

MARCH / APRIL 2011

IOWA OUTDOORS

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IN THIS ISSUE:

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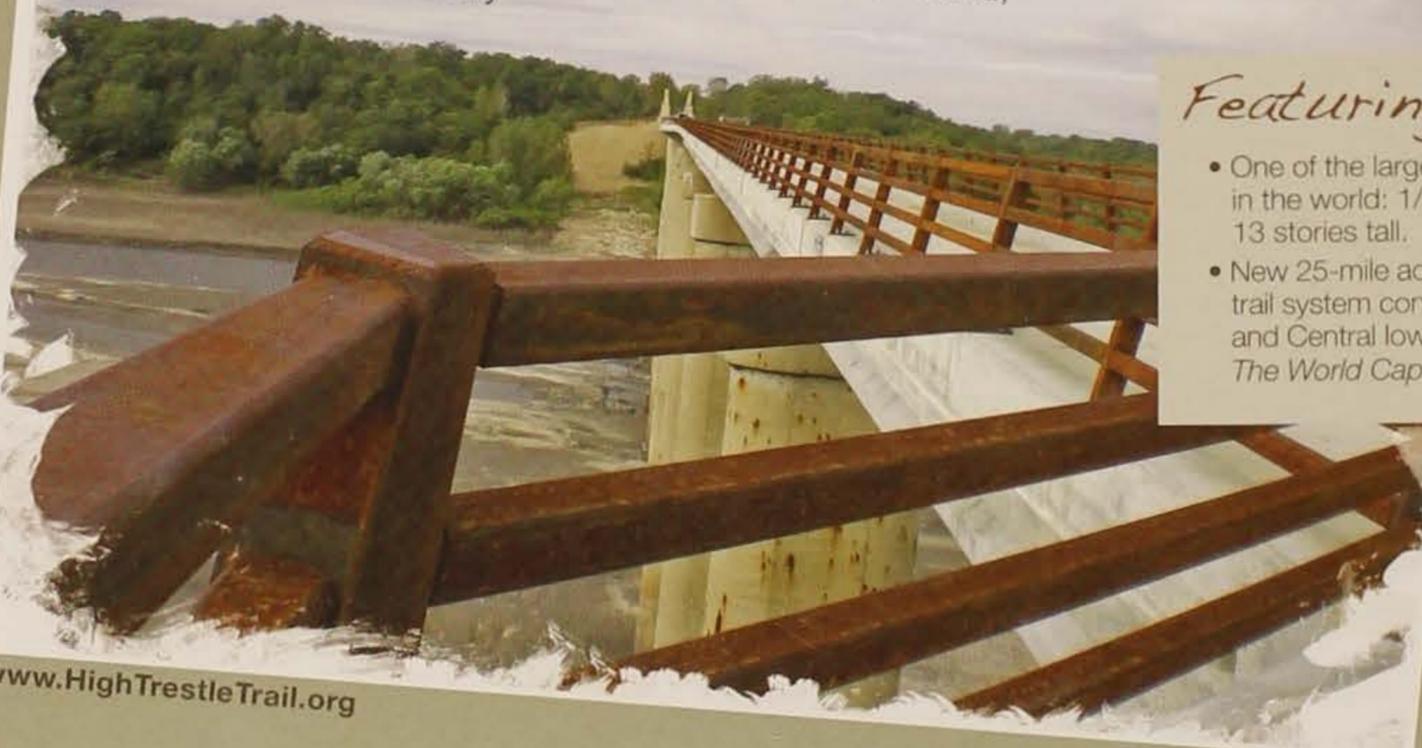
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Contributors



NANCY THOMPSON of Ames has been painting and drawing for more than 25 years. A major portion of her work is devoted to Iowa's landscape and parks. She earned a bachelor of fine arts degree from Iowa State University. Her work has received many awards and she regularly submits art to regional and national juried shows. See her work at The Octagon Center for the Arts in Ames and the Hudson River Gallery and Frame Company in Iowa City or at nancythompson.org.



ERIC HERMANN, a Des Moines-based designer and photographer, recently moved back to his home state after 13 years in Atlanta, Ga. He really missed Iowa winters and sweet corn, and is now enjoying both with his wife in the Drake neighborhood. See more of his work at www.ericjhermann.com.



JEN WILSON is a travel and features writer based in Des Moines. Her work appears in *National Geographic Traveler*, *Frommer's Budget Travel*, *Midwest Living* and *Esquire*. She spent 2009 in Europe for her upcoming book, *Touching Up My Roots*, available in book stores in May. Follow her journey at www.touchingupmyroots.com.

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.

EDITORIAL MISSION

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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STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOE WILKINSON

ABOUT THIS PHOTO

Growing up in Coon Rapids, artist Nancy Thompson always held an appreciation for her home state and its natural beauty. Now she mixes that love with another lifelong passion—painting—in her “Unexpected Vistas” series. “My goal is just to capture the beauty of the state parks,” Thompson explains. “People don’t think of these places when they picture Iowa, they think of agriculture and everything that comes with it. They don’t realize what the state has to offer.”





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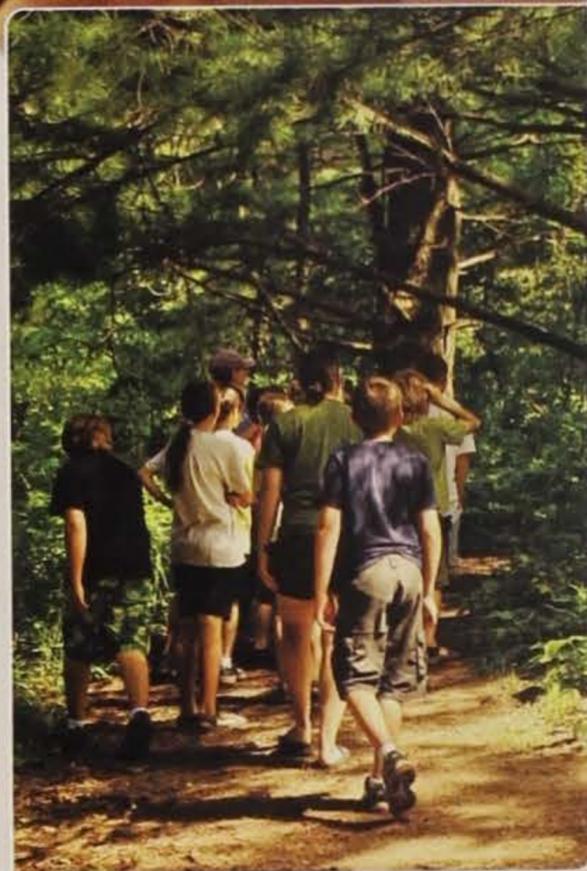
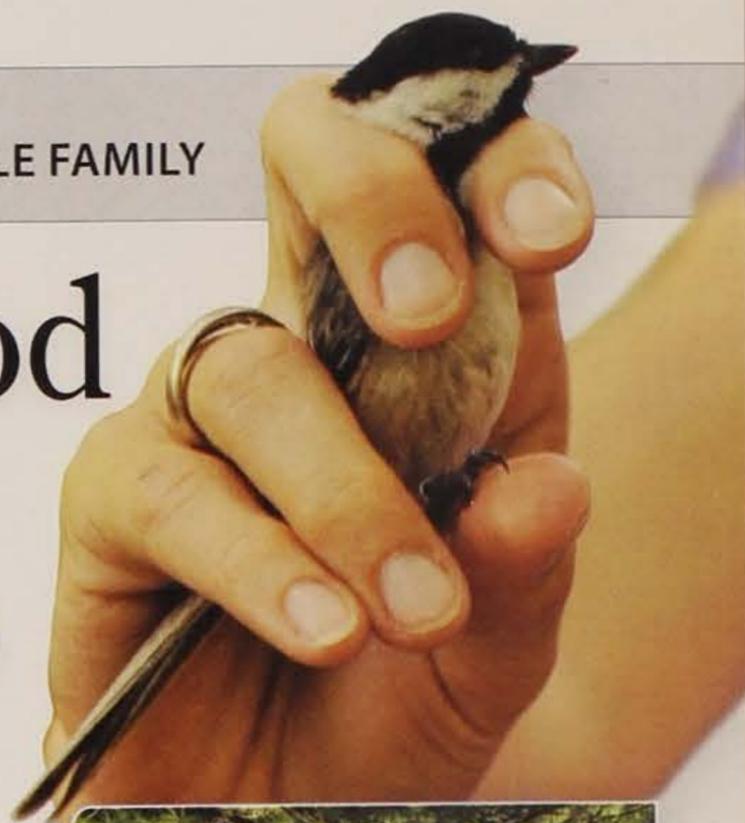
ABOUT THE COVER AND THIS PHOTO

Des Moines freelance photographer Eric Hermann captured this image while shadowing travel writer Jen Wilson on her trek through Taylor County. Sampling the offerings of Lake of Three Fires State Park and the sleepy community of Bedford along the way, the team ended the day gathered around a crackling campfire.

ACTIVITIES, TIPS AND EVENTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

Make Childhood Memories at Summer Camp

Kids Learn While Having Fun at University of Iowa and DNR Camps



The sun peeks through the trees at McBride Nature Area, casting shadows on the ground and lighting up the faces of a group of eager children. They sit in a semi-circle waiting not-so-patiently for their turn. What might that turn be? A video game? The TV remote? Neither. They are waiting to hold a wild bird in their hands, many for the first time.

Part of this day is spent learning about bird banding, one of the many activities kids get to experience through the Iowa Wildlife Camps. The children assist camp coordinator Meredith Caskey with setting up a mist net. Now, inches from their faces, are two recently banded chickadees.

Iowa Wildlife Camps through the University of Iowa Recreational Services offers camps for kids in kindergarten through ninth grade. Since its inception

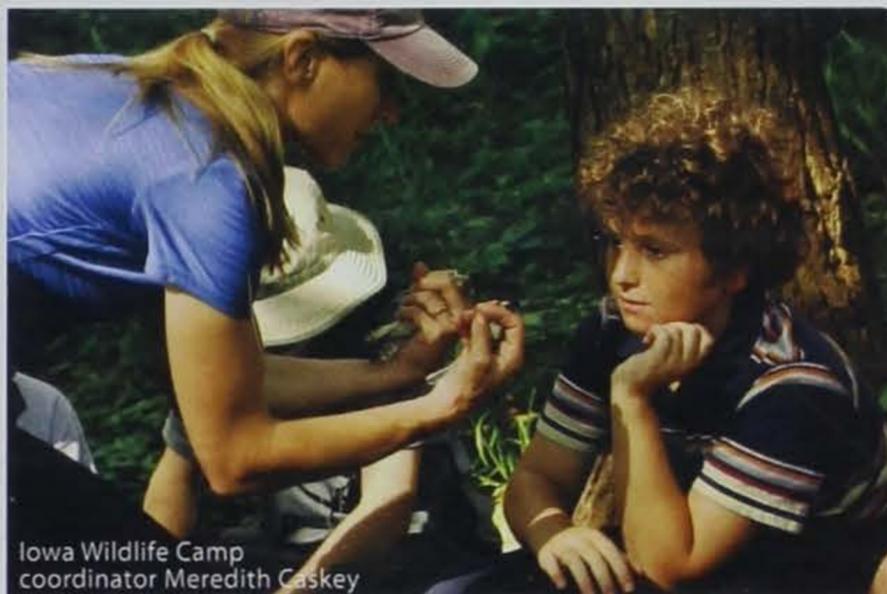
in 1985, the camp has grown from a single-day camp with fewer than 100 campers to 10 different day camp programs that service nearly 1,200 a summer.

Caskey, an 11-year veteran with the wildlife camps, says they offer a unique experience other day camps do not. "We not only provide the kids with fun, recreational activities but we also teach them about the outdoors and the environment," she says.

Campers participate in activities such as canoeing, shelter building, orienteering, outdoor cooking and hiking. Caskey says campers prefer the activities they have never done before, such as the bird banding or the orienteering. "We try to make the orienteering like a treasure hunt," she says. "We hide little items in the woods and teach them how to use GPS and a compass to find them."

Get Kids Involved

Camp registration begins mid-March. Camp prices vary depending upon activity and age groups and range from \$80 to more than \$200, but often qualify for child care tax credits. Learn more about the Iowa Wildlife Camps at <http://recserv.uiowa.edu> and click on youth programs or call 319-384-4720.



Iowa Wildlife Camp coordinator Meredith Caskey



Today, however, bird banding is all that is needed to captivate the group of campers surrounding Caskey. They watch intently as she measures the chickadee for the band that will go above its foot. "This band allows us to learn so much about the bird," Caskey says with a smile, announcing that she has a surprise. "We get to hold the bird?" a girl asks, her eyes widening. Caskey walks child to child allowing them to gently pet and hold the bird. After everyone gets a turn, she holds her arm skyward and opens her hand. The bird flutters its wings for a split second, then takes flight.

"That is my favorite part of my job," she says. "Watching the satisfaction these campers get is just great." However, Caskey's ultimate camp goal is what she calls the three As: awareness, appreciation and action.

"Awareness leads to appreciation. Appreciation leads to action," she says. "When we take care of wild places we become more aware of what the environment provides us. If we take care of our environment, we are taking care of ourselves."

DNR OUTDOOR CAMPS

The DNR runs camps including Outdoor Journey for Girls (OJ), and Hunting and Conservation Camp for Boys (HACC) held at the Springbrook Conservation Education Center in Guthrie Center. These are three-day camps with two nights spent in park dormitories. One OJ camp is also held at Hickory Hills near Dysart. Costs are typically funded by scholarships from Pheasants Forever and Women in Natural Resources. Registrations begin in late January. The DNR also coordinates the Youth Hunter Education Challenge (YHEC) held near Indianola. Learn more at www.iowadnr.gov/camps.html.

HACC introduces 12 to 15-year-old young men to the outdoors through hands-on experiences in a positive and supportive environment. Held June 22 to 24 and July 27 to 29. Call 641-747-8383 to register.

Outdoor Journey introduces outdoor skills to girls ages 12 to 15 in a supportive, learning environment held June 15 to 17 and August 3 to 5 at Springbrook and one camp held July 12 to 14 at Hickory Hills near Dysart. To register, contact dawn.santamaria@dnr.iowa.gov or 515-281-7828.

YHEC is for boys and girls ages 12 to 18 that have passed a hunter education course and are Iowa residents. Events include archery; muzzleloading rifle, shotgun and small-bore rifle shooting, wildlife identification, orienteering, trail safety and written exam. Held June 10 to 12 at Wesley Woods Camp near Indianola. To register, call 515-281-7828.

Get Your Green Thumb

Two New Books to Help You Restore America's Lost Ecosystem

Restore, Rejuvenate and Renew

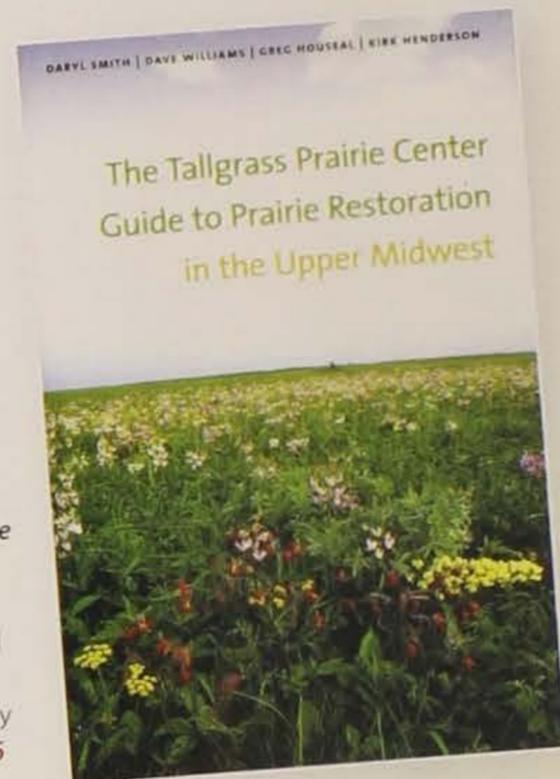
Join the trend in returning America's most destroyed ecosystem—the tallgrass prairie—to your yard, school, pasture or roadside using *The Tallgrass Prairie Center Guide to Prairie Restoration in the Upper Midwest*. The comprehensive manual is an essential companion for anyone interested in planning or maintaining all types of prairie restorations and reconstructions.

From teachers and landowners to prairie enthusiasts and professional conservation managers, all will find this book insightful, practical and inspiring. Focusing on conservation plantings, prairie recovery, native landscaping at homes, roadside plantings and pasture renovations, the authors of this authoritative guide—who collectively have more than a hundred years of experience—have created a manual that brings together everything one needs to know.

From preparing a site to seed sources, planting to seed harvesting, propagation to transplanting and steps to restore degraded prairie remnants, this guide also includes use of prescribed fire and other techniques to restore lands through text, photos, drawings, maps, charts and tables.

GET A COPY

The Tallgrass Prairie Center Guide to Prairie Restoration in the Upper Midwest by Daryl Smith, Dave Williams, Greg Houseal and Kirk Henderson is available at bookstores or from the University of Iowa Press at **1-800-621-2736** or uiowapress.org. 342 pages. 98 photos. \$27.50 paperback. ISBN 1-58729-916-X



Unlock the Secrets of Seedling Identification

Get rooted in this year's growing season by sprouting new skills to identify native prairie seedlings and impress your hiking friends by sharing insight into the depth and breadth of native forbs and prairie grasses.

It's one thing to name mature flowering plants and prairie grasses when in bloom or at full height, but to do so when the plants are at an early growth stage and seemingly nondescript—well that is pure magic to the uninitiated.

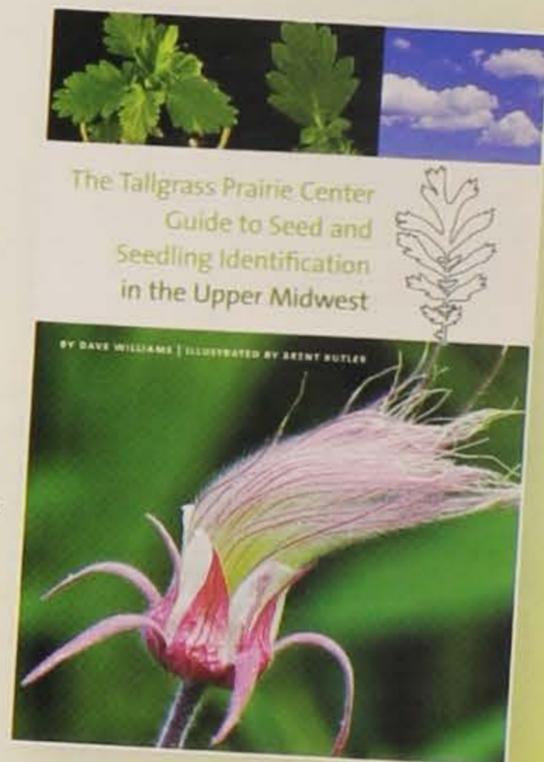
And plant enthusiasts can do it thanks to the recent release of *The Tallgrass Prairie Center Guide to Seed and Seedling Identification in the Upper Midwest*, a lavishly illustrated guide to help everyone from urban gardeners to grassland managers properly identify and germinate 72 species of tallgrass wildflowers and grasses. The book inspires and aids those desiring to plant their landscape with tallgrass prairie seeds or live plants.

Identifying seedlings is achieved by using the key in the book to narrow down choices until the correct species is found, such as rolling a stem between your fingers or using a hand lens for certain details. Then you'll be guided through step-by-step choices with aid of photos and drawings.

Author Dave Williams is a program manager for the Prairie Institute at the Tallgrass Prairie Center at the University of Northern Iowa and has been actively engaged in prairie restoration and reconstruction since 1989. Producing the book was a painstaking process, requiring growing plants in a greenhouse setting to obtain all of the several hundred photos of plants close in size to field-grown seedlings.

GET A COPY

The Tallgrass Prairie Center Guide to Seed and Seedling Identification in the Upper Midwest is available at bookstores or from the University of Iowa Press at **1-800-621-2736** or uiowapress.org. 132 pages, 329 color photos, 43 drawings; \$14.00 paperback. ISBN 1-58729-902-X



Prairie Rescue

Lace up your boots, dig out your work gloves and head to the Prairie Resource Center for a unique volunteer opportunity as educational as it is rewarding.

Located 30 miles northwest of Ames near the community of Lehigh, the DNR's Prairie Resource Center is the answer to public land managers' native prairie seed needs. The center provides seed to DNR land managers for prairie restoration on new and existing state public lands, which in a given year, can be upwards of 2,000 acres. More than 100 species of native wildflowers, grasses and sedges are grown at the center, providing the seeds for future plantings. Since 2003, the center has produced enough seed to cover 12,500 acres, the equivalent of more than 19.5 square miles.

To keep up with production and demand, the center is looking for volunteers to transplant seedlings and harvest

seed. Opportunities abound, with the most help needed between March and October. March and April is prairie seedling transplanting in the greenhouse. May and June has volunteers replanting seedlings in production rows outside. July through October is harvest time.

"With more than 100 different varieties of seed produced, you can imagine the hours that go into this endeavor. We are always looking for help, whether it's individuals, school classes, garden clubs or service groups," says Bill Johnson, who manages the center. "If it's not planting or harvesting, it might be clearing undesirable trees and vegetation. And volunteering in the outdoors is great exercise, so why pay a fitness center?"

For more information on the Prairie Resource Center, go to www.iowadnr.gov, click on "Hunting and Wildlife," then "Prairie Resource Center," or call 515-543-8319.

See Your Parks Like Never Before

Become a Campground Host for Free Stays and Relish Watching the Park Change Over the Season

Live the life of a campground host at one of more than 50 state parks and enjoy a season of free camping in exchange for assisting park staff and welcoming other campers.

Typically outgoing camping enthusiasts themselves, hosts help park staff and are available to answer questions about park features as well as camping rules and etiquette. Volunteers may perform light maintenance, help keep the park clean and advise staff of park needs or visitors' comments. No matter the tasks, all walk away with deeper connections to the park and forge friendships with other nature buffs.

"Each park is different, and each has unique needs, so assigned tasks depend on the park and the willingness and ability of our volunteers," says program director Linda King. "If you like to camp, love the outdoors and enjoy helping people, this is a perfect fit," she says. "Without them, we would not be able to offer many of the services our visitors enjoy."

In return, hosts get to camp for free, staying in a centrally located campsite that offers optimum interaction with visitors.

As important as the work is to park staff, volunteers note the job has greater rewards, beyond a free campsite.

"It helps out the park, and we have met so many friends that come back," says Eddy Dirks, who along with wife Jane, have served as campground hosts at Pleasant Creek State Park for the last six years. "We enjoy the heck out of it."

Minimum requirements include the ability to stay at least four sequential weekends from Friday afternoon to Sunday night, although many stay the entire camping season to enjoy solitude and observe the ebb and flow of nature over an extended stay.

For a list of campgrounds in need of hosts, check out volunteer.iowadnr.gov or call Linda King at 515-242-5074.

BY JUPITER, PARKS: A MIRACLE DRUG

BY TIM LANE



Given their health benefits, I would like to suggest a new name for parks. Let's call them...P...A...R...X. For the record, the R in the prescriptions symbol comes from the Latin word for recipe and the X formed on the leg of the R forms a Roman symbol for the god Jupiter. In other words, Medieval pharmacists were saying "take this and pray the gods grant you a cure."

When I first became involved in Iowa's effort to promote physical activity, there were studies on the health benefits of activity, parks and chronic disease. But compared to today, we were in the Dark Ages. We now have studies of studies, where all the details provide greater validation and more precise data. One mega analysis of 19 studies following 1.5 million participants over five to 28 years found that each five-unit increase in body mass index (BMI) carried a 31 percent increase in risk of death. It showed benefits to delaying obesity onset to after age 50.

A recent study in *The Journal of Lipid Research* followed 9,000 adults over nine years was the first to link exercise with quantifiable decreases in LDL or bad cholesterol. And it wasn't just that as little as one hour a week of moderate activity lowered cholesterol, but that it was very quantifiable. The University of North Carolina study found that each hour of moderate exercise or half-hour of vigorous activity resulted in a decrease of almost 4 milligrams per deciliter of bad cholesterol in Caucasian women, and more than 10 milligrams for African-American women. For women past menopause, the benefits were *greater*.

Guys...it was a women's thing. Our gender didn't seem to have the same benefits. Regardless, be mindful of all the other benefits of activity, and inviting the women in your life out for a walk outdoors is a noble thing to do.

Researchers can confidently say aerobic and resistance training benefits those with type 2 diabetes by lowering their blood glucose level. This is good news about diabetes, good news about heart disease and good news for both men and women. Side note to women...after those guys ask you for a walk, you can trump that with a suggestion that you do resistance training the next day.

So get outside to exercise and realize that there is *strong evidence* exercise lowers the risk of early death, coronary heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, adverse blood lipid profile, type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, colon and breast cancer and weight gain. It also improves cardio-respiratory and muscular fitness, reduces depression and provides better cognitive function. There is *moderate evidence* for lower risk of hip fracture, lung cancer and better weight maintenance and bone density and improved sleep quality. Using parks for outdoor physical activities really is a prescription for better health, by Jupiter!

Tim Lane is a nationally recognized authority on public health and physical activity. Last summer he and his buddies rode bicycles across Iowa, river to river, in 21 straight hours.

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.

ETHAN, AGE 5, IN DUBUQUE ASKS:

Do raccoons really wash their food?

If you and your child have ever viewed a raccoon preparing to eat near a water source, you've probably noticed the raccoon dunking and rubbing its food as if it was washing it. In fact, its scientific name, *Procyon lotor*, literally means "washing bear."

The washing ritual is one of the most puzzling things raccoons do. While it's often thought raccoons wash their food before eating because of cleanliness, that's unlikely because raccoons don't wash everything before they eat it. In fact, raccoons sometimes don't wash the dirtiest of food items. For example, they won't wash earthworms, which are extremely dirty.

Research indicates raccoons do not wash their food intentionally. It was once believed raccoons wetted their food because they lacked salivary glands and moistened their food first before eating it to aid swallowing. This myth was debunked, since raccoons do, in fact, produce ample saliva for chewing and swallowing.

Research continues, but as for now the only ones that know why raccoons sometimes dunk their food in water is the raccoons. Perhaps when explaining this phenomenon to your child you might use the analogy that raccoons sometimes dunk their food much like we sometimes dunk our cookies into our milk, and like the raccoon, if milk is not available for dunking, we eat our cookies anyway.



It's Slime Time

Children of the '80s no doubt remember that ooey, gooey nuclear-green liquid that is slime, and some may even remember the popular Nickelodeon show *You Can't Do That On Television* that brought the sticky stuff to national attention. Reintroduced a few years ago, slime is once again on toy store shelves, proof that kids still revisit the most rudimentary, traditional forms of fun—grossing each other out.

Bring some of the fun into your home by making your own. It's easy to make, slightly educational (a science lesson in how the simple ingredients instantly turn to goo, along with the use of measurements) and it's cheap. Send the kids outside and let their imaginations wander as they select colors and contemplate the various "uses" it has. They'll spend hours making, molding and manipulating. It keeps kids occupied at the campsite. The final product has Silly Putty consistency, so clean-up is a breeze. Store the slime in a resealable bag. If it dries, add a little water or make a new batch.

EQUIPMENT

- Measuring cup
- Small bowl
- Food coloring
- White glue
(not washable glue)
- Borax
- Water
- Paper towels



DIRECTIONS

Mix well equal parts glue and water in measuring cup (1/4 cup each makes a nice batch). Add food coloring to desired darkness. In bowl, mix roughly 1 tablespoon borax with 1 cup water. If the borax completely dissolves, add a little more until it doesn't. Pour glue mixture into borax solution. Instant goo!

WHY IT WORKS

Polymers are chains of molecules. Adding borax changes the glue polymer (polyvinyl acetate). Borax bonds polyvinyl acetate molecules together in a network so they can't flow like they did as glue. Now the slime can stretch and isn't sticky like glue.



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

FIRE STARTER

Get your campfire going in even the worst conditions with this cheap fire starter made from everyday bathroom items. Simply take cotton balls, coat in petroleum jelly and be on your way to quick, reliable flame. Store in film canisters, resealable plastic bags or lidded, plastic bowls. Or how about reusing those worn-out webbed belts or straps and used candles? Cut belts or straps into 3-inch strips, dip in melted candle wax and store. When it's time to bring the heat, place two to three cotton balls or one strap underneath tinder and light.



Natural Scent Cover

Why waste money on expensive scent covers for your clothes when there is a free, natural alternative. The trick works great for deer hunters and wildlife photographers who need to mask human odor. Simply store hunting clothes in a plastic tote with fresh cut evergreen boughs or inexpensive cedar chips. Place boughs or chips in a mesh bag—such as an onion sack or potato sack—to minimize the mess from dropped needles and wood chips. Evergreen boughs also work well as an emergency scent cover while in the field.



How To Spool Line



Frustrated with spinning reel line coming off in a spiraled mess? Try this simple trick to ensure fishing line is loaded properly. Thread the line through the rod guides, under the bail and double wrap the line around the spool. Cinch with an arbor or double overhand knot. **THE SECRET?** When you cast a spinning reel, the line comes off clockwise. Having the line come off the feeder spool counter-clockwise helps tame line twist. **ANOTHER SECRET?** Apply moderate tension as you re-spool to ensure a tight wind. Enlist the help of a friend, or if going solo, run the line through the pages of a thick phone book. Fill the reel spool within $\frac{1}{8}$ th to $\frac{3}{16}$ ths of an inch from the edge. Any more or any less will affect performance.

TREE MOSS WILL POINT ME IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Moss definitely grows on the north side of trees, therefore hikers and others who have lost their way assume that in a pinch, they can use the orientation of tree moss as a make-shift compass. However, what these outdoor adventurers do not take into consideration is that moss also grows on the south, east and west sides too.

The determining factor depends on where the tree is located. Moss needs shady, moist areas to thrive. So depending on where the tree is located in relation to the sun and whether the area supports prolonged moist conditions helps determine where moss will grow. If a tree is sufficiently shaded, moss may grow on all sides.

The orientation of moss on a tree is not a valid indicator in determining your direction, but there are other reliable directional indicators that may assist you if you lose your way. For example, the sun's position with relation to the time of day is a reliable indicator because the sun always rises in the east in the morning and always sets in the west in the evening.

In addition, attaining the ability to identify prominent constellations such as the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper, as well as being able to identify the North Star—Polaris (which unlike moss is always located due north)—can assist hikers, bikers and motorists alike in determining their direction in the unlikely event that they become lost. But moss solely as a navigational tool? Don't bet your GPS on it.

For a DNR source on moss check with John Pearson at 515-281-3891

MYTH?
OR
TRUTH?

Ask The Expert Dave in Plainfield asks: "Will stocking reverse our pheasant decline?"

BY SHELENE CODNER

The theory that stocking pheasants in Iowa will increase populations has been flying around for several years. We've decided to take point on this ring-necked rumor and have bird-dogged whether this idea will fly or whether we can bag this one as a myth.

Proponents contend that when pheasants were introduced to Iowa in the early 1900s populations subsequently increased, concluding that if stocking was successful then it will be now, too. But Iowa's landscape was much different then. Farming was different and native prairie was prevalent, creating habitat areas well-suited for feeding, nesting and breeding. Today, due to reduced habitat, the survival of pen-raised birds released into the wild is low.

On average, pheasants released in the spring, summer and fall have survival rates of less than 25 percent, and the percentage of pheasants that survive when released during the winter months can be as low as 5 percent. Contrary to popular belief, hunting is not to blame for high bird mortality.

The primary cause is the lack of suitable habitat, recent harsh winters and wet springs.

The idea of stocking pheasants to increase the population does not fly, so we bag this one as a myth. There are many resources available to help create suitable habitats to support pheasant populations. Two include www.iowadnr.gov and www.pheasantsforever.org.



GOT A QUESTION? Send to: ASKTHEEXPERTS@DNR.IOWA.GOV

PHEASANT PHOTO BY CLAY SMITH; TREE PHOTO BY ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

Lost In Iowa

BY JENNIFER WILSON PHOTOS BY ERIC HERMANN

BELOW: Ten miles of lush park trails are popular for day hikes. RIGHT: A restored watershed for better angling, sandy beach and playground provides fun for all. Members of the Bedford Saddle Club get a start on the evening's meeting by building a fire. Earlier fire makers included the Potawatomi, known as the "Fire Nation," who once roamed the area with two other tribes to form a loose confederacy known as "Three Fires." The tribes held a council to join forces for protection against invading tribes. Smoke from three fires signaled the meeting location. The fires kept burning as long as the three were joined. If any of the fires went out it meant the tribes had left the area.



The Quietest Park

And Why you Should Put Lake of Three Fires State Park in Southwest Iowa on Your Map.

Tender shoots rise from the vast croplands of southwest Iowa. Last year's corn stubble has gone gray over a long winter in Taylor County, 100 miles southeast of Council Bluffs. Windmills and weather vanes stand rusting, but working, next to broke-down barns. They're lonesome relics of life as it once was in Iowa.

For weekenders shaking off winter's sleepy mantle and looking for an old-fashioned outdoors good time, Taylor County's Lake of Three Fires State Park is where to go—a 694-acre park named for the council fires of three Native American tribes that once shared this land.

Lake of Three Fires is one of the most underused in the state parks system. It feels like you have it all to yourself. But if improvements continue to work out as well as they have been, then that's about to change.

Workers are shoring up its 10.5 miles of trails.

A lake renovation in 2004 (*see sidebar on page 22*) is just beginning to bear serious bobber-friendly benefits. With nothing more than a rod and a lightly outfitted tackle box, you can easily catch your first fish of the season.

The park has 126 campsites, 38 with electrical hookups, located among a pretty grove of old-growth oak, walnut and ash—some more than a century old. Six *Little House on the Prairie*-style cabins overlook the lake.

Road bikers especially reap the benefits of this forgotten



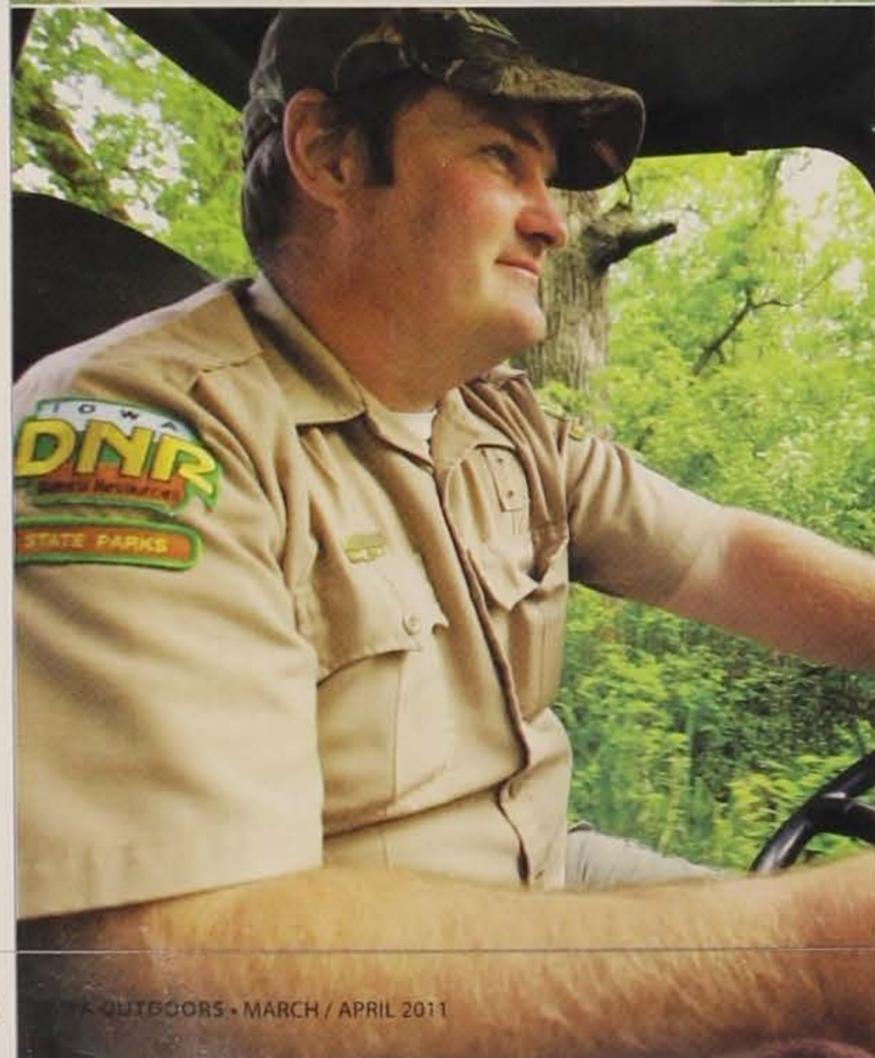
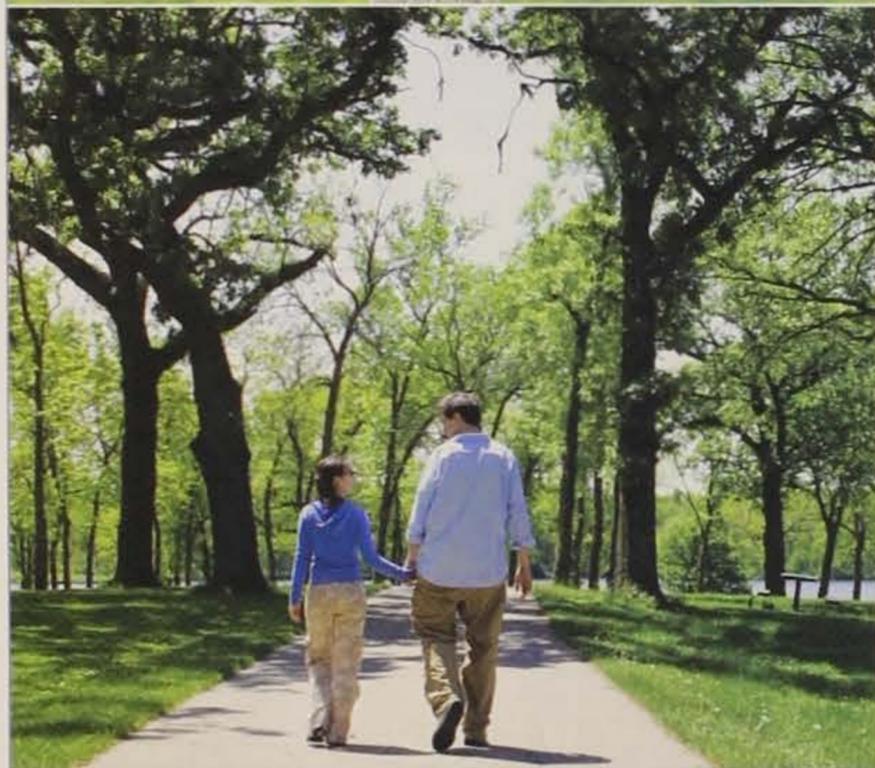
Lost In Iowa

A photograph of a rustic wooden cabin with a gabled roof. The cabin has a window with a dark shutter on the left and a door with a glass panel on the right. In front of the cabin is a green metal picnic table with two benches. The cabin is surrounded by lush green trees and grass. The scene is set in a park-like environment.

Nestled along the lake, six park cabins make a fine place for economical family vacations and a spot for easy morning fishing with panfish for breakfast. They have heat/AC and are equipped with a refrigerator, microwave and cooktop stove. Renters must provide bedding, towels and cooking and eating utensils. The cabins are available year-round for reservations. Reserve online at reserveiaparks.com or 1-877-427-2757.



Lost In Iowa



land as they skim along quiet county blacktops in a place that remembers a life of easy fishing, homemade food and long walks on paths lined with wild berries.

NATURAL PATH

"It might be forgotten, but it's pretty diverse," says Doug Sleep, Lake of Three Fires park manager since 2001. He's navigating the 6.5-mile lake loop trail in his four-wheeler.

Sleep says the Civilian Conservation Corps built this park during a five-year period from 1935. The trail hugs an 85-acre lake where grandparents help grandkids reel in bluegill after bluegill.

Sleep is a former college third baseman who looks more like a sunburned coach these days. It's a one-man park. He's the guy running the DVD projector on the handmade movie screen on Saturday nights in the campground, keeping an eye on things.

Lake of Three Fires is remarkably quiet even after winter subsides, he says. Aside from Labor and Memorial days, when the park turns into a small city, things stay mostly peaceful here, even when kids romp on the playground or toss a round of Frisbee golf.

Sleep mows, too, and he can direct you to the prettiest patches of phlox, Dutchman's breeches, ear-leaved false foxglove and jack-in-the-pulpit. In spring, the redbuds bloom like crazy.

Americorps workers and the DNR trail crew will make big improvements this summer to sop up the mud in the trail bottoms. Leggy cathedrals of walnut shelter passers-by on the upland areas. If they get hungry, they can pluck wild strawberries, gooseberries or raspberries.

Sleep stops the four-wheeler and points a thick finger at a flash of polka dots. "Flicker," he says.

"If you're into birding, we've got all kinds," he says, ticking off yellow-rumped warbler, cedar waxwing, rose-breasted grosbeak, indigo bunting, orioles and bluebirds. Then he grins. "They wake me up every morning."

Sleep points out an area on the northwest side of the park that was farmed until the 1950s. Sleep burned it off to see natives such as butterfly milkweed return.

"Gentian's back," says Sleep, taking off his camouflage cap and running a hand over his wispy tight-cut baseball-guy hair. "Indian grass and big and little bluestem, too."

He shakes his head like he can't believe it.

"I've got old postcards where there weren't even trees on that hill."

He drives on. "Here's delphinium," he says, not even looking before calling out the stately patch of purple at the forest edge.

He's memorized the trail.

OLD-FASHIONED IOWA

"What's homemade here, Dottie?" Sleep asked earlier at lunch in the Junction Café, two miles south of Lake of Three Fires. "What didn't come off a truck?"



LEFT: Disc golf is popular at the park and wide trails make for easy hikes. Park manager Doug Sleep makes the rounds in his Gator. ABOVE: Yvette Zarod Hermann, Deb Davenport and Donna Eischeid saddle up for a sunset ride as the sky turns dusky. Davenport has ridden here since childhood.

Dottie, in high red bouffant (as it should be in a Naugahyde joint where old farmers drink coffee), looks at him like he's just done a back flip.

"All of it," Dottie chuffs, chucking him a menu.

Well, not every single thing on the Junction Café's menu is made by hand. But much of it is, including the tater tot casserole, raspberry fluff, cake for the "legendary strawberry shortcake," hot beef, biscuits, pies and Sunday's ham balls.

Homemade food is a big deal in Bedford. At The Eatery, situated on Bedford's Jesse-James-style red-brick Main Street, the buttermilk pie is the house special. The word "special" just doesn't do justice to owner Shirley Winemiller's warm, sweet custard atop flaky crust.

Her husband, Jim Winemiller, is director of the Taylor County Conservation Board. Winemiller talked about this old-fashioned piece of fading farm country. The 1900s farming practices once endangered the wildlife. He remembered when there were no deer or turkey. Few pheasants. Sparse waterfowl.

"Now we've got all of that," he said, thanks to the

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) that helped restore habitat. "We have so much wildlife here compared to 50 years ago," says Winemiller. "If you saw a deer when I was in high school, you got your name in the paper for reporting it."

Farming practices nearly ruined the lake, says Sleep. "Back then, we didn't have the technology—the knowledge—of how erosion happens."

It went from 25 feet deep to 12. "We lost close to 15 acres," Sleep says.

They dredged it in 2004. Now it's 20 feet deep with good water clarity. Siltation ponds provide habitat for wetland plants and animals and trap sediment. As Sleep zooms past on the four-wheeler, goslings follow their mama around one of them.

Sleep stops to visit with Harvey Ploeger. The 40-year employee of the Mount Ayr Wildlife Refuge comes to the park to catch crappie, bluegill, catfish and sometimes bass. Today, he's reeling them in on the jetty, parked on a lawn chair in a green blast jacket.

"They've done a lot of restoration work, as far as watershed," says Ploeger. "Everything's real lush right now."

Lost In Iowa

Lake of Three Fires underwent a large watershed and lake restoration in 2004. Here's why and how it's done:

- Sediment from farming practices and erosion settled into the lake. It had gone from 25 feet deep when it was created to 12 feet at its deepest point. The lake lost close to 15 acres.

- Dredging is a method of deepening lakes by scraping or removing solids from the bottom. It is only effective if steps are taken to simultaneously reduce sediments entering the lake as part of a larger project.

- A grinder was lowered into the lake from a floating barge which liquefied the muck at the bottom and pumped it out.

- The park built a 30-acre basin nearby for the sediment, now home to a few siltation ponds and wetlands that provide habitat for plants and animals and filter water entering the lake to keep it cleaner.

- Terraces and barriers were built to reduce gully erosion in areas close to the lake.

- The DNR drained the lake and killed rough fish like carp and gizzard shad, leaving the lake to fish that feed on sight and depend on clarity—generally better catches.

- Next the DNR built habitat structure for the fish, like downed cedar trees or more complicated terraces with gravel on top and big rip-rap on the sides.

- The lake was refilled.





LEFT: Yvette Zarod Hermann surveys the lake in the morning, looking for fishing spots. ABOVE AND RIGHT: Dottie serves the "legendary strawberry shortcake" at the Junction Cafe in Bedford. The brick-walled interior at The Eatery, also in Bedford, is known for its warm, sweet custard atop flaky crust. ABOVE AND BELOW: The recently renovated lake and improved watershed offer excellent fishing suitable for all ages. The lake has been giving up monster crappies up to 14 inches, along with slab-sized bluegills up to 9 inches.

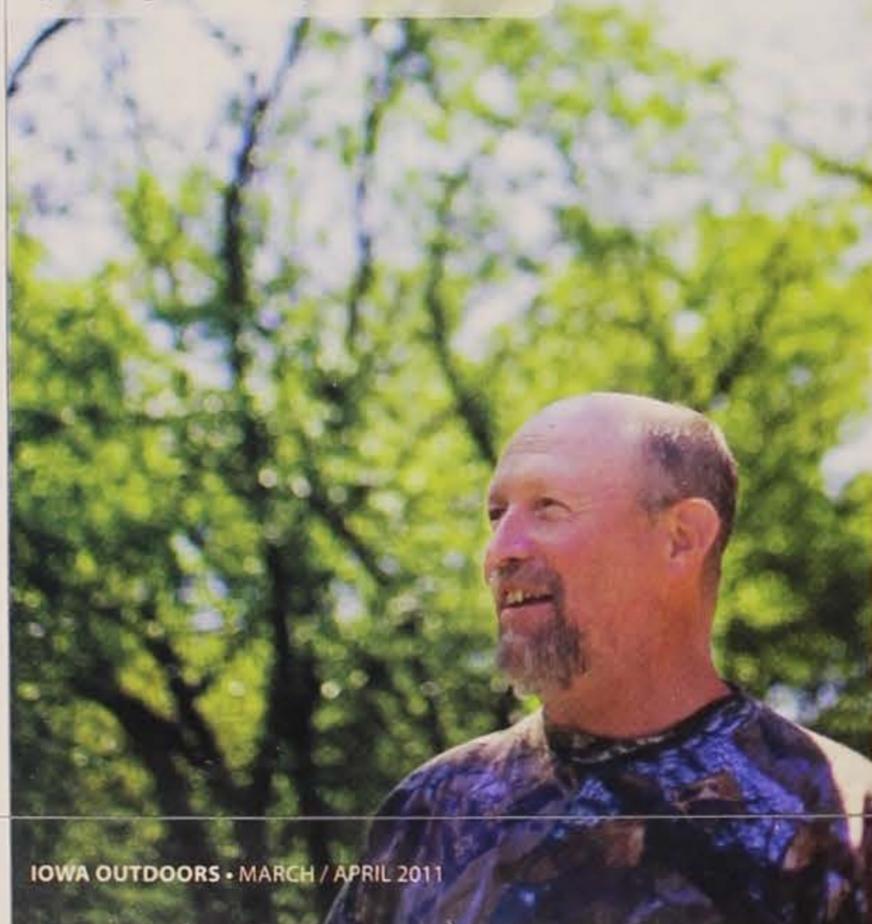


Lost In Iowa



Wildflowers in bloom make for a sweet hike on a postcard-perfect trail for Eric Hermann and Yvette Zarod Hermann of Des Moines.

Gary Morris, 59, of Fayetteville, Ark. emerges from the woods in camouflage-print shirt, pants and shoes. He's here for a prize long-beard turkey.



A PARK WITH HEART

The diversity and solitude of Taylor County works out well for hunters, says Sleep. "You can go pretty much anywhere in the United States and not see the deer population we have here."

He moves on to visit one of the cabins where a spring hunter is spending the week. Gary Morris, 59, of Fayetteville, Ark. emerges in camouflage-print shirt, pants and shoes. He's here for a prize long-beard.

"I come to Iowa because Iowa turkeys are much larger," he says. "They're in the neighborhood of high 20s or 30 pounds. That's what everyone's after—a large bird. I'm a taxidermist and that's the goal."

Morris built a new home and reserved a place in it for the turkey he intends to bag in Taylor County. "There is a reason I am here. It's to bag my turkey of a lifetime. And not a feather out of place, either. I can do that here."

Equestrians come to Lake of Three Fires State Park for the wide, rolling trail ride. The Bedford Saddle Club formed in 1953 to help turn it into a horse-friendly destination. Today, the east side of the park holds an equestrian campground with eight electric sites and a new flush toilet.

As Sleep's park tour draws to a close, he stops to check on the saddle club members, gathered around a campfire in early evening. They talk horses and good times on a trail where fox and wild turkey are occasional riding companions.

Deb Davenport, a rangy brunette in smarty-pants glasses, saddles up for a sunset ride. Davenport, 47, has ridden here since childhood. She and her good friend Donna Eischeid, 51, head out as the sky turns dusky.

Coyotes yip. The horses flush clusters of whitetail deer. A flooded-out plain of cottonwoods looks like a swamp.

Davenport remembered when the campground was just a mess of weeds. She and Eischeid pulled up two campers anyway, and spent several days with their horses, their girls, no electric and no water but a hydrant.

"We were brave," laughs Davenport.

Even then, says Eischeid, they knew this place was special.

"I just don't know if enough people realize what a nice park this is," says Eischeid.

They'll head back to the campfire soon, where hot dogs are finishing up on the grill. They'll get into the gooseberry pie and monkey bread and potato salad—all homemade, of course. Doug Sleep will call it a night early. The birds will be up before dawn, roaming the park. So will he.

Davenport speaks. "I grew up on this lake. We had our family reunions here. My husband and I got married here on one of the jetties," she says. She and Eischeid navigate the easy, sloping trail, passing woods and water and farmland with rusty barbed wire.

"My mom passed away here while she was camping. My youngest daughter also got married here."

The trail is smooth. They say it's good for a green-broke horse. It's a simple, easy path, and it's one of their favorite places on earth.

"This place is deep in my heart," Davenport says, heading toward the campfire burning near the lake, a council fire waiting for people to see it, and join in.

TRIP NOTES

Where to Eat?

The Junction Café. Gut-busting goodness, at the junction of highways 2 and 148 into Bedford. 712-523-2454 • rockindiamond.com/cafe.htm.

The Eatery. Come for lunch or dinner in this fun rehabbed building with a tin ceiling, and leave surprised and satisfied. At lunch, try the Rennington (loose meat, bacon and cheese) with a side such as cold three-bean salad. 712-523-2588.

What to Do?

More parkland. **Sands Timber Recreation Area**, with 235 acres and a 60-acre lake. The rest is timber, ideal for birding. 712-523-2852; mycountyparks.com.

Taylor County Museum. A formidable collection of clothing, medical supplies, beauty gadgets, military uniforms and much more. The 4-acre complex includes a rare round barn and 110-year-old log cabin. 712-523-2041.

Antique shopping. Main Street Bedford is known for antique shopping. It's hit or miss, but you can tell from a glance in the wide picture windows if shops have what you're looking for. It's on the National Register of Historic Places—so technically the whole thing is an antique.

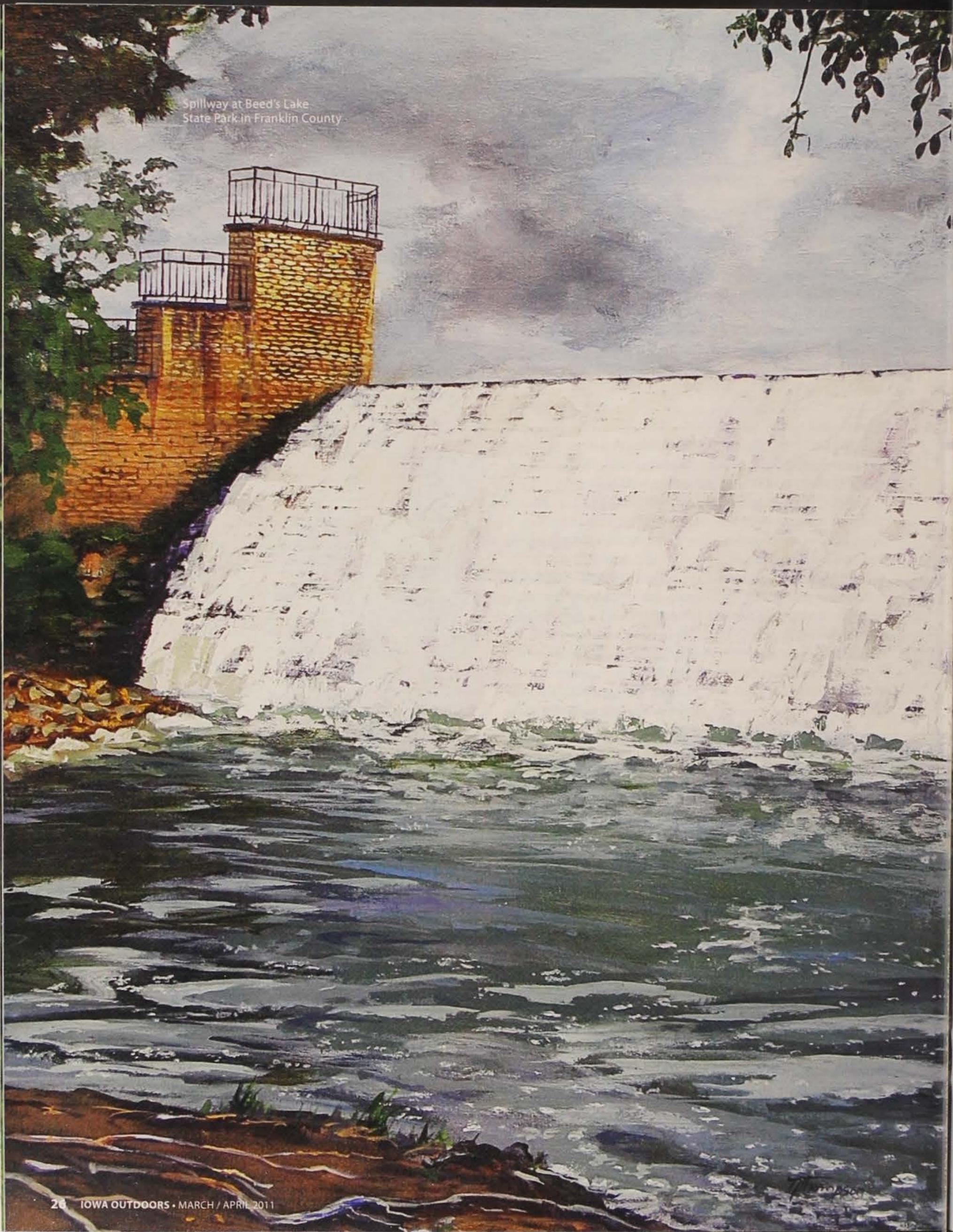
Bedford Building Supply. Get a head start on spring with reasonably priced garden supplies, hunting gear and fishing tackle on Main Street. 712-523-2075. 🐾



Members of the Bedford Saddle Club gather around the fire with park manager Doug Sleep.



Spillway at Beed's Lake
State Park in Franklin County



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All in the Artist's Scope

An Ames Woman's Quest to Paint Iowa's Parks

BY SHANE HALLENGREN PAINTINGS BY NANCY THOMPSON

A paint brush dances over the waiting canvas. The hand strikes in quick beats and alternates to wide, slow strokes in a bold parry-and-riposte between canvas and brush. The conversation between the two is punctuated by brief intermissions as the artist finds the correct combination of colors from her easel before redoubling her strike.

Quickly, Nancy Thompson recreates the drooping trees that frame the dramatic spillway at Beed's Lake State Park in Franklin County. Her painting captures the water which pours over the wall of layered limestone and into the dark pool below. Her practiced hand captures the steely-gray sky standing atop the 40-foot wall of falling water. Thompson skillfully recreates the powerful scene in miniature. Watching the adept artist at her craft gives insight to the level of effort put into such a work.

Before beginning, Thompson eagerly scoured the area surrounding the spillway, considering the angle and lighting offered by each vantage, before finally setting her easel on a soft bank across from the cascading water. This is the decided spot that will create the most visually



pleasing experience for an audience. This angle will give the most striking view of the water falling down the layered limestone, with the water framed by an impressive tiered support wall. Her experience, eye for detail and familiarity with the compositional demands of her work

are vividly obvious in her every action.

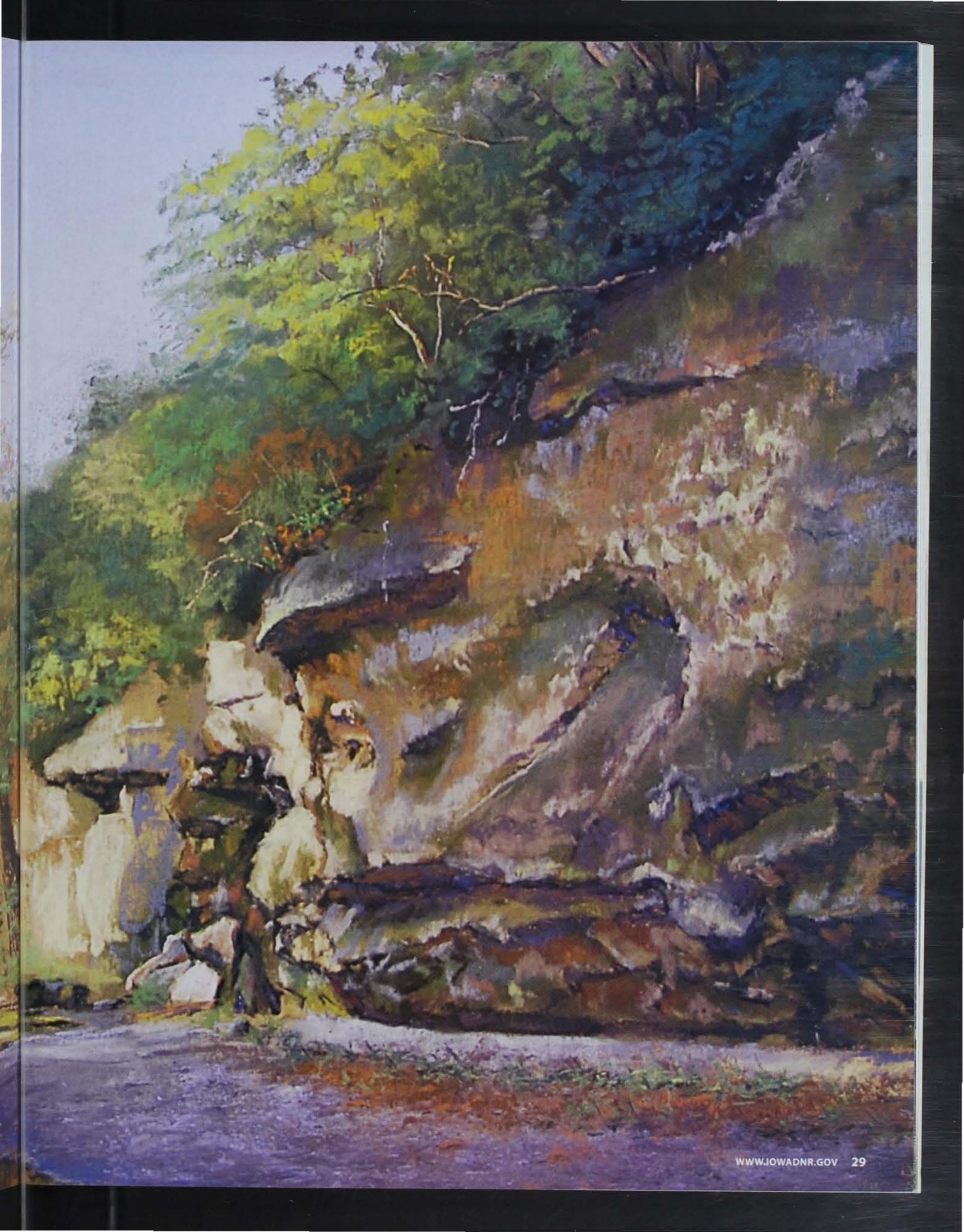
"It's all about composition," Thompson explains, working over the constant rumble of falling water. "You want to create more interest for as long as possible. You have to guide a viewer into the piece. Everything is designed to create a pathway into the center of interest."

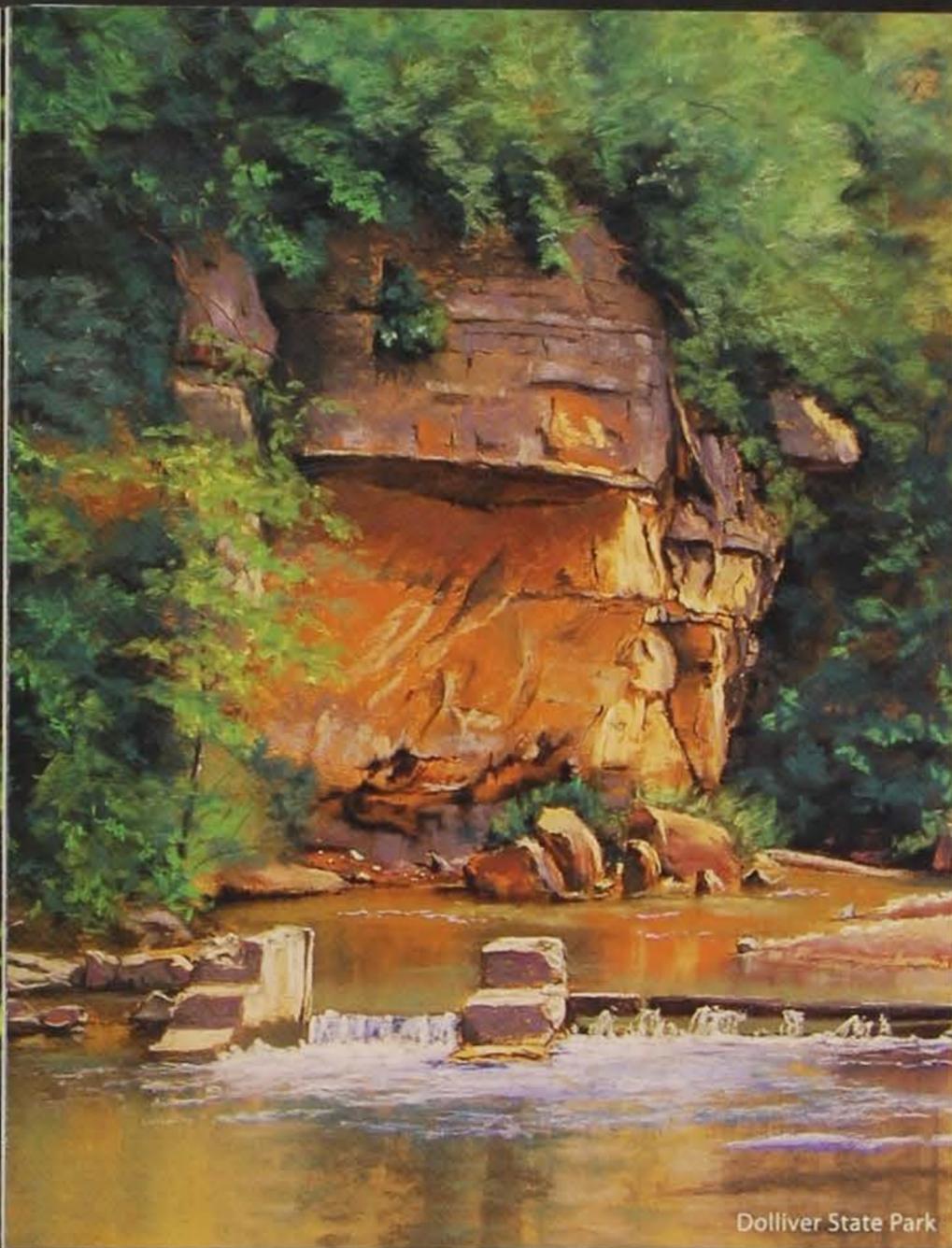
It is a lesson that Thompson learned through diligent practice of her discipline. She has been painting on-site landscapes for 15 years. Since the summer of 2009, this Ames resident has been working on a collection of paintings titled "Unexpected Vistas," which features scenes from state parks around Iowa. The project has taken her to nearly two dozen of Iowa's 83 state parks.

"Working on-site is always demanding," she says, describing how every environmental dynamic comes into account. "You have to deal with the elements. It can be

The Canyon at Ledges
State Park near Boone







Dolliver State Park



Pilot Knob State Park near Forest City

Artist Nancy Thompson of Ames is known for her works in oils, acrylics and pastels depicting Iowa parks. "I have a deep appreciation and love for the landscape and nature. This has been a lifelong interest spanning back as far as I can remember and I knew from early on that I wanted to be a visual artist so that I could capture the beauty I saw in nature for others to see and appreciate," she says. Landscapes offer "endless possibilities and combinations that spark my creative interests such as the meandering and flowing line of a river or path, or the sharp contrasts of light and shadow on a sunny day and the abstract patterns that are created." See more of her work online at <http://nancythompson.org>.

uncomfortable, hot, cold, wet, bugs get into the paint." These factors affect every facet of Thompson's process, down to the medium used in capturing the scene. Since she has been provided with an overcast day, acrylics were her natural choice. In the event of an unpropitious shower, the acrylics will afford better protection to the work than oil paints. Once the acrylics have been set on the canvas, they will dry and won't run like oil paints if exposed to water. Countless subtle choices such as this must be made in her pursuit to best capture Iowa's beauty.

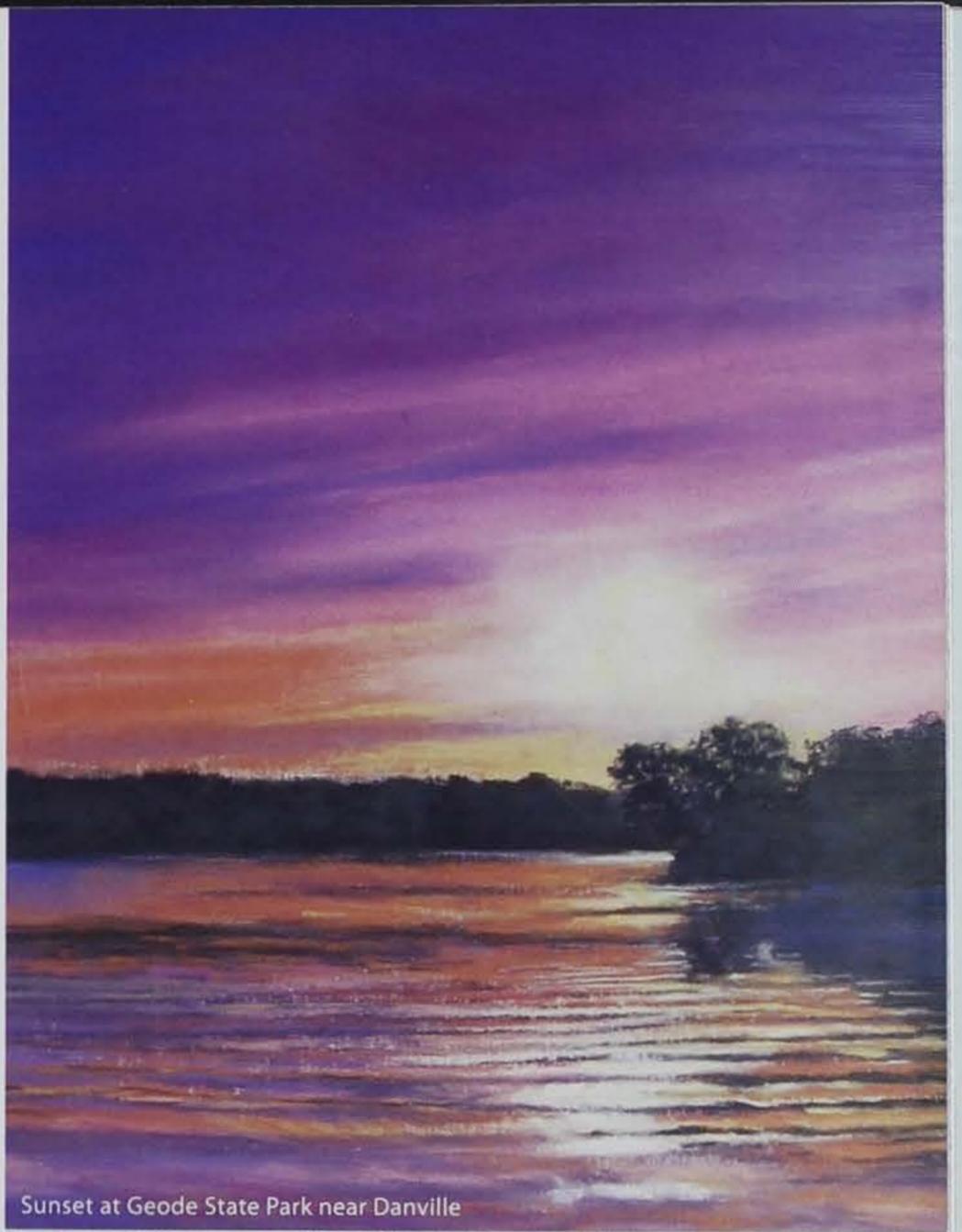
Thompson's affection for Iowa began as a child growing up in rural Coon Rapids. However, it truly came to fruition as an artist during her graduate studies at Iowa State University, where she completed her thesis project on the Whiterock Conservancy near her hometown. This project blossomed into a love for painting the unique places that Iowa has to offer and she soon found an outlet for this passion in her "Unexpected Vistas" series.

"My goal is just to capture the beauty of the state parks," Thompson explains candidly. "People don't think of these places when they picture Iowa, they think of

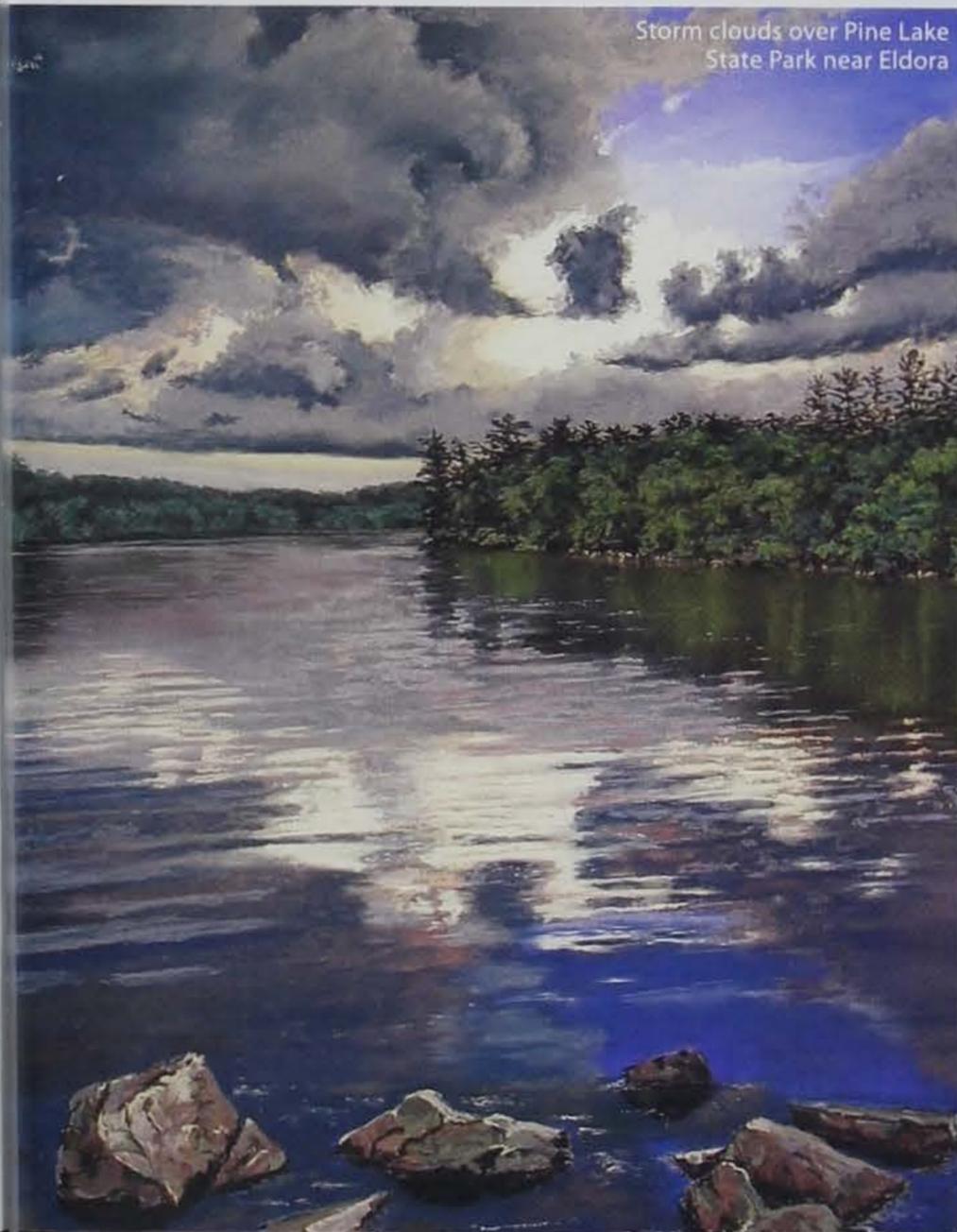
agriculture and everything that comes with it. They don't realize what the state has to offer." This goal has led to her desire as an artist to remain extremely faithful in her re-creation of the state park scenery. She will not take creative liberties on the work if it means compromising the landscape.

Thompson feels a strong responsibility to the audiences who will see her paintings. For the locals who know and love the park she depicts, she hopes to re-create in her art the sense of place they experience when visiting their park. For those who have never visited these places, Thompson hopes to present a realistic depiction of the scene in order to excite the viewer and inspire them to visit. In her mind, the parks create their own natural appeal, and her role is not to embellish this, but simply put it on display.

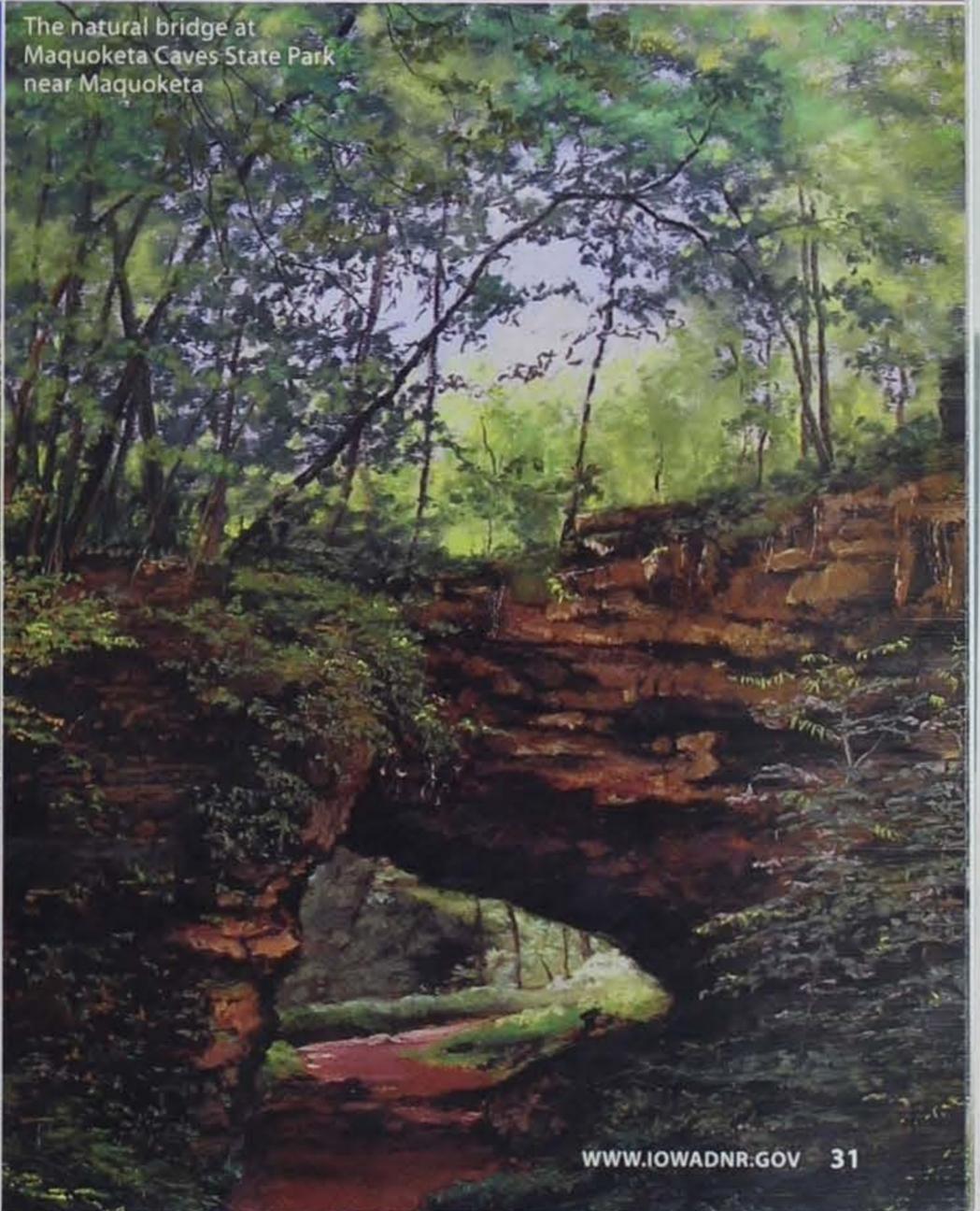
"I paint these places because I love the land," Thompson ardently says. "It feels like home to me and I never get tired of painting it." This explains why she has no plans of ceasing. "I see this as an ongoing series. I will work on it indefinitely." 🐾



Sunset at Geode State Park near Danville



Storm clouds over Pine Lake State Park near Eldora



The natural bridge at Maquoketa Caves State Park near Maquoketa

View from the Crow's Nest at Pikes Peak
State Park overlooking the Mississippi River
near McGregor







REVAMPED, RETOOLED AND READY FOR ACTION

See why major restorations from improved water quality to better habitat and rebalanced populations has these areas breaking out as top fisheries.

STORY BY MICK KLEMESRUD PHOTOS BY DNR STAFF

OPPOSITE: Habitat and water quality are key ingredients to a successful fishery. Catfish Creek, part of the Swiss Valley Park and Nature Preserve near Dubuque, is a prime example. Ten years of habitat improvement and watershed projects to slow water flow and sediment delivery have turned Catfish Creek from a seasonal trout fishery to a year-round coldwater stream that supports stocked as well as stream-reared trout.

The classic movie line “*Build it and they will come*” is just as fitting in the fishing world as it was to an Iowa baseball field. Provide a healthy place to live, with great habitat and good water quality, and fish will come. The following 12 fisheries, poised to be top fishing destinations in 2011, prove that investing in resources produces quality angling. These projects are possible because of Iowans’ investment in the Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund and the Lake Restoration Program.

1. BIG HOLLOW LAKE

Iowa’s newest lake is ready for prime time. Big Hollow Lake, completed in December 2008, should offer excellent fishing from mid- to late summer.

“We’re already getting reports of 14-inch largemouth bass, 5- to 6-inch bluegills, and 14- to 16-inch channel catfish. There is an abundant food source so that growth is not unexpected,” says fisheries biologist Chad Dolan.

Roughly 600 adult crappies were stocked in the 178-acre lake last spring before the spawn and likely put on some major growth. The DNR also stocked redear sunfish.

Dolan worked with the Des Moines County Conservation Board on the fish habitat in Big Hollow. There are fields of 6- to 8-inch rocks topped with limestone chips that will attract spawning bluegills. Dolan says they added lots of “catfish hotels,” which are 18-inch culverts cut in sections covered with riprap, plus timber piles, reefs and fish mounds covered with riprap.

“One thing that impressed me was the natural habitat—the shoreline, hillsides, woody structure,” Dolan says. “I expect it to be a haven for largemouth bass. I expect it to be an outstanding sunfish lake.”

The lake is part of the Big Hollow Creek Recreation Area 10 miles north of Burlington off U.S. Highway 61, which already offers a model airplane airport, observatory, archery and shooting range. It offers restrooms, tent camping and picnic facilities. There is a beach, three-lane boat ramp, canoe access areas and parking. Trails are available for horseback riding.

The Des Moines County Conservation Board is planning a campground with full hookup sites and a bathhouse, four full-service cabins and one primitive cabin, beachside bathhouse and concession stand. A fish cleaning station will be added this summer. Work is underway to pave 152nd Avenue, which leads to the entrance of Big Hollow, and is expected to be finished by fall, weather permitting.

2. CATFISH CREEK

Catfish Creek has gone from being a seasonal trout fishery to a year-round coldwater fishery that supports stream-reared brown trout and stocked rainbow and brook trout. This year, Upper Catfish Creek will be stocked with catchable rainbow and brook trout throughout the summer’s hottest months—something that has not occurred for more than two decades.

Catfish Creek had a history of temperature spikes during hot summers that prevented trout stocking in



July and August. But over 10 years, a series of stream improvements has increased overhead cover and improved water quality.

"One temperature spike can kill all your trout," says fisheries biologist Dan Kirby.

To minimize temperature spikes, work was done in the watershed to slow water and sediment delivery to the stream. A combination of pervious pavement, rain gardens, terraces, native grass plantings, ponds, timber stand improvements, water and sediment control structures, streambank stabilization and no-till farming projects improved stream conditions.

"We directly improved 4,700 feet of streambank and added 750 feet of bank hides," Kirby says. To greatly improve angler access to much of the stream, eroded banks and box elder trees were replaced with gently sloped banks and native grasses.

Catfish Creek is part of the Swiss Valley Park and Nature Preserve, near Dubuque. Most of the habitat work was done near the new nature center.

A 2006 survey of angler use listed Catfish Creek as the 21st most used stream out of 78, with 10,000 visits per year. The survey will be conducted again in 2011. "I would be pretty surprised if it doesn't move up the list," he says.

3. CRYSTAL LAKE

In the early 1990s Crystal Lake drew so many anglers that overflow parking from the boat ramp often spilled out along the road and into town. That came to an end during the flood of 1993, when common carp entered the lake through the outlet and started Crystal Lake down a path only a complete renovation could fix.

Initiated by the community based Save the Lake support group, dredging increased the average lake depth from 4 feet to 7.5 feet and sunk the deepest hole from 8 feet to 18 feet depths. The fish population was then renovated.

Three years later, those fish have shown excellent growth. Initial re-stocking of the 264-acre lake included northern pike, bluegill, largemouth bass and channel catfish, followed by fingerling walleye. Adult black crappies were stocked, giving fisheries biologist Scott Grummer hope they will spawn immediately and be the source of crappies in the lake.

Lacking a food source for the pike during the initial 2009 stocking, fathead minnows were added, and subsequent huge minnow spawns have fueled rapid pike growth.

"There was an endless supply of fathead minnows. It's like fish on Miracle-Gro," Grummer says. In two years, northern pike have grown to more than 20 inches, walleye are between 11 and 14 inches, largemouth bass 10 and 14 inches and the bluegills from 5 to 7.5 inches.

"Crystal Lake is going to be a tremendous bass fishery this year. Northerns will be in the 2 foot range. It is going

to be nice to have a northern fishery in the area again. We have not had that in a while," Grummer says. "Last fall, we were hearing reports of anglers catching nearly a fish per cast. This lake has been so underutilized it will be good to get it back on the radar."

WALK-INS WELCOME

The renovation included a 15-acre lake built as a sediment control structure. Stocked with bass, channel catfish and bluegills in 2003, it provides a unique walk-in fishing experience from either the campground or parking lot on the wildlife area. It is located near the north end of the county park campground.

4. GREEN VALLEY

Green Valley Lake emerges from a two-year project again ready to draw anglers from across Iowa and neighboring states for excellent fishing that starts each spring.

Once a premier destination for crappie and bluegill fishing, angling deteriorated after yellow bass and common carp upset the balance and ruined water quality.

Water was lowered 12 feet in 2008 to fix the lake outlet and prevent carp from entering. All fish were eliminated, boat ramps repaired and additional fish habitat placed, including cedar trees in the deepest areas that should hold panfish during winter. Several spawning areas and fish mounds topped with gravel were also built that will likely be fish magnets.

The DNR restocked fish in 2008 while Green Valley's water level was held low for two years to remove up to 200,000 cubic yards of sediment. The lake will be allowed to refill this spring.

"Bluegills are 7 to 8 inches and extremely chunky," says fisheries biologist Gary Sobotka. "There should be a lot of fish along the shore during the spring."

Green Valley has a new largemouth bass minimum length limit of 18 inches. Most bass measure 8 to 15 inches, with an occasional fish measuring up to 18 inches.

While there are crappies, their numbers are low, but size is large. More crappies will move to angler-acceptable size this year. Fish shorelines early, then brushy structures from mid-May through early summer.

Channel catfish are growing quickly, with most between 15 and to 25 inches. Fish shallow bays where the wind is blowing in during early spring.

After fishing, stay at the renovated campground or in a new cabin. Larger sites with 50-amp service, new fire rings and picnic tables were added, some with water and sewer hookups. A new shower building and playground were created.

5. LAKE MACBRIDE

Lake Macbride is on a roll. Fishing and water quality



Roughly 4,700 feet of Catfish Creek's streambank were stabilized with rock riprap and 750 feet of bankhides were added, making the coldwater stream one of the more popular trout destinations in the state.





Lake McBride

Lake McBride



Lake McBride



FAR LEFT: Brother and sister enjoy a successful day fishing at Red Haw Lake south of Chariton. A perennial bluegill lake, the fishery was decimated during the flood of 1993. To repair the watershed, sediment ponds were built to catch silt. Fish habitat was added and the fish populations adjusted. Now Red Haw is reliving its bluegill fishing glory days. **REMAINING PHOTOS:** Lacking adequate fish habitat and good water quality, Lake Macbride in Johnson County was never a model fishery. But a \$2.4 million restoration project initiated in 2001 changed that. Islands and underwater reefs were installed, along with a 1,000-foot dike to stop silt and sediment from entering the lake. Fishing jetties were created and 3,000 tons of rock riprap were placed along the shoreline. Lake Macbride now enjoys some of its best walleye fishing ever, and other species are rebounding as well.



are excellent, and anglers are hooking the benefits. But things were not always so good.

Lake Macbride suffered from poor water quality and fish habitat, shallow shorelines and limited shore fishing access. In 2001, a \$2.4 million project began to turn its fortune around.

From shallow bays, silt was removed and used to build 24 new islands and underwater reefs later covered in protective rock. Dozens of large boulder piles were added to several old submerged road beds. In the south arm, a half-mile-long, 12-foot-wide reef was built.

To protect water quality, a 1,000-foot silt and nutrient dike was placed along the north arm and 10 miles of shoreline was armored with riprap. Six new fishing jetties offer improved access for shore fishing. In 2009, Macbride was drawn down again to add more rock to shoreline, jetties and islands eroded from the 2008 flood.

"I don't know how many people came up to me and said this is the best fishing they have ever had for walleye," says fisheries biologist Paul Sleeper. "It's the best I can remember and I've been here since 1988."

Macbride has huge year classes of 13- to 15-inch and 18- to 20-inch walleyes. In the spring, troll shad-colored crankbaits in 6 to 10 feet of water in the upper arms or look for rocky points and use a jig and minnow or a shad colored crankbait. In the fall, walleyes head to rocky areas in the evening and hit shad crankbaits or swim baits.

Macbride also has an excellent population of 16- to 18-inch wipers weighing 2 to 3 pounds. Wipers weighing 5 pounds are common and fish up to 15 pounds are there.

The best fishing is in late June and July when wipers chase young shad in the early morning and late evening. Watch shad, chased by wipers, breaking the surface in open water and throw a flashy lure into the melee.

There is a strong year class of 8- to 9-inch crappies, lots of 11 to 13-inch fish and some up to 15 inches. Channel catfish are very good for all sizes. Use shad, cut shad or shad guts in the evening near the shallow water at the campground area in the upper south arm.

Macbride also has flathead catfish, muskies, excellent largemouth bass fishing and is the only lake in Iowa that has Kentucky spotted bass. "There are a lot of opportunities to go after a lot of species and we are riding a wave of good fishing," he said.

6. MUD LAKE PROJECT

A \$4.2 million habitat improvement project in Pool 11 of the Mississippi River has gone a long way toward bringing good fishing close to Iowa's shore. The project area north of Dubuque created a tremendous fishery just 30 steps from the Mud Lake Park boat ramp parking lot.

The area historically offered good fishing, but years of sedimentation left only 1 to 2 feet of water in this

backwater habitat. The fishery had declined to two remnant populations: one at the local marina where periodic dredging projects provided deeper water, the other two miles downriver in a slough called Lake Zollicoffer.

The project connected the two areas, using dredge spoil to create a two-mile-long dike to protect against sedimentation and current from the main river channel. The dredge cut allows fish to move, especially during the winter, when the surrounding areas may be frozen to the bottom.

An additional dike near the marina deflects current away from the project area, and with the dredge cut, tripled critically needed overwintering areas—a proven magnet for all river species.

Zollicoffer's, with its sufficient depth, was connected to the project area during the dike construction. It also created slack water that bluegills desire in winter.

"This was done to improve habitat, but this project has brought good fishing close to anglers," says fisheries biologist Scott Gritters. "The project is providing a lot of great summer fishing. The area has enough flow through the system to keep oxygen in the backwaters but not too much flow to push fish out in the winter."

Unfortunately, another area created for overwintering has not been as attractive. An area Gritters refers to as Fish Hook, because of its shape, lies just off the main dredge area in the middle of shallow water and sediment. It has not yet drawn any winter use.

"It is not uncommon for it to take a few winters to develop a population," he says. "But we would like to speed up the process."

The DNR marked 9,000 bluegills, releasing them into Fish Hook where cedar trees were added for habitat. "I don't know if it will work or not," Gritters says. "Our hope is to see them next year."

7. RED HAW LAKE

The 76-acre Red Haw Lake south of Chariton has a history as a panfish-producing machine.

"It was a destination for high quality bluegill fishing, in part because of its excellent water quality," says fisheries biologist Mark Flammang.

But all that changed as the flood of 1993 damaged the spillway. To fix it, the lake was lowered. Once complete, the lake was allowed to refill, which happened slower than expected. The resident carp population increased and uprooted aquatic plants as the water rose. Red Haw now had a carp problem and water quality tanked.

The once high quality resource needed help. In 2002, the DNR eliminated the fishery and started over. To protect water quality, the DNR built sediment ponds in the watershed. The lake received new fishing jetties and boat ramps. Recently, fish habitat was marked with GPS

coordinates included on the new lake map at iowadnr.gov. "Initially the panfish fishing did not return to the level we had hoped," Flammang says. "The fish were growing slowly."

The tide has turned. Bluegill quality is excellent and is getting better every year, and largemouth bass quality improved. Historically, there were a lot of 8- to 12-inch bass in the lake. Now large numbers of 15- to 20-plus-inch fish are present.

"We didn't see this coming," Flammang said. "Bass anglers should take note because this lake is worth a look."

Fishing is also good for channel catfish and, during the spring, for crappies of various sizes. A crappie caught in 2010 weighed more than 3 pounds.

8. SPIRIT LAKE

Spirit Lake is riding a hot streak anglers will talk about for decades. "We are on track for the highest walleye harvest since 1984. Only 2006 had a higher harvest," claimed fisheries biologist Mike Hawkins, two months before the end to the walleye fishing season.

The completion of the Iowa Great Lakes watershed management plan last summer will serve as a guide to manage and protect the lakes, Hawkins says, and to improve the fishery for the long term. Protecting or enhancing water quality provides the foundation for good habitat and a thriving fishery.

In 2007, a change in the walleye slot limit required the immediate release of all walleyes measuring 17 to 22 inches, shifting the harvest to smaller fish, which reduces the number of fish in the lake and improves growth rates of remaining fish.

"When we changed the slot limit, we had a perfect situation. We had a huge 2001 year class of walleyes that is now our brood source. Even if we did not change the slot, we would still be in a great situation because of that year class," he said. "We need more time to assess the regulation but all indicators are it was the right thing to do at the right time."

"We need to look at these lakes as a whole system in order to manage them correctly," Hawkins says.

Spirit Lake involves more than just walleyes. The lake set a record for 31,300 yellow perch harvested in October alone. With catch records dating back to 1957, the next closest harvest was 20,000 from October 1994.

"The size of perch has gone up dramatically, which is another indicator of a healthy perch fishery. We're fairly confident good perch fishing will continue as more year classes come into the system," he says.

Other species are thriving as well. Largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, bluegills and northern pike will offer excellent fishing in 2011.

"But if you're a walleye angler, you should plan on fishing from the opener through June and again through the ice," Hawkins says.

9. STORM LAKE

With more than 26,000 angler trips with a harvest exceeding 13,000 walleyes in 2010, Storm Lake takes its place among the finest walleye fisheries in Iowa.

The 3,000-acre-plus natural lake is a source of eggs for the walleye stocking program. A 17- to 22-inch slot limit placed on walleyes in 2007 has, according to fisheries biologist Ben Wallace, increased the number of adult fish in the slot over the past three years.

"Anglers in general are pretty happy with the slot. A lot of anglers have a self-imposed limit of 17 inches because they see the value of those bigger fish, the importance to the hatchery for their egg production," Wallace says.

The new slot limit encourages the harvest of smaller fish, making more food available for the remaining fish to grow. Results from night shocking in 2010 found a large year class of 12- to 14-inch walleyes that should still be available for harvest in 2011.

A Storm Lake dredging operation ongoing since 2003 has removed 4 million cubic yards of silt, increasing the average lake depth and creating 18-foot-deep holes. "There is a lot of fishing that is going on in the dredge cuts," Wallace says.

Fishing and water quality will improve once a renovation project on Little Storm Lake marsh is complete. The project calls for the 2-foot-deep, 150-acre marsh to be cut off from the main lake with a dike and using water control structures to dewater the marsh to consolidate sediment and allow vegetation growth.

"Once we get the marsh working properly, it will act as a filter for the water entering Storm Lake," Wallace says.

Lake access should improve once boat ramps at the new complex on the west side are reconstructed. The complex has some food available, marine supplies and fuel.

Fishing begins from shore soon after ice out. Most takes place along the north shore at the Chautauqua jetty or the east shore between Lakeside Marina and Kings Pointe Resort.

In the spring, use a minnow under a slip bobber, cast a jig with a leech or a white or fire tiger-colored twister and a minnow. In the summer, troll twisters or crankbaits.

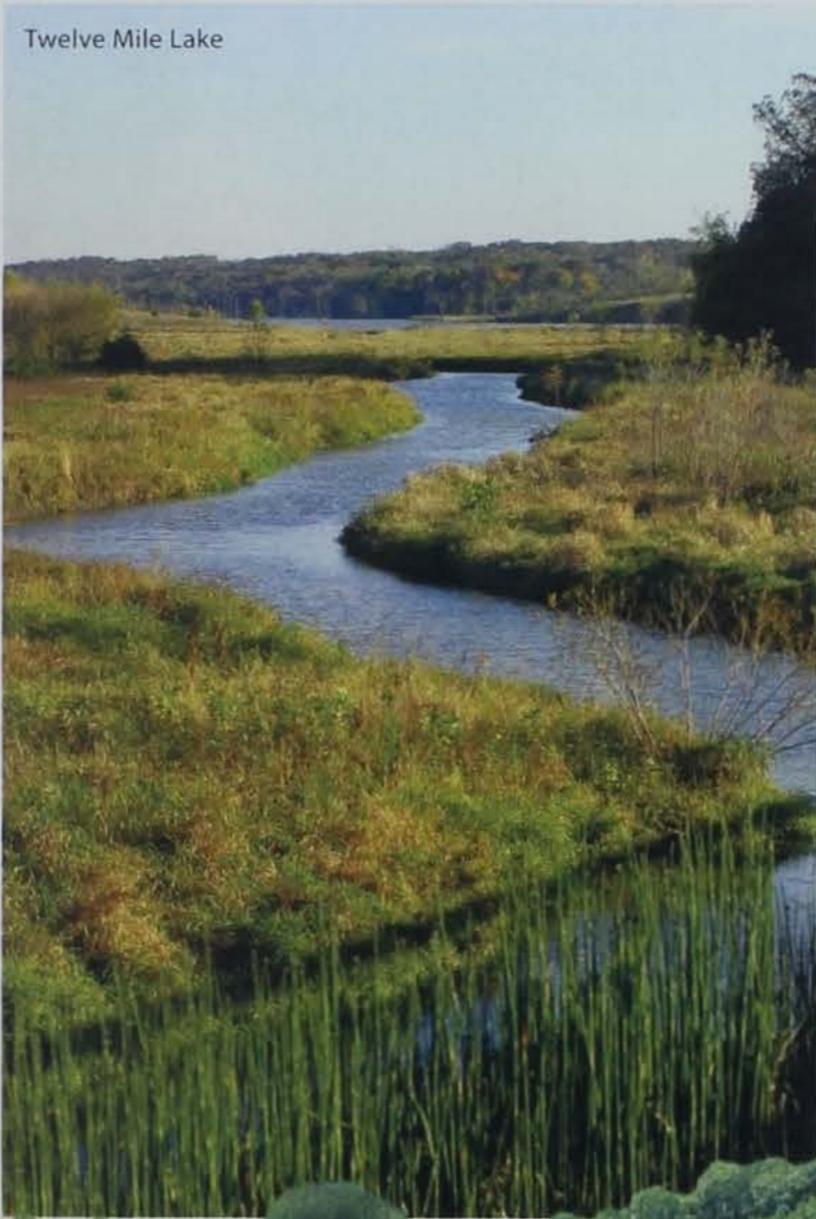
10. TWELVE MILE LAKE

Twelve Mile Lake returns as the top fishing destination in southwest Iowa after a major lake renovation and habitat improvement project in 2006.

"An over-population of yellow bass and common carp lead to a dramatic reduction in the number and quality of all sport fish in Twelve Mile," says fisheries biologist Gary Sobotka.

As yellow bass populations exploded, they out-competed other species for food, even consuming eggs

Twelve Mile Lake



Crystal Lake



Spirit Lake



Catfish Creek

Twelve Mile Lake, Storm Lake, Crystal Lake and Catfish Creek all experienced rebounds in fishing following major renovation projects to improve fish habitat, remove siltation and control runoff within the watershed. In each project, undesirable fish populations were removed. With proper habitat and improved water quality, sought after game species thrive with the environmental improvements.



UPPER RIGHT: Viking Lake is reborn following a 2006 restoration that included installation of sediment ponds, fish habitat and riprap, and removal of an unwanted and stunted yellow bass population. ABOVE and RIGHT: An ongoing Storm Lake dredging project is turning the 3,000-plus-acre natural lake into one of the top walleye fishing lakes in Iowa. Storm Lake is also at the center of Iowa's walleye stocking program.



IOWA GREAT LAKES WALLEYE OPENER

The 2011 Iowa Outdoors calendar incorrectly listed the opening of walleye season on the Iowa Great Lakes as April 30. *The correct date is May 7.*



- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| 1) BIG HOLLOW LAKE | 7) RED HAW LAKE |
| 2) CATFISH CREEK | 8) SPIRIT LAKE |
| 3) CRYSTAL LAKE | 9) STORM LAKE |
| 4) GREEN VALLEY | 10) 12 MILE LAKE |
| 5) LAKE MACBRIDE | 11) VERNON SPRINGS DAM |
| 6) MUD LAKE PROJECT | 12) VIKING LAKE |

or newly hatched fry. Their numbers got so large and food so low, yellow bass became stunted, rarely growing to 8 inches in length.

In 2005, the DNR lowered the lake, removed all the fish and began a project to return Twelve Mile to elite status, adding large rock fields, rock reefs and mounds. Spawning areas of rock topped with small gravel were built within casting distance of fishing jetties. GPS coordinates to each area were added to lake maps.

"Twelve Mile is producing excellent fishing for walleyes, bluegills, largemouth bass and channel catfish," says Sobotka. "Bluegills are big and chunky. Largemouth bass are everywhere. There are excellent numbers of walleyes measuring 11 to 24 inches.

"Twelve Mile will have some of the best bullheads in the state. Most bullheads are longer than 11 inches and weigh more than 1 1/2 pounds. Channel catfish fishing should be tremendous this spring for fish between 2 and 4 pounds. If it's not already, Twelve Mile should be on your 'must fish' lake list," Sobotka said.

Twelve Mile Lake is in Union County near Three Mile Lake and Green Valley Lake. The latter two offer camping, fishing and other outdoor opportunities.

11. VERNON SPRINGS DAM

A deteriorating low-head dam on the Turkey River at Vernon Springs southeast of Cresco was rebuilt in August in a first of its kind in the state showpiece that allows fish to move over the dam.

This crumbling dam gave fisheries biologist Bill Kalishek an opportunity. "Dams are fragmenting our rivers. With a low-head dam, fish can move downstream, but the dam blocks fish movement upstream," he says.

Adding stair-like rock arches, water walks down from higher elevations. The rocky habitat attracts diverse aquatic life that draws fish such as walleye, smallmouth bass, rock bass and northern pike. Between each rock arch is a landing area fish use as they swim upstream and over the dam.

"Fish move. We have radio telemetry studies that show fish move long distances during different times of year," Kalishek says "In the Turkey River below Elkader, channel catfish will move into the Mississippi to overwinter and return in the spring. They need different areas for spawning and summer habitats. Reconnecting the fish's ability to get to critical habitats is important in making long term improvements in fish populations. There are no channel catfish in the Turkey River upstream from the dam at Elkader," due to the blockage.

Upon completion, staff collected 10 fish previously marked below dam that swam through the rock arch structure. "It is very difficult to document fish movement so we were excited," Kalishek says.

The project has drawn interest from other counties. Buchanan County residents visited the site while considering work on a Wapsipinicon River dam. Iowa has an estimated 200 low-head dams built 70 to 80 years ago and many are in various states of disrepair.

12. VIKING LAKE

Suffering from poor water quality and a yellow bass population that crowded out other fish, southwest Iowa's 136-acre Viking Lake was in dire need of help.

That came in 2006, starting with a partnership between the DNR, other agencies, local groups and nearby landowners that resulted in the installation of 22 ponds to intercept runoff and pollutants before entering the lake. The lake was drained and 5,000 feet of shoreline armored with riprap. Fish habitat and fishing jetties were installed, and all the fish were removed.

Viking Lake promptly refilled in 2007. The reborn lake was stocked with largemouth bass, channel cats, bluegill, redear sunfish and crappies. "Largemouth bass responded well and there are already bass big enough for the bragging board," says fisheries biologist Bryan Hayes. "The growth of channel catfish populations is better than expected. The fishing forecast is excellent."

The lake was not the only thing renovated.

In 2002, the DNR invested nearly \$900,000 in electrical hookups, campsite pads and new campground shower buildings, and Viking Lake boasts the only full-service restaurant in an Iowa state park.

"The kids can catch fish in the lake, swim at the beach and eat ice cream at the restaurant without leaving the park," Hayes says. 🐟



A 9-pound wiper caught from Lake Macbride



Sandy watches for ducks during a late season snowstorm at Clear Lake.

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STORY AND PHOTOS BY LOWELL WASHBURN

It was late afternoon when the man and his dog reached the top of the hill, and the sun had already begun its descent to the western horizon. Stooping low, the man laid his carefully wrapped cargo on the grass. Standing erect, he paused to admire the wetland panorama that sprawled below.

Most of the marsh could be viewed from atop this hill, and the pair had stood here many times before. The man was a hunter. The dog, also a hunter, was a Chesapeake Bay retriever who answered to the name of Sandy. Day or night, work or play, the two were rarely apart and their shared passion was for all things waterfowl. This was their favorite marsh.

Long ago, the man had decided that one day he would dig in this very spot. Today would be that day. Taking a shovel from the bundle, he put his back to the task. At first, the dense network of grasses resisted the effort but eventually gave way, allowing the blade to sink deep into the soil. Much too steep for farming, the hilltop was virgin prairie and the man idly wondered if he were the first human to ever disturb this spot.

When the excavation was complete, the man laid his shovel aside. Kneeling to the ground, he softly cradled the dog in his arms before finally lowering her lifeless form into the earth. Although the man had had plenty of time to prepare for this day, the actual event became much harder than he had envisioned. Suddenly overwhelmed by the reality of the moment, the man was a bit surprised, but not ashamed, as unexpected tears began to fall from his cheek.

Several minutes passed before the man stood again and began refilling the grave. When the task was finished, he carefully replaced the pieces of sod he had saved and slowly smoothed each plant into place. In the end, there was little evidence the hill had been disturbed.

Although darkness was now beginning to engulf the

marsh, the man was hesitant to leave. Then, from high overhead, came the sharp whistle of wings. Instinctively looking skyward, the man could not detect the ducks as they passed in the growing night. But the sound did cause the hunter to reflect—his mind's eye turning back to the countless days he and Sandy had shared on this and many other marshes. They had been good days. Days filled with teal and wigeon, storm-tossed mallards and noisy echelons of southbound geese.



He thought back to a time when the dog was young, eager, and in his mind at least, among the best on the marsh. He recounted the scores of ducks successfully brought to bag because of the dog's uncanny ability to mark downed game or to ferret out a cripple from amidst dense stands of bulrush.

One of the hunter's fondest memories had occurred during a bone-numbing, blue-finger, winter's morning

when he and gunning partner, Bob Humberg, had hunkered beside the last open air hole on Clear Lake. The season was waning and the big lake was already covered with ice and buried in 6 inches of new snow. A big band of mixed divers had suddenly swarmed the decoys and five birds had been dropped from the flock. Upon release, Sandy hit the water with gusto, making straight for a wing-tipped goldeneye that had fallen into the center of the spread. As the retriever drew near, the injured duck suddenly dove and disappeared beneath the ice. Undaunted, the dog executed her own dive, quickly disappearing in the same direction.

One by one, the moments slowly and painfully ticked by—each second becoming its own eternity as the dog failed to appear. Rushing to the water's edge, the hunters

silently wondered if the dog had lost her way and become disoriented beneath the ice. If so, there could be little hope.

Then, suddenly bobbing to the surface like a giant straw-colored cork, the dog's head reappeared above the icy chop. Even more incredible was the sight of the winged-tipped goldeneye held gently in her mouth. The retriever's return was immediately hailed by a stress-relieving cheer from the anxious hunters.



Even though the legendary diving and underwater swimming ability of the goldeneye duck is akin to that of a loon, the Chesapeake had somehow managed to seize and secure her underwater prize. Although the man never did figure out what really happened under the ice that blustery morning, one fact remained certain. There was never a better day to be accompanied by a reliable witness.

As is always the case with dog and man, the seasons and the years passed all too quickly and at last the faithful retriever began to lose ground. Little by little, the bounce disappeared from her light-footed gait, and the bright yellow eyes grew dim. The man realized that Sandy's days in the field were drawing to

a close, and perhaps the dog sensed it too.

As a working retriever, the dog had been more than willing to pull her weight. Even during the later years, she remained as joyfully enthused over the brutally harsh conditions of late season as she had been for September's opening day teal. But over the years the dog had become far more than a working tool and the man realized that it was the constant companionship he would miss the most—the nuzzle of a wet nose, the shared sandwich, the tail that never stopped wagging. Each of us have things come into our lives that are, in a word, irreplaceable. Sandy was one of those things and the man now felt a complete and overriding sense of loss. It was the kind of emptiness you may have already known if you've ever shared the outdoors with friends no longer at your side.

It would be hard to say exactly how long the man lingered beside that hilltop grave, but by the time a passing flock of Canadas jarred him back to consciousness, the inky blackness of the night sky had become studded with a million white hot stars.

Slowly rising to his feet, the man began to pick his way down the dark hillside. Although the path was familiar, the walk to the road seemed long and, above all, lonely. It was, perhaps, the loneliest of my life. 🐾

Maverick Muskie

From Spirit Lake to
South Dakota—One Fish's
Improbable Odyssey

BY JOE WILKINSON PHOTOS BY THE IOWA DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES AND SOUTH DAKOTA GAME, FISH AND PARKS



M

uskellunge, the “fish of 10,000 casts,” are Iowa’s ultimate trophy fish. It takes years, and a sizable angler-funded investment, to get these top-of-the-line predators to trophy size. Now, the capture of an Iowa-raised muskie in South

Dakota provides a watery trail of escape and adventure. It also raises some questions. How many are lost to the recurring nightmare of flooding? What—if anything—can be done to stem the flight of these maverick muskies?

The Catch...

On a chilly November day, fisheries workers feel the drag on their net on this Missouri River backwater below Gavin’s Point dam. As they retrieve the 125-foot net, they fold it on the deck, working any snared fish back out of the mesh.

These South Dakota fisheries workers and six other crews—representing state fisheries agencies from Montana to St. Louis—are looking for sturgeon. Most are shovelnose sturgeon, fairly common on the upper Missouri. On a rare occasion, it is an endangered pallid sturgeon, the primary target in this study. They record length and weight, then check to see if the prehistoric-looking creature is tagged.

In six years, though, they have never caught one of these.

“I think it was the fourth net we checked. I saw it and said, ‘Holy cow, it’s a muskie!’ Kind of amazing. It’s really rare to find a muskie up here,” says resources biologist Stephen Belay. Especially this 13-pounder...then a second, smaller one later that day.

But what were the chances? And where was it from?

“It hatched in 2002. We stocked it in Spirit Lake in 2003. We lost track of it after 2007,” answers Joe Larscheid, DNR fisheries bureau chief. Lost, but now found. In between, the maverick muskie navigated floodwaters, spillways, dams, a winding trip down one of Iowa’s scenic rivers and a gill-popping trip up the Big Muddy.

The Journey...

She began her watery emigration by following floodwater over the spillway from Spirit Lake to East Lake Okoboji sometime after April 2006. Over time, the path led through a couple isthmuses—water bridges—through Upper Gar Lake, Lake Minnewashta and into Lower Gar Lake.

Even at the “bottom” of the Iowa Great Lakes chain, there was no stop sign. High water rolling over the top of Lower Gar’s spillway or through an outlet structure was her escape route into Mill Creek at Milford. From there, it was a short trip to the Little Sioux River, winding down, up and through prairie, bluffs and wooded ridges across nine counties. Obstacles, such as the Linn Grove dam in Buena Vista County, and the Sill 4 dam just upstream of the confluence with the Missouri River in Harrison County, didn’t stop her.

Now, a decision.

“She turned right instead of left,” deadpans Larscheid. After more than 200 miles downstream, she went upstream into the current another 141 miles. Upriver to Sioux City, the fish had a trip through the channelized Missouri. She could have explored several tributaries, but the final leg pointed this runaway—ok swimaway—through a meandering Missouri’s timbered islands, chutes and backwaters. And just above Yankton, S.D., on Nov. 16, 2010, the 36.5-incher was netted. She was 350 river miles—and who knows how many more in side trips—away from home.

The Concern...

Quite a journey. Quite a concern, too. Muskies are a trophy fish. Iowa’s Great Lakes Region is a great place



to catch them. However, in the last couple decades, Iowa has been losing a share of its adult, stocked muskies. "In a year, about 20 percent of the population as a whole, either dies of natural mortality, maybe the angler takes it, or they go over the dam in a high water event," explains Larscheid. "We have known for years that when water goes over the dam, muskies—like any other fish—go over, too. We are concerned when fish go over the dam," says Larscheid.

That's because it takes years for them to grow to trophy size. By then, a pretty big chunk of time, effort and money is invested in these high-demand products. And biologists monitor them along the way. Letting them surf over a flooding spillway is not a desired option for these whoppers, who are under human scrutiny much of their slippery lives.

The eye opener came in 2006. "We experienced a flood event. About half the adult muskies in Spirit Lake in 2005 we caught below the spillway in 2006—in the Okoboji chain," recalls Larscheid. From there, it took only another high water event for these trophies and trophies-to-be to move out of East and West Okoboji, through Upper Gar, Minnewashta to Lower Gar, then over the lowhead dam into Mill Creek and out of the system entirely.

The Process...

It all starts each April, along gravel shorelines on Spirit Lake as well as East and West Okoboji. As water temperatures approach 50 degrees, adult muskies prowl the shoreline, looking for a place to spawn. Dozens are caught in gill nets, brought onboard netting boats and returned to the one-story brick hatchery on the isthmus connecting Spirit and East Okoboji. "Returned" because, chances are, they were spawned there years before.

Female brood fish are stripped of eggs. The eggs are fertilized and incubated in the hatchery. From that point, Iowa muskies are on the fast track.

In the wild, countless hungry predators are after little muskies and any other fish they can swallow. Thus, spawning fish produce hundreds—even thousands—of eggs. Of the small fraction hatching, only a tiny handful reaches maturity. In the hatchery, however, 70 percent of incubated eggs hatch. And a large share, which make it to stocking size a year later, are out of reach of most predators.

These sac fry consume their yolk sacs and start figuring out what food is. From there, Iowa's pelleted feed program gets "more muskies to market." Over each holding tank hangs a feeder trough. At five-minute intervals, a timer snaps open spring plates and sand grain-sized commercial feed—"mash" at this size—drops into the water. "Muskies are not as trainable as other hatchery-reared species. They're not as aggressive," explains Spirit Lake hatchery manager Donna Muhm. "They lay there in the water. If food comes by, they eat it. Eventually, they learn to feed."

The little fish are gulping pencil eraser-sized pellets as

4-inch fingerlings. "The dry pelleted feed greatly improves survival in the hatchery," emphasizes Larscheid. "We were pioneers in that research. A lot of states have adopted it." At 4 inches, they are switched to a minnow diet. By October, they are 10 to 12 inches long.



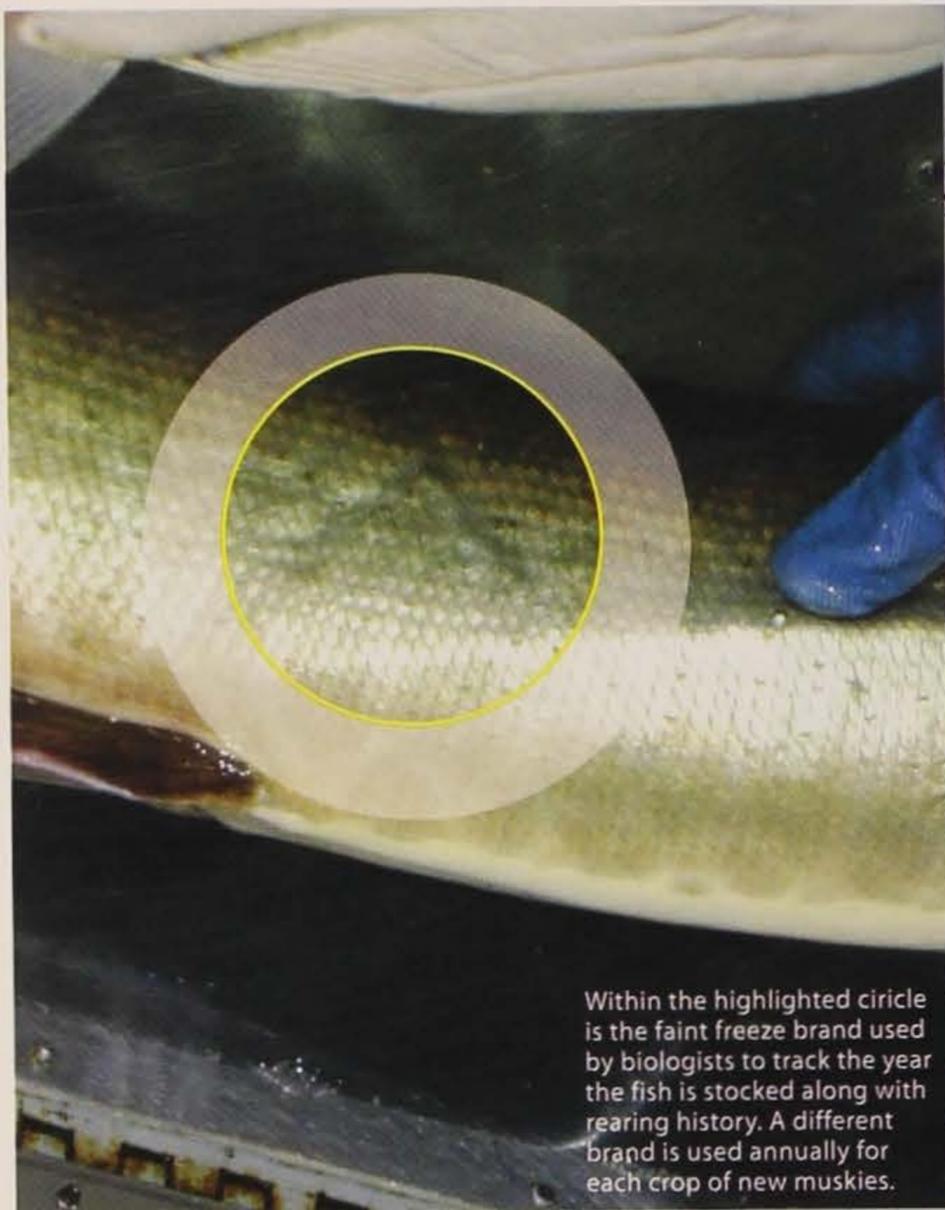
Change in Scenery...

Next stop is the Rathbun hatchery in southern Iowa. The 6-month-olds winter here in concrete holding ponds. Come spring, these minnow-munching machines are 12 to 14 inches. They've been fed, housed and kept free of disease and other pitfalls that might befall them in the wild. And that year of attention doesn't come cheap. "We will raise 3,500 to 4,000 for stocking in Iowa," says Muhm. "We figure it costs about \$8.80 each to get them to that point." That sounds expensive, but research shows that survival of muskies is hundreds of times better with the revolutionary diet and overwintering in the hatchery.

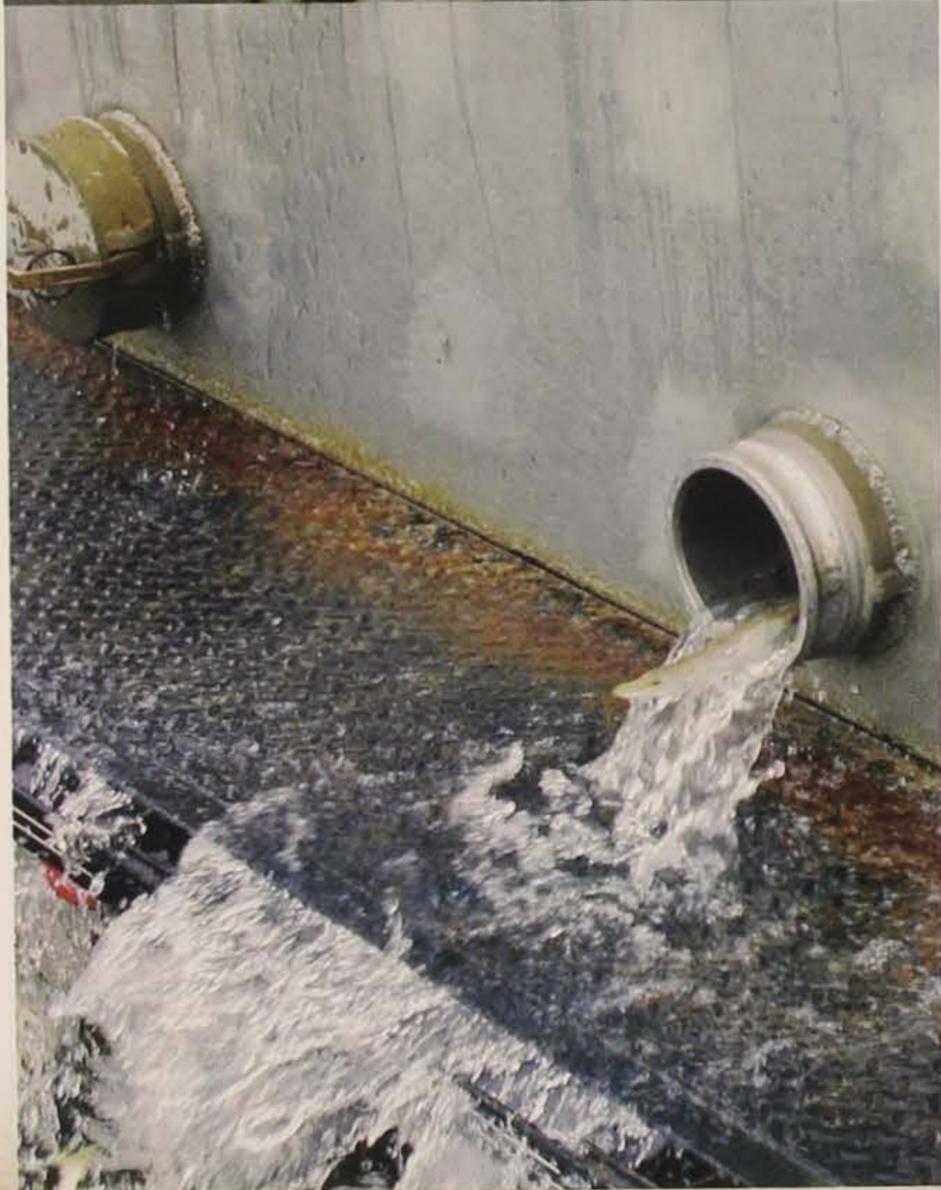
Their tour of Iowa wraps up right back at Spirit Lake.

OPPOSITE PAGE: South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks fisheries biologists untangle a catch of fish during a sturgeon study on the Missouri River. BELOW: South Dakota crew member Jason Kral holds the maverick muskie that washed over the Spirit Lake spillway and wound up in Yankton, S.D.—some 350 miles away.





Within the highlighted circle is the faint freeze brand used by biologists to track the year the fish is stocked along with rearing history. A different brand is used annually for each crop of new muskies.



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They will be stocked in a few days in the lake system and other "muskie lakes" across Iowa. First, though, a liquid nitrogen freeze brand is applied. In 2003, that brand was "1-3," applied on the left side. The permanent 1-inch brand grows to about 4 inches as the fish matures.

It was that brand LeBay and the crew noticed seven years later, as they worked their surprise muskie out of the net. They also broke out a handheld "tag reader." As that electronic wand passed over the muskie's left cheek, a "blip" told them they had a hit. A tiny electro-magnetic wire, injected into her left cheek muscle a couple years prior in Iowa, provided a unique passive integrated transponder (PIT) number. A new chapter had just been added to the underwater journey of Muskie 431A1E3A25.

Usually, by the time an Iowa-reared muskie gets to this size, it is no stranger to fisheries biologists. "Ours is probably one of the most studied populations in the world," says Larscheid. "Every fish stocked is marked. We know the year it was stocked and the rearing history. If we recapture it in our gill nets, it gets a PIT tag. From that point on, we document the growth of these fish, the survival. We determine the population abundance in a lake. We know the individual history of that fish."

The Challenge...

The \$1 million question is: "How many fish ARE leaving the lake?"

"That is one of the challenges we face," says district management biologist Mike Hawkins. "How big is the problem?" We have had outmigration. Our (PIT tag) population estimates are reliable. That is our best tool for managing the population. We have a handle on the movement from Spirit Lake to Okoboji. Out of the system, though? The figures are not so reliable."

Their study suggests the "escape" instinct has to do with high water in the spring. An urge to spawn? But why one year, and then not so much in another?

So, a muskie in the river? River anglers buy licenses, too, right? It can provide exciting fishing below the dam. The concern, though, is that fish reared and managed for a lake system are no longer there. And in the case of 431A1E3A25, lost to the anglers who paid for her relatively expensive room and board for seven years. "They are expensive," notes Larscheid. "We have that initial investment and then every year, we have mortality. By the time they get to 40 inches, there are fewer out there, yet we still have the investment."

The Future...

So, how do you keep them where they belong? The easy answer would be to stop the floods. Recent history suggests, though, that would be a head-in-the-sand approach. Water has overtopped the spillways at Spirit Lake, at the other lakes in the chain, seven of the last 10 years. Hundred-year floods seem to occur every few years now.

Could a physical barrier hold back fish emigration when water goes over the top, or surges through outlet structures? "You get a lot of debris in the water, too—

trees, brush," notes Larscheid. "You can get plugging around that barrier. It becomes ineffective. It's been tried for a lot of years; chain link fences, a bar system. Generally, they don't work."

Another prospect might be to turn the fish around. Bubble screens and electric barriers both show promise. So do acoustic blocks that rely on sound waves. They also cost money. Big money.

"We are actively investigating these technologies. Some states have deployed them in certain situations with good success. We are looking, but are not near the implementation phase," says Larscheid. "Even if we cannot stem the flow of muskies leaving our lakes, the future of muskie fishing in Iowa is bright. It is better now than ever before and will only get better as we continue to refine our management of this trophy species."

The process of rearing muskies to a size where survival is greatly increased is time consuming and costly. Freeze-branding (far upper left), egg stripping, feeding, raising and ultimately stocking all take time. Yet the rewards are well worth the effort. The objective of muskie stocking is to provide enough fish for anglers to average one per 100 hours of angling. In the Iowa Great Lakes, it is closer to one in 30 hours. Yet, there is not a lot of angling exploitation. Anglers voluntarily release most of the muskies they catch. Trophy size is in the eye of the beholder, but for muskie fanatics, 50 inches is the benchmark. Those "trophies," according to tagging studies, are as much as 20 years old.





Bass lures from Dowagiac, Mich.-based Heddon were must-have tackle in the 1950s and '60s. These lunker-getters are in good to very good condition, just a few scratches from being used. However, a box along with it sometimes doubles the lure's value. After all, what do most of us do when we take any purchase out of the box? We throw it away.



RIGHT: When this nearly 7-inch mud puppy lure was designed around 1970, probably by the C.C. Roberts Bait Company in Mosinee, Wisc., it featured a pull-away hook and leader. Should you lose your battle with the muskie who hit the hook, the wood body would stay afloat for retrieval.

Trolling for Treasure

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOE WILKINSON



Garage sales. A swap meet. An estate auction can be prime territory. Interested in antique fishing tackle? It is all yours if the price is right. With online shopping, the sky is the limit. Just be careful what you are buying.

Of course, there was no Internet and no smart phones when Don Kline started picking up old tackle a few decades ago. Then, you had to show up in person. "Auctions were the main source for tackle. It was entertainment 30 years ago," recalls Kline. "They'd set everything out at the house or the farm. Now they truck it into a building and lay it out."

He fell into his hobby easily. As a fisheries biologist with the Department of Natural Resources, he had a natural interest in fishing gear. Now retired, Kline and his wife, Marge, still make the circuit from their home in Washington. If there's an auction or a promising sale in southeast Iowa, even in Illinois, they could be there.

"Back then, at auctions, they'd have all the old rods and reels piled up. A garage sale? They didn't even put out the fishing tackle. People weren't buying it. It wasn't that valuable," laughs Kline. "I would roam around the flea markets, the mini malls in the early days. It was cheap. The trouble is, I just didn't buy enough of it then!"

SO, WHAT IS COLLECTIBLE?

Age is a factor, of course. Wooden lures, hand-painted from the "pre-plastic" era, are a hot commodity. Still, there has to be enough of a product to give you a

reasonable chance to obtain a few. Many focus on fishing's "Big Five" manufacturers: Heddon, Pflueger, Shakespeare, South Bend and Creek Chub.

The important thing is to collect what you like. "A lot of people find their dad's, their uncle's or granddad's old tackle box," says Kline. "After getting hooked, they discover tackle at garage sales and flea markets. Then it's on to collectors' clubs and shows. The Internet is the newest hunting ground."

"A good friend and I were talking. He said, 'I love eBay. I can go to a show everyday,'" recalls Dudley Murphy, co-author of *Fishing Lure Collectible* encyclopedias. He is concerned about fake or retouched lures and other collectibles when a buyer only has a description or photograph to judge the piece. "Nearly all collectible hobbies have those who attempt to deceive," he warns. "Learn who to trust until you can trust your own judgement."

Murphy is co-founder of the National Fishing Lure Collectors Club and edits the group's magazine. He has established steps concerning suspect lures. "If I see a lure, I'll bookmark the site if I'm not sure. I call people. You need to be able to ask if it's authentic." Acknowledging, of course, that he has authored books which compete with online services, Murphy still likes something he can hold in his hand. "You can take a book anywhere."

Helpful or suspect, you could spend weeks negotiating



The Holy Grail?

In the art world, it would be a lost DaVinci. Cars? Maybe a '65 Mustang, never driven. But how about fishing tackle? What is the Holy Grail? "I'd say the Haskell minnow. There were only 10 or 12 made," ventures Kline. "The work that went into them! He actually tapped in the scales on the sides. One went for \$10,000 or more."



Triple treble hooks and a blood red stripe set identify this Heddon (Dowagiac) "muskie vamp."

The popular Heddon "pumpkinseed" from the 1950s and '60s.



BELOW: A sturdy tacklebox is important on the boat or the bank while you're fishing, or in your hobby corner or shop. Besides holding your collectibles (Kline separates his by company name), good wood and metal tackle boxes are as collectible as the lures they once held.

References for Lure Collectors

Over time, people wanted to know more about the stuff inside grandpa's tackle box. Catalogs and books followed. Carl F. Luckey's *Old Fishing Lures and Tackle* is packed full of information, pictures and prices. A three-volume set of Karl T. White's *Fishing Tackle Antiques & Collectibles* is a picture and value guide to White's extensive collection. Kline relies heavily on both.

Also out there: *Fishing Lure Collectibles: An Encyclopedia of the Early Years 1840-1940* by Murphy and Edmisten as well as the follow-up *...the Modern Era, 1940 to Present*. Hundreds of other texts, brochures and magazines help light the way for fishing tackle fans, telling them what it is and what it's worth.

These days, collector guidebooks are often replaced by a keyboard and screen. Information is at your fingertips in an instant with message boards, eBay and many other websites. The potential to learn, buy and sell is endless. But then, so is the margin for error.





In the box above is Kline's haul from just one weekend auction. He couldn't walk away from 10 antique reels, eight or nine lures and a few other peripheral tackle items. At right is a Red Eye Hofschneider.

Getting Started

It doesn't take much to achieve a collectible state of mind. About 10 years ago, my mother-in-law gave me a metal box out of a shed on the family farm. In the beat-up box were some beat-up fishing lures.

A few years later, Kline and I worked an outdoor show, so I hauled it along. He was mildly impressed. An olive green muskie plug—made of wood—with pull-away hook and leader caught his eye. "That's a Mud Puppy from the 1940s and '50s," he recalled, putting on a price tag of \$50-\$60, had it been in excellent condition. Mine grades a notch or two below. An orange and black T60 Flatfish musky lure with a double treble hook could bring about the same amount, Kline thought. A wood Phantom plug with chipped white paint had him thinking. "This would have had fluorescent paint (where paint was now missing); maybe \$10-15," Kline suggested.

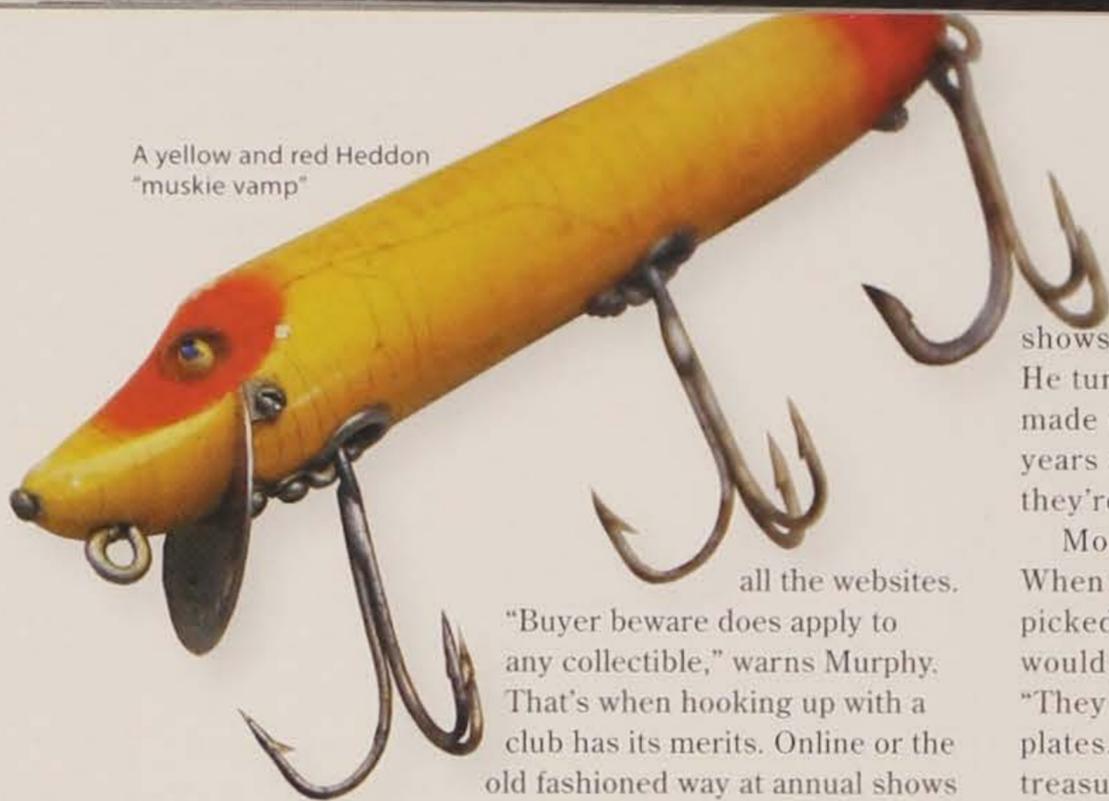
Those were the big finds in my hand-me-down "treasure chest." Since then, a \$5 garage sale tackle box yielded a big Red Eye Muskies spoon, made by Hofschneider, and a smaller one, maybe turned out by the Paw Bait Company. Nothing to break the bank yet, but I'm learning to watch for some of the key names: Heddon, Arbogast, Shakespeare, as well as old features like square brass swivels, stuff that isn't made anymore.

My meager collection looks sort of cool in a decades old glass pie display case—another garage sale acquisition. If somebody notices, I offer what little background I have. Just like the "old collector," though, I face the same dilemma Kline does: "I just didn't buy enough of it then."



Heddon used a netting material and then spray painted through it to create the scale pattern on this Dowagiac minnow 150 model.

A yellow and red Heddon
"muskie vamp"



all the websites. "Buyer beware does apply to any collectible," warns Murphy. That's when hooking up with a club has its merits. Online or the old fashioned way at annual shows and displays, you can talk to others who share your interest and curiosity. Many sites offer message boards to sort out information. Get to know a few members, and you develop a trust. "It's a great hobby. A lot of fun guys with similar interests. You can get more enjoyment out of the hobby."

Rob Pavey rides herd over www.mrlurebox.com. It's important for him to "keep it reel" when it comes to old fishing tackle. Asked about "getting what you pay for," Pavey, an outdoor writer for the *Augusta Chronicle* in Georgia, points right back to an interview he did with the blog "ephemera" a couple of years ago. "Remember that what goes around, comes around. Help other collectors with their collections and others will help you. Be honest in all your trades and transactions."

Pavey, a long time member of the NFLCC, urges collectors to join the club and attend some shows. "You will learn more than any reference book can teach you and make friends in the process," he says. He is also big on those fishing tackle encyclopedias—listing Carl Luckey's as the best all-around reference—and just getting word out, among friends, estate dealers and anyone who might have fishing gear to sell or swap.

You can cover more territory online. On the other hand, developing a network as Pavey suggests can pay off as well. "My son and his wife are always looking for tackle for me." She is from Spirit Lake and was going through a relative's belongings, relays Jim Bonrud of Rosemount Minn. An old green reel in very good condition was wrapped up in a small leather pouch. Her grandmother told him he could have it. Going online, Bonrud learned he had a decent bargain. It is valued at \$15 to \$25.

Kline keeps an eye on websites. But auctions, his "bibles" and experience help, too. He's always on the lookout for peripheral stuff—line, pliers, skinners and fishing knives. "They were a lot like pocket knives, but with a little scaler and a filet blade. Almost everybody would have one back then," Kline swears. "It is very important to collect something with a connection to your fishing memories."

That includes salesman cards for Carlisle hooks. In the 1930s or '40s, a company rep would use them to convince store owners to stock up on a few dozen tins or paper boxes. A display of actual hooks glued to one card

shows an offset curve design. Another has a wider throat. He turns one over to reveal the card's earlier life. "He made these out of a seed corn poster!" Kline says. "Ten years ago, these would have gone for \$3 to \$5 each. Now, they're two to three times that."

Most fishing antiques are a little piece of history. When a hardware store in Mount Vernon closed, Kline picked up a box of fishing reel parts. "That's where you would go back then to fix your reel," explains Kline. "They had the little handles, the shafts, the housing end plates. Each had its own price tag." Other overlooked treasure? His Dayton Bait Company paperweight is made from—ironically—a plastic float. And there's a wooden reel with silk thread. Silk? "You had to dry it out after every use. Otherwise, it would rot," recalls Kline. "Then nylon came along and revolutionized that."

But most collectors want the big two. "Lures and reels," says Kline. "Most popular are the early lures, made of wood or molded plastic. Reels are the other significant items." Kline looks for quality reels made by small companies like Meek and Talbot, companies later bought up by the big names—Pflueger, South Bend, Shakespeare.

And there are moments when you know, "I got it right." At a sale, Kline spotted some silver/nickel-plated reels. "I said to myself if I was ever going to own one, it was going to be today," he recalls. "There was another guy there. We were bidding them up. I ended up with four, he got the other two." From there, the auction moved to their boxes. "We started bidding on them, too," laughs Kline. The auctioneers learned in a hurry that the box can be as valuable as the reel. After all, what did you do after you opened it? You threw it away."

At the same auction, he bid on a choice of reels...and picked up several for \$10 to \$12.50. "I brought them home and looked them up. They were early Pfluegers. One of them was worth \$330 to \$400!"

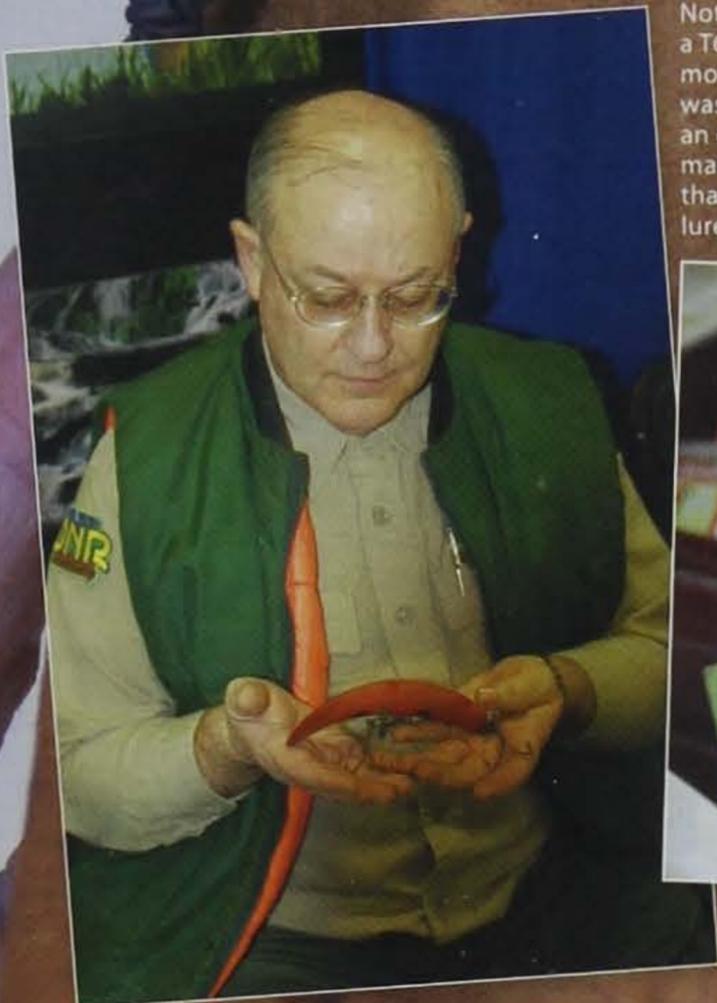
Looking it over and holding it, one notices the tiny bone handles and a patina to the metal after 70-plus years. "These early reels were probably made by jewelers. They would have the equipment to grind the bearings," notes Kline. Working the reel, one can feel the smooth, almost flawless feel. "This is a B.F. Meek, out of Kentucky. That's supposedly where a lot of the good reels were made back then," notes Kline, as he goes through the pedigree of "who bought who" for which product line.

Along with hundreds of lures, Kline owns hundreds of rods. He picks up a one-piece, steel Hurd rod and reel with walnut grips. "This one never panned out. It was high end, high quality," reviews Kline. "People wanted to buy their rod and reel separately, though."

These days, the competition is getting tougher. Garage sales? "You gotta get there first," stresses Kline. "It's hard to get a deal now. Everything is priced out. The advantage is gone. If you don't (bid it up) the antique dealers will bid on it. They know it's worth something." 🐾



ABOVE: This Pflueger Summit silver/nickel-plated reel rates its own leather pouch. After the 1950s, companies switched to cloth bags. Notice the fine engraving on the butt plates. LEFT: Kline looks over a T60 flatfish, made by the Helin Tackle Co. in Detroit. Most of these molded plastic collectibles range from the 1950s to '70s. This one was left behind, "back on the farm" with another dozen lures, in an outbuilding. BELOW: These Pflueger Muskill muskie lures were made in Akron, Ohio by the Enterprise Manufacturing Co., a firm that dates back to the 1890s, about the time early versions of these lures were made.



HOW TO AVOID FLUSHING MONEY DOWN THE DRAIN

Install Better Toilet Technology to Reduce Bills, Save Resources

Toilets account for nearly 30 percent of water consumption in a home, using more water than any other activity. The options are to upgrade toilets to new high efficiency units that use 1.6 gallons per flush, or install a dual flush converter for about \$19 to \$30. Available at many hardware stores, Wal-Mart, Costco and Home Depot, the HydroRight Dual-Flush converter can save \$100 per year in water costs, works with the majority of toilets and installs within minutes.

A marvel of human efficiency, the kidneys filter a couple of pints of blood per minute, removing waste as urine. The irony? Once urine is expelled, humans use a lot of water—gallons per flush—to remove a scant amount of liquid. This inefficiency not only wastes water and boosts utility bills, it requires energy-intensive pumps that emit greenhouse gases to move and treat vast amounts of water.

But the simple, money saving solution of installing dual-flush toilet retrofits allow users to use a small flush for liquid waste or a full flush for solid waste with substantial savings. A family of four can easily save 10,000 gallons of water a year.

Based on technology used in Europe and Australia for decades, the award-winning HydroRight quickly and easily turns standard toilets into two-button fixtures proven to reduce water usage by 30 percent. One button is the quick flush setting that uses significantly lower water volumes for liquids and paper—the setting needed four out of five times. The second full-flush button uses the normal amount of water for solids.

To order online, visit www.goMJSI.com, or check the aisles of home improvement and hardware stores.

Know Thy Flush

If you are unsure of your toilet vintage, check the manufacture date on the underside of the tank lid where it is often stamped into the porcelain. Toilets built after 1993 are more efficient. Those made during the 1980s typically use 3.5 gallons per flush. Older toilets often use much more water, five to eight gallons per flush.



Benefits of Saving Water

Efficient water use helps reduce demands on water supplies, as well as drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, as using less water means moving and treating less water. This not only saves on water bills, but helps reduce local taxes and levies by delaying the need to increase water delivery and wastewater treatment systems. Delivering water and wastewater services is energy intensive, as the water is treated, pumped to homes and businesses, pumped to wastewater facilities and treated again. Using less water reduces energy use and cuts greenhouse gas emissions.

Put a Stop on Leaks

Further reduce water bills by checking for dripping faucets. It is amazing how many gallons of water are wasted by slow drips. A simple washer replacement is often an easy, inexpensive repair that can eliminate wasteful leaks.

Sleuthing for Expensive Waste

Another leak check is to read your water meter before turning in for the night. Check the water meter again first thing in the morning. If the reading has increased and no water was used during the night, you may have a leak. Remember to account for ice makers, furnace humidifiers or other appliances that operate overnight.

Flapper Waste

Even though a toilet isn't running, it can still leak water. If you suspect a problem, put a few drops of food coloring in the tank and let it sit several hours. If the dye has colored the water in the bowl, there is a leak. A common, inexpensive fix is to install a new toilet tank flapper.

Find a volunteer project or post your own event at www.keepersoftheland.org or call 515-281-0878.

Admiration & Legacy

BY JESSIE ROLPH BROWN PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH

CONSERVATION UNCAGED

BLANK PARK ZOO, DES MOINES

Vermicomposting just part of zoo's conservation mission

Today's menu: llama hair, cardboard, veggie scraps, denim overalls and manure—all tasty items for the red wiggler worms at Des Moines' Blank Park Zoo. The worms nosh on trash, turning it into valuable compost for the zoo's grounds. The zoo's smallest employees began about four years ago when the zoo contacted the Iowa Waste Exchange for a way to reduce the amount of waste heading to the landfill. Set up with a worm farmer, the zoo started with a few hundred worms and now has tens of thousands. Not only does the composting effort, headquartered in a bin in a garage, save trash from the landfill, the zoo saves money on compost and uses fewer pesticides—all part of its mission to spread the message of conservation, says Jessie Weeks, an animal handler and the zoo's conservation coordinator. "The role of zoos is changing. We need to be a leader in conservation and inspire people to care about the environment. It's such a great opportunity and a responsibility that people leave with a better sense of conservation," she says. The zoo raises money for worldwide and local conservation, from the International Snow Leopard Trust to Hogs for Frogs, the zoo's annual bike rally to benefit the DNR's Toad and Frog Call Survey. Since last summer, 25 cents of every admission goes to Coins for Conservation, where visitors vote for their favorite wildlife project—Iowa prairie chickens, Georgia sea turtles or international giraffe conservation. The zoo also opens up the worm bin for elementary to college classes looking to compost at school or home. "People want to come to see the worms," Weeks says.



Walter, Steve and Adeline Langland



A FAMILY HERITAGE LIVES ON

LANGLAND FAMILY, WINNESHIEK COUNTY

Conservation runs deep in family's roots, improves trout stream

Walter Langland knows people will travel hundreds of miles for the chance to snag a wild brown trout amidst the idyllic Winneshiek County landscape. He sees anglers from Minneapolis, Chicago and across Iowa cast a line in North Bear Creek—a stream generations of his family have worked to protect and share. "Walter and his father have always allowed public fishing on North Bear, the most used trout stream in the state," says DNR fisheries biologist Bill Kalishek. "Everybody really looks up to Walter and values his judgment." Langland, along with his wife Adeline and son Steve, has worked with the DNR and Trout Unlimited to stabilize the stream's banks and provide trout habitat. The family has also moved acres into conservation and forest reserve programs. Conservation has been a family priority since 1940, when Walter's father was one of the first farmers in the county to use conservation practices. "The farm was run down when he acquired it, and it took a long time to build up the soil again," Langland says. The work benefits wildlife too, as the Langlands watch deer, turkeys and bald eagles along the stream. "I appreciate that others can enjoy the beauty of this driftless area. It's important to preserve its natural characteristics," he says. His son Steve, who grew up playing in North Bear, said the water is much purer now, after fencing cattle from the stream and other work. "I'm continuing on what my grandfather and father have done. It sets an example for others to follow."

FLOATING FOR A RIVER'S FUTURE

CHUCK "C.J." AND MELISA JACOBSEN, CLINTON COUNTY

Clinton County couple lead yearly cleanup to protect the Lower Wapsi

This fall, things will come full circle for Melisa and Chuck "C.J." Jacobsen as they tackle the final stretch of the Lower Wapsipinicon River. Veterans of the DNR's annual river cleanup, Project AWARE—they've missed only one—the Clinton County couple founded the Lower Wapsipinicon River Cleanup Project in 2006 to protect the neighborhood river. Each fall, along with a team of volunteers, they've chipped away at a different river stretch, floating 74 miles and walking 21 miles on the surrounding land. "Those two just make a perfect team," says Mark Roberts with the Clinton County Conservation Board. "They're just consistently caring people." The cleanups have pulled almost 26 tons of trash—including odd finds like a shortwave radio, wheelchair and lots of boats—with almost half of that recycled. "It's like a fever you catch. It's one of the nastiest jobs around, but people are eager to do it," C.J. says. More people help each year, and it's often a family affair. Even the Jacobsens' preschooler, Macailah, has her own paddle and picks up trash everywhere she goes. "You do it because you want to lead by example. I want to do something, and this is the something I can do," says Melisa. Come October, the cleanup will have covered the river from Anamosa to the Mississippi, and will head back to the top in 2012. "We're trying to get people to use rivers more and be responsible users, to have more picking up than throwing down," says C.J. "We like to think every place we visit we leave a little bit better."





Venison Jerky—An Enduring American Staple BY JOE WILKINSON

Venison tastes great, but like all culinary staples, you can only eat so much. When I was a kid, a neighbor would bring over a roll of deer salami each winter, processed after his hunting trip. It disappeared in a hurry—a wild game treat in our house.

With the freezer full, not a week goes by when we don't have a venison meal—or four—courtesy of the bluffs in northeast Iowa. Deer steaks, roasts and stir fry dot the menu. My homemade Italian deer sausage goes great as a sandwich or featured in mostaccioli or lasagna. Salami and pepperoni from the local locker are tasty, too. However, it's a little pricey to drop off all our deer for processing.

I've sampled dozens of jerkies, rollups and spicy sticks of one kind or another. Use this basic recipe to turn out good jerky and take it back with you into the woods or on the water for the next outing.

The key is to use the best cuts. Lacking fat and connective tissue, a well-trimmed backstrap loin is the best choice. Hindquarter roasts work, too. You'll want to experiment with ingredients as well as length of time in the marinade or dehydrator.

IOWA BLUFF COUNTRY JERKY

2 lbs trimmed back loins or hindquarter roasts
1/2 cup soy sauce

1/2 cup Worcestershire sauce
1/4 cup ketchup
1/4 cup brown sugar
1 teaspoon black pepper
3/4 teaspoon onion salt
3/4 teaspoon garlic powder
16 drops of red or cayenne pepper sauce (like Frank's Red Hot)

Mix all, allowing the dry ingredients to dissolve as much as possible and blend. Cut back loins into strips one quarter to a third of an inch thick. Layer strips in the marinade, covering the surface of each piece. Let marinate for six hours, flipping the airtight container every couple hours to keep all pieces



Delicious, Easy Golden Pheasant Nuggets BY ALAN FOSTER

covered. Transfer the pieces to the drying racks of the dehydrator. You may want to drain them, or set them on a paper towel if they drip too much. This removes some of the spices, though.

Each dehydrator is a little different. I simply followed the instructions in mine (10 hours at 160°). And while jerky should hold up fine for a few weeks without refrigeration, I still store mine in the refrigerator or even the freezer until needed.

Chicken nuggets top the list of most kids' dinner choices, but don't settle for the processed meat-like chunks found in grocery store

freezers and fast food restaurants. Pair these tasty golden pheasant nuggets with some homemade fries and you'll have kids wanting to stay home for dinner.

GOLDEN PHEASANT NUGGETS

- 2 whole pheasant breasts cut into 1-inch chunks**
- 2 eggs, beaten**
- 1 cup water**
- 1 ½ teaspoons salt (can substitute half salt, half garlic salt or garlic powder)**
- 4 teaspoons sesame seeds**
- 1 cup flour**

To make batter, mix all ingredients except pheasant. Dip pheasant

chunks in batter and fry at 375° for three to five minutes or until golden brown. Serve with homemade fries.

TIP 1: To create a light, airy coating, use self-rising flour instead of all-purpose flour.

TIP 2: The secret to crispy, delicious homemade fries is in the cooking. Deep fry small batches of fries at 375° until softened but not browned. Remove and season with salt or favorite seasoning blend. Let oil return to temperature before adding additional fries. Once all are cooked, return small batches back to fryer and cook until brown and crispy.



Tunnel Vision

Tunnel vision: *An extremely narrow or prejudiced outlook; narrow-mindedness.*

Conservation officers need to be constantly aware of the pitfalls of tunnel vision. I distinctly recall several of my field training officers cramming that into my brain 10 years ago. "Don't get too focused on one thing. Keep an open mind and see the big picture."

It is dangerously easy to fall under the spell of tunnel vision during a stressful event, such as a high-speed pursuit. My failure to adhere to this sage advice, however, usually occurs during routine situations. For example, while checking a duck hunter, I might notice an extra duck in the pile. It suddenly becomes easy to overlook other problems and focus solely on the over-bag violation. It's usually not until I'm driving away that it dawns on me that I may have forgotten to verify that the gun was plugged and that there was a life jacket in the boat.

I'd probably be spared occasional embarrassment if I could carry a training officer elf on my shoulder that would politely whisper, "Hey! You're missing something," every time I became a little too narrow-minded. In fact, I wish I'd had an elf with me during a recent exchange.

I was at the Army Corps of Engineers' office talking with some park rangers about a person well-known to every law enforcement agency in the county. I'll call this person "Jim." To put it nicely, Jim rarely thinks things through before acting. I'm familiar with him because, although he is an avid hunter, he isn't so devoted to following game laws. The rangers were telling me about various problems that had been occurring on Corps property and why, for various reasons, they suspected Jim as the culprit. The most serious involved a call they

received the previous day from a birdwatcher reporting a bald eagle shot on the Iowa River just below the Coralville Reservoir spillway.

According to the caller, he was below the spillway with several other spectators, photographing the 50-some bald eagles congregated around the open water. He was watching a bird through his binoculars when he was startled by the sharp blast of a shotgun. The deafening boom disturbed the eagles and they took to the sky in erratic flight. The confused crowd searched for the source of the shot, but was unable to pinpoint it. As the eagles slowly composed themselves, the caller decided the sound must have been caused by something innocent, like a truck backfiring. Until five minutes later, that is, when one giant dead bald eagle bobbed past him as it floated downstream.

So, this is what I had to go on: there was a loud blast that sounded like a shotgun. Then, in the distance between the spillway and the witness—a mere 400 yards—a dead bald eagle fell from the sky.

The rangers and I decided the most likely scenario was the shooter had been driving along the top of the dam when he or she took a shot at one of the many eagles soaring near the road above the spillway. There was only one person that would do something so bold...or stupid. That person was Jim.

The rangers and I scoured the road for a spent shotgun shell or bullet casing. Nothing. I surmised that the shooter either didn't eject the shell, or that it ejected inside the vehicle.

Sleep eluded me that night as I mulled over the possibility of Jim getting away with something so serious



right under my nose. My mind was hounded with images of him driving his truck over the dam. Drool seeped from the corners of his mouth at the sight of the majestic soaring targets. I imagined him reaching over and grabbing the uncased, loaded shotgun. Then, poking it through the window, he cackled and muttered, "Take this, Erika!" before pulling the trigger.

My only sliver of hope that this case would ever be solved rested on the fact that, if the poacher was indeed Jim, he wouldn't keep his mouth shut. I knew he would boast to *somebody* about what he had done. So, my plan of action was to beg the public for information through an article in the newspaper.

The following day, just as I settled at my computer to write the article, the sheriff's office called. The dispatcher informed me that another birdwatcher below the spillway had just witnessed someone shoot another bald eagle. The suspect's vehicle was a red truck seen on the east side of the river. Guess what color Jim's truck is?

I immediately called a Corps ranger to get him on scene. I raced to the spillway. On my way, I called the witness. Her voice trembled as she related her story. Her family was watching the eagles, when they heard an extremely loud shotgun blast. She turned around just in time to see an eagle plummet to the river and float

downstream. After herding her children into their van, she scanned the shoreline for suspects. The only vehicle she spotted was a red truck on the opposite side of the river. I told her to stay where she was and that I'd be there shortly.

The ranger called and informed me that he was with the red truck. The truck belonged to an elderly couple armed with a pair of binoculars. Not likely suspects. My hopes of catching Jim red-handed were starting to disintegrate.

As I pulled into the spillway area, the witness flagged me down. I pulled up next to her and rolled down my window.

"Well, I think we've figured out what happened," she said, frowning as she pointed to the sky above the river.

I squinted up, oblivious to what she was pointing at. "What?" I asked.

"The power line," she said, "the bird dropped right below the power line."

"What power line?" I asked cautiously, feeling my face begin to flush. "Oh. That power line."

Later, the ranger and I stood together and gaped at the top of the electrical pole. Two of three fuses were blown. One fuse for each eagle. I kept asking the ranger, "How did we miss this?" But I knew the answer. I could almost feel the sting of the elf hand slapping my cheek and saying not so politely, "Hey, wake up! You missed something." 🐼

BY SHANE HALLENGREN

AMERICAN EEL (*Anguilla rostrata*)

Consider yourself lucky if you ever hooked one of these slippery fellows in the Mississippi River. Despite its formidable appearance and persona, the American eel is a sought-after catch in some parts of the country. This is the only species of eel found in Iowa, although four native lamprey species act as eel lookalikes. Lampreys can be distinguished from eels by their circular mouths, which the mostly parasitic fish use to attach to a host. Alternatively, eels maintain fully developed mouths and jaws.

ONE OF A KIND

The American eel is the only catadromous fish in North America, meaning it is born at sea, matures in freshwater and returns to sea to spawn. They are born in the Atlantic's Sargasso Sea, where they live for a year prior to entering freshwater rivers. Females mature in freshwater for as long as 30 years before returning to sea to rejoin the males that remained in the estuaries, spawn and die. A female may lay 4 million buoyant eggs.

RARE GIANTS

Because of their ability to slither across wet land, American eels can sometimes be found in landlocked lakes. In this environment, the fish can grow to monstrous proportions. On rare occasions, lake-dwelling eels have been recorded at up to 6 feet in length and as much as 15 pounds. On average though, a river-dwelling eel will not reach more than 2 to 3 pounds.

I CAN SEE RIGHT THROUGH YOU

These slimy fish metamorphose several times in their lives. One of their life phases is known as the glass eel phase, which occurs just before entering freshwater rivers. During this stage, the young fish's skin is completely transparent.

ONE IF BY LAND

The American eel is able to absorb small amounts of oxygen through its skin, as well as through its gills. Because of this, they are able to leave the water and travel across wet grass or mud if needed. This behavior is often recorded as a way to avoid dams blocking their migratory route. Still, don't confuse this serpentine swimmer for a water snake; it is most certainly a fish.



EVOLUTIONARY EXEMPLAR

Evolutionary biologists are particularly interested in the American eel as recent studies recorded interbreeding with the European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*). This reproduction creates a hybrid, which retains the most preferable traits of both parents. These hybrids make their freshwater homes in Iceland, where they account for more than 15 percent of the total eel population.

VICIOUS TWISTER

Because of their weak jaws, eels have to think of creative ways to get meat off their prey. They grab their food and spin their bodies ferociously to tear off pieces of flesh. They have been recorded at up to 14 spins per second. Olympic figure skaters can only complete five spins in that amount of time.

DELICACY

A booming industry in the 1990s, commercial fisheries on the East Coast still catch the American eel for export to Europe and Asia, where eel is popular cuisine. After arriving, the eels are smoked, grilled, roasted or served as sushi. Stateside, eel is also pan-fried, pickled or jellied before being eaten.

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