotation could be profitable in the long run if it allows farmers to make the transition to organic production.

In Washington, Hedlin has certified his previously flooded field as organic.

One recent morning, two dozen dunlin and Western sandpipers pecked for worms, tiny invertebrates and other bugs on a potato farm pumped with a few inches of freshwater. The birds are on their way to the Arctic to breed.

“You can see they’re feeding like mad,” Morse said, peering through her binoculars.

During the first year of the pilot project, hundreds of sandpipers, dowitchers, yellowlegs, and Dunlin flocked to three farms, including Hedlin’s.

In all 15 species, including many of high conservation concern, have used the fields, though cattails and other vegetation took hold faster than expected and crowded out shorebirds as time went along. Project leaders now plan to mow down the vegetation when they flood another 100 acres later this year.

“It’s been very successful,” said Hedlin, standing at the farm his grandfather homesteaded in 1906. “When we look back the biggest success is that we learned to work together.”

“Keep close to Nature’s heart... and break clear away, once in awhile, and climb a mountain or spend a week in the woods. Wash your spirit clean.” John Muir- 1838-1914- Naturalist and Founder of the Sierra Club
21 Gun Giveaway Winners Announced

At the Spring Board Meeting held in Pierre, SDWF’s board members drew the winning names of those who had purchased 21 Gun Giveaway tickets. There were 840 tickets sold for this annual fundraising event. SDWF gave away 8 guns or cash settlements to the winners.

1. Jack Tolk, SD
2. John Weidenback, SD
3. James Larson, MN
4. Dale Lian, ND
5. Ted Domeier, MN
6. Richard Dobesh, SD
7. Kevin Holiday, MN
8. Brian Bock, SD

I want to thank everyone who purchased and sold tickets for this raffle. Your generosity makes SDWF what it is today. THANK YOU!