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Current topics and issues affecting outdoor recreation in our State. Prepared by the North Dakota Chapter, The Wildlife Society, and the North Dakota Wildlife Federation.

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### Fragmentation Diminishes Habitat Value

Ask sixth graders what wildlife habitat consists of and there's a good chance they will tell you food, cover and water. Which is great. But there's a fourth element — space — that tends to be overlooked yet critically important. Wildlife needs to have all the elements (food, cover, water) in the right places within an adequate area (space). Fragmented into smaller parcels by roads, highways, trees planted on native prairie, energy development (oil, gas, and wind), and urban sprawl, remaining habitat cannot support or is detrimental to wildlife even if it has food, cover, and water. North Dakota's highways fragment the landscape killing moose, deer, and numerous other wildlife species trying to cross. When the McClusky Canal fragmented family farms it became harder for farmers to make a living. When habitat is fragmented wildlife have a harder time surviving because the space they need is broken into pieces too small to meet their needs. Fragmentation results in more competition, more noise, more traffic, more invasive plant species, more predators; all detrimental for wildlife crammed into spaces too small. Think of habitat as building a house. You use eight-foot 2x4's, cut them in half, and although you still have roughly 8 feet of wood, it is of little use. In the Killdeer Mountains Wildlife Management Area, a large draw once occupied by wintering elk, no longer is inhabited by elk due to one oil well pad and an access road. One oil pad and road were a minor impact to food, cover, and water, but a large impact to space, fragmenting the landscape, making it no longer inhabitable by elk. The consequences of habitat fragmentation are glaring for species dependent on continuous tracts of native prairie such as sharp-tailed grouse and other grassland nesting birds. North Dakota has lost over 60% native grassland since European settlement. Remaining native grassland is experiencing epic diminished habitat value from fragmentation. Changes to habitat appearing to be minor fragment habitat with serious consequences. Therefore, local, county, state, and federal governments need to recognize impacts from fragmentation of habitat and begin a dialogue on how to end or minimize habitat fragmentation before some of our native species can no longer call North Dakota home.

For more information on this message or other conservation topics, contact: Mike McEnroe, Past President, North Dakota Wildlife Federation, ([memcenroe@bis.midco.net](mailto:memcenroe@bis.midco.net)) or Rick Nelson, President, North Dakota Chapter, The Wildlife Society, ([bluebill@bis.midco.net](mailto:bluebill@bis.midco.net)). For a complete list of Conservation Notes visit ([www.ndctws.wordpress.com](http://www.ndctws.wordpress.com))

