

MARCH/APRIL 2004

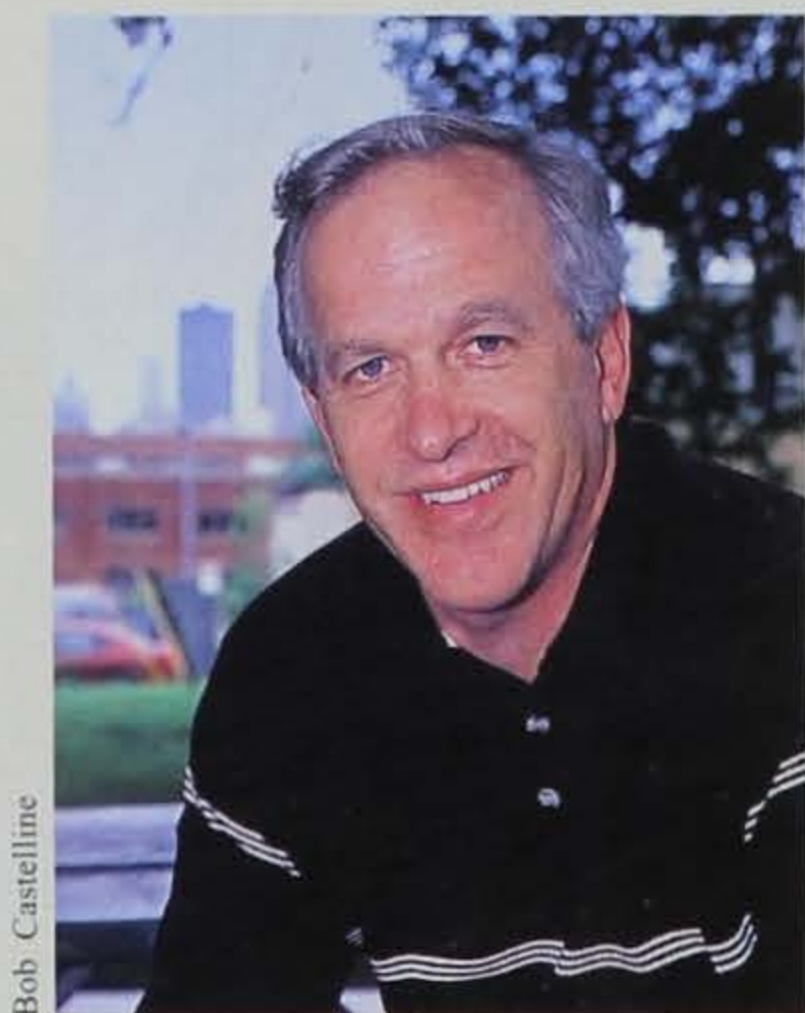
# IOWA CONSERVATIONIST

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES





# FROM THE DIRECTOR



Bob Casteline

## Improved Water Quality Provides Pleasant Surprises

In the last few years, nature has been delivering a strong message to our trout-stocking program on some northeast Iowa streams.

Nature is telling us that our work is paying off in big dividends – and we couldn't be more delighted!

You see, one of the most important jobs we have in the DNR is ensuring the long-term improvement of recreational opportunities. Over the years, water quality degradation has reduced or even eliminated natural reproduction in many of our streams and lakes throughout the state. A successful hatchery program is one of the most visible and effective tools for improving sportfishing throughout Iowa.

Yet something quite remarkable is taking place in northeast Iowa. Research has documented

that nine *more* trout streams in the last two years are considered to be Category I stream segments meaning they are now capable of maintaining viable populations of brown and brook trout without any stocking. Iowa now has 31 streams that fit into that category as well as another 27 stream segments considered to be Category II meaning that at least some natural reproduction has been documented, but not enough yet to maintain a viable population naturally.

All told, we are now able to document at least some natural trout reproduction on a total of 115 miles of stream out of a total of 266 miles classified in the state as coldwater with trout management potential. To put that into perspective, altogether, it would be like having a trout stream with natural reproduction stretching from Des Moines to Iowa City.

Now here's the truly remarkable part: In the mid-1970s, we could document natural reproduction on only *six* stream segments.

In an era when phosphorus, nitrogen and countless other substances in water can be measured in parts per million to document problems, it is extremely gratifying to measure success in the form of sleek, muscular brown trout wiggling in our survey nets.

Natural reproduction of trout represents so much more than just increased fishing opportunities. This trend is a major indicator of improved water quality in the northeast part of the state.

Anyone who has hooked into a scrappy trout can testify to the feistiness of this fish. But when it comes to tolerating poor water conditions, you're better off hitching your cart to bullhead or carp. Trout don't tolerate poor water conditions very well and certainly don't reproduce naturally in less than ideal conditions.

There are a number of factors contributing to this success story including the following:

- Establishing more vegetation along streams to reduce the impacts of soil erosion through farm programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program and Continuous Conservation Reserve Program for filter strips. For all the concerns we may have about other pollution, nothing can be as devastating to natural reproduction of many fish species as siltation covering the rocky bottoms of streams and lakes needed for successful spawning.
- Conducting focused watershed projects that have improved the conditions on many coldwater streams.
- Increasing the physical habitat within streams from construction projects on both private and public land.
- Increasing acquisition of land by the DNR and county conservation board along trout streams to protect the watershed and provide public recreational opportunities.
- Using wild genetic strains of trout in our stocking program.

### Director's Message

*cont. on page 4*



FRONT COVER: FARM POND FISHING BY  
CLAY SMITH  
BACK COVER: SANDHILL CRANE BY TY  
SMEDES



Lowell Washburn

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virtually unheard of in Iowa. Today, they are once  
again showing up on Iowa marshes.



## Director's Message

*cont. from page 2*

There is one other explanation for why we have so many more streams documented today for natural reproduction than the six we had in the 1970s – we do a much better job of monitoring what is happening in our environment than we did back then. Even so, I see the fact that we know more about what is happening in our streams as a huge positive.

I would point out that much of this success could be attributed to the anglers who have invested

in improvements to the resource through their purchase of fishing licenses and trout stamps.

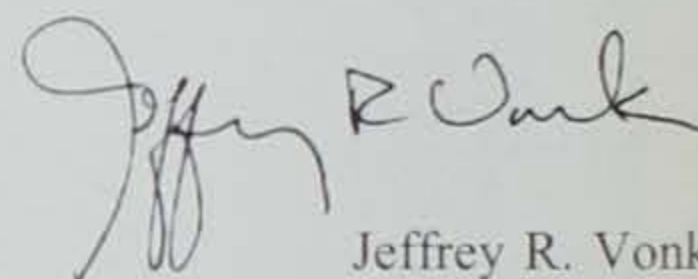
Without their support and interest, it's doubtful that I would be writing about documented natural reproduction of trout in 58 stream segments in Iowa.

And in recent years, private landowners have become an important factor in improving water quality as well. Most of our trout streams run through private lands and the exemplary effort and cooperation we have received in recent years from landowners to make watershed and streambank improvements

has been absolutely vital to this success story.

In an era when improving water quality is a key objective for our state and much of the attention gets focused on the problems, success stories like this serve as an inspiration to us all to do even better.

The trout, after all, are telling us we *can* make a difference.

  
Jeffrey R. Vonk

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March/April 2004

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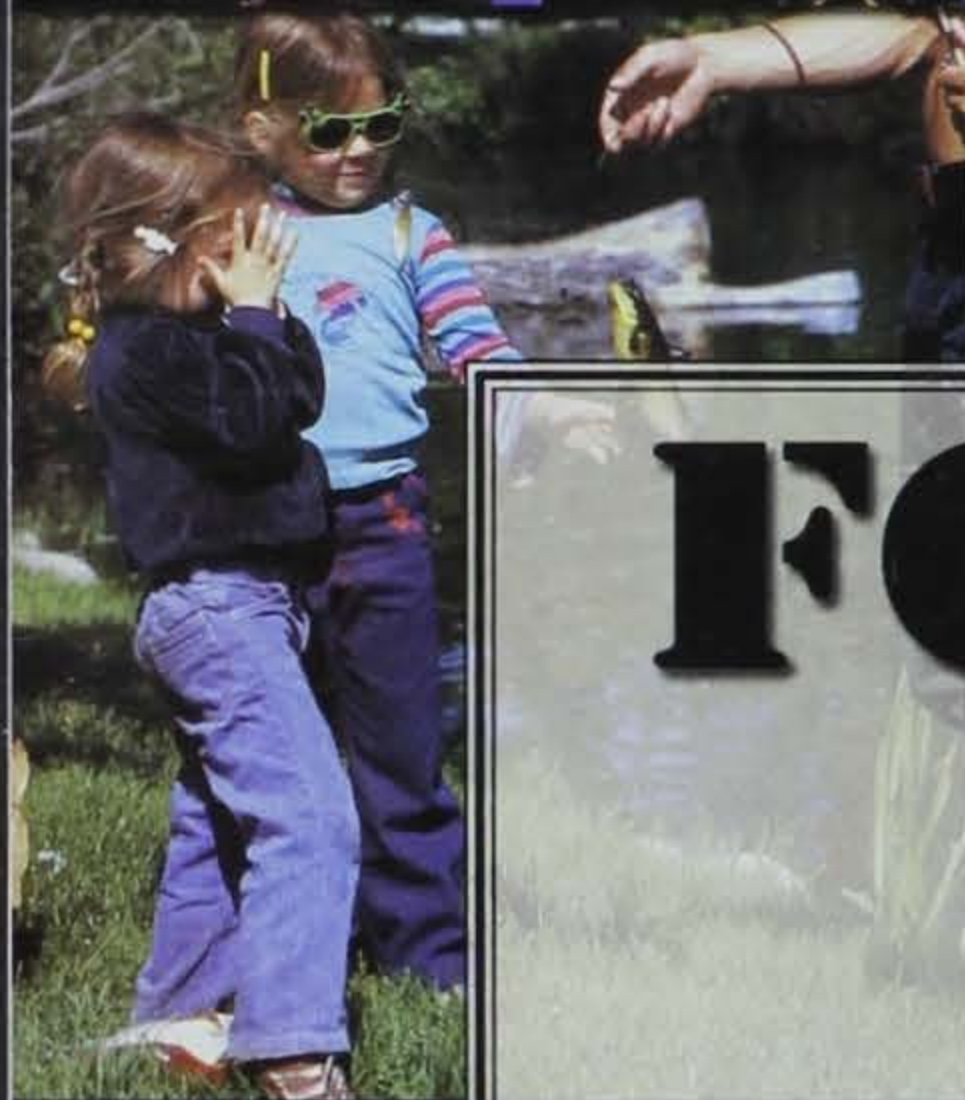
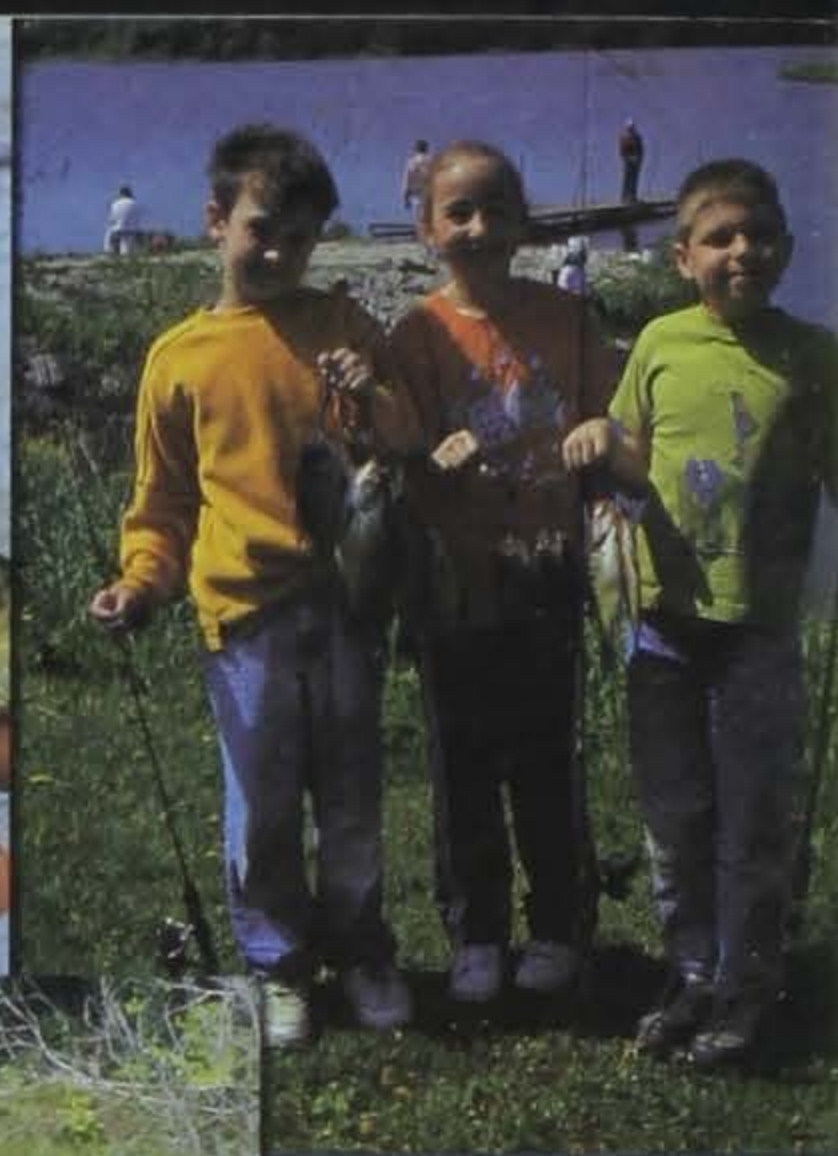
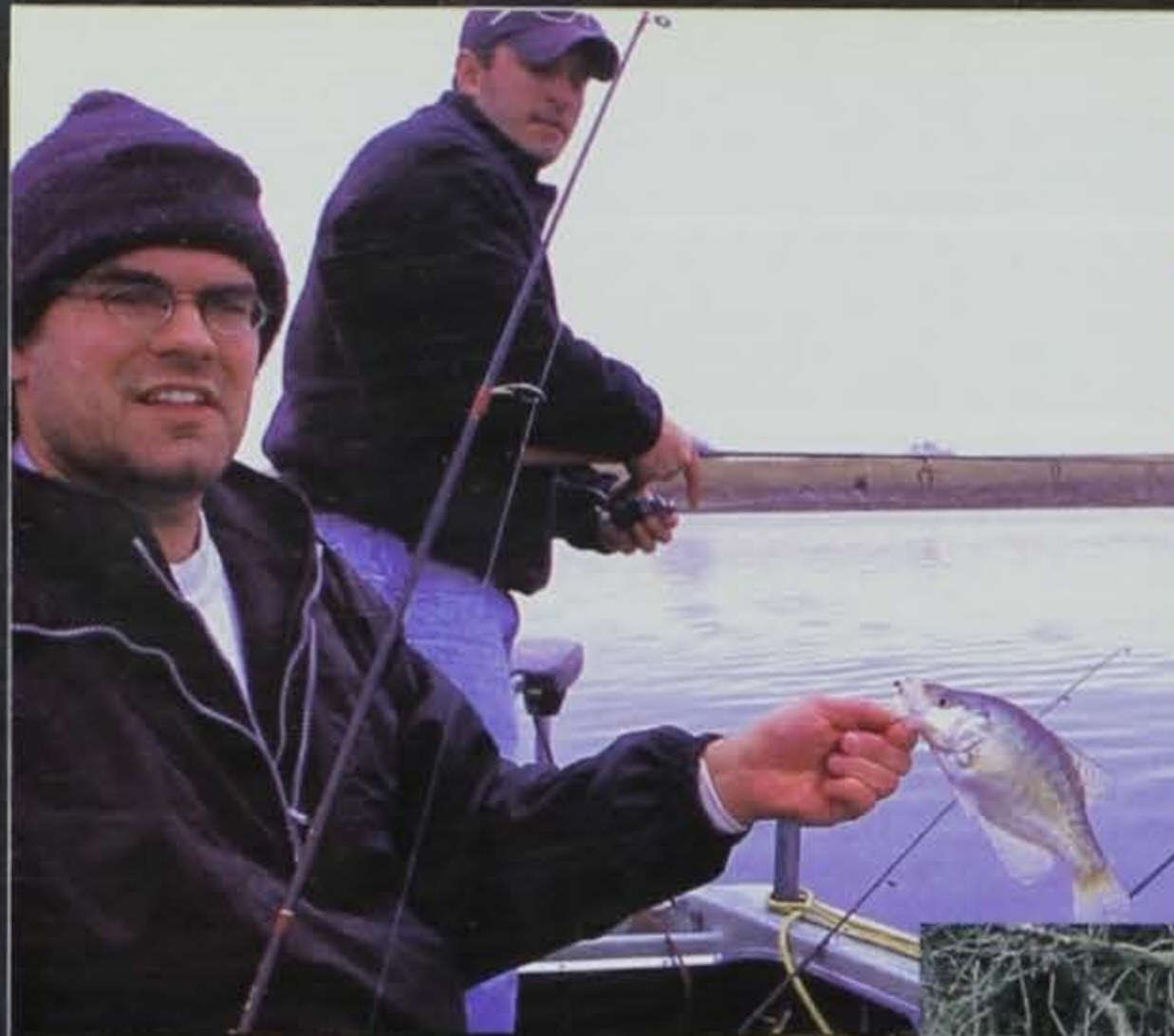
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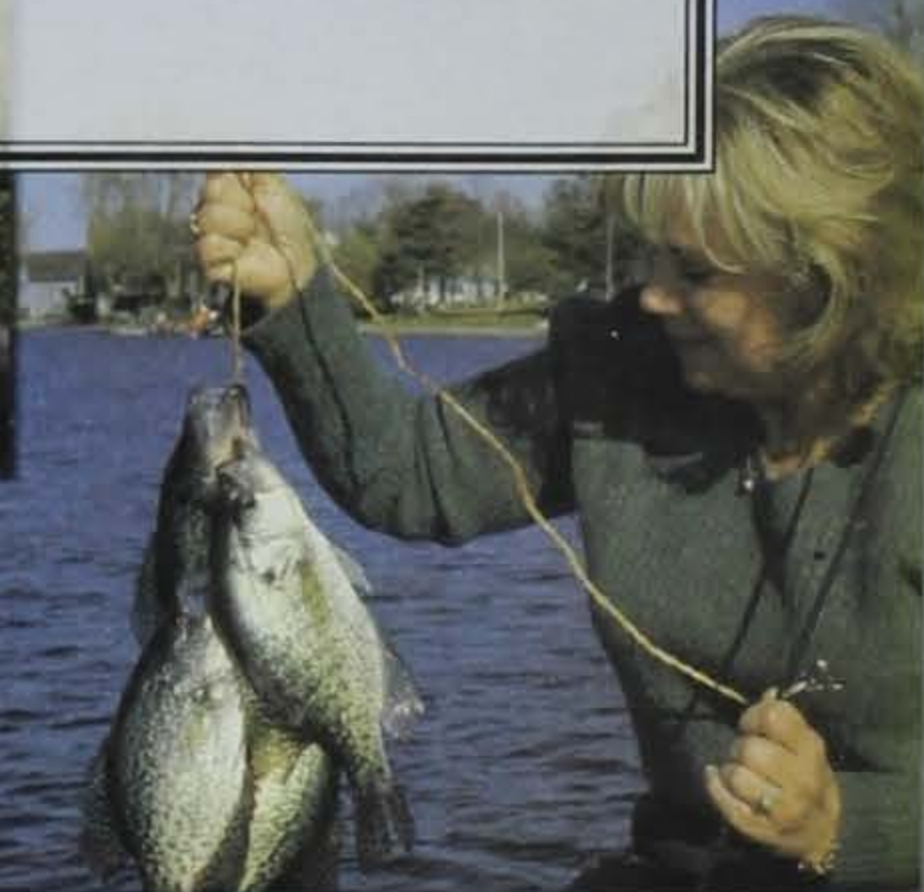






# FORECAST 2004

Last year was a banner year for  
fishing in many Iowa waters.  
Will 2004 be the same?



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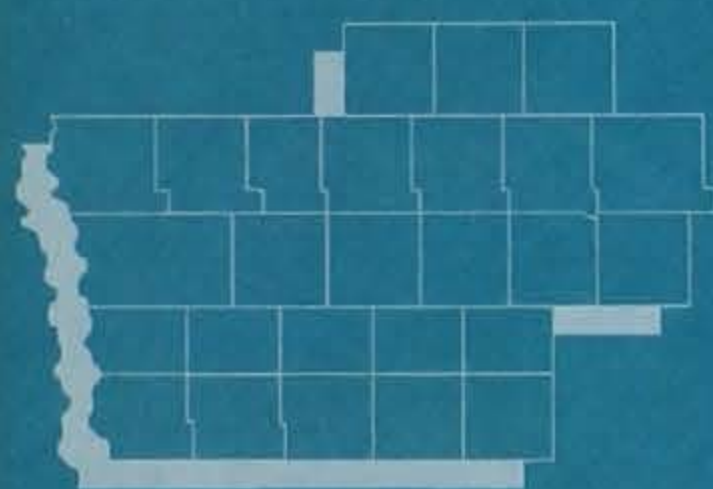
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## SOUTHWEST IOWA

By Andy Moore,  
regional fisheries supervisor

**COLD SPRINGS  
STATE PARK**  
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Have you ever looked up the definition of fish or fishing? Collectively they mean the sport or business of fishing, a place for catching fish, to attempt to catch fish, to seek something by a roundabout means, or to search for something under water. Personally, I believe all the definitions fit. Apparently, so did the roughly 400,000 others, who fished in Iowa

last year and pumped an estimated \$400 million into the Iowa economy in the process.

So where did your license money go? Some was spent in southwest Iowa to improve fishing and fishing access for anglers. Lake Anita, for example, underwent renovation and restocking, including shoreline and fish habitat improvements. A new

fishing jetty was constructed at Lake Manawa, and existing jetties were repaired at Fogle, Big Creek and Beaver lakes. Lake Manawa and Saylorville Reservoir were stocked with white bass, and smallmouth bass habitat was improved in the Raccoon River. Walleye, bluegill, redear sunfish and hybrid striped bass were produced at the Mt. Ayr hatchery for stocking, and fish population surveys were conducted on many of the 101 lakes and hundreds of miles of streams in the southwest district. We are trying to do our part to provide good fishing opportunities, now it is up to you, the angler, to get out early and often to take advantage of those opportunities.

Most anglers know fishing is normally very good during April, May and most of June when fish are in shallow water actively feeding and spawning. However, some anglers don't realize there are good fishing opportunities at other times of the year.

Shortly after ice-out in March, when the waters first begin to warm, is one of the best times to catch channel catfish. That's when catfish go on an early feeding binge, feasting on fish and other organisms that died during the winter. Look for shallow water areas in lakes that warm fast

### TOP SURPRISE OF 2003

#### *Desoto Bend, Harrison County*

Crappie fishing this past spring at Desoto Bend was fantastic, with numerous fish caught that exceeded 10 inches. Most of the crappies were caught during the May spawn. Anglers found fish close to shore near a variety of habitats, such as underwater tree structure, old pilings and rock riprap.

Fishing should be excellent again this spring. Anglers will have their best luck using small lead-head jigs (1/64- to 1/16-ounce), light line (2- to 4-pound test) and bobbers. When fish are more finicky, tip the jig with a small minnow. Cast toward structure,

Lowell Washburn



with or without a bobber, then retrieve the lure slowly. Fish will be found in shallow water (2 to 5 feet) around structure. If water clarity is good, as it was last spring, you may be able to see male crappies guarding the nesting area.



on sunny days, or deeper river pools below riffles. Use shad bait, liver, night crawlers or prepared bait. Still-fishing with baits fished near the bottom seems to work best. Channel catfish are tasty when caught out of colder water, and good populations can be found in most southwest Iowa lakes, including Big Creek, Prairie Rose, Mormon Trail, Greenfield and Manawa.

If you like catfish, don't forget the flathead. True, they are harder to catch, but anglers using live green sunfish for bait and fishing at night — and those who have a lot of patience — are successful. Flatheads are common in many of southwest Iowa's

larger streams, as well as in Prairie Rose Lake and Lake of Three Fires.

Panfishing from April to mid-June is very productive because the fish are on the spawning beds or shallow rocky areas and brush piles. Bluegill and crappie are readily caught using night crawlers or minnows with bobbers, or soft bodied jigs of various colors. Still-fishing or casting and slowly retrieving the bait is often the best method, but variations such as a stop-and-go retrieve or a slight jigging motion will catch some of the more picky, larger fish.

When the weather gets hot during late June to August, the crappies and bluegill often move to deeper and



Ken Formanek

## TOP HUNCHES OF 2004

### *Prairie Rose, Shelby County*

Keeper-sized crappies are back at Prairie Rose. After a couple of lackluster years of crappie fishing —

more from size than numbers — a large year class of crappies has grown to an angler-acceptable size of 8 to 10 inches. Last spring anglers were catching 7- to 8-inch fish nearly every cast.

Concentrate your efforts near shore around rock riprap or the numerous brush piles located around the lake.

### *Red Rock Reservoir, Marion County*

Fisheries management surveys in 2003 found numerous crappie in the 11- to 14-inch range. The fish were in good condition, and fish exceeding 1 pound were very common. Good numbers of white bass and wipers were also sampled, particularly in the Whitebreast area. With good water levels, 2004 could be a banner year for the Red Rock fishery.

## TOP 10 BLUEGILL LAKES

1. **LAKE AHQUABI, Warren**  
Seven- to 9-inch fish; fish jigs and night crawlers near jetties.
2. **BIG CREEK LAKE, Polk**  
Seven- to 9-inch fish; try road beds, jetties and shallow points.
3. **SPRINGBROOK LAKE, Guthrie**  
Seven-inch fish common along dam and downed trees on west shore.
4. **THREE MILE LAKE, Union**  
Seven- to 9-inch fish common.
5. **MEADOW LAKE, Adair**  
Eight- to 9-inch fish; expect quality not quantity
6. **GREENFIELD LAKE, Adair**  
Lots of 7- to 8-inch fish around brush and spawning areas.
7. **VIKING LAKE, Montgomery**  
Seven- to 8-inch fish common; work along shoreline in June.
8. **BADGER CREEK, Madison**  
Good for 7- to 8.5-inch fish.
9. **BEAVER LAKE, Dallas**  
Good numbers of 7- to 9-inches.
10. **HOOPER LAKE, Warren**  
Seven- to 10-inch fish; try along dam and west shoreline.

## TOP 10 CRAPPIE LAKES

1. **RED ROCK RESERVOIR, Marion**  
Eleven- to 15-inch fish; try feeder stream coves and dam.
2. **BIG CREEK LAKE, Polk**  
Good numbers of 7- to 9-inches.
3. **WILSON LAKE, Taylor**  
Eight- to 11-inch fish abundant on dam during spawn.
4. **GREEN VALLEY LAKE, Union**  
Fish along rock shoreline in spring for 7.5- to 10-inch fish.



## BEST PLACE TO TAKE THE FAMILY

### *Hickory Grove Lake, Story County*

Located five miles west of Colo, Hickory Grove Lake is also within 20 miles of Ames, Iowa State

University and a plethora of theaters, museums, shopping, restaurants and sporting events.

Besides good bluegill fishing, the county park has a good camp-

Clay Smith



ing area and beach, along with canoe and paddle boat rentals. There are hiking trails, prairies, numerous shelters and picnicking areas.

cooler waters. But don't give up on these fish just yet. Instead, find a boat and seek out the deeper habitat such as humps, points, trees or weed beds that might be holding good numbers of nice panfish. Try drifting soft body baits, night crawlers or minnows in 10 to 15 feet of water to locate the fish, toss out a buoy to mark the spot and settle in for some good fishing. Another way to find crappies in deeper water is to troll a crankbait that runs 10 to 12 feet deep. I have located good schools of crappie this way, and if they hit a crankbait they are usually 10 inches or larger.

During this same hot weather period, largemouth bass seek out cool water — usually under 80 degrees. They can be located in deep water in the same manner as other panfish, but keep in mind they will also come into shallow water to feed during the early morning and evening. As the water

cools in the fall, these fish will begin to move back into 5 to 10 feet of water. Be sure to change your fishing habits appropriately.

Several lakes in the southwest district contain walleye. Many anglers only fish walleye in the spring before and just after the spawn. However, walleye can be caught very readily in the morning or evening during the hot summer months. Summer walleye anglers typically troll crankbaits or drift minnows or night crawlers over points or drop-offs in 12- to 15-feet of water. Live baits can be fished with lead head jigs, floating jigs, spinners, jigs with soft bodies or bait bouncers. Good crankbait colors are fluorescent orange, chartreuse, silver and fire tiger.

Sometimes, summer walleyes can be caught in shallow water when they are feeding on a windy shore along the mud line near clear water. Good

5. **THREE MILE LAKE**, *Union*  
Fish along rock shoreline in the spring; 7.5- to 10-inch fish common.
6. **DESOTO BEND**, *Harrison*  
Eight- to 13-inch fish; best in spring along structure.
7. **COLD SPRINGS LAKE**, *Cass*  
Good for 7- to 11-inch fish along points and structure.
8. **PRAIRIE ROSE LAKE**, *Shelby*  
Spring is good for 7- to 9-inch fish along rock shoreline
9. **EASTER LAKE**, *Polk*  
Fall surveys indicated good numbers of 7- to 9-inch fish.
10. **WEST LAKE**, *Clarke*  
Abundant numbers of 7.5- to 10-inch fish.

## TOP 10 LARGEMOUTH BASS LAKES

1. **BADGER CREEK**, *Madison*  
All sizes; largest at 20 inches.
2. **WEST LAKE**, *Clarke*  
All sizes; 14- to 17-inch fish common.
3. **LITTLE RIVER LAKE**, *Decatur*  
All sizes 12 inches and larger.
4. **GREEN VALLEY LAKE**, *Union*  
Trophy fish available; 22-inch minimum size limit.
5. **PRAIRIE ROSE LAKE**, *Shelby*  
Large 14- to 20-inch fish.
6. **VIKING LAKE**, *Montgomery*  
Twelve- to 15-inch bass available.
7. **ROBERTS CREEK LAKE**, *Marion*  
Good numbers in the 12- to 17-inch range were surveyed.
8. **BIG CREEK LAKE**, *Polk*  
Abundant bass up to 16 inches; 18-inch minimum length limit.





Ron Johnson

## MOST OVERLOOKED

*Wilson and Windmill lakes,  
Taylor County*

Wilson and Windmill lakes are two county areas that are frequently passed over. Wilson is 17 acres and has 8- to 11-inch crappies that are commonly caught on the dam during the spawn, plus good numbers of 12- to 16-inch largemouth bass. Windmill, a 22-acre lake, has a good population of 7- to 9-inch bluegills readily accessible during the spawn. Both have gravel boat ramps, so a 4-wheel drive will be helpful.

walleye fishing can be found in Three Mile, Little River, Mormon Trail, Big Creek and Red Rock lakes, plus the Des Moines River.

Last, but not least, don't forget the white bass and hybrid striped bass (wiper). They can be caught in bunches during hot weather when they go on a midsummer feeding frenzy for young gizzard shad. Red Rock and Saylorville reservoirs, plus the Des Moines River below Saylorville and the Scott Street and Center Street dams, are very good places to catch these fish. Try trolling several baits, especially silver lures that mimic shad, or look for schools of fish feeding on the surface of the water. In the river, white bass and wipers can be found near the dams where the fish tend to congregate. Once the fish are located, the action can be fast and furious.

The year 2003 was a good fishing season and with good weather, 2004 could be even better. Remember, if you don't go fishing, you can't catch fish.

## HIDDEN JEWEL

*Slipbluff Lake,  
Decatur County*

Slipbluff Lake is located two miles northwest of Davis City in southern Decatur County. The 16-acre lake has a gravel boat ramp, so 4-wheel drive vehicles are recommended, and an electric motors-only restriction. Both make fishing this lake an adventure. It has good crappie and bluegill fishing, with fish up to 8 to 10 inches. Watch the weather, though, as the lake can be murky after a big rain.



Lowell Washburn

9. **RED ROCK RESERVOIR**, *Marion*  
Good numbers of big bass up to 20 inches, fish along dam.

### 10. FARM PONDS

Best bass fishing available, but ask permission first.

## TOP 5 CHANNEL CATFISH LAKES

1. **MORMON TRAIL**, *Adair*  
Population surveys indicate 224 fish per acre.
2. **PRAIRIE ROSE**, *Shelby*  
High numbers of 3- to 6-pound fish, plus flathead catfish
3. **FOGLE**, *Ringgold*  
Fall surveys showed many 14- to 20-inch fish.
4. **NINE EAGLES**, *Decatur*  
Fish range 14 to 25 inches.
5. **ROCK CREEK**, *Jasper*  
Good population of fish up to 4 pounds.

## TOP 5 WALLEYE LAKES

1. **MORMON TRAIL LAKE**, *Adair*  
Good population of 1-pound fish.
2. **BIG CREEK LAKE**, *Polk*  
Many fish approaching the 15-inch minimum size limit.
3. **LITTLE RIVER LAKE**, *Decatur*  
Thirteen- to 17-inch fish common; trophy fish available.
4. **THREE MILE LAKE**, *Union*  
All sizes with plenty of fish exceeding 26 inches.
5. **DES MOINES RIVER**, *Boone and Polk*  
Fish below dams and in riffle and pool areas.





# SOUTHEAST IOWA

By Steve Waters,  
regional fisheries supervisor

**LAKE DARLING  
STATE PARK**  
110 LAKE DARLING ROAD  
BRIGHTON, IOWA 52540  
(319) 694-2430

Because I am a fisheries biologist and an avid angler (sometimes even successful), I am asked repeatedly to share my fishing secrets. I can't say how many times I have helped put people on fish. Although it is part of my job, it gives me great satisfaction to help anglers enjoy the wonderful world of fishing.

With that said, my first tip for all anglers is to know the phone number of the local fisheries biologist. No one knows the waters better than the fisheries biologists, so they can be a good first step. Also, visit the DNR's website ([www.iowadnr.com](http://www.iowadnr.com)) and arm yourselves with the latest fishing

report, lake maps, etc., or purchase the DNR's new interactive CD containing lake maps and fishing regulations (available through the Central Office in Des Moines).

For me, my fishing season begins in late March. When water temperatures reach about 50 to 55 degrees, catfish begin a feeding spree. Their favorite smorgasbord item is fish that didn't survive the winter, so "match the hatch" and use sour fish (cut baits). Fish in the shallower, warmer portion of a lake or river with the wind blowing across or away from you. This will set up a wind current that allows catfish to find your bait.

Most of our public waters support good catfish populations, but I have had some of my best fishing at Rathbun, Coralville, Darling, Kent, Macbride, Hawthorn, Keomah and Miami. Rivers are virtual catfish factories so don't ignore these productive systems. My favorite is the Mississippi River.

That leads me to my second tip. Make sure to include the family on those early catfish outings. The fishing is generally done from shore, giving young people some great outdoor options if fishing slows or if their interest level wanes. Kids love roasting hot dogs on an open fire, and s'mores of course. Bring along the baseball glove or Frisbee for alternate recreation. If they have fun, they will be receptive to going again, and being outdoors is much better than rotting in front of the TV.

Depending upon the water body, late April to mid-May is one of the best times to look for crappies. They are in a spawning mode and are generally in shallower water, which makes them quite vulnerable to anglers. The action can be very hot with the end result being a great fish fry.

I prefer small jigs for crappies. If the crappies are really on, jigs will generally out-fish other baits. If the

## TOP SURPRISE OF 2003

### *Lake Odessa, Louisa County*

Although managed for waterfowl hunting, this large backwater impoundment on the Mississippi River holds some of the best bluegill and crappie fishing in the area, despite recent levee blowouts.

Summer drawdowns for waterfowl management have also meant the smaller fish are concentrated with the larger predators, leading to fast growing fish. Bluegills average 7 to 9 inches, and 9- to 12-inch crappies are common. Don't be



Ken Formanek

surprised if you find a few crappies in the 14- to 16-inch range. Odessa also has a reputation as an excellent bass fishery. This is a big complex, so a map or GPS are valuable tools to help you navigate this unique area effectively.





DNR photo

## BEST HUNCH FOR 2004

*Lake Rathbun,  
Appanoose County*

If you have visited Lake Rathbun recently, chances are you have bagged a great number of crappies. However, as is always the case, crappies have to be small before they can be big, and recent catches have illustrated that.

Still, Lake Rathbun is not listed as one of the nation's best crappie lakes for nothing. Thanks to excellent year classes in 1998 and 2000, both quality and density have improved greatly. Sampling has seen an abundance of 9- to 11-inch crappies.

## HIDDEN JEWEL

*Shimek State Forest ponds,  
Lee and Van Buren counties*

Four large ponds lie tucked away in the Farmington and Donnelson Units of the Shimek State Forest. The ponds are between 6 to 7 acres and all hold good populations of largemouth bass, bluegill and channel catfish.

Shagbark and Bitternut ponds have boat ramps, and motors are restricted to electric only. Black

bite is a little slow, tip the jig with a small minnow or simply use minnows and a bare hook. Once I find the spawning fish, I generally use a small bobber to keep my lure off the bottom as I cast and retrieve my bait through the congregated fish.

Although I prefer to fish out of a boat, wading and fishing the shoreline is a good option. Keep in mind that crappie do not require a lot of action from a bait to entice them, and often too much lure activity can reduce your catch rates.

I have fished crappies in most of the lakes in the southeast district, and at times all have produced excellent fishing. Crappie populations fluctuate from year to year, so it can pay to move around to the hot lakes. However, for consistent results year-in-and-year-out, I like Rathbun, Coralville, Macbride, Odessa, Mississippi River (Big Timber), Miami and Lake Darling.

The best part about crappies is, about the time fishing gets good, morels start popping. And nothing compliments a meal of fresh crappie

Oak has a parking lot nearby and a walkway and fishing jetty. White Oak is most secluded. For those willing to take the one mile walk, exceptional bluegill angling will be the reward.



Clay Smith

## TOP 10 BLUEGILL LAKES

1. **LAKE SUGEMA, Van Buren**  
Tremendous numbers of 7- to 9-inch fish; habitat galore.
2. **LAKE WAPELLO, Davis**  
Excellent numbers of 8- to 9-inch fish.
3. **INDIAN LAKE, Van Buren**  
Great quality; 8- to 10-inch fish.
4. **HAWTHORN LAKE, Mahaska**  
Good numbers of 7- to 9-inch fish; great water quality.
5. **FARM PONDS, all counties**  
Mostly private water; best place for a trophy.
6. **LAKE GEODE, Henry**  
Good numbers of 7- to 9-inch fish with 10-inch fish present.
7. **LAKE ODESSA, Louisa**  
Lots of 7- to 9-inch fish.
8. **LAKE IOWA, Iowa**  
Seven- to 9-inch fish; try jigs and worms around brush piles.
9. **DIAMOND LAKE, Poweshiek**  
Seven- to 10-inch fish; fish around jetties and brush piles.
10. **PLEASANT CREEK LAKE, Linn**  
Good in shallow bays during the June spawn.

## TOP 10 CRAPPIE LAKES

1. **CORALVILLE RESERVOIR, Linn**  
Fish around downed trees or vertical jig rocky shorelines; 10- to 14-inch fish common.
2. **LAKE MACBRIDE, Johnson**  
Gobs of 8- to 10-inch fish.
3. **UNION GROVE, Tama**  
Eight- to 10-inch fish.
4. **IOWA LAKE, Iowa**  
Good numbers of 9- to 11-inches.
5. **MISSISSIPPI RIVER-BIG TIMBER**  
Eight- to 10-inch fish common.
6. **LAKE ODESSA, Louisa**  
Nine- to 12-inch fish.
7. **RATHBUN LAKE, Appanoose**  
Excellent numbers of 9- to 11-inch fish; best in years.

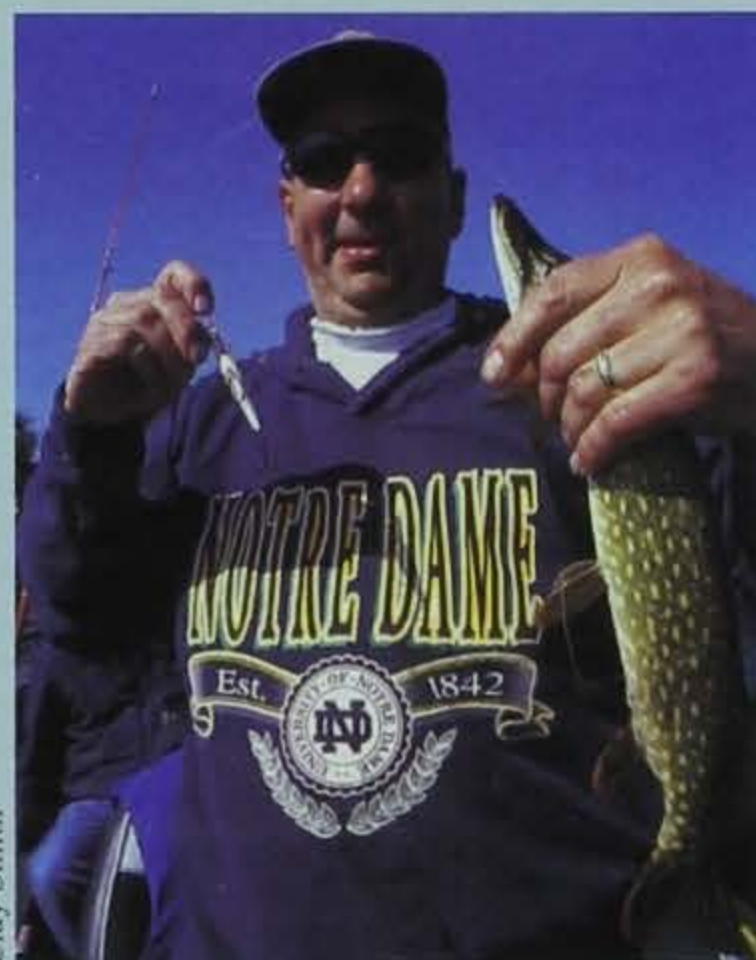


## MOST OVERLOOKED

### Northern Pike

My choice for "Most Overlooked" is more about a species than a place. It's a species with a toothy grin and an attitude for cooperation and ferocity. This species only needs a better following of anglers to champion its attributes. I am referring to the northern pike in Iowa's southern reach of the Mississippi River.

Since the Flood of '93, pike numbers have increased, making fishable populations readily available. Try the mouths of streams and rivers early in the year and in the fall. During late spring and



Clay Smith

summer, try backwaters and side channels with downed timber or rock outcrops. Use bait that sparkles, and get ready for a fight.

better than morel mushrooms. Although I am willing to divulge my fishing hotspots, my son and grandson would disown me if I revealed their mushroom hunting spots, so it looks like you are on your own.

Toward the end of May, bluegills start their spawning ritual. They set up housekeeping in the shallower portion of bays or protected areas, fanning out distinct circular areas for their nest. You will know you are in the right spot if the area looks like elephants walked through.

Fishing for these dynamic fighters during the spawn is similar to crappie angling. I prefer to use a small jig (smaller the better), and darker colors seem to be the more productive. If the fish need a little enticement, a small bit of worm seems to do the trick. One of my favorite combinations is an ice jig tipped with a wax worm. However, if you are fishing this setup

in deeper water, forget the bobber. Also, bluegills are different than crappie in that they are more attracted to a presentation with action. Therefore, don't be afraid to give your bait a twitch or two on the retrieve.

One of the things I like about bluegill fishing is their populations are generally stable from year to year, meaning if the fishing is good in a specific lake one year, it's probably good the next. Some of my favorite bluegill lakes in southeast Iowa are Sugema, Wapello, Hawthorn, Geode, Diamond, Miami, and of course, farm ponds.

Like ice-out catfishing, spring bluegill fishing is a great family event. The fish are associated with shoreline habitat and are highly cooperative. When the kids are along, don't forget to arm the cooler with beverages and treats; they can be your best friends

8. **LAKE MIAMI**, *Monroe*  
Tons of 8- to 11-inch fish.
9. **INDIAN LAKE**, *Van Buren*  
Nine- to 11-inch fish with 12- to 14-inch fish available.
10. **LAKE DARLING**, *Washington*  
Eight- to 9-inch fish are common.

## TOP 10 LARGE MOUTH BASS LAKES

1. **MISSISSIPPI RIVER-BIG TIMBER**  
Great numbers; all sizes.
2. **LAKE ODESSA**, *Louisa*  
Good numbers of fish up to 20 inches.
3. **LAKE MIAMI**, *Monroe*  
Excellent numbers; all sizes.
4. **LAKE WAPELLO**, *Davis*  
No-kill regulation; gobs of 12- to 17-inch fish.
5. **HAWTHORN LAKE**, *Mahaska*  
Great population of 16- to 22-inch fish.
6. **LAKE SUGEMA**, *Van Buren*  
Twelve- to 18-inch protected slot limit; numerous 11- to 17-inches.
7. **PLEASANT CREEK**, *Linn*  
Eighteen-inch minimum size limit; lots of 14- to 16-inch fish.
8. **LAKE MACBRIDE**, *Johnson*  
Good numbers; all sizes. Lots of new habitat.
9. **DIAMOND LAKE**, *Poweshiek*  
Good numbers of 2- to 4-pound fish; no outboard motors.
10. **FARM PONDS**, *all counties*  
Best chance for a trophy.

## TOP 10 CATFISH LAKES

1. **MISSISSIPPI RIVER**,  
*Pools 16, 19*  
Stump fields are good producers.
2. **LAKE DARLING**, *Washington*  
Lots of 15- to 19-inch fish; 9-pounders present.
3. **CORALVILLE**, *Johnson*  
Excellent population; all sizes.



to help make a great day more successful.

Look inside my tackle boxes and it's clear that I enjoy fishing for largemouth bass. They say lures were made to catch anglers, and my tackle box is proof of that. The point is, bass will bite on a variety of artificial baits.

Certain baits are more productive at certain times; jigs in cold water, spinner baits in the spring, crankbaits in the summer, jigs and spinnerbaits anytime, and plastic worms from late spring on. And then there are surface baits, which work best on calm mornings and evenings. For me, sitting in a boat at sundown working a surface lure along a weedline or

shallow flat and having a bass attack the bait with a vengeance is pure magic.

I can still see my grandfather, dad, and me so many years ago plugging away for bass in the glow of a gorgeous sunset. What makes this memory so special? Is it the family, the fish, the old boat, the beautiful outdoors? I really believe it is the combination of all these factors that make a fishing outing so special.

Someone once said bass fishing is where you find it, and bass fishing can be found throughout southeast Iowa. Mr. Bucketmouth is everywhere, but my favorite haunts are the Mississippi River (Big Timber and



Clay Smith

## BEST PLACE TO TAKE THE FAMILY

*Lake Macbride, Johnson County*

Thanks to the recent lake restoration project, we are starting to see the anticipated improvements to the Lake Macbride fishery.

A huge year class of black crappies dominates the fishery. The 9-inch-average fish should be enough incentive alone to attract

family fishing. However, bluegill, largemouth and Kentucky bass, channel catfish and walleye are itching to end up on the end of a fishing line as well.

When it is time to put the fishing poles aside, camping,

hiking trails, a scenic bike trail, boat rentals, beach facilities, a lodge and Frisbee golf are all available in the associated state park. There is power boating at nearby Coralville Reservoir and great restaurants. Other close attractions include the Coralville Mall with a children's museum, the Amana Colonies, Devonian Fossil Gorge and the University of Iowa.

4. **KENT PARK, Johnson**  
Outstanding angling; excellent shoreline access.
5. **OTTER CREEK, Tama**  
Lots of 14- to 20-inch fish.
6. **RATHBUN LAKE, Appanoose**  
Exceptional fishery, all sizes.
7. **DES MOINES RIVER**  
Exceptional fishery, all sizes; fish snag areas.
8. **HAWTHORN LAKE, Mahaska**  
Excellent fishery with fish up to 25 inches.
9. **LAKE KEOMAH, Mahaska**  
Good for a variety of sizes.
10. **LAKE MIAMI, Monroe**  
Excellent numbers, all sizes.

## TOP 5 WALLEYE LAKES

1. **RATHBUN, Appanoose**  
Excellent fishery; large numbers of 15- to 21-inch fish.
2. **SUGEMA, Van Buren**  
Good numbers of 15- to 19-inch fish; fish up to 24 inches.
3. **MISSISSIPPI RIVER, lock and dam 15 and 17**  
Great tailwater fishery; fish move to wing dams in summer.
4. **IOWA RIVER, Johnson**  
Fish below Coralville Dam and Burlington Street dam in Iowa City.
5. **WAPSI RIVER**  
Fish below dams at Central City and Anamosa.

## TOP 3 WHITE BASS LAKES

1. **RATHBUN LAKE, Appanoose**  
Excellent fishery; best in years. Fish average 10 to 14 inches.
2. **MISSISSIPPI RIVER**  
Fish below locks and dams and wing dams.
3. **PLEASANT CREEK, Linn**  
Best in summer; look for schools feeding on surface.



numerous backwaters up and down the river), Sugema, Wapello, Geode, Macbride, Pleasant Creek, Hawthorn, Odessa, Miami and my pond.

A quick word about summer-time catfishing and panfishing. During the summer, catfishing at night is quite an adventure. After dark the cats turn on to stink and cheese baits and worms. Summer-time panfishing tactics also change. Bluegill and crappie move away from the shore and are typically found suspended above the lake's thermocline. Slip bobber and tight line techniques are most productive at this time.

Oh, there are walleye, flathead catfish, white bass, redear sunfish and ice angling discussions that will have to wait for another time. And what about summertime catfish

camp on the banks of the Skunk River?

I cannot tell you how many times I have heard the following statement from folks I have talked to. It goes something like... "I used to fish," followed by a number of reasons why they don't anymore. Almost all say they miss being on the water, enjoying Mother Nature. Most of all, they miss the contact they had with family and friends.

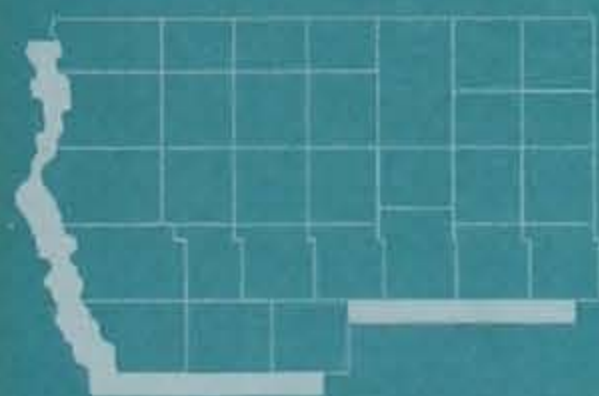
My final tip is fishing is not an indoor sport. You cannot participate, connect or reconnect with all the great things fishing offers if you do not make an effort to get outside and enjoy one of life's greatest and simplest pleasures...fishing. If you need some advice, give one of us a call. We are here and anxious to help.

### **TOP 3 FLATHEAD CATFISH WATERS**

1. **SKUNK RIVER**  
Easy to fish because of its size; popular fishery.
2. **MISSISSIPPI RIVER, Pools 16-19**  
Best below locks and dams and side channels.
3. **CEDAR, IOWA, WAPSI, DES MOINES RIVERS**  
Good for all sizes. Look for big fish in holes during summer, and drift piles and bridge pilings.

### **TOP 2 REDEAR SUNFISH LAKES**

1. **LAKE GEODE, Henry**  
Fish have been sampled up to 11 1/2 inches.
2. **LAKE WAPELLO, Davis**  
Good numbers of 8- to 12-inchers.



## **NORTHWEST & NORTH-CENTRAL IOWA**

By Thomas W. Gengerke, regional fisheries supervisor, and Jim Christianson, Lannie Miller and Jim Wahl

**SPIRIT LAKE  
FISH HATCHERY  
122 252nd AVENUE,  
SPIRIT LAKE, IOWA  
51360  
(712) 336-1840**

Natural lakes, rich prairie streams, small impoundments and great border rivers all offer unique and diverse opportunities for Iowa anglers and visitors to our state. Our fisheries are diverse in their community structure; the "special events" which frequently surround these angling opportunities are unique and many of our aquatic habitats are truly exceptional. No other resource, with the exception of the Mississippi River, supports such a wide diversity of

sportfish. Multi-species fish communities offer anglers opportunities year-round. Let's take a look at some of those from a seasonal perspective.

### **Spring**

Shortly after the ice goes out, pike anglers in northern Iowa head to their favorite stream in search of the toothy predator. Northern pike are one of the first fish to become active and provide a good chance to catch a fish greater than 10 pounds. The

Winnebago River in Winnebago, Hancock, Worth and Cerro Gordo counties offers some of the best early season pike fishing in the state.

During the spring, northerns seek out shallow, backwater areas for spawning. Several public access sites on the Winnebago River offer this type of habitat. Because water temperatures are very cold (35 to 45 degrees), live bait is the preferred choice. For that reason, most anglers use a medium to large chub fished on



or near the bottom. In this early period, pike are most active during the warmest part of the day, and sunny days (in mid-afternoon) produce the best results.

If catfish are your bag, ice-out fishing in the natural lakes is for you. Catfish in almost all Iowa lakes put on the feedbag immediately after ice-out, but some of Iowa's natural lakes are premier hotspots. Fish, especially shad, die each year during the winter, and ice-out seems to signal the start of a catfish feeding binge. Fish on the windy side of the lake in shallow (less than 5-foot deep) water.

Several baits will work, includ-

ing dead chubs, dead minnows and even some dip baits, but the best are shad entrails and shad sides. They can be purchased at most bait shops. They are very effective, even if shad aren't present in the lake. Use small slip sinkers with a small split shot to hold the weight off the hook. A number 2 or 4 bait holder hook is ideal. Leave a little slack in the line so the fish doesn't feel any resistance. The top three choices for red-hot action would be Black Hawk Lake, Storm Lake and East Okoboji.

Walleye fishing really kicks into gear in northern Iowa with the



Ron Johnson

## BEST HUNCHES FOR 2004

**Brushy Creek Lake,  
Webster County  
Lake Cornelia, Wright County**

Brushy Creek has been a tremendous fishing lake since it was filled in 1998, and 2004 promises to be a banner year.

A large number of slab crappie, from 9 to 13 inches, are present in the lake, along with a huge year class of 7- to 9-inch bluegill. On

top of that, large numbers of 17- to 23-inch walleye are present as well as some great largemouth and smallmouth bass. Throw in some muskies that will top 20 pounds and you have a fishing bonanza.

Spawning crappies and bluegills can be caught near the shoreline in May and June, while later in the summer, fish will suspend near the sunken timber that abounds in the lake. Walleye are caught all year long on the underwater points using a slip bobber and leeches.

A strong year class of yellow perch that averaged 8 inches in 2003 should provide excellent opportunities at Lake Cornelia in 2004. Perch have always existed in Cornelia, but this is the greatest number of catchable-size fish in recent years. Fish the north shoreline during the spring with small minnows or night crawlers. As the water warms, move to deeper water along the old dredge cut near the north shore.

## TOP 10 WALLEYE WATERS

1. **CLEAR LAKE, Cerro Gordo**  
Two strong year classes; 12- to 16-inch fish.
2. **DES MOINES RIVER, Kossuth and Humboldt**  
Population on the increase.
3. **IOWA RIVER, Hardin**  
Fish from Alden downstream.
4. **STORM LAKE, Buena Vista**  
Lots of fish larger than 15 inches.
5. **BLACK HAWK LAKE, Sac**  
Seventeen- to 20-inch fish.
6. **BRUSHY CREEK LAKE, Webster**  
Fish the points and flats with slip bobbers and leeches.
7. **SPIRIT LAKE, Dickinson**  
Large 2001 year class.
8. **SILVER LAKE, Dickinson**  
Thirteen- to 18-inch fish.
9. **FIVE ISLAND LAKE, Palo Alto**  
Eighteen- to 20-inch fish sampled in 2003.
10. **LOST ISLAND LAKE, Palo Alto**  
Good recruitment of 2001 year class.

## TOP 5 YELLOW PERCH WATERS

1. **SPIRIT LAKE, Dickinson**  
Good numbers observed in creel and population surveys.
2. **SILVER LAKE, Palo Alto**  
Eight- to 10-inch fish abundant.
3. **LITTLE SWAN LAKE, Dickinson**  
Large fish available. Good numbers.
4. **LAKE CORNELIA, Wright**  
Eight- to 9-inch fish common. Fish north shore.
5. **SILVER LAKE, Worth**  
Eight- to 10-inch fish common. Use small minnows.





Lowell Washburn

## TOP SURPRISE OF 2003

### *North Twin Lake, Calhoun County*

North Twin lake has seldom experienced a fishery as good as last year's. In 2003, it provided some tremendous fishing for 9- to 12-inch crappies and 7- to 9-inch bluegills. If that isn't enough, it also produced some great channel catfish, yellow bass and walleye fishing. Boat anglers did better than shore anglers, as the fish seemed to concentrate along the outside weed line or in the deep-water fish habitat. Small leadheads or live minnows were excellent choices for these panfish species. Look for another great year in 2004.

"opener" on Spirit and the Okoboji lakes during early May. It's a time filled with excitement, anticipation and anglers using about every presentation and terminal tackle known to man. However, the old standbys of minnows and leeches usually take the majority of fish from rock reefs.

Many anglers don't wait for the opener and begin fishing in earnest at Lost Island, Silver (Dickinson County), Five Island, Storm and Clear lakes shortly after ice-out. Clear water and cold water temperatures mean the best fishing is usually in low-light conditions or after dark. Fish slow with a jig and a minnow. River walleye anglers should try the Linn Grove Dam on Little Sioux, the Estherville riffles on the West Fork of the Des Moines River and the Klondike Dam on Big Sioux.

Want to tangle with a bronze-backed brawler? Smallmouth bass fishing is terrific shortly after ice-out. Successful anglers usually target shallow rock piles on calm, sunny days. A jig and a minnow is the time-honored traditional favorite. Spirit Lake and West Okoboji have excellent populations of ol' red-eye.

If northern pike, channel catfish, walleye and smallmouth bass aren't on your list, how about bluegill, crappie and bullheads? Bluegills and crappies are available in the majority of our lakes. Find the shallow, protected areas that warm the earliest and fish small baits (1/16- 1/64-ounce jigs — I prefer black) slowly. The canals on West Okoboji are a real bonus. For crappies, a small minnow fished under a bobber is a good technique. If you're fishing from a boat, try casting a 1/16-ounce or lighter jig and "swim" it back to the boat.

The Spirit Lake "grade" is a traditional hotspot for bullheads. Crawlers are the preferred bait, and fish will bite after dark so add a lantern to your equipment list. Other

## TOP 10 BULLHEAD WATERS

1. **RICE LAKE, Winnebago**  
Abundant 1/2- to 3/4-pound fish.
2. **SILVER LAKE, Worth**  
Nine- to 10-inch fish.
3. **CLEAR LAKE, Cerro Gordo**  
May and June are prime time.
4. **LOST ISLAND LAKE, Palo Alto**  
Traditional producer.
5. **SILVER LAKE, Palo Alto**  
Abundant 10-inch fish.
6. **SPIRIT LAKE, Dickinson**  
Really large fish; good numbers.
7. **DOG CREEK LAKE, O'Brien**  
Large population.
8. **BLACK HAWK LAKE, Sac**  
Large numbers of 8- to 10-inches.
9. **NORTH TWIN LAKE, Calhoun**  
Large yellow bullheads available.
10. **CENTER LAKE, Dickinson**  
Good numbers and good shoreline access.

## TOP 5 CRAPPIE WATERS

1. **BROWNS LAKE, Woodbury**  
Excellent population of 9- to 12-inch fish.
2. **NORTH TWIN LAKE, Calhoun**  
Best fishing in recent years; 9- to 10-inch fish.
3. **BRUSHY CREEK LAKE, Webster**  
Ten-inch fish available.
4. **LOWER PINE LAKE, Hardin**  
Good numbers of 7- to 8-inches.
5. **BEEDS LAKE, Franklin**  
Drift fish above the thermocline in summer.

## TOP 10 CHANNEL CATFISH WATERS

1. **BOONE RIVER, Hamilton**  
Abundant 1- to 2-pound fish below Webster City.



## BEST PLACE TO TAKE THE FAMILY

### *Upper and Lower Pine Lakes, Hardin County*

Located in Pine Lake State Park near Eldora, Upper and Lower Pine lakes offer great opportunities for family fun. Both lakes provide good fishing for bluegill and crappie. Trophy bass up to 7 pounds are available in both lakes, with the best population occurring in the lower lake. The lower lake has a large swim beach and the upper lake has boats and canoes for rent. The campground is located on the upper lake and several cabins are available for rent on the Iowa River below the lower lake. A well-maintained trail system provides hiking between the lakes and a close-up view of the unique landscape surrounding the lake.

As an added bonus, the Iowa River lies on the edge of the park and provides excellent fishing for channel catfish, walleye and smallmouth bass.



Clay Smith

Spirit, West Okoboji, Lost Island, Five Island, Silver (Dickinson County), Black Hawk and Storm — along with Brushy Creek, are just some of the lakes where walleyes really turn on during the early summer.

Several techniques work during this time of year, but trolling with artificial lures and drift fishing with bottom-bouncers are two of the most preferred techniques. Most trolling occurs in 5 to 10 feet of water with crankbaits such as Thundersticks, Shad Raps, Frenzys or Wally Divers. A variety of colors work, however chartreuse is one of the most popular. The best live bait choices are minnows, night

top destinations are Center, Dog Creek, Lost Island, Silver (Palo Alto County), Clear and Black Hawk lakes.

### Summer

Year-in and year-out some of the best walleye fishing on natural lakes in northern Iowa occurs during the month of June. The walleyes have fully recovered from the rigors of spawning and are aggressively feeding. The natural lakes — Clear,

crawlers or leeches.

Walleye anglers know fishing is typically the best when there is a "chop" on the water, and the best catches often occur on the windy side of the lake. Walleyes frequently school (congregate), so if one is caught, throw out a marker and fish the area thoroughly. There is no sure-thing in fishing, however walleye fishing on natural lakes in June may be as close as it gets.

Later in the summer, smallmouth

2. **IOWA RIVER, Hardin**  
Quality habitat from Alden to Union.
3. **CLEAR LAKE, Cerro Gordo**  
Fish in July with chicken livers.
4. **STORM LAKE, Buena Vista**  
Perhaps the best in northwest Iowa.
5. **BLACK HAWK LAKE, Sac**  
Easy access and lots of 1- to 5-pound fish.
6. **SNYDER BEND LAKE, Woodbury**  
Good numbers of 10-pound fish.
7. **LAKE PAHOJA, Lyon**  
Excellent numbers of 2- to 8-pound fish.
8. **SILVER LAKE, Dickinson**  
Abundant 2- to 3-pound fish.
9. **INGHAM LAKE, Emmet**  
Excellent numbers.
10. **EAST OKOBOJI, Dickinson**  
Large fish available.

### TOP 5 BLUEGILL WATERS

1. **BRUSHY CREEK LAKE, Webster**  
Huge year-class of 7- to 8-inch fish. Focus on suspended fish near timber.
2. **NORTH TWIN LAKE, Calhoun**  
Lots of 8- to 9-inch fish.
3. **BEEDS LAKE, Franklin**  
Plentiful 6- to 7-inch fish.
4. **UPPER AND LOWER PINE, Hardin**  
Large number of 6-inch-plus fish.
5. **WEST OKOBOJI, Dickinson**  
Excellent numbers. Early spring and summer are great.

### TOP 5 SMALLMOUTH BASS WATERS

1. **SPIRIT LAKE, Dickinson**  
Good numbers of large fish.
2. **IOWA RIVER, Hardin**  
Twelve-inch-plus fish common.



bass move to deeper rock piles and emerging weed lines and can be caught with live bait (leeches) and artificial lures. West Okoboji is my top summer smallmouth bass lake.

Summer can be a tough time to catch panfish, especially when water temperatures are high. Bluegills that were so easy to catch a few months before have seemingly disappeared. Don't give up, they haven't left the lake, they've just changed locations.

One of the best methods to catch bluegill during the summer months is to drift fish during the morning and evening hours when bluegill are the most active. A depth locator or fish finder can be a valuable asset — although not mandatory — to locate suspended schools of fish.



Ron Johnson

## HIDDEN JEWEL

### *Indian Lake, Hancock County*

Indian Lake, located in Eldred Sherwood Park in Hancock County, is a 21-acre artificial lake that provides excellent fishing for large-mouth bass and bluegill. It also is stocked annually with channel catfish and walleye. The lake is managed by the Hancock County Conservation Board and is three miles east and one mile north of Goodell. The lake has a gravel boat ramp and allows boats with electric motors only. Camping, a swim beach and shelter are also available for visitors.

Several types of tackle will work. A small ice fishing teardrop jig tipped with a wax worm or small piece of angleworm is very effective. A small split shot will help keep your bait at the right depth. A small number 8 or 10 hook tipped with live bait will also catch bluegill. Start in about 7 feet of water and drift into deeper water. Many times the bluegill will be suspended over very deep water. If you haven't had a bite in several minutes, adjust the depth of your lure. Once the bluegill are located, anchor over them and vertical fish or continue drifting through the school.

## Fall

Fall is the favorite time for many anglers who prefer to catch panfish in

Iowa's natural lakes. During September and October, panfish school heavily and provide anglers the opportunity to fill a wire basket with excellent table fare. Big Spirit Lake and Clear Lake are two of the most popular fall locations. West Okoboji, Silver (Palo Alto County) and Little Swan are also good choices.

Yellow perch are the quarry at Spirit Lake, and yellow bass on Clear Lake. Although they are different species, the same tackle and techniques will work for both. Most are caught still-fishing from an anchored boat. If you are unsure

3. **BOONE RIVER**, *Hamilton*  
Fish below Webster City.
4. **NORTH RACCOON RIVER**, *Sac and Carroll*  
Growing population; fish are 8 to 18 inches.
5. **Des Moines River**, *Webster*  
Fish up to 5 pounds.

## TOP 5 LARGEMOUTH BASS WATERS

1. **LOWER PINE**, *Hardin*  
Good numbers of legal fish, with some over 5 pounds.
2. **BEEDS LAKE**, *Franklin*  
Fish exceeding 12 inches are abundant.
3. **BRIGGS WOODS LAKE**, *Hamilton*  
High densities; fish the edge of the weedline.
4. **BRUSHY CREEK LAKE**, *Webster*  
Lots of fish in the timber and along the shoreline.
5. **CENTER LAKE**, *Dickinson*  
Good numbers of 15-inch-plus fish; practice catch-and-release.

## TROPHIES AND UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES

**TROPHIES** — Muskie populations in Clear Lake (Cerro Gordo County), Spirit and West Okoboji (Dickinson County) and Brushy Creek (Webster County) have grown in numbers and size. Late summer and fall are peak periods.

**UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES** — They're scrappy and good eating, so don't overlook Iowa's yellow bass bonanza. Fish average 8 inches at North Twin (Calhoun County) and Black Hawk (Sac), to 11 inches at Clear Lake (Cerro Gordo County).



## MOST OVERLOOKED

### *Center Lake, Dickinson County*

Center Lake was once dominated by black crappies, however in recent years bluegill numbers have increased. This small natural lake will provide anglers with quality fishing this spring. Abundant habitat provides both shore and boat anglers opportunities to catch this popular panfish.

Anglers will also experience excellent catches of largemouth bass 15 inches and larger. However, anglers are urged to practice catch-and-release of this very important predator species. Off-shore areas, such as deep break lines and a hard bottom, are areas for anglers to concentrate their efforts. The submerged reef south of the boat ramp on the west side of the lake can be very productive.

Anglers will see an upswing in



Ron Johnson

the walleye fishery as good numbers of angler-acceptable fish are present. Wading or just plain fishing from shore is often productive in this lake. Cast minnow-imitating lures or fish after dark with a lighted bobber and crawlers or leeches.

Channel catfish, which were stocked in 1999, have had excellent growth and will sustain the fishery for many years to come. This lake typically gets little fishing pressure and thus has the potential to produce 20-inch fish in the future. The bullhead angler often overlooks this lake, but recent surveys indicate good numbers of quality fish.

where to fish, look for a concentration of boats and it's likely you'll be in the right spot.

Most perch anglers use a small jigging spoon or mini jig tipped with silver wigglers. Yellow bass anglers prefer small minnows or cutbait attached to small jig or spoon. Perch and yellow bass are bottom feeders, so keep your bait on or near the bottom. Generally there is no need to cast, just fish vertically over the side of the boat. If the action is slow, move frequently until you locate a feeding school.

Fall can also be one of the best times to catch crappie. Like other predatory fish, crappie feed heavily in the fall to prepare their egg masses and to put on fat for the winter months. In some areas, fishing for crappie is better in the fall than during the spring. Black Hawk Lake in Sac County has been one of these areas. Although some crappies are caught in the spring along the shoreline as the fish move into the shallows to spawn, many more are caught in the fall when water temperatures are in the 50s and 60s.

When the water temperatures are that low, patience is a virtue. Small jigs and a slow presentation is the rule to catch a mess of slab-sided crappies. In cold water, scent is also an important component of a successful trip. Tipping your jigs with natural bait such as wax worms or wigglers or artificially scented baits will greatly enhance your success. A small bobber, about the size of a nickel, will keep your jig at the proper depth and make a very slow retrieve possible.

## Winter

Ice fishing for catchable-sized rainbow trout in Mason City is a unique opportunity. Over the past 10 years, ice anglers have caught 1/2- to 3/4-pound trout stocked in the 15-acre pit located in Lester Milligan Park. Four stockings occur throughout the winter, with the first release taking place just before Thanksgiving. Although the pond is 35 feet deep, most trout are caught suspended from the bottom at a depth of 3 to 10 feet. A large variety of baits work, including small minnows, commercial trout bait, waxworms, cheese, small jigging spoons or leadhead jigs.

Remember, a trout fee is required in addition to your fishing license to fish for trout.

Winter is also a great time for the traditional favorites such as walleye, yellow perch, northern pike, yellow bass, bluegill and crappie. Most of the techniques explored earlier apply. Walleye anglers frequently switch to terminal tackle which "shines" and bait it with fish eyes, minnow heads or live minnows. Fish near the bottom both early or late in the day.





## NORTH EAST IOWA

By Dave Moeller  
regional fisheries supervisor

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While three-fourths of Iowa is best known for quality lakes and impoundments, the northeast district is the river and stream capitol of Iowa. And what a diversity of flowing waters it is; from the gin-clear waters in the spring-fed trout streams gurgling over rock and gravel riffles, to the more placid and laid-back pace of the larger interior streams and rivers, to the granddaddy of them all, the Mighty Mississippi and its endless

myriad of channels, backwater lakes and sloughs. Both residents and visitors to this unique and scenic part of Iowa can find an equally diverse variety of quality fish populations to pursue and enjoy.

The thing I personally like about fishing flowing water is that "just around the bend" you'll have that portion of stream or river all to yourself, and all the cares and worries of the world are somehow magically

left behind. I also find flowing water kind of hypnotic or mesmerizing, in a pleasant way, kind of like the quiet and solitude of staring into a campfire. It's hard to get your fill.

But not all northeast Iowa waters are in a hurry to get somewhere. There is also a sprinkling of small lakes, impoundments and ponds where anglers can get away from it all and leisurely commune and enjoy the outdoors on "flat water." So whether you prefer to recreate on flowing or standing waters, grab your fishing rod and let's take a look at some of the fishing opportunities awaiting you. And by the way, take your

### BEST HUNCH FOR 2004

#### *Meyers Lake, Black Hawk*

This 26-acre lake located adjacent to Highway 20 in Evansdale is definitely on the rebound after a severe winterkill in 2000-01 forced a complete lake renovation and fish restocking. Abundant numbers of 7-inch bluegills, 8-inch crappies and 14-inch channel catfish were found in surveys last fall. Large-mouth bass will be 12 to 14 inches and provide some excellent catch-and-release action (15-inch minimum length limit). If you are looking for a place to catch a mess of nice bullheads, Meyers Lake is a good choice.



Lowell Washburn

### TOP 10 SMALLMOUTH BASS WATERS

1. **CEDAR RIVER,**  
*Bremer and Black Hawk*  
Best habitat and numbers between Waverly and Waterloo.
2. **CEDAR RIVER,**  
*Floyd and Mitchell*  
Good populations, especially downstream of St. Ansgar.
3. **MAQUOKETA RIVER, Delaware**  
Catch-and-release area below Delhi Dam; big fish and lots of them.
4. **MAQUOKETA RIVER,**  
*Jones and Jackson*  
Good numbers of 15- to 16-inches.
5. **MISSISSIPPI RIVER,**  
*Pools 9-11*  
Expanding population; fish rocks with swift current; many 12- to 17-inches.
6. **SHELL ROCK RIVER,**  
*Butler and Bremer*  
Good population from Greene to Cedar River.
7. **TURKEY RIVER, Fayette**  
Very good numbers of all sizes.
8. **UPPER IOWA RIVER,**  
*Howard and Winneshiek*  
Most scenic river in all of Iowa; catch-and-release area from Decorah to Upper Dam.



daughter and son, or a neighbor child along with you so they too can learn and experience the lifelong fun and satisfaction of angling. Rarely do kids get into trouble when they have a fishing rod in their hand.

About the time you think you're going to croak with a severe case of cabin fever in March, the ice starts breaking up on the interior rivers and the Mississippi River, and walleye (and sauger too on the Mighty Mississippi) head upstream for the upcoming spawning season. The adult walleyes congregate just below

the navigation dams on the Mississippi and the low-head dams on the interior rivers. This is definitely the best time to catch a real wall-hanger. Use a florescent-colored jig tipped with a minnow and retrieve it slowly along the bottom. Mississippi River boat anglers often vertically jig vibrating lures or slowly work three-way rigs with a minnow with success. The key is to keep your offering within a foot of the bottom and work it slowly.

The stocking rate of fingerling walleyes was tripled a few years ago on all the interior rivers and popula-

## BEST PLACE TO TAKE THE FAMILY

### *Volga River Recreation Area, Fayette County*

This 5,400-acre state recreation area is an excellent family fishing destination. Located four miles north of Fayette just off Highway 150, this area is a beautiful combination of lake and streams, hills and valleys, timber and prairie, bustling recreation activity and quiet solitude.

The 135-acre Volga Lake has good fishing for bluegills and crappies and has lots of channel catfish, including some real lunkers. There's easy shoreline access, with a floating fishing pier, sidewalk access for fishing off the dam and a jetty on the dam. Excellent boat ramps and courtesy dock are available for no-wake boating. Also meandering through the area is the

Volga River, a small rocky river that harbors many feisty smallmouth bass and is best fished by wading. The non-modern campground has 42 nonelectric campsites. There are miles of nature, bridle, biking and snowmobile trails.

Wildlife abound, providing excellent deer and turkey hunting. Rumor has it that the elusive morel mushroom can be found in abundance in early spring (but shhh, please don't tell anybody). For a change of pace, try fishing one of the five stocked trout streams located less than 20 minutes away.



Clay Smith

9. **VOLGA RIVER**,  
*Clayton and Fayette*  
Small river suitable for wading; very scenic valley.
10. **WAPSIPINICON RIVER**,  
*Buchanan*  
Best populations from Littleton downstream.

## TOP 10 CHANNEL CATFISH WATERS

1. **AVENUE OF THE SAINTS**, *Bremer*  
Lots of 15- to 17-inch fish; good shoreline access.
2. **CASEY LAKE**, *Tama*  
This lake has some monsters exceeding 10 pounds.
3. **CEDAR RIVER**,  
*Mitchell, Floyd, Chickasaw, Bremer and Black Hawk*  
Excellent catfishing year-in and year-out.
4. **MAQUOKETA RIVER**,  
*Delaware, Jones and Jackson*  
Good populations from Manchester to Mississippi River.
5. **MEYERS LAKE**, *Black Hawk*  
Excellent numbers of 14- to 17-inches.
6. **MISSISSIPPI RIVER**, *Pools 9-15*  
Population continues to expand with many strong year classes.
7. **SHELL ROCK RIVER**,  
*Butler and Floyd*  
Good numbers of 14- to 20-inches throughout.
8. **SOUTH PRAIRIE LAKE**,  
*Black Hawk*  
Abundant 15- to 21-inches with some exceeding 5 pounds.
9. **TURKEY RIVER**, *Clayton*  
Anywhere below Elkader; mostly channel cats but a few flatheads.



## HIDDEN JEWEL

*Little Turkey River,  
Delaware County*

This trout stream is located in a 480-acre state wildlife area two miles east of Colesburg just off Voyager Road. This remote timbered valley is a real gem. Extensive stream habitat improvement projects in recent years have significantly benefited this trout stream. Stocked twice a month (unannounced), primarily with 1/2-pound brown trout and a few brook and rainbows mixed in, this stream will get you away from the crowds. As an added bonus, the brown trout fingerling stockings have produced a population of stream-reared browns that will test your trout fishing skills. As with all state wildlife management areas, primitive pack-in camping is allowed so spend a few days to fully enjoy the sights, sounds and smells of a bubbling trout stream flowing through beautiful timbered hills and valley.



Clay Smith

more of a year-round activity, especially with increasing numbers of streams with strong wild brown trout populations. The first week of April is the start of the eight-month stocking season of half-pound trout. Some people shy away from pursuing trout, thinking they have to be an expert to be successful. Not true. Trout take a wide variety of natural baits and lures and most anglers use spin or spin-casting outfits. You'll definitely increase your catch by using light line; four-pound test is good.

Trout lay facing upstream watching for food items to drift down to them, so work your way upstream and cast upstream and retrieve with the current. You'll definitely increase your catch if you try a

variety of baits or lures and experiment with what works best. Night crawlers, salmon eggs, commercial bait, small brown/black or olive jigs and small spinners should always be a part of your trout arsenal.

May and June is a magical time for anglers. That's when three very popular species — largemouth bass, crappie and bluegill — are in shallow water and very cooperative. It's also when bank fishing can be more effective than fishing from a boat.

10. **VOLGA LAKE, Fayette**  
Excellent population of cats exceeding 20 inches.

### TOP 10 TROUT WATERS

1. **BAILEY'S FORD, Delaware**  
Very popular catchable stream with county park amenities.
2. **COLDWATER CREEK, Winneshiek**  
Stocked with rainbows and brooks; wild browns increasing.
3. **FRENCH CREEK, Allamakee**  
Catch-and-release for all browns; a unique, high quality stream.
4. **GLOVER'S CREEK, Fayette**  
Stocked with catchable rainbows and browns; public ownership recently expanded.
5. **LITTLE TURKEY RIVER, Delaware**  
Expanding brown trout population due to improved habitat and natural reproduction.
6. **LITTLE PAINT CREEK, Allamakee**  
Improved habitat. Intense stocking of rainbows and brooks; wild browns present.
7. **RICHMOND SPRING, Delaware**  
Easy access and intense stocking in this stream
8. **SNY MAGILL, Clayton**  
Rainbows and brooks stocked twice each week; miles of stream in public ownership.
9. **SPRING BRANCH, Delaware**  
A favorite of fly-fishers due to myriad of insect hatches.
10. **WATERLOO CREEK, Allamakee**  
Highest density of wild brown trout per mile in all of Iowa.

### TOP 5 BLUEGILL WATERS

1. **CASEY LAKE, Tama**  
Seven- to 9-inches; drift the main lake after the spawn.

tions have been increasing rapidly. Don't miss out.

About the same time, channel catfish seem to wake up after a long winter and are real hungry. Their target is winterkilled fish, so cutbait or dead chubs often work well. Other natural foods such as night crawlers also work well in cool water. When the water warms up later in the summer, switch to stink baits, cheese baits and chicken liver.

Trout fishing in Iowa is becoming



Target any shallow-water structure such as underwater trees, brush and riprap for largemouth bass. More important than the particular bait or lure you use is presentation — get it right next to the structure. Crappies and jigs were made for each other. Fish a marabou or soft plastic jig directly or a couple feet below a small bobber and slowly “jig” the retrieve. Crappies have a soft mouth so don’t set the hook too hard. Try a piece of

crawler or a small minnow if they aren’t hitting jigs. These same techniques work on bluegills as well.

My personal favorite is the hard-hitting, hard-fighting and sometimes airborne smallmouth bass. The key to catching them is finding habitats they prefer — a combination of rock (or riprap) and swift current. The only other component is water that is not too turbid. Good success can start as early as May and last throughout the

## MOST OVERLOOKED

### *Drum and catfish fishing on the Mississippi River*

Mention Mississippi River and most anglers think about walleye, sauger, largemouth bass, bluegill, crappie, northern pike and smallmouth bass. However, a couple of species are possibly more numerous combined than any of the above — freshwater drum (also known as sheepshead) and channel catfish.

With drum and catfish, you don’t have to worry about minimum size limits, bag limits and possession limits because there aren’t any. Nor do you have to worry about having fancy gear and a bunch of high-priced lures. The only things to worry about are having enough bait and enough room in the freezer.

Even though both species are commercially harvested, their populations remain very strong. Drum are most likely increasing due to the recent infestation of the exotic zebra mussel on which they readily feed. There are several strong year classes of channel

catfish entering the fishery and angling success should be very good for many years to come.

A rod with some backbone, strong line and either bait-casting or larger spinning reels with good drag systems are recommended. Night crawlers and crayfish (live or just the tails) work very good for both. Use big crayfish if you want to target big drum. Dip baits and stink baits work best on catfish during the warmest months. Fish the bait on the bottom on the main channel borders or in the side channels, always in current. The best eating for both species are from those weighing under 2-1/2 pounds. For drum, it’s important to place them immediately on ice and trim away any reddish meat from the fillets.



Ron Johnson

2. **LAKE HENDRICKS, Howard**  
Quality angling for bluegills up to 8 inches.
3. **MISSISSIPPI RIVER, Pools 9-14**  
Improving numbers of 6- to 8- inchers; several years with good vegetation have helped.
4. **PLAINFIELD LAKE, Bremer**  
Bluegills have reached 7 inches in this new borrow lake.
5. **VOLGA LAKE, Fayette**  
Consistently holds 6- to 8-inch and larger fish; bigger fish are caught in fall months

## TOP 5 LARGEMOUTH BASS WATERS

1. **GEORGE WYTH LAKE, Black Hawk**  
Eighteen-inch and larger fish can be caught near structure.
2. **LAKE MEYER, Winneshiek**  
Good supply of quality-size bass.
3. **MISSISSIPPI RIVER, Pools 9-13**  
Biggest bass population in Iowa.
4. **MITCHELL LAKE, Black Hawk**  
Nice class of 15- to 17-inchers.
5. **SOUTH PRAIRIE LAKE, Black Hawk**  
Abundant 12- to 17-inchers present; 18-inch minimum length limit. Easy shoreline access.

## TOP 5 CRAPPIE WATERS

1. **LAKE DELHI, Delaware**  
Fish for abundant 9 inchers in the shoreline habitat in the spring.
2. **LAKE HENDRICKS, Howard**  
Good numbers of 9- to 11-inchers present.
3. **MEYERS LAKE, Black Hawk**  
Abundant 8-inchers.



## TOP SURPRISE OF 2003

### *Bass fishing on the Mississippi River*

One year ago, anglers and biologists alike were very concerned about the future of largemouth bass fishing on the "Big River." Late last fall, anglers were catching and biologists were sampling significant numbers of bass—primarily largemouths—that had large, red, open sores on their bodies. Quite frankly, infected fish looked bad with a capital B.

Lab tests confirmed that the sores were caused by bacterial infections, but some bass also tested positive for Largemouth Bass Virus, an exotic virus that has shown up in several waters around the country. Would all infected bass die? Would this huge bass population crash? Would it spread up and down the river? Would it spread to other species? Would it spread to inland waters? These were questions for



Ron Johnson

which there were no reliable answers.

However, some of our worst fears subsided as both bass fishing success and the average size caught were excellent in 2003.

While many anglers release all the bass they catch, those who keep legal-size bass longer than 14 inches need not fear eating them. While it is not recommended to keep and eat obviously infected or sick fish, there are no known diseases of fish that can harm humans as long as the flesh is cooked.

entire open-water season whenever water clarity is good. Drift a crayfish or night crawler; or cast a plug or twister-tail in the deeper pools. Don't overlook fishing in the swift-flowing riffles, because if you find them there, it will definitely be fast and furious action. You'll likely catch both smallies and walleyes on the interior rivers. Don't overlook the Mississippi, especially Pools 9 through 11. Smallmouth populations have really been increasing in recent years.

So much for talking and reading

about fishing; it's time to get out there and enjoy it first hand. The accompanying sidebars list some of the better waters for the primary species found in beautiful northeast Iowa. However, don't let these lists or the identified time frames limit when and where you and your family go fishing this year. The right time to go is whenever and as often as you can. I truly hope your fishing success and enjoyment during 2004 are surpassed only by the beautiful surroundings of northeast Iowa's waters.

4. **MISSISSIPPI RIVER, Pools 9-14**  
Lots of 9- to 11-inchers with fish up to 15.

5. **VOLGA LAKE, Fayette**  
The face of the dam is the hotspot in late spring.

## TOP 5 WALLEYE WATERS

1. **CEDAR RIVER,**  
*Bremer, Black Hawk, Chickasaw, Floyd and Mitchell*  
Increasing population.
2. **MISSISSIPPI RIVER, Pools 9-15**  
Several good spawns in recent years is rebuilding the population.
3. **SHELL ROCK RIVER,**  
*Butler and Floyd*  
Good numbers throughout, but best between Greene and Camp Comfort Park
4. **TURKEY RIVER,**  
*Howard, Fayette and Clayton*  
Lots of 14- to 16-inchers present.
5. **WAPSIPINICON RIVER,**  
*Buchanan*  
Best from Independence to Troy Mills.

## TOP 3 NORTHERN PIKE WATERS

1. **LAKE MEYER, Winneshiek**  
All sizes present with a few exceeding 30 inches.
2. **MISSISSIPPI RIVER, Pools 9-11**  
Most are 3 to 5 pounds with a few pushing 15.
3. **WAPSIPINICON RIVER**  
*Buchanan, Black Hawk and Bremer*  
Good natural population; 15-pounder sampled in 2003.





# BRINGIN' BACK THE BRONZEBACK

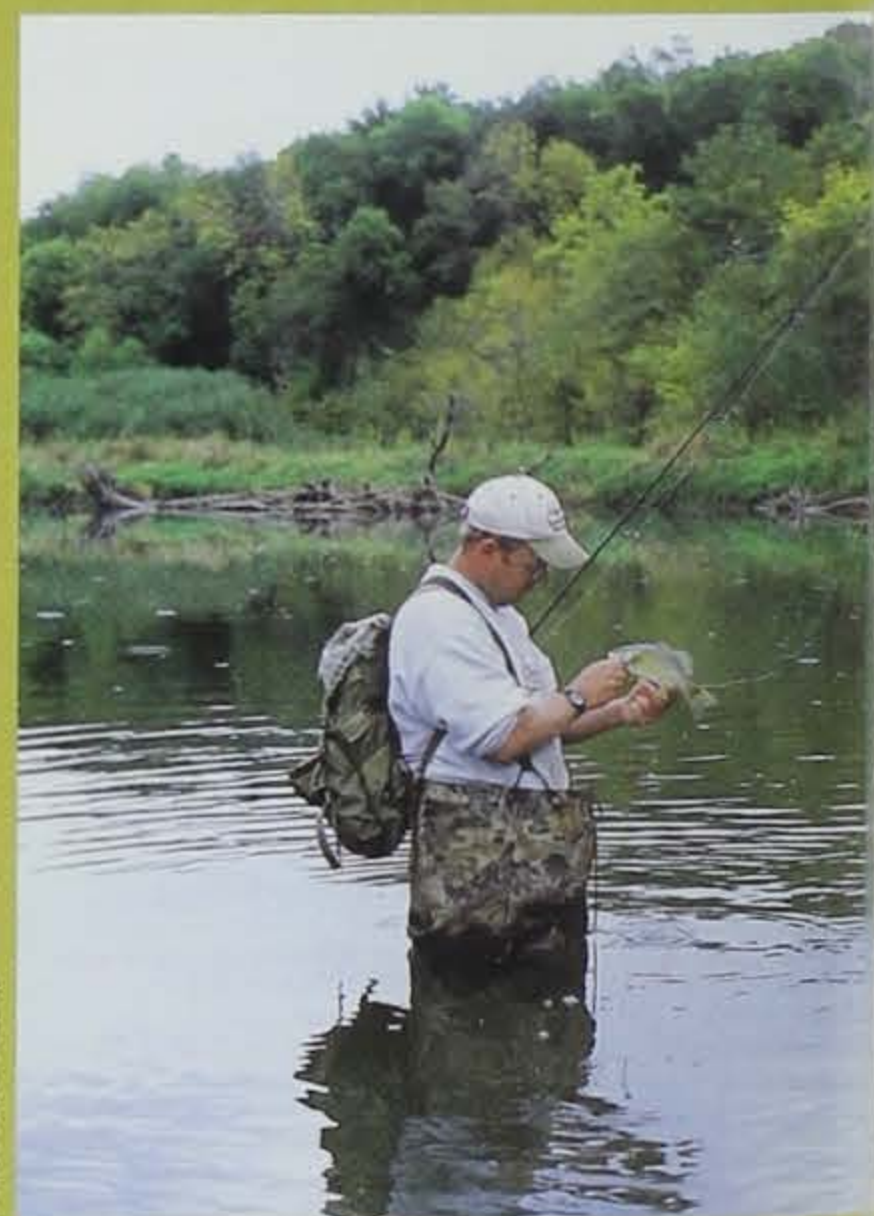
by Mick Klemesrud

**S**mallmouth bass in the Middle Raccoon River are finally back after the damaging flood of 1993. The flood changed much of the stream's habitat and fish populations in the catch-and-release-only area between the Linnen Mill Dam and the Redfield Dam.

Joe Hanner, director of the

Guthrie County Conservation Board, said he began hearing reports in 2002 that anglers were catching a few smallies. Last summer, the stories improved to the point where anglers were reportedly catching 30 to 35 smallmouth bass on a half-day fishing trip.

That was enough to get Hanner



Mick Klemesrud



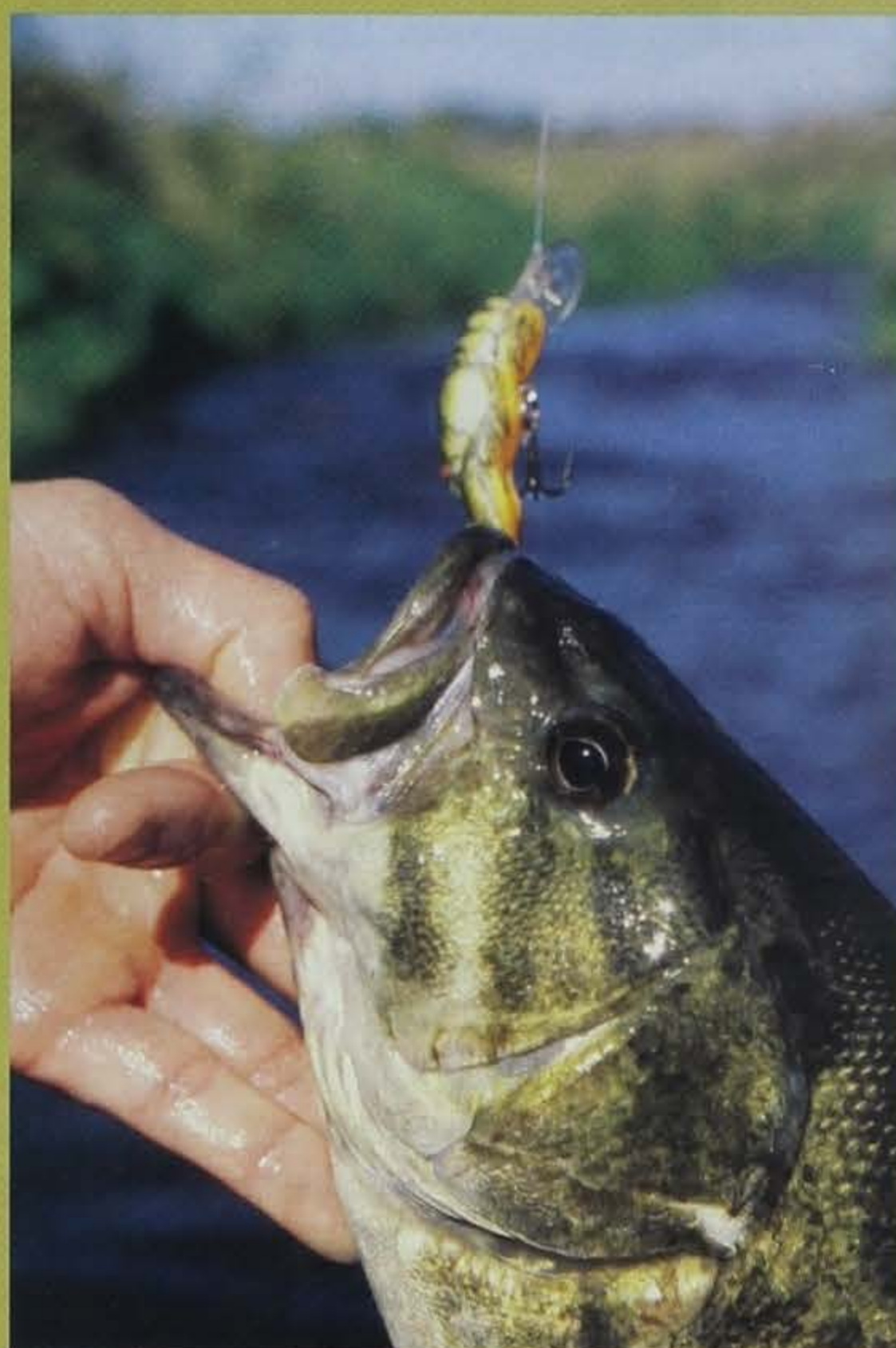


Mick Klemesrud

Guthrie County Conservation Board Director Joe Hanner walks a stretch of the Middle Raccoon River between Lennon Mill Dam and the Redfield Dam (left), stopping at some of his favorite smallmouth bass haunts (below left).

Smallmouth bass (right) were all but wiped out in that stretch of the river after the Flood of 1993, but thanks to a stocking program initiated four years ago, smallmouth bass are once again turning up in the creel of Middle Raccoon River anglers.

Lowell Washburn



back on the river. He spent a late September day fishing the no-kill stretch to see for himself if the fish were indeed back.

"I really thought we would be catching 6- to 8-inch fish," Hanner said. "But we caught seven to eight fish above 12 inches. That makes me excited for the future of this great resource."

Before the Flood of 1993, the Middle Raccoon River was a unique resource, known for its excellent smallmouth bass fishing. But the flood changed a lot of the stream habitat and fish balance. Gone were

the larger wintering holes, and silt covered much of the gravel bottom.

About four years ago, the DNR began stocking smallmouth bass in the protected area. Fish were stocked every other year and are now turning up in the creel. The DNR has additional plans to improve the stream.

"We are set to install some wintering holes in the river this spring," said Marion Conover, chief of the DNR's fisheries bureau. "We are hopeful for the continued improvement of the smallmouth bass fishery and for other fish species in the river as well."

Anglers fishing the Middle Raccoon are also catching walleyes, crappies and occasionally a northern

pike, largemouth bass and bluegill. Ironically, the species least reported is the channel catfish.

"It is such a unique resource for central Iowa," Hanner said. "The resource has such an impact on our area financially from money spent by canoeists, anglers and other outdoor recreationists, that the continued use and improvement of the stream will benefit all of us in central Iowa."

*Mick Klemesrud is an information specialist with the Communications Bureau in Des Moines.*



Guttenburg overlook: Lowell Washburn and the Dark Falcon moments before her release.

Letting go can be hard to do.

Especially when it's someone you love.

Last April, I had to let go. Had to say good-bye. But in this case the *someone* wasn't a person. It wasn't even a dog. Instead, it was a bird. A female peregrine to be exact.

For seven years, the falcon and I had enjoyed a nearly inseparable partnership. Our activities varied from wandering windswept autumn wetlands in search of mallard ducks to entertaining crowded schoolyards filled with wide-eyed fifth-graders. In either situation, her superb powers of flight never failed to thrill the audience.

But on this sunny April afternoon, it appeared as if the thrills had indeed come to an end. In a few moments it would all be over. The bond would be severed. Our partnership dissolved. In all probability, the falcon and I would never meet again.

Our relationship began when I acquired the falcon from The Raptor Resource Project. As a 38-day-old, captive-bred chick she was ungainly and awkward. A big hooked beak at one end, huge taloned feet at the other. In between was a large, somewhat shapeless form. Her plumage was a mix of half feathers, half down. Most folks would probably think of the bird as ugly. For me, it was love at first sight.

The following day, the youngster was integrated into a group containing six other young falcons that were being released into the wild. Survivors of that release would hopefully

become breeders helping to bolster a small, but growing, population of modern-day wild peregrines. In the event she could be recaptured, *my falcon* would be used as a falconry (hunting) bird. The risk associated with allowing the hawk temporary freedom was justified by the possibility of obtaining a bird with superior physical conditioning.

The release box was located 150 feet above the ground. On her 45th day of life, the falcon jumped from the box and initiated her first free flight. Within a week, she had learned to soar, was chasing any other bird that dared to invade her space, and was engaging in mock aerial battles with her siblings. Her plumage was noticeably darker than the other peregrines, and I began to refer to her as the Dark Falcon.

On her 24th day at the site, the Dark Falcon assisted one of the males in flying down, killing, and eating a wild pigeon. If she killed again, the falcon could become fully independent. Perhaps she already

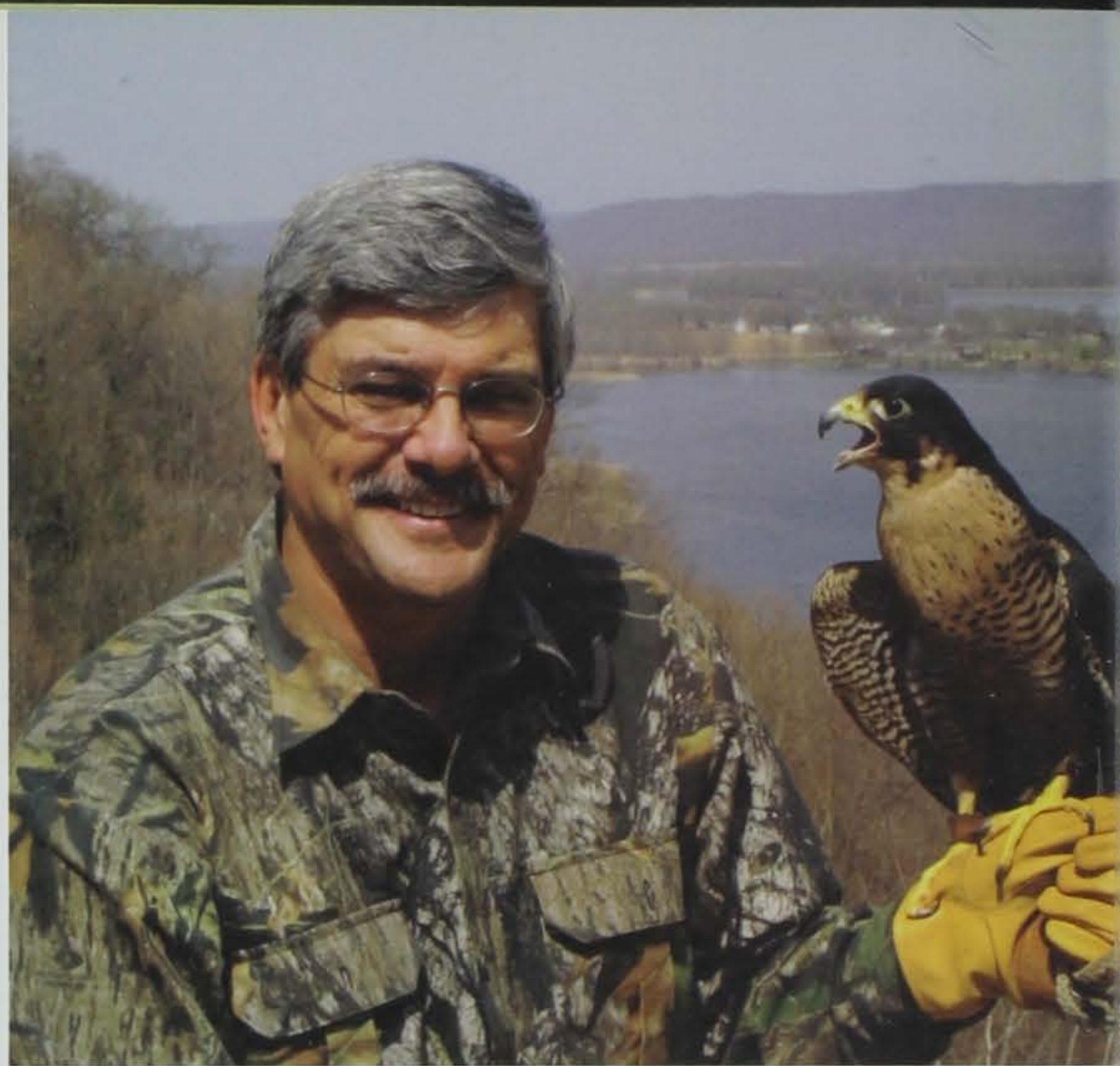
had. Either way, it was time to attempt her recapture.

Fellow falconer Lance Christensen volunteered to assist. Arriving before daylight the following morning, Christensen wore a big grin and carried a five-foot bow net on his shoulder.


By sunrise, the net was set and in place. A freshly thawed whole quail served as bait. Thirty feet away, Lance and I sequestered ourselves within the confines of a makeshift canvas blind.

The sun was just clearing the treeline when the Dark Falcon arrived. Her general demeanor showed she had not fed. The bird immediately spotted the quail, but after staring intently at the bait for a couple of minutes, her attention suddenly shifted to a passing flock of grackles. Lance and I both knew a successful hunt would dash our chances for capture.

The bird's focus suddenly shifted back to the quail and the Dark Falcon hopped down to the bait. We pulled the trap's trigger. The net silently sprang to life and engulfed the feeding







# Letting Go

by Lowell Washburn

falcon. Leaping from the blind, we ran to claim the prize.

The hawk was "feather perfect," and I was thrilled. Needless to say, the newly trapped raptor did not share the enthusiasm. She bit, footed, clawed and struggled. However, within seconds we had covered her head

with a leather falconer's hood that sealed out daylight and, more importantly, the sight of her enemies — namely us. Ten minutes, and several tantrums later, the hooded falcon stood quietly on my gloved fist.

For the next several days, I became committed to the task of "manning" the new falcon. The first 72 hours were grueling. But by the end of the fifth day I could detect a noticeable decline in the bird's level of fear and resentment. By day 10, she was feeding calmly on the fist. From then on, things progressed at a rapid pace.

By the end of the second week, I had introduced the falcon to the lure — a hand-sized, leather disc that, when rapidly twirled at the end of a cord, can entice an errant hawk to return to her trainer. By the middle of the third week, the peregrine was flying the full length of a 160-foot leash to seize tidbits of chicken breast I had secured to the lure. At that point, there was nothing left to do but bite the bullet and allow the falcon to fly free.

For the human trainer, a new bird's first free flight is the scariest moment in falconry. By now, you have invested nearly a month of time and effort into the hawk and the impending hunting season is drawing close. The greatest fear, of course, is that the falcon will simply fly away — taking the hopes and dreams of the upcoming season with her.

I felt this fear as I stood at the edge of a large grassland and prepared for our first free flight. I fiddled with equipment until there was nothing left to do. It was time to "strike the hood," as they say, and let come what may.

At last I took a deep breath and gently pulled the hood from her head. For a split second, the falcon's huge black eyes flashed in the late afternoon sunlight. She then blasted from the fist and powered out over the grassland.

The first flights of most captive-reared falcons are nothing to write home about. A couple of low circles around the falconer, an awkward landing, followed by a good feeding on the lure. It's a process of daily repetition as a young hawk literally learns to fly.

But the Dark Falcon was different. After spending a full three weeks in the wild, she understood everything about flying. Scariest yet was the fact that she had already gained a rudimentary understanding of the rewards associated with the hunt.

I'll never forget what happened during the next three or four minutes.

After powering off the fist, the Dark Falcon made a beeline for the far side of the grassland. It soon became apparent that she had attained "radar lock" on something. The target soon became obvious — a flock of starlings enroute from a nearby cow pasture to their evening roost.

The flock spotted the approaching falcon and poured on the coals. The starlings were hopelessly out-matched and the peregrine closed quickly. Then, just as she reached to grasp one of the terrified birds, the flock disintegrated. The maneuver caused the desired moment of confusion and the starlings escaped.

Undaunted, the falcon began to climb higher. As she continued to fly up and away, I began swinging the lure and hollered for her return. She ignored the invitation and kept going. Panicking, I hollered louder and began swinging the lure faster and faster until it became a huge, circular blur.

Out in the distance, the falcon suddenly folded into a black teardrop and fell from the sky. I never did see her intended victim. Whatever it was, the fortunate creature beat the falcon to earth and the hawk was soon climbing back into the blue. The best news was she was now headed straight back in my direction.

She made it about halfway when the pigeons arrived. There were three of them and, like the starlings, they were probably headed for the evening roost. Within moments, the chase was on and the inexperienced young falcon pursued the escaping birds to the limits of my vision.



I knew I was in real trouble now. After this much excitement, it would take extreme good fortune to recover the falcon. Then, much to my amazement, I spotted a small black dot far to the north. The dot continued to increase in size until I knew for sure it was the returning falcon.

When the bird had closed to within 100 yards or so, I released the swinging lure. It arced high into the air and then fell to earth. The falcon set her wings and coasted in for the chicken breast tidbit. After that, she jumped to the fist and calmly accepted the hood as if we had been to the field a hundred times before.

I was mentally exhausted, yet completely wired.

"Wow!" I thought to myself. "If I can hang onto this one she's really going to be something."

I was right.

The Dark Falcon and I spent most of our first hunting season pursuing ring-necked pheasants. Standard procedure was to release the falcon and then the dog. The hawk would circle overhead while the dog searched for game. When the dog found and pointed a bird, I'd make the flush and the chase was on. Like most first-year birds, the falcon caught a few and missed a lot. The important thing was that the hawk was beginning to understand the fundamentals of the game.

I began the second season with high hopes. Those hopes were shattered on our very first hunt. After receiving a perfect flush, the falcon successfully grasped a young-of-the-year rooster. Unfortunately, the fleeing gamebird had just made the cover of a fenceline. Before the falcon could release her grip the pheasant went under the fence's top strand of barbed wire while the hawk

went over the top. The pheasant was bagged, but the price was high. In addition to receiving a couple of severe scrapes, the falcon suffered a broken left leg.

The injured leg swelled to twice its normal size, and the hawk was "put up" for a season that had never really begun. Within three weeks, however, the swelling was greatly reduced. To my amazement, the falcon had completely recovered within six weeks. A slightly bent tarsus (main leg bone) was the only evidence anything had ever been wrong. We returned to the field and hunted for the remainder of the winter without a hitch.

The third season was the one I had been waiting for. By now the falcon would hang overhead indefinitely. She had learned to fly higher, stoop (dive) faster, and hit harder. We added waterfowl to our venue. After two years of flying winter-hardened pheasants, mallard ducks were a piece of cake.

As chairman of the Iowa Peregrine Falcon Recovery Committee, I was beginning to receive an increasing number of program requests from conservation, school and civic groups. By now, I had gained the falcon's complete trust. I decided to give her a try as an educational bird.

As unlikely as it seemed, the falcon and a classroom full of boisterous fifth graders were a perfect match. Later, we began doing outdoor flying demonstrations in a variety of settings ranging from rural wildlife areas to college campus athletic fields.

For most folks, it was a first-time opportunity to come eyeball to eyeball with the planet's fastest bird. Unfazed by crowds as large as 700 people, the falcon would often start an event by buzzing the crowd with a couple of high-speed, low-level passes that never

failed to bring a mix of cheers and screams. Some folks actually thought they were about to be struck. The act was so convincing that more than one person literally hit the dirt.

The serious side of our presentations portrayed the peregrine falcon as the first species to run up the red flag on the indiscriminate use of DDT pesticides. Our culture soon learned, of course, that DDT contamination was affecting far more than the falcons. The peregrine, its ultimate demise, and ongoing efforts to restore the species led to some profound discussions on past transgressions and the responsibility we all bear for good environmental stewardship.

Indoors and out, the Dark Falcon would entertain and educate more than 100,000 people during the next five years. She appeared in 14 television markets, and was frequently used as a magazine and media model.

The Dark Falcon had now entered the prime of life. Her biological clock was ticking. It was time to seek a mate and raise young. During the off-season, the falcon instinctively spent much of her time fashioning the crude gravel scrape that would eventually contain her eggs.

I removed the nest ledge. Undaunted, the falcon moved to the floor and made a new and larger scrape. When fall arrived we returned to the field to hunt ducks and pheasants, and to the classroom for environmental education.

The next summer, she made a nest scrape deeper and wider than the year before.

By the end of her fourth hunting season, the Dark Falcon had come as close to being a machine as a bird can get. After surviving hundreds of chases, she had gained as thorough an understanding of wild pheasants as any





Lowell Washburn

chickened-out and took her back home.

We were now at the end of our seventh season and had once again returned to the river. Standing atop the scenic overlook at Guttenburg, it was time to fish or cut bait.

Conservation Officer Steve Schutte had joined me for the occasion. He had also been acquainted with the bird for several years.

"I still can't believe you're doing this," said Schutte.

"Neither can I," was the best response I could muster.

As I'd done before our very first flight, I fiddled with equipment until there was nothing left to do. The only difference was this time the equipment was coming off instead of going on. I felt that same fear in the pit of my stomach as when I stood at the edge of that grassland seven years earlier.

At last I pulled the hood from her head. For a split second, the falcon's huge black eyes flashed in the afternoon sunlight. She blasted from the fist and powered out over the broad expanse of the Mississippi.

Somehow, the hawk seemed to realize this was a new deal. It wasn't a hunt and it wasn't a class-

room. Climbing into the blue, she made four circles soaring higher with each pass. She then leveled off and headed straight up-river toward the cliff ledge nest sites of her ancestors.

After she disappeared, Steve and I hung around for awhile. I don't remember exactly what we said. We mostly talked about the river and how exciting it was that nesting peregrines were beginning to return to the limestone bluffs of the Upper Mississippi. We also talked about the Dark Falcon, her spectacular past, and what would hopefully be her bright future.

Several minutes passed. We had fallen silent and were just watching the river when Schutte suddenly exclaimed, "Lowell, look, here she comes again!"

Following his gaze, I spotted a small dark spot coming in high from the north. It was the Dark Falcon. The bird was 500 to 600 feet above the river and flying strong against the spring breeze. She soon arrived above our position, but made no attempt to linger. As if bidding final farewell she quickly turned and, for a second time, disappeared up-river.

For a long time we stood in silence, watching and waiting for a sighting we knew would never come. At last, we gathered up our equipment and silently headed home.

It's been almost a year now, and I still think of the Dark Falcon on a near daily basis. In my mind's eye, I can still see her flashing eyes and sleek form. Sometimes I see her sitting atop a limestone ledge keeping a watchful eye on the river as she guards her growing brood of chicks. At other times I imagine her plummeting from high in the sky to put serious heat on a group of migrating shorebirds.

Letting go is hard to do. I still miss her. Wherever she is, I wish the Dark Falcon well.

bird dog. But it was the duck hunting we loved most. During her seventh season, she only missed one duck — a record unsurpassed by any of the other 22 falcons who have allowed me to become their partner.

In spite of all the excitement we shared during the hunt, those summertime scrapes began to nag my conscience. So much so, that by the end of the falcon's fifth season, I had decided to return her to the wild. As a superb hunting bird, faithful companion and effective educator, she had paid her dues. She didn't owe me or anyone else a thing. In fact, it was just the opposite.

At the end of her sixth season, I actually made it as far as taking her to the Mississippi River for release. I



# Governor's Environmental Honor Iowa Le



Roger A. Hill

Look for the four  
Environmental  
Excellence Award  
winners to be  
featured in  
upcoming issues of  
the *Iowa  
Conservationist*.



Clay Smith

Governor Tom Vilsack honored 15 Iowa organizations and businesses with environmental excellence awards on Feb. 16 in Des Moines. The recognition is part of a program paying tribute to Iowans for their leadership and innovation in protecting Iowa's natural resources.

"I congratulate these Iowans for their outstanding work to protect and enhance our environment," Vilsack said. "Their efforts serve as a model in providing clean air, water and land for all Iowans."

The awards program recognizes comprehensive environmental programs by organizations and businesses, along with special project awards in water quality, air quality, waste management, habitat restoration/development, and energy efficiency/renewable energy. The winners were chosen from nearly 70 nominations and include:

**Environmental Excellence Award**  
Alcoa, *Bettendorf*  
West Des Moines Community School District, *West Des Moines*  
City of Coralville, *Coralville*  
Timberhill Winery, *Sibylla and William Brown, Leon*

**Special Recognition in Energy Efficiency/Renewable Energy**  
University of Iowa Main Power Plant, *Iowa City*  
MidAmerican Energy Company, *Davenport*  
Monsanto Company, *Muscatine*



the Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, the Department of Economic Development, the Department of Education, the Department of Public Health and the Iowa Waste Reduction Center.

The ceremony took place at the Wallace State Office Building in Des Moines on Feb. 16. The awards are sponsored by the Governor's Office, the Department of Natural Resources,

award winner and the awards Complete details about each

Timberhill Winery, Sibylla and William Brown, Leon  
Matt McQuillen/Twin Rivers Pheasants Forever Chapter, Anamosa



## Released

23"	6/1	Gerald Gress, Tripoli	Farm Pond, Fayette
22.75"	5/9	Dan Kollbaum, Merville	Farm Pond, Woodbury
22.5"	6/8	Paul Mc Knight, Dubuque	Farm Pond, Van Buren
22.5"	8/1	Sheila Duhn, Cambridge	Farm Pond, Lucas
22.25"	3/29	Chris Mack, Ames	Farm Pond, Crawford
22"	3/22	Brett K Monteleone, Dallas	Green Valley Lake, Union
22"	4/5	Kylie Danae Monteleone, Dallas	Farm Pond, Marion
22"	4/28	Steven J Walker, Red Oak	Pond, Montgomery
22"	4/4	Matthew Vavroch, Montezuma	Diamond Lake, Poweshiek
22"	8/22	Kyle Yates, Villisca	Farm Pond, Montgomery

## Bass, rock (minimum 1 lbs.)

1 lb 8 oz	6/73	Jim Driscoll, Dubuque	Mississippi/Dubuque
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NO NEW ENTRIES

## Bass, smallmouth (minimum 4 lbs. or 20")

7 lbs 12oz	9/90	Rick Gray, Dickinson	West Okoboji, Dickinson
5 lbs 3 oz	8/3	Dana D Dowd, New Hampton	Upper Iowa River, Howard
5 lbs 3 oz	4/26	Greg Loonan, Swisher	Mississippi River, Clayton
5 lbs	6/12	Grant Schuchert, Spirit Lake	Spirit Lake, Dickinson
4 lbs 10 oz	9/3	Kelly Sprague, Fredericksburg	Wapsipinicon River, Bremer
4 lbs 10 oz	4/25	George A Paulson, Springville	Turkey River, Fayette
4 lbs 8 oz	7/26	Zachary Miedema, Hospers	Spirit Lake, Dickinson
4 lbs 3 oz	9/19	Kurt Smith, Harpers Ferry	Mississippi River, Allamakee
4 lbs	8/20	Michael Jacobs, Monticello	Maquoketa River, Delaware

## Released

21"	5/17	Dick Cain, Glenwood	Big Spirit, Dickinson
21"	7/22	Eric D Blunt, Charles City	Farm Pond, Floyd
20.5"	6/20	Alan Fettes, Ashton	West Okoboji, Dickinson



Look for the four  
Environmental  
Excellence Award  
winners to be  
featured in  
upcoming issues of  
the Iowa  
Conservationist.

Clay Smith

Special Recognition in Energy  
Efficiency/Renewable Energy  
University of Iowa Main Power Plant,  
Iowa City  
MidAmerican Energy Company,  
Davenport  
Monsanto Company, Muscatine

2 lbs 10 oz	6/11	Guy H Hempey, Sioux City	Snyders Bend, Woodbury
2 lbs 9 oz	8/10	Ron Tjaden, Sibley	West Okoboji, Dickinson
2 lbs 8 oz	7/23	Fred Davis, Newton	Lake Red Rock, Marion

### Class, wiper (minimum 4 lbs.)

1 lbs 15 oz	9/97	Don Ostergaard, Des Moines	Des Moines, Polk
1 lbs 12 oz	6/17	Bob Dowson, Des Moines	Saylorville Lake, Polk

### Class, yellow (minimum .75 lbs.)

1 lb 9 oz	4/91	Bill Campbell, Council Bluffs	Lake Manawa, Pottawattamie
1 lb 9 oz	5/00	Michael Grandick, Underwood	Lake Anita, Cass
1 lb 4 oz	10/1	John Mackey, Clear Lake	Clear Lake, Cerro Gordo
1 lb 2 oz	4/16	Hunter Nehls, Charles City	Clear Lake, Cerro Gordo
1 lb	5/22	Carl Hutchens, Mason City	Clear Lake, Cerro Gordo
(released)			
1 oz	10/8	Chris Mack, Clear Lake	Clear Lake, Cerro Gordo
1 oz	7/19	Cheryl Ann Westrum, Webster City	Clear Lake, Cerro Gordo
1 oz	4/15	Jordan Nehls, Charles City	Clear Lake, Cerro Gordo
1 oz	6/27	Rita Eagers, Webster City	Clear Lake, Cerro Gordo
1 oz	7/6	Dan Rothmeyer, Carroll	Arrowhead Lake, Sac
1 oz	12/15	Kathy Atkinson, Hampton	Clear Lake, Cerro Gordo

### Bluegill (minimum 1 lbs.)

3 lbs 2 oz	7/86	Phil Algreen, Earlham	Farm Pond, Madison
1 lb 12 oz	2/2	Josh Miller, Sioux City	Farm Pond, Plymouth
1 lb 12 oz	7/12	Kevin Kimm, Charles City	Pond, Floyd (released)
1 lb 10 oz	5/29	Jack Machacek, Central City	Farm Pond, Jones
1 lb 8 oz	5/20	Clyde Oberbroeckling, Holy Cross	Farm Pond, Clayton
1 lb 8 oz	6/21	Kim Gingerich, Cedar Rapids	Farm Pond, Jones
1 lb 8 oz	5/20	Mike J Larson, Forest City	Farm Pond, Audubon
(released)			

Gover



# awards eaders

## Special Recognition

**in Waste Management**  
West Des Moines Community School District, *West Des Moines*  
Midwest Computer Brokers, Inc., *Walford*  
Habitat Restore, *Quad Cities, Davenport*  
Habitat for Humanity –

## Special Recognition

**in Water Quality**  
Sioux County Soil & Water Conservation District, *Orange City*  
South O'Brien FFA, *Paullina*  
Dr. James Baker/ISU Ag & Biosystems Engineering, *Ames*

## Special Recognition in Air Quality

University of Iowa Main Power Plant, *Iowa City*  
Monsanto Company, *Muscatine*  
Bus Emissions Education Program, *Clive*

## Special Recognition in Habitat Restoration/Development

CAM Middle School, *Massena*  
Timberhill Winery, Sibylla and William Brown, *Leon*  
Matt McQuillen/Twin Rivers Pheasants Forever Chapter, *Anamosa*

Complete details about each award winner and the awards

program are available at [www.iowadnr.com](http://www.iowadnr.com)

The ceremony took place at the Wallace State Office Building in Des Moines on Feb. 16. The awards are sponsored by the Governor's Office, the Department of Natural Resources,

the Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, the Department of Economic Development, the Department of Education, the Department of Public Health and the Iowa Waste Reduction Center.

Bob Casteline



Clay Smith



Clay Smith







## Farm Pond Winterkill

# What Do I Do Next?

Article by Lannie R. Miller  
Photo by Clay Smith

Iowa boasts more than 90,000 farm ponds where anglers spend hundreds of thousands of hours fishing. Farm ponds are some of the most popular places to fish because they are as productive and fertile as the watersheds that feed them. Farm ponds produce some of the biggest and best catches of bluegill, large-mouth bass and channel catfish with as much as 300 to 500 pounds of fish per surface acre. The current state record bluegill was taken from a farm pond.

Besides fertile water and fast growing fish, Iowa also, unfortunately, has severe winters with thick ice and lots of snow. These condi-

tions, aggravated by high fertility, can lead to winterkill. Winterkill results when the dissolved oxygen level in the pond becomes too low to sustain fish. In winter conditions, dissolved oxygen levels below three parts per million are considered critical for fish.

So what do you do when, after a long winter, the ice recedes from your pond in the spring and the shoreline is littered with dead fish?

The first thing to do is assess what fish, if any, are left in your pond. When most people see a few hundred dead fish, they immediately think a total fishkill has occurred. A complete fish winterkill is rare in a farm pond, especially if the pond is





small hook tipped with a piece of night crawler will entice even the smallest bass or bluegill to bite after the water warms.

The final survey method is to use a quarter-inch mesh minnow seine to inventory what is left in your pond. Again, the pond owner should wait several months after ice-out to allow the water to warm and the fish to move into the shallows. Newly hatched largemouth bass and bluegill should be present after June and will help you determine if remedial stocking is needed.

What should be done if no fish are observed after trying all of these methods? The DNR provides free fish to farm pond owners that meet four requirements. The pond must be:

- at least a half-acre in size.
- a minimum depth of at least 8 feet.
- fenced to exclude livestock.
- void of all fish life.

A common misconception of farm pond owners and anglers is that if a pond owner accepts fish stocking from the DNR, the owner must allow public access to the pond. This is not a requirement and access to the pond is at the owners discretion.

If your pond meets all of these requirements, you qualify to receive free fish. Bluegill and catfish will be stocked in the fall, while largemouth bass are stocked the following spring. Contact your local NRCS Office by July 1 to sign up for fish. A DNR employee will contact you and arrange an inspection of your farm pond.

Sometimes remedial or additional stocking in a farm pond is recommended if a species is low in numbers

but not completely absent. Additional largemouth bass in the 6- to 8-inch range can be stocked at 10 per acre to help boost the population. Five to 10 adult bluegill per acre may be stocked if the landowner feels the bluegill numbers are too low to produce a sufficient year class.

Channel catfish can be restocked as 6- to 8-inch fish at a rate of 25 to 50 per acre. Remember, very few channel catfish are reproduced naturally in a farm pond due to bass predation, so restocking is required every three to four years regardless of winterkill. These fish can be obtained from any of Iowa's private hatcheries at a nominal cost.

The DNR publishes a small booklet called *Iowa's Farm Ponds*, with recommendations on how to better manage farm ponds for fishing. It also has information about pond construction, stocking information, fish management and aquatic vegetation control. The booklet is free by calling 515-281-5918.

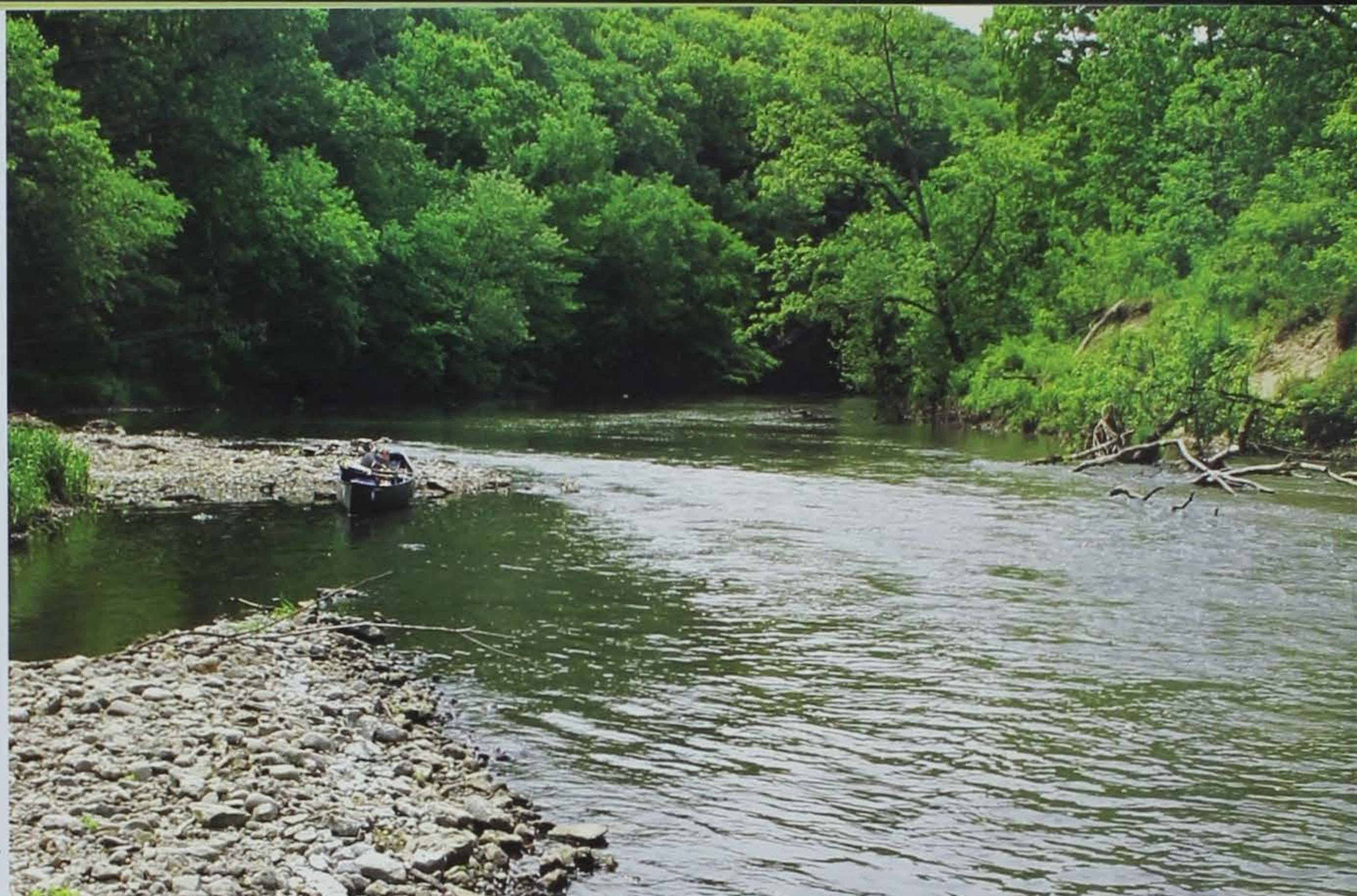
Most winterkill situations are unavoidable. A severe winter can eliminate or curtail years of angling enjoyment. It is imperative to be able to determine what species and numbers are left in the pond and decide on a course of action. Your local fisheries biologist is always available to help you with these decisions and offer advice. For the number of a biologist in your area visit [www.iowadnr.com/fish/offices/manage.html](http://www.iowadnr.com/fish/offices/manage.html), or contact 515-281-5918.

*Lannie R. Miller is a fisheries biologist located at Storm Lake.*

moderately large and deep. Before deciding all of your fish are dead, wait a month or so to let the water temperature rise. A visual inspection of the pond on a warm, quiet spring evening may reveal fish of various sizes swimming along the shoreline in shallow water. As spring progresses, you may even observe adult fish nesting in the shallow water. If fish are observed, it means a total winterkill has not occurred and time will usually return your pond to carrying capacity. It is also rare that one species of game fish is eliminated from a pond while others survive.

Angling is another way to see if fish are present in your farm pond. A





# Maquoketa River 2003 Project AWARE

Article by Brian Soenen

The tenacious rains and bone-chilling winds were no match for dozens of hard-nosed Iowans who spent the first week of National Rivers Month in June slogging through mud, wrenching canoes over sandbars and shallow riffles, and spending their vacations drenched and dead tired — all in the name of water quality.

It may sound miserable, but this first annual DNR-sponsored, week-long canoe trip down the Maquoketa River may be one of the most memorable experiences these Iowans have ever taken part in.

Starting at the outlet of Backbone State Park and stopping just short of the mighty Mississippi, more than 100





volunteers from the first annual Project AWARE hauled 109 tires, 16 chairs, 20 barrels, 91 bags of trash, a BMX bicycle, an Easy-Bake® Oven and much more junk from the eastern Iowa river.

Although daily rains dampened gear, spirits soared as volunteers took part in wildlife and water quality monitoring, educational programs and streamside cleanup. The 100-mile expedition took participants from the headwaters to the mouth of the river, allowing them to observe the effects of the watershed surrounding the Maquoketa. Beautiful, scenic stretches of the river sharply contrasted the cut-banks and junk piles that exist along the way.

As the convoy of canoes paddled through the varied landscapes, educational programs provided participants with insight into Maquoketa River's watershed. Programs highlighted the plight of the freshwater mussel, Maquoketa River Alliance research, Aldo Leopold and the land ethic, eastern Iowa geology and Iowa poet laureate Michael Carey's river poetry. Anglers stared in awe as a fish-shocking demonstration revealed a 16-inch smallmouth bass hiding nearby, and after witnessing the subsequent walleye fingerling release, many of them vowed to come back in search of "the big one."

Aside from trash detail and formal programs, participants collected water monitoring data each day. Nitrate, phosphate, dissolved oxygen, pH, transparency, streambed substrate (the rocks, sand, gravel found on the river bottom) and benthic macroinvertebrate (insects that live in the stream) information was gathered and presented to the group. Relationships between stream bottom composition and insect

populations were most apparent.

Benthic macroinvertebrates need the spaces that exist between rocks – areas where they can hide from predators, lay their eggs and feed. Although natural geology is responsible for the original substrate of Iowa streams, effects of human activities in the watershed, such as soil erosion, can cover existing substrate with a layer of sand or silt and destroy these insect habitats.

As the Maquoketa River matures from a small headwater stream to a

large interior river, the diversity of benthic macroinvertebrates decreases. This decrease is a direct reflection in the change of streambed substrate that is observed when the river nears the Mississippi. The stream bottom shifts from bedrock, gravel and cobble upstream to more sand, silt and mud downstream.

As the river matured, so did the Project AWARE participants. Although increased sediment loads clouded the water and destroyed aquatic homes, the trip inspired those



DNR photo



Volunteers from the first Project AWARE hauled 109 tires, 16 chairs, 20 barrels, 91 bags of trash, a BMX bicycle, an Easy-Bake® Oven and much more junk from the Maquoketa River.



close to the river to preserve and protect its beauty. It gave them purpose, it gave them friends and it gave them hope; a hope that someday, the cloudy water will become clear and the Maquoketa will be respected, preserved and enjoyed by generations to come.

As Henry David Thoreau once stated, "Heroes are often the most ordinary of men [and women]." Ordinary people doing ordinary things — floating the river, watching wildlife, monitoring water quality and cleaning up Iowa's rivers — one piece of junk at a time.

*Brian Soenen is the coordinator for the IOWATER program.*



DNR photo

Participants learned more about the Maquoketa's watershed, and how such things as soil erosion (right) can impact the river. During one of several educational programs, DNR fisheries personnel demonstrated fish sampling techniques (above).



DNR photo



**S&J marine**

**5611 Second Avenue  
Des Moines, IA 50313**

**515-283-2391**

**Fax: 515-288-3107**

**boatmansj@aol.com**

**MERCURY**  
#1 On The Water



Clay Smith





Clay Smith

## Join Us for the Second Annual Project AWARE

**WHAT** — A week-long canoe trip. The expedition will include free camping, low-cost meals and educational programs.

**WHERE** — Des Moines River from Fort Dodge to Des Moines.

**WHEN** — June 19-26. Participation the entire week is not required. Spend one day or the whole week or any time in between.

**WHY** — To focus on water quality, river cleanup and having fun!

**WHO** — Anyone interested. Co-hosted by the IOWATER Citizen Water Quality Monitoring Program and the Department of Natural Resources Keepers of the Land Volunteer Program.

Project AWARE is open to all registered participants. Children under 18 must be accompanied by an adult. A limited number of canoes and equipment will be available for those who do not have their own. Safety precautions and regulations will be in place at all times during the event. For more information about Project AWARE, a daily schedule or registration form visit [www.iowadnr.com/volunteer/04aware.html](http://www.iowadnr.com/volunteer/04aware.html) or contact Brian Soenen at 515-281-6640 or [brian.soenen@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:brian.soenen@dnr.state.ia.us).

**Registration deadline is May 1.**



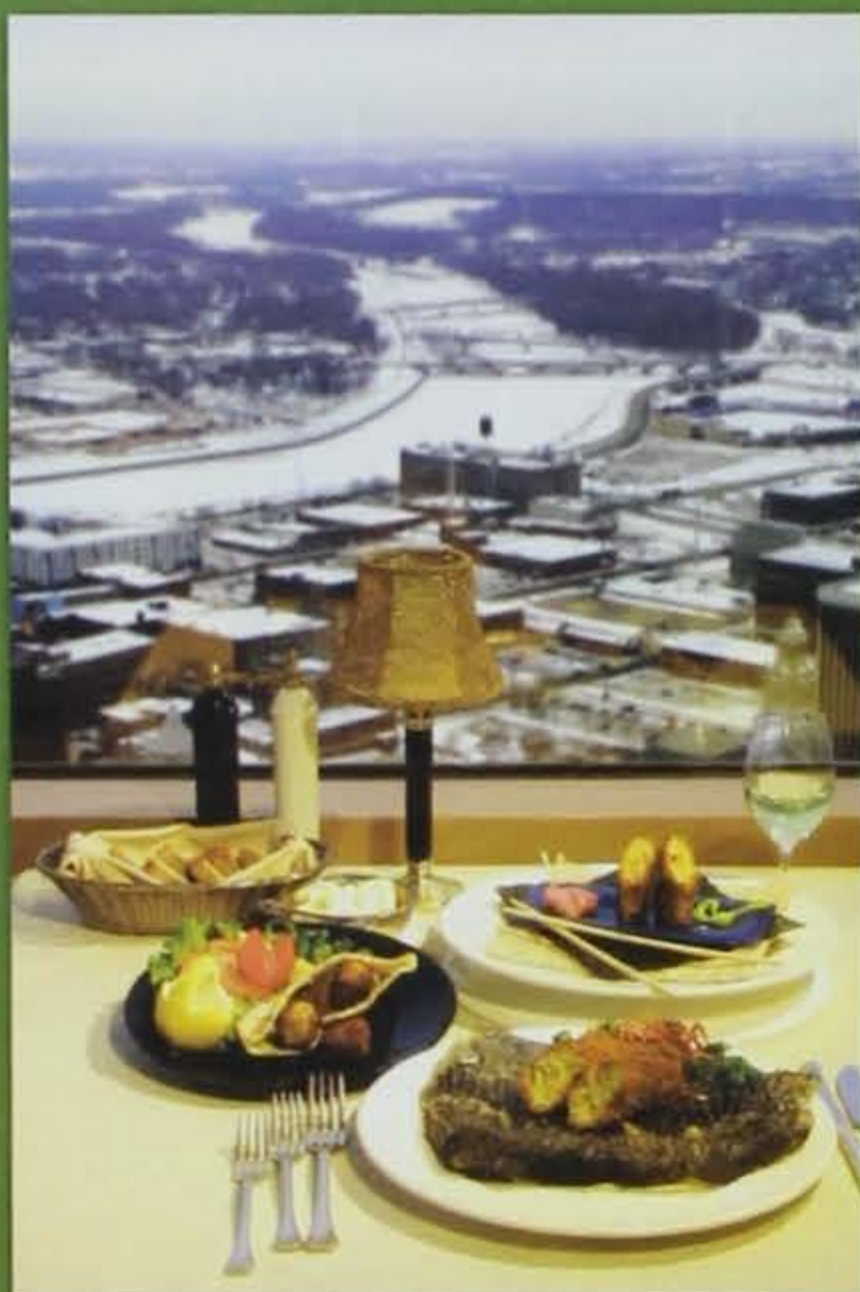
DNR photo



Join the IPN, only \$10/year!  
Write IPN, PO Box 572, Nevada, IA 50201  
or see [www.iowaprairienetwork.org](http://www.iowaprairienetwork.org)

Besides collecting trash each day, AWARE participants collected water quality data.





A view of the Des Moines River from the Embassy Club at 801 Grand

kitchen as he prepared a meal of Iowa bluegills and presented his Bluegill Pills for all to enjoy.

### *Bluegill Pills*

1 pound bluegill fillets  
1 pound jumbo lump crabmeat  
favorite cooking oil  
teaspoon lemon juice  
tablespoon Dijon mustard  
3 cloves roasted garlic  
salt and pepper to taste  
4 egg yolks  
1 cup bread crumbs  
tablespoon chopped parsley  
(or fresh herb of choice)  
1/4 cup heavy cream  
half onion, chopped

*Grind the bluegill fillets or chop in a food processor with all ingredients, reserving half the bread crumbs. Use a splash of white wine, if desired, to facilitate processing ingredients. Mix well but do not let ingredients get soft, mushy or indistinguishable.*

*Using your hands, form into cylinders approximately 3 inches long and 1 inch in diameter. Roll in remaining crumbs and fry or saute in oil until cooked thoroughly. Cut off the ends (eat to check seasoning) and cut cylinder on bias and stand or lay on plate. Garnish and serve with wasabi, tartar or hot sauce. This mixture can easily be formed into patties or balls and used as a sandwich filler.*

This recipe page will become a regular feature in the *Iowa Conservationist*. It will showcase fish, game and wild plants prepared by chefs from restaurants across Iowa. The menu for 2004 will include channel catfish, Canada goose and pheasant, with a surprise in store for the May/June issue.

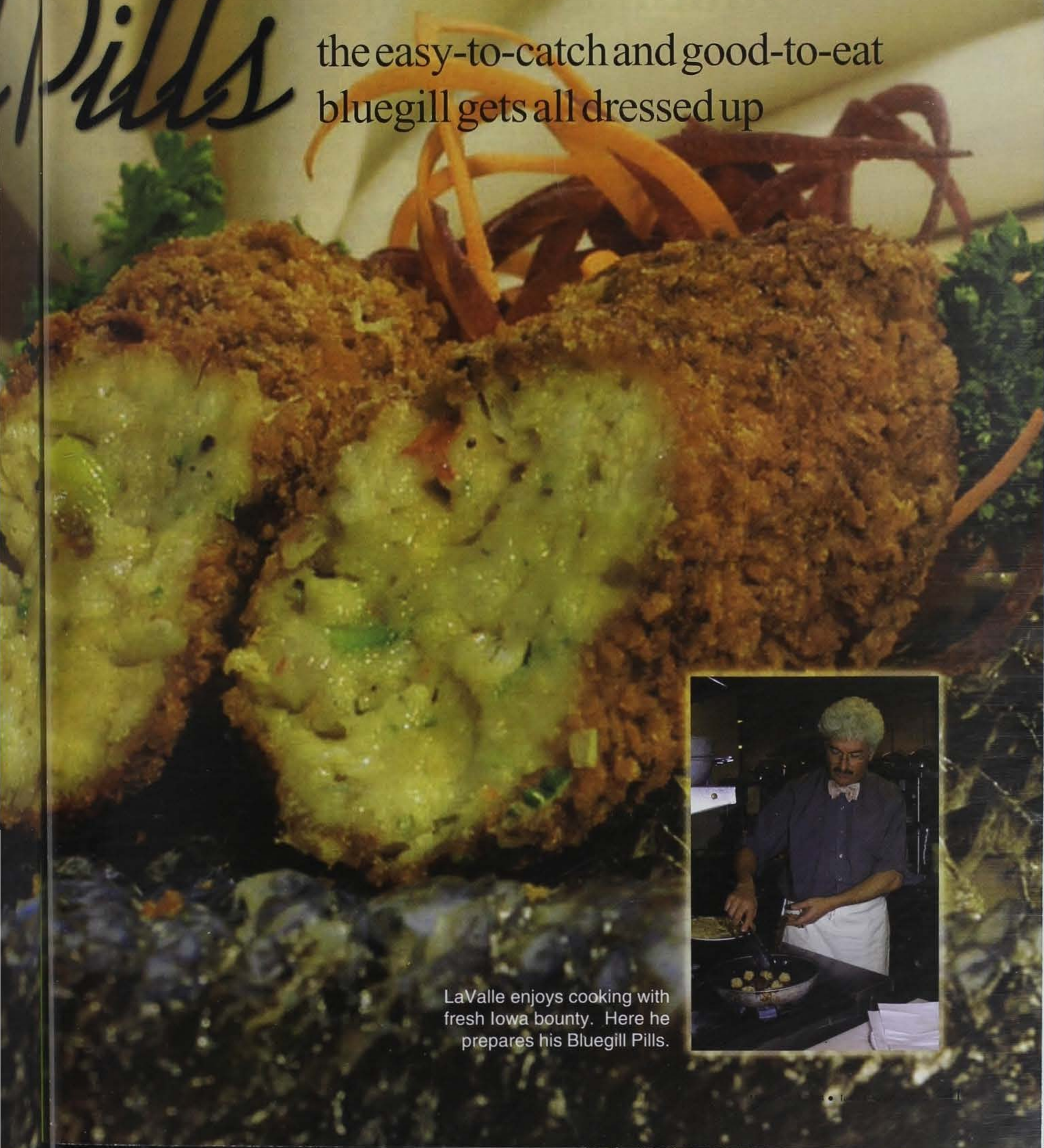
# Bluegill Pills



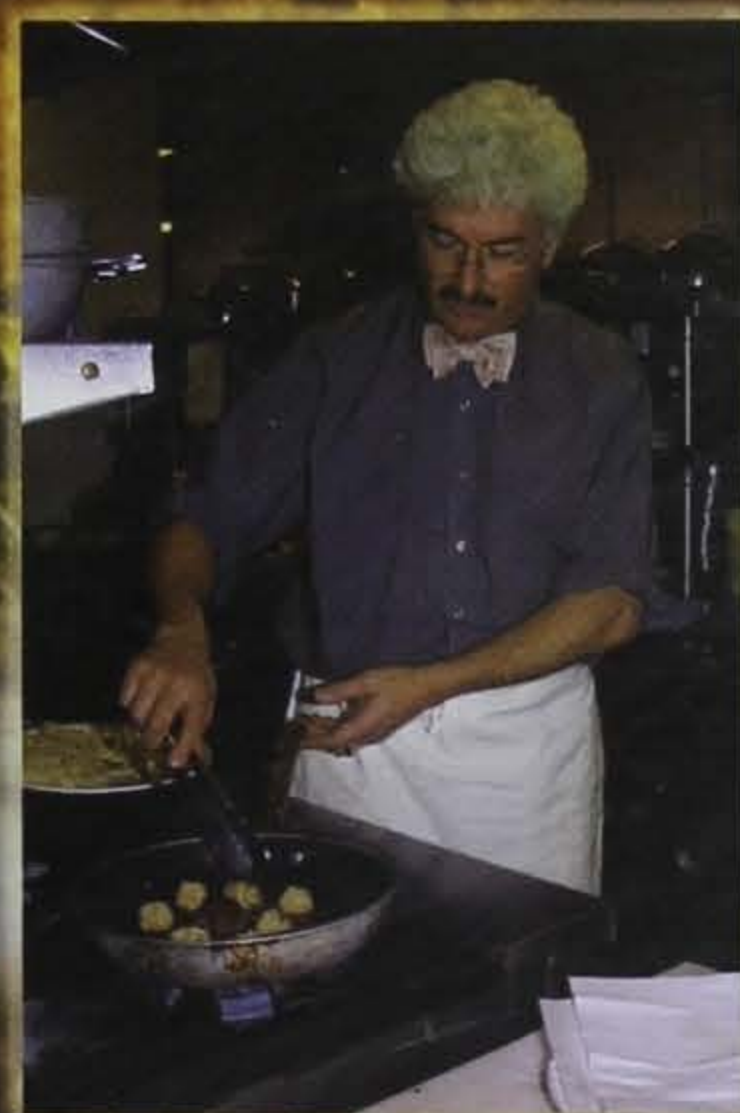


# Bluegill Pills

the easy-to-catch and good-to-eat  
bluegill gets all dressed up



LaValle enjoys cooking with  
fresh Iowa bounty. Here he  
prepares his Bluegill Pills.





# Building for the Environment

by Tami Foster

The low-lying masonry buildings may seem out of place in a prairie landscape wrought with big blue stem, stiff goldenrod and compass plant. Habitat – home to pheasants, ducks, songbirds and other species – borders the buildings, showing a unique contrast of nature and structure.

At the Iowa Association of Municipal Utilities Office and Training Complex south of Ankeny, the natural areas, buildings and training fields were designed to compliment

the contours of the existing land while minimizing any negative impacts on the ecosystem. The suburban soybean field, which was destined for development, is now a restored tall-grass prairie. Best management practices were implemented for erosion and sediment control. A wetland treatment system cleans wastewater before it leaves the site.

Following the philosophy of sustainability, the 25-acre complex stands as an example of how to

design, construct and operate buildings to reduce environmental impacts and energy consumption while contributing to the health of its occupants.

“We need to practice what we preach,” says Bob Haug, executive director of IAMU. “When we had the opportunity to develop a training and office facility, we wanted to be able to demonstrate the viability of a sustainable approach to site management, building design and construction, and facility operation. The site demonstrates that even in an urbanizing area, natural habitat can be maintained.”

## Going Green

While sustainable, or green, design is a relatively new term, many sustainable practices have been included in building construction and remodeling for a long time. Providing environmen-

tal, health and financial benefits, sustainable design issues include water quality and conservation, energy production and energy efficiency, use of recycled and recyclable materials, indoor air quality, and landscaping.

To include sustainable design in your construction or remodeling project, the following steps should be considered.

### Identify your needs

The first step is to include sustainable design concepts from the beginning to include solutions with the most significant

Iowa Association of Municipal Utilities Building



IAMU photo



impact. Do you want to use recycled materials? Do you want to keep building and operating costs low? Will you recycle construction and demolition waste? How about incorporating renewable energy?

### **Choose your "green team"**

Undertaking any building or remodeling project will likely involve professional contractors to make the project a success. For a "green" project, be sure to ask about their knowledge of sustainable design and how it has been included in previous work. Check with local green building programs or organizations, and ask for recommendations. See the list of websites at the end of this article for links.

### **Design for the environment**

Understanding your surroundings will make the most of sustainable design options. If you are constructing a new building or home, knowledge of the local ecosystem will help minimize impacts on the environment. Be cognizant of surface and groundwater near your site, local plant and animal species, and appropriate native materials that could be incorporated.

### **Choose "green" materials**

Keep your building goals in mind when selecting green materials. Like any building materials, most will have conditions in which they work best. For example, products that work better in a dry, tepid climate may not perform as well in the fluctuating climate of Iowa. When building green, purchase durable materials to minimize replacement; buy energy efficient appliances, lighting and building components; use recycled materials; and recycle construction and demolition materials.



Bill Rowland

Landfill of North Iowa Environmental Education Center

### **Select the right site and equipment**

Modern heating, cooling and ventilation systems, lighting, and appliances provide comfort and convenience, good health and safety. Be sure to select efficient equipment that is correctly sized for your building or home. The most cost-effective way to control environmental conditions is by passive means — find a site that protects from the worst weather elements of your region, take advantage of day lighting and passive solar heating opportunities, and choose materials that provide adequate protection.

### **Landscape**

Landscaping can be both beautiful and functional. Planting native trees and shrubs can protect against winter winds or channel cooling breezes during the summer. One large shade tree alone can provide cooling equal to a four-ton air conditioner. Landscaping can also attract birds, butterflies and helpful insects and be less likely to attract pests.

### **Check it out**

Once you have constructed or renovated your building or home, make sure it is safe for occupancy and able to perform as planned. You may want a contract with your builder to test building performance once it is

completed. The contract should identify how problems will be corrected and who is qualified to do the tests and repairs. Three tests that should be conducted are: duct leakage test for forced-air heating or cooling system; safety back draft test for gas water heater and gas furnace; and blower door test for air leakage.

### **Stay in shape**

Once your building or remodeling project is finished, you'll need to maintain it properly to keep it healthy, safe and efficient. Material care, proper maintenance of heating and cooling equipment, pest control and landscaping will keep a building in the best shape possible.

### **Finding Direction**

Sustainable design is an opportunity to use resources efficiently while creating healthier buildings and homes. It provides cost savings through improved health and productivity, lower-cost building operations and resource efficiency — and moves us closer to a sustainable future.

*Continued*

*Tami Foster is a program planner with the department's energy and waste management bureau.*



## The Iowa Sustainable Design Guide

Designing and constructing a building or remodeling a home or office can be a long and often complex process. To help you implement sustainable design principles into this process, the *Iowa Sustainable Design Guide* was developed.

The guide was written for anyone involved in the design, construction and operation of buildings and surrounding sites. This includes, but is not limited to, building owners, designers, contractors, facility managers and building occupants. It is applicable to remodeling and new projects, and

applies to various types of buildings — from schools and office buildings to laboratory facilities.

Anyone interested in sustainable design — whether a novice or an experienced professional — will find this guide useful. While the content focuses primarily on nonresidential construction, many of the processes and solutions presented are applicable to residential construction as well. In addition, resources specific to residential sustainable design are included.

To access the guide on-line, visit [www.sustainableiowa.org](http://www.sustainableiowa.org) or you can request a printed copy by calling (515) 281-6558 or emailing at [tami.foster@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:tami.foster@dnr.state.ia.us).

## Sustainable Design in Iowa

Several buildings in Iowa have included sustainable design in their development and construction. For more information on these and other buildings in Iowa and throughout the U.S., visit [www.sustainableiowa.org](http://www.sustainableiowa.org) and click on *Case Studies*.

### Central College, Vermeer Science Center, Pella

The first LEED™ rated facility in Iowa was built using key sustainable design options, including a solar-powered fountain and information kiosk which acts as a building directory, as well as connecting the user with information regarding the fountain, renewable energy, and facts about the building and its sustainable features.

### The Family Museum of Arts and Science, Bettendorf

This 44,000-square-foot museum features key sustainable design elements including the use of recycled-content products (wallboard, carpeting, countertops, floor tile, lawn furniture, play surface and structural steel), wainscoting made from wood from a certified forest, and the recycling of waste materials during construction.

### Golden Hills Resource Conservation & Development, Oakland

One of the first buildings in the state to be designed with LEED™ as a guiding principle, the RC&D office sustainable design features include minimal site disturbance, low-flow plumbing, geothermal heat pump, daylighting, insulated concrete forms, reuse of office furniture, insulation

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Central College photo

Entrance to the Vermeer Science Center at Central College in Pella

manufactured from recycled newsprint and operable wood windows with high performance glazing.

#### **Iowa Judicial Building, Des Moines**

Completed in 2003, this 124,000-square-foot building – home to the Iowa Supreme and Appellate courts – was designed to last 100 years. Sustainable design features include energy efficient mechanical and electrical systems and daylighting.

#### **Linn County Conservation/Wickiup Hill Outdoor Learning Center**

Located near the Cedar River, this outdoor classroom is rich in archaeological history and habitat diversity. Sustainable features include a geothermal heating system, use of recycled materials for roofing shingles and carpeting, daylighting and in-floor/forced air and water heat exchangers.

#### **Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge/Prairie Learning Center, Prairie City**

The 5,000-acre complex features a low-lying modern structure surrounded by prairie, buffalo, elk and white-tailed deer. The refuge recreates the native plant and animal communities that greeted Iowa's earliest settlers in the

mid-1800s. Included in the sustainable design are research facilities for prairie, oak savanna and wetland; a laboratory and greenhouse; and a geographic information system for soils, vegetation, topography.

#### **University of Northern Iowa/Center for Energy and Environmental Education, Cedar Falls**

This facility was designed not only to house a range of energy and environmental education programs, but also to serve as a model for energy- and resource-efficient construction. Sustainable design elements include passive solar design, high-efficiency lighting and insulation, and low-maintenance construction materials.

#### **Landfill of North Iowa Environmental Education Center, Clear Lake**

This education center incorporates sustainable design practices by using numerous reused and recycled products and materials, daylighting, passive solar and geothermal heating. In addition, compost made on site was used for landscaping and natural limestone was used for both exterior and interior walls.

For more information on sustainable design, contact the DNR at (515) 281-8094 or visit the following websites:

#### **Building Green**

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

Publishes the Environmental Building News, a publication of technical articles, product reviews, and other information.

#### **Energy Star**

[www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov)

Helps businesses and individuals adopt energy efficiency.

#### **Green Seal**

[www.greenseal.org](http://www.greenseal.org)

Sets sustainable standards for products and materials.

#### **Iowa Sustainable Design Initiative**

[www.sustainableiowa.org](http://www.sustainableiowa.org)

Supports the integration of sustainable design principles in state government projects.

#### **Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED™)**

[www.usgbc.org/LEED](http://www.usgbc.org/LEED)

A voluntary national standard for developing high-performance, sustainable buildings.

#### **U.S. Green Building Council**

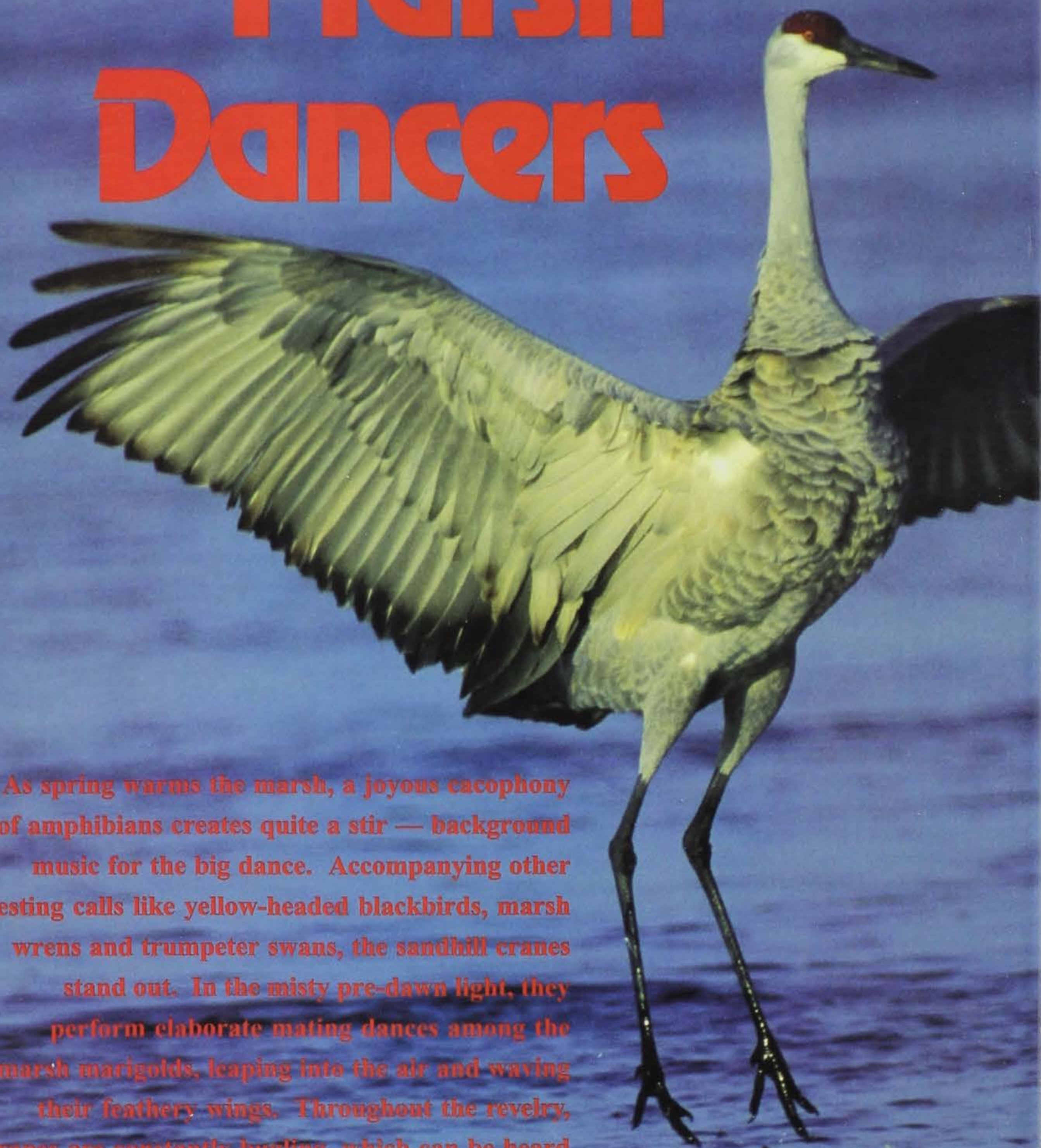
[www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org)

A coalition of leaders from the building industry promoting environmentally responsible buildings.



# Marsh Dancers

As spring warms the marsh, a joyous cacophony of amphibians creates quite a stir — background music for the big dance. Accompanying other nesting calls like yellow-headed blackbirds, marsh wrens and trumpeter swans, the sandhill cranes stand out. In the misty pre-dawn light, they perform elaborate mating dances among the marsh marigolds, leaping into the air and waving their feathery wings. Throughout the revelry, cranes are constantly bugling, which can be heard a half-mile away.



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A steady spring rain was collecting strength as a friend was checking prairie potholes for shorebird activity.

Suddenly he sighted a group of large birds flying in a rather tight formation — steel gray birds against a gray western sky. “It was a squadron of great blue herons, I think, but I have never seen seven in a flock.”

“Well,” I asked, “were their necks coiled or extended?”

He replied, “Their necks were straight out and their legs were like the tail of a kite. And when they landed, they began leaping like they were on pogo sticks.”

“Sounds like sandhill cranes,” I said. “What a great bird to see returning to Iowa marshes . . . but pogo sticks?”

In flight, great blue herons typically coil their S-curved necks against their breast with legs streaming behind. Conversely, sandhill cranes extend both legs and their necks. Herons are generally solitary, while cranes often travel as groups. Reports of multiple “herons” away from a nesting rookery are probably cranes.

Cranes are an ancient group of birds more closely related to rails and coots than to herons. Cranes also provide an animated display of leaping and calling in their courtship antics, presenting and tossing cattails, all the while flapping their 6-foot wingspan, and creating a rousing ruckus throughout the marsh. It’s a fascinating show from these “marsh dancers.”

Noticeable in their calls, sandhill cranes are prehistoric birds, existing

virtually unchanged at least 6 million years. There are six subspecies of sandhill cranes worldwide, of which three are migratory and travel through the Midwest. The most numerous are the lesser sandhill cranes, numbering about 500,000, which are also the smallest subspecies at 6 to 8 pounds. There are about 90,000 Canada cranes, which comprise about 15 percent of the population. And there are about 10,000 greater sandhill cranes, native to Iowa, which weigh about 8 pounds.

Author James Dinsmore, in *A Country So Full of Game*, writes: “Prior to European settlement of Iowa, greater sandhill cranes probably were a common nesting species and abundant migrants across the state. As early as 1820, Edwin James saw large flocks of cranes migrating north along the Missouri River in Harrison County. Even in the 1890s, it was not uncommon to see flocks of hundreds or even thousands of cranes in Winnebago and Hancock counties in spring. Although there are few specific records, sandhill cranes probably were fairly common nesters in north-central and northwest Iowa. With settlement, the combination of unregulated market hunting and loss of nesting habitat led to a rapid disappearance of cranes from Iowa. The last sandhill crane nesting of that era was at the headwaters of the Iowa River near Hayfield in Hancock County in May 1894. As was common in those days, the eggs were taken for an egg collection.

By the early 1900s, even migrating sandhill cranes were rare in Iowa. For the next 60 years, there were very few reports of cranes in the state. Throughout the Upper Mid-

west, problems similar to Iowa’s caused sandhill crane populations to dwindle. Just a few dozen pairs remained in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan through the 1940s. During the 1970s and 1980s, however, nesting populations increased in the northern states, and a few migrating sandhills were seen in Iowa.”

The number of greater sandhill cranes reported in Iowa increased significantly in the late 1980s, culminating in their return as a nesting species in 1992. These nesting birds migrated from wintering grounds in Florida and Georgia and are derived from an increasing Wisconsin flock spilling into Iowa. The huge flocks that gather in central Nebraska are lesser sandhill cranes that nest in Canada, Alaska and Siberia. Those flocks are probably the source of most cranes seen in western Iowa during migration.

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## Article by Pat Schlarbaum Photos by Don Poggensee

In 1992, after a 98-year absence, sandhill cranes successfully nested in Iowa at Otter Creek Wildlife Management Unit along the Iowa River in Tama County. Otter Creek was established in 1965 as the first area in the state to be designated a waterfowl production area (WPA). The WPA system has created habitat by maximizing federal and state dollars designated for wildlife. The marsh has grown from the original 2,280 acres to 3,600 acres mostly through purchases from the DNR trust fund and habitat fee monies from license sales. The Iowa River corridor that









Ty Smedes

eggs (though occasionally one or three) that hatch in late spring. Parents are very adept at concealing young in the marsh's lush summer growth. Cranes do not have webbed feet, but they can swim, although adult birds usually avoid deeper water. Chicks are good swimmers and may leave the nest to follow parents through the wetlands, sometimes within hours of hatching. At 3 months of age, the young begin to fly, but the brownish-colored colts remain with their parents throughout their first winter. Adult cranes are shades of gray but occasionally a reddish hue is observed. Preening with muddy bills, cranes may stain feathers of the upper back, lower neck, and breast with iron in the mud — hence the rusty color.

Cranes are social birds, constantly communicating with each other by *kurr kurr*. While a group feeds, sentry cranes stand watching for danger. Cranes have extremely sharp eyesight and acute hearing. Their bills and feet are important tools, used for feeding and defense. Their sharp, sturdy bills can probe frozen soil, and

the serrated edges help grasp slippery food like worms and snakes. Cranes are omnivorous and, in addition to worms and snakes, eat waste grain, seeds, berries, roots, tubers, frogs, crayfish and insects.

Not only are beaks used for getting food and preening feathers, they are also used as weapons. Cranes will flash the bright red patch on top of their heads to an opponent or predator to indicate battle readiness. The feet and legs work together with the beak. Each foot has three long, clawed toes. The claws are very sharp and can be used in scratching for food or for protection. When cranes are threatened, they use their wings to maintain balance and then jump up and strike at the attacker with the claws.

Cranes may fly 50 mph during level flight, but prefer to soar, especially during migration. When soaring in thermals (updrafts of warm air), cranes will circle until they reach a desired altitude, usually between 3,000 and 5,000 feet. Once the appropriate altitude is reached, cranes leave the thermal and glide forward, slowly losing altitude. They then find another thermal and repeat the process. Cranes prefer migrating at altitudes less than 5,000 feet, but some species are forced to fly much higher. Cranes ride thermals so efficiently that they have been seen flying at 29,035-plus feet over Mt. Everest.

Each spring, just to the west of Iowa in south-central Nebraska, more than 500,000 lesser sandhill cranes cover an 80-mile stretch of the Platte River between Kearney and Grand Island. This incredible avian display creates one of the greatest concentrations of any animal species on

earth, and comprises 80 percent of the world's sandhill crane population. Cranes have stopped on the Platte for millions of years on their northward spring migrations. These staging areas provide food and secluded habitat on the journey from wintering grounds more than 1,000 miles away in Mexico and states from Arizona to Mississippi.

As author Barry Bedlam relates, "When the morning sun illuminates the Platte, thousands of sandhill cranes are revealed, crowded onto sandbars. The laugh-like calls of the tall, thin birds grow louder as more awaken. Some wade into the shallow water. Others dance; hopping with their long grayish-brown wings spread wide and red-capped heads bobbing."

When an intruder like a coyote or human approaches, sentry cranes raise the alarm, and the whole flock ascends with a crashing of wings and urgent calling. It seems every bird takes flight at once, and the river appears to rise. Calls become louder and sharper as birds swirl in formations, zigzagging across the sunlit sky as far as the eye can see — creating a world of cranes. The birds disperse to nearby fields to feed throughout the day and return to sandbars along the river in the evening. They store about a pound of fat during their month-long stay, before heading for the tundra of northern Canada, Alaska and Siberia.

Each year, thousands of bird watchers visit south-central Nebraska to experience the sandhill crane extravaganza. A study conducted for the Environmental Protection Agency five years ago estimated that bird watchers spend \$25 million to \$30 million each spring in central Ne-



Mating pairs create nest mounds by pulling up marsh plants. The female typically lays two eggs that hatch in late spring.



Don Poggensee, Ida Grove, Ia

braska visiting the cranes. Our desire to see sandhill cranes clearly illustrates the economic power wildlife viewing can offer. (For more information about Kearney area, contact the Rowe Audubon Sanctuary at 308- 468-5282 or [www.rowesanctuary.org](http://www.rowesanctuary.org).)

As cranes occur across Iowa, reports of their whereabouts are appreciated. Each year, Iowans assist the Annual Midwest Sandhill Crane Count conducted by the International Crane Foundation (ICF) from Baraboo, Wisc. The count, which began in 1976, is used to monitor the general population trends and distribution of sandhill cranes in the Upper Midwest, and promote the awareness of cranes and wetland conservation. In 2002, about 2,500 volunteers tallied more than 10,000 sandhill cranes in the

count area. Their web site is [www.naturalists@savingcranes.org](http://www.naturalists@savingcranes.org).

The Iowa DNR Wildlife Diversity Program is encouraging birders to take part in the ICF count and to monitor marshes throughout the nesting season. Citizen scientists volunteer their time to document the exciting return of this native species, so long removed from our marshlands. Their efforts are much appreciated.

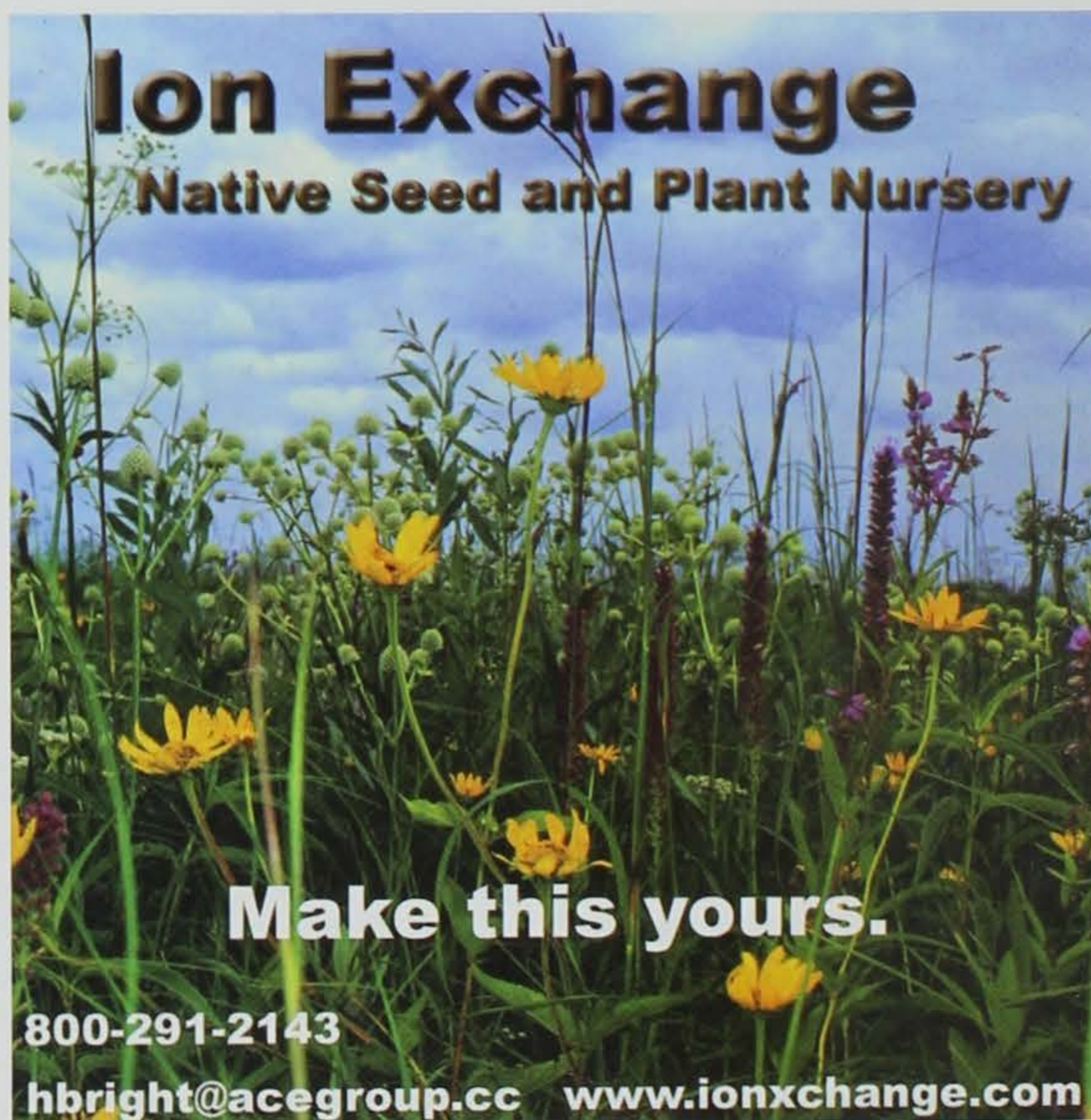
In 2002 and 2003, sandhill cranes were observed in four new sites. Reports were received of cranes sited in Clinton and Chickasaw counties. Allamakee County picked up another site where young were produced, and across the state in Woodbury County, a pair was seen with a juvenile.

It's pretty incredible to see sandhill cranes returning to Iowa marshes each spring. Like so many wetland critters, cranes are responding to habitat reclamation efforts. So join the fun and leap on down to your favorite marsh to enjoy nature's orchestration and dazzling courtship dances. Hopefully, you'll be serenaded by primal calling that harkens an era when thousands of wetlands pocketed the plains. The marsh dancers are worth it. Try to share it with children and friends sometime soon.

*Pat Schlarbaum is a wildlife diversity technician for the department in Boone.*

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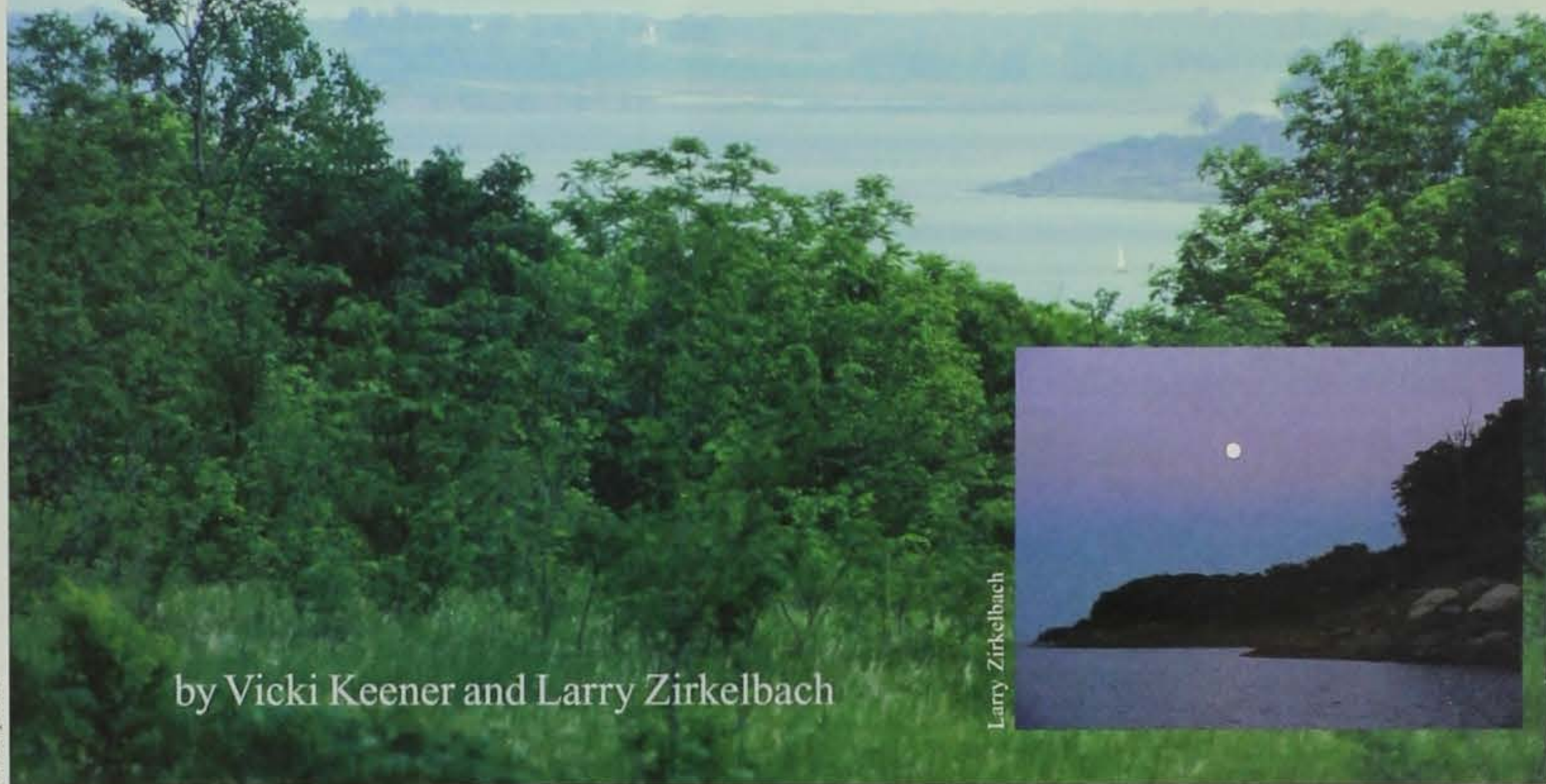


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## PARKS PROFILE

# ELK ROCK STATE PARK



DNR photo

by Vicki Keener and Larry Zirkelbach

Larry Zirkelbach

One of the more common questions regarding Iowa state parks is "Why the name." For some, there is an easy answer; for others, no one really knows for sure. But in virtually every case, the name explains a piece of the park's history.

So why the name Elk Rock State Park? It would be romantic to claim Elk Rock was the site of the last indigenous elk, or maybe the place where the final elk hunt in Iowa took place. That, however, would be a stretch since, historically, elk primarily inhabited the northern part of the state, and that was many years gone by.

Unlike many of Iowa's state parks, which have historic or

Native American influence in their names, there remains a bit of mystery behind the origin of Elk Rock's name. Supposedly, the name came from an unusual rock formation along the lake on the south side of the park. I have looked many times for this "elk" rock and have yet to find it. I will continue to search and will not leave any rock overlooked until I find this elusive "elk." Another story has it that a local contest was held to name the new park. However the name came about, it is here to stay.

The history of Elk Rock can be traced to a major development in the area — the construction of Lake Red Rock. In 1969, the year the Lake Red Rock dam was

finished, the United States Army Corps of Engineers agreed to lease 1,100 acres on the north side of the lake to the state. The area was named North Elk Rock.



Larry Zirkelbach



ABOVE LEFT: A distant view of Elk Rock. BELOW LEFT: A young boy enjoying a hike on the trail. RIGHT: Elk Rock and the Red Rock complex teem with wildlife, from white pelicans, bald eagles and a variety of waterfowl to deer, turkeys and upland game.

In 1978, an additional 850 acres was leased and called South Elk Rock. North Elk Rock has since been given to the Marion County Conservation Board and renamed Cordova Park.

The existing 850-acre state park is divided into two areas located on the southwest side of the lake. The main park hosts the campground, trails, two playgrounds and modern facilities. The Bridge Unit, which is currently closed for repairs but will reopen this spring, is a roadside picnic area.

Like many other state parks, Elk Rock is nestled atop a wooded bluff along a lake. What makes Elk Rock unique, though, is no other park is

Larry Zirkelbach



bordered by three miles of shoreline, and it sits on the largest lake in Iowa.

Because the lake is so big and the dam keeps water open year around, Red Rock has become a major winter roosting area for bald eagles. Groups of more than 100 eagles have been seen feeding and resting below the dam on the Des Moines River. Thousands of white pelicans, waterfowl and a variety of shore birds also visit the lake during spring and fall migrations.

The biggest draw to Elk Rock, though, is the equestrian facilities. Although the multi-

Clay Smith



use trails are open to mountain bikes, hiking, snowmobiling and cross country skiing, probably 90 percent of the use is horseback riding. There are 60 campsites developed specifically for equestrian camping, along with numerous hitching rails, three shaded stalls and a riding arena. The trails are relatively easy and suitable for both young horses and riders, or experienced riders just wanting a relaxing ride in Iowa's woodlands. Some of the trails will even accommodate small horse-drawn carts and wagons. There is an annual horse and mule show that allows riders of all ages to



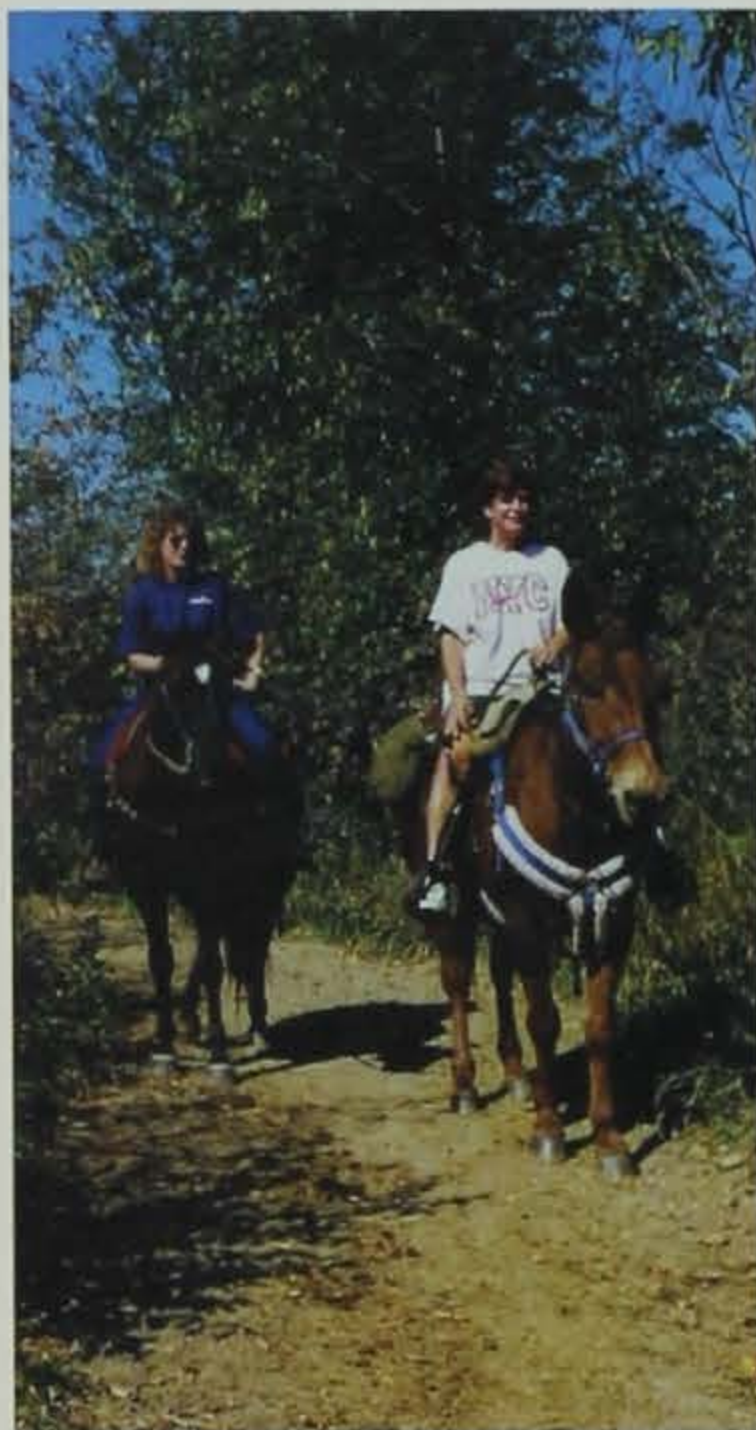
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# PARKS PROFILE



Larry Zirkelbach

test their amateur skills in basic riding events. This show is generally the Saturday before Father's Day.

Attractions outside the park include the 106-foot high observation tower at Cordova Park. The award-winning structure is built on the old water tower at the former North Elk Rock.

For a taste of Holland, a visit to nearby historic Pella is a must. The Molengracht Plaza, a recreation of an authentic Dutch canal, is adjacent to the Vermeer Mill and the Interpretive Center. While your there, don't forget to check out the windmill, which at 90 feet, is the tallest working

windmill in the United States.

For a little more fast-paced action, sprint car races are held nearly every Saturday April through September in Knoxville.

Lake Red Rock, of course, is also a major draw. At

19,000 acres, it is Iowa's largest lake and draws anglers and boaters from across Iowa and all four border states. It holds its own against any other lake in Iowa for crappie, catfish and white bass fishing.

During fall and winter, when summer activities subside, upland

game, deer or waterfowl hunting can carry you through to next year. Nearly the entire lake is open to waterfowl hunting, along with another 25,000 acres of public hunting around the lake and adjacent to the park.

Iowa state parks are open year around, although some of the modern conveniences may not be available. The modern shower houses close down at the end of October, however electricity and water are still available throughout the winter. For the slightly more hardy, it's a great time to camp without the crowds and congestion normally associated with the busy sum-



Larry Zirkelbach

TOP: Horseback riding and Elk Rock's equestrian facilities are the primary draw to the park. The trails are suitable for riders of all skill levels. ABOVE: The main portion of Elk Rock contains the campground, two playgrounds, trails and modern facilities.

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mer recreation season. Or, if you like crowds, plan a trip around one of the major events that draw tens of thousands of visitors to the area from across the United States and around the world. Two of the most-noted are Tulip Time in Pella in May and the National Sprint Car

Championships in Knoxville in August.

Make it a point this year to visit Elk Rock State Park. Enjoy a hike or trail ride through the woods. Bring the boat and fishing gear and head to the lake for a chance at the big one, or just enjoy a scenic boat ride along the

beautiful red rock sandstone bluffs that gave the town its name.

*Vicki Keener is the park manager and Larry Zirkelbach is the park ranger at Elk Rock State Park.*

## ELK ROCK AT A GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Approximately seven miles north of Knoxville and 10 miles west of Pella on Iowa Highway 14.

**FISHING:** Situated on Lake Red Rock, Iowa's largest impoundment, and within a few miles of Roberts Creek. Bass, catfish, walleye, crappie, white bass and wipers are the predominant species.

**BOATING:** There are two boat ramps on Lake Red Rock located near the main park entrance and by the office.

**CAMPING:** Regular camping area contains two circles with nine electrical sites; electrical hookups available at 12 additional sites. Equestrian campground features 60 sites (24 with electricity), a modern shower building, horse stalls, hitching rails and riding arena.

**TRAILS:** Multiuse trail system branches out from equestrian campground; 13 miles of equestrian trails, with additional mileage available on Army Corps of Engineers land. Mountain bikes also allowed. Trails are occasionally closed under wet conditions. Contact park office for trail status.

### PICNICKING:

Picnic area located approximately one mile north of park entrance on Iowa Highway 14.

Contains one open shelter and foot trail to lake.

### FUN FACTS:

Lake Red Rock is a major stopover location for waterfowl and other migratory species in both spring and fall, including pelicans and bald eagles.

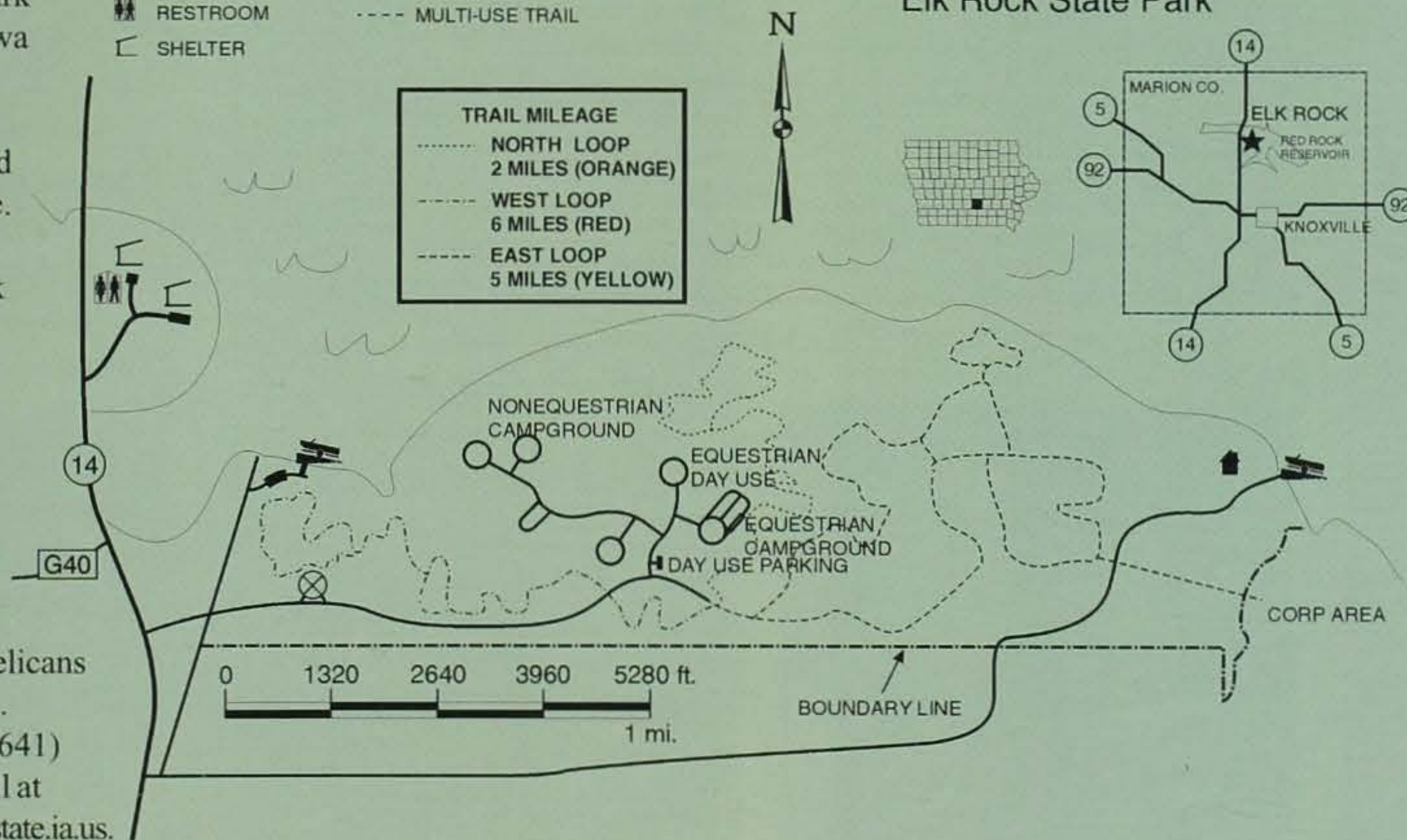
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- WEST LOOP  
6 MILES (RED)
- EAST LOOP  
5 MILES (YELLOW)

## RED ROCK RESERVOIR Elk Rock State Park





# CONSERVATION UPDATE

## Missing Minnesota Peregrine Falcon Found In Des Moines; Injured Raptor Returns Home

A peregrine falcon found in Des Moines in February has apparently caused quite a stir among bird enthusiasts in both Iowa and Minnesota.

DNR nongame supervisor Doug Harr received a telephone call Feb. 12 from Des Moines police school liaison officer Greg Morse of a possible injured peregrine at East High School. Falcon V31, also known as "Mae," was apparently trapped in the school's courtyard. State officials believe the bird was feeding on a pigeon, and may have collided with a window in the courtyard.

Harr captured the bird and contacted nongame wildlife technician Pat Schlarbaum, who made a quick trip down from Boone to help assess the situation. After an injury evaluation, the falcon was released later that day from atop the new state parking garage. Mae took a loop around the State Capitol dome and disappeared into the sky.

A quick check of the per-

egrine falcon restoration network indicated Mae was released in Minnesota in 1988. She nested on the Excel Energy (NSP) smokestack in Bayport, Minn., a suburb of St. Paul. She had produced roughly 36 young in 15 nesting seasons.

"Because of this record and her advanced age, she is one of the most valuable peregrine falcons in the Midwest, if not the nation," said Harr.

Interestingly enough, Mae had never left Minnesota — until this past November. Her strange departure left Minnesota officials fearing the worst; they had even prepared a eulogy for her.

"Minnesota peregrine authorities were estatic to learn that she was still alive," Harr said.

Minnesota officials initially believed Mae showed up in Bayport less than 24 hours after being released in Des Moines. However, that falcon turned out to be "Belinda," a peregrine fledged in Monticello in 1999. Further confusing the matter, on Feb. 14 East High School officials reported a peregrine once again feeding on a pigeon at the school.

Like all good stories, this one has a happy ending. On Feb. 18, another peregrine showed up in Bayport, and this one proved to be Mae. Needless to say, Minnesota officials were happy to have her home.



Pat Schlarbaum



## PHEASANTS

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Iowa's Pheasants Forever chapters are working with farmers and landowners to establish wildlife habitat. The mission of Pheasants Forever is to restore pheasants and other wildlife populations by providing quality habitat. Pheasants Forever provides assistance to landowners in planting food plots, nesting cover, shelterbelts and other habitat for game and nongame wildlife.

Pheasants Forever currently has 103 chapters throughout the state eager to work with local farmers and landowners for the benefit of all upland and wetland wildlife. For help planting wildlife habitat or for more information about Pheasants Forever, contact:

- ◆ Jim Wooley  
Southern Iowa  
(641) 774-2238
- ◆ Matt O'Connor  
Eastern Iowa  
(563) 926-2357
- ◆ Mark Heckenlaible  
Western Iowa  
(402) 687-2004
- ◆ Dave VanWaus  
Central Iowa  
(641) 377-3480



## Special Light Geese Spring Conservation Season Underway; Hunting Regulations Liberalized

The spring hunting season on light geese, which includes white and blue phase snow geese and Ross' geese, is open and runs through April 15.

This is a special U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conservation order that allows for spring snow goose hunting.

Hunters are required to have a valid 2004 Iowa hunting license, and pay the current habitat and state migratory game bird fees. The federal duck stamp is not required.

All normal waterfowl hunting

regulations apply, except hunters are not required to use waterfowl plugs in their guns and they may use electronic calls. The daily shooting hours are from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset. The daily bag limit is 20 birds with no possession limit.

The conservation order was implemented in an effort to reduce the size of the mid-continent light goose population and halt the widening destruction of fragile arctic habitats.



### Hy-Vee Promotes TIP Program With Free Bags

In the fall of 2003, HyVee Food Stores printed and donated approximately 2 million plastic grocery bags emblazoned with the Turn-In-Poachers (TIP) logo and message. The bags were distributed to various HyVee stores throughout the state.

Over the past 11 years, HyVee has printed the bags four times; during the fall of 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2003.

"The Turn-In-Poachers Board and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources thanks HyVee for their continuing support of the TIP program and wildlife resources here in Iowa," said Steve Dermand, TIP coordinator.

For more information about Iowa's Turn-In-Poachers program, contact Dermand at (515) 281-4515, or at [steve.dermand@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:steve.dermand@dnr.state.ia.us).

## National Fishing Week

### Free Fishing Days June 4-6

In an effort to promote the sport of fishing, the DNR will be joining other agencies and organizations across the country in celebrating National Fishing Week June 5-13.

As part of the week-long event, the DNR has designated June 4-6 as Free Fishing Days in Iowa. During those days only, Iowa residents may fish and possess fish without a license. Payment of the trout fee, normally



Clay Smith

required when fishing for trout, has also been waived. All other fishing regulations, including size and possession limits, apply.



# CONSERVATION UPDATE

## Forested Riparian Buffers Improve Water Quality and Benefit Landowners

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is taking aim at improving Iowa's water quality through riparian buffers.

Riparian buffers are strips of trees and grasses planted along streams. Riparian buffers put natural vegetation back on the landscape to filter soil sediment, fertilizer, manure and herbicides before they reach waterways. Planting trees and shrubs also improves Iowa's wildlife habitat and natural beauty.

The riparian buffer program requires planting trees and grasses on an area 180 feet wide along each side of the stream. Buffers planted on crop ground must contain at least 60 feet of trees or shrubs. The other 120 feet can be planted to native grasses. The entire buffer could be trees and shrubs if desired. Buffers on marginal pasture land must be at least 160 feet of trees and shrubs.

"Water quality and wildlife are big winners in this program; however, landowners can also win by using buffers to increase their income," said Paul Tauke, forestry supervisor for the Iowa DNR. The program will reimburse landowners 90 percent of their planting costs.

Landowners can also receive a \$150-per-acre sign-up bonus and annual rental payments for 15 years. If the buffer is on pasture, the payment is \$84 per acre annually. If the buffer is on crop ground the rental rate depends on

the average soil rental rates for the soil type on which the buffer is planted.

The riparian buffer program is a continuous sign-up practice. Landowners can apply anytime

at their county Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or Farm Service Agency (FSA) office. Any crop or pasture land adjacent to a creek, stream or



NRCS photo

river qualifies for the program.

For more information go to [www.iowatreeplanting.com](http://www.iowatreeplanting.com), or contact Tauke at (515) 242-6898 or [paul.tauke@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:paul.tauke@dnr.state.ia.us).

## DNR Issues First Air Permit With Mercury Limits

The Iowa DNR recently issued the nation's first air permit that controls mercury emissions. The permit was issued in June for future expansion of the MidAmerican Energy station at the Council Bluffs Energy Center, expected to be operational in 2007.

"The permit will reduce mercury emissions by at least 83 percent," said Chris Roling, the DNR engineer who issued the permit. The permit requires a "sorbent," or material such as activated charcoal powder or other material be mixed with flue gases to adsorb mercury. Fabric filters or electrostatic precipitators then collect the mercury-laden powder along with fly ash and soot.

The DNR was able to consider the controls after a portion of the Clean Air Act kicked in that requires utilities and air

pollution control agencies to look for ways to reduce mercury emissions using maximum achievable control technologies. MidAmerican Energy proposed using the technology in their permit application.

"Any new coal-fired utilities in Iowa or elsewhere in the nation will also need mercury controls," he said. "The technology is available and not cost prohibitive."

Airborne mercury precipitates into waterways and can accumulate in fish tissue, posing health risks, such as neurological damage and learning disabilities for developing children. Pregnant women, nursing mothers and children under age 15 are typically advised in many states to eat limited amounts of certain fish, depending upon the species and fish size that also affect mercury concentrations.



## Students and Teachers Dig Trees For Kids

Jacob, a fourth grader from Delaware Elementary in Des Moines, "digs" planting trees. After planting trees at school during Earth Week last year, Jacob said he "might even buy a tree."

"The students loved planting trees, and have more appreciation for the trees and plants around the building" says Donna Queen, director of the Tornado Learning Club at Storm Lake Middle School.

All the trees were planted through the Trees For Kids (TFK) and Trees For Teens (TFT) programs, which offer free educational and tree planting programs to any public or private elementary and secondary schools in Iowa. Both programs produce and distribute packets full of tree education materials, including crossword puzzles, word searches, a full-color educational poster and internet activities. This year's theme for Trees For Kids focuses on Lewis and Clark's travels and natural resources observa-

tions of Iowa in 1804. In addition, teachers receive instructions on how to obtain free landscape-sized trees to plant during Earth Week (April 22-30).

Last year more than 300,000 students and 11,500 teachers planted in excess of 77,000 trees, valued at more than \$3.8 million. Planting trees allows students to learn firsthand about the environment. It also gives them an opportunity to shape it.

Funding and support for Trees For Kids/Teens is made possible through a cooperative partnership between the DNR Forestry Bureau, Iowa Nursery and Landscape Association, Iowa Bankers Association, USDA Forest Service, MidAmerican Energy, Aquila, Alliant Energy, Iowa Tree Farm Committee, Iowa Woodland Owners Association, Iowa Society of American Foresters, Iowa Conservation and Education Council, Trees Forever and Iowa State University Extension Forestry.

To receive a copy of the free educational materials available through Trees For Kids, contact Callie Pieracci at (515) 281-4915, email [TFKids@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:TFKids@dnr.state.ia.us) or visit [www.iowadnr.com/forestry/](http://www.iowadnr.com/forestry/).

"I never knew there was an Arbor Day. I learned a lot about trees," says Ashley a third grader at Jefferson Elementary in Bettendorf. "It is a good thing to have trees. I like trees."



Ruth Hitchcock

## Upcoming NRC and EPC Meetings

The dates and locations have been set for the following meetings of the Natural Resource Commission and Environmental Protection Commission of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Agendas are set approximately 10 days prior to the scheduled meeting date. For additional information, contact the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Wallace State Office Building, 502 E. 9<sup>th</sup> St., Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0034.

### Natural Resource Commission:

- April  
No meeting
- May 13  
Pottawattamie County

### Environmental Protection Commission:

- April 19  
Ingram Office Building,  
Urbandale
- May 17  
Ingram Office Building,  
Urbandale

### State Preserves Advisory Board:

- April 1-2  
Kent Park,  
Johnson County



# WARDEN'S DIARY



## Lions And Tigers And Bears, Oh My

by Chuck Humeston

It was late summer when I overheard the sheriff's department radio dispatcher giving a call to a deputy.

"The subject states he has a bear on his property," the dispatcher said.

I radioed to tell the dispatcher I would answer the call as well. I was joined by fellow officer Burt Walters, who being in the general vicinity, decided he had to see this for himself.

When we arrived, the owner said he saw a bear enter the barn. The barn stood next to a fence line bordered by mulberry trees fat with fruit. Bear delicacy. It was also mostly obscured by giant ragweed that reached much higher than our heads.

There was a time I might have told the caller, "Now, just get in out of the sun for awhile. You'll be fine." But, that was then, and this is now. There are too many things showing up in Iowa that we haven't seen before or haven't seen in decades.

Sure, once in awhile we see a disoriented moose take a wide swath into Iowa. That's not all

that unusual. I mean, who wouldn't want to leave Minnesota? Seriously, usually a brain disorder is to blame for the aimless wanderer. Occasionally, a bear will show up in the wild in northeast Iowa. Anomalies.

But now, the unusual is approaching the routine.

Another fellow officer, Dave Tierney in western Iowa, emailed me pictures of a mountain lion hit by a car in his area. It's not the only verified mountain lion sighting in Iowa either.

Bobcat sightings, albeit still extraordinary, are not the breaking news stories they once were. In fact, one fall I worked with an officer in southern Iowa who had just returned from more than one call to remove a bobcat from a trap.

Why the new visitors? Some aren't really visitors, but rather captive animals that escaped. Still, have you taken a trip out West lately? Take a look at some of the urban areas. Denver is covering the foothills and crawling up the sides of the mountains. You can drive from Colorado Springs to Ft. Collins and almost never leave development. As habitat turns into tract housing, wildlife has to go somewhere.

Apparently, east is the chosen direction for many.

Of course, I hear from those who have their own theories.

"You traded turkeys for mountain lions, and you're putting them out there to reduce the deer herd."

"I talked to so and so. He saw a mountain lion, and one of your guys told him it was in an area where you stocked them."

"Why are you stocking bears?"

Oh please. If there were so many lions and other predators out there, you would think more hunters in the field would see them. Not to mention stocking mountain lions in an agricultural state like Iowa would not be the most politically amiable thing to do, would it? Then there is the issue of funding such a program. It makes good coffee shop talk, but that's about all.

### Back To The Bear

Burt and I approached the ragweed, and I stopped and looked at him. "You realize if a bear's in that ragweed, we won't see it until its right on top of us?" He nodded and we looked at each other with the same thought. "I'll get the shotgun," I said. We



didn't intend to kill the bear, but we didn't intend to become bear bait either. So, we walked and we searched, through the entire mulberry grove. No bear, no tracks, no sign, nothing. "Call us again if you see something," I said. He did. The next day.

"I found bear tracks," the homeowner said. "Where?" we asked. He led us to a garbage can lid he used to cover the tracks. He proudly lifted the lid and proclaimed, "Right there."

Walters and I looked at the tracks, looked up, looked at each other and looked at the homeowner. In unison we exclaimed what we saw as obvious. "Dog."

"What?"

"Dog," we answered, and we pointed out the difference between bear and dog tracks.

Once again, the coffee shop and police scanner telegraph

went into motion. The alleged bear became two bears, then three, complete with cubs. Half-eaten deer carcasses were reported, but when I asked to be taken to them, they couldn't be found. The calls usually ended with, "Well, no, I didn't really see it, but I heard from so-and-so, who heard from so-and-so, who heard from so-and-so, who heard from someone who saw it."

The alleged bear moved to the highway. It was seen crossing the road. We checked it out. No bear, no tracks. The closest thing to a bear we found was a very large, dark-colored chow barking at us from the farm nearby.

Someone pointed out a discarded milk jug slashed to pieces. He held it up. "What would do this?" The deputy and I

looked at each other. "Bad case of DOT mower," we answered. After awhile, the alleged bear apparently disappeared, hopefully into Walters' territory.

Honestly, though, I don't discount anything now. Just last fall a bobcat was struck by a car on Highway 20 in the county where I work. I get asked what I'm going to do. I hear the fears from some. "They'll eat our livestock." They'll eat us."

Granted, a big cat on the hunt is nothing to fool with. And I've had a close enough encounter with a bear in a tent in Minnesota. Still, most of these animals don't want anything to do with us anymore than some want anything to do with them. Most of them are secretive and would rather avoid us.

I guess if I see something, I plan to enjoy it. Carefully.

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