

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2009

# IOWA OUTDOORS

THE DNR'S MAGAZINE OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

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**MAJESTY ALONG FROZEN RIVERS**  
A PHOTOGRAPHER'S VIEW OF EAGLE BEHAVIOR

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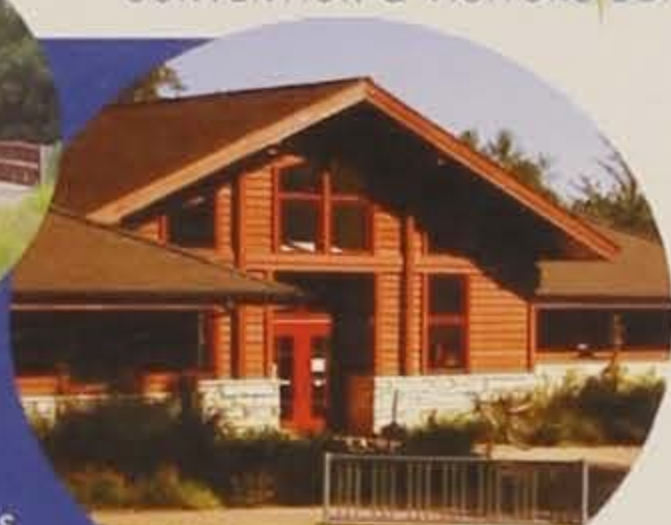
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# NATURE AND HUMANS FIND THEIR OWN GAIT AT THE NATURAL GAIT

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Owners Howard and Donna Bright bought a chunk of land along the Yellow River more than 20 years ago. "For the Woodland people, this was holy land," Bright says simply, spreading his hands to indicate the forested ridgeline where most of his cabins sit, and the clear trout stream below, where a fishing line looks big as baling wire.

Standing on nearly 400 acres, the resort is horse-friendly, like most of this area, and includes the Brights' wildflower seed company, Ion Exchange. The cabins aren't the light version found in most resorts, either. Their thick timbers, wood-burning stoves and reclaimed lumber and barn pieces are as comfortable as they are beautiful, jutting from a lovely landscape in a way that begs for steaming coffee on the porch, or a rowdy round of cards at night.

If you stay at the Ion Inn, the original lodging next to the Brights' house, you can wake up, cross the gravel road and start fishing first thing in the morning.

"A lot of the time, when man comes in, he destroys the very thing he came to see," Howard Bright says. "That didn't happen around here."

A typical fall morning at the Natural Gait unfolds atop a high ridge, in a cabin overlooking farmland and streambeds. The sky will turn pink, and then purple, and so on, until a full electric blue illuminates the bright beauty of fall.

This is the kind of day that'll convince you how important it is to get grounded in the land before you have to entertain all those relatives at Thanksgiving, and then, seemingly minutes later, at Christmas.

So whether it is before the holidays or if you need a rest afterwards, get out there, if only to hunker down in a cabin, its chinks lined by thick rope so the drafts can't diminish the efforts of a thick, popping fire in the stove.

Have a good time with your friends or a quiet, relaxing, more intimate time with that special person in your life. Dip into the treasure chest of nature that Allamakee County offers.

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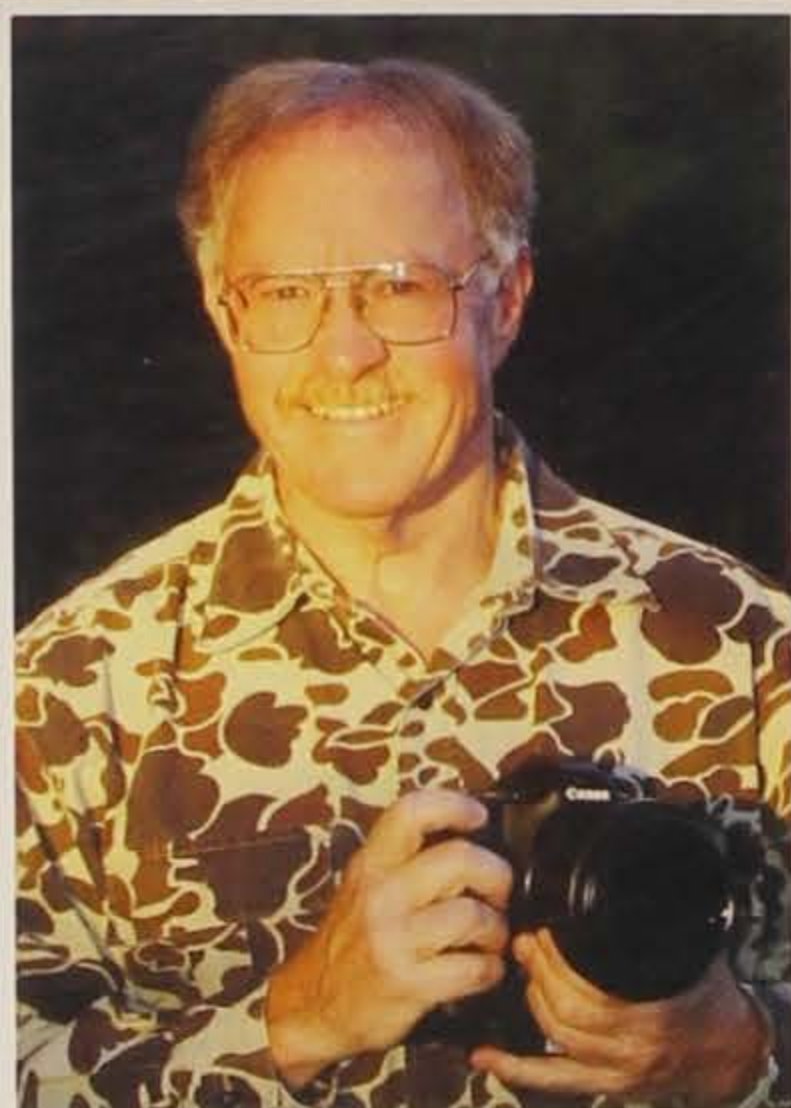
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# IOWA OUTDOORS

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To conserve and enhance our natural resources in cooperation with individuals and organizations to improve the quality of life for Iowans and ensure a legacy for future generations.

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We strive to open the door to the beauty and uniqueness of Iowa's natural resources, inspire people to get outside and experience Iowa and to motivate outdoor-minded citizens to understand and care for our natural resources.

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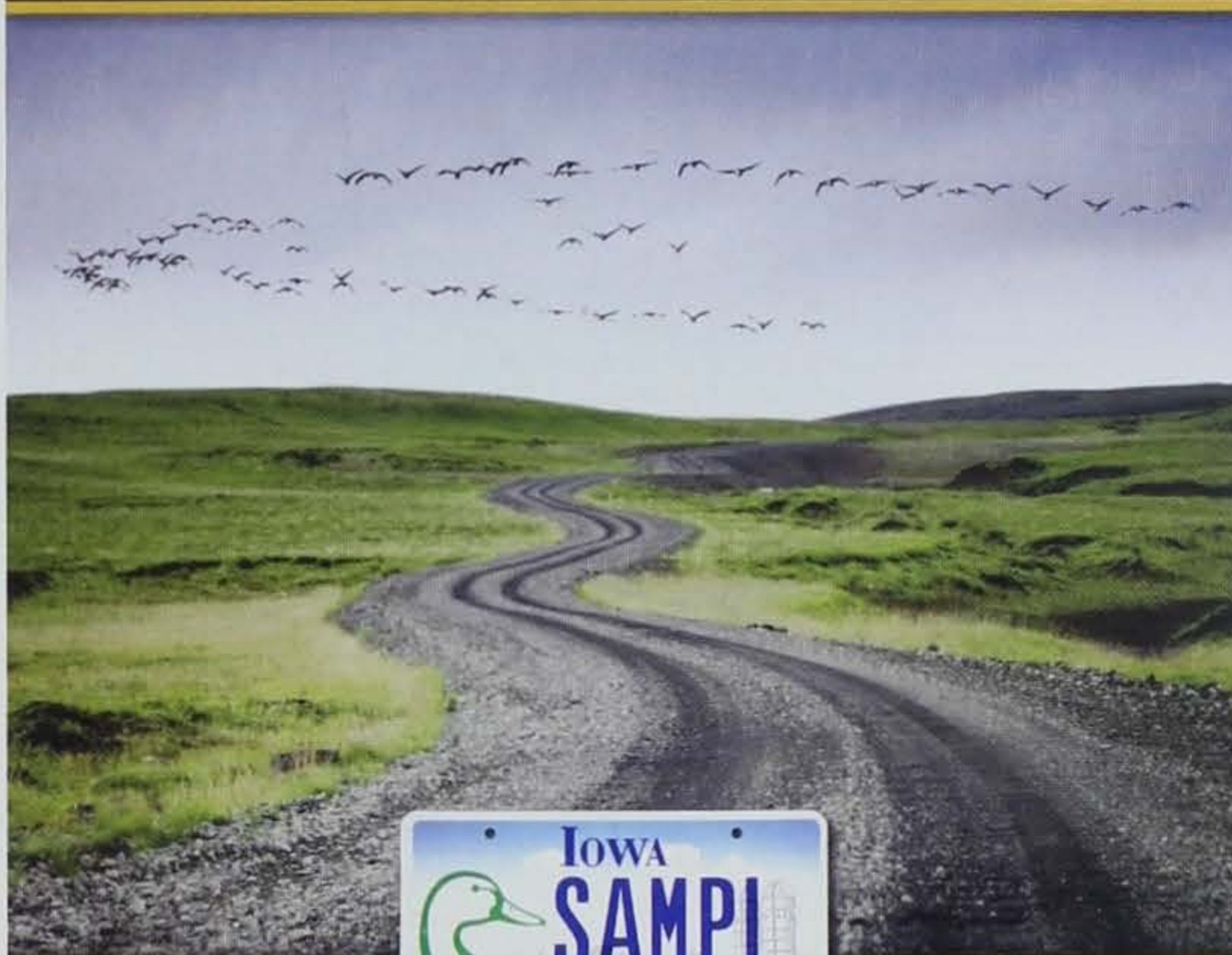


Prairie Chicken



Long-Billed Curlew

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STORY AND PHOTOS BY LOWELL WASHBURN

#### ABOUT THIS PHOTO

Snatching a gizzard shad to fuel up for a cold night, an eagle flies eye-level past photographer Ty Smedes on the Des Moines River below the Lake Red Rock dam. "Sometimes I find a place where I can stand against a tree with the sun at my back," he says of being out of his blind. "Wearing full camouflage and concentrating on not moving, the eagles will come right in front of me. But you have to be in the shadows," he says. "I like to shoot early or late in the day—that is when the light is best." Smedes shot this image at 3:30 p.m.

#### ABOUT THE COVER

Ice coats the legs of a hungry bald eagle as -20° wind chills instantly freezes spray from collecting fish a few miles below the Lake Red Rock dam. Once deeming Iowa too difficult to photograph eagles in flight, photographer Ty Smedes considered a trip to Homer, Alaska. "I held off the trip for several years to learn more about eagles and their habits." The challenge paid off. "I can get as good or better flying eagle shots in Iowa than Alaska," he says. All his eagle photos in this issue were taken in central Iowa.

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ACTIVITIES, TIPS AND EVENTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY



# Mush Your Way to a Blizzard of Family Memories

A rare adventure gives you  
bragging rights with your friends



**G**rab a pair of mukluks and hit the trails, towed by a team of hard-working huskies. Hunkered down under a toasty pile of blankets provided by avid musher Ginger Plummer, families can taste travel adventure at its best with a 3-mile jaunt down the Great Western Trail in Warren County.

If a brief touring mush breaks your winter blahs, and you can bet it will, try leading your own team of friendly Siberians through Plummer's musher training program, set up by special arrangement. With nearly 35 years of husky and sledding experience, her training allows you to command your own howling, husky-powered polar express and drive the straining team for a fast ride, cruising through the snow. "If anyone wants to learn to drive, we can teach them," says Plummer.

Dog sledding rates depend on the weight of riders as this determines how many of Plummer's 45 seasoned sled dogs to hitch into a team. A 175-pound man will require six to eight dogs. It takes one assistant per husky to keep the raring dogs contained before launch.

The sled fits three small children or two larger children. Adults must ride solo, except of course, for the capable driver, who alternately runs and rides the sled rails. "The driver has to be in good shape," quips Plummer, who notes they must also prepare for the unexpected, such as controlling the team should a rabbit appear down the trail.

"When you pull up and first see the dogs tethered, they are nuts—screaming and howling," says Plummer of the shrieking, lovable huskies. "Don't be afraid about the noise, the dogs are very friendly, but just extremely excited to get going. They know what is coming when they get tethered up and they can't wait to start running."

Once the sled starts, the dogs settle in, getting their rhythm and setting their pace. During the ride, expect the boisterous huskies to focus on their task and bask in

the sheer pleasure of their work. "They won't make a sound while running," she says. "You will hear silence mostly, except the paw pads on the snow and dogs breathing." Expect to see birds and other wildlife along the way and billowy breath clouds from the dogs.

On the return, the dogs are fulfilled. "Their tongues will hang out, but they are happy. They love to run."

#### WHEN TO CALL

To make a memorable experience, at least 2 inches of the right snow is needed. "The snow must be packable," says Plummer. "Like snowman-making snow." Light, fluffy snow doesn't support the sled runners and overly deep snow also poses pulling problems.

If the conditions are right, that's the time to call for the weekend-only arrangements. Make advance reservations if possible, based upon snowfall forecasts or the current snowpack.

Rates vary, with a minimum charge of \$25. Rides last 20-30 minutes for the three-mile ride, depending upon conditions.

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#### STAY SNUG

Dress in layers. Wear a synthetic underlayer, such as polyester, to wick moisture from the skin. Top the wicking layer with a warm layer such as fleece or wool. The last, or outer layer should cut the wind and prevent snow from soaking your warmth layer. A nylon windbreaker, waterproof pullover or parka usually works. Wear snow pants and tall boots to prevent snow from soaking your feet. Don't forget warm gloves or windproof mittens, a scarf or facemask and a hat.

*Together* *Half Day On \$50*

## GRAPEVINE WREATH FOR THE BIRDS

Give a gift to your feathered friends and dress up your backyard with this easy to make, inexpensive grapevine birdseed wreath. Grab the kids, a wreath (available at craft stores), a jar of peanut butter, a bag of birdseed and some raffia or ribbon and dip into this fun, family project. Attach a loop with raffia or ribbon to the wreath top, spread peanut butter on the vines, sprinkle with bird seed and hang wherever the birds fly. Dress it up with crabapples, berries, evergreen sprigs or pine cones to give it a seasonal look. A little tip? Melt the peanut butter in the microwave and apply with a small paint brush to simplify and expedite the task. Total cost: under \$15.



## Backlight Your Photos

Give your favorite photos some lasting warmth by creating simple photo candle shades. Find clear glass candle holders—either circular- or square-shaped—and make prints to fit. Trim to the same size as the candle holder, roll around the holder and affix with clear tape.

The candle will backlight the image and give it a fresh look. Experiment with landscapes, wildflowers, fall color photos and your family in the out-of-doors.

For safety, use solid glass candle holders, avoiding those with open holes to prevent paper from getting too hot.

WREATH PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH; LAMP PHOTO BY BRIAN BUTTON; QUILL PHOTOS BY STUDIO Z

# Write Like Our Forefathers

Since the sixth century, the quill pen was the writing tool until replaced by the steel pen point in the 1800s, and later by fountain and ball point pens. In today's age of texting and typing, penmanship has nearly vanished.

Kids and art-minded adults can craft easy-to-make homemade quill pens using turkey or goose feathers to revive this art.

*We People*

## SUPPLIES

Flight (larger wing or tail) feather from goose or turkey.

**NOTE:** *Plumage from any legally harvested game can be used for ornamental and decorative uses, but songbird and endangered or threatened species feathers cannot be possessed for any reason or use. While feathers from legally harvested upland birds can be bought and sold, migratory game bird feathers cannot under the Lacey Act.*

1) Strip feathers from end of shaft to make room for your hand to grasp the quill.

2) Clean and harden the tip to stiffen the nib by leaving feather in a sunny window for a week, or fill an empty soup can with clean sand and heat on stovetop. Stick feather tip into sand and let cool.

3) Use a sharp, small knife or X-acto knife to cut off a ¼ inch from the quill end.

## MAKE YOUR POINT

4) With a sharp knife, cut the end at a 45° angle, down and away from the top.

5) Cut a short slit along the top center of the tip to help draw inkflow.

6) Cut away the front of the quill to form the scoop.

7) Slice a scoop from the underside of the nib, centered under the slit.

8) With tweezers, or knife, scrape out membrane from inside of tube to increase ink-holding.

9) Make the point by cutting slivers on both sides of the slit to make a fountain pen shaped nib.

10) If the slit is overly long, the tip will be too soft. If the slit is too short, the pen tip will be too hard. Trim as needed.

Buy India ink from a craft store and dip the pen into the ink. With practice, you can create unique lettering for special occasions.



STEP 4



STEP 5



STEP 8



STEP 9

## I SIGNED THE KYOTO PROTOCOL

BY TIM LANE

Last year I had the opportunity to meet and hear the mayor of Seattle, Greg Nickels, talk about the "Emerald City" and the environment. His honor shared how a series of dry winters in the normally wet city had provided his "wake up call," one that prompted him to begin a nationwide effort to do something the federal government wasn't willing to do at the time—agree to the Kyoto Protocol.

Nickels and more than 131 other like-minded mayors formed a bipartisan coalition to fight global warming on the local level. Many weren't sure about the global warming thing, but saw tons of benefits in engaging in the fight.

This reminded me of physical activity. Many folks link physical activity to weight management, but don't focus on that alone. There are hundreds of other good reasons to be active. The same can be said for the Kyoto agreement. By observing the protocol we can reduce our dependence on foreign oil, be more active, save money and improve air quality.

So I have decided if the mayor can take the initiative and have cities step up to the plate, I can take it one step further. In 2009 I will sign the Kyoto Protocol as an individual. That is, I will have my lawyer (aka my brother) draw up a legal document binding me to various aspects of the Kyoto accords.

I will legally commit myself to reduce my heat-trapping gas emissions to levels 7 percent below those of 1990, by 2012. In Seattle they now require cruise ships to turn off their diesel engines while docked and loading supplies or passengers. That is a great idea, but it won't do me much good. On the other hand, I can avoid the elevator, turn the heat down, bike to parks rather than drive, keep tire pressures at recommended levels and drive my car less. With the new Iowa water trails effort, maybe I can boat more.

I will replace a motor boat trip with a kayak adventure. I will carpool to Backbone, rather than drive alone. I will camp rather than stay in a hotel. I actually look forward to the idea of both signing the accord and fulfilling the agreement. I can also see myself casually mentioning at parties, "Well yes, I have signed the Kyoto accord as well." I have never signed an international agreement nor do I know anyone who has. I therefore see this as quite a feather in my cap.

In fact, I intend to go below my 1990 levels and I intend to do it before 2012. As I understand it, that allows me to sell my unused "carbon credits" to others. So if you are using more carbon than you were in 1990, let's talk.

I might not be able to convince you to sign an international treaty. But let me encourage you to create a bloc of like-minded individuals in 2009 and enroll in Live Healthy Iowa (formerly Lighten Up Iowa). You can find information at [www.lightenupiowa.org/](http://www.lightenupiowa.org/). Maybe I can get my team to name ourselves the Kyoto Dragons.

*Tim Lane is the fitness consultant with the Iowa Department of Public Health. A marathoner, former director of the National Ski Patrol, climber and volleyball coach, he has cycled across America once and Iowa 25 times. He's a regular on RAGBRAI. Tim also helped design and promotes Live Healthy Iowa.*

## But Why?

Helping adults answer children's nature questions

BY A. JAY WINTER

*A. Jay Winter educates up to 20,000 Iowa children each year as the DNR's training specialist at the Springbrook Conservation Education Center.*

### Why are bald eagles found below dams in the winter?

— KATHERINE, AGE 8, SIOUX CITY

Bald eagles spend their winters below Iowa dams because that is their appropriate habitat. Dams provide food, water, shelter and space all arranged in a usable format. The open water provides a source of fish and good hunting perches (food and water), loafing areas to sit quietly and conserve energy (space), and areas out of the wind to roost (shelter).

Dams provide an excellent opportunity for you and your children to observe eagles. If you park by a dam, chances are you will see these impressive birds perched in large trees or cruising the river channel. It is a great way to spend time with family or friends. But don't be surprised if you spot our nation's symbol outside its preferred habitat. Eagles often leave the river to feed on carrion (dead animals) of many types. You might spot one flying over or perched near farm fields away from the river.

Other things to watch for near dams are waterfowl (ducks and geese) that may linger throughout the winter, fish visible in the clear waters and various mammals that may be active in this fertile environment.

Explain to your child that dams are very dangerous places. The water is very cold and flows in all different directions below a dam, so stay clear of the water!



GLOBE PHOTO BY ISTOCKPHOTO.COM; EAGLE PHOTO BY TY SMEDES

## REALITY OR SNOW JOB?

MYTH

There's a saying, "Big flakes, little snow and little flakes, big snow." There's a storm of controversy surrounding where this myth hailed from. But according to the Old Farmer's Almanac, the meaning of this weather lore is crystal clear: The larger the snowflake, the less accumulation—the smaller the snowflake, the more snowfall.

Trying to predict snowfall totals based on this myth is flaky at best. According to KWWL Storm Track 7 meteorologist Mark Schnackenberg in Waterloo, "The size of snowflakes are not accurate predictors of the amount of snowfall that will accumulate. Weather forecasting is a much more dynamic and scientific process. Several factors affect snowflake formation, including temperature, air currents and moisture. The only accurate prediction that you can make from larger snowflakes is that they contain more moisture and will make excellent snowballs."

When temperatures are very near or just above freezing, snowflakes will partially melt, producing a liquid film on the snowflake. This liquid film makes the flakes larger and acts like glue to help them stick together. When temperatures are colder, snowflakes tend to be smaller and dryer. In essence, the size of the snowflake can help you determine if the temperature is warmer or colder, (if you are outside with your ruler measuring snowflakes you may already know this) but cannot predict the amount of accumulation.

So, it sounds like this myth should take a powder. "The only way to truly obtain accurate weather predictions is to turn on your television and stay tuned to your trustworthy, local news team," says Schnackenberg.

According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the largest snowflake on record is 15 inches wide and 8 inches thick reported at Fort Keogh, Mont., on Jan. 28, 1887.

### Ask The Expert

Mary in Muscatine asks: "Are woodchucks and groundhogs the same animal? Do groundhogs really forecast the coming of spring?"

**How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?** We'll never know because the *Marmota monax's* common name (woodchuck) is not representative of this mammal's habits or habitat, but reflects the early English pronunciation of the Cree word for this creature—wuchak. Later, this rodent acquired a common English name that suggests its burrowing habits—the groundhog.

The full name of the most famous groundhog of all is the Seer of Seers, Sage of Sages, Prognosticator of Prognosticators and Weather Prophet Extraordinaire, otherwise known as—Punxsutawney Phil.

On Feb. 2 of every year, Phil makes his annual trek to Gobbler's Knob, a hilltop two miles southeast of Punxsutawney, Penn., where according to a tradition started in 1887 by the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club, Phil leaves the burrow (a climate controlled man-made tree stump) where he has been "hibernating" (throughout the year Phil actually lives indoors at the local library) to discover whether cold

winter weather will continue. If Phil cannot see his shadow, he remains above ground, ending his hibernation. If Phil's shadow is visible, six more weeks of cold weather will follow and he returns to his burrow.

There is no scientific evidence available to support this belief, nor to explain the claim of Phil's Inner Circle—a group of local dignitaries responsible for caring for Phil—that although a groundhog's average life span is six years, Phil is an astounding 122 years old and the very same groundhog that made the first weather prediction back in 1887.

Inner Circle members insist this famous weather predictor's longevity is attributed to the love and companionship of his not-so-famous wife, Phyllis, as well as Phil's annual practice of sipping the elixir of life—special groundhog nog that extends his life.

Not only will we never know the answer to the question, "How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?" chances are we will never know how many groundhogs have actually portrayed Punxsutawney Phil over the past century.



GOT A QUESTION? Send to: [ASKTHEEXPERTS@DNR.IOWA.GOV](mailto:ASKTHEEXPERTS@DNR.IOWA.GOV)

TIPS, TRICKS, HOW-TO AND MUST-KNOWS TO ENHANCE YOUR OUTDOOR FUN



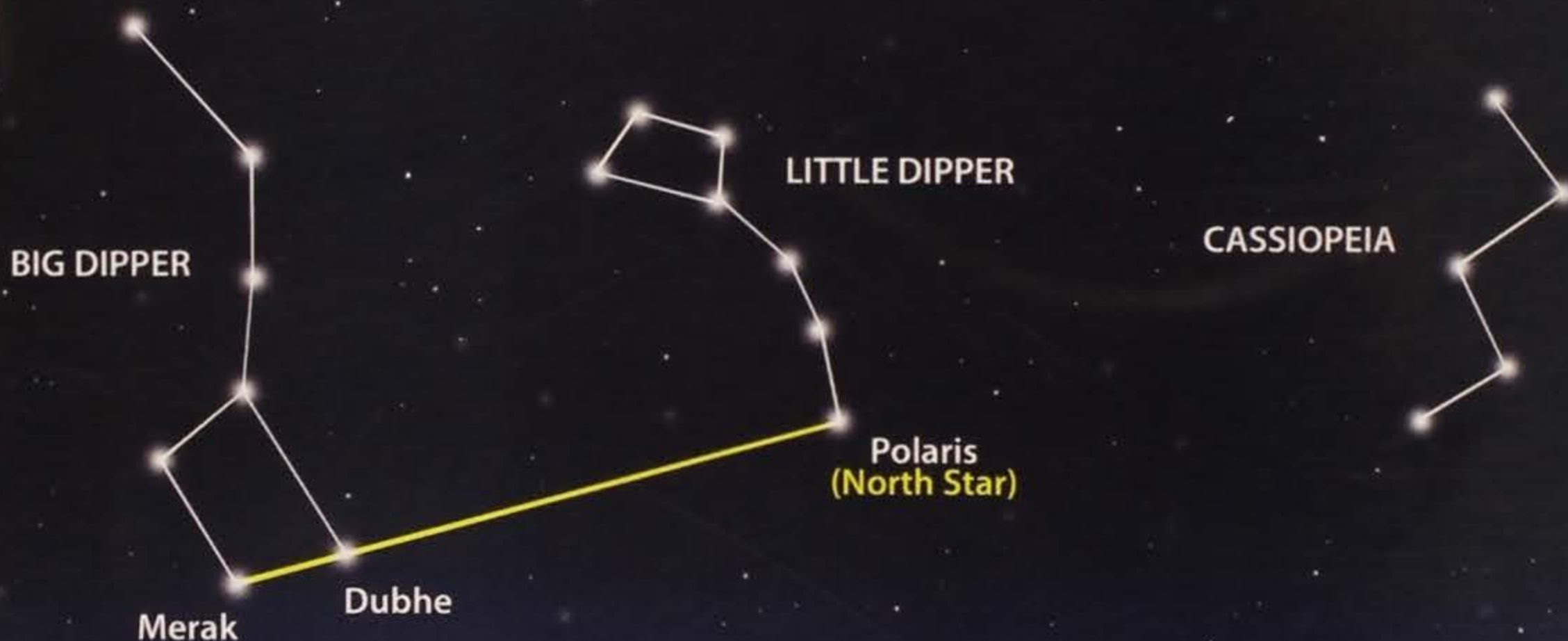
## INCREASE PANFISH CATCHES DURING THE WINTER

When bluegills, yellow perch, yellow bass and crappies are not active, it's time to get on the move.

Cut several holes 30 to 40 feet apart, catch a few fish from each hole, then move to the next. The idea is to maximize the catch by exposing the bait to new fish, hook the aggressive fish in the group, then move to the next hole.

There are times during the winter when panfish do not move much. By covering a greater area, anglers increase the chance of finding areas with higher densities of fish.

Panfish often bite throughout the day, so anglers have to search to find feeding fish. By staying on the move, anglers have a better chance of leaving the ice with a mess of fish for supper.



## BY THE LIGHT OF THE NORTH STAR

To find north at night, get over the notion that the north star, Polaris, is the brightest in the sky—that's a myth. To find Polaris, a medium bright star, first find the two bright stars in the cup of the Big Dipper and extend a line toward the fainter Little Dipper. That line will point to Polaris, the last star in the handle of the Little Dipper and the star that all others in the night sky appear to rotate around.

## INVESTING FOR THE FUTURE

**CARGILL, EDDYVILLE**

**Employees at Eddyville plant spearhead donation to Honey Creek**

It may not be your traditional return on investment. But for Cargill, a \$50,000 donation to Rathbun Lake Resort will have lasting benefits for its employees, its business and the community. Spearheaded by employees at the Eddyville corn milling plant, the donation will sponsor the future activities center at Honey Creek Resort State Park, where kids and adults can take part in environmental education programs and other nature-based activities. "We spend as much money as possible in activities and initiatives that our employees are involved in," says Gavin Atkinson, facility manager of the Eddyville plant. "It was that link to education, and how it tied in with the importance of our natural resources, which is very important to Eddyville and Cargill." And the extra benefits of donating towards the resort park? Honey Creek is not only a great destination for current employees to recharge, but a way to attract new Cargill staff to the area. "It's important to enrich our communities; it's another great thing to have in southeast Iowa," Atkinson says. Eddyville Cargill employees have been generous towards their community by giving through payroll deductions and matching Eddyville and corporate donations. A team of employees works to disperse those donations throughout the community, and looked to Honey Creek. "It's a very generous donation. Cargill is such an important part of our area and have really been committed to our area over the years—they were one of our lead donors," says Kevin Kness, president of Rathbun Lake Resort, Inc.



GAVIN ATKINSON

BARB CLIMIE

## BUILDING UPON A LEGACY

**BARB CLIMIE, CENTERVILLE, and MARTHA HOCH, CHARITON**

**Sisters honor their pioneering late father with \$5,000 donation**

The view from the comfy chairs of the second floor sitting area at the Honey Creek lodge is like a dream for sisters Martha Hoch and Barb Climie. Just outside is Lake Rathbun, where they've spent countless hours boating, skiing and picnicking, thanks to their father's decades-long work to create the lake. He also envisioned a resort on the lake, so when the sisters heard about the need for donations to help complete Honey Creek Resort State Park, they knew it was the perfect way to honor their father, Robert K. Beck. "My father was one of the founders of the lake association and this would have been his pride and joy. It's continuing what he had started," says Climie, of Centerville. The owner and publisher of the local Daily Iowegian newspaper, Beck worked to create opportunities for his native Centerville and championed the idea of a resort to the state legislature and others. After taking a tour of the lodge with members of Rathbun Lake Resort, Inc., Climie and Hoch decided to give \$5,000 towards the sitting area, making them some of the first private donors for the project. "My parents were known as great entertainers," says Hoch, of Chariton. "The seating area is a great place to gather, so it seemed appropriate." The sisters also see the resort as a great place to bring people together—both their own families and for the larger community. Hoch plans to celebrate Christmas at the lodge with her children and grandchildren, and both see the resort as a boon to the area. "It's going to help our community, bring visitors to our area and help the economy," says Climie.



MARTHA HOCH

## JOIN THE EFFORT

**Create your own legacy with a donation or sponsorship at Honey Creek Resort State Park**


Donors have helped make Honey Creek Resort State Park a reality, and there are still plenty of ways to be a part of the success. Donors can work with Rathbun Lake Resort, Inc., a local fundraising group established by area residents to help bring the destination resort to Rathbun Lake. Make a donation and be recognized on the resort's Legacy Wall or on a name recognition sign on one of the resort's meeting and conference rooms, golf holes, cabins, trails or boat docks, for example. A donation towards completing the resort is an investment in the community and the state, says Kevin Kness, Rathbun Lake Resort president. "It's an awesome facility. It will be a destination people will return to and a great asset for Iowa. I encourage anyone with an interest in the area or the state to be a part of this." To learn more, contact: Kevin Kness at 641-932-7887; Carol Bradley at 641-437-7206; Denny Ryan at 641-799-3861; or Bill Duey at 641-647-2464.

**Cargill is just one sponsor that has donated \$1,000 to \$50,000. OTHER LEAD SPONSORS INCLUDE:**

- Iowa Trust and Savings Bank, Centerville, \$50,000
- Peoples State Bank, Albia, \$30,000
- First Iowa State Bank, Centerville, \$30,000
- Roger and Jan Winslow, \$30,000
- Mercy Medical Center, Centerville, \$30,000
- L and W Quarries/Ideal Ready Mix/Johnson Holding Company, \$30,000

## Lost In Iowa

BY JENNIFER WILSON PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH



At Backbone State Park, brother and sister Sam Hoff, age 5 and Zadié age 3 explore with snowshoes far from their Des Moines home. RIGHT: Elliot Donovan, 2, and sister Greta, 5, of Des Moines prepare for fun in the snow. Sam and Greta make a snowfigure.

# Cabin Fever

In Iowa's oldest state park, old man winter won't slow you down—he's just part of the scenery.



“Exploding egg cake!” announces Mike Donovan, pulling his wife Emily’s recipe for Swedish *umspunkaka* from the rental cabin’s oven. The smell of coffee is in the air on a winter weekend getaway for this Des Moines family. Soon the kids, Greta and Elliot, will set aside their puzzles and descend upon the simple kitchen table set with lingonberry jam and maple syrup.

At Backbone State Park, on a winter weekend, you’ll need something like this fluffy egg pancake dish to fortify your corpus before leaving the warm shelter of the park’s small cabins. Take your pick of winter activities: snowshoeing; snowmobiling; sledding the raucous hills; fishing for trout in burbling rivers and streams.

Really, there’s no reason to feel cooped up on this plot of northeast Iowa, 55 miles east of Waterloo. It’s like a self-contained entertainment unit, with a lake, woods, streams, the Maquoketa River and 21 miles of trails.

“You know what I like about a place like this?” says Mike, looking out a window as fat snowflakes fall. “Aside from a few snowmobilers and cross-country skiers, we’ve got the whole place to ourselves.”

#### THAT TRAIL

Mike is right. Iowans tend to pull down the shades once the weather turns chill, but those willing to venture out during January and February will experience parks that feel like private playgrounds. Kids can run free in open spaces and wooded places. If you’ve ever spent winter indoors with little ones, you know just how important that is.

Dave Sunne knows. He’s Backbone’s park ranger, and

his brood romps through all 2,000 acres in every season.

“The park is beautiful this time of year. It just takes on a whole new look when it’s covered in snow,” Sunne says, hands interlaced across the chest of his coveralls as he kicks back in a maintenance building. Sunne (pronounced “sunny”) looks like a high school basketball coach, blondish little moustache and all.

His is Iowa’s oldest state park, traditional in feel, with forested winding roads, and much of it nestled in a deep, woody ravine.

The park is divided into two units—north and south—with a very high, narrow hogback ridge jutting out over a bend in the river. It’s called the Devil’s Backbone, which, if you’re hiking it, inspires serious awe that conservative Iowa didn’t fence this baby in. One misstep, and you could fall a deadly distance on either side of the “spine.”

It’s exhilarating, really.

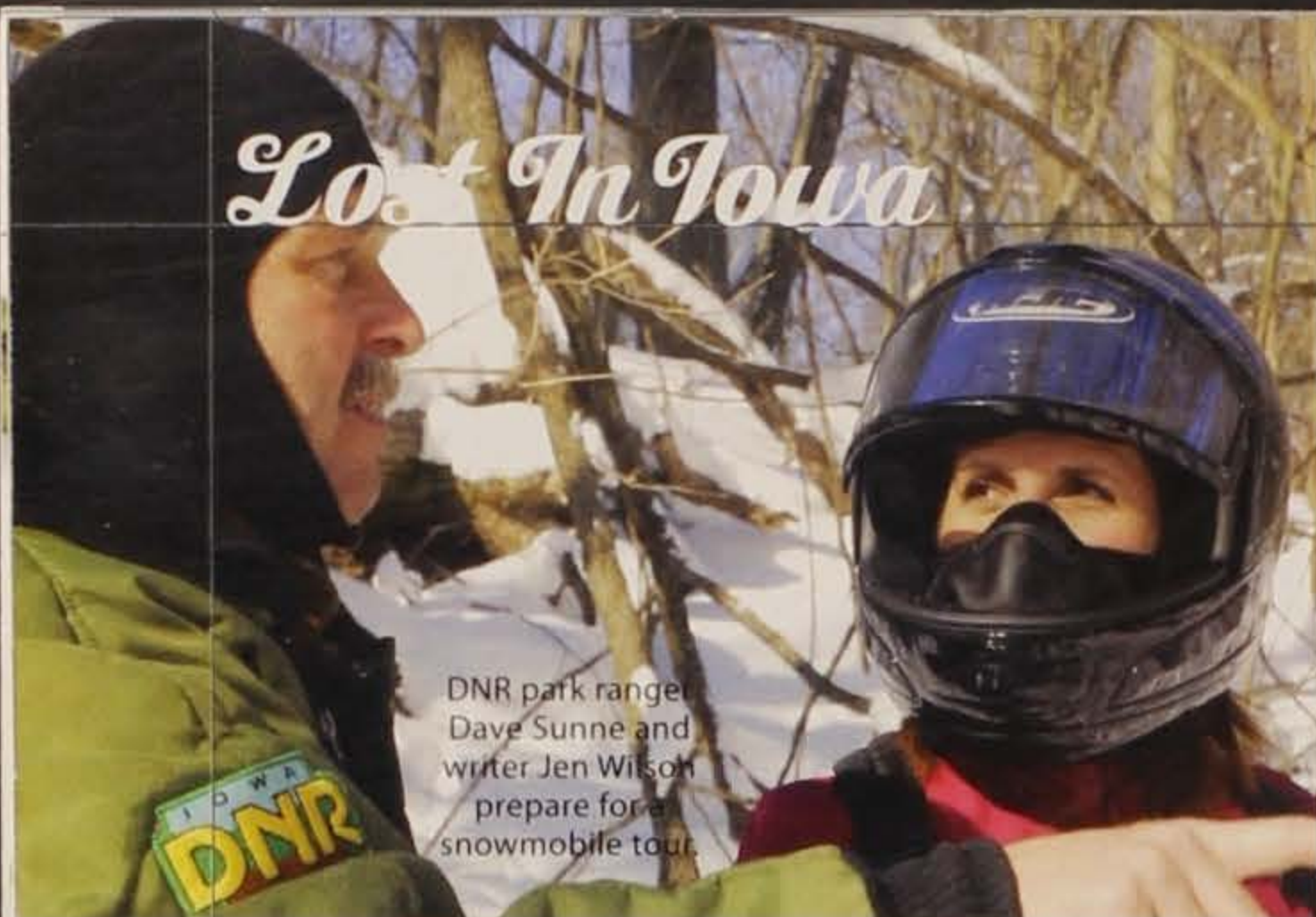
“I just can’t believe this trail,” says Emily Donovan, balancing across the path covered in snow. “It’s amazing.”

In winter, against a white backdrop, the wildlife watching is vivid. Bald eagles hunt the open water, and deer are herded up. Coyotes yip throughout mating season. Finches, cardinals, jays, nuthatches and chickadees flit around on bright mornings. You may glimpse an otter, wild turkey or any number of hawks. Do a little ice fishing on Backbone Lake, and you might find trout or native crappie on your line.

“You can go to sleep to the sound of owls hooting,” says Sunne. “I do every night.”

He says each winter visitor has a different agenda. Some hike and reflect. Some tote a stack of books to their cabin and don’t emerge for days. Others bring cross-country skis

# Lost In Iowa



DNR park ranger Dave Sunne and writer Jen Wilson prepare for a snowmobile tour.

## SNOWMOBILE ETIQUETTE

- Stay on the trail.
- Straying tears up vegetation, increasing erosion, especially on steep slopes.
- Report trail issues to the ranger (*downed trees, maintenance needs, irresponsible drivers*).
- Yield to living creatures, including humans.
- Stay to the right on the trail.
- Take it slow when passing.
- Close all gates behind you.
- Carry out what you carry in.



One of 16 cabins at Backbone State Park, the two-bedroom Eagle View boasts an outdoor fire ring perfect for a winter warm up.



Jen Wilson and daughter Zadie ascend the sledding hill.

or snowshoes. Photographers can't get enough of the place.

"Then there are the people who just want a break from everybody else," he says.

Don't forget the snowmobile crowd. Truth be told, it's just flat-out fun to see all that pretty scenery whooshing past at 40-some miles per hour. The park's Westlake Trail is a real rollercoaster ride, with just enough serious drama to make you whoop with utter joy or sheer terror.

The trail shows the Maquoketa River at its prettiest. Sunne claims the whole park is a postcard, and that's largely thanks to the water, flanked by tall spindly trees like legs of adolescent boys—native white pines, oak, shagbark, elms.

## ACTION, ADVENTURE AND DRAMA

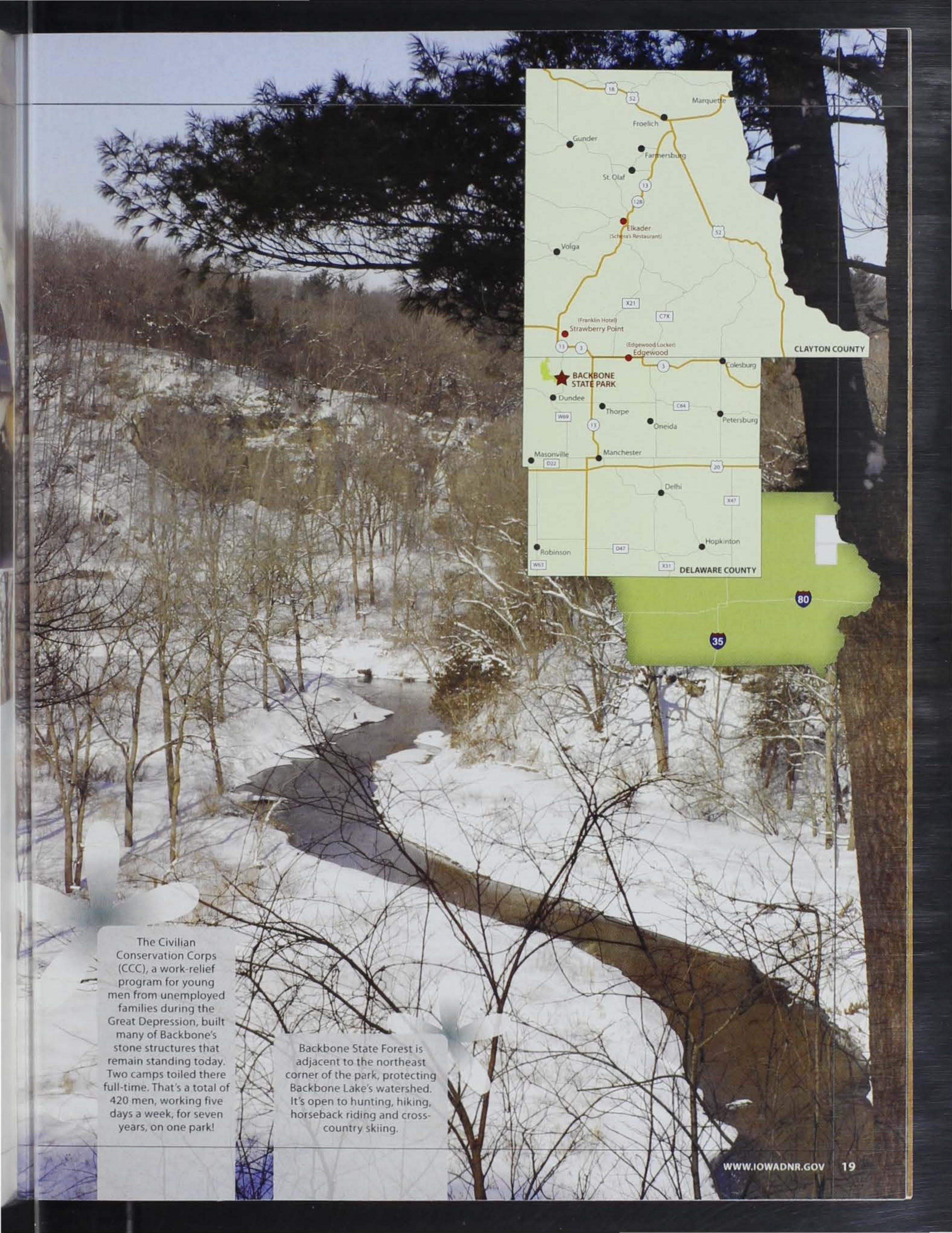
Emily suits up to take the kids snowshoeing, first

removing the toys inserted in her boots during what was supposed to be naptime.

"You get cabin fever at home. It's somehow easier to get cabin fever somewhere else," she laughs. "We'd never strap on snowshoes at home—but you almost have to when the snow is deep and the trails are this pretty."

Not far away, the sand dances under the water at the head of Richmond Springs. For thousands of years, this very spot has pumped about 2,000 gallons per minute of 42-degree water from the dolomite limestone, making the surrounding streams cozy for trout.

Mike is stealing a little grown-up time here, casting his line and hoping for the best. A good day this time of year is maybe one or two fish. Mike doesn't seem to mind.



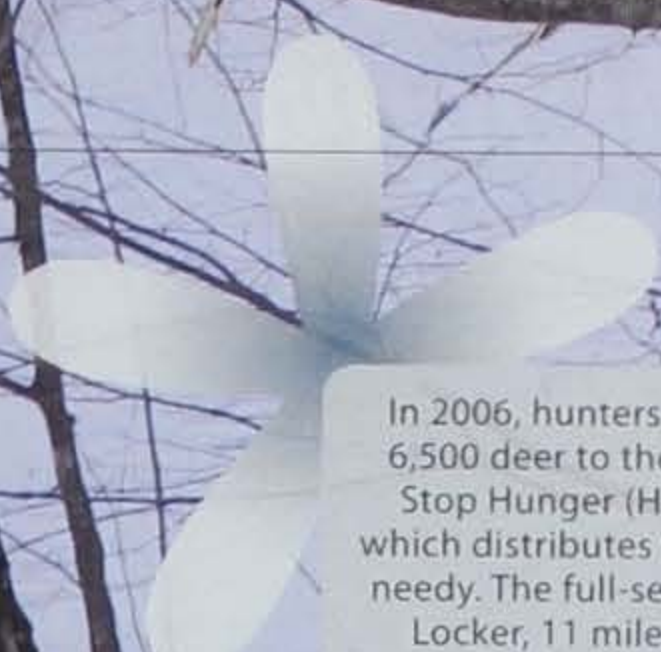
The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a work-relief program for young men from unemployed families during the Great Depression, built many of Backbone's stone structures that remain standing today. Two camps toiled there full-time. That's a total of 420 men, working five days a week, for seven years, on one park!

Backbone State Forest is adjacent to the northeast corner of the park, protecting Backbone Lake's watershed. It's open to hunting, hiking, horseback riding and cross-country skiing.

## *Lost In Iowa*

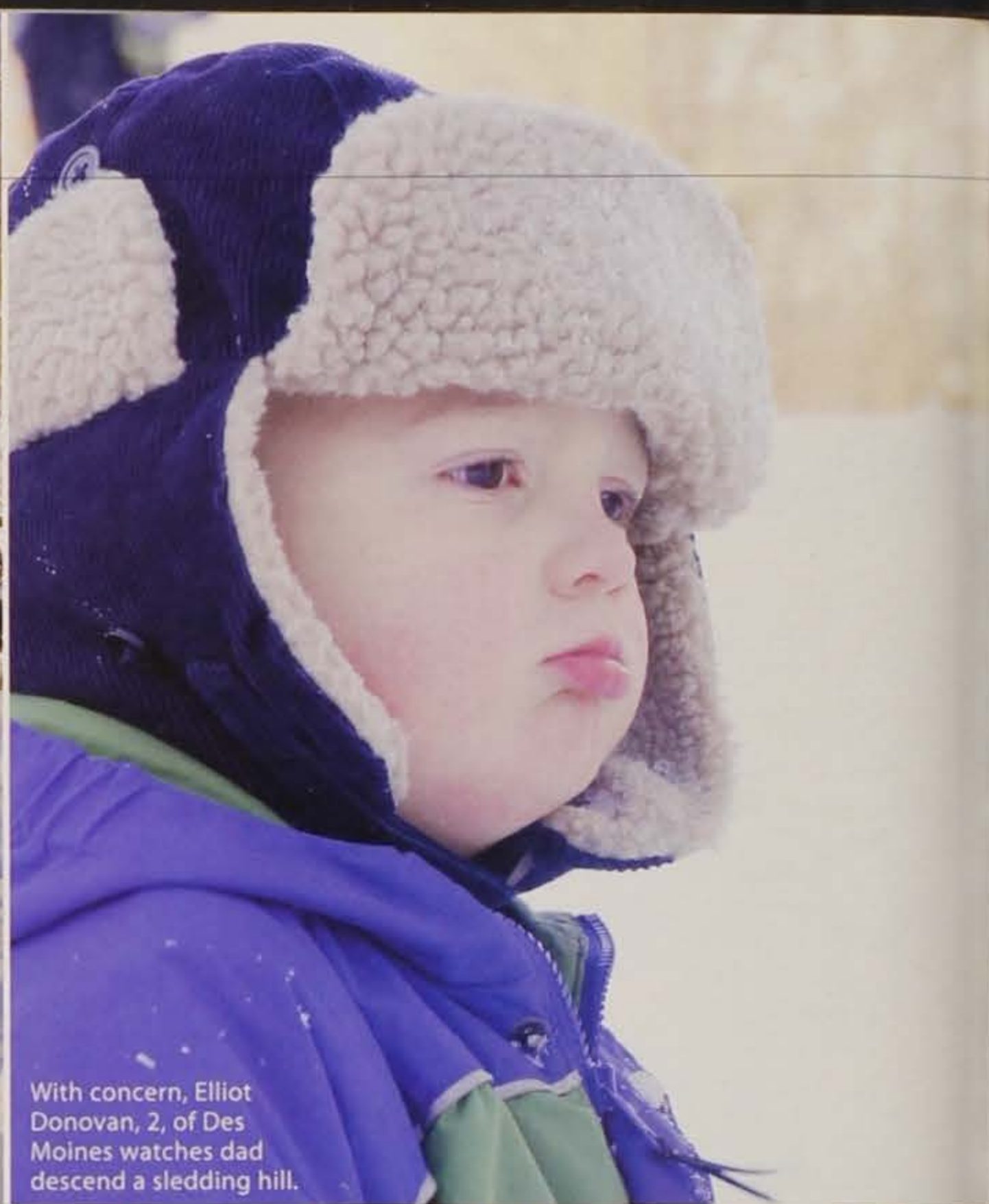
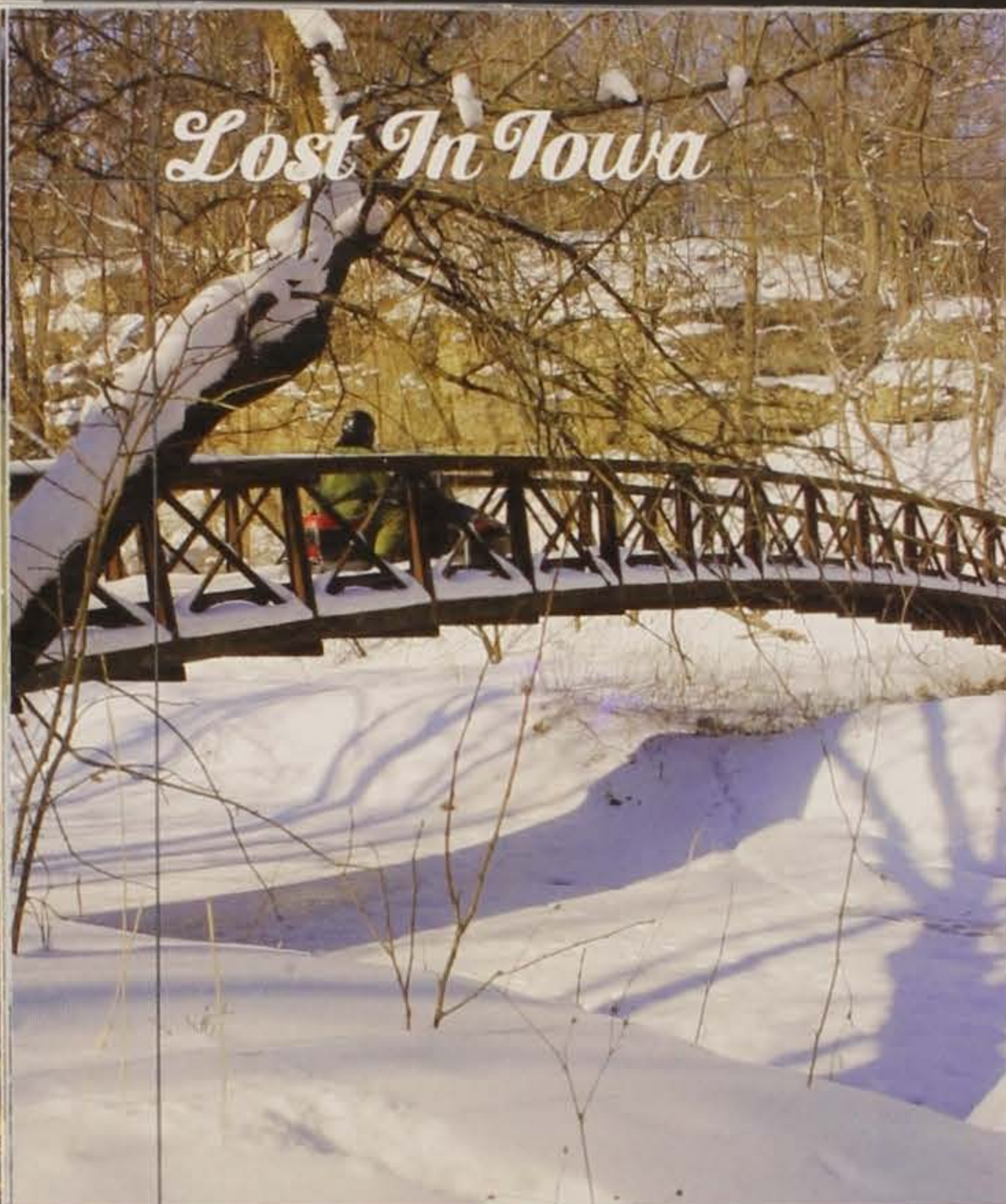


Mike Donovan of Des Moines casts for winter hold over trout—the big, wary ones that feed year round in spring-fed open waters. Winter anglers prefer spinner baits and fly-anglers prefer using nymphs and wet flies. Winter is an often overlooked time for trout fishing.



In 2006, hunters donated about 6,500 deer to the DNR's Help Us Stop Hunger (HUSH) program, which distributes venison to Iowa's needy. The full-service Edgewood Locker, 11 miles northeast of Backbone, processed 3,450 of them. (Their bacon ain't bad, either.)

# Lost In Iowa



With concern, Elliot Donovan, 2, of Des Moines watches dad descend a sledding hill.



Frederique Boudouani and Brian Bruening of Schera's Restaurant

"This is a little refuge that has so many qualities you don't typically see in Iowa topography," he says, tilting back his head to soak up the winter rays. "Everywhere here is secluded and serene—all plunked down in the middle of some farm fields."

The quiet is later interrupted when the whole Donovan crew joins Ranger Sunne's family on a sledding hill near their house. At Backbone, the sledding is righteous. And it's not very serene.

Mike saddles up a saucer, and barrels away. His son Elliot, who is almost 3, watches in awe.

"Whoa! There goes Dad! Yay, Dad! Hey, wait! Dad? You okay, Dad? Dad? Dad?!"

Mike has wiped out, and Elliot starts down the hill on little snow-suited legs. It's not a particularly big wipeout in sledding terms, unless you're two and you've never seen one before.

"Dad! Oh, no! Dad!"

Mike sits up, spits out a mouthful of snow and gives Elliot the thumbs-up.

All is well again in kid world.

The hill is one continuous eruption of laughter and whoops. Kids and grownups race to the bottom, eyes wide and mouths agape.

This is winter's best side—not the hibernating crabbiness or holiday hubbub. It's open-mouthed belly laughs, runny-nosed exertion, and rare moments of adventure in a landscape that appears on the surface to shut down for the season.

Mike snowboards down the hill a few feet—Elliot watching, concerned—then bites it. Mike giggles—giggles!—and yells to his son: "That's about as good as it gets!"

And in Iowa, in winter, it really is. ❄️

#### SIDETRIP TO MOROCCO

Backbone State Park cabins don't have fireplaces, which is disappointing. So if eating next to a roaring flame is your favorite winter activity, head 20 miles to the antique beauty of Elkader, specifically to Schera's Restaurant, perched on the edge of the Turkey River overlooking a stone arch bridge—courtesy of the same masons who built Elkader's lovely stone Catholic church.

Schera's, named for the heroine in "1001 Arabian Nights," draws from North African, Algerian and Mediterranean cuisine to fill its menu, thanks to co-owner Frederique Boudouani, who is of French-Algerian descent.

"When we first moved to Iowa, the dining choices were meat and potatoes or more meat and potatoes," says Boudouani. "We wanted to break that mold."

A colorful Moroccan décor—and a decent fireplace—make the restaurant a great side trip.

Boudouani and his partner, Brian Bruening, met at MIT in Boston then moved to Iowa, where Bruening grew up. They ultimately settled in Elkader, because of its namesake, 1800s Muslim war hero Emir Abd El Kader.

El Kader's international claim to fame is this: While in exile in Damascus (for the war hero stuff) he saved the lives of 12,000 Christians and Jews from mobs incited by the local Turkish governor. El Kader's benevolence was recognized around the world—a Muslim helping thousands of Christians and Jews was big news. Abe Lincoln even sent him a pair of dueling pistols.

"The kicker is that in the 1800s, the most precious thing to the leaders of this town was to name it after someone from another part of the world," says Boudouani.

Another part of the world that also brings us a nice Couscous Royale—veggies and sauce over couscous and skewers—and a fine hummus-like appetizer called Cade, served with a basket of bread and harissa, a Tunisian hot sauce.

Schera's Restaurant, 107 S. Main St., PO Box 726, Elkader, 563/245-1992; [www.scheras.com](http://www.scheras.com)

#### TRAVEL NOTES

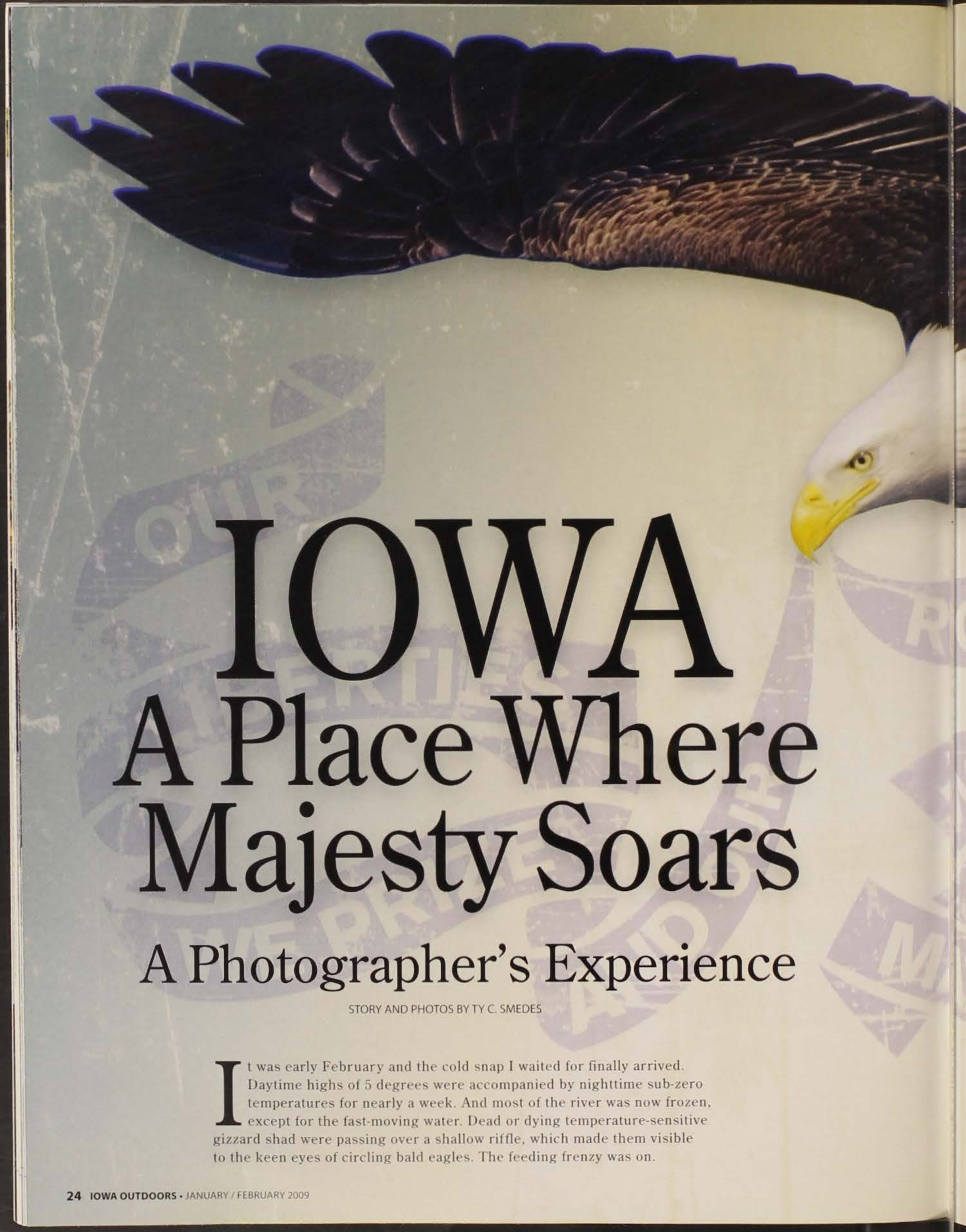
• **BACKBONE STATE PARK.** Sixteen cabins, \$85-\$100 per day. 1347 129th St., Dundee. 563-924-2527; [backbone@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:backbone@dnr.iowa.gov). [www.iowadnr.com](http://www.iowadnr.com)

• **FRANKLIN HOTEL.** Might as well give in: Winter exertion calls for hot comfort food like Granny used to make. This hotel's restaurant makes daily specials like meat loaf, chicken and noodles, Swiss steak. ... You know what we mean. 102 Elkader St., Strawberry Point; 563-933-4788.

• **EDGEWOOD LOCKER.** Full-service meat locker since 1966 (with a second location in Arlington). How many of those have you seen lately? 563-928-6814; [www.edgewoodlocker.com](http://www.edgewoodlocker.com).



Greta, 5, and Emily Donovan hit the hills.



# IOWA

## A Place Where Majesty Soars

A Photographer's Experience

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TY C. SMEDES

**I**t was early February and the cold snap I waited for finally arrived. Daytime highs of 5 degrees were accompanied by nighttime sub-zero temperatures for nearly a week. And most of the river was now frozen, except for the fast-moving water. Dead or dying temperature-sensitive gizzard shad were passing over a shallow riffle, which made them visible to the keen eyes of circling bald eagles. The feeding frenzy was on.



RIGHTS  
WE WILL  
MAINTAIN



As the number of arriving eagles increased, I focused on an approaching bird, which was still out of range. Tracking his flight, I was amazed at what I witnessed. Not once...twice...but three times, he plucked a shad from the icy waters, consuming each in midair before settling into a tree along the far bank. In typical bald eagle fashion, he cleaned his beak by repeatedly wiping it on the tree branch. Young eagles quickly learn to eat small fish in transit, rather than risk being robbed while consuming their prey in a tree.

It seemed several eagles were in the air most of the time...twisting, turning, diving and catching shad. The fast action provided a constant challenge to my reflexes and photographic skills. But this was what I had been waiting for!

Soon, a first-year eagle lit nearby and began consuming a fresh-caught fish. But before he could finish, he was quickly dive-bombed by crows, hoping for scraps. Hackles and wings raised, he stood his ground defiantly, and soon the assault passed.

#### LOOKING FOR THE SICK OR WOUNDED

Further up-river, another eagle swooped down on a flock of resting mallards. As the nervous flock skittered across the water, they were watched for any sign of weakness. A slow reaction by any duck would alert the opportunistic eagle to a sick or injured bird. But such was not the case today, as all ducks appeared to move quickly and in unison.

The previous year I witnessed an ill or wounded redhead drake being strafed by a circling group of four eagles. As he drifted downstream, each eagle took a turn making a pass at him in tag-team fashion. Although the duck was able to dive and elude his attackers, as he tired each set of talons came closer to its mark. As I watched the current take them downriver and beyond my sight, I knew the drake's demise was imminent.

I have photographed this stretch of the Des Moines River since 1994, when I first met up with Buck Visser. Since both Buck and I were hunters and outdoorsmen, we immediately hit it off. He graciously allowed me to store my canoe at his cabin along the river bank. And many a winter morning found me canoeing through the icy water, well before first light, to enter my tree blind on the other side. Like waterfowl, eagles leave their nighttime roost and begin to fly out to feed about 45 minutes before sunrise. I needed to be well concealed within my blind before they arrived. My first photo blind was adjacent to

a huge dead cottonwood, the skeleton of which hung out and over the water. Its many branches provided a perfect fishing perch.

#### PARENTAL INSTINCTS

Soon an adult eagle, with a freshly caught shad, landed on a favorite branch within camera range. It was a cold morning, and he ruffled his feathers to gain loft and to improve insulating efficiency. But before he could begin dining, an immature eagle of no more than 1 to 2 years of age swooped in and landed beside him. The young bird wasted no time, using his wings to bludgeon the adult.

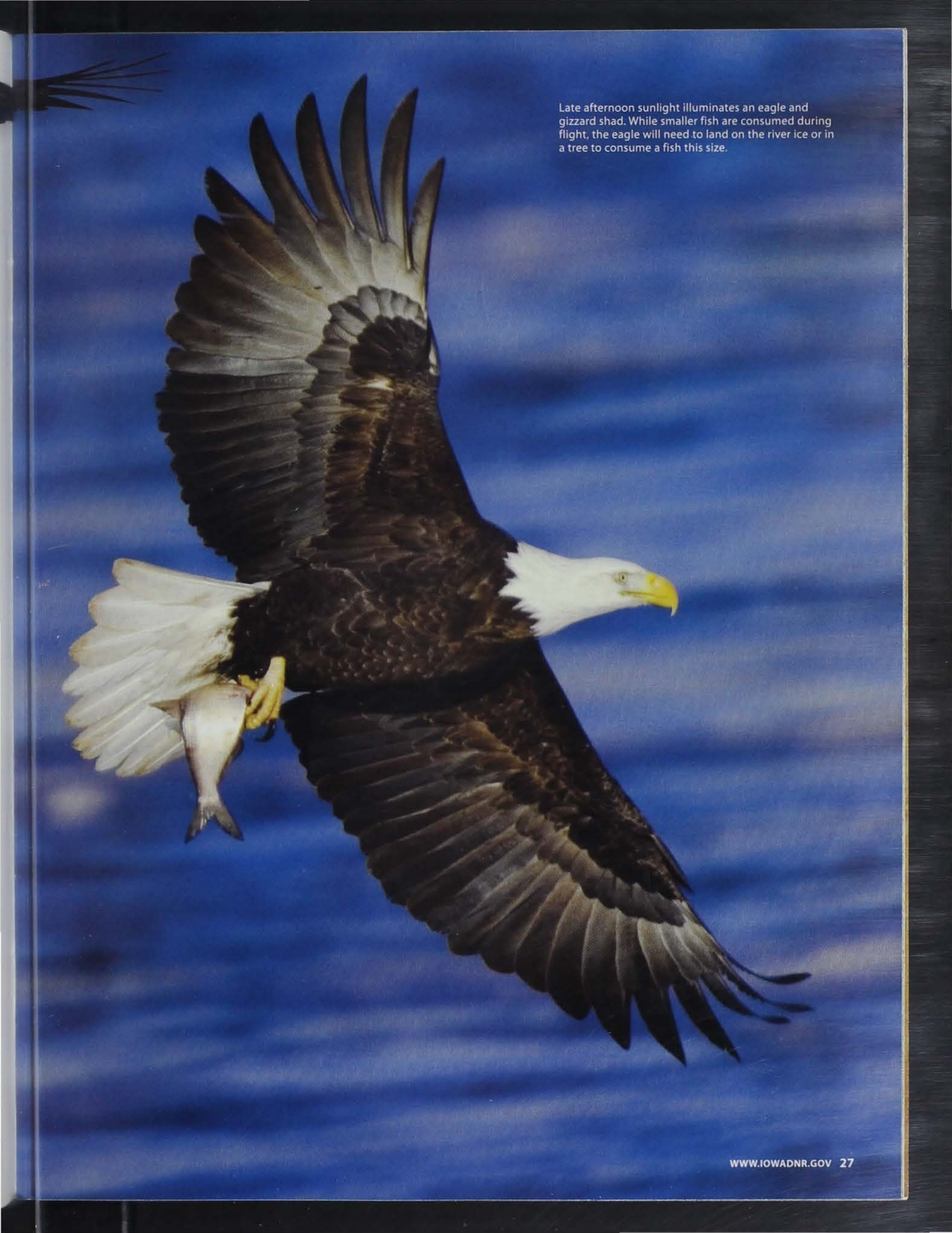
In an attempt to fend off the challenger, the older bird protected himself with his wings for perhaps 20 seconds before relinquishing his prize. As he dropped his catch and flew off, the young bird quickly swooped to the river below and snatched his stolen loot.

To say I was startled at what I had just witnessed was indeed an understatement! Why would an older and more experienced eagle succumb to a much younger and less experienced juvenile? Eagle biologists would tell me this was nature, as it should be. It seems the instincts of older and more experienced adults allow them to recognize the youngsters as inexperienced and perhaps in need of help. And perhaps many first-year eagles would perish without help from seasoned adults, which are more capable anglers.

#### CONFLICT AT THE NEST

A few years later in northeast Iowa, I witnessed an even more startling facet of eagle behavior. A well-concealed blind along the Upper Iowa River allowed me to observe and photograph nesting activity for two years, before a fierce windstorm sent the nest crashing to the ground. With an objective of photographing adults landing at the nest and feeding the young, I was startled to find a 3-year-old juvenile feeding a nestling. This hard-working caretaker did most of the feeding while the parents loafed in a nearby white pine, just a few-hundred feet away. Although eagles are usually fiercely protective, these parents were allowing the juvenile to feed their youngster. Needless to say, I was more than a little disappointed to find the adults were doing no more than about 25 percent of the feeding! I wasn't getting many photos of the adults at all.

I spent a few days in the blind, and things settled into a predictable routine, when the most unimaginable event occurred. At the nest, the adolescent was busily feeding the

A bald eagle is shown in flight against a blue sky with wispy clouds. The eagle has its wings spread wide, revealing the underside of its wings which are a mix of dark brown and white feathers. Its head is white with a sharp yellow beak, and it is looking towards the right. In its talons, it holds a large, silvery fish, identified as a gizzard shad. The fish is oriented vertically with its head pointing downwards. The overall scene is captured in a high-quality photograph with vibrant colors.

Late afternoon sunlight illuminates an eagle and gizzard shad. While smaller fish are consumed during flight, the eagle will need to land on the river ice or in a tree to consume a fish this size.

A full-page photograph of a bald eagle in flight over a body of water. The eagle is shown from the side, with its wings spread wide, revealing the intricate patterns of its dark feathers. Its head is turned back, and its talons are extended, holding a fish. The background consists of a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The water below is a deep blue with some white foam or ice visible.

**A MOMENT IN TIME**

Combining incredible speed and coordination, this bald eagle uses 1 1/2 inch-long talons to pluck a fish from the icy Des Moines River.





Spotting a fish, an eagle turns to make an attack run. Competition between birds is fierce, and successful anglers are often chased by other less capable anglers. **RIGHT:** This defensive juvenile eagle is harassed by crows that vie for scraps of just-consumed fish. It didn't take long for him to fend them off. Countless lift-offs and landings have removed bark from the perching branch.

nestling, when suddenly he crouched and began tracking something approaching from above.

As I readied my camera, a sudden burst of activity erupted when another immature eagle landed on the edge of the nest. The intruder's feet had barely touched down when the defender leapt into the air and latched onto his back. In a blur of violent motion, they tumbled together from the nest. Down, down, down they plummeted, toward what seemed a tragic end. But instinctively, the defender recognized the inherent danger of the approaching ground and released the intruder just in time. Disaster was avoided as the intruder flew to a nearby tree, with the defender in hot pursuit. Then again, the defender hit the intruding eagle, knocking him out of the tree. The pursuit continued towards the nearby river.

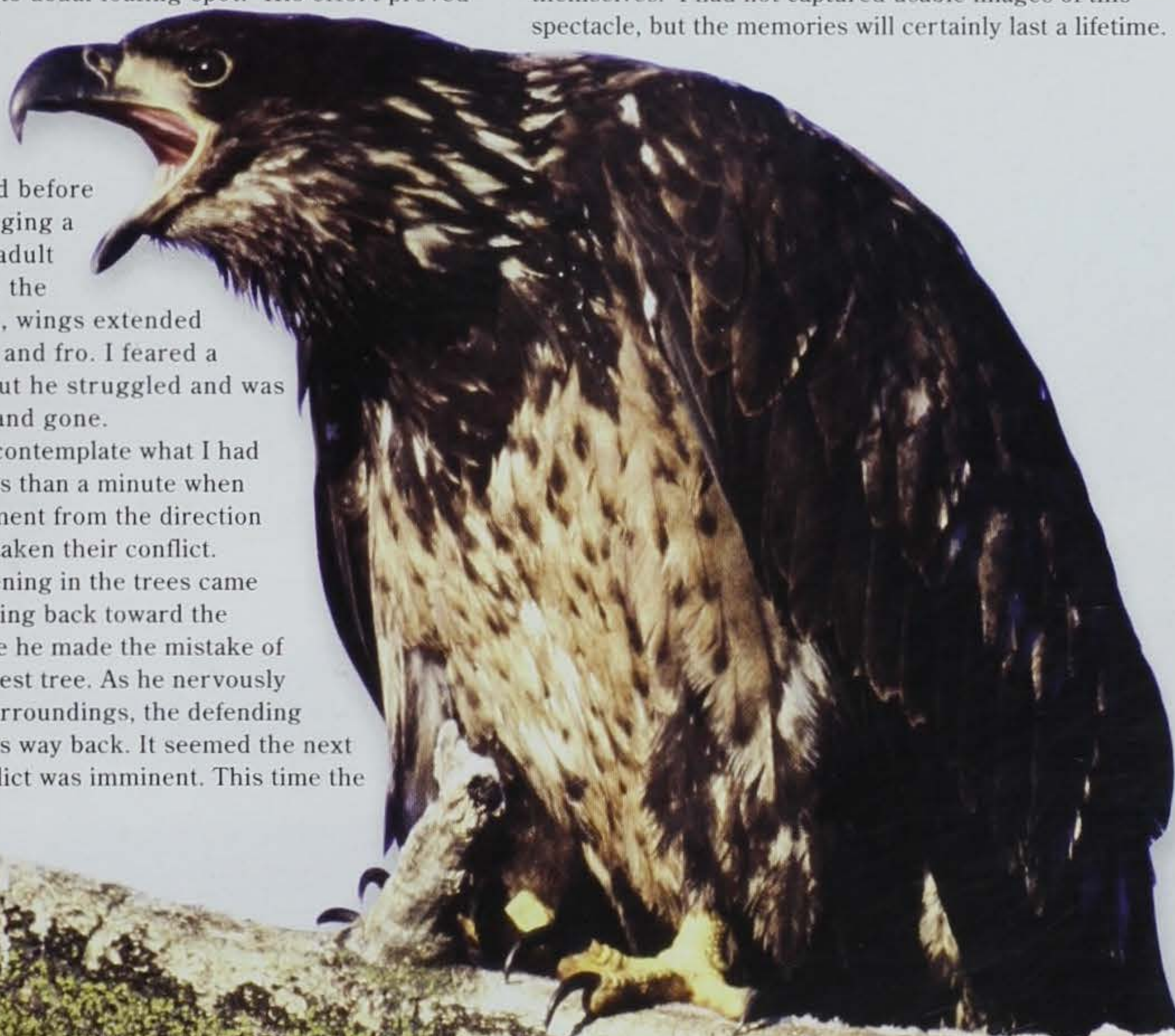
Not surprisingly, the action continued to heat up. One of the parents joined the conflict, having spotted the fight from its usual loafing spot. His effort proved futile, however, when he tried to strike the intruder that had been ousted a second before his arrival. Logging a near-miss, the adult crash-landed in the top of a sapling, wings extended and swaying to and fro. I feared a broken wing, but he struggled and was soon airborne and gone.

I was left to contemplate what I had just seen for less than a minute when I spotted movement from the direction the eagles had taken their conflict. Through an opening in the trees came the intruder, flying back toward the nest. Once more he made the mistake of landing in the nest tree. As he nervously surveyed his surroundings, the defending eagle winged his way back. It seemed the next step in the conflict was imminent. This time the

unsuspecting intruder was hit from behind...he never saw it coming.

As the conflict again moved out and over the river, I was left to survey the scene. Feathers were everywhere...in the air, drifting downward, like autumn leaves on a calm wind.

Thoroughly stunned, I was left to wonder about what I had just witnessed. Why did an adult pair of bald eagles allow this 3-year-old to feed their young? And why was this juvenile interested in helping? Again I consulted the experts for answers, and the feedback made sense. It seems the 3-year-old was most likely a member of this extended family. Because he had most likely been reared at the same nest, and by the same parents, he was being allowed to help. They recognized him as one of their own, and felt comfortable with his presence. And at the age of 3, his parenting instincts were apparently beginning to manifest themselves. I had not captured usable images of this spectacle, but the memories will certainly last a lifetime.




Near-zero temperatures and ice often concentrate large numbers of eagles around small areas of open water. Despite bone-chilling conditions, eagles will often stand in shallow water, waiting for prey.



**WATCH IOWA'S PARADE OF BALD EAGLES**  
**2009 BALD EAGLE WATCH EVENTS**

For a complete listing of agendas, times and locations for the below events, visit [www.missriver.org](http://www.missriver.org). Some events have indoor programs, refreshments and children's activities or require reservations.

- Jan 3-Feb 14** (weekends) Mississippi River Visitor Center, Dubuque 309-794-5338  
**Jan. 3** Clinton Bald Eagle Watch 815-259-3628  
**Jan. 10-11** Quad Cities Bald Eagle Days 309-794-5338  
**Jan. 10** Muscatine Bald Eagle Watch 563-263-7913  
**Jan. 17** Dubuque Bald Eagle Watch 563-556-4372  
**Jan. 17-18** Keokuk Bald Eagle Days 800-383-1219  
**Jan. 24-25** LeClaire Bald Eagle Watch 563-322-3911 ext. 120  
**Feb. 28** Prairie DuChien Eagle Watch 800-732-1673  
**Feb. 22** Saylorville Bald Eagle Watch 515-276-4656  
**Mar. 7-8** Red Rock Bald Eagle Watch 641-828-7522  
**Mar. 7** Linn Grove Eagle Watch 712-296-4920



### THE EAGLE THAT WENT FOR A SWIM

One day while at Buck's cabin, I warmed myself by his wood-burning stove as he recounted an interesting observation. He recalled eagle-watching on a cold wintry morning. He told the story about an eagle that flew to a favorite perch, just above the water surface. Many eagles used this snag protruding from the water, and it had stood the test of time....until that day. When this eagle's feet hit the perch, it suddenly gave way. The eagle's momentum not only carried him into the water, he momentarily vanished from sight. When Buck grabbed his binoculars for a closer look, he spotted the bird breast-stroking towards shore. Luckily the bank was not steep, and the wet eagle was able to climb out. Buck recalled how the cold and bedraggled bird kept

shuffling and lofting his feathers, for perhaps an hour or more. Ultimately Buck's spirits were lifted when he saw the eagle was able to fly away. Recalling the temperature was around zero degrees, he exclaimed, "Tough bird!"

### LOSS OF AN OLD FRIEND

Sadly Buck passed from this world in August of 2007. And at his visitation a table was filled with some of his favorite outdoor memorabilia. It was among those prized possessions that I spotted a framed print of my first published bald eagle photo. I had given it to Buck many years ago, after he had helped me gain permission to photograph eagles on an adjacent property, and collect that very image. He was my river-side friend who will never be forgotten. 🐾

### IOWA'S BEST EAGLE VIEWING

Iowa's wintering eagle population concentrates along spillways and dams on large interior reservoirs and the Mississippi River. When rivers freeze, open water below dams sustains eagles with easy meals of fish, stunned by the over-the-dam ride.

The state's largest eagle concentration is in Keokuk along the Mississippi River below Lock and Dam 19. Here, up to 700 eagles may gather after extended cold spells to feast on fish below the dam. The area holds the 25th Bald Eagle Appreciation Days on Jan. 17-18 (**800-383-1219** or view schedule at [www.keokukiowatourism.org](http://www.keokukiowatourism.org).) Guttenberg, Dubuque, Bellevue and the Quad Cities also have excellent eagle watching.

All lock and dams on the Mississippi River provide good eagle viewing as do waters below the dams at Saylorville, Coralville, Red Rock and Rathbun reservoirs. There is good eagle viewing below the Scott Street Dam downriver from downtown Des Moines. (Order our January/February 2007 issue for \$3.50 for complete central Iowa eagle viewing, including maps and side attractions by calling 515-281-5918.)

CASHING IN ON

# *Antique Decoy*

COLLECTING



# Once Employed To Lure Duped Ducks Into Gun Range, These Relics Are Making Waves In The Antique Collectables World

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LOWELL WASHBURN



## Antique Decoys Recall Duck Hunting's Golden Age

**I**t was duck hunting's Golden Age. The Civil War had ended, a growing population was rapidly expanding westward, opportunities abounded and America's natural resources were seemingly limitless.

Technological advances in firearms, ammunition and transportation made it possible for market hunters to take more wild game faster and, equally important, to deliver their bag to hungry urban markets in record time.

The continent's sky-darkening clouds of waterfowl drew increasing numbers of recreational hunters as well. For the next eight decades, America would enjoy a bird hunt the likes of which the world has never seen, nor will ever witness again.

Then, as now, duck and goose hunters needed decoys, and plenty of them. That increasing need was met by local carvers, most of whom were market or sport hunters themselves. But instead of modern-day resins or plastic molds, decoy makers of yesteryear cunningly employed draw knife and rasp to fashion lifelike counterfeits from shapeless blocks of balsa, cedar, sugar pine and tupelo. And although they may not have known it at the time, these early craftsmen were producing more than just working decoys for their backwater clients. They were creating one-of-a-kind sculptures that would one day be regarded as fine art. Each time a completed mallard, bluebill or canvasback came off the work bench and into the marsh, it carried with it the potential to become a unique and valued piece of classic American folk art.

Times change, and as decades passed America's natural resources, including her migratory birds, grew

limited. Many old timers gave up the hunt when market gunning was outlawed. More fell by the wayside as legislation dropped daily limits to a mere 50 ducks.

Hunting boats were left to the elements and the old hand-crafted decoy rigs were stowed and forgotten to forever languish in barn attics and boat sheds. Considered outdated and useless tools, countless duck, goose and shorebird decoys were split into stove kindling. An appalling thought to contemporary collectors, the act was literally akin to warming the kitchen by igniting bundles of \$100 bills.

But all was not lost. Many historic decoys successfully survived the perils of time. Even today, previously unknown decoys pop up at flea markets, antique stores or from among the dusty rafters of a Midwestern barn. Each new discovery is cause for celebration.

## The Million Dollar Decoy

*Growing Popularity of Collecting Brings Big Bucks For Wooden Ducks*

**W**hen it comes to identifying, appraising or selling antique waterfowl decoys, Gary Guyette is the walking, talking, real deal.

A resident of St. Michael, Md., Guyette has accounted for more than \$120 million in sales of collectable decoys during the past three decades. Along with partner Frank Schmidt, he currently manages Guyette & Schmidt Inc., the world's largest and most successful decoy auction

**ABOVE:** Elmer Crowell's preening pintail. Perhaps the most talked about piece in decoy collecting history, the carving sold for \$1.13 million in 2007—the most paid for a single decoy.

house. When the top collectors need counsel, Gary Guyette gets the call.

"Decoys are a fascinating subject and the number of people collecting old decoys continues to grow," says Guyette. "There are a lot of different reasons for buying a piece. Some people look at old working decoys as investments, while others purchase them strictly for their beauty. Some people purchase a particular decoy simply because it reminds them of a special hunt or a particular period in their childhood."

From a purely financial perspective, most collectable decoys do tend to increase in value, says Guyette. Generally speaking, the more you pay for a piece the faster it tends to appreciate. For exceptionally rare or unique decoys, initial prices can be staggering and record sales continue to be shattered.

In 2003, Guyette sold a preening drake pintail decoy, carved by Cape Cod market gunner Elmer Crowell, for \$801,000. In 2007, he sold a feeding plover decoy for \$830,000, and an antique merganser for a wallet-flattening \$856,000. Later that year, the Crowell pintail traded hands again, this time privately, and made national headlines by fetching \$1.13 million—the highest sum paid for a decoy.

"Each decoy really is a work of art," says Guyette. "When it comes to decoy prices, nothing really surprises me anymore."

Although million-dollar decoy sales are restricted to the rich and famous, decoy collecting is by no means limited to the Millionaires' Club.

"You certainly don't have to be rich to collect worthwhile bird decoys," notes Guyette. "People can still find beautiful pieces for under \$200, and you can purchase some very nice decoys for under \$500." Guyette is currently listing a 1948, mint condition, factory-made wooden Wildfowler mallard for \$350. "That same decoy would have sold for \$200 just a short time ago."

## Three Tips for Better Collecting

Decoy collecting enthusiasts often possess shared traits. Most, for example, are men, says Guyette. Most have bird hunting backgrounds, and the majority have hunted waterfowl. Decoy collectors also enjoy some excess income. Nearly 80 percent are 40 years of age or older—largely because they represent the group with more of that all-important excess income. Despite some similarities, anyone can get involved in collecting. Here are some tips.

"It's really no surprise that interest in collecting decoys remains so high," says Guyette. "Each piece is literally an example of classic American folk art. As is always the case with fine art—beauty exists in the eye of the beholder."

"Although most decoys will increase in value, not all collectors are investors," notes Guyette. "Many people collect decoys simply as sculptures and also for their

historical value."

**1)** "Decoys fashioned by the more famous carvers bring much higher prices than those made by less well-known artists," says Guyette. "The older the decoy the better, and condition is huge."

**2)** Anything that makes a piece stand out adds to its collectability. Because they were produced in fewer numbers, unusual species like teal, mergansers or wood ducks command higher prices than comparatively more common mallards and bluebills. Preening, sleeping or feeding birds have more potential than traditional poses. Not all collectibles are necessarily hand-carved. Factory-made wooden decoys not only have eye appeal, but have also become a serious part of today's decoy collecting market.

**3)** "We do around five or six free online appraisals per day," says Guyette. "The best advice I can give people is to buy what they like and what they can afford. You also need to be sure you're getting what you think you're getting. Find a reputable, honest dealer that really knows decoys and take it from there."

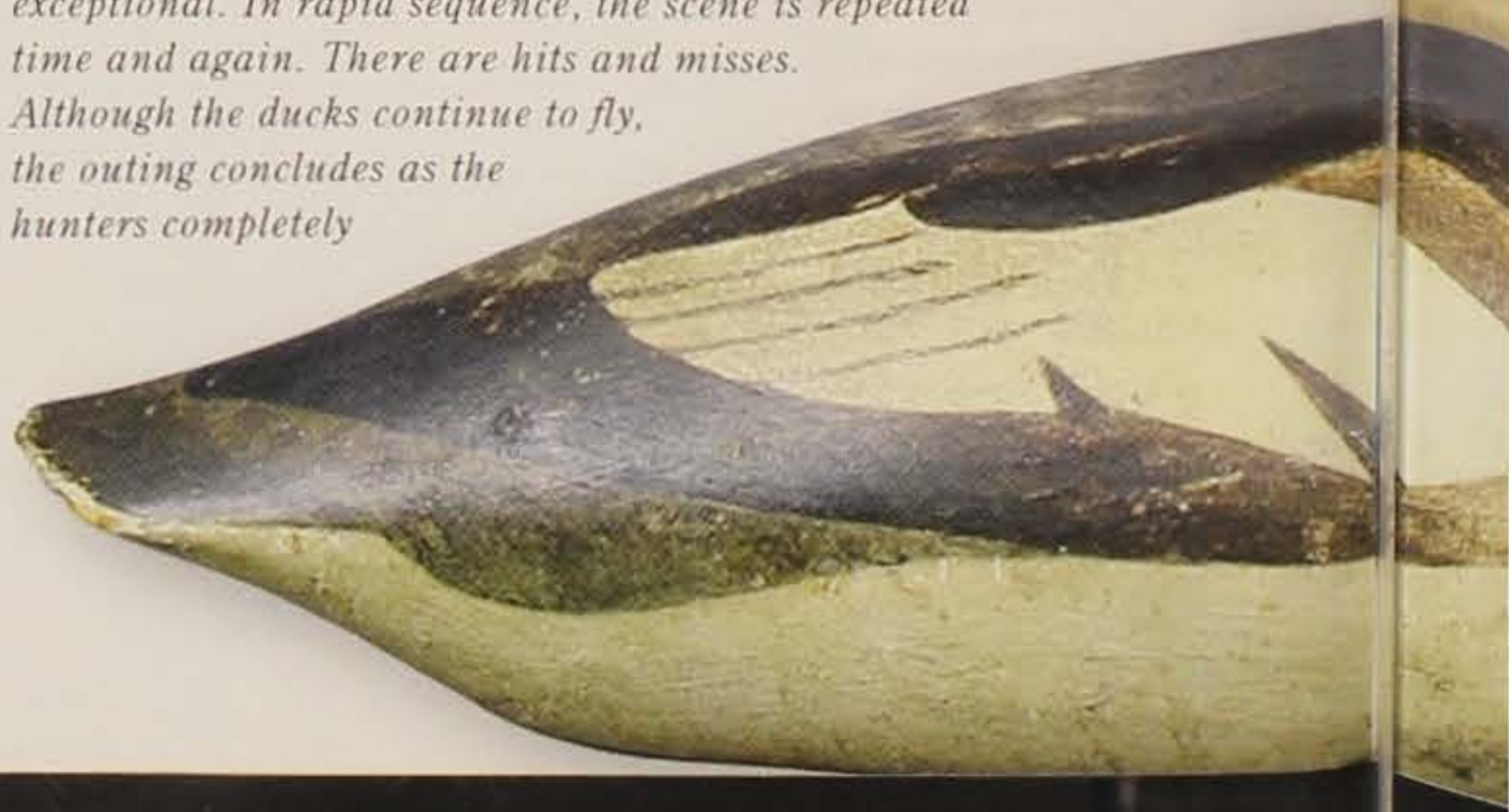
Not all decoys are created equal. To find out what Granddad's old decoy is worth or to view other historic pieces listed on the market, send a single profile photo of your piece to: [decoys@guyetteandschmidt.com](mailto:decoys@guyetteandschmidt.com).

## Lovelock Cave Yields 2,000-Year-Old Decoy

*The scene is timeless. At the edge of a shallow marsh, two hunters crouch in the cattails. With sunrise fast approaching, a rising breeze provides lifelike movement to the group of 11 canvasback decoys swimming out front. Scanning overcast skies, the hunters anxiously await the arrival of the day's first flock.*

*Ducks appear. On the deck and zig-zagging from pothole to pothole, the canvasbacks are looking for company. Spotting decoys, the flock banks sharply and prepares to land. Within moments, the ducks are nosily splashing down among the stiffly bobbing counterfeits. Simultaneously, the hunters rise and fire.*

*The migration is on, and the morning soon proves exceptional. In rapid sequence, the scene is repeated time and again. There are hits and misses. Although the ducks continue to fly, the outing concludes as the hunters completely*





LEFT: Merganser hen decoy. Carved during the late 1800s by a Massachusetts duck hunter named Lothrop Holmes, this red-breasted merganser hen sold for \$856,000. ABOVE: A collection of aged factory made decoys—vintage 1930s and 1940s—manufactured by the Victor Trap, Herter's and Evans Companies.

#### ANCIENT DECOY

One of 11 now-famous Tule Eater Native American canvasback decoys, unearthed during an excavation of the famed Lovelock Cave in Nevada in the 1920s. Some were finished, some unfinished—waiting for a layer of canvasback feathers for a realistic look. Perfectly preserved due to the arid land and constant cave temperatures, each decoy was individually wrapped, and the owner had taken great pains to conceal them from others. At more than 2,000 years old, they are the world's oldest-known decoys.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SCOTT KLETTE,  
courtesy Nevada State Museum,  
Carson City, Nevada Department  
of Cultural Affairs





*exhaust their supply of ammo. Gathering the slain and bagging the decoys, the duo leaves the marsh. Arriving home, the hunters clean their game and then store the decoys in the basement. Tomorrow will bring another day on the marsh.*

No one knows what tragedy may have befallen those hunters, but one fact is sure. They never did return to that bag of 11 handcrafted canvasback decoys, nor did they claim any of the other possessions contained in their home.

The hunters were ancient Tule Eater Native Americans— forerunners of the Northern Paiutes. The shallow marsh was in Nevada. Located less than a two hour drive from Reno, the hunters' home is the now famous Lovelock Cave.

While excavating Lovelock Cave in 1924, archeologists L. L. Loud and Mark Harrington discovered a false floor hiding an underground basement-like storage pit. Opening the door, they unearthed the most amazing discovery in decoy collecting history.

There, in a woven basket, were 11 near perfectly preserved canvasback decoys. Fashioned from woven tule, or bulrush reeds, painted with soot and red ochre and adorned with canvasback feathers, the decoys were ancient works of art. Subjected to numerous carbon dating tests, the artifacts proved to be no less than 2,000 years old—making them the world's oldest known decoys.

Today, migrating hordes of waterfowl still congregate on the sprawling, 16,000-acre marsh that lies below the entrance of Lovelock Cave. With thick and extensive beds of sago pondweed, the wetland is a magnet for diving ducks like redheads, ring-necks and scaup. The prized canvasbacks still come here too, and peak numbers may surpass 17,000 birds. Contemporary hunters, like Nevada Waterfowl Association President Chris Nicolai, still carefully place their decoys and anxiously await the impending dawn of a new day.

"In addition to great duck hunting, I also find a real sense of history on this marsh," says Nicolai. "Where I normally hunt, you can look up over your shoulder and make out the (Lovelock) cave entrance. When you think about how long people have been hunting ducks here, it takes the term 'waterfowling tradition' to a completely new level."

Archeologists say that Tule Eaters often employed nets to capture ducks. After placing their reed and feather decoys on the water, the Native Americans erected the web-like devices to intercept incoming flocks. Although deadly, the nets were only effective under low light conditions of dawn and dusk. During the remainder of the day, they used bow and arrow to hunt over decoys in the

exact manner employed by modern-day shotgun toting waterfowlers.

"This is an extremely arid region and the marsh depends on snowmelt from the mountains," says Nicolai. "That means water levels can fluctuate a lot. When levels are down and the shoreline recedes, you can really see how long and how hard this place has been hunted. On any day of the week you can take a walk and literally fill a 5-gallon bucket with small, bird point arrow heads. The bottom of the marsh is just covered with them."

"I'm really not surprised that the world's oldest decoys were discovered here," says Nicolai. "It is so incredibly dry out here that there is still lumber lying on the ground from when the wagon trains came through here on the way to Oregon. It's so arid that nothing seems to go away."

## Antique Goldeneye Takes Iowa Collector On Decoy Roller Coaster Ride

Like most Iowa farm boys, Lake Mills' Mark Chose had daily chores. One duty was to walk to the pasture each afternoon and bring the cows home for milking. As was common in northern Iowa farm country, the pasture contained a boggy slough that drew hundreds of ducks and geese during fall migration.

While going for the cows one day, Chose happened upon an abandoned decoy. Intrigued, he removed it from the mud and carried it home.

Forty-five years later, Chose is still dragging decoys home. He's sort of lost track of the numbers though. Today, his collection of duck, goose and shorebird decoys, along with old calls, shells, paintings, advertisements and other waterfowl hunting memorabilia, consumes two rooms and is still growing.

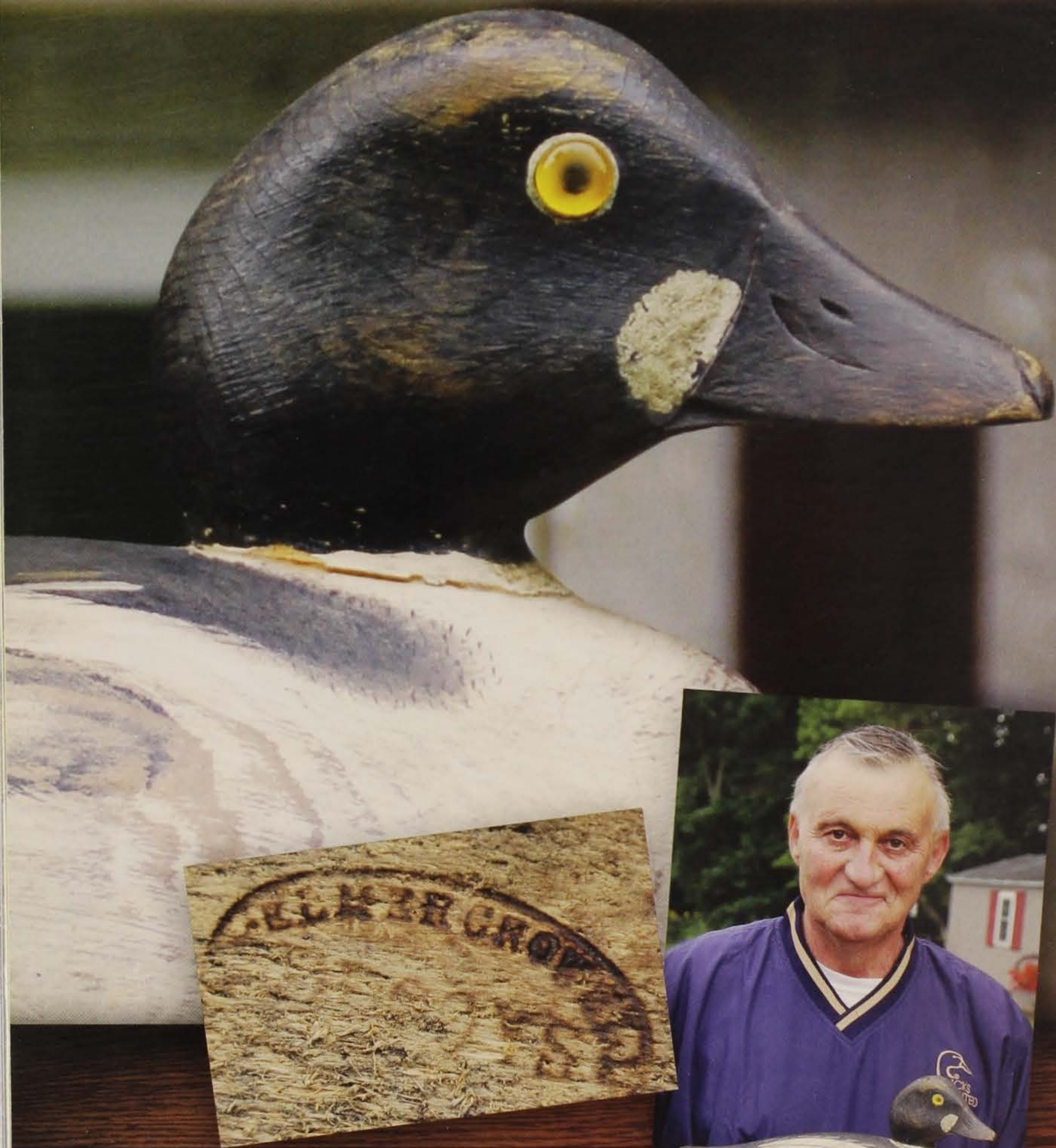
But of all the unique and interesting pieces the collection harbors, one decoy stands head and feathers above the rest, a hand-carved drake goldeneye. An astounding example of simple elegance, the decoy has no major splits or dents, retains nearly all of its original paint and has original glass eyes. Although the piece scores extra points for being a more "unusual" species, the goldeneye's most unique characteristic is its amazing story.

While perusing the aisles of a Saturday flea market where collectable old decoys often pop up, Chose paused to visit with a vendor. During the conversation, he spotted a basket containing decoys under the table. The basket held several



**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Once known for its impressive flights of southbound diving ducks, Hancock County's Eagle Lake was a second home to avid waterfowler Clarence Miller. During the glory days of the 1940s and 1950s, Miller assembled an impressive rig of 200 hand-crafted lesser scaup (bluebills). Today, five of the bluebills are all that remain—representing a unique link to Iowa waterfowl heritage. **BELOW:** Not all collectible decoys are waterfowl. During a long 1950s North Iowa-style winter, Hancock County farmer, artist, and skilled taxidermist Charlie Brcka crafted this great horned owl at his rural Garner studio. The well worn decoy was never used to attract other owls, but was rather intended to arouse the anger of its arch enemy—the common crow. The effort was aided by an equally well worn factory made, wooden crow.





Mark Chose displays his counterfeit goldeneye, initially thought to be an A. Elmer Crowell original. Crowell's decoys, considered among the finest and most desirable ever made, fetch top dollar. Two of his originals—the pintail pictured on page 35 and a sleeping Canada goose—set world records when they sold for \$1.13 million apiece. Had this one been an original, it would have been worth \$10,000 to \$15,000. The giveaway? The craftsman's full name—A. Elmer Crowell—is burned into each original.

Produced by the famous Pratt Decoy Factory (Illinois), these wooden mallard "dekes" attracted clouds of ducks for Iowa waterfowler Gus Weida during his outings on the northeast Iowa Mississippi River backwaters. Weida relied on the decoys for more than three decades before finally retiring them.



interesting pieces, including the drake goldeneye.

"The guy who had the decoys traveled up and down the East Coast during winter, and then sold stuff across the Midwest during the rest of the year," says Chose. "I asked what he'd take for the goldeneye. He considered it for a bit, and then said he'd have to have 80 bucks. Although I love old decoys, I'm really not an expert on collecting, and I'm not an investor. Whenever I can, I just buy what I like and I really did like this one. I finally said, 'OK, I guess I'll take it.'"

Upon arriving home and viewing the goldeneye under brighter conditions, Chose discovered the words "Elmer Crowell Decoys" faintly stamped into the decoy's base. A quick Internet search identified Crowell as a turn-of-the-century Cape Cod market gunner, hunting guide and prolific maker of waterfowl decoys. Regarded as a true Picasso by modern-day collectors, Crowell's carvings continue to command high prices. Examples of Crowell's best work sell for hundreds, and in some cases, hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"I just couldn't believe this was happening," says Chose. "The first thing I did was contact a nationally renowned decoy collector at Buffalo Lake, Minn. I described the decoy, and he asked questions. When we were finished, he said the goldeneye was worth a minimum of \$10,000.

"I was just shocked. I still couldn't believe this was for real," Chose continues. "The next thing I did was contact two more well known collectors and they agreed, saying the decoy would be worth anywhere from \$10,000 to \$14,000, and maybe a lot more. All three said that if this decoy was for real it would be a huge find for me. By then my heart was racing, just beating like crazy."

But the sword had two edges. Instead of having a wonderful new piece to add to his collection, Chose was sitting on a \$10,000, 2-pound block of wood. Hanging onto the decoy became much harder to justify than the original purchase.

"It was a real dilemma and before long I was giving some very serious consideration to selling the decoy," recalls Chose. "It was just too much money. Like I said, I'm not an investor, I just love old decoys."

Before he actually sold the decoy, Chose wanted to make one last contact to make absolutely sure of what he had.

"I called the president of the Minnesota Decoy Collectors Association and told him my story," says

Chose. "He was coming down the interstate and we decided to meet at Cabela's in Owatonna. When we got together, he had two Crowell decoys with him and let me take a look at them. Then he asked to see the goldeneye."

"The first thing he did was smell the wood, and said it was the right stuff—eastern red cedar—which was what Crowell used," Chose continued. "He looked the decoy over for quite awhile and then put it down. 'It really is beautiful, but there are a couple of problems and I'm going to say you have a fake. It's not a Crowell.' At that point, my heart just sank. I was almost sick to my stomach."

On virtually all known examples, Crowell painted the bottom of his decoys. The goldeneye is unpainted. But it was the oval stamp—the one that created all the excitement in the first place—that provided the most incriminating evidence. The stamp was slightly larger than the one used by Crowell. Also, all known authentic examples of his work are emblazoned with the words "A. Elmer Crowell." The imprint on the goldeneye simply says "Elmer Crowell."

The forgery is not the first. At least four similar Crowell counterfeits are known to have surfaced across the country, all believed forged by the same hand. At least two can be traced back to the Cape Cod coastline. Although no one has been able to positively identify the fraud, one fact is certain. The crook had an intimate understanding of Elmer Crowell's style and technique. Some speculate that he may even have spent time in the master's shop.

If there is a silver lining, it's that Chose still owns and continues to admire this beautiful decoy.

"All I can say is that this has been a real saga—a real roller coaster ride," says Chose. "But like I said, I'm not an investor. I just truly like the look and feel of old decoys because they remind me of earlier days, remind me of how things used to be."

As for blowing his \$80 on a forgery, Chose is long past being bothered by that. Authentic Crowell or not, the decoy is still a good piece and its scurrilous past gives the bird a dubious, but unique, historic value. It is also worth mentioning that, so far, Chose has been offered up to \$500 for the goldeneye—as a known fake.

As it turns out, that \$80 was money well spent. The old goldeneye easily outperformed just about anything else Chose could have done with the eighty bucks—including the purchase of gold. Just goes to show that even bad decoys are good. 🦆

BY BRIAN BUTTON

PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH

# Free

## Make the Most of Winter

From skinny skis to tenting—3 surefire ways

### SLOW SHUFFLE TO A RACER'S SKATE— *Cross Country* Skiing IS FOR ALL

Some bill it the world's greatest aerobic activity. While they may be right, you can set your pace at a leisurely saunter or a heart-pounding adventure for adrenaline junkies.

"Anyone who can walk can cross-country ski,"

says Tom Wilton of Polk City, a skiing enthusiast who voluntarily grooms 3.5 miles of trails at nearby Big Creek State Park. "It is a lifetime sport."

Skiers relish getting outside during the winter with an activity that keeps them warm and offers views of the winter landscape, wildlife and solitude, enhanced by sound-dampening snow.

"It can be quite peaceful and there are the health benefits, too. I like the cardiovascular benefits," says Wilton.

Getting started is as easy as borrowing or renting skis, boots and poles. Check with county conservation offices for outings. Beginners start on touring skis, typically waxless. Avid skiers may have several pairs for specialized uses—touring skis for general use, skate skis



# Come

## Winter

### ways to warm up winter

for freestyle (a motion that mimics ice skating) and the more standard waxable classic stride skis.

"Start with just trying to walk and stay upright, then try to get some glide going—that's where balance and practice come in. The more time you spend on skis, the more comfortable you get," he says.

Finding a place to ski is easy. Virtually anywhere with snow will suffice. Novices should look for flat terrain in woods, parks and river valleys. You can blaze your own trail in fresh snow, or follow existing tracks.

"I'm hooked on the exhilaration when you glide along on a ski. When gliding, you are not expending as much energy. As your technique gets better you can go farther and faster with less effort. It puts a big smile on your face."

#### SKI TRAIL ETIQUETTE

- Ski the right direction on one way trails. Keep to the right on two-way trails.
- Leave space between you and other skiers
- Let others know you are approaching and passing from behind by calling out "on your left."
- Do not block ski trails or intersections. When stopped, step to the side out of tracks. If you fall, move off the track as quickly as possible.
- Carry out what you carry in.
- Skate skiers should keep off classic tracks.
- Hikers, dog walkers and snowmobiles should stay off groomed ski trails and use multiuse trails instead.
- Do not walk or run on groomed ski trails.
- Move off trail to allow grooming equipment to pass.
- If you fall and make a divot on a groomed trail, fill it in with packed snow.
- Downhill skiers have the right-of-way.
- If going out near dusk, wear a headlamp and take basic emergency supplies such as water, a heat reflective blanket and a change of clothes in the car.

# A Tent IN THE SNOW

Let's face it—winter camping has some initial challenges, but the rewards are silence, serenity and having big places to yourself. Create active daytimes with hiking, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, then be prepared for winter's long nights with good lighting gear to illuminate camp. Breaking into winter camping isn't hard, but you'll rely on good gear and solid skills. Here's a few basics.

## START EASY

Pick a winter night with low wind and moderate temperatures.

Use it as a shakedown to gain skills and work out any kinks. Then gradually master colder conditions as skills build. Novice winter campers should find a nearby park. "Go close in case you have to bail out," offers Marshall Toms, an avid winter camper and manager of Jax Outdoor Gear in Ames.

## GET THE RIGHT TENT

Typical summer tents with large mesh windows won't cut it in the winter. A three-season convertible tent has smaller windows and beefy poles to hold snow loads, says Toms. You'll want a roomy tent to store gear, extra clothes and to stand up easily—you'll likely have more tent time in the winter.

Toms advises using a small, easy-to-store backpacker shovel to clear a place to pitch the tent. With heavy snow and frozen ground, regular tent stakes are useless. Use heavy triangle stakes, snow flukes or heavy nail stakes to penetrate frozen ground. Make a deadman anchor by filling plastic grocery sacks with snow and burying under packed snow. Tie stake-out cords to the anchors.

## THE THREE WS FOR WINTER

"There's no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothes," says winter enthusiast and avid skier Tom Wilton of Polk City. He says to dress in layers to regulate body temperature and moisture. This is vital when skiing, hiking and snowshoeing. Remember the Ws—wicking, warmth and wind/water. A wicking layer, such as polypropylene long underwear, wicks moisture from the skin to prevent clamminess. Next, wear a warmth or insulating layer such as fleece or wool. Top it with a wind and waterproof outer shell of GORE-TEX or other breathable, waterproof fabric. Layering allows complete control over temperature to prevent excessive sweating and subsequent chilling after a workout.

## MUMMY UP

Hooded mummy bags hold warm air better than their rectangular counterparts. Good bags have draft protectors along zippers and collars to ward off cold. Increase bag warmth by adding a waterproof, breathable bivy sack (\$100), which adds 10 degrees to any bag. A silk liner (\$40) adds 10-12 degrees. "The silk liner saves you from washing your bag over and over," says Toms.

With bags, there are two ways to go—synthetic or down fill. Down is lightweight and compressible, but loses insulating ability when wet. Synthetic choices include Hollofil, Quallofil and Polarguard. "Polarguard Delta mimics down for compressibility. PrimaLoft is comparable to the loft of down," he says. (Price range \$180 for synthetic to \$250 for down rated to zero degrees.)

Even a great bag is useless without good protection from the ground. Choose closed cell foam sleeping pads with a high insulating value to prevent heat loss into the frozen ground. Most campers double-up on ground pads to stay toasty.

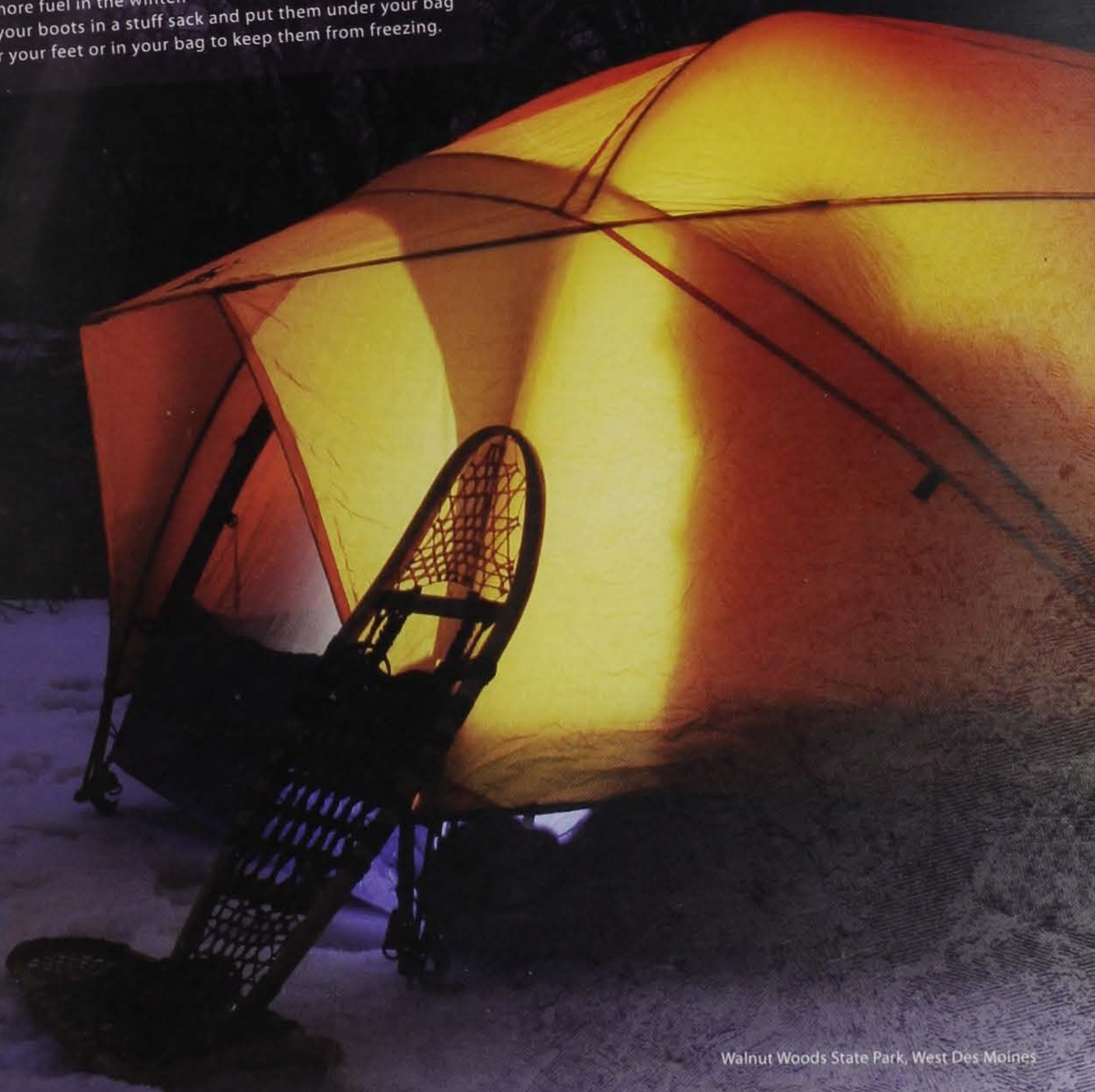
## LIGHT UP THE NIGHT

Ward off long, dark nights with good lighting.

"A lot of different LED-based lights are getting brighter and better," says Toms. "If sitting around a lot at night, take a Coleman propane lantern" and plenty of fuel for outside use. LED headlamps, lanterns and flashlights work great in the tent. Ensure you have plenty of batteries and keep spares warm in internal pockets. Headlamps are a must for night skiing.

## TOP 7 SNOW CAMPING TIPS

- 1) Do a few jumping jacks before bed to rev up some heat. (But don't get sweaty.)
- 2) Avoid sleeping with your face in the bag. Breath moisture decreases the bag's insulating ability.
- 3) Double up ground pads. Use two, full length closed cell foam pads to insulate you from the frozen ground.
- 4) Keep a whisk broom in the tent to brush off snow from boots and clothes after entering and sweep the snow outside. Use broom to whisk out frozen breath crystals from tent walls and ceiling in the morning.
- 5) Keep toes snug by adding a bottle filled with warm liquid to your sleeping bag near your feet. Make sure the lid is well sealed.
- 6) Pack plenty of extra fuel. Cooking and boiling will use far more fuel in the winter.
- 7) Put your boots in a stuff sack and put them under your bag near your feet or in your bag to keep them from freezing.



Walnut Woods State Park, West Des Moines

## Great Skiing at State Parks

Big Creek, Polk County, offers 3.5 miles of skate and classic groomed trails with two miles of easy flats and the remainder small hills. Get trail conditions at <http://lakesidenordic.home.mchsi.com>.

George Wyth, Black Hawk County, offers 4 miles of classic trails and 3 miles for skate skiing, both mostly on the flats. 319-232-5505

Mines of Spain, Dubuque, has 6 miles of groomed trails (Cedar Ridge Trail (classic) and Prairie Ridge Trail (both classic and skate.) 563-556-0620

Pilot Knob, Winnebago County, has 2 miles of packed flat trails for skate skiing. 641-581-4835

Volga River, Fayette County, 4 miles of hilly, forested trails for classic skiing. 563-425-4161

Yellow River Forest, Allamakee County, the Luster Heights Unit has 4.5 miles groomed for classic skiing in mostly hilly and forested terrain. 563-586-2254

For a listing of statewide groomed trails (tracks set by machine) visit <http://iowaskitrails.blogspot.com/>

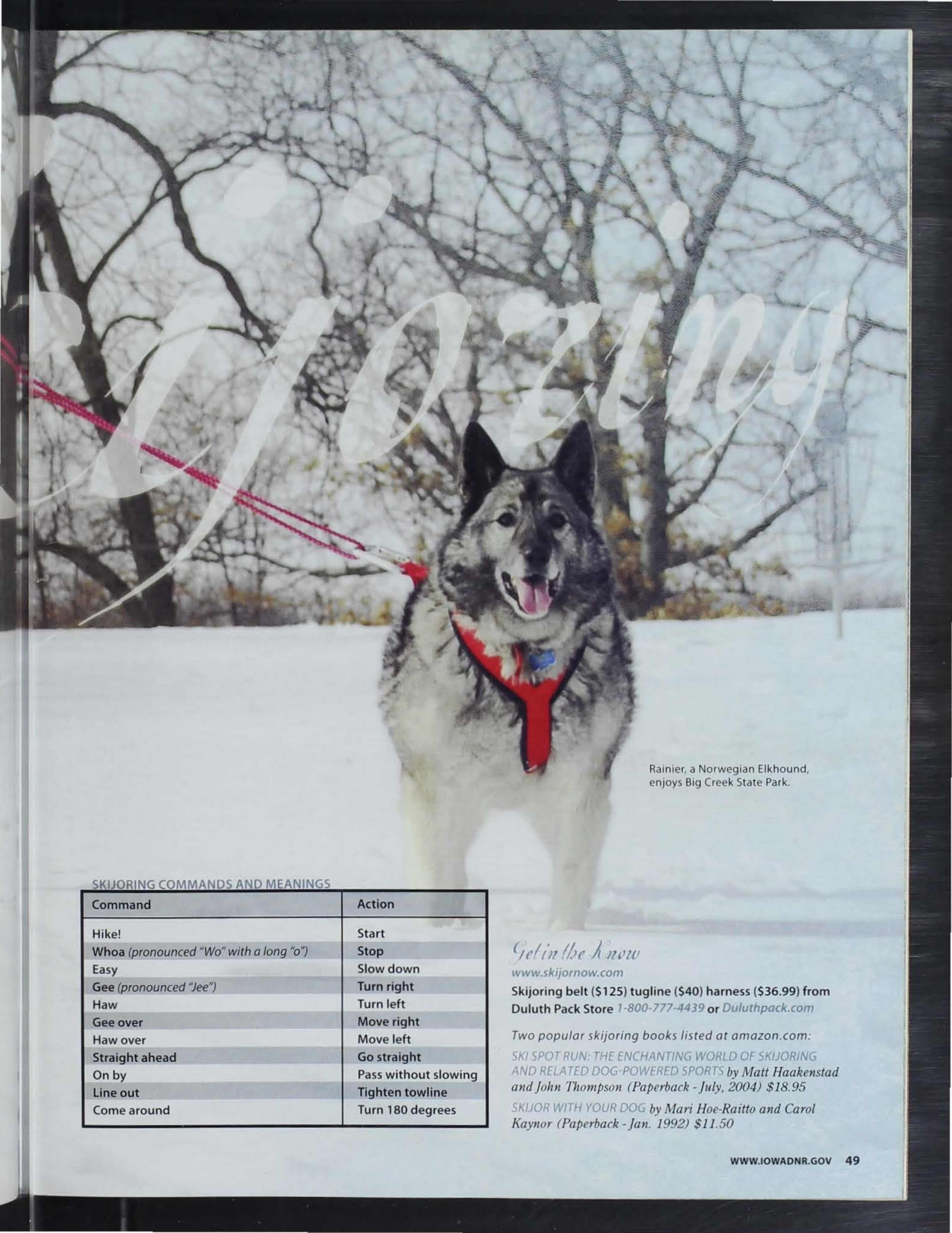
# Skijoring— CANINE CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

Add "gee" and "haw" to your vocabulary and hit the outdoor snowpack with your dog. Skijoring is a mix of dog sledding and skiing with a skier and dog harnessed together. Speed, adventure and a certain amount of unpredictability make for good times with winter-loving dogs.

For any dog with a passion for running, skijoring is supercharged fun. The skier should be proficient at snowplow stops, cornering and feel comfortable climbing and descending hills. Skijoring isn't for novice skiers.

Basic gear includes a dog harness, towline and belt for the skier. You can purchase belts with bungee lines to cushion snap starts, or make your own belt using quick-release carabiners, bungee cord, rope and a wide, supportive weight-lifter belt.

Get started gradually, with short runs to allow your dog to gain fitness and confidence. Keep it fun and always use lots of praise. Above all, practice quick releases and reconnecting the towline to your belt before venturing out and never wrap the towline around your hands, legs or neck. 🐾



Rainier, a Norwegian Elkhound, enjoys Big Creek State Park.

#### SKIJORING COMMANDS AND MEANINGS

Command	Action
Hike!	Start
Whoa ( <i>pronounced "Wo" with a long "o"</i> )	Stop
Easy	Slow down
Gee ( <i>pronounced "Jee"</i> )	Turn right
Haw	Turn left
Gee over	Move right
Haw over	Move left
Straight ahead	Go straight
On by	Pass without slowing
Line out	Tighten towline
Come around	Turn 180 degrees

#### *Get in the Know*

[www.skijornow.com](http://www.skijornow.com)

Skijoring belt (\$125) tugline (\$40) harness (\$36.99) from Duluth Pack Store 1-800-777-4439 or [Duluthpack.com](http://Duluthpack.com)

Two popular skijoring books listed at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com):

*SKI SPOT RUN: THE ENCHANTING WORLD OF SKIJORING AND RELATED DOG-POWERED SPORTS* by Matt Haakenstad and John Thompson (Paperback - July, 2004) \$18.95

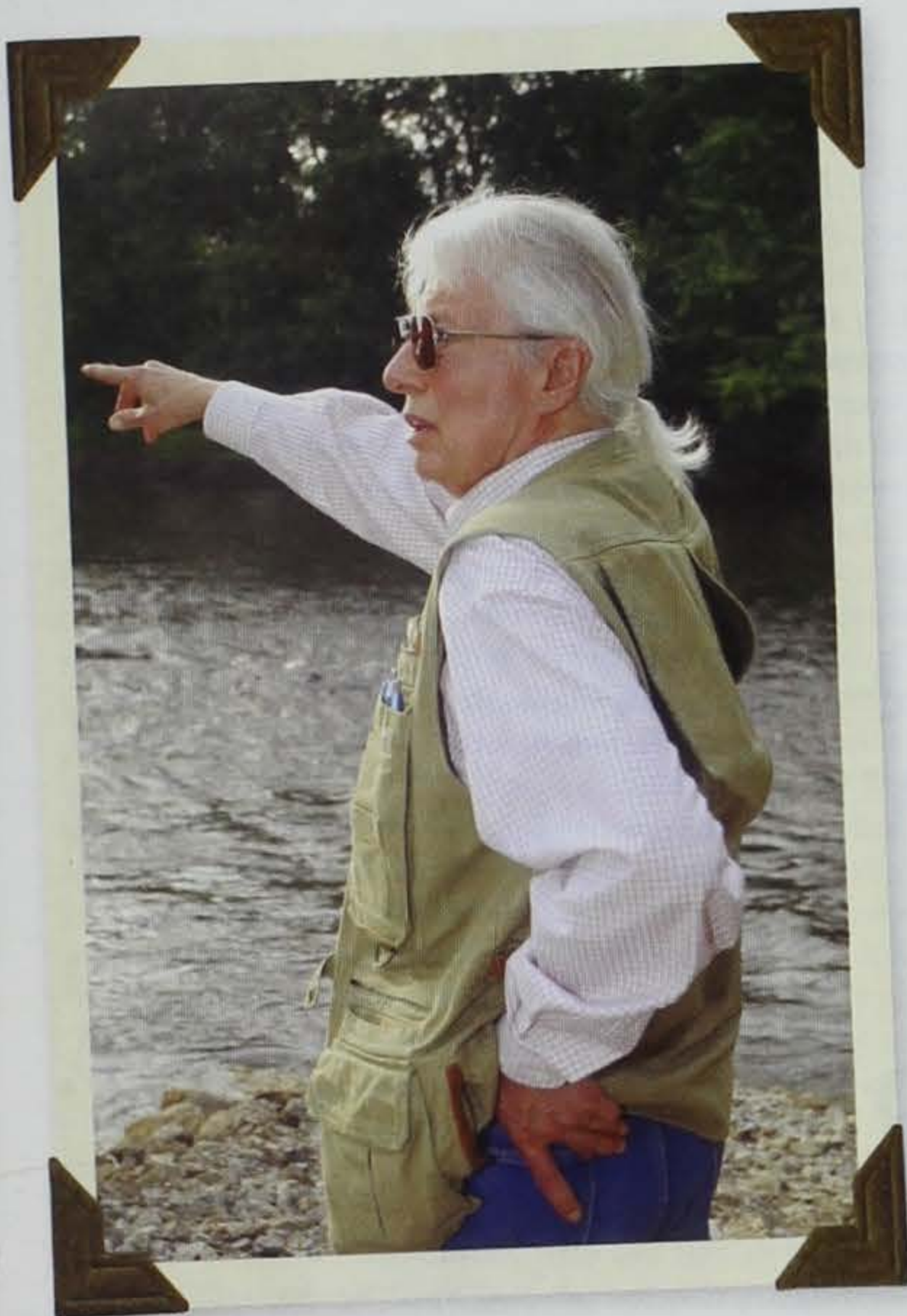
*SKIJOR WITH YOUR DOG* by Mari Hoe-Raitto and Carol Kaynor (Paperback - Jan. 1992) \$11.50

# Bridges Home

BY NATE HOOGEVEEN PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH

**Robert Waller, Author of  
"Bridges of Madison County,"  
Reflects On Earlier Days  
Exploring Iowa's Rivers.**

Author Robert James Waller takes a break from a brief return to Iowa to discuss the importance of protecting Iowa's rivers with Project AWARE volunteers.



**R**enaissance Man" may be too conventional a description to fit Robert James Waller. He never specifically set out to become one of Iowa's famous sons. Artist, photographer, writer, professor, economist are all labels that fit him comfortably. Even as a boy, he was a deep thinker. He is a self-described classical conservative, and yet is a romantic, too, penning novels such as "The Bridges of Madison County," "Slow Waltz in Cedar Bend," "A Thousand Country Roads" and "Border Music."

If a common theme winds through his novels from Bridges on, it's the celebration of freedom among rugged individualists. His male protagonists often fall into an illicit love affair with a beautiful soulmate.

"The Bridges of Madison County" was certainly a turning point in Waller's life; in many ways, it validated him, and was a heady time, at first. Then, the public's response to the book was unnerving in many ways. Tour buses began showing up at his modest Cedar Falls home unannounced. It became the beginning of the end for his life in Iowa. He ended up on a ranch in southwest Texas 60 miles north of Big Bend National Park, nurturing an overgrazed ranch into an oasis for wildlife, writing more novels and finding a new love.

In the days before Bridges, Waller was focused almost entirely on his home state, and waxed poetic of his boyhood years tromping through and around the Winnebago and Shell Rock rivers, stopping at home with stringers of fish so that his mother could cook them. While an economics professor at the University

of Northern Iowa in the 1980s, he moonlighted by writing essays for the *Des Moines Register*, including, Where the Wizard Lives, about the peninsula at the confluence of those rivers at Rockford.

One of those essays was a multi-part series about a float from the headwaters of the Shell Rock River in Lake Albert Lea to its mouth. It was called, Going Soft Upon the Land and Down Along the Rivers. On the river, and in his essay, he mused about a future Iowa that might respect its rivers, wildlife, small towns and parklands. It was later published in a collection of Waller's essays called "Just Beyond the Firelight." In part due to the way that essay captivated public attention, and in part due to his reputation as an economist, the Iowa General Assembly took the unprecedented step of asking Waller to write an economic future for Iowa. In it, he developed a rationale for protecting waterways based on the influential 1968 article in the journal *Science*, Tragedy of the Commons, written by Garrett Hardin, in which Hardin describes the dilemma when an individual acts only in his or her own best interest, in turn destroying shared resources for everyone.

Waller remains connected to Iowa through both memories and sustained friendships. A primary partner in adventure is J.R. Ackley, an insurance agent and former mayor of Marble Rock. The two men struck up a friendship during Waller's float down the Shell Rock, and Ackley appeared in the essay. They still go on long road trips together. They go fly fishing, a skill Waller learned from Ackley, but mastered in ways Ackley says he has a hard time fathoming.

Waller recently visited Iowa and spoke to a crowd assembled for the 2008 Project AWARE (A Watershed Awareness River Expedition). The DNR's annual week-long river clean-up was played out on the banks of the Winnebago River in Waller's home town of Rockford. We caught up with him on one of his periodic visits to Marble Rock, where we interviewed him at Ackley's home.

**Q** What sparked the idea to paddle the entire length of the Shell Rock River and write about it?

**A** Well, I had been quite ill the year before, and I thought, you know, I might not be making it very far... I decided that a man ought to do one significant thing, at least, before he went on too far. The rivers had been so important to me. In fact, that's what my talk is tonight: What the Rivers Taught Me. So in any case, I needed to pick one of the rivers, either the Winnebago or Shell Rock, that I grew up on. It was a hard choice. I'd spent more time on the Shell Rock, and that was a little easier to figure out how to canoe than the Winnebago, because the Winnebago kind of starts off in a bunch of marsh land. Anyway, I just planned for a long time. I am a pretty thorough person

about such things. I'd never paddled a canoe before in my life. I went out and got a canoe. I bought a solo canoe. There was just room for my gear, and me, and my dog. But I learned to be a good canoeist before I left; I built up the shoulders, the paddling arms, and I figured out how to do all the twists and turns, and the safety things, and what happens if there is dead fall, how to handle that if you hit it, and so I was very well prepared. I decided I wanted to do this, but for reasons that were obscure even to me. Some things are just worth doing, without even knowing exactly what the output is going to be.

**Q** *Did you plan on publishing it?*

**A** I had written so much for the Register by that time, so many essays. So I thought, well, this might be fun, and I took careful notes. And I had never done any photography either, and so I went out and bought a camera and practiced that before I left. I packed up, and put in, and just figured "let's see what's out there." And, of course, I was just absolutely appalled by the first 20 miles of river or so. It was dead, totally lifeless. That was probably partly due to farm runoff, but mostly due to the packing plants and the sewage effluent in Albert Lea. I think I pointed out in the essay that Albert Lea, Minn., had gotten money to fix that problem and instead built sewage lines for an exclusive development on the lake. Blood comes out my ears when I think about those things. It shouldn't, because it happens all the time. But I was just appalled. The siltation was horrible the first day.

**Q** *So it was late in the season...*

**A** It would have been July 31 when I put in. The water was fairly low. That first day was a killer because I was going through water only a few inches deep. My canoe weighed 150 pounds fully loaded, with plenty of water, bags, a tent and cameras. And so here I was dragging it through mud and under fences. By the time that day ended, I was really exhausted. And I didn't know where I was; that was what was fascinating. Here I am in Iowa... I

have driven all over these roads, and I had no idea where I was, other than somewhere north of Northwood. It was just a pleasant bend in the river. I thought, well, I could take a swim. There was a little sand bar, and a tree, so I camped there. That first night out, a huge storm came through and bad weather hit. Anyway, the trip went on from there...so exactly why I did it, I am not sure. But I know it was a tribute of some kind to the river. I wanted to... I've got to be careful here, I am starting to tear up a little... I thought I might be saying goodbye to the rivers. Those two rivers formed the foundation of my entire life.

**Q** *For a guy like me, a fellow lover of rivers, that's quite a statement.*

**A** The speech tonight is chapter one from this book I'm writing. So that's how important the idea is to me. If a man is going to write about his intellectual life, and it begins with rivers, that's pretty profound, I think. I am not the first person to do that, of course. Lots of men have been influenced by rivers. Maybe women, too.

**Q** *What transformation did you find as a result of that journey on the Shell Rock?*

**A** I don't think it was a transformation. It was a confirmation, a confirmation of all the things I already sensed and believed. It was not until somewhere around 1995 that I finally wrote the words that captured the words that I felt, all those years later. The setting for my speech tonight will be one of an 11-year-old in 1950 in Rockford. In 1995, I was writing my novel "Border Music." Texas Jake Carmine is my alter ego. He's what I might have turned out to be if it hadn't been for a few good women and my parents: kind of a border jerk, a ne'er-do-well. So Bobby McGregor asks Jack Carmine, "Well, Jack, what is your view of things of life in general?" And Jack says, "We come, we do, we go, and that's about as important as we ought to take ourselves." And that's the kind of thing you forget when you are an adolescent. You can get pretty self-focused. And then, you start doing things, and you get some applause, and you can forget it again for a moment.



**Q** But you've said you take everything you do very seriously, right?

**A** You take your work seriously, and the consumers of your work seriously, but you don't take yourself seriously. Once you can obtain that level of enlightenment, it brings enormous freedom—absolute freedom. Humility really is another way to think about freedom. So that's what the rivers taught me. It was this notion of my relative unimportance in light of a river that never stops. It took more than 50 years to express what I felt when I was 11 years old on the river that day: "We come, we do, and we go." The first observation that led to it was made sitting on a minnow bucket on the Shell Rock and the Winnebago...all by myself sitting down there on a Sunday morning I was looking to my left into the water. I know what the color of the minnow bucket was ...

**Q** Yellow?

**A** No, it was one of those old silver ones. You know, with the paint coming off. It had red lettering on the side that was pretty much washed away. My line was up. I only half-fished most of the time. When I was by the rivers, I pondered, and I looked out, and I got to thinking: "Let's see, the minnows eat the algae, the bass eat the minnow, and I eat the bass." And I remember realizing I am not at the top of the food chain. And that has become so profound through my life. If you wanted to ask one thing I know for sure, it is I am not the top of the food chain. I know that clearly.

**Q** In the late 1980s, you were asked by the legislature to commission a study on what Iowa should do economically. It seems like hiring one person to formulate a recommendation is something that's just not done.

**A** No it isn't. It was very surprising and quite innovative. What happened is Iowa had commissioned a never-ending series of boilerplate commissions and

reports. I don't know how much they paid for them. And there were some younger guys in the legislature at that time who were really dissatisfied with the lack of creativity. You could almost forecast the language: "Iowa has a high quality workforce with a great educational system, hard-working people with a great environment, a good place to bring up your kids." It goes on and on and on, ad nauseam. I like to get down to the nuts and bolts of things.

**Q** What were some highlights of the book, "Iowa: Perspectives Today and Tomorrow," which resulted from your work for the legislature?

**A** I looked at things we already had on hand in Iowa. And I thought we could become the leading geriatrics center in the world; you know how to deal with aging, which we could all see coming 20 years ago. I emphasized soybeans, because if you're going to feed a burgeoning population you're going to have to have a lot of high protein and good and healthy oils. I wrote about making use of all of it while taking care of our land. Not letting the soil go to the Mississippi River, because we'd already washed away a lot of it. I checked that book the other day, and I did talk about food prices going up if we started using our grains for ethanol.

**Q** You used Iowa's streams as a running example, referring to the Tragedy of the Commons...

**A** That article by Garrett Hardin was one of the most brilliant six pages ever written. If everyone acts in their own self interest, they'll collectively destroy a shared resource, even though that's in no one's interest.

**Q** Even then you were thinking about rivers and streams and what sort of economic framework we might consider to improve waters.

**A** They used to run trains from Chicago out to here for the smallmouth bass fishing. You talk about throwing away a resource. You want tourism? Get the rivers clean,

FAR LEFT: Waller describes the days he spent traversing rivers, most notably Iowa's Winnebago and Shell Rock, and the impact they had on his life and his writings. LEFT: Waller poses with Luke Wright, the DNR's water trails construction technician, who facilitated Waller's visit and interview. RIGHT: Waller and Nate Hoogeveen, DNR River Programs Coordinator, take a break along side the Winnebago River, where Waller spent many a day while growing up in Rockford.



and let the smallmouth do what smallmouth do. I suppose the Tragedy of the Commons runs through the entire book I'm working on. I am dealing with everything from obesity to drug addiction to soil erosion. All of that. I am trying to show how similar these problems really are.

**Q** *So what took you away from us? How did you end up in Texas?*

**A** Well, Iowa is a nice place. One of its great charms and its weaknesses at the same time is it's kind of homogeneous. It's hard to find that anymore. I don't want to get into this too far because it will start to sound whiny and self-indulgent. But when you write a book such as "The Bridges of Madison County," things start to get pretty tight here. It got really close. It was more than just the Japanese tour buses stopping in front of my house in Cedar Falls. That book was a cultural phenomenon. Being the reclusive kind of guy that I am, I just needed a lot of space. So I just moved to a place that was as far away from anything as you can get in the United States. My wife and I lived way back in the mountains, high desert mountains there.

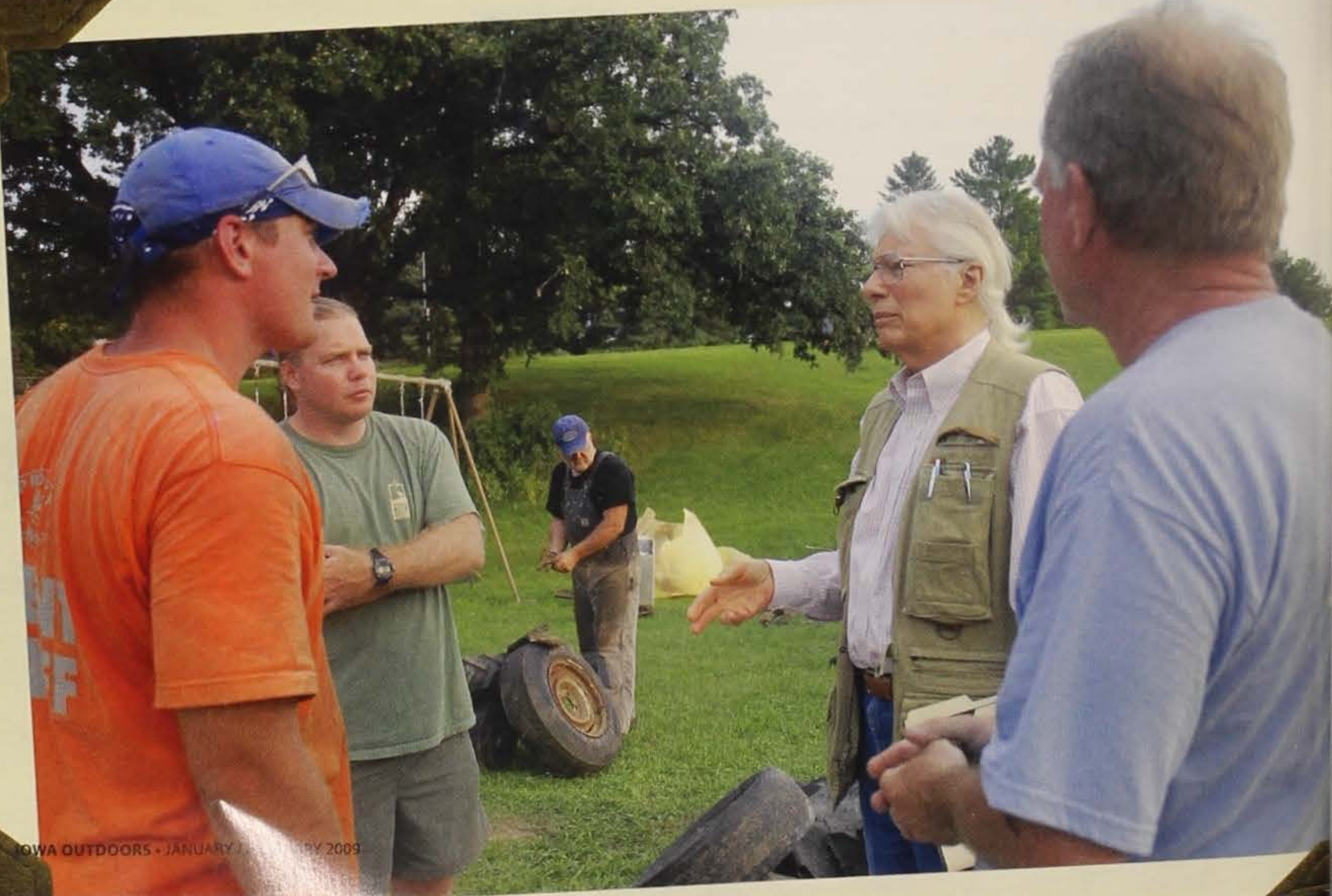
**Q** *What was that like, after "The Bridges of Madison County?"*

**A** There's something about the American public and that whole notion of celebrity and fame. It can just be scary. They can start sucking on you, and they get a hold of your sleeve every time you turn around and making you offers you can't refuse, all of which you can refuse... It got completely out of hand.

**Q** *So you flew off everyone's radar screen?*

**A** I'd go to Manhattan on book business, and they would say, "How big is your ranch?" And I would say, "Well, not quite as big as Manhattan." And two people lived there. I used to joke with J.R. that it always annoyed me that I owned everything I can see except for this 6,000-foot mountain peak. But it was a big mountain. And, to buy that mountain, well, I don't think they would have sold it. Anyway, I ran the ranch as a game preserve.

**Q** *What motivated you to do that?*



**A** It was rock and dirt and nothing else. It had been overgrazed. So I decided to see if I could bring it back. I am a great believer in nature. If allowed to rehab itself, then it will. I decided to just let the land do what it could do. Ranchers had shot lions all over the place. I wanted to give a home to everybody—everybody being the wildlife. I wanted to watch them establish their own equilibrium. I have great faith as an economist, and also just as an amateur observer of nature, that things will reach their own equilibrium if you don't monkey with them. So by the time I left years later, a wildlife biologist from Texas Parks and Wildlife toured the ranch with me before I sold it. He said in the old days, they used to say you'd have grass up to a horse's belly. Well, we had grass back up to a horse's belly. We had bear, lion, rattlesnakes, coyotes, and a bobcat lived right up the hill behind the lodge where Linda and I lived.

**Q** *How long did it take before you felt it had regenerated?*

**A** About six years.

**Q** *And you left the ranch?*

**A** It broke our hearts to leave that land. I wept, driving off the last day. And why did I sell it? Let's just say it was time to be sensible when I got to be 65.

**Q** *How often do you think about Iowa?*

**A** I think about Iowa all the time. It's my home. I am a transient in Texas. I thought off and on that maybe I might want to move back in later years. Iowa's really a part of me. I probably felt more for Iowa than a lot of Iowans do in terms of trying to understand its essence. But, I married a Texas woman, and there's not a chance in hell. Texans don't move. They may go to the boundary of Texas, but that is about it. She thinks if you come into Texas you ought to have a passport. And to be honest, there are some advantages. Down there, I go fly fishing in January in short sleeves.

**Q** *What advice do you have for Iowa in 2009?*

**A** I have to be careful, because I have been away for 15 years. It would be presumptuous of me to dispense detailed advice without coming back and living here for a year or two. My general advice is always the same: think locally, and look to see what you have around you before trying to do things that are really complicated and big.

Brian Soenen (far left), a natural resource biologist with the DNR's IOWATER program, explains the work of hundreds of volunteers to clean up trash from Waller's beloved Winnebago River on Project AWARE. Hoogeveen and Wright look on, as sculptor David Williamson sorts through trash that can be used to create gates that will soon adorn the DNR's building at the Iowa State Fairgrounds.

**Q** *In what other ways are rivers in your blood?*

**A** My mother grew up on the Wapsipinicon River. She was a real country girl. Grew up real poor. And her father supplied the family with food from trapping, hunting and fishing. He was a Wapsie fisherman.

**Q** *So, about your next book. It's not a work of fiction. What is it about?*

**A** I think of it as the intellectual history of a country boy—me. You might remember an essay I wrote called, "One Good Road is Enough." It was about growing up in a small town. I kept looking for the road metaphorically, and also in fact. They finally paved the road out of Rockford, but for a long time when I grew up it was all gravel. It stayed gravel in my mind. It was dusty. How does a kid from Rockford, Iowa, get to do what I have been allowed to do in my life? Well, part of it is America, of course. You can do anything you want to in America. So a lot of people over the years keep asking me how do you play jazz guitar, and still be an economist and still do fine art photography, and like mathematics, as if these things are contradictions. And for some reason, even from the time I was growing up, I saw no boundaries between these areas. It just seemed to me natural to move from one to the other. And it got more natural as I got older. I am always doing the same thing; I just change my tools from time to time. It's integrated life, essentially. So I'm one year into writing this book, with three to go, probably. It's not that it's such a long book; it's just that it's hard to write. And, I have to resort to mathematics at times to explain my thinking.


**Q** *So it's sort of a long essay?*

**A** No, an essay implies rhetorical devices where you're trying to get people to do something. I think it's more of a scientific book. That these are the way things are and if you want to accomplish this, this will work. It's not my opinion. Here is the data. This and this will work.

**Q** *Any other books in mind?*

**A** This may be the last book I'll write, depending on energy, and how long I live. I turned 69 last Friday. That starts to focus the mind. I have been thinking about doing this book off and on for about 30 years. But I am glad I didn't tackle it before this. I have lived a lot, and I got to go through the whole "The Bridges of Madison County" craziness, and all of that, and I learned a lot about myself in the world in that process.

*Nate Hoogeveen is the River Programs Coordinator for the Iowa DNR. Author of the guidebook, "Paddling Iowa," and previously an outdoors and environmental writer, Hoogeveen grew up in Le Mars, and today lives in Des Moines.*



**SAFE HOUSE**—A mallard hen finds a safe haven inside a Delta Hen House. During a previous Iowa experiment, mallard hens enjoyed a 70 to 87 percent success rate when using artificial nesting cylinders. By contrast, mallards nesting on the ground only had 15 to 20 percent success.

# In The Hen House

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LOWELL WASHBURN



For nesting pairs of mallard ducks, the local housing market is looking up. Thanks to a joint venture between state and international agencies, migrating mallards will find a noticeable increase in secure breeding sites as they arrive in Iowa this spring.

According to DNR waterfowl technician Al Hancock, the new conservation partnership between the Iowa DNR, the Manitoba, Canada-based Delta Waterfowl Foundation and the Waterfowl Association of Iowa calls for the installation of 500 artificial mallard nesting structures on Iowa wetlands during the next four years. Known as the Delta Hen House, the structures are 18-inch diameter, 3-foot-long wire cylinders covered in flax straw and lined with softer nesting material. When installed over water, the structures provide a safe haven from marauding predators such as skunks, mink and raccoons. The pilot project is currently focusing on north-central Iowa marshlands surrounding Clear Lake. The effort represents the first hen house supersite ever attempted in Iowa.

"Late last winter, we (DNR wildlife personnel) were able to install the first 100 hen house structures in north Iowa," says Hancock. "All nests were placed on public areas, and we targeted the smaller prairie pothole-type wetlands that nesting mallards prefer."

As the project moves forward, DNR wildlife crews will monitor individual structures for use and success, said Hancock. The Iowa DNR will also maintain the structures

by making needed repairs, replacing nesting material and other maintenance duties.

"We realize that no single tool can solve all the problems nesting mallards encounter," says Matt Chouinard, Delta Waterfowl Foundation staff biologist and perfecter of the Delta Hen House nest. "But we also realize that hen houses work and are a very cost-effective way to make a difference and help boost local mallard populations."

"By looking at information obtained from banded mallards, we've found that successful hens will return to the same nesting cylinder year after year," says Chouinard. "As they continue to produce ducklings, more and more [surviving] females return to the same area. Our banding has also revealed that ducklings hatched in nest cylinders are very likely to use the same type of structures as adults. As more and more adult females return each spring, the project grows."

In a previous Iowa trial, artificial nesting cylinders received 70 percent use by mallard ducks, and enjoyed a 70 to 87 percent rate of success. By contrast, around 80 percent of the mallard nests initiated (on the ground) in traditional upland areas were lost to predators. To maintain a stable population, mallards need a nesting success rate of at least 15 percent.

To learn more about the Delta Waterfowl Foundation, visit [www.deltawaterfowl.org](http://www.deltawaterfowl.org).



**DOUBLE TROUBLE**—Iowa waterfowl studies have revealed that, on average, more than 80 percent of wild duck nests are destroyed before hatch. Nest predators—including red fox, skunks, crows, weasels, ground squirrels and others—are the main cause for failure. In addition to destroying eggs, red fox are also extremely adept at capturing nesting hens.




**MALLARD GURU**—Delta Waterfowl Foundation staff biologist Matt Chouinard places an individually numbered metal web tag on a mallard duckling hatched from a nest structure on southern Manitoba's Delta Marsh.

Regarded as North America's top nest structure expert, Chouinard has extensively studied the effectiveness of mallard nesting structures across Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Ontario. After evaluating a variety of popular structure types, Chouinard helped perfect the flax straw-covered, wire cylinder Delta Hen House. More than 2,800 of the structures are currently in use in Manitoba.

Chouinard is currently campaigning to promote the use of hen houses in the Lower 48. A large number of the structures are being used on Minnesota wetlands, where biologists have reported a (mallard) use rate of 60 percent.

"If we can achieve a (mallard hen) use rate of 40 or 50 percent and 80 percent of those nests are successful, that's extremely good—especially when compared to the success rate of ducks nesting (on the ground) in uplands," said Chouinard. "In Minnesota, we've been able to evaluate the structures for seven years now. During that time, we've recorded a 93 percent success rate, which is just outstanding." *Photo by Fred Greenslade*

A photograph showing three men in winter gear installing a large, round, straw-filled nest structure on a metal pole in a snowy field. The man on the left is wearing a red hooded jacket and yellow overalls. The man in the center is wearing a black beanie and a tan jumpsuit. The man on the right is wearing a brown beanie and a dark jacket with a 'DNR' patch on the sleeve. They are standing in a field of tall, dry grass with snow on the ground. A vehicle is partially visible on the right.

DNR Wildlife Technicians Dick Coy (left), Al Hancock and Brian Hickman install an over-the-water, Delta Hen House mallard nesting structure at the Union Hills Waterfowl Production Area located south of Clear Lake. During the next four years, 500 mallard structures will be installed in northern Iowa wetlands surrounding Clear Lake. The project is the result of a joint venture between the Manitoba, Canada-based Delta Waterfowl Foundation, the Iowa DNR and the Waterfowl Association of Iowa.

## CARBON FOOTPRINT: *Smaller Is Better*

Your carbon footprint is the amount of greenhouse gases produced by the things you do. Measured in units of carbon dioxide equivalents (CO<sub>2</sub>e), many calculators on the Internet will estimate personal carbon footprints.

The Environmental Protection Agency's is at [www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/ind\\_calculator.html](http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/ind_calculator.html).

Burning fuels and generating electricity are the two largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions for Americans.

Here are some tips to shrink your personal carbon footprint...



### YOU BEAUTIFUL MISERI SKINFLINT! CHEAPSKATE!

You'll slash your carbon footprint and keep more money in your pocket if you...

#### TRIM DOWN YOUR HOME'S ENERGY BILL

- Replace regular light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs.
- Turn down the thermostat at night in the winter; turn it up in the summer.
- Buy energy-efficient products with the Energy Star® label.
- Add insulation to your home.

#### DECREASE THE DISTANCE TRAVELLED IN YOUR PERSONAL VEHICLES

- Walk, jog, stroll, run or bike instead; combine errands.
- Share a ride, catch the bus.
- Drive a hybrid or fuel-efficient vehicle.

#### BUY LOCAL PRODUCTS TO SAVE EMISSIONS FROM LONG-DISTANCE SHIPPING.

## REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

- Buy products with less packaging
- Be resourceful with ways to reuse products or materials
- Recycle everything you can

## THEY'RE GASES, MAN. THEY CATCH THE WAVES.

Greenhouse gases allow short and long wave radiation from the sun into earth's atmosphere, but block the long-wave (infrared) radiation from bouncing back into space. As a result the earth's atmosphere warms, similar to the way a greenhouse does. The two major greenhouse gases are water vapor and carbon dioxide. Other greenhouse gases include methane, ozone, chlorofluorocarbons and nitrogen oxides.

#### RESCUE RESOURCES FROM OBLIVION

It takes 95 percent less energy to recycle aluminum than it does to make it from raw materials. Recycling steel saves 60 percent,

recycling newspaper 40 percent, recycling plastics 70 percent and recycling glass 40 percent. For more information about reducing greenhouse gases and recycling go to [http://recycling.stanford.edu/recycling/caq\\_benefits.html](http://recycling.stanford.edu/recycling/caq_benefits.html)

## STOP THE GAIN. BECOME A LOSER!

A carbon-offset balances your CO<sub>2</sub> emissions with a product or action that saves or stores an equivalent amount of CO<sub>2</sub>. Make sure they can go the distance.

For information about the cleanest and most fuel-efficient vehicles go to

[www.epa.gov/greenvehicles](http://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles)

**SAVE ESTABLISHED TREES AND PLANT MORE**  
Trees remove CO<sub>2</sub> from the air and store it. The biggest and oldest shade trees store the most. Forests save more per square mile than most terrains.

#### STAY ROOTED

How many trees will offset your carbon emissions? A mid-size sedan with air conditioning driven 11,300 miles a year will emit 10,168.3 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub>. It takes 15.2 trees per year to offset those emissions. For more information about tree storage of CO<sub>2</sub> go to: [www.americanforests.org/resources/cc/](http://www.americanforests.org/resources/cc/).

## Wild Goose Stew

Wild game in general—and waterfowl in particular—often receives an unwarranted bad culinary rap as being “gamey.” But any game, when properly dispatched, cleaned, cared for and cooked, can surpass anything bought from a grocery store. And just think, it’s free-range and growth-hormone free; all the rage in the food circles today. This simple, hearty recipe is sure to win over even the most doubting palate.

**2-3 pounds goose, cubed**  
**4 large potatoes, cubed**  
**4-5 carrots, cubed**  
**4 stalks celery, cubed**  
**2 onions, chunked**  
**1 package prepared stew seasoning**  
**1 28-ounce can diced tomatoes**  
**8 cups beef stock**  
**1 box frozen peas**  
**flour**

In a large stew pot combine beef stock, stew seasoning, potatoes, onion, celery and garlic and simmer on medium heat. Meanwhile, coat goose meat in seasoned flour and brown. Add meat and tomatoes to pot and simmer on

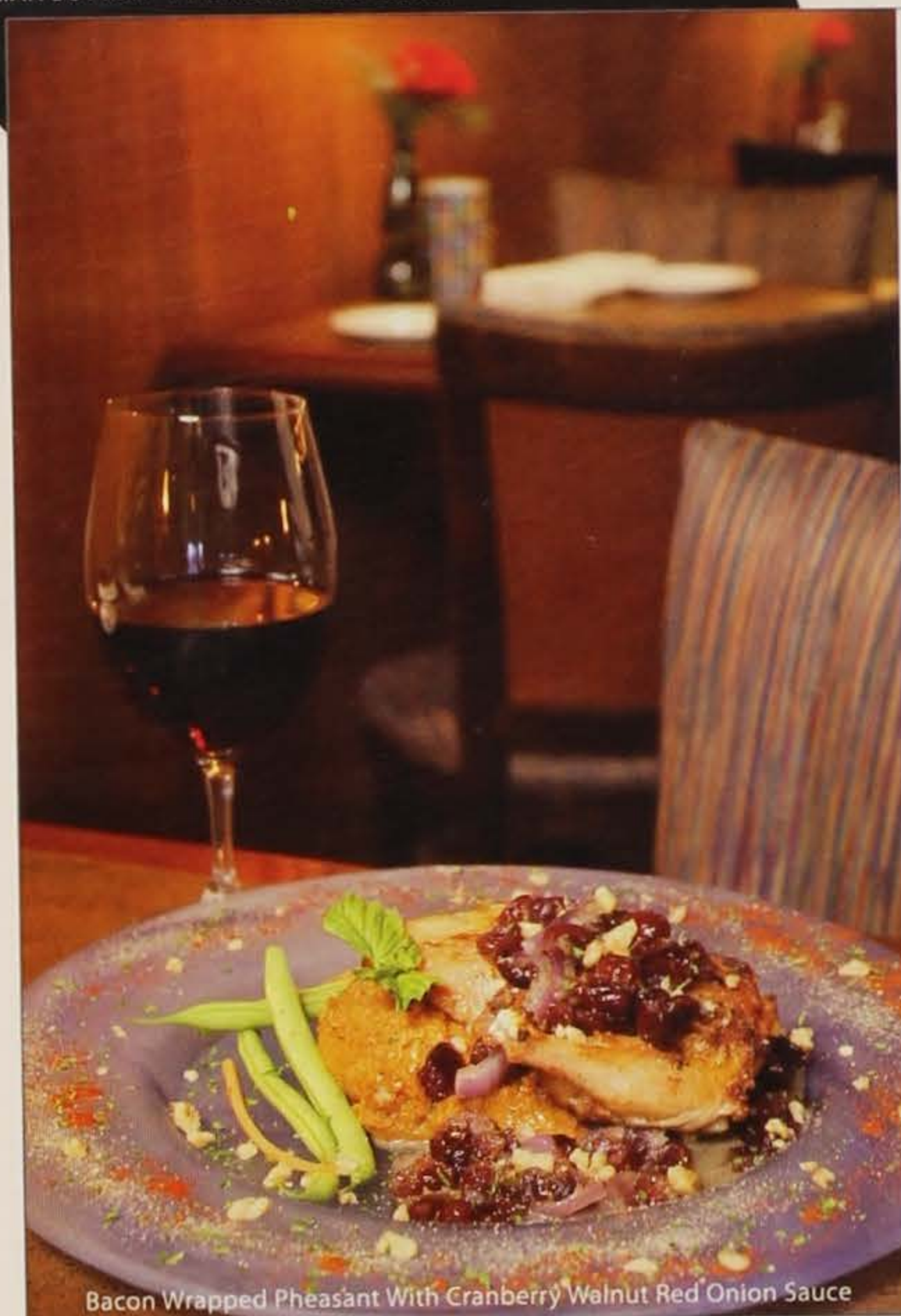
medium-low heat for an hour and a half. Add peas and heat through. The flour on the goose will thicken the stock. Serve with a slice of thick, crusty bread.

**JAZZ IT UP.** Add several dashes of hot sauce or Worcestershire sauce for added zing. Add a bottle of dark, stout beer for an earthy spin. For an unmistakable fall flavor burst, sprinkle a little apple pie or pumpkin pie spice on the goose while it is browning.

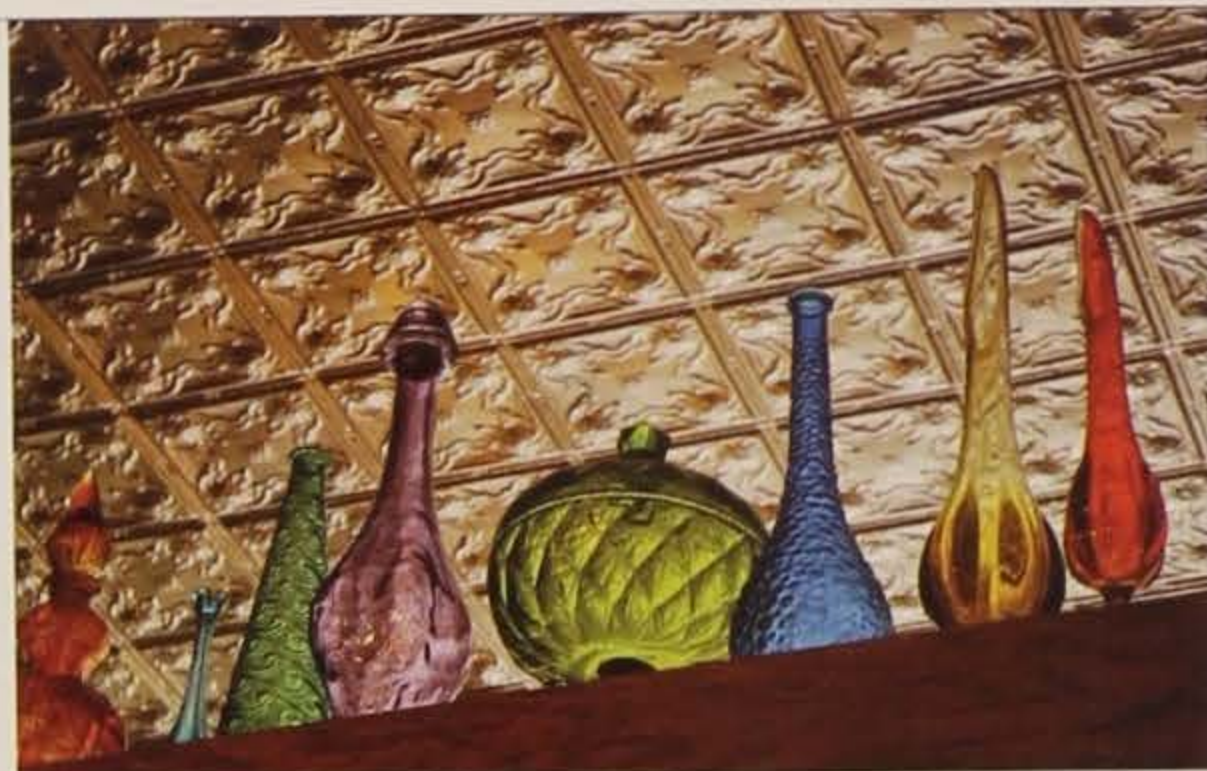
### GET INVOLVED

*The goose used in this recipe was harvested by 11-year-old Austin Winter of Dallas Center. Get your children involved in the outdoors by taking part in the youth hunting seasons, or check out DNR youth camp opportunities at [www.iowadnr.gov/camps.html](http://www.iowadnr.gov/camps.html).*





Bacon Wrapped Pheasant With Cranberry Walnut Red Onion Sauce



Owner and chef Kim Wolff



For owner, chef and Dubuque native Kim Wolff, the seasons and fresh, local produce inspire her changing menus. Early winter patrons enjoy her 20-foot, lit Christmas tree adorned with 400 decorative purple, green, gold and copper balls that graces the interior from Thanksgiving through New Year's.

## Pepper Sprout, Dubuque

LOCATED IN IOWA'S OLDEST CITY, THIS EATERY IS KNOWN FOR ITS BISON AND LAMB DISHES AND A SEASONAL MENU AS FRESH AS ITS LOCALLY GROWN PRODUCE. WARM-UP WINTER WITH THESE RECIPES.

### PEANUT CRUSTED WALLEYE WITH CRAWFISH AND SAUSAGE CREOLE SAUCE

*A Louisiana-inspired take on walleye migrates upriver. If crawfish are unavailable, substitute with shrimp.*

6 walleye fillets

Egg wash (one egg beaten with 1 tablespoon heavy cream)

#### PEANUT CRUST

1 cup crushed, roasted peanuts, or plain peanuts roasted in 350° oven for 10 minutes until light brown.

½ cup flour

salt and pepper to taste

1 egg

1 tablespoon heavy cream

#### CREOLE SAUCE

1 cup clam juice

1 tablespoon sweet pickle relish

½ teaspoon diced shallot

½ teaspoon diced garlic

salt and pepper to taste

1 small link or 2 ounces andouille

sausage or other sausage, diced

8 pieces crawfish or shrimp cut into pieces with shells and tails removed

½-1 teaspoon hot sauce

1 pinch creole seasoning

Jalapeno pepper, optional

Preheat oven to 350°. Mix peanuts, flour, salt and pepper and place in

shallow dish. In a bowl, beat egg with heavy cream.

In a saucepan, mix all sauce ingredients except crawfish, and heat until liquid is reduced in half, about 15 minutes. Add crawfish in the last two minutes or a few minutes earlier if substituting with shrimp.

Dredge walleye fillets in egg wash then coat one side in peanut crust mix. Add oil to heavy, oven-proof, non-stick skillet and heat on stovetop until hot. Pan sear fillets on peanut side for two minutes, then flip and place pan in oven. Bake 10 minutes.

Remove baked fish from pan and onto plates, adding sauce on top.

Serve with wild rice on the side.



Hand plated copper ceilings and sturdy old brick walls create warm, candle-like lighting. Framed French food prints adorn the walls. With 82 seats, reservations are recommended. Chef Kim uses local produce from April through October, including local bison, trout and pork. Local goods extend into winter with home-canned tomatoes and corn hand-cut from cobs.



Peanut Crusted Walleye  
with Crawfish and Sausage Creole Sauce

— — — — — HAVE A GOOD RECIPE OF WILD FOODS TO SHARE? Send to: [WILDCUISINE@DNR.IOWA.GOV](mailto:WILDCUISINE@DNR.IOWA.GOV) — — — — —

# **BACON-WRAPPED PHEASANT BREAST WITH CRANBERRY WALNUT RED ONION SAUCE**

*Cranberries add a tart sweetness to pheasant and the bacon adds moisture.*

4 pheasant breasts with wings on  
4 slices bacon  
Cranberries, ½ bag fresh or 8 ounce bag dried  
2 cups white wine  
1 cup chicken stock  
1 teaspoon shallots, diced  
Pinch salt and pepper  
Honey to taste  
1 small red onion, chopped  
½ cup chopped walnuts, chopped  
Orange zest from half an orange

## **2 tablespoons butter**

Preheat oven to 350°. Remove wing tips from breasts, leaving the drumstick portion attached. Split breast and remove cartilage. Wrap pheasant with bacon.

Make sauce by mixing all ingredients except walnuts and orange zest in a bowl. In a saucepan, bring sauce to boil and reduce by half, or about 15 minutes. Then add orange zest and walnuts and two tablespoons butter and cook five more minutes.

On stovetop, add a small amount of oil to pan and sear wrapped breasts on one side on high in a non-stick, oven-proof pan, for 1½ minutes, flip and place in oven. Bake 10-15 minutes.

*Pepper Sprout*  
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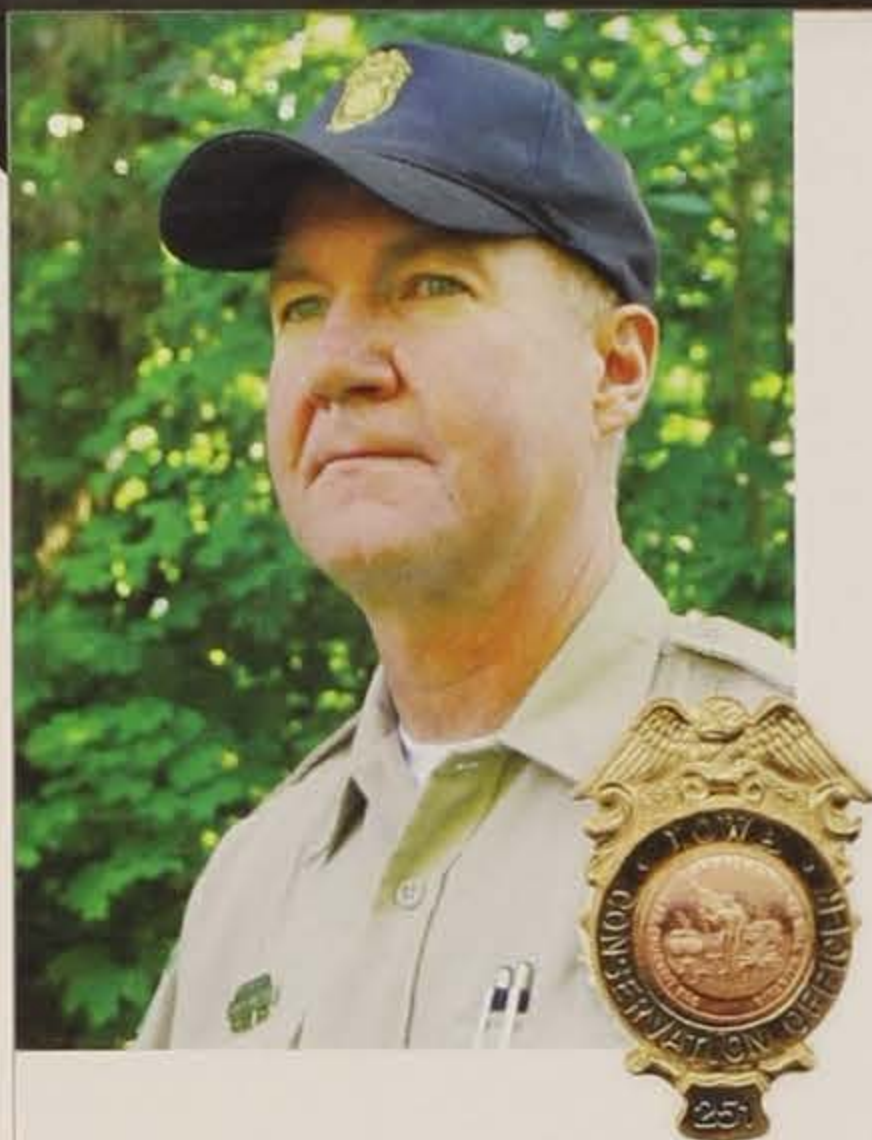
## **HOURS:**

DINNER: Tuesday-Thursday  
5 p.m.-9 p.m.

Friday-Saturday 5 p.m.-10 p.m.  
(bar open until 2 a.m.)

Reservations recommended.

**LIQUOR:** Full bar with 165 wines.



## Crossing the Line

Sometimes it can get kind of discouraging. I've never really considered what I do as a "crusade." But, sometimes you see things that make you wonder if you're really making a difference at all.

Hunting laws exist for three basic reasons. They protect the resource, promote public safety and ensure everyone has a fair chance to bag game in the field. Along with that is a set of ethics we try very hard to instill in hunter safety courses and presentations. And one of the elements of those efforts is the concept of a "fair chase."

Now this may seem harsh, but I don't know any other way to put it—when does the chase stop being "hunting," and just becomes "killing?"

I'm not the only one that asks that question. Last year it came up in a complaint reported to our Turn In Poachers hotline. I stopped to see the caller, who willingly invited me out, and whose location offered a great view of a wetland split by a gravel road.

He gave me what every officer investigating a complaint wants—a detailed description of the alleged infraction and those involved. Every day about the same time, the same car with the same people cruised down the gravel road. Winter had covered the land with a thick layer of ice and a blanket of snow. Pheasants had no choice but to leave cover to feed at the edge of the gravel road. They were totally exposed. The occupants, the good samaritan complained, appeared to be shooting pheasants out the car window with a rifle. "There are usually three in the car, and you don't have your windows down this time of the year for nothing.

"I'm a hunter too," he said, "and that's not hunting." In fact, this guy was downright mad about it. "Those

pheasants are just trying to get something to eat." In his view, it wasn't fair.

I asked if he cared if I parked in his driveway to watch the area, and he told me that would be no problem.

So the next day, late in the afternoon, I drove to his house and parked. The problem was I could hardly see a thing. Fog had rolled in. You could only see a few yards through the thick soup. But, while it's not good for seeing, it's great for listening as the sound bounces off the fog and carries a good distance.

I sat and rolled down the window. It was December, and it was damp and cold. I couldn't run the engine or the heater as I had to listen. So, I sat listening to my teeth chatter. I thought about the issues. Shooting a rifle from the road, loaded gun in the car, maybe late shooting, this could go on and on. What were these guys thinking? And sadly, I and other area officers were getting all kinds of complaints about the same activity.

The sun was making its early descent, as it does that time of the year, and I was thinking of giving up when I heard off to my left the sound of tires, crunching on gravel. I lowered myself in my seat, until I thought, "Uh, you think you're hiding or something?" So I sat up again. The sound stopped. I could hear the sound of exhaust as the engine idled and echoed off the fog. It was like they were right next to me.

I knew they were stopped. And, I knew why they were stopped. Driving through the wetland I had been amazed at the number of pheasants at the edge of the road. Nothing was happening, and I was considering driving onto the road and forcing the issue.

Then "ping, ping." The sounds bounced off the fog





from the unmistakable sound of a .22 caliber rifle. A few minutes later, I hear the sounds of crunching gravel approaching. I hunkered down and peered over the steering wheel. Sure enough, it was the same car as described. Three occupants were inside and the windows were down. They passed slowly and didn't even give me a look. I waited, not wanting them to see where I was coming from.

The car slowly disappeared into the fog. I sat up and started my pickup. I suddenly realized I had a big problem. There was so much ice on the road I was sliding all over trying to catch up. I couldn't see them. I came to an intersection, and made a guess they might try to circle the section. So, I slid sideways around the corner. It turned out to be the right guess. I was soon behind the car and turned on my lights. They saw me, but weren't stopping. And it wasn't just because of the slick road; it was obvious the unloading of guns was taking place.

I touched my siren button, and they slid to a stop with me behind them. I didn't intend to break my neck or anything else running up to the car on the ice, so I made the best fast walk I could.

Two in the front seat and one in the back, and the front passenger had a shotgun mostly out of the case with shells littering the floor. In the back were more gun cases, which held a couple of .22 rifles. I made sure the rifles were unloaded which they were. I worked the action of the shotgun, and a live shell popped out the chamber.

"I thought it was unloaded," he said.

"Well, it isn't," I said, thinking, "Like I haven't heard that before."

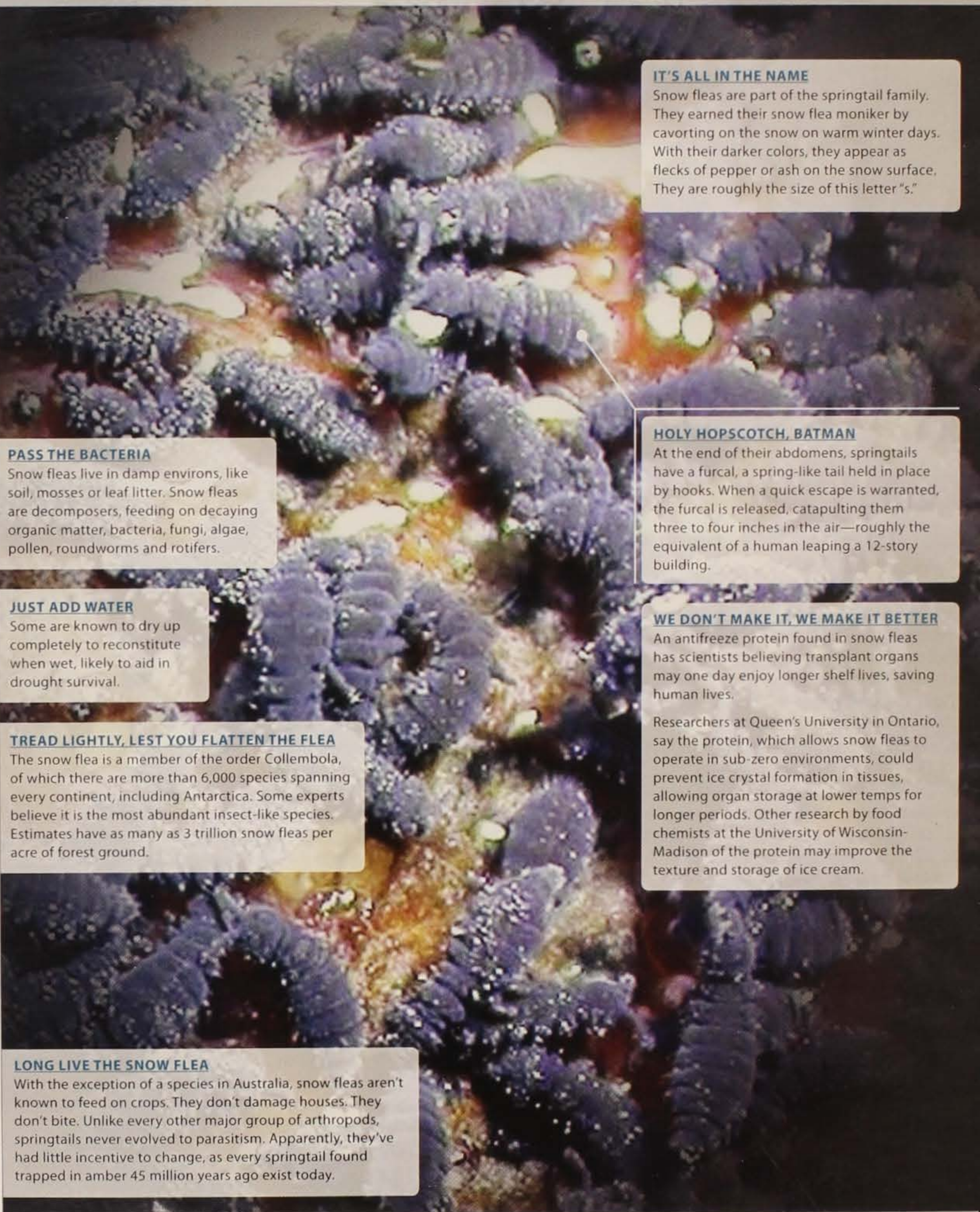
I asked to look in the trunk. Sure enough, in the trunk were fresh dead pheasants.

I looked at licenses and got out my ticket book. I have a rule I try to follow based on good advice given to me long ago. "Give someone a ticket, or give someone a lecture, but not both. In fact even if not giving a ticket, avoid the lecture." It's served me well, because as I said, I try to keep it impersonal and do my job, not go on a crusade. But as I handed it to the young man for him to sign I simply said, "You know, this isn't hunting. This is killing. There are people watching what you do." They thanked me and we both went our separate ways.

As I left I thought. These guys sat through a hunter safety course. From whom did they get the idea that the end justifies the means? What used to be an activity for survival is now a sport. Without a line drawn by ethics it ceases to be sport.

All of us are faced with choices—the pheasant flying up for an easy shot at 4:45 p.m. The turkey that struts up to you after hours while you're still watching from your stand, out of eyesight. The trophy deer on the other side of the fence on property you don't have permission to hunt. The choices come up all the time in the field. And, most likely, no one will probably be watching you. What choice will you make? 🐾

## SNOW FLEAS (*Hypogastrura nivicola*)



### IT'S ALL IN THE NAME

Snow fleas are part of the springtail family. They earned their snow flea moniker by cavorting on the snow on warm winter days. With their darker colors, they appear as flecks of pepper or ash on the snow surface. They are roughly the size of this letter "s."

### PASS THE BACTERIA

Snow fleas live in damp environs, like soil, mosses or leaf litter. Snow fleas are decomposers, feeding on decaying organic matter, bacteria, fungi, algae, pollen, roundworms and rotifers.

### JUST ADD WATER

Some are known to dry up completely to reconstitute when wet, likely to aid in drought survival.

### TREAD LIGHTLY, LEST YOU FLATTEN THE FLEA

The snow flea is a member of the order Collembola, of which there are more than 6,000 species spanning every continent, including Antarctica. Some experts believe it is the most abundant insect-like species. Estimates have as many as 3 trillion snow fleas per acre of forest ground.

### HOLY HOPSCOTCH, BATMAN

At the end of their abdomens, springtails have a furcal, a spring-like tail held in place by hooks. When a quick escape is warranted, the furcal is released, catapulting them three to four inches in the air—roughly the equivalent of a human leaping a 12-story building.

### WE DON'T MAKE IT, WE MAKE IT BETTER

An antifreeze protein found in snow fleas has scientists believing transplant organs may one day enjoy longer shelf lives, saving human lives.

Researchers at Queen's University in Ontario, say the protein, which allows snow fleas to operate in sub-zero environments, could prevent ice crystal formation in tissues, allowing organ storage at lower temps for longer periods. Other research by food chemists at the University of Wisconsin-Madison of the protein may improve the texture and storage of ice cream.

### LONG LIVE THE SNOW FLEA

With the exception of a species in Australia, snow fleas aren't known to feed on crops. They don't damage houses. They don't bite. Unlike every other major group of arthropods, springtails never evolved to parasitism. Apparently, they've had little incentive to change, as every springtail found trapped in amber 45 million years ago exist today.

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