



JANUARY, 1974



conservationist

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ROGER SPARKS, EDITOR
WAYNE LONNING, PHOTOGRAPHER
JERRY LEONARD, PHOTOGRAPHER

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ice fishing "hot spots" on the UPPER MISSISSIPPI

By Gary Ackerman
Fisheries Biologist

and

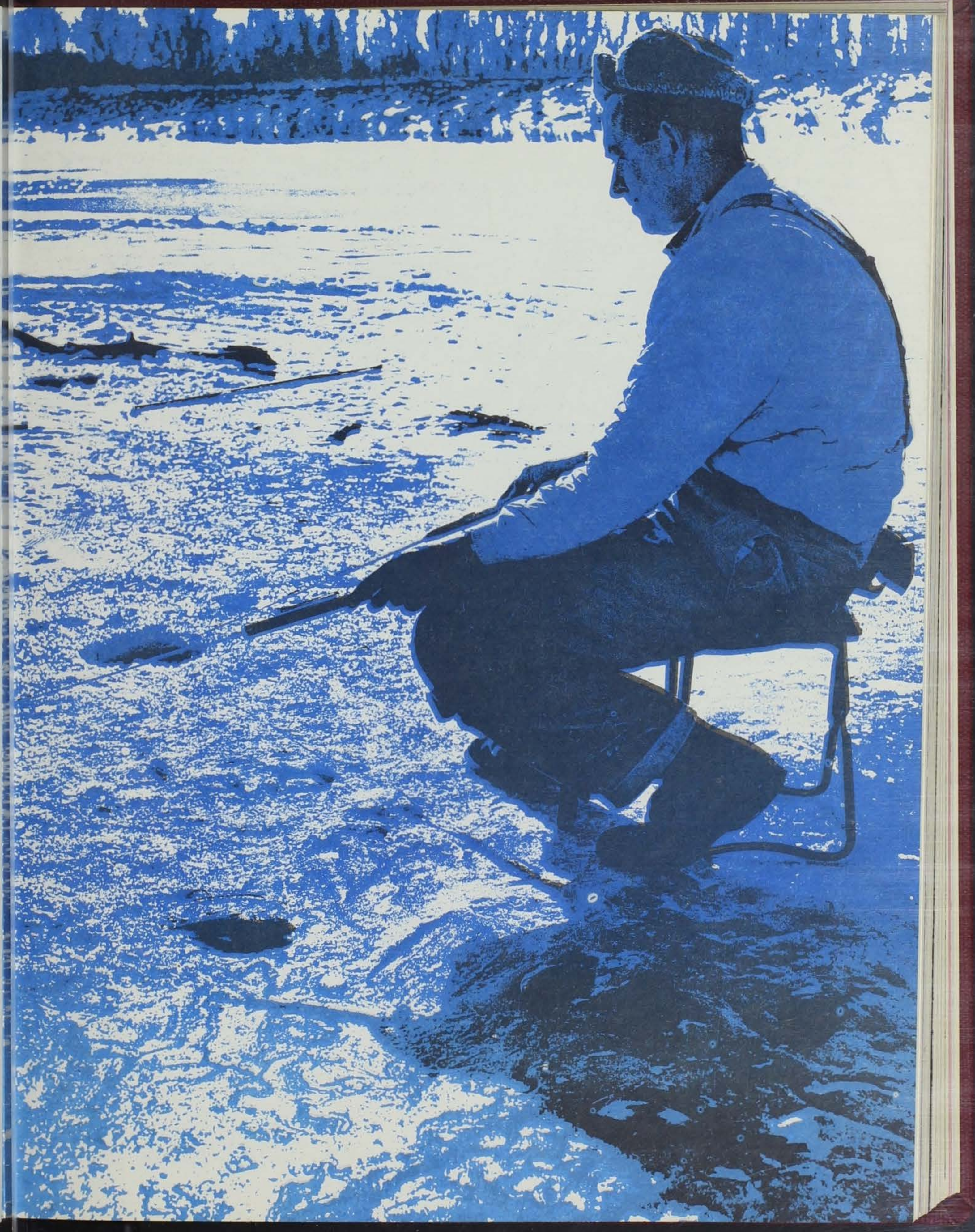
John Spinner
Fisheries Biologist

Huddled against a chilly northwest wind, a mass of clothing obscures the figure of a man squatting on a five-gallon pail and hunched over a small hole in the ice. About the only sign of life is a twitching right arm affixed to a small rod. A ridiculous sight, true, but when they start biting this form comes to life. Action is fast and furious when the quarry, the tasty bluegill, bites.

Winter ice fishing is focused on specific backwater ponds,

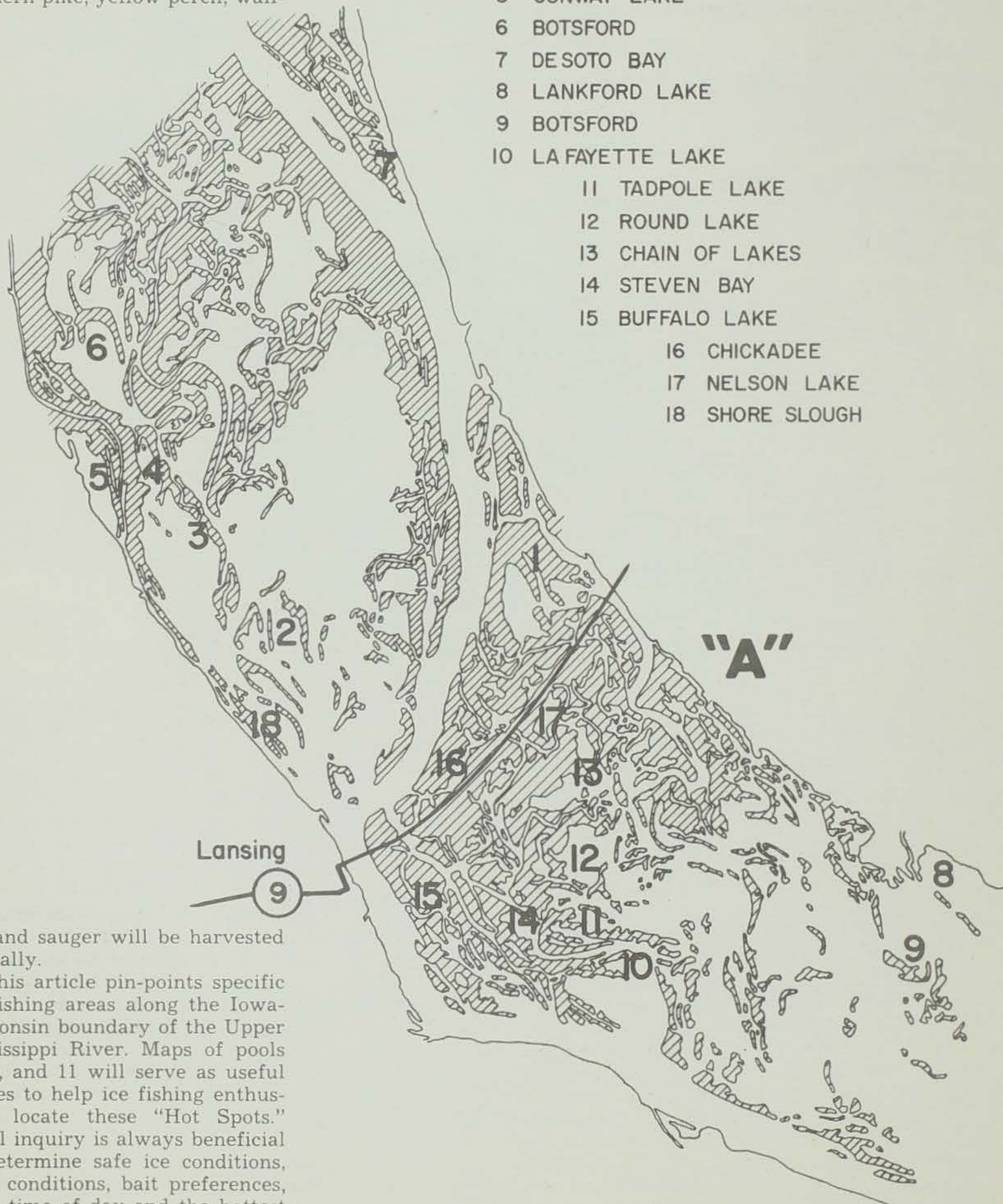
COVER PHOTO

The red-tailed hawk photographed by Wayne Lonning, staff photographer, is a common Iowa raptor. Red-tails are summer residents and breed in all parts of the state. Many individuals, like this one, remain in southern Iowa during winter.



lakes and sloughs along the Upper Mississippi River. Over the years certain key areas tend to be productive ones and hundreds of ice fishermen will concentrate at these "Hot Spots." Many thousands of bluegill and crappie with occasional largemouth bass, northern pike, yellow perch, wall-

- 1 MULE LAKE
- 2 MOSS LAKE
- 3 CATFISH LAKE
- 4 BECK LAKE
- 5 CONWAY LAKE
- 6 BOTSFORD
- 7 DESOTO BAY
- 8 LANKFORD LAKE
- 9 BOTSFORD
- 10 LA FAYETTE LAKE
- 11 TADPOLE LAKE
- 12 ROUND LAKE
- 13 CHAIN OF LAKES
- 14 STEVEN BAY
- 15 BUFFALO LAKE
- 16 CHICKADEE
- 17 NELSON LAKE
- 18 SHORE SLOUGH



eye and sauger will be harvested annually.

This article pin-points specific ice fishing areas along the Iowa-Wisconsin boundary of the Upper Mississippi River. Maps of pools 9, 10, and 11 will serve as useful guides to help ice fishing enthusiasts locate these "Hot Spots." Local inquiry is always beneficial to determine safe ice conditions, road conditions, bait preferences, peak time of day and the hottest

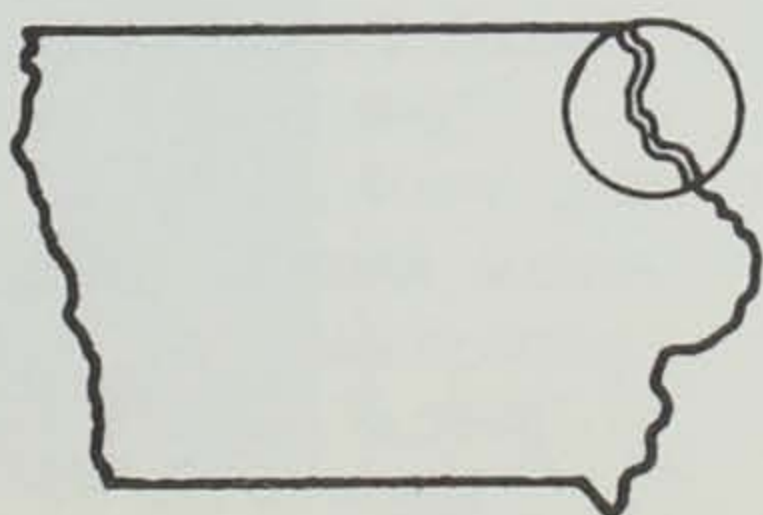
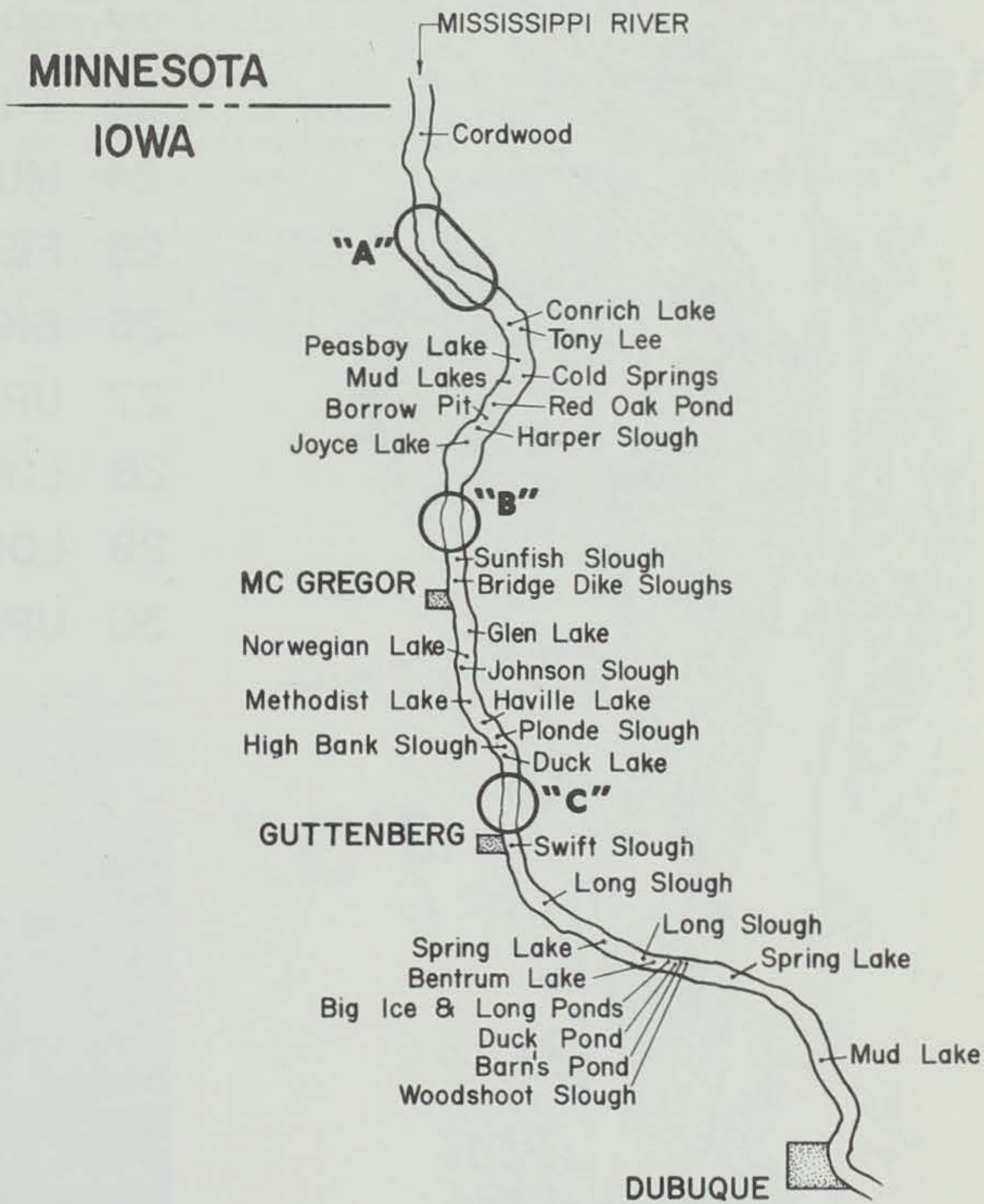
"Hot Spot." Check at bait shops, taverns, restaurants, and service stations, or ask other ice fishermen.

The habitat commonly fished are the shallow, deadwater ponds, lakes and sloughs adjacent to the main river. Bluegills are readily taken in quite shallow depths from one to six feet around weed beds, along submerged stumps, along rock piles, in submerged tree tops and along the periphery of springs. Crappie fishing can be excellent in similar habitat although better fishing is generally found in deeper water (from six to fifteen feet) along steep banks and around submerged trees.

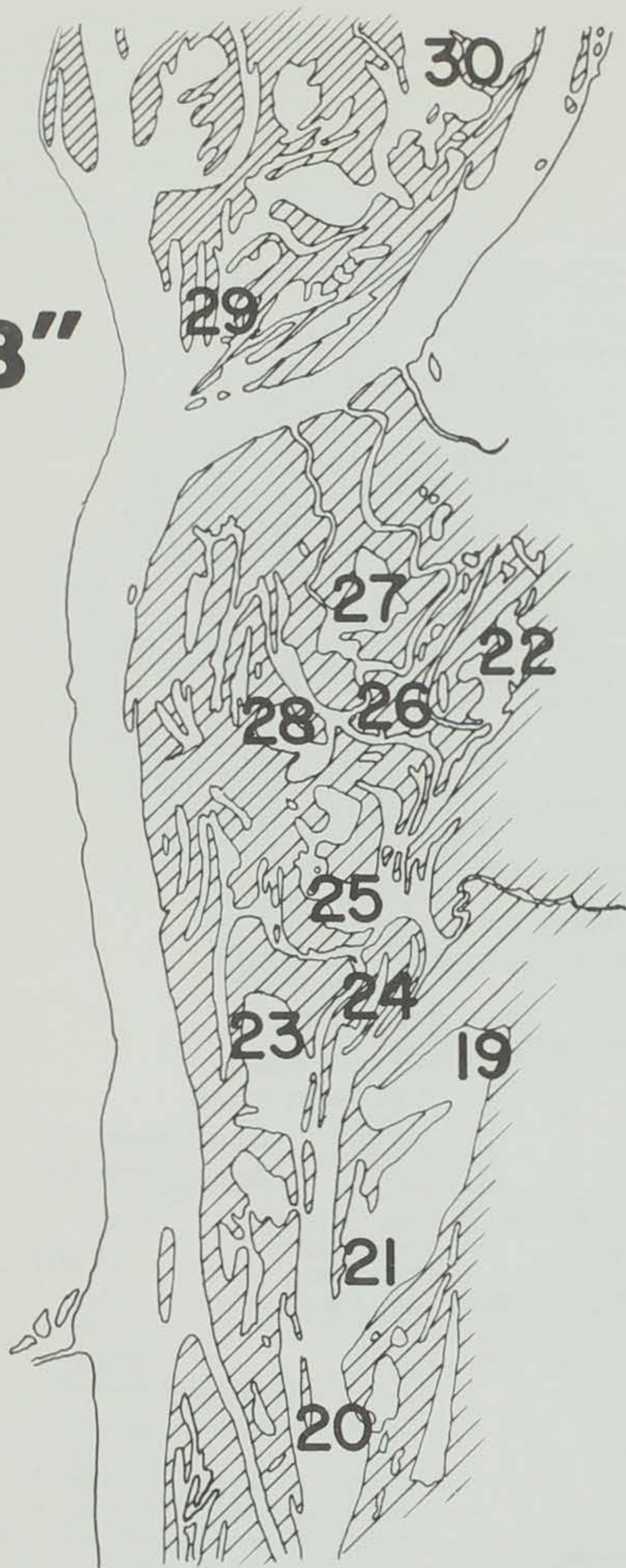
Best Baits

The more productive baits for bluegill are small, natural ones affixed to very small jigs in sizes from 8 to 12. Some of the common baits are mousies, wax worms, meal worms, golden grubs, red worms or small minnows. Some popular ice jigs have dazzling monikers like Mitzi Ditzzi, Little Atom, Wee Willie or Tear Dot. Crappie readily take these baits and jigs, but larger ones in sizes from 4 to 8 are preferred. These assure the fisherman of well-hooked fish and fewer escapes. Small minnows are a popular crappie bait so take extra weight and a larger hook, especially when fishing deeper water.

Fishing seasons and limits are quite liberal for the Mississippi boundary waters of Iowa and Wisconsin. Through a reciprocity agreement between the two states, either state fishing license is valid between the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy and the Milwaukee Road Railroads which parallel the banks of the Mississippi River. Seasons are continuous with no minimum length limits on any species of fish. There are daily limits of ten walleye or sauger with an aggregate possession limit of 20; a daily bag limit of ten largemouth bass or smallmouth bass with an aggregate possession limit of 20; a daily bag limit of five northern pike with a possession limit of 10; and no bag or possession limits on bluegill, crappie or yellow perch. No person shall use more than



"B"



- 19 GRAYMORE LAKE
- 20 BIG LAKE
- 21 LITTLE CANOE
- 22 SPRING LAKE
- 23 TILMONT LAKE
- 24 MUD LAKE
- 25 FISH LAKE
- 26 BIG MISSOURI
- 27 UPPER DOUBLE
- 28 LOWER DOUBLE
- 29 LOWER MUD HEN LAKE
- 30 UPPER MUD HEN LAKE



—Commission Photo

two lines nor more than two hooks on each line in still fishing or trolling. License requirements vary between the two states so check the law where the fishing license is purchased.

Safety First

Ice fishing can be dangerous for unfamiliar sportsmen. You can check ice by using a heavy ice spud from 10 to 15 pounds and giving the ice a forceful blow immediately ahead of you. Be especially cautious when getting onto the ice, on crossing cuts and sloughs that may contain a current, and when approaching stumps or submerged trees where ice sometimes doesn't freeze evenly.

Don't fish alone. Stay a safe distance from your companion and in case of a breakthrough, carry a rope or long sapling. Use of automobiles is always risky. Snowmobilers should stay on well-marked trails and avoid areas where ice is unproven.

Some establishments furnish safe transportation on the river for a small fee. Ice boats powered by aircraft or air-cooled automobile engines transport fishermen in safety when ice conditions are questionable.

Popular Sport

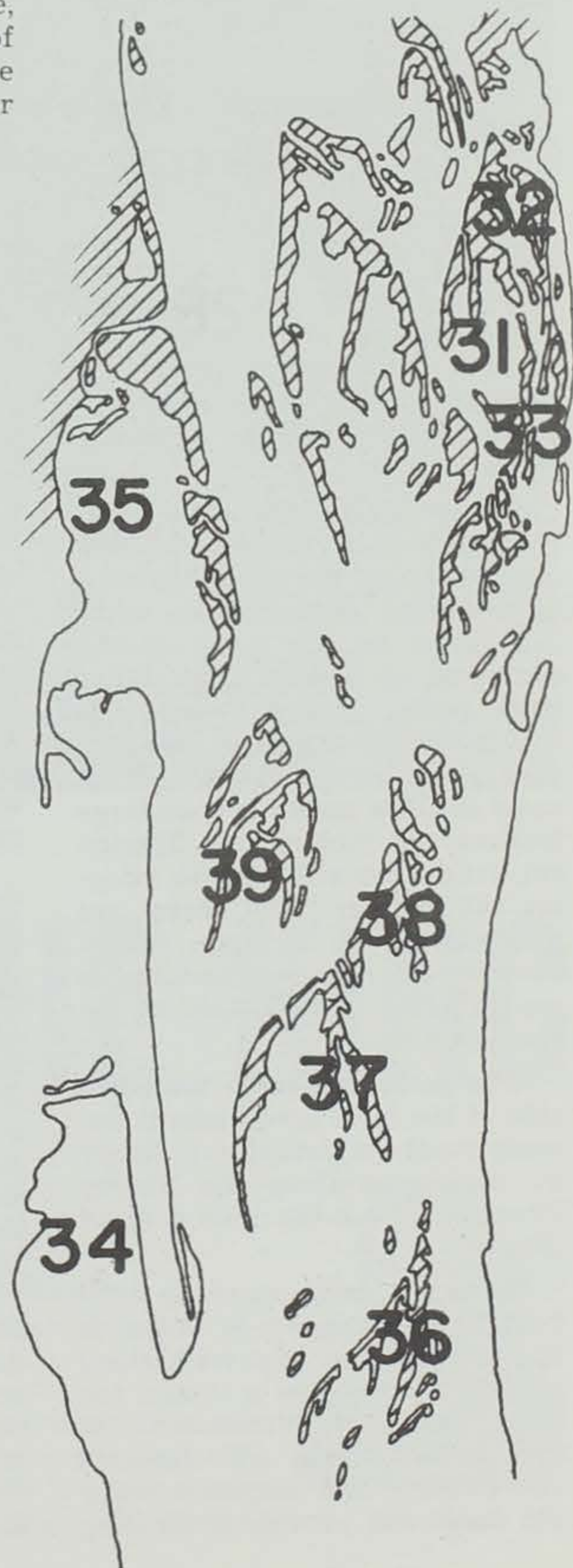
Every five years the states of Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, and Missouri conduct a creel survey of various pools of the Upper Mississippi River. This survey is coordinated through the auspices of the Upper Mississippi River Conservation Committee which is an organization of these states dedicated to the preservation and the management of the natural resources of the Upper Mississippi. Normally only open water sport fishing is surveyed, but in 1968, Wisconsin expanded their creel survey to qualify the winter ice fishing. Pool 7, which extends 12 miles from North La Crosse to Trempealeau, Wisconsin, was surveyed. It contains an estimated 13,600 acres, and in many ways is similar to pools 9, 10, and 11.

In brief, here are some of the findings of Wisconsin's creel survey. The annual fishing effort in pool 7 was 63,283 fishermen, and

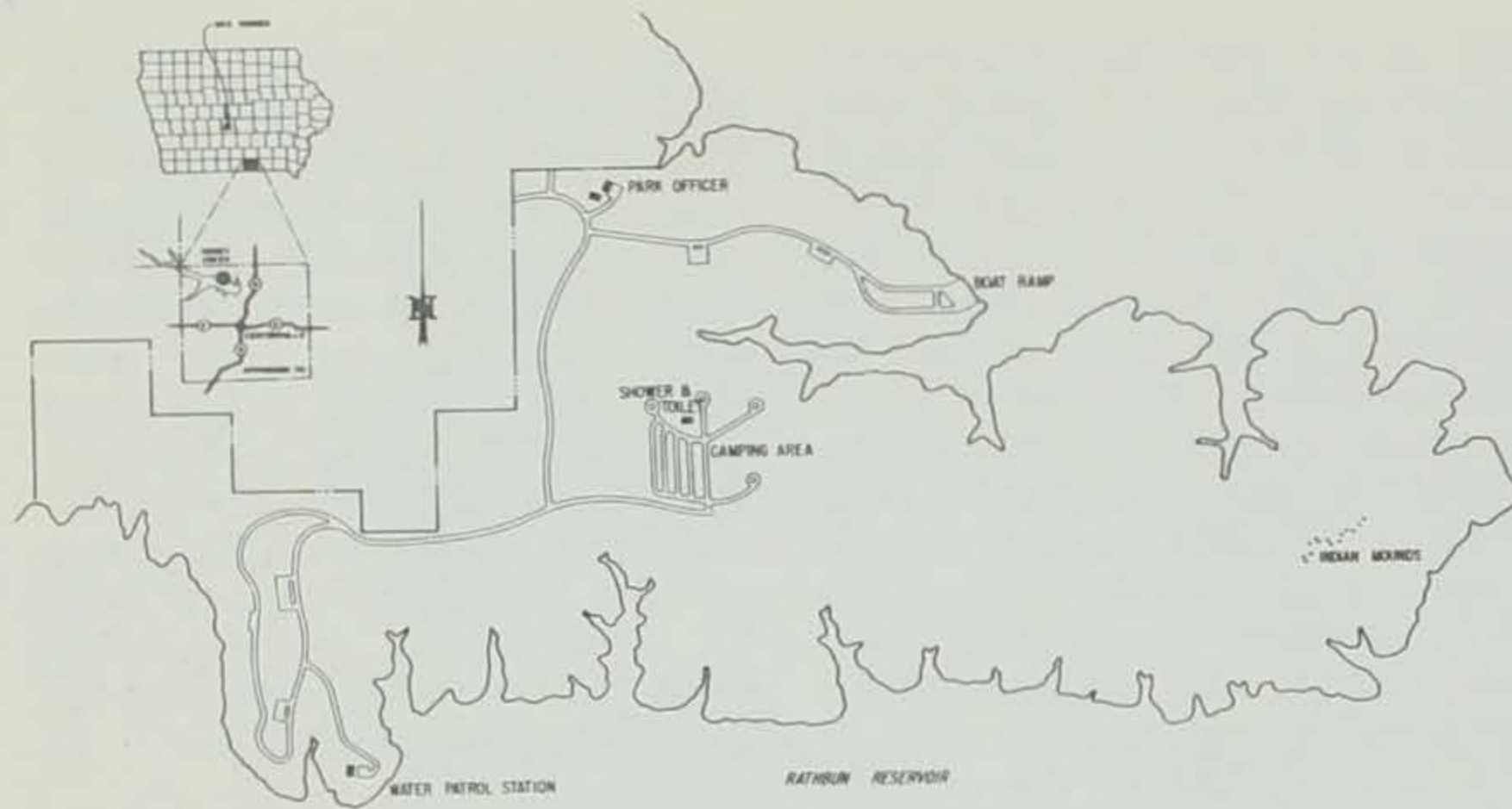
43% of all sport fishing occurred in winter! The total annual fishing pressure was 233,973 man hours, and 47% of it was expended in winter! The total annual harvest of sport fishes was 258,634 and 63% were creel by ice fishermen! The species composition caught by winter ice fishermen was bluegill (89,346), crappie (43,923), yellow perch (12,441), largemouth bass (10,574), northern pike (3,436), sauger (1,776), and walleye (782). Ice anglers accounted for 74% of the bluegill, 73% of the crappie, 68% of the yellow perch, 74% of the largemouth bass, 61% of the northern pike, 15% of the sauger and 8% of the walleye.

Try winter fishing in one of the "Hot Spots" along the Upper Mississippi. Join those rugged enthusiasts who brave chilly winds and combat cold feet and frost bitten fingers to stare patiently with watering eyes over neat round holes, hoping and waiting to see a tiny bobber sink below the surface. These hardy sportsmen are rewarded with full creels of tasty panfish, bass and pike. To them, winter ice fishing is sport fishing at its very best on the Upper Mississippi River. ☆

"C"



- 31 JIM MOORE
- 32 WOOD DUCK SLOUGH
- 33 HANBANKS SLOUGH
- 34 BUSSY LAKE
- 35 FRENCH TOWN LAKE
- 36 DRAKEHORN SLOUGH
- 37 BEER CAN SLOUGH
- 38 GRIME'S SLOUGH
- 39 GOOSE POND



Honey Creek State Park WINTER "HOTSPOT"

Lake Rathbun has received plenty of "ink" in the newspapers in recent years, and rightly so. There's plenty of room and recreation opportunity for spring, summer and fall visitors. Now it's a sure bet to become a winter "hotspot," too.

Honey Creek State Park on Rathbun's north shore is a great place to enjoy the stark splendor of snow-clad southern Iowa without giving up too many of the comforts of home. Like other state parks, Honey Creek welcomes winter use. The camping area is bladed and kept clear of snow to allow access to even large trailers and pickup rigs. Electrical outlets are available to campers all winter and there are plenty of them. A large, heated shower and restroom building is conveniently located right in the campgrounds.

The park, located on the north side of the 8,500 acre Federal impoundment, is actually a finger of land separating the Honey Creek arm from the main body of the lake.

Take an early morning hike from the campgrounds down to the peninsula tip. Just walk along slowly, and witness a season too often overlooked. Winter bird life and animal tracks will decorate the frosting and maybe a wary old buck will provide a thrilling

glimpse. At any rate, the hot coffee back in the camper will provide ample reward for the morning's efforts.

The lake itself could provide another brand of entertainment. When it freezes solid and the ice is thick enough to be plenty safe, give ice fishing a try. Crappies have reached jumbo size in Rathbun and many of the walleyes run two pounds or more. Locating the fish is the key, but that may not be as tough as it seems on the big lake. Summer fishing was good around nearly every inch of the shoreline and the fish will probably hang out in the same general areas.

Search a particular point or bay thoroughly by chopping new holes and fishing various depths. Persistent anglers who keep moving will eventually sample what could be some of the state's best ice fishing. Small minnows should take the big crappies and attract an occasional walleye too. Just a final word of caution — check ice thickness from the shoreline out and be certain of its safety.

Basic camping rates at Honey Creek State Park are \$2.50 per day per camping unit. Camping with electricity costs \$3.00 per day, per unit. For further information, contact the Park Officer, Honey Creek State Park, Rural Route No. 2, Moravia, Iowa 52571.★



HOW TO

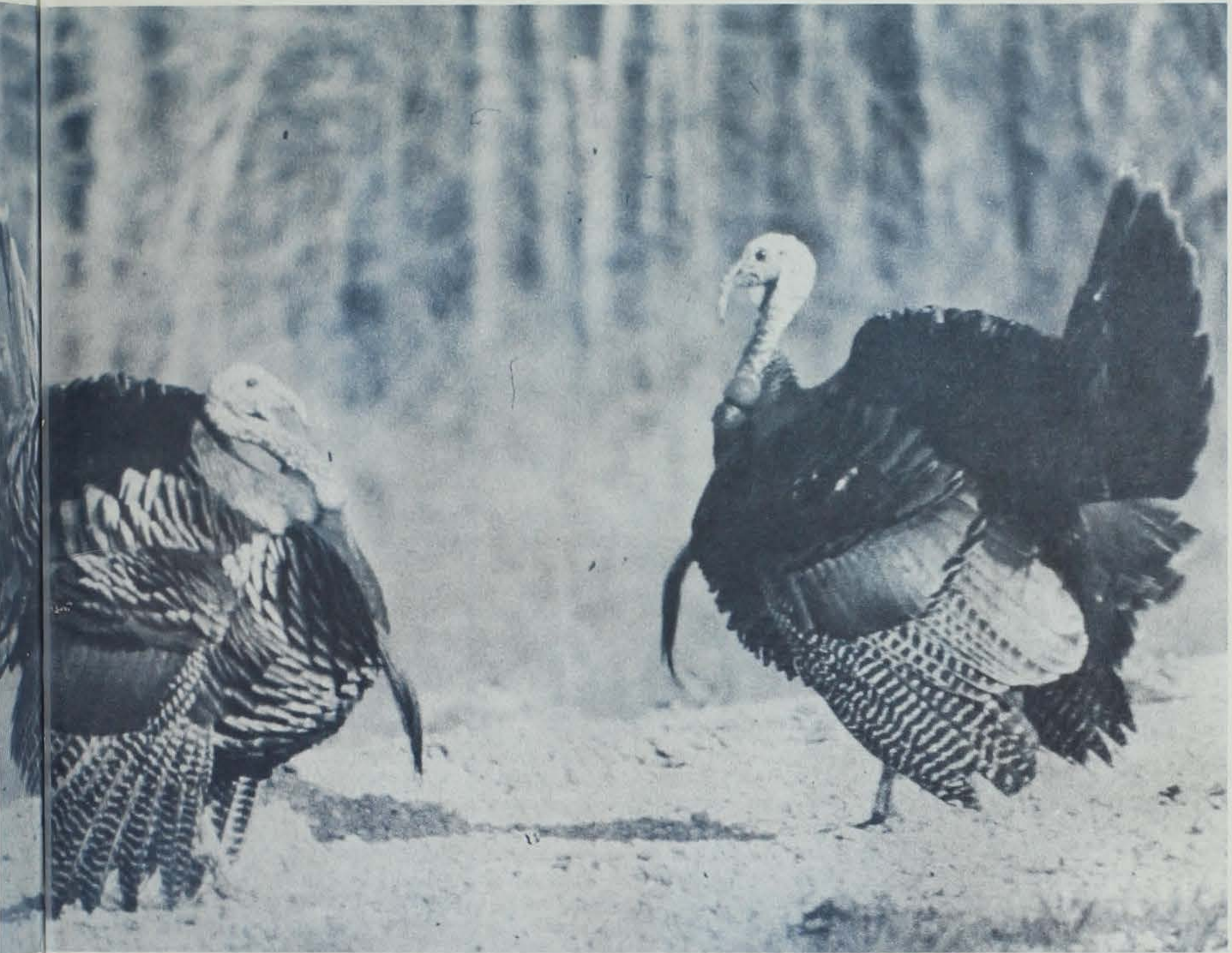
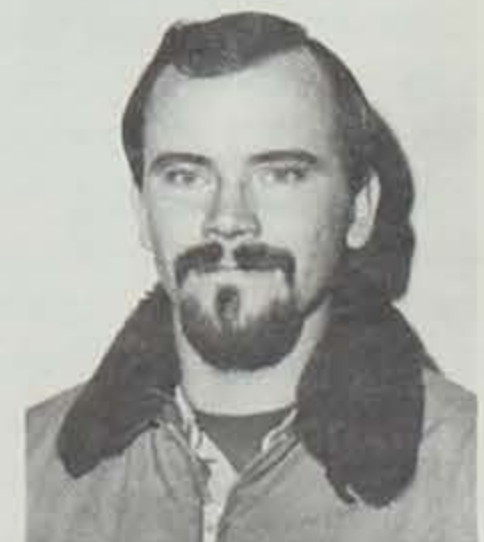


Photo by Bob Sheets

WHO DETHRONE THE KING

By Bob Sheets
Wildlife Research Biologist



Bob Sheets

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Historical Building
DES MOINES, IOWA 50319

"The cold predawn breeze brought water to my eyes as I tried not to blink. I could hear something crunching the leaves

as it approached slowly. Then the noise stopped. I scanned the ridge with the right barrel I had salvaged from my old broken binoculars. There he was! All I could see was a trained eye in a gray, ghost-like head that was rock still and barely visible. I yelped on my cedar box call once more. He slowly rose over the ridge and came down the slope toward me. I was lying flat on my chest under a windfall and I swear my heart was pounding a four-foot hole in the ground. I froze and watched. When he was within 40 yards, he dropped his wing tips to the ground and raised his head high to the rear. He looked for all the world like a 200 pound "Supergobbler!"

That may resemble the beginning of a hunting story this spring following Iowa's first wild turkey hunting season in modern times. It just may be that some Iowans are asking where are the wild turkeys in Iowa and where did they come from? For these questions, the following brief explanation is in order.

Since 1960, an experimental re-introduction program has been going on involving several different strains of wild turkeys. The right strain was eventually found, and today Iowa has a strong wild turkey population that is not only capable of a regulated harvest, but is also in need of the season. Maintaining wild traits in a species that must live with man means keeping it fearful of man. Wild turkeys have a tendency to assume domestic habits if they are protected year around for several years. A spring gobbler season has proven to be a vital management tool in keeping domestication low.

The eastern strain wild turkey introduced into southcentral and southeast Iowa has shown real promise. Since the release of 31 birds beginning in 1966, their numbers have bounded to an estimated 1,200 turkeys over 300 square miles of occupied range. Timberland within two to five miles of the initial release sites has revealed fall and winter bands of adult gobblers ranging

over relatively small areas. Along with this sign of surplus male birds has been a stabilized winter count within several miles of the release sites. Survival has also appeared high with the last official report indicating one banded bird to be at least five years old. All signs now point to a need for one of the most enjoyable management tools — a well regulated spring gobbler hunt. Wild turkeys introduced into northeast Iowa have not shown the reproductive success that the southern Iowa birds have, but their distribution has now covered nearly 400 square miles.

Hunting Tips

Now, down to the matter at hand. Iowa will be hosting its first wild turkey hunting season this spring, and there is homework to be done. I would like to encourage the patient and dedicated hunter to apply for the season. Hunting wild gobblers in the spring runs a far different nature than any other hunting in Iowa. The hunter **must** become as familiar as possible with the area he wants to hunt. One good idea is to listen for gobblers several mornings before the season opens to locate the best area. Then after checking for tracks and reconnoitering the terrain, carefully select a windfall or build a blind in the most strategic location. During March, April and early May, gobblers are usually traveling with a harem of four to six hens and one set of tracks will likely have been made by the ol' bronze monarch.

Gobblers send their mountain shaking calls up to three-fourths of a mile, meaning you will have no trouble learning if they are in the area. Gobbling activity peaks out just before dawn with one bird gobbling as often as once every 30 seconds. My observations have shown me that old toms usually begin broadcasting about the same time that the whippoorwills finish their serenading. This is often around the popular hour of 4:00 a.m.! During early May, this will be about one hour before

sunrise giving a hunter a half-hour to locate birds and learn what is going on before the hunt begins.

Calls and Companies

Next on the agenda is learning the importance of partially mastering a wild turkey call. This item alone can draw the knife between going home with a 20-lb. gobbler or leaving empty handed. Notice the list of turkey call companies and the grouping of four different types of calls. Every hunter will have his own talents and prefer one type or another, but there are still some general points to be discussed. Cedar box calls and slate calls are reasonably foolproof after listening to a record and practicing. Once the yelp of the hen can be imitated, these calls can give the most consistent sounds. The drawbacks to these two styles is that they require a hunter to lay his gun down and then move his hands. A wild turkey's ability to detect movement is unbelievably keen; so if box or slate calls are used, make sure hands and forearms are concealed. In fact, go one step further and conceal your entire body. The "turkey yelper" is a bit more difficult to master, but does emit a realistic and piercing call. It requires movement to the lips and can also betray a hunter. The diaphragm mouth call is convenient but also difficult to master. It is no more than a thin latex rubber film mounted in a vinyl coated steel ring. Once placed against the roof of the mouth, the call can first imitate a gobble to encourage a wild gobbler to return the call. Then when the bird's general direction is known, the lovesick "yelp" of the hen can be created with only a slight change in tongue position. This call allows the hunter two free hands and a ready weapon when the gobbler moves in.

When the conversation turns to making a clean kill on a turkey, a few more points need discussing. You may notice shotgun gauges have been restricted to 10

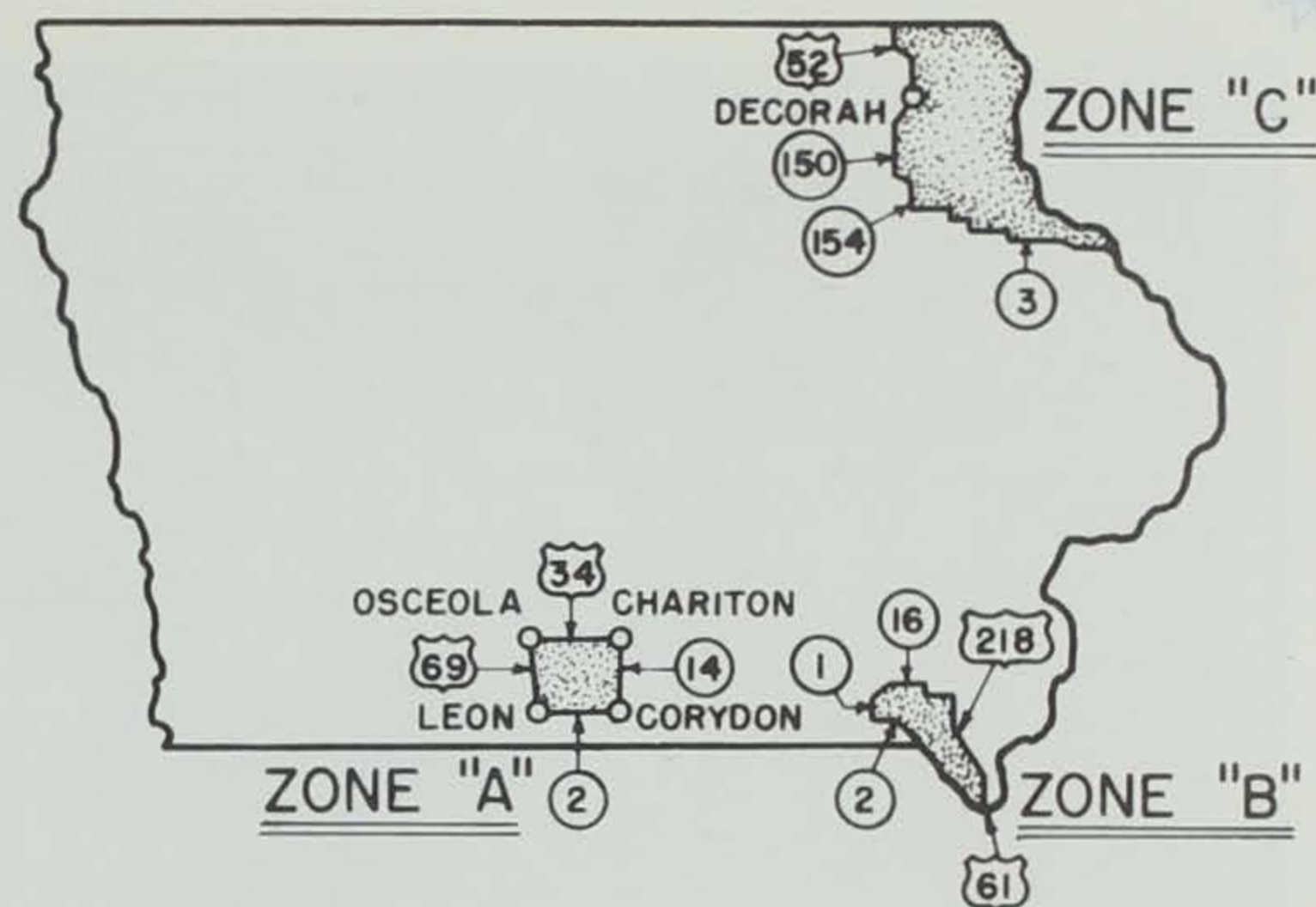
through 20 gauge. The 28 gauge and 410 gauge do not have the effective shot pattern that the others offer. It may be a surprise to some, but a turkey hunter should not try for a body shot. The bird is too large to kill consistently with a flesh wound. The fact is that a head and neck shot are the most reliable. That means a full shot pattern is necessary. You may also realize then that the 00 buck and No. 2 shot loads are not as effective as good old No. 6 shot. Most veteran turkey hunters will testify that you want to wait until you are within 20 to 30 yards of a big ol' tom before squeezing off a load of sixes, aimed at the base of the neck.

The rifle hunters may wonder why their favorite weapon has not been allowed for spring gobbler hunting. It is well known that the rifle is an efficient weapon and would no doubt do the trick on any size gobbler. A few states do sanction its use. But the Iowa Conservation Commission has one thought in mind by offering a spring wild turkey hunting season — to provide high quality hunting whenever possible; in this case, matching wits with a wily gobbler.

Shotgun hunters will have to learn to play the con-game with that feathered king of the woods. They will have to entice the bird into a 20 to 40 yard gunning range. By this time any turkey hunter will have earned his trophy and will have a lasting memory of a fine experience in the forest. The intention is to establish a "call up" spring gobbler season. The resource and its habitat is limited which demands a maximum amount of hunter effort for each bird bagged. Shotguns and turkey calling have accomplished this in most turkey hunting states. The combination has led to the finest hunting known involving wild turkeys.

A hunter that takes time to locate birds before the season, is off to a good start. He can accomplish this with his own leg work, phone calls to the local conservation officers, wildlife management biologists, and state fores-

(Continued on Page 12)



1974 spring gobbler season

This May will mark the first time in modern times that Iowans will have the opportunity to hunt wild turkeys in the Hawkeye State. Only bearded (male) turkeys can legally be taken.

Hunting will be permitted in three zones — A, B, and C (see map). Zone A in southcentral Iowa, is portions of Lucas, Decatur, Wayne and Clarke counties and includes part of Stephens State Forest; Zone B in southeast Iowa, is portions of Lee and Van Buren Counties which also includes Shimek State Forest and; Zone C in northeast Iowa, is mainly found in the timbered hill country of Allamakee and Clayton counties and includes the Yellow River State Forest.

The ICC set two hunting seasons, May 4 - May 10 and May 11 - May 19, 1974. A special turkey hunting license will be good for only one of these periods. A total of 450 licenses will be issued. Only 75 licenses will be issued for each zone for each of the two seasons. The license fee is \$10.00.

License applications are available from county recorders, most hunting license outlets or by writing to the ICC, 300 Fourth Street, Des Moines, Iowa 50319. Applications will be accepted only from February 1 - 15, both dates inclusive. Applications received prior to or after this period will not be considered a valid application. Unsuccessful applicants will receive their fees and applications back after the random computer drawing. Licenses will be issued to Iowa residents only.

Shooting hours will be one-half hour before sunrise to noon each day. Only 10, 12, 16 and 20 gauge shotguns shooting shotshells, or long bows with broadhead arrows will be permitted in taking turkeys. The use of decoys, electronic calls, dogs, horses, motorized vehicles, aircraft, and bait will be prohibited.

The daily bag, possession and season limit is one bearded "Tom" turkey. ★

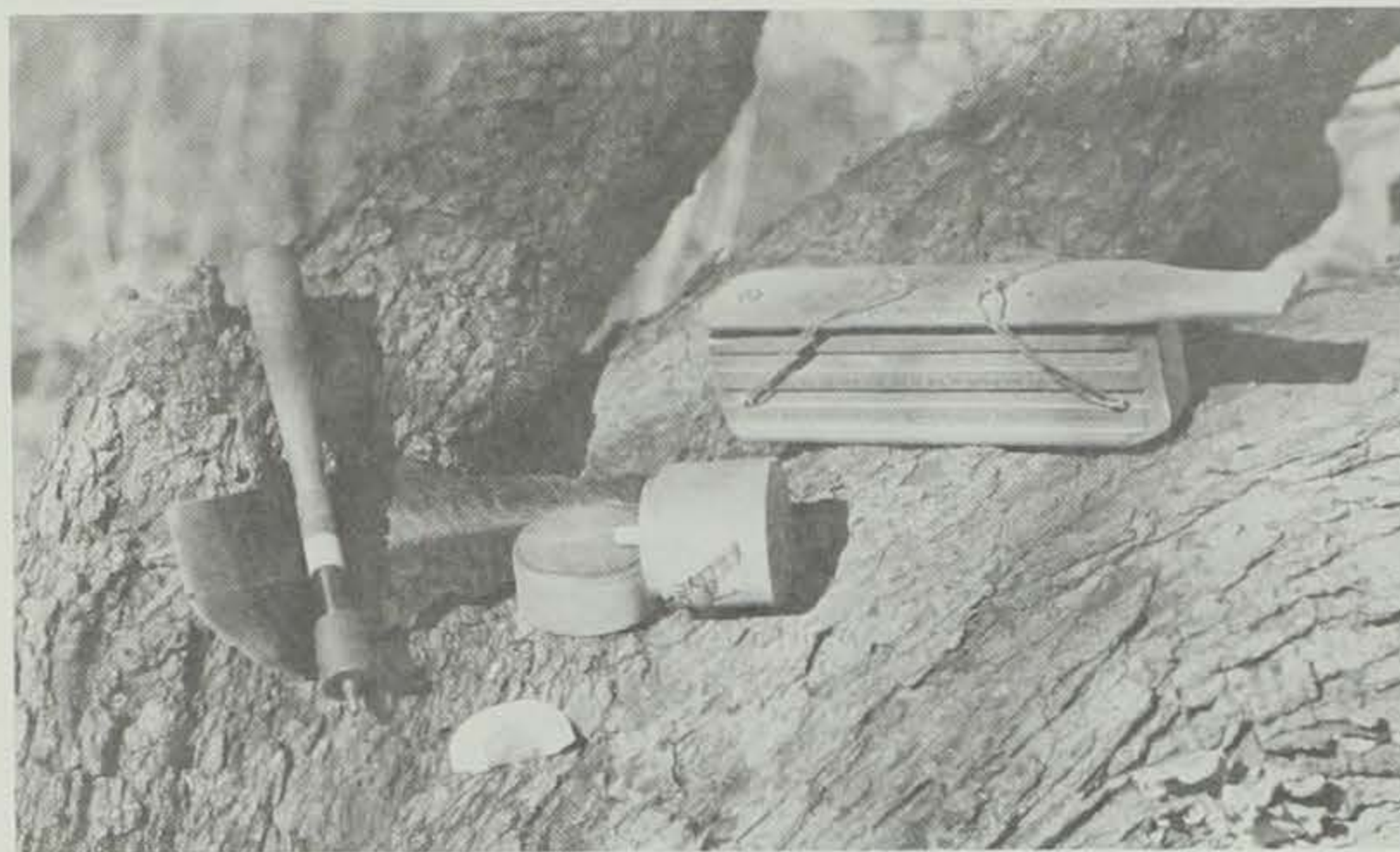


Photo by Ken Formanek

Turkey Calls and Companies

Burnham Bros., Marble Falls, Texas 78654 (Cedar Box and Slate Calls).

Herters Inc., Rural Route No. 1, Waseca, Minnesota 56093 (Cedar Box Call).

Leon's Shop, Lexington, Virginia 24450 (Mouth Blown).

Faulks Game Call Co. Inc., 616 18th Street, Lake Charles, Louisiana 70601 (Cedar Box Call)

M. L. Lynch Co., Dept. SA-1-

Box 377, Liberty, Miss. 39645 (Cedar Box Call).

Mallard Tone Game Calls, 2901 16th Street, Moline, Illinois 61265 (Cedar Box Call).

Philip S. Olt Co., Pekin, Ill. 61554 (Mouth Blown and Cedar Box Calls).

Penn's Woods Products, Inc., 19 West Pillsburg Street, Delmont, Pa. 15626 (Mouth Blown, Slate, Cedar Box, Yelper Calls).

ters in the area, and by writing the Des Moines office for information. Informational leaflets describing hunting methods and locations will be sent to each successful applicant along with his hunting license. A public meeting to answer any questions may also be held with 1974 hunters before the season begins. Then when opening day arrives, three vital points should be mastered: (1) how to camouflage in the proper location for the hunt; (2) how to imitate the lovesick yelp of a spring hen; and, (3) how to remain patient.

Insights Into a Spring Gobbler's Habits

Although wild turkeys have some similarities to their pheasant, grouse and quail cousins, their habits are uniquely their own. Beginning in early April,

wild gobblers begin tapering off from a winterlong feeding effort that has put them up to their maximum annual weight. By this time, they have developed a spongy accumulation of fat at the base of their throat. It is called the breast sponge and it acts as an energy reservoir for the next several weeks while their thoughts turn toward the ladies. Young males that have been roaming with adult hens break away from the apron strings, and for the first time begin looking for the attention of other females. About one fourth of the young toms are capable of mating, but they seldom manage to establish a territory. The reason is obvious — the old "mountain shakers" that have been around for a few years will not allow it. These adults have usually already begun their gobbling,

announcing that they are boss of the roost. The young gobblers, affectionately referred to by old turkey hunters as "jakes," manage to harass a few old gobblers but that is where it ends. Two-year old gobblers or older have taken to a solitary way of life. During spring, one or two jakes may roost with the king but when daybreak arrives and the harem gathers to the call, the boys inevitably wind up on the sidelines.

As spring progresses, the hens select a nest site, begin laying eggs for a two-week period, and then begin a patient 28 day incubation period. Iowa's 1974 season time table should find most hens on the nest and unavailable to the hunter's eye. A noon closing each day will further protect nesting hens that may come off their nests during warm afternoon hours. But, there will always be an exception to the rule!

Look For The Beard

The beard consists of 10 to 14 dark string-like feathers hanging from the base of the throat. Jakes will exhibit a 2 to 4 inch beard while adult gobblers may pack a 7 inch beard or longer. If it nearly sweeps the ground as the bird walks, you are looking at a real trophy. Just remember, look for that beard! Biologists at each check station should be able to give age and weight information on each bird examined. A running check on the biggest gobbler will no doubt be kept. Biologists, officers and hunters will all be interested in how large some of these birds are.

When most hens have begun tending to their nest, a second peak in gobbling will occur. This normally takes place several days after the main gobbling peak as a result of increasing competition. Each gobbler is attempting to find the last remaining hen. During this time, the big bronze monarch will most likely come to a well handled call.

An approaching gobbler can easily descend on a hunter with phantom-like ability. The crunching footsteps described in the beginning may or may not occur. A wary gobbler may take an hour

picking the most silent path possible. Many hunters report birds appearing from the opposite direction they were last heard. I had that happen last spring when two adult gobblers walked up to my call making absolutely no noise. When I made another scrape on my cedar box call, the resulting gobbles sounded like a bomb going off behind me.

If luck is with you and a gobbler comes to your call, he may — he just may give you the performance of a lifetime. Once he thinks he is close to his lady, he will drop his wing tips and fluff every feather on his body. This is when his appearance takes on the resemblance of a black, 55 gallon drum! He will fan his tail and drag his flight feathers on the ground. Then with his head in a regal position, he will send his grand finale gesture — a low guttural noise emitted from his windpipe. The sound resembles a sound you may make if you attempt to say “kum-kump” very slowly with your mouth closed. As the big gobbler performs he will make several “turkey trot” runs from side to side to impress his lady friend. If a hunter makes one false move during this time, the bird will nearly vanish before his eyes. So if you plan to make a move, it had better be confined to pulling a trigger.

Turkeys have returned to Iowa. Their numbers are now high enough to begin the use of a vital management tool — a well regulated gobbler harvest to keep the flocks wild. The birds are back due to hunter supported game management. So hunters, the season is your to enjoy. If camera fans want to record the spring ritual on film, the forest welcomes them also. But please remember, there will likely be 450 patriots in the woods during the season. So for best results, it may be wise to be in and out of the woods before the hunting season begins.

Best of luck to the successful applicants on their first chance at the ultra-sport of spring gobbler hunting!



iowa snowmobiling

Photo by Jerry Leonard

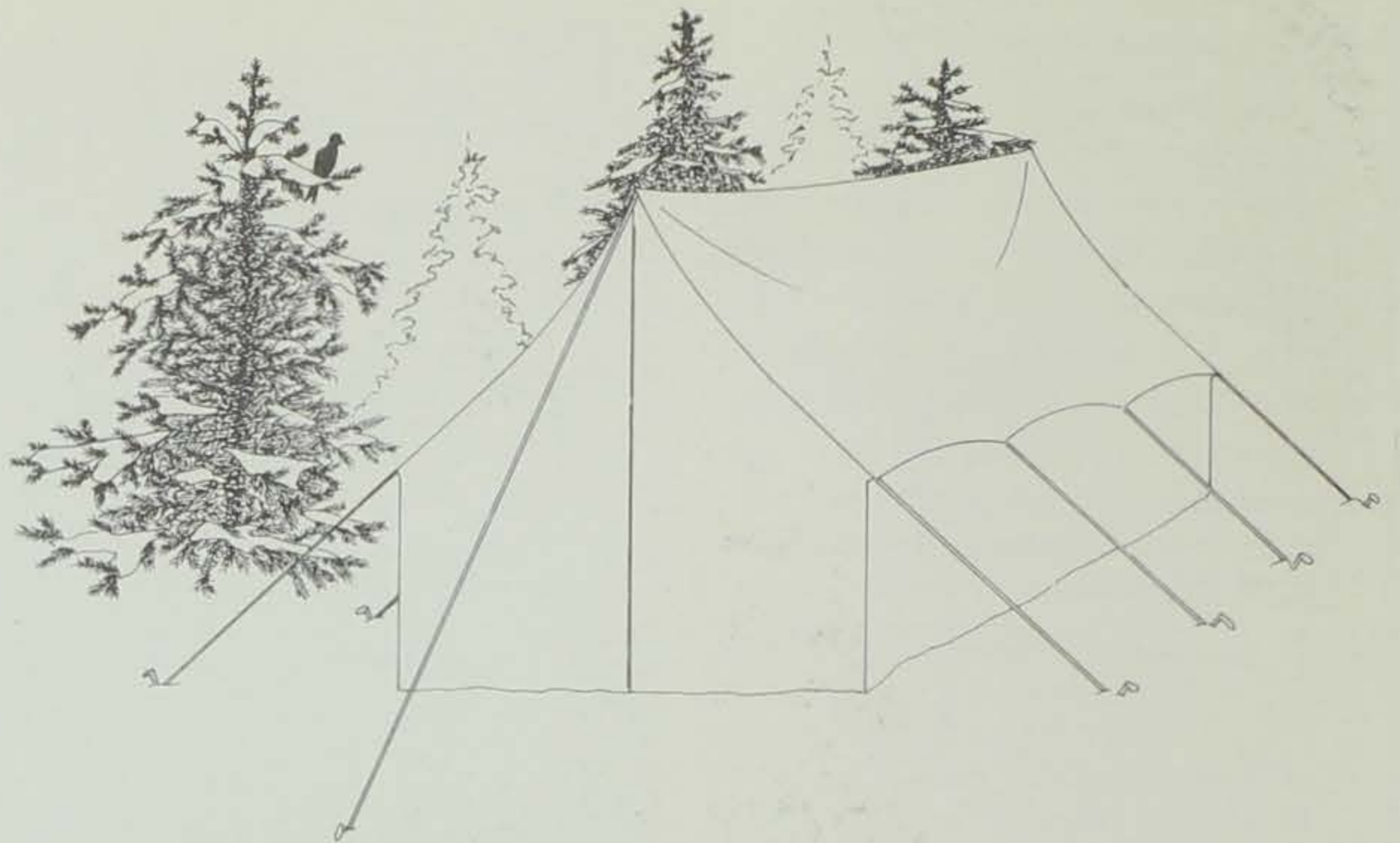
Iowa doesn't have nearly the number of registered snowmobiles of other more northern states such as Wisconsin, Minnesota, or Michigan. We don't have some of the problems encountered with large numbers of snowmobiles, either. What we do have is an access program which provides many areas of public lands for snowmobile use. A list of these areas and the officers responsible for them may be obtained from the Iowa Conservation Commission. The officers are also available to conduct presentations about snowmobiling to interested groups and snowmobile clubs.

Because snowmobiling is such a new activity, regulations remain at a minimum. Such factors as complaints by landowners, injuries and fatalities, will influence legislation as the sport grows. So the time is here now to preserve the identity of a type of recreation which can be enjoyed by all.

Knowledge of regulations is a must. The best way to direct public feelings against snowmobiling is for snowmobilers to ignore what few regulations we do have. A second area of more personal importance is your own safety. One of the best and easiest ways to learn about safe operation of

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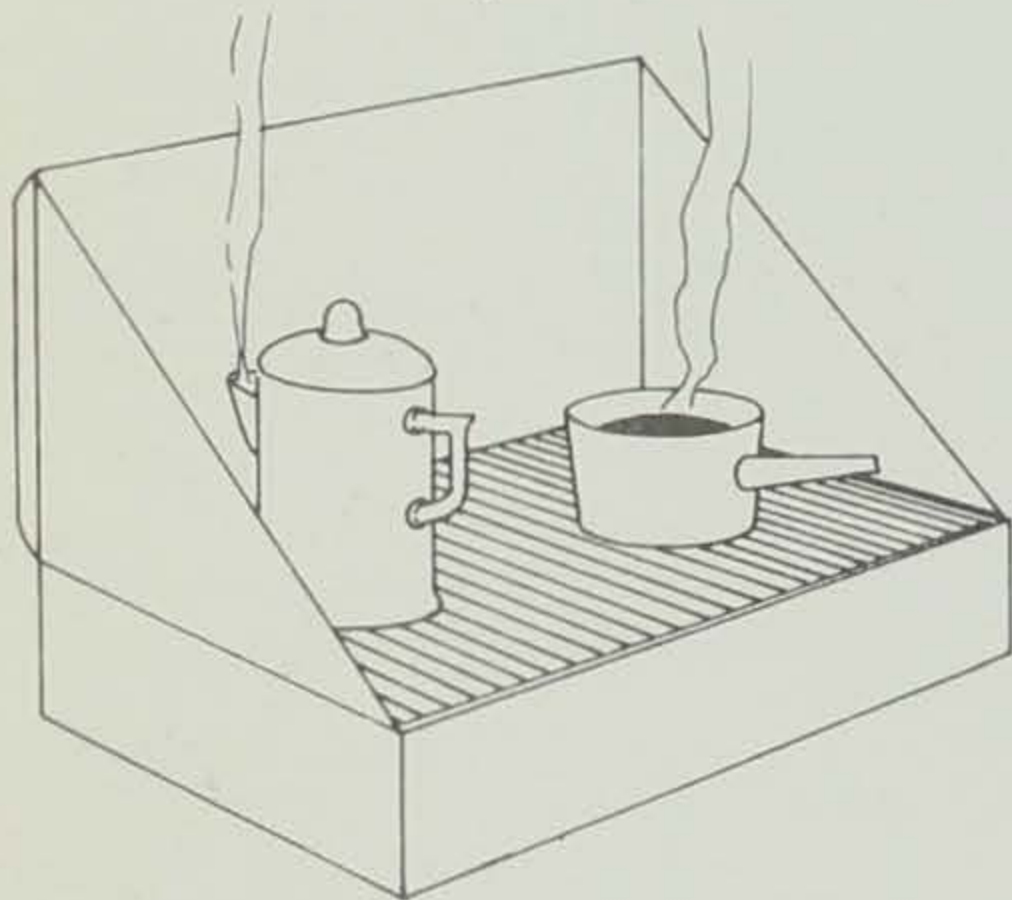
WINTER CAMPING



Winter camping in Iowa's state parks can be as comfortable as summer camping and much more exciting. Competition for a favorite camping spot has disappeared and the spectacular winter landscape is yours.

The following chilly weather preparations are necessary :

- Warm clothing including insulated boots , gloves and underwear and a hooded parka. Include one change of clothes and two pair of sox. Keep clothing packed moisture free when not being worn.



- Locate a good wind break for your area.
- A sheet of plastic under your tent will keep it from freezing down.
- Sleeping bags should be heavy enough for winter weather
- Catalytic heaters are nice , but not necessary.

- Easy to prepare meals such as chilli or stew with Hot Tea , coffee or chocolate are best and allows more time for enjoyment.
- For a list of parks open to winter camping , write to the

IOWA CONSERVATION COMMISSION
300 - 4TH STREET
DES MOINES, IOWA 50319



ILLUSTRATIONS BY
LARRY POOL